

THE WALTER & ELIZA HALL INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL RESEARCH

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Director:
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9th October, 1962

Dr. Irving H. Sher,
Director of Research,
Institute for Scientific Information,
33 South Seventeen Street,
Philadelphia 3. Pa.

Dear Dr. Sher,

I was interested to hear about your Citation Index project and to do a little analysis of the list of my own citations that you were good enough to send. The most interesting feature to me was the continuing reference to some early more or less classical papers in fields that I now have only a minor interest in. I naturally missed most of these citations in the originals.

Of the 26 recent citations 1957 onwards, my estimate is that I noted about half in the originals but as I have not made a specific note of most of them this can only be a reasonable guess.

My impression is that I should find the chief usefulness of such an index in balancing the respective claims of 2 or more workers for a given fellowship or position, or for election to an Academy &c. In Australia I often find it very difficult to assess the status of a man working in a relatively small field in which there is initially no one else in Australia who can give a fully competent estimate of his published work.

The Citation Index is at least an objective piece of evidence that could often be extremely useful when assessments of this sort must be made. I wonder whether, if the request were made by a research fund granting agency in Australia, the information could be provided by your organization in regard to say 20 applicants in the form

	1960		1961		1962		&c.
	A	C	A	C	A	C	
Smith, A. B.	2	10	1	1	0	0	

where A is the number of articles cited and C the total number of citations? I believe this would provide a rather grim but very valuable touch of realism to some of our discussions.

There are, of course, many possibilities of injustice to a given individual and the citation index would have to be used as carefully as every other judicial instrument, but having regard to all its possible weaknesses I believe it could be very valuable. I hope you will succeed in making it a standard working tool.

Yours sincerely,


F.M. Burnet

Burnet