

LETTER

How to Fix the "Review Process"

Dear Editor,

I read with interest and dismay your Editorial in the February issue of the *Journal of Biological Rhythms*. It claims that what reviewers really want is the true, the new, and the important. What nonsense! As the Social Sciences, Literary Criticism, the French intelligentsia, and the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle teach us, the "true," the "new," and the "important" have no objective reality. They are always already social constructs. Once we deconstruct these empty signifiers, it becomes obvious that the entire "Review Process," be it for acceptance of papers or for Tenure, serves to mask and maintain the rigid paternalistic hegemony of the academic ruling class.

Legitimacy is well-known to be restricted. Reviewers and editors are either striving to join, or already members of, the academic elite. They uphold the dominant paradigm, the competitive and colonialist way of knowing. Alternate worldviews are disenfranchised and discredited, and coded signifiers are applied to relegate the disempowered to secondary status. The high and mighty, the noblemen and their lackeys, call the rest of us "pedestrian," and it's true, for we have to walk while they ride. What do they know, these oppressors and exploiters of working scientists? Did they ever have to cross a scientific frontier in the snow with nothing to cover their feet but pages torn from back issues of *Current Contents*?

But it need not be this way. The people can make their voices heard. The Chelm Institute solved the problem in the early seventies, fostering the communal and cooperative, rather than the individualistic and agonistic. Unlike my previous University, which, it should be noted, I left voluntarily, the Chelm Institute, which I am proud to have joined, includes linguists, subalterns, migrant workers, administrative assistants, and scholars of popular culture, as well as members of the wider community, on all its Promo-

tions and Tenure and Evaluation Committees. To ensure fairness and representation, these Committees administer a lottery system for Chairs, Tenure, faculty promotions and evaluations, and student grades.

This approach should be applied to the "Review Process" for manuscripts submitted to the *Journal*. A lottery system would ensure openness, fairness, and representation. It would overcome the deep structural biases and credentialism in the present system, as well as resolve the epistemological lacunae always already inherent in the restrictive use of terms like "true," "new," and "important." You can support the myths that maintain the oppressors' status quo or strike a blow for freedom. Establish a lottery system for determining which manuscripts get published and put the *Journal* at the forefront of the fight for fair and equal treatment for working scientists! It would also save a lot of time and effort.

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Editor's response:

Thank you for your suggestion. It, or something close to it, is being tested right now on the Internet. There are also those who say that the outcome of the "Review Process" for papers and for Tenure does not much differ from a random selection anyway. Still, the "Review Process" satisfies an important need: Most scientists and reviewers are members of university faculties, who grade and rank everyone and everything as a way of life. They would feel something amiss without it. As for your allegations and concerns, I enjoin you, in the words of one of your forebears at Chelm, the first Professor of Indoor Carpeting: "Presume not to know where others have trod, nor how well they were shod." Finally, congratulations on your appointment to the renowned and influential Chelm Institute in its new location.