



Editors' Update

Your network for knowledge

From issue 17, February 2007



Leo Egghe

Behind the Scenes... Launching a new journal

One of the foremost experts in the field of informetrics, Prof. Dr. Leo Egghe recently launched Elsevier's *Journal of Informetrics*. It is the first published journal focusing specifically on the dynamic and expanding field of data analysis in information science.

Prof. Dr. Egghe graduated from the University of Antwerp with a PhD in Mathematics in 1978. After teaching mathematics at the University of Hasselt from 1974 to 1979, he became the university's chief librarian. In the mid-1980s, Egghe received a second PhD, this time in Information Sciences from City University in London. He decided to combine his two areas of expertise by conducting research into applied mathematics as it pertains to library and information science, which guided him to the field of informetrics.

Now the chief librarian at Belgium's Hasselt University, Prof. Dr. Egghe also teaches two courses at the University of Antwerp in informetrics and information retrieval. His research has resulted in several published books, the most recent being *Power Laws in the Information Production Process: Lotkaian Informetrics*, published in 2005 by Elsevier in Oxford. He also founded the first international conference on informetrics in 1987 at the University of Hasselt. The conference now

occurs every two years all over the world and has recently been held in China and Sweden. The next, scheduled for Spain, has already attracted nearly 200 papers from prospective attendees.

A rapidly growing field

The term "informetrics" was coined by a German professor named Nacke in the late 1970s. At the time, the field studied only information that existed in paper form, most of which was contained in libraries. While it still does that, informetrics has seen explosive growth in the past decade due to the advent of networks such as the Internet and local intranets.

Informetricians examine data in all its forms, measuring the distribution of information and the links between different data sets. According to Egghe, informetrics is a field comprising all quantitative studies related to information science. These include bibliometrics (i.e. bibliographies and libraries), scientometrics (i.e. science policy, citation analysis and research evaluation) and

webometrics (i.e. metrics of the Internet or other social networks such as citation or collaboration networks).

Establishing a need for a new journal

In 1989, Egghe submitted his first proposal to Elsevier for a journal on informetrics. Unfortunately, his proposal was not accepted at that time. "It is very difficult for a publisher to start a new journal. It costs a lot of money and it may not be clear whether the new journal is needed," Egghe explains. "In 1989, the Internet was still in its infancy and the field was relatively small, with just a few people involved in informetrics research. Furthermore, Elsevier accepts just one out of 20 proposals for new journals."

Egghe continued with his research, writing books and publishing around 200 articles in peer-reviewed scientific journals. While writing his most recent book, he was in contact with members of the social sciences department at Elsevier. He decided that the time was right to reopen the discussion on a journal of informetrics.

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He renewed his proposal in 2002, and it was studied very closely by Elsevier over the ensuing three years. Eventually, Elsevier in Oxford decided that there was a need for a new journal and approval was given in April 2006.

Egghe feels that this proposal succeeded the second time round simply because of the right timing and the fact that there was a gap in the market. With the dawn of the information age, the field had now matured to a point where there was a need for the journal, and no journals on the subject of informetrics had yet been established. Egghe was able to support his proposal with numerous reports that proved the field was growing very rapidly. He provided hard statistics and references to articles that supported his argument.

He was also helped by his experience in guest editing two issues of Elsevier's *Information Processing and Management*. This journal focuses on information retrieval, but Egghe created special issues in 2005 and 2006 on the topic of informetrics. As a guest editor, he attracted contributions from many experts in his field.

The publication of these issues served as a test run for Elsevier to see how research in the field of informetrics was being used by the scientific community. Since the issues were also published electronically, Elsevier was able to count the number of times the articles were downloaded. Elsevier recorded more downloads for these special issue articles than for the journal's regular articles, proving that there was an audience of readers hungry for information on the subject. The success of the special issues also proved that there was a niche market of informetrics researchers who would be eager to contribute to a journal in this active and lively field.

Laying the groundwork

Egghe's efforts as a guest editor provided the foundation for his future work on the new journal. In setting up *The Journal of Informetrics*, one of Egghe's first steps was to launch several calls for papers. These electronic announcements were sent to informetrics discussion groups comprising hundreds of informetricians. In the announcements, Egghe explained the focus and scope of the journal, inviting experts in the field to contribute. "It is a challenging process," Egghe says, "With no existing samples to view, the potential audience has a difficult time grasping the publication's profile."

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Fortunately for Egghe, his name was already quite well known in the informetrics community and he was able to compile an impressive editorial board consisting of over 30 of the leading figures in the field. The support from the community, including those active in journals published by other companies, was key to getting the journal off the ground.

The journal is launched

The first print issue of *The Journal of Informetrics* was published on January 12, 2007. The electronic version can be found on Elsevier's ScienceDirect. The journal will be published quarterly, with around 10 articles per issue. But Egghe expects the journal to grow in line with the rapid growth of informetrics itself. Based on the early acceptance of and enthusiasm for the journal in the scientific community, Egghe

believes that his optimism is warranted.

The journal has a very broad scope and will consider a wide array of topics for articles. "All quantitative aspects of information science belong to the scope of the *Journal of Informetrics*," Egghe says. "The papers must be of a high quality, and feature mathematical models explaining regularities in information sciences, or contain very good experimental data sets."

Several authors will be drawn from the editorial board, but Egghe considers every informetrician to be a potential author for the journal. The journal

already has a database full of article referees as well. For each article published, there are two referees who judge the quality of the article.

According to Egghe, the journal will have high, exacting standards.

"The quality of scholarship is improving all the time and the degree of 'hardness' in the field is increasing," he says. For this reason, a high rejection rate of around 50 percent is planned for submitted articles, thereby maintaining the journal's quality. "We want this journal to be the leading journal in the field of informetrics," Egghe says. "That can only be realized if we apply professional standards of paper acceptance and rejection."

Egghe is proud to be editor-in-chief of the only journal that currently bears the name "informetrics" in its title. "On an international level, this is the only informetrics journal in the world."

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