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The Survey of Biological Abstracting

A Survey of Biological Abstracting, supported by funds from the National Science Foundation and other agencies, is being conducted to determine the effectiveness of present abstracting programs. The program is divided into two principal parts: (1) a study of the current effectiveness of abstracting agencies, and in particular of *Biological Abstracts*, in covering the relevant scientific literature; and (2) a determination of the consensus among American and foreign biologists of the merits, defects, and desirable changes in the over-all abstracting program.

The statistical study of the actual effectiveness of the abstracting services is being broken down into four analyses. First, a sample period, 1947-1949 inclusive, was chosen so as to be far enough back to have been finished by the abstracting services, yet recent enough to be representative of present practices. Journals were selected to form a representative sample of subject fields, and the coverage by the abstracting services of articles published during 1947-1949 has been analyzed (a) as to the percentage of articles not abstracted or not indexed, and (b) as to the average interval between the publication of an article and of the abstract of it. The journals are grouped in three ways: journals supplying author's abstracts, and those not doing so; journals of American, or of British, or of foreign language countries; journals wholly biological in content and those only partially biological in content.

Second, a comparative study is being made of the relative proportions of known biological journals, selected as worthy of scientific attention, now being covered by the several abstracting services. The proportion of articles originating in different countries is also being studied.

Third, the comparative coverage of particular subjects is being analyzed. For example, a number of recent bibliographies of specific topics, e.g., bibliographies on Drosophila, Cerebral Circulation, Collagen, Plasma Substitutes, the Pathology and Physiology of Burns, Polychaetous Annelids, and Pituitary-Adrenocortical Function have been checked to determine the number of items in the bibliography which can be located in *Biological Ab-*

stracts; and whenever feasible, the number of items under the same or a similar subject heading in *Biological Abstracts* not to be found in the special bibliography was likewise ascertained.

Fourth, overlapping between abstracting agencies has been studied by taking a particular subject and determining what proportion of the articles thereunder in each abstracting journal is included in the other. *Biological Abstracts* has thus been compared with *Chemical Abstracts* with respect to coverage of the subject of Chemotherapy over the test period; with *Resumptio Genetica* with respect to the coverage of human, animal, and plant genetics, severally; with the *Zoological Record* with respect to articles dealing with species of animals; with the *Geological Indexes* with respect to paleontological articles; and similarly for other subjects with the *Excerpta Medica*, *Berichte über die gesamte Biologie*, *British Abstracts of Chemistry and Physiology*, etc. It is hoped that the survey will be able to include also *Psychological Abstracts*, the *Current List of Medical Literature*, and the *Bibliography of Agriculture* in this part of the study.

A questionnaire has recently been mailed to about 7000 biologists in the United States and abroad by a random sampling of the mailing lists of the Federation, the American Institute of Biological Societies, the American Society of Bacteriologists, the Entomologists, and the biological librarians. Others will be included to assure adequate representation, especially of foreign biologists. The returns will be coded and analyzed by machine; and personal comments will be compiled for use in formulating ultimate recommendations. In order to assure that the questionnaires represent a random and not a biased sample, the returns will be checked against complete censuses of opinion among the biologists of a few selected areas, e.g., a metropolitan area with numerous colleges and universities and research institutions; a small college or two in relatively isolated situations; a large agricultural college in a small midwestern town, etc.

It is hoped that the Survey can be completed this year, and that the final report and recommendations will be published in some journal of wide circulation accessible to all biologists.

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SCIENCE, founded in 1880, is published each Friday by the American Association for the Advancement of Science at the Business Press, 10 McGovern Ave., Lancaster, Pa. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Lancaster, Pa., January 13, 1948, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Acceptance for mailing at the special rate postage provided for in the Act of February 28, 1925, embodied in Paragraph (d-2) Section 34.40 P. L. & R. of 1948.

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Annual subscriptions, \$7.50; single copies, \$.25; foreign postage, outside the Pan-American Union, \$1.00; Canadian postage, \$.50. Special rates to members of the AAAS.

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