

Rejection Doesn't Have to Hurt: AGU's Manuscript Referral System

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Objectives

- Track manuscripts with the "Reject and Refer" decision to determine how successful AGU's manuscript referral system is at retaining content in the AGU portfolio.
- Determine how many of those manuscripts had a consultation opened between editors of transferring and transferred-to journals.
- Determine whether or not using the consultation feature in the submission system helped the manuscript be more successful in the transferred-to journal.
- Determine ultimate publisher of manuscripts originally rejected and referred by an AGU journal.

Background

In 2015, AGU enabled a referral system in our peer review system EJournalPress (EJP). It is a reject decision type where the editor selects one other AGU journal to which the author can transfer their manuscript. This feature is meant to improve author satisfaction (negates the need to re-enter submission info) while keeping content in our portfolio. Simultaneously, AGU launched a broad-topic journal which welcomes papers other AGU journals might consider out of scope. We also enabled in EJP the consultation feature which allows editors to consult with editors in other journals. We encouraged editors to consult with the receiving editors when referring manuscripts to the receiving journal (when appropriate).

Methods

We tracked all decisions made on manuscripts from 2015-2017. We focused on "reject and refer" decisions. We analyzed the following:

- Reject and refer decision rates in relation to other decision types
- Rate of author uptake on referrals—did they transfer their manuscript to the suggested journal?
- Final decisions on transferred manuscripts
- Final publisher of manuscripts originally rejected and referred in an AGU journal

Results

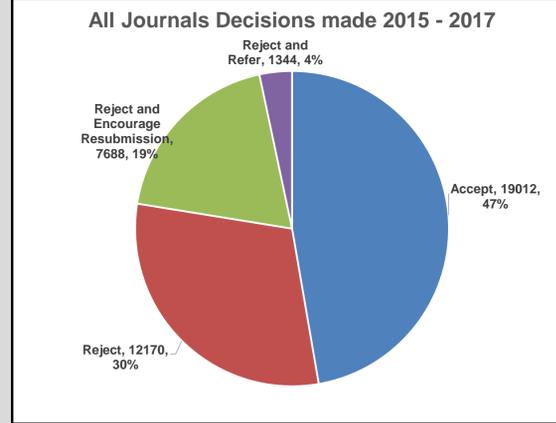


Figure 1: Final decisions made in 2015-2017 across all AGU journals, totaling 40,212. "Reject and encourage resubmission" closes out current manuscript but allows authors to transfer previous manuscript information to new submission within same journal; new manuscript number and submission date.

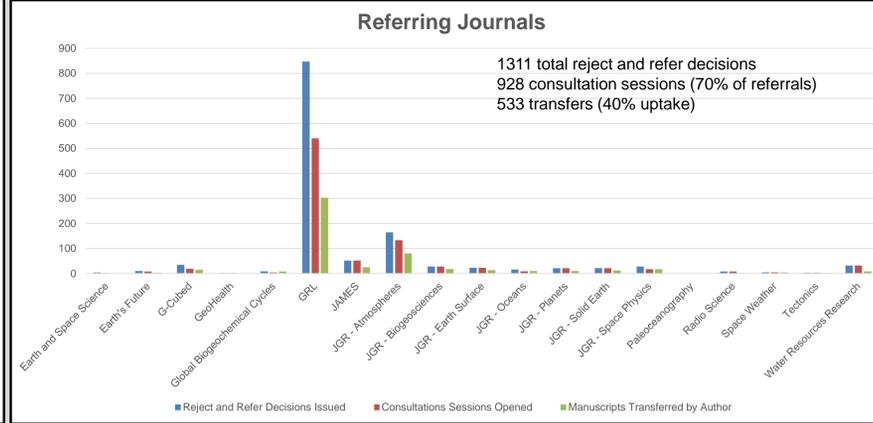


Figure 2: Number of reject and refer decisions issued by AGU journal, number of consultation session opened on those manuscripts, and number of the suggested transfers acted on by authors.

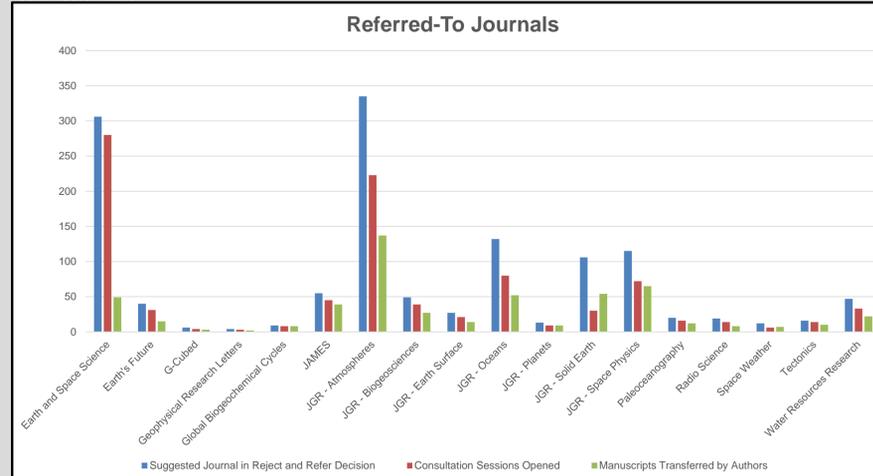


Figure 3: Number of manuscripts referred to that journal, number of consultation sessions opened from referring journal, and number of manuscripts transferred to that journal by author.

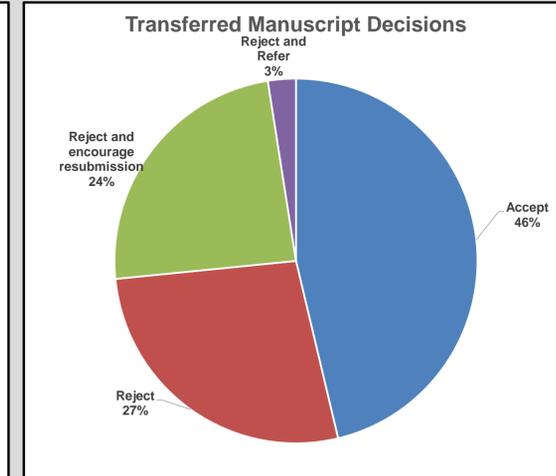


Figure 4: Final decisions of those manuscripts that were transferred. Does not include transferred manuscripts currently under review/revision.

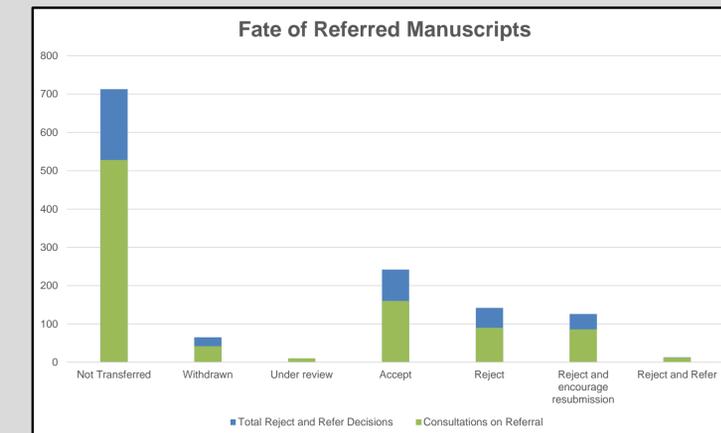


Figure 5: Number of manuscripts with "reject and refer" decision grouped by current status and indicating which of those in each category had consultations between the editors.

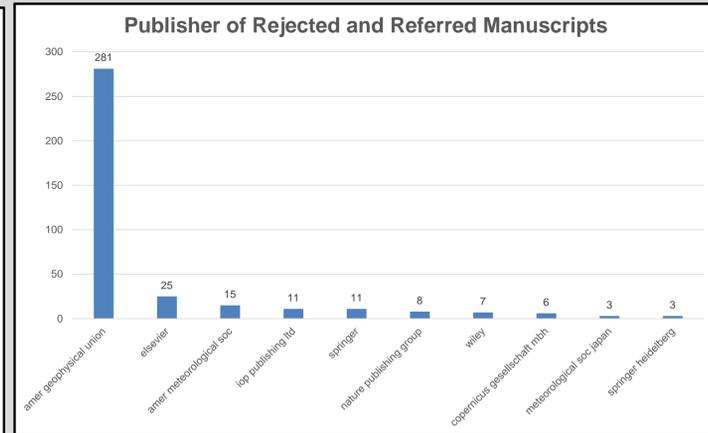


Figure 6: Top 10 publishers of manuscripts originally given "Reject and Refer" decision by AGU journal. Does not show 11 additional publishers of 2 or fewer manuscripts.

Conclusions

We rejected 12,000 manuscripts in 2015-2017 (Figure 1). This represents enormous potential for transfers to other AGU journals, including to our broad topic journal, *Earth and Space Science (ESS)*. Only **4% of our decisions are reject and refer**, which could be higher. Our highest volume, high-prestige journal, *Geophysical Research Letters (GRL)*, rejects and refers the most (Figure 2). More than half of their reject and refer decisions include consultation sessions, which is a significant number because the sessions take additional time and are optional. Some journals open consultation sessions for all of their referrals (e.g., *JAMES*, Figure 2). **There is not a strong correlation between the number of consultation sessions opened and the number of manuscripts transferred.** *ESS* does not receive the most referrals (Figure 3), which we need to work to increase. There are a few journals where the number of consultation sessions nears the number of manuscripts transferred; it might be worth looking into which journals these referrals are coming from and what those editors are including in their decision letters.

What is noteworthy is the similarity in overall decisions (Figure 1) with the decisions of transferred manuscripts (Figure 4). This indicates that the manuscripts rejected and referred enjoy the same fate (for better or worse) as manuscripts overall. **Over 700 manuscripts were not transferred but did have a consultation session (Figure 5).** This may indicate that opening a consultation session doesn't necessarily result in a successful transfer. Probably more effective are the decision letter and author's perception of the suggested journal, all of which could be considered when implementing a referral system.

AGU was able to retain some rejected and referred manuscripts (21%). This number is probably higher due to major changes in title, failure to use the transfer link, and/or resubmitting it to a journal not referred by the editor (AGU or non-AGU).

