Scholar Search: A global assessment of the productivity of italian Universities

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Motivation

In times of economic crisis, when support for science is likely to become severely limited it has become even more crucial for governments and funding agencies to be able to make rapid and unbiased assessments of the scientific returns of research investments. This is felt to be particularly urgent among the Italian scientific community since the government has chosen to counteract the economic crisis by cutting public expenditure without sparing education and research. The severe budget cuts will affect the scientific productivity of Italian Universities over the next few years. To mitigate this problem there is an urgent need of tools that help assessing the productivity of Institutions, Department individuals.

Methods

We have developed a script that automatically retrieves from the Cineca database names, roles and affiliations for the almost 60000 academic employees of Italian Universities and uses this information to collect from Google scholar their publications and related citations. The retrieved data have been organized in a user friendly relational database that is accessible at http://160.80.35.6/ScholarSearch/. The analysis refers to publications in English in years 2005-2008 and was gathered on December 20th 2009. Only publications reporting University affiliations were considered. All the data were collected automatically without any attempt of manual curation. As such we are aware that the database may contain errors and may under(over)-rate the productivity of some individuals. The inconsistencies may be due to a number of issues that are difficult to identify and correct: homonymy, inconsistency between names at CINECA and on the manuscripts, coverage of the Google Scholar Database, yet unidentified errors on our side. Despite these possible problems, we have decided to make this work public because some colleagues have found it useful. We feel that although some of these numbers may be challenged, when used judiciously, they offer a useful tool to compare the productivity of individuals, departments and universities within the Italian university system.

Results

• It is fast. The entire CIVR analysis was replicated by one person in one afternoon.
• It is affordable. Google Scholar is a freely accessible resource. • It is economical.

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It makes use of the peer reviewing already implemented in the publishing system. • It is open. It avoids the perceived, secrecy, subjectivity and rivalry of the peer review system. • It is democratic. Anybody can use our script, or more sophisticated versions, to repeat the evaluation process. • It is versatile. Once a metric is agreed upon, it can be integrated in the script easily. • It is not exclusive. It can be complemented by additional peer reviewing.

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