



## Introduction to Special Issue on Novel or Unusual Ideas in Environmental Statistics

**Rick Paik Schoenberg**  
Department of Statistics, UCLA

---

### Abstract

Innovative ideas are often unfairly rejected by journals during the publication process, in favor of more standard, mainstream articles. Brief comments on this problem, which motivated this special issue, are given.

**Keywords:** novel ideas, publication.

---

This is the first of what we hope are many annual special issues of the *Journal of Environmental Statistics*, each devoted to a particular theme, statistical topic, or environmental concern. The theme focused on in this issue concerns novel or unusual ideas in environmental statistics. In 2017, I began to notice that, in my own research, the more novel my ideas, the more likely they seemed to get rejected from publications. Conversely, the only papers I have ever written that sailed through the publication process were probably my least interesting papers. I mentioned this to a few people and their responses were almost unanimously that this was their experience as well.

In light of this, Professor Christou and I decided to dedicate a special volume of the *Journal of Environmental Statistics* to ideas related to statistics or environmental sciences, that were rejected elsewhere or cut from other papers perhaps because they were too novel or unusual. We wrote some of our most esteemed colleagues to ask if they might contribute, and were thrilled to have submissions from such a wonderful group of scholars.

The articles contained in this special issue and their authors need no introduction nor can I provide further interest by introducing them. While some represent new research that has not been submitted for publication previously, most of the papers here were previously submitted elsewhere and rejected on grounds that seemed rather narrow-minded and unfair considering their novelty and ingenuity and we are proud to publish them in the *Journal of Environmental*

*Statistics.* I would also like to present below just a sampling of some remarks on the topic of the publication process and its bias against novelty by some other researchers who did not contribute. The authors' names will be kept anonymous and particular names of journals are removed in what follows, but I can say the authors are absolutely preeminent researchers in Environmental Statistics and the journals they refer to are considered the top journals in our field.

“I had a paper rejected by [*journal name omitted*] and I wrote the editor and criticized the Associate Editor's conclusion so the Editor sent it out for a second round of review and the second Associate Editor rejected it based on a totally different set of reasons. In both cases rejection was based on the fact that the paper did not conform to the way the Ass. Editors felt the issue should be addressed. To the credit of the editor he decided if it was so controversial it should be published, it was and in the first year it was one of the top cited papers in the journal, and none of the citations were critical of the paper.”

“I agree completely! I think that this has always been the case but it is more so now than in the past.”

“This effect follows naturally from a 'Bayesian indecisive reviewer' model. A reviewer who is unsure about the value of a paper, might try assessing it via Bayesian approach. Since most new ideas do not develop into established theories, an a priori evaluation of a novel paper is low. This can be changed by author's prior success, actual paper content, etc, but this shows why extra effort is needed to push a new idea forward.”

“I had this experience throughout my entire career, every time I started on a new topic.”

“[M]uch agreed. My most influential papers in statistics journals indeed had got rejected initially.”

“You have lots of company... My sense is that a number of disciplines, including statistics, are increasingly using posting sites like <https://arxiv.org> with peer reviewed publications a secondary concern. In a recent paper I wrote, about half the references were unpublished. This puts the burden on each researcher to read and think about the work they cite rather than accepting the usual stamp of approval from some journal. That applies also to tenure and promotion reviewers. I believe this is a healthy trend. And rebellions like yours are also healthy.”

The notion that creativity and unusual ideas are sometimes frowned upon, rather than smiled upon, by the publication process in general is an issue that badly needs to be addressed by our academic community. I hope this special issue serves in some tiny way to spur some dialogue about this concern and to provide an outlet for ideas that were unfairly rejected elsewhere.

**Affiliation:**

Rick Paik Schoenberg  
Department of Statistics, UCLA  
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1554  
E-mail: [frederic@stat.ucla.edu](mailto:frederic@stat.ucla.edu)  
URL: <http://www.stat.ucla.edu/~frederic>