

EDITORIALS

Stating the Significance of Our Work

In 2019, the American Meteorological Society (AMS) Publications Commission agreed to add the option of “significance statements” to published papers. Appearing after the abstract in a published paper, the significance statement is intended to explain why the research matters to society at large (see the Significance Statements web page for more information and guidance; <https://ametsoc.org/SignificanceStatements>). Scientific papers are typically written to share information with other researchers but not so much with the general public and those who could put the ideas into practice. Significance statements are a way to bridge that gap so as to let a wider audience know what we are doing and how it matters to them. The statements may also help to reach researchers in different fields whose work has some overlap with ours, stimulating connections that may otherwise not be made.

Furthermore, much if not most published research is funded at least in part from public sources. In addition to the requirements of the particular funding agency, we as researchers have an obligation to show society at large what we are doing and why our work justifies the money that society allocates for that work. Significance statements can help to show how our papers contribute to understanding our world and why that understanding is useful to us all.


The Publications Commission chose to start significance statements in two journals, *Weather and Forecasting (WAF)* and *Weather, Climate, and Society (WCAS)*, as a way of gauging interest and learning how best to help authors explain their work clearly and succinctly. Gary Lackmann, Chief Editor of *WAF*, has been the champion of the significance statement in AMS journals, but *WCAS* won the friendly competition to be first to publish a significance statement.

Shadya Sanders, Terri Adams, and Everette Joseph wrote “Severe Weather Forecasts and Public Perceptions: An Analysis of the 2011 Super Outbreak in Tuscaloosa, Alabama,” appearing in the July 2020 issue. As they explain, forecasting of severe weather has improved greatly, and people report that they understand the storm warnings. Nonetheless, many people underestimate the risks posed by such storms, resulting in unnecessary deaths. In other words, their work matters because lives are literally at stake. To improve response to storm warnings, they suggest that “participants needed to personalize the threat before protective actions were prompted.” Not only is their topic important, they offer ideas for improving response to the warnings, turning academic research into real-world benefits.

Not all of our papers address matters of life and death, but they all speak to topics of importance to the society in which we live. If you submit a paper to *WCAS*, we encourage you to include a significance statement to make your work more accessible to a broader audience. If you read papers in *WCAS*, please consider sharing significance statements with friends and colleagues who are in different fields or are outside the sciences altogether. The more people there are who know about our work, the better it is for society.

Henry P. Huntington
WCAS Chief Editor

Gary M. Lackmann
WAF Chief Editor

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