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Too Much Academic Research Is Being Published

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There is a crisis in academic publishing and in the global knowledge distribution system generally—there is too much pressure on top journals, there are too many books and articles of marginal quality, predatory journals are on the rise, and there is a tremendous pressure on academics worldwide to publish. The decision by *The Review of Higher Education*, a highly respected academic journal, to temporarily suspend submissions due to a backlog of more than two years' worth of articles awaiting reviews or publication, set off a twitter storm and much debate in the corridors of academia about the future of academic publishing, and in particular its essential foundation, blind peer review.

These fundamental problems are artifacts of several developments in global higher education in the past half-century—especially massification and the rise of national and international rankings of universities. Related to this is the sociological phenomenon of isomorphism—that most academic institutions want to resemble the universities at the top of the academic pecking order—and thus seek to become research intensive. And finally, a growing trend in doctoral education is to dispense with the traditional PhD dissertation and replace it with the requirement for doctoral students to publish several articles based on their research in academic journals, in effect moving responsibility for evaluating doctoral research from university committees to journal editors and reviewers.

A DYSFUNCTIONAL AND UNNECESSARY SYSTEM

Our argument is a simple one. There is too much being published because the academic system encourages unnecessary publication. Drastic cutbacks are needed. Reducing the number of academic articles and books would permit the peer review system to function more effectively, would reduce or eliminate the predatory journals and publishers that have emerged recently, and would, perhaps most importantly, remove massive stress from academics who worry about publication instead of teaching and service.

In his 1990 book *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities*

for the professoriate, Ernest L. Boyer argued that the evaluation of academic work should include all aspects of the responsibilities of the academic profession, and that the large majority of professors who are not employed in research-intensive universities should be evaluated for their teaching and service, and not for research. He argued that most academics need to keep abreast of research trends and current thinking in their fields, but do not need to produce new knowledge. Those few academics at nonresearch universities wanting to do research and publish should, of course, be permitted to do so.

At the same time that research is deemphasized for most academics, the recognition and respect given to teaching must be enhanced. Both institutional and individual isomorphism must be eliminated—not an easy task but by no means impossible through a combination of carrots and sticks. Most universities that are not research intensive should, and largely do, focus on teaching. Faculty members should be rewarded for good teaching and for service to society and industry and not expected to do fundamental research. The German Humboldtian model, where all universities have a research mission, is wasteful and unnecessary

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to maintain quality. The demand by universities of applied sciences and other nonresearch universities to be given research funding and granted PhD programs—and the inclination of politicians to support them—goes against that trend. The growing numbers of universities of applied sciences in Europe and elsewhere should not have a research function but should remain true to their name and focus on teaching supported by applied research. Professional doctorates are an alternative path to research-based PhDs for people not aiming for a research-focused career.

If a careful differentiation is made and research publication is required only in the research universities, our guess is that the quality of research and development will increase and more than half of current so-called research articles could be eliminated.

QUALITY WITH CONTROL

To restore rationality to the publishing system, the sheer volume of articles and books must be reduced. We do not advocate that knowledge production be concentrated in the rich

countries, but rather that knowledge production be concentrated mainly in research universities in *all* countries. The established journals should pay much more attention to diversity of viewpoints, methodologies, and subject matter. The traditional monopolies of the research paradigms and subject areas evident in most prestigious publications need to be broken with more representation of quality scholars and authors from developing and emerging economies, as well as gender and other forms of diversity.

We call for quality but also for control of what quality is by the academic community instead of by nonacademic rankers, publishers, and citation and impact measurers. The solution is not to produce more research of poor quality. Quality, and not quantity, should be the objective, in combination with bringing quality control back to the academic community, while making sure that that control is not dominated by small groups in research universities in the rich countries.

POSSIBLE REFORMS

The first steps, of course, are to define the differentiated missions of academic systems, to place academic institutions in appropriate categories, and to link financial allocations to missions.

The knowledge distribution system needs major change. Research-intensive universities and appropriate professional societies, and government funding and other agencies need to take much more responsibility—and control—over a system that has become overly commercialized and in part corrupted. Predatory journals and publishers need to be weeded out. The extortionate prices charged by many of the monopolistic private-sector publishers, such as Elsevier and Springer, need to be reduced. The peer review system, which is at the heart of the maintenance of quality of scientific research and publication, needs to be strengthened. We are arguing essentially that the publishing system is out of control and, at this point, in a deep crisis, because of the amount of material seeking publication and being published. The volume has overwhelmed the publishing system and has introduced overcommercialization and corruption.

Our argument and proposal for a solution to the problem is to reduce the amount being published, not by interfering with the freedom of academics or concentrating power in the hands of the traditional academic power-brokers. We propose simply recognizing that most universities, and most academics globally, focus on teaching and that the large majority of universities recognize their important roles as teaching-focused and do not seek to become research-intensive institutions. ■

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