Responding to the Challenges Facing Scholarly Communication

Evaluation of Publications in Academic Personnel Processes
(Endorsed by the Academic Council on April 19, 2006)

Discussion Statement

The University of California Academic Senate recognizes and reaffirms the importance of a scholar's creation of new knowledge in fulfilling the faculty's role of education, research, and service. The process that a university faculty uses to make decisions about hiring, promotion and award of tenure relies heavily on scholarly works including publications. Historically, the quality of publications has been based in part on the quality of reviewers, presentation, and distribution, which features are well known for existing books and journals. As publications evolve with modern techniques of presenting scholarly works, these same features of quality must be evaluable and preserved. Veterans of our academic personnel process feel the following statements are important in evaluating and maintaining the quality and accessibility of scholarly works that are used in assessing faculty performance.

1. The standard for evaluating scholarship is publication or presentation at peer-reviewed, refereed outlets, as judged appropriate by faculty within each discipline. Publication need not necessarily be in print.

2. Publishers of new and established books and journals should provide the following in a readily-accessible form:
   a. Names and institutional affiliations of editors and referees
   b. Names and institutional affiliations of authors for the past two or more years
   c. Numbers of manuscript submissions and the acceptance rate for publication
   d. Copyright, open-access, and archival policies for the publication

3. Using available information including what publishers provide, it is the obligation of the evaluating department to assess the quality of the publication and the publication outlet. Evaluation of presentations of scholarly work (conferences, concerts, galleries, and so on) should include an explanation of the importance of the venue.

4. Economic factors make it increasingly difficult to publish books in the humanities and social sciences. The University should therefore consider offering subventions in start-up support for new faculty, particularly junior faculty, to publish books in peer-reviewed presses.

5. Academic personnel committees will consider new forms and modalities of scholarly communication as they become available and are validated through experience, as well as new forms of evaluating them.

Background

Central to the life of the University is evaluation of a faculty member's research. Large price increases for academic journals, and the unwillingness of many presses to publish books with limited circulation, force the University to ask whether the ways it had evaluated publications in the past (relying largely on publication in peer-reviewed, printed outlets) remain appropriate and realistic, and to ask how to evaluate work appearing in electronic media. A subcommittee of the Special Committee on Scholarly Communication (SCSC) consisting largely of faculty who had served on a campus and statewide personnel committee[1] reviewed the academic personnel policies of other universities, and found few references to electronic publications. The State University of New York at Buffalo requests in its "Promotion Dossier" a separate listing of "scholarly electronic publications with complete description of academic or professional nature

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[1] The roster of full committee and subcommittee members is maintained at
http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/senate/committees.php?action=committee_details&comm_name=SCSC

and sponsorship of the electronic agency." Perhaps because electronic publication is new, most academic personnel policies do not mention them specifically; for example, MIT describes Research and Scholarship as "Contributions to scholarship resulting from research and study, including publication of books, articles, and reports" without reference to electronic publications or presentations.

In some fields scholarly activity is not judged by publication in journals or books. The performing arts (such as music or dance) offer one example. Nevertheless, evaluation can be rigorous. The factors that enter into academic review include the venues of performances (Carnegie Hall usually counts more than a presentation at a local community college), the content of published reviews, and the reputation of the reviewers (a review in the New York Times will likely count more than a local review). Computer scientists often publish in proceedings of refereed conferences. Some UC physics departments accept electronic journal articles for appointment and advancement cases; several view some papers published only electronically as equivalent to articles published in standard journals. Some departmental faculty give the Journal of High Energy Physics (JHEP) and the Journal of Cosmology and Astroparticle Physics (JCAP) equal weight to that of a traditional print journal; the Institute for Scientific Information recently rated JCAP as having the highest impact factor in the field. Furthermore, these electronic archives maintain a database of citations, allowing evaluation of a paper's impact.

Publication and presentation practices in different disciplines are likely to change over time, and academic personnel committees should regularly evaluate the merits of new practices.

Forms Of Evaluation
Review and evaluation of scholarly work should consist of at least two steps. First, the work should appear in a peer-reviewed outlet. Second, work should be evaluated after its appearance. Why the first step? It has the advantage that the venue and reviewers can be evaluated, e.g. the quality of a journal, the standards of a journal editor, and the reputations of referees. In contrast, when we solicit a letter of recommendation, we know the academic quality of the writer. But we do not know what standards that person uses, or how the reviewer rates other people. Letters of reference are not substitutes for publication or presentation in outlets with readily knowable reputations. A gatekeeper for publication can also protect the University against weak departments or weak departmental selection or promotion procedures, that might result in a narrow selection of external referees, inappropriately finding the few, perhaps a small minority, who think highly of a candidate's work.

Evaluation of the work and its impact after it appears is an important second function, done by academic personnel committees, with the help of other appropriate faculty. Acceptance by a prestigious venue pertains to a specific scholarly work. The committee should judge that work as part of the whole body of material, not abrogating or transferring its judgment to an external entity, such as a journal editor. The academic personnel committee also has the opportunity and experience, more than do ad hoc departmental hiring or tenure committees, to judge work broadly across disciplines, thereby helping promote and ensure excellence across schools and campuses.

The University should welcome publication in electronic or other new media where appropriate, but faculty members and Departments have a responsibility to explain the distinction of those venues in comparison with more established ones. Electronic publishing can provide several advantages, including quicker access to new information, web links, 3-dimensional graphing, and storage of data sets. But as we emphasize above, the quality of new methods or venues of presentation needs to be determined by carefully scrutinized peer review.

The evaluation of a new or established publication venue can include a number of factors. ISI publishes citations for over 8,700 international journals, and discusses the criteria it uses in selecting 10-12% of the nearly 2,000 new journal titles it reviews annually. (See "The ISI Database: The Journal Selection Process"). These criteria include the journal's basic publishing

standards, its editorial content, the international diversity of its authorship, the timeliness of publication, and citation data associated with it. Other important features of a publication's quality are the credentials of its editorial board and peer reviewers, the reputation of other authors, the quality of work published, and citations to articles in it. Electronic venues may offer new measures of a scholarship's utility, such as frequency of viewing and querying new work. In the end, departments, deans, and the faculty members themselves have the responsibility to explain how they regard a particular venue's quality and why, both new and already established.

Conclusion
New ways of presenting and disseminating scholarly work are inevitable, but they must be attended by scrupulous protection of the quality of scholarship and extend successful practices in evaluating that quality. We offer the discussion and specific suggestions above to assist the UC and other university communities in their role of protecting and evaluating scholarship even as forms for its presentation evolve.

ADDENDUM TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The SCSC appreciates and agrees with the statements above, drafted by a subcommittee comprising former Committee on Academic Personnel (CAP) members and chairs (URL for names) and based on their extensive experience using current methods in the selection and promotion of an outstanding faculty at UC. SCSC absolutely agrees with UC's CAPs that the quality of work presented in new publication methods must be of the same or greater quality as current scholarly works.

However, we want to stress that in the immediate future, the University, its faculty, and its evaluation processes will increasingly encounter new forms of and new media for scholarly communication. Many faculty may fear that they will be penalized for publishing in new venues. The University will be disadvantaged if innovative forms and media of scholarly dissemination are discouraged for no other reason than that they are new. In the current system we believe that the academic personnel process at times may place excessive reliance on the reputation of the venue to the detriment of specific assessment of the work itself. As the variety of venues for scholarly publication widens, all participants in the review process should re-dedicate themselves to judicious assessment of all faculty research, in whatever venue, and to extend to innovative forms of publication the same careful evaluation of scholarship upon which the University has traditionally relied to assure the quality of its faculty.

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