Introduction:

Prof. Hermalin gave his background—he is a principal investigator on a Moore Foundation grant, investigating mathematics literature, in conjunction with MSRI. He used to work with Bepress. The discussion is to center on the issue, “if the goal is to get academics to publish in other places, what are the incentives that are currently facing academics, and what is feasible and what is not in getting them to change.” Now the “prestige journal” is everything, with no attention to cost. Prestige is what drives so much of an academic reputation. The real very daunting challenge is how to get people to change to other venues. The greater hope is getting academics to make other material accessible, e.g. using CDL for reporting. With working papers and preprints, even if they are still published in prestigious journals, and even if ultimately the journal is for profit, you can get the work out in other ways for increased access. Other ways to put pressure on journals to change their behavior include going off editorial boards or refuse to review papers for these journals.

Discussion:

One faculty member said he never thought of the correlation between prestige and the expense of journals; in his field it is the question of who reads the papers. His incentive is having as many people as possible reading his work. He could use feedback on who and how many are reading his papers and what do they think of the work.

Prof. Hermalin replied that prestige does not necessarily equal expense. In economics, society journals are most important.

There is a need to recognize differences across fields. Relying on ISI Thomson to get citation data is problematic since they are only pulling citations for published journals and not looking at working papers.

Reply—Google Scholar can look into who is citing whom when and how often, but it has the ability only if it was published in electronic form.

There were several comments about the fact that peer review only means a few people have looked at a paper; also being cited heavily does not mean quality. One problem is that thousands of people will download something just based on a person’s reputation, not that a particular work is of high quality.

There is a trend now to increase the prestige of less expensive journals; the concern is how to get people to stop reviewing and submitting to the high prestige expensive journals. Some departments will tell faculty what they consider the best journals.
No editor has actually stopped being on a board—they need to have their own alternative journal. The American Mathematical Society has not increased the number of pages in their journals. It is difficult for libraries to get new subscriptions, even for a low-priced new journal. Why not have in the review process for tenure and/or promotion the statement that it is a plus to have people published in these new journals. It will be difficult however to supplant existing journals—this will take a while.

We should be cancelling subscriptions. Why can’t the university say we’ll take 5% of our collections budget to take on the new journals. Use this idea in continuing the debate in the Faculty Senate about the “Statement of Principles”.

Another incentive would be to use library funds to support new models and offer subsidies for editorial offices and other financial incentives. There are benefits to faculty editors such as course-release and other support.

There is a question about monographs—there is an increasing expectation of faculty to publish but there are fewer presses; can we subsidize the University press?

Print is expensive, but we want to hang on it. Should we encourage people to publish online?

Because of the difficulty of publishing two monographs for tenure, some people publish lots of articles. An author can hand a pdf file to a publisher like UC Press if it’s already gone through the review process by others in the field. The editing doesn’t have to be done by the press.

There have to be incentives for non-traditional publication, having digital as the copy of record. Can the Budget Committee say that is not necessary—publish less but better in considering tenure and merit reviews. They should look at the five or eight best publications; also make it easier to load post-prints and they can also generate bio-bibs that way.

Maybe change the policy to only show what you have done online or in a repository.

The vast majority of publishers will allow you to put your work online, and even some publishers who don’t will make an exception for faculty who must make it available, as with NIH employees.

One question—can a consortium of universities say to a publisher that it is our policy that we will only consider those who make their material openly accessible?

Another question is if a publisher can use the backfiles as leverage, in the sense that if you chose to cancel a journal you would lose the back issues.

It needs to become easier to put a paper into a repository—one faculty member said it was extremely difficult getting it done.

notes by Norma Kobzina
March 31, 2005