The decline of peer review in the post-Gutenberg age

Kenny Cargill
November 14, 2009
LSO Symposium

http://kenny.cargill.googlepages.com
Definition, Function and Manifestation of Peer Review

• Promotion of professional standards of scholarship (Brown and Adler, 2008).
• Peer reviewers, through debate, negotiate quality and, in particular, originality (Lamont, 2009).
  ◦ Forensic rhetoric.
• Academic publishers as the guarantors of peer review (Binfield et al., 2008, p. 144).
  ◦ The top-down hierarchy of traditional academic knowledge production negotiates risk and ensures quality.
  ◦ Review in camera comes before publication.
  ◦ Guarantee of blind and double blind review.
Fractures in the Traditional System
Views from Authors

• Peer review is an inefficient and inexact process (Harris, 2008).
  ○ Overly long response times. Obstruction of the publication of timely research.
• Peer review facilitates plagiarism (Brainard, 2008; Greenberg, 2007).
• Peer reviewers are incompetent (Tipler, 2003).
  ○ Resistance to ideas that introduce "paradigm shifts" (cf. Kuhn, 1962; Gans & Shepherd, 1994).
  ○ The promotion of homogeneity through homophilic biases (Lamont, 2009).
• Peer review is insufficiently transparent.
• Authors receive poor feedback.
Fractures in the Traditional System
Views from Peer Reviewers

• Breach of confidentiality (Brainard, 2008; Guterman, 2004; Guterman, 2008).
• Dependence on volunteerism and the service quota of academic tenure (Myers, 2009).
  ◦ Editors ask for too many reviews.
  ◦ Reviewers perpetuate the process.
  ◦ Editors do not screen submissions.
  ◦ Insufficient instruction from editors.
  ◦ For the system to survive, more than just tenured faculty should be recruited to perform review.
Historical Background: Peer Review as Censorship

- Institution of review boards in Early Modern European learned (royal) societies (Biagolioli, 2002).
  - *Mémoires* of the Académie Royale des Sciences
  - *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society
- The establishment of the closed system and the negative definition of quality.
  - Poor quality is simply what cannot be published.
- Early critics of the closed system.
  - John Milton's *Areopagitica*
  - John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*. 
The revision of Peer Review in the "post-Gutenberg" age

• Creation of an open system (Cope and Kalantzis, 2009).
  ○ Review occurs after publication.
    ▪ Expansion of post-publication review (Borgman, 2007, p. 59).
  ○ Peers are self-selected.
  ○ The wisdom of crowds and "crowdsourcing" (Surowiecki, 2004).
  ○ Linus's law (Raymond, 2001; Black, 2008).
Technology as Catalyst for Open Peer Review

• PDFs, the paper metaphor and the closed system (Cope and Kalantzis, 2009).
• Scholarly communication is enhanced by interactive, electronic media.
  ◦ Blogs (Brown and Adler, 2008, p. 29).
  ◦ Open access archives. The case of arXiv.org and RePec.org.
• As an archive gains respect within a field, it can acquire the "legitimization" and "registration" function of the scholarly journal (Borgman, 2009).
Conclusions and Closing Questions

• How can an open access peer review system address the hiring, tenure and promotion processes of Academia?
• How will publishers cope in an electronic future where Raymond's (2001) and Black's (2008) ideas dominate?
• What are the implications for libraries as selectors of information resources? Is this an important value-added service of the library? (Buckland, 1988)
• What are the implications for libraries as publishers (i.e., as those responsible for open access archives and institutional repositories)?


References (continued)


References (continued)


References (continued)


