Changing scholarly communication through a greater understanding of academic career incentives

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Discussions about the need to change the model of scholarly communication have been going on for decades. It seems, however, that these discussions inevitably conclude that culture change in academia is thwarted by a lack of incentives for scholars to do things differently. Whether the goal is to encourage the research community to publish outside of "glam" journals, publish open access, post pre-prints, share data, or devote time to alternative forms of scholarship like software, blogs, or podcasts, and to do more public engagement, the proponents of change are stymied by the incentive structures entrenched in academic institutions through the review, promotion, and tenure (RPT) process. However, despite the importance of the RPT process, and its perceived role in impeding change, very little is known about current RPT practices as they relate to questions of scholarly communication. To address this dearth of information, we collected RPT documents from over 120 institutions from the US and Canada and from over 350 departments, from a wide range of disciplines, at those institutions. The institutions were chosen through a stratified random sample taken from the Carnegie Classification of Institutions and documents collected through a combination of crowd sourcing and targeted messages. The result is a large and representative set of RPT documents whose content was subsequently analyzed, using a combination of traditional reading and machine text processing tools, to understand patterns, identify examples, and gather insights into the RPT process. This presentation will cover the main findings of this study, including the internal tensions that exist within the documents, the ambiguity of language used, and the institutional and departmental differences in how incentives are expressed, all in the hope of starting a conversation about how to change the culture in academia towards a more open system of scholarly communication.