

## The 'Publish-or-Perish' Syndrome

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The outcome of research is in the form of patents, publications, reports etc. Successful publications bring attention to scholars as well as their sponsoring institutions, facilitating continued funding and an individual's progress through his/her field. In popular academic perception, scholars who publish infrequently, or who focus on activities that do not result in publications, may find themselves out of contention for available tenure-track positions. From the stakeholder's point of view, publications are important for an academic portfolio, often deciding a coveted promotion or appointment, research funding, or a fellowship or even a "Chair" (K. Desai, 2012; doi: 10.4103.0253-7613..99294). The importance of publishing and authorship can be well gauged from the words of F. Mullan (1999; doi: 10.1377/hlthaff.18.4.118): "Writing makes a record, a mark on the world, no matter how small. One's written words become one's offspring. The stories and their messages will live on as evidence of one's presence on the planet and engagement with life", and the analogy that the Council of Science Editors has drawn between paternity and authorship as "both being acts of creation - in the one case, new persons; in the other, new ideas".

There, however, is a sustained pressure on the faculty and students to rapidly and continuously publish academic work to sustain or advance their career. The academic scientific enterprise, too, rewards those with the longest CVs and the most publications. Not only that, while certain supervisory bodies have redefined their norms for promotions using marks for publications based on candidate's position in the sequence of authors defining their intellectual input, other institutions consider impact factors of journals, citation



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rates and other bibliometric information as important parameters for promotions. According to a report in the Guardian (5 Sept 2011), "Not long ago, Imperial College's Medicine Department were told that their 'productivity' target for publications was to 'publish three papers per annum including one in a prestigious journal with an impact factor of at least five'. The phrase 'Publish or perish' aptly describes this pressure. While some consider 'Publish-or-perish' practices as being unhealthy, others argue that some pressure to produce cutting-edge research is necessary to motivate scholars early in their careers to focus on research advancements, and learn to balance achievement with other responsibilities of the professorial role. The most notable among criticisms of this phenomenon is that emphasis on publishing may decrease the value of resulting scholarship, as scholars tend to spend more time scrambling to publish whatever they can manage, rather than spend time to develop significant research agendas. In an article 'Publish or perish, but at what cost?', Ushma S. Neill, Executive Editor, Journal of Clinical Investigation (doi: 10.1172/JCI36371) argues that under pressure to generate voluminous output, scientists often fall prey to double publishing, self plagiarism, and submitting 'minimal publishable unit'. It might also detract from the time and effort that a teacher should devote to teaching. Unfortunately, the rewards for exceptional teaching rarely match the rewards for exceptional research, which encourages faculty to favor the latter whenever they conflict. Globally, many institutions today do not focus on teaching ability when they hire a new faculty, but simply look at their publication list. There are instances where accomplishments including teaching, advising, developing workbooks, being available for students, serving on committees and serving one's profession on positions of leadership and elected offices despite heavily weighing in favor of teaching and service to the institution were not considered enough for grant of a promotion. This single-minded approach on the professor-as-researcher may cause faculty to neglect or unable to optimally perform other responsibilities including teaching. Another important aspect of professorship is mentorship of graduate students, an aspect rarely assessed when new faculty are admitted to a department. Among academics, the maxim 'Publish or perish' (i.e., publish your research or risk losing your job) is a threatening reminder of the importance of publication. However, despite its cynicism, the phrase 'Publish-or-perish' makes an important point: Publishing findings, hypotheses, theories, and lines of reasoning and relevant evidence is critical to the overall progress of science and humanity. Thus, while there appears a need to use different criteria/thresholds to assess research contribution of full-time researchers vis'-a-vis' teacher-cum-researchers or those who have been assigned routine scientific jobs such as screening, documentation etc., it would be ideal to optimally utilize time, intellect and available facilities to publish to the best of one's abilities and flourish.