Returns on research: patents and publications

Last week in this column I discussed one aspect of the evaluation of the returns on publicly funded scientific research, namely the number of patents will and licenses that are transferred to the business sector. This metric was very positively impacted by the passage of the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980. Another powerful return is the amount of new scientific knowledge coming out of research. It is therefore vital that research results be accurately communicated and widely disseminated. While conferences, reports, and other interactions among researchers are important to communicating and advancing science, scholarly publications remain critical for sharing research findings more broadly and for maintaining the scholarly record. Remarkably, this essential communication function is accomplished using, on average, less than 1% of a research institution's budget. I believe that commercializing the results of federally funded research through licensed patents and commercializing the communication of these research results through saleable publications are closely related.

Commercializing federally funded research through patents and licensing is a clear expression of its short-term value. And thanks to Bayh-Dole, it generates income for the investors, their institutions, and the private sector licensing companies, with a resulting boost to the economy. The university community is a tremendous supporter of Bayh-Dole, which pays off for them, quite literally, in the billions of dollars. It is perhaps surprising, then, that some in this community object to publishers' (both for-profit and non-profit) commercialization of the expression of federally funded research, made possible by significant investments in editorial production, dissemination and archival of peer-reviewed journals.

The financial state of scholarly publishing has in recent years been stressed by two extenuating circumstances.

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...History in the shelving

In June many staff saw large carts of valuable archival records wheeled out of the Niels Bohr Library & Archives and stored
temporarily throughout the building. Moving out these thousands of boxes was part of our project to replace the moveable shelving system that was installed in the second floor Archives stacks when the building was constructed. A new electric push-button system will provide good space for a long time to come.

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Member Society Spotlight

Hear ye, hear ye! ASA awards for excellence in acoustics

The Acoustical Society of America is seeking nominations for two awards, whose deadlines are coming up at the end of August. Nominees/applicants need not be members of ASA.

William and Christine Hartman Prize for Auditory Neuroscience

Prize information.

Medwin Prize in Acoustical Oceanography

Prize information.

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Coming Up

July 20-24

- AAPM 56th Annual Meeting (Austin, TX)

July 21

- Brown bag lunch given by Alex Wellerstein on “John Wheeler’s H-Bomb Blues: Searching for a Missing Document at the Height of the Cold War” (College Park)

July 25

- SPS interns program presentations (College Park)

July 26-30

- AAPT Summer Meeting (Minneapolis, MN)
August 1

- Last day of SPS internships (College Park)

August 13

- Birthday socials (Melville and College Park)