

Yet More Proof That Academic Publishing Has Become a Scam

Last year, a piece I did titled [“Why Professors Are Writing Crap That Nobody Reads”](#) generated some attention.

In it, I pointed out what is commonly known among university professors today, namely, that most of the “peer-reviewed” essays and books they write are read by an extremely small handful of people (like 5-10, half of whom are probably sycophantic graduate students). The principal reason they keep churning them out is the familiar maxim of “publish or perish”—a publication provides two lines on a CV that helps ensure tenure, or at the very least a vanity hit to convince professors of their continued relevance.

This morning, a story from *The Guardian* appeared in my Facebook feed that provides yet another confirmation of the general thesis of that piece.

Titled [“Academics are being hoodwinked into writing books nobody can buy,”](#) it recounts one professor’s recent experience of being contacted by an academic publisher who was willing to publish anything he wrote—no matter how obscure.

Why, you might ask? Here’s the game: the academic publisher knows that he can sell a few hundred copies of the book at an exorbitant price to university libraries around the world. If the professor also forces his unsuspecting students to buy copies for a course, then “cha-ching!”, even better.

The author of the article keeps himself and the name of the academic publisher anonymous, which is kind of weak, though it serves to show the fear in which professors live today. Becoming a whistle-blower likely means being shunned by academia, which further means—except for the very talented—[a dramatic decrease in future job prospects.](#)

Nevertheless, in spite of the anonymity, I decided to reference the article because it provides insight into a known phenomenon in the out-of-control academic publishing industry.

Because the academic publisher in question is not named, I can't verify if it is a "reputable" publisher. Most savvy PhDs know that a publication from some random press won't be worth too much on a CV when they apply for jobs (along with 500 other applicants) at top-tier colleges. They know to seek after reputable academic presses when they want to put out a book.

But the business for the reputable publishers is similar to the one outlined in the *Guardian* article. They typically charge \$100-\$200 for a book—a sticker price that can only be afforded by university libraries, in which they will be confined to some dark corner, and after a dozen checkouts, to irrelevancy. The difference is that the reputable publishers are most likely able to sell their books to a greater number of libraries.

Now, as in other posts, I'll clarify (since this seems so necessary for some) that *not all* high-level academic publishing today is worthless. Some of it helpfully expounds on important points and issues you won't find covered in the popular nonfiction books on *Barnes & Noble* shelves.

However, I still maintain that a lot of academic *is* self-serving crap. The simple fact is that there are many professors out there who should not be writing; who should just be teaching, and continually developing their skills in that craft. A PhD *usually* means that you can write coherently and use proper grammar, but it doesn't necessarily mean that you have original ideas that are worth putting in print.

But until universities begin scaling back the publishing requirements for tenure, more crappy academic writing is what we'll continue to get.

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