

Why Does the Evaluation of Research Need to be Reformed?

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The evaluation of scientific research already has an extensive and well-structured literature on its objects, motives, methods and procedures, criteria and standards, difficulties, and results. It hardly needs elaborate philosophical underpinnings as there is normally, but not always, a consensus around what is truly important and valuable research. Simultaneously, most governments around the world recognize that current methods for evaluating research for funding purposes are not sufficient for current needs, and they are now funding efforts to find new and improved methods. In the United States alone, as evidenced by the concerns of the American Council on Competitiveness, the initiative of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, and the National Science Foundation's funding of studies to build a science of science and innovation policy, a primary interest is assessment to understand how to improve research so that it can effectively contribute to national goals. Similar efforts exist throughout Europe, in Japan, and in Korea. In early 2008, a volume of *New Directions for Evaluation* (NDE), guest edited by myself and Michael Scriven, titled "Reforming the Evaluation of Research" is scheduled for publication. This volume, devoted to reforming the evaluation of research, is intended to contribute to the process of addressing this analytical need. It represents the thinking and work of some of the world's leading scholars

and practitioners who have devoted themselves to improving the way that research is evaluated. Without staking any great claim about reforming research itself, a field of action that has rarely been out of the public eye, ultimately the suggestions found in that volume should indirectly result in increasing the quality of, and payoff from, research that is done, reducing the cost of doing it, and lending public credibility to the manner in which research is funded.

While there is normally a consensus around what is truly exceptional research, the conventional practices of evaluating researchers and their research have traditionally been implicit, subjective, and determined by an unwritten perspective of what constitutes good research. Making this process explicit, systematic, and objective requires a departure not only from longstanding principles and procedures, which have mainly viewed science as a self-regulating endeavor, but also a departure from many contemporary ideologies. This forthcoming volume of NDE, devoted to efforts at improving the evaluation of research, represents the theoretical, methodological, and practice perspectives from some of the world's leading scholars who have devoted themselves to improving the way that research is evaluated. These contributions come from authors currently or recently working in Australia, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The chapters in this volume offer what we hope will be

powerful and promising insights about evaluation of research, not only for the scientists, technologists, and scholars who have been or will be subjected to an assessment of their own research, but also for research managers and policymakers.

The papers under the heading “Reforming the Evaluation of Research” in this issue of JMDE appear here due to the space limitations of NDE, not because of their quality, and are intended to supplement our forthcoming volume of NDE.

References

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