Creative Scholarship Related to Promotion & Tenure in the 21st Century

Virginia Rolling, Georgia Southern University

Anna Ruth Gatlin, Auburn University

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Creative scholarship can be an important aspect to the promotion and tenure process in academia especially since many tenured and tenure-track faculty must produce research to progress in their careers (Sotto-Santiago et al., 2021). Since creative scholarship is one way that scholars produce research in creative fields, there is a need to reassess the importance of creative scholarship according to present day standards influenced by the recent COVID-19 pandemic which disrupted creative scholarship projects, data collection, and dissemination of new knowledge acquired through research. Creative scholarship is vital to multiple fields (e.g., textiles, apparel, interiors, art, theater, and other creative disciplines), and thus, it is important to recognize that creative scholarship should be evaluated across multiple disciplines and academic roles. Interestingly, the definition of creative scholarship for interior design has not been updated since 1993 (IDEC, 1993). Furthermore, before the pandemic Morris and Parsons (2016) found when surveying members of ITAA that there was no unified accepted definition of creative scholarship. As such, creative scholarship as a vital part of academic advancement in the 21st century needs to be reassessed and possibly redefined for the advancement of creative scholars in their careers to attain promotion and tenure according to present day standards. Thus, this research aimed to determine current practices for the generation and submitting of creative scholarship for the purposes of promotion and tenure.

For this pilot study, 39 participants at an international conference were asked to fill out an online survey. The survey consisted of 30 Likert-type questions, two open-ended questions, and 10 close-ended questions that were adapted from Adams (2004) and later from Adams and Meyer (2009). Basic quantitative data analysis using descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. Qualitative exemplar quotes were also used to help explain the statistical data. Out of the 39 participants, nine were tenure-track or tenured (TT/T), five were academic administrators (in roles that typically require tenure status), six were non-tenure-track (NTT), nine were academic professionals, and fourteen were “other” (e.g., students, etc.). According to the respondents, many generate creative scholarship in an academic year as follows:

• 27.5% generated one creative work in an academic year.

• 25% generated six or more creative works in an academic year.

• 20% generated no creative works in an academic year.

• 10% generated two creative works in an academic year.

• 10% generated three creative works in an academic year.

• 7.5% generated four creative works in an academic year.

• 0% generated five creative works in an academic year.

In comparison, respondents reported the following for submitting their creative work in an academic year:

• 50% typically do no submit creative work in an academic year.

• 23.69% submit one creative work in an academic year.

• 10.53% submit two creative works in an academic year.

• 7.89% submit three creative works in an academic year.

• 7.89% submit six or more creative works in an academic year.

• 0% submit four or five creative works in an academic year.

In conclusion, there is more creative scholarship being generated than submitted in an academic year. Most individuals reported either generating either one (27.5%) or else six or more (25%) creative works in an academic year which are extremes, whereas most individuals (50%) reported not submitting their creative work in an academic year. Furthermore, creative scholarship work that is submitted will most likely be either one creative work (26.69%) or two creative works (10.53%) compared to three creative works (7.89%) or six or more creative works (7.86%). According to these statistics, there is an evident disparity between generating creative works compared to submitting creative works. The reasons for this disparity may be better understood by participant exemplar quotes such as “…I do not believe my institution values creative scholarship as equal to traditional scholarship” whereby participants do not submit due to a perceived inequality of scholarly values between traditional compared to creative dissemination of research. Another participant stated, “Creative scholarship is not easily measurable, even if it includes data points, so it is considered the lesser of scholarship.” From this statement, disparities in the valuing of one scholarship over another is also expressed. In the following statement, the participant relays “I think traditional scholarship is the only way to create new knowledge” which creates a barrier towards creative scholarship having the same advantage of being perceived as creating new knowledge. Lastly, a participant shared that “creative scholarship is not accepted for promotion and tenure in my program” which poses another barrier to valuing creative scholarship as a worthy form of research used towards career advancement.

The present research is valuable in showcasing not only the disparities between generating compared to disseminating creative scholarship through the submission process, but also the perceived value of creative scholarship compared to traditional scholarship for promotion and tenure purposes. As such, these results highlight a key issue in the perception of creative scholarship as valuable across different academic roles. This research is vital in its ability to help initiate discourse on improving perceptions of creative scholarship towards instituting better academic policies for upholding creative scholarship as a rigorous and legitimate form of research in the promotion and tenure process.

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