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License Back: How Crunching Publication Data Can Bring the Scholarly Landscape Back into Balance
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Abstract: Much ink has been spilled over the serials crisis. Approaches to addressing this problem vary from assembling and breaking up Big Deals, to a variety of open access publishing models, but none of these has resulted in a shift that wrests agency and control from a handful of multinational commercial interests and returns them to universities and libraries, the very institutions supporting the factors of research production. The rise of open access publishing, and Gold open access in particular, has created a new opportunity for market capitalization that has, to date, been most effectively cornered by the same entities that contributed to the original serials crisis. Gold APCs (article processing charges) paid between 2005 and July of 2018 is estimated by OpenAPC to have surpassed $100 Million USD. The availability of publication data tools now makes it possible for academic institutions to identify, collect, and assess their institutional contributions to the scholarly record. The Academy has aggressively protected tangible profit-generating intellectual property encapsulated in the form of patents, yet the intellectual property contained within scholarly articles, for which copyright has been systematically transferred to publishers subsequent to the 1976 Copyright Act, has been freely given away and then repurchased within the packaging of the academic journal as a matter of course. The author takes a critical look at the academic publishing landscape and puts forward a license-back model that utilizes existing mechanisms and infrastructure of a research institution, such as technology transfer, to create a more balanced scholarly publishing landscape whereby universities that contribute to the body of scholarly knowledge receive compensation for their contributions. This proposal seeks to encourage data-driven solutions that extend beyond APC-based approaches to critically analyze the notion of scholarly value as measured by means other than institutional procurement cost.