Chapter 4. Review Office

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1. Preface

In April 2000, national universities in Japan broke away from the conventional system and started implementing various reforms with their status as “Independent Administrative Institutions”. With respect to university evaluations, the universities are facing challenges on how to realize fairness, transparency, multi-facetness and ensure the fitness of purpose as well as issues on how such performance exerts effects on the future status of study and society. In actively promoting reforms in these areas, they are taking a trial and error approach.

In December 2004, Tohoku University started operating an enhanced Tohoku University Information Database whose primary purpose is to deal with university evaluations. This database includes, in part, the Tohoku University Researchers’ Information Database that started operating in February 2003. With the creation of the Tohoku University Information Database, all university teaching staff are requested to individually enter information that covers a wide range of their activities from research to education. In October 2003, the Tohoku University Library introduced “Web of Science” that provides a unique searching method, cited reference searching, which can be used for research evaluations, with access to natural science information as far back as 1945. With these moves toward creating databases on the overall level of Tohoku University, its constituents, i.e. the faculties, graduate schools and institutes, are required to reconsider how to deal with individual databases they have already created with respect to their research achievements. In April 2003, the Institute for Materials Research (IMR) stopped collecting information for its original bibliography database (KINLIB) that covered publications by its staff.

A tenure system has been introduced for the teaching staff of some of Tohoku University’s faculties, graduate schools and institutes. IMR also introduced this system and teaching staff employed after April 2001 are subject to this system. Accordingly, since April 2002 all IMR teaching staff have had to report their research achievements to the director once a year.

As mentioned above, the situation surrounding university evaluations have been rapidly changing both inside and outside the university. The Review Office, a part of the Office of Information and Public Relations, conducts routine activities according to the situation and circumstances while

dealing with collecting information and investigative activity to meet situations that may emerge in the future.

2. Organization after transition to a corporatization

Along with the transition to corporatization, IMR's organization has undergone a major reform centered on its committees as shown in Section 1. As a result, the former review section was consolidated with another section into the Office of Information and Public relations headed by a deputy director and the name was changed to the Review Office. In this new style, the professor in charge of review work corresponds to the head of the former review section. Considering the complexity of "evaluation" arising inside and outside the university and the importance of evaluation practices, the head of the Office of Information and Public Relations (deputy director) would concurrently serve as the professor in charge of review work. In response to directions from the head of the Office of University Evaluation Analysis asking for a person to be responsible for evaluation at each faculty, graduate school and institute and a person to be responsible for operating the Tohoku University Information Database, the former was assumed by a professor at the Office of Information and Public Relations (Deputy Director, Hanada) and the latter by an associate researcher (Onose).

3. Evaluation of publications and database

1) Data transfer, integration and recreating between databases

In principle, research evaluation is performed using the peer review process, where, as it is commonly known, the database is indispensable as a tool to accomplishing evaluations. However, there are some challenges, i.e. the evaluation situation is not yet fixed inside and outside the university, researchers are not willing to enter information on their publications into databases because of the time involved, issues exist involving the items for evaluations and improving the accuracy of data input and standardizing expression descriptions.

The Tohoku University Researchers' Information Database batch registers multiple data for individual researchers according to the publication. With this function the Review Office is addressing establishing measures for data transfer between different databases as well as integrating and recreating its databases while paying attention to copyright. This allows effective use of existing commercial databases of the Web of Science and databases created and operated individuals and organizations and data from paper lists of individual researchers that have been systematically input (e.g. full-text data) to support researchers.

2) Use of software

To implement the above, it is necessary to select optimal conversion software (interface) and database software while meeting the situation and making best use of them according to the purpose. Using specially created, customized programs is one approach but another approach is to use general, inexpensive, commercial software such as Access, File Maker Pro, Excel, Memo Pad, Word Pad and Hidemaru while appropriately combining them and satisfying the purpose. When using commercial software, it is easy to keep up with IT technology that involves rapid software development since the commercial software has frequent upgrades.

3) Use of cited reference databases (Web of Science, etc.)

As described above, Tohoku University has introduced a cited reference database, Web of Science (all data from 1945 for natural science) and ISI Essential Science Indicators. Investigation by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports Science and Technology includes an item that relates to how often publications are cited in other publications. To appropriately deal with this, the basic step is to comprehensively understand the state of publications at respective institutes and faculties and graduate schools. The next step is to set up an environment where retrieval and data processing technologies are properly dealt with. In the early stage, IMR purchased and uses the Institution Citation Report (CD). However, ICR is now considering replacing the ICR with another that allows direct retrieval of the Web of Science that operates via the university network.

4. Public release of evaluation material

Since the IMR Self-examination and Evaluation Report somewhat resembles a data book, FileMaker Pro has been used as a tool that allows effective processing of data used in publishing data books as well as editing and layouting.

In 2002, an input screen with FileMaker Pro was made to be accessed from the public on the website for data collection and content correction by the authors themselves. To further develop this, there has been a trial method since 2004 where the results of database retrieval, which are the base of data books, are published on the web as PDF files to allow printing and publishing the data books. Presently, the 2002 and 2003 Self-examination and Evaluation Reports and the results of the External Evaluation for 2000 are on the website as “Act IMR”. In the future, IMR’s bibliography information will be added to Act IMR.

At present, the Tohoku University Information Database has data on the web by individual researchers as a unit while IMR has the data by evaluation indices as a unit. With the change in the managing organization following the transition to an independent administrative institution, IMR is

required to exert its originality while noting the moves of the whole university. With the progress in electronic publishing (websites, CD, etc.) it is important to clearly recognize the distinctive roles between book style and electronic publications and use either of them according to the purpose. IMR is facing versatile issues to be dealt with while tracing the trend of the times even in the limited area involved with releasing its evaluation material to the public.