OPEN ACCESS AND LIBRARIES

Essays from Cites & Insights, 2001-2009

Walt Crawford

A Cites & Insights Book
Livermore California, 2010
Open Access and Libraries:
Essays from Cites & Insights, 2001-2009

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Introduction

This book brings together articles (and, in a few cases, sections of articles) on open access and other aspects of library access to scholarship that appeared in *Cites & Insights* (citesandinsights.info).

Articles appear exactly as they did in the original journal, modified only to fit the book’s page size and typography. No updates or corrections have been made (except for one or two typographical errors. Articles appear in strict chronological order. There is no additional commentary.

This book appears only for the record. It is not a comprehensive overview of OA during the first decade of the new millennium, and it is not even a comprehensive view of what Walt Crawford thinks about OA. It is what it is: A record of what I published about OA during that decade, quite possibly omitting some short pieces.

The first *C&I* article related to OA, before that name was well established in the field, appeared in May 2001. (At the time, the term was FOS—Free Online Scholarship.) The last, as I was concluding that I was no longer able to value to OA-related discussions, appeared in November 2009. Quite a few appeared during those nine years. I’ve also included one “disContent” column from *EContent* that’s directly on topic (that column appears as submitted, not necessarily exactly as published).

It’s possible, even likely, that some OA-related commentary within *Cites & Insights* doesn’t appear here—for example, predictions from Peter Suber and others would have appeared in larger Trends & Quick Takes articles, not picked up for this compilation.

Thanks to Peter Suber for agreeing that this might be a worthwhile compilation.

But There’s No Index!

For which I apologize. I had planned to include a partial index—including people, journals, article titles, but probably not topics—using Word’s indexing facilities.
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It was not to be. Perhaps it’s the sheer length of this book; perhaps it’s the number of sections. Maybe there’s some obscure bug in Word2007.

Whatever the case, whenever I go beyond the first 60 pages or so, using “Mark All” and “Mark” as appropriate to flag index points (hey, Peter Suber’s name appears a few dozen times!), then save the result, then open that result…well, the result is chaos. Last time, the 519-page book suddenly turned into 1,290 pages, with multiple lines of headers from various chapters making up a huge and unchangeable page footer on each page.

If this was a project expected to yield significant income, I might prepare a separate index document—but for a book this long, that would take scores of hours. I honestly can’t justify the time for a book that’s being given away in electronic form and sold for barely more than the cost of production in print form.

If this book is useful, maybe some reader will generate an index. If not, well, again, my apologies.
Getting Past the Arc of Enthusiasm

May 2001

Spell it $TM. The prices of scholarly journals in science, technology, and medicine seem nearly incomprehensible to those of us who don’t work in academic libraries. $9,036 a year for one narrowly focused science weekly. An average of $658 for all science journals in 1999. Even some of the initiatives for lower-priced journals seem staggering: $2,415 a year (for Web-only access) sounds cheap only when compared to that $9,036.

For more than a decade now, some scholarly journals have worked at a different price point: Free, at least for Internet distribution. That non-price raises two questions:

➢ Are free scholarly electronic journals any good?
➢ Do free scholarly electronic journals last?

Pioneers: The 104 Starters

ARLs Directory of Electronic Journals, Newsletters and Academic Discussion Lists for 1995 includes 104 items that appear to be free refereed scholarly electronic journals. Those journals still publishing in 2000, a minimum of six years, can be considered lasting titles. Some electronic scholarly journals started years before (typically using email or other non-Web distribution techniques); I’ve served on one (now-dead) electronic journal’s editorial board since late 1989.

While 1995 may seem like ancient times for the Web, Mosaic (the first widely-available browser) was well established by then. Most academic libraries had Internet access, many used various forms of electronic communication, and more than a few were building Web sites.

Fifty-seven of the 104 journals in the 1995 ARL Directory had Web or Gopher addresses (URLs). Seventeen of those addresses still worked in
early 2001. Finding the others proved fascinating and frustrating. After working with a variety of tools, I found Eureka and Google most useful.

The RLG Union Catalog via Eureka provides a good first cut answer as to whether a journal has been noticed by academic libraries or the Library of Congress. For nineteen titles, not a single record could be found, a bad sign for academic significance. For most of the others, I could click on a cataloged Web address to locate the journal itself—and most of those addresses worked. Where Eureka failed (through lack of records, lack of URLs, or dead URLs), Google usually succeeded—not always in finding the journal itself, but finding evidence that the journal did exist at one time.

**Good News: The Results**

Early free electronic journals have done better than might have been expected:

- Eighteen were misdescribed or have changed direction.
- Ten are missing in action—or have nothing but e-mail addresses, which makes them invisible to the larger scholarly community.
- Five are so confusing that their status is unclear.
- Twenty seen to have fallen prey to the arc of enthusiasm: after a few good years, the journals have died or become comatose.
- Two journals ceased for reasons other than declining interest.
- Twenty-one journals still publish a small but steady flow of manuscripts.
- Twenty-eight journals still publish substantial numbers of refereed articles.

Of 86 titles that were available as free refereed scholarly journals in 1995, 49 (57%) still publish six years later. Given the difficulties of coordinating refereed journals and the problems inherent in “free,” that’s a remarkable record.

**Clarifying Intentions (“Misdescribed”)**

Some titles in this group may have changed approach over the years; others are cases where I interpreted the 1995 entry too loosely. Associates: The Electronic Library Staff Support Journal has turned out three issues per year since 1995—but, while valuable, it does not appear to be a scholarly journal. JAC Online: A Journal of Composition Theory is a print journal that provides free online access to archived articles (cur-
rently ending in 1996). Three journals currently carry prices—although in two cases, the prices are relatively low ($100 for *J.UCS*, $20 for *Postmodern Culture*). Several titles are actually literary journals or journals of campus life.

**Mysteries, Confusion, and Oddities**

Does *Advances in Systems Science and Applications* exist? Is there an *Electronic Visual Arts Journal* or an *Online Modern History Review*? Varied and extensive efforts failed to turn up any publicly accessible evidence. Three 1995 titles lack Internet archives of any sort but may still “publish” by e-mail only. Eight journals have Web sites that don’t work. A Google-cached home page for the *Electronic Journal of Analytic Philosophy* shows six issues between 1993 and 1998—but none of those issues can be reached.

*Digital Technical Journal*, the online version of an established print journal, published at least 20 articles per year from 1993 through 1997. That declined to ten each in 1998 and 1999. Then, as Compaq absorbed the remains of Digital Equipment Corporation, the journal disappeared. *Slavic Review (Post Print Edition)*, also an online offshoot of a print journal, managed two online issues in 1994 (13 papers) and four in 1995 (30 papers). Then, the publishers called an end to the online experiment.

**The Arc of Enthusiasm**

The largest group of dead or comatose journals follows a pattern I call the arc of enthusiasm. After the considerable effort of creating a new journal, all goes well for two to five years, but the flow of articles never regains the peak reached in the first or second year. Finally, the flow of articles dwindles to a trickle. The journal shuts down or continues as a ghost journal, publishing one or two articles every year or two. Some observers of this scene assumed that most early free scholarly electronic journals would show this pattern. Refereed scholarly journals are hard to maintain without any revenue, and it’s been difficult to use electronic publications for tenure or to show their impact on a field.

While some of the ten mystery journals may have succumbed to the arc of enthusiasm, only 23% of the properly-described 1995 titles clearly fall into this category—and back issues of these 20 journals continue to be available on the Web or the Internet.
Public-Access Computer Systems Review (PACS Review) began in 1989 and has published only one article since 1997. At least one study of electronic journals showed that PACS Review has had more impact than most, but that wasn’t enough to keep it healthy. The Katherine Sharp Review published seven articles in 1995, eight in 1996, 11 in 1997, nine in 1998, and five in 1999. Then it was cancelled.


Small Successes
Twenty-one titles still publish a steady flow of articles but average fewer than ten articles a year. In some fields, a journal that publishes six good articles a year is a significant addition to the literature.

Only three titles are in science and medicine: Complexity International, PSYCHE: an Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Consciousness, and Solstice: An Electronic Journal of Geography and Mathematics. At least three-quarters are in the humanities and social sciences. This group includes such specialized journals as E Journal: Murdoch Electronic Journal of Law, Electronic Antiquity: Communicating the Classics, CLIONET (now called The Electronic Journal of Australian and New Zealand History), and Classics Ireland.


All but one of these titles have university affiliations. Six are sponsored by or affiliated with associations. Not one survives without the formal or informal subsidies that university and association affiliation provide.

Strong Survivors
The largest group of journals, 28, represents clearer success stories. All but two have either university or association affiliations or sponsorships. Exceptions are Emerging Infectious Diseases (published by the
Center for Disease Control) and the Web Journal of Current Legal Issues (affiliated with a commercial print publication).

Eleven titles fall into science, technology, and medical fields (with three others arguably fitting there as well). Math has journals such as *Electronic Journal of Combinatorics*, *Electronic Journal of Differential Equations*, *Electronic Transactions on Numerical Analysis*, and the *New York Journal of Mathematics*. A number of free STM journals are not only healthy but vigorous: the *Journal of Fluids Engineering* has published at least 100 papers in each of the last four years.

Librarians have one long-standing success story: *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship*, sponsored by ACRL’s Science & Technology Section. Four journals focus on education: *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, the *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education*, the *Journal of Statistics Education*, and the *Journal of Extension*, an established print journal that moved to pure electronic publication in 1992. Other journals cover topics in law, humanities, social sciences, and literature—including such gems as *De Proverbio* (international proverb studies, with articles from names such as Alan Dundes).

**Do Free Journals Matter?**

Free electronic scholarly journals—the 49 surviving pioneers and many more begun since 1995—seem lost in the library shuffle, as attention turns to aggregation of online articles from expensive commercial scholarly journals. These aggregate sources are anything but free. SPARC and other initiatives work toward priced journals that don’t punish libraries as severely, while JSTOR and other initiatives work to make journal archives more readily and reasonably available.

Only a handful of pioneering free electronic journals turn up in ISI’s lists of 3,000 indexed serial titles: *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, the *Journal of Artificial Intelligence Research*, and the *Journal of Fluids Engineering*. My own attempt to get feedback on the significance of these journals yielded too few responses to be significant. A few people suggest that these journals are significant within their fields, in addition to the three just noted: *Beiträge zur Algebra und Geometry*, *Electronic Green Journal*, *Electronic Journal of Combinatorics*, *Electronic Journal of Communication*, *Electronic Journal of Differential Equations*, *Electronic Transactions on Numerical Analysis*, *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship*, *New York Journal of Mathematics*, and the *Journal of Extension*. 
Stephen P. Harter and colleagues studied the impact of electronic journals in 1996. Of those that seemed to have some demonstrable significance at the time, only two still appear to be healthy: *Psycoloquy* and *Electronic Journal of Communication*.

Michael Fosmire and Song Yu published “Free Scholarly Electronic Journals: How Good Are They” in a free scholarly electronic journal, *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship* (Summer 2000). This fine article is limited to STM journals (taken from the 1997 ARL Directory). Briefly, the study ranks *Emerging Infectious Diseases* and the *Journal of Artificial Research* very high for impact, with the *Electronic Journal of Differential Equations* ranking fairly high for immediacy; two others ranked higher than average for impact or immediacy.

Just as there’s no such thing as “the serials crisis,” there’s no such thing as *The Solution*. Scholars will not unanimously flock to utopian concepts that all papers should be distributed from “preprint” archives or that “scholarly skywriting” will save the day. For better and worse, commercial journals (as print products and as electronic aggregations) seem likely to dominate the field of refereed scholarly journals for some time to come.

Domination is not exclusivity. Any path towards easing the funding and access crises for scholarly journals includes many disparate steps. Free electronic scholarly journals represent one such step—and they can succeed, even prosper. Such journals offer specialized outlets in humanities and social science niches that are too narrow to justify commercial journals. They may also pre-empt aspects of science, technology, and medicine, or at least offer competitive outlets for quality scholarship.

It isn’t easy, but it can work. It does work. Four dozen journals, all of them free, refereed, scholarly, and electronic, continue to publish a significant flow of articles after at least six years of life. Libraries should pay attention to those journals, and librarians should be part of efforts to expand the field. It’s not a total solution, but it is one counterbalance to the power of the international journal publishers.

**Free Electronic Journals from 1995: The Lists**

For completists, the lists of journal titles follow. Except for the mysteries, you can probably find the current Web sites for most of them using Google.
Misdescribed

These publications are either priced, non-scholarly, or not journals.

Associates: The Electronic Library Support Staff Journal
CORE
Cornell Political Forum
Counterpoint
Deep South
Depth Probe
JAC Online: A Journal of Composition Theory
Jewish Studies Judaica eJournal
Journal of Veterinary Medical Education
J.UCS (Journal for Universal Computer Science)
Modal Analysis
NETCOMTALK
Postmodern Culture
RUNE: MIT’s Journal of Arts and Letters
Sand River Journal
Sixteenth Century Journal
Virtual Mirror
We Magazine

Mysteries

While some of these may be available as email “journals,” I was unable to find any working Web presence for them as e-journals in early 2000 or early 2001.

Advances in Systems Science and Applications
Electronic Visual Arts Journal
Ideas Digest Online Newsmagazine
Olive Tree
Online Modern History Review
Psychology Graduate Student Journal: The PSYGRAD Journal (PSYGRD-J)
Radio Scientist On-Line
RD: Graduate Research in the Arts
Sense of Place
SPEED: An Electronic Journal of Technology, Media, and Society

Oddities: The Least-Clear Cases

It’s hard to know what to make of these five, although cases can be made that InterJournal and Psychiatry On-Line are small successes of odd sorts. I append informal notes on each one.


InterJournal. Distributed on per-article basis. Pattern: in early 2000, 225 accepted items on Web site, dates only on individual articles. In early 2001: 620 manuscripts, of which 328 are supposed to be final. Divided into three parts: CX: Complex systems (318), PX: Polymer and Complex Fluids (20), BG: Genetics (2).

Psychiatry On-Line. Finally able to locate UK version in 2001. No issues; 51 papers over the last six years.

RhetNet. Tiny amount of odd material on Web site; appears to be wholly inactive since mid-1997.

The Arc of Enthusiasm

Some of these could come back to life, to be sure—but most seem to follow a pattern that becomes familiar. Here and for the remaining categories, where I could determine the patterns, I show the number of issues and formal articles for each calendar year beginning in 1993 (in the form year: issues/articles)—or, for journals that appear on an article-by-article basis, the number of articles (year: articles). Many e-journals in all categories include quite a bit of material in addition to formal articles; in some cases, a “+” shows a journal with unusually extensive contents other than articles. “Many” means that I stopped counting after a couple of dozen articles. “Ceased” indicates that the journal explicitly ceased publication. Some titles began years before 1993.


Getting Past the Arc of Enthusiasm


Ceased for Other Reasons

Digital Technical Journal was an established print journal from DEC that went electronic in 1993. Compaq purchased DEC; some time later, it killed off the journal. Slavic Review just didn’t work out as a free electronic “post-print” but may continue as a print journal.


Small Successes

Is it fair to separate this group from the final group simply because these journals publish fewer than ten formal articles a year? Perhaps not, and “small” does not mean either useless or insignificant.


TESL-EJ: Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language: An Electronic Journal.

Strong Survivors

When a commercial publisher says that there’s no such thing as a free journal, here’s a list of established scholarly journals that suggests otherwise. (The asterisks mean “so far, as of early February 2001.”)

Beiträge zur Algebra und Geometrie/Contributions to Algebra and Geometry.


Feedback (June 2001)

Charles W. Bailey, Jr. was the founder and original editor of Public-Access Computer Systems Review—a very early electronic journal that eventually faded away. After reading my article, he offered the following comments:

During my time as editor, I found that, given author characteristics (they were typically librarians or computer specialists, not information studies or other faculty members) and the “double curse” of electronic journals (they are new journals published in a new medium), a significant amount of energy was required to recruit authors to submit papers. If I had waited around for submissions, it would have been a short “arc” indeed. After the journal became refereed, I often found that authors of papers that I thought could easily pass review didn’t want to
bother with it because of the extra time involved and the perceived lack of personal payoff. That’s why I was pleasantly surprised in my final year as editor (1996) when virtually all authors wanted peer review and, given the added editorial labor involved, we couldn’t push papers through the review process fast enough to publish all the submissions in that calendar year. So, from my perspective, the seventh year of publication didn’t seem like one of declining author interest; quite the opposite. I was perfectly happy to publish five refereed papers and one communication vs. sixteen communications (as in 1990). After 1996, annual Web use statistics suggest significant ongoing reader interest--usage peaked in 1998 (the last year an article was published) with over 250,000 requests; however, by 2000 it had only declined by around 5,000 requests.

Bailey also provided more current information on *EJournal*, which I hadn’t managed to track after 1996. “By the way, *EJournal*, while hard to find, is still publishing issues at www.ucalgary.ca/ejournal/. I have a link to an article in it in my bibliography so I had to track it down when its URL changed.”

With that additional information, a case can be made that *EJournal* should move from “arc of enthusiasm” to “small successes”—it is indeed still publishing, sort of. Here are the modified figures: 1993: 3/3; 1994: 4/5+; 1995: 2/3; 1996: 3/3+; 1997: 1/3; 1998: 2/2; 1999: 1/0+; 2001: 1/1 (so far). The single issue in 1999 was a “Valedictory” from the retiring original editor. I’m not sure why I was unable to locate the 1997-1999 articles during my two rounds of Web searching in 2000 and 2001, but am pleased to see that *EJournal* is still around. (Note: here as throughout the study, I’m being as liberal as possible in counting articles—some of them may not have been refereed. That liberality also explains differences in my annual article counts for *PACS Review* from Charles Bailey’s counts: as he notes, few early articles were refereed.

Anyone else out there who wishes to update or correct the record? I was pleased and surprised at how well these pioneers have actually done; I’d be even more pleased to find other stories of e-journals that have come back to life. Send me details: wcc@notes.rlg.org.

Harry M. Kriz, director of interlibrary services at Virginia Tech, pointed out another relevant article and offered his own comments on attempts to replace commercial print journals. The article: Anne B. Piternick, “Attempts to find alternatives to the scientific journal: a brief review,” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 15:5 (1989), pp. 260-6.
I haven’t read it yet; Kriz summarizes that “the author traces various alternatives to the scientific journal and explains why they failed to replace print on paper. That was 12 years ago; a followup study that specifically updates Piternick’s article might be interesting. (And may already have been published: I don’t see most library literature.)

Some of Kriz’ comments, not necessarily about my study but about ejournals in general:

There is at least one consideration missing from the debate about e-journals and their future and how universities can become powerful by becoming publishers. There seems to be no real understanding of the purpose of scientific and scholarly journals. If those purposes are not met by e-journals, then e-journals will fail, just as all past alternatives have failed because they did not meet the purposes served by print journals.

The idea that universities will replace publishers seems naïve. Universities gave up publishing scientific and engineering papers long ago… Most universities do not even have a mechanism for tracking either the journal articles or the technical reports written by their faculties…

Just the fact that people talk about journals as vehicles for scholarly communication is puzzling. This is not the principal purpose of journals, and in the humanities this sometimes doesn’t seem to be even one of the purposes. In the early 1980s I wrote an essay in our library newsletter reporting on Eugene Garfield’s preliminary analysis of the Arts & Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI) database. He reported that 53% of the 107,000 source items he studied were reviews… Scholarly research articles constituted only 26% of the items indexed… Also interesting was the fact that in 1981 only about 5% of the references in the A&HCI journals cited other A&HCI journals… [Within the three ISI citation databases], there were 27 scientific journals each of which was cited more times in 1981 than the entire set of 1,200 humanities journals.

As an interlibrary loan librarian I haven’t followed the e-journal debate closely because e-journals have been irrelevant in my work so far. The demand is booming for photocopies of printed articles held by those libraries that are managing to maintain their collections. And the demand is concentrated on journals published in the past five years. About one-third of all photocopy requests are for articles published during this year and last.

Kriz also forwarded two postings he’d made to the ILL-L list earlier this year. One discusses the surprising breadth of cooperation represented in ILL operations; the other offers a counterpoint to “Everything’s on the Web.” A few excerpts:
Questions: 1) How many lending libraries does it take to support the interlibrary borrowing operations at your university? 2) How many lending libraries are required to support one of the colleges within your university? 3) How many lending libraries are needed to support the work of a single faculty member?

Answer to all questions: More than I ever imagined…

During calendar year 2000, Virginia Tech (VPI) borrowed more than 28,000 books and journal articles from nearly 1,100 libraries. We delivered these items to nearly 3,100 students, faculty and staff at Virginia Tech.

It startles me to learn that it took more than 1,000 libraries to support Tech’s research needs during a single year. It amazes me even more that over the past four years it required the resources of more than 1,900 libraries to support Tech’s researchers. These numbers give new meaning to the cliché that “no library can own everything its users need.”

Briefly, answers to the second and third questions were that it took 433 libraries to support VPI’s College of Engineering in calendar 2000—and that one ILL customer required items from 127 different libraries, and 22 users needed 100 items or more—requiring 318 libraries to fulfill the requests. “Clearly effective interlibrary loan service depends on the good will and cooperation of hundreds of people at hundreds of libraries.”

A few weeks after that February posting, Kriz posted this item, worth reprinting in its entirety (with some changes in paragraphing):

75% of freshmen entering Virginia Tech (VPI) this year agreed that “Everything is on the Web.” If this were true, then we would expect that the incidence of interlibrary borrowing and lending of journal articles would be declining. In fact, just the opposite is occurring at Virginia Tech.

**Borrowing:** In the past four years, interlibrary borrowing has increased by 85%… In that same period, article photocopies have increased from 62% of total borrowing to 70%.

**Lending:** Tech’s interlibrary lending has remained almost unchanged… However, article photocopies have risen from 58% of all lending in fiscal 1998 to 65% of lending in fiscal 2001.

**Conclusion:** The increased availability of electronic journals has not resulted in decreased demand for paper journals held in archival library collections. In fact, despite the extraordinarily rapid growth of information on the Internet, our dependence on other libraries continues to increase. Our greatest growth in demand is precisely in that area, journal articles, where we might have expected resource sharing over the Inter-
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net to reduce our dependence on the paper collections of other libraries.
Electronic Access to Scientific Articles: Another Perspective

EContent Magazine, May 2002

Martin White’s “Behind the Firewall” in the December 2001 EContent presents a publisher-oriented perspective on the current situation with scientific journals and electronic access. His story is one way of viewing history and the present, but many academic librarians and scholarly authors see things a bit differently. Here I am again, library person in a content-producer’s land, annoying you with a different perspective

The Backstory

White says that, after 300 years in which most STM journals were published by societies as part of membership, a major change occurred after World War II “as the rapid growth of scientific progress meant that professional societies could no longer keep pace with the supply of papers being submitted for publication.” In his story, the heroic innovators of North Holland and Pergamon Press saved the day by developing a commercial STM publishing business “where it was the publisher taking the initiative and risk, and not just the scientific societies.”

Jean-Claude Guédon of the Université de Montréal offers a similar timeline but with a twist, in his article “Beyond core journals and licenses: the paths to reform scientific publishing” (ARL Bimonthly Report 218, October 2001, available at www.arl.org/newsltr/218/guedon.htm). There had long been commercially-published STM journals, playing “a relatively minor, fragmented, and ultimately secondary role.” Then came Science Citation Index, defining a set of core scientific journals. To quote Guédon, “With the sudden emergence of a core set of journals, publishers became aware of the fact that these journals would have to be bought by every library worth its salt. In other words, the previously
vaguely prestigious, financially uninteresting field of scientific periodicals had become an inelastic market that could be milked for all it was worth. Periodical prices then began to climb precipitously.”

White recognizes the inelasticity as placing publishers “in an enviable position” but uses the innocent comment “the profit margins on STM publishing were very good.” White further suggests that it was primarily outside of North America that library budgets weren’t rising at the same rate as journal prices—but North American libraries have never had bottomless pockets either.

White says the crunch came in the “mid-1990s” when “libraries had to make some hard decisions about cancellations.” The Library Systems Office at UC Berkeley helped coordinate a 10% serials cancellation in the Berkeley libraries while I was there—in the mid-1970s, not the 1990s. As Guédon points out, the problem has been around for at least three decades, warping library acquisitions budgets as new books are forsaken in order to maintain serials subscriptions. By the 1990s, the problem had reached true crisis proportion in many major academic libraries.

Electronic Delivery and The Big Deal

White tells us that, while it’s straightforward to build full-text databases from journals already produced electronically, “it would require investment, and so the electronic journals would cost more than the print versions”—sometimes as much as 150% above the print price. He believes that this pricing is the progenitor of library consortia and “difficult negotiations” for publishers.

Many in the library field see those negotiations as “difficult” in a rather different way. Librarians and digital gurus pointed out that one presumed major cost of journal publishing is the printing and distribution. Some libraries would be only too happy to abandon the print version as long as lasting access to full-text articles was assured. That should save big money for the publishers; libraries expected to share in that savings.

That isn’t how the “Big Deals,” as Kenneth Frazier calls them, worked out. The big publishers offered monolithic packages: You (the library or consortium) get all of our (the publisher’s) articles in electronic form—but only if you pay us every penny you’re paying now for print subscriptions, plus more, plus a guaranteed annual increment.
Frazier, director of libraries at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, detests the Big Deal and makes a compelling case for opposing it. You’ll find Frazier’s original article on the Big Deal in the March 2001 D-Lib Magazine, available at www.dlib.org/dlib; a number of responses to the article appear in the April 2001 issue. Meanwhile, many academic librarians saw the horse’s head on their budgetary beds: it was a deal they did not feel they could refuse.

White tells us that (correctly) libraries want to know which articles (or which journals) are being used and that publishers don’t want to tell them. Such recalcitrance reduces library knowledge of journal usage patterns and is not sustainable in the long run. But then, the Big Deals may not be sustainable either.

Where Do We Go From Here?

White says that scientific publishing is a “delicate linear chain” from author to publisher to library to reader—but a growing number of radicals question the need for that second party, at least in publishers’ present form. White says there are more than 10,000 scientific publishers—but also that “the business is…the province of a relatively few publishers,” presumably the likes of Reed Elsevier and Taylor & Francis. That leaves some 9,995 publishers to fend for themselves. Finally, he looks for a “much greater degree of harmony…between publishers and libraries” but thinks it will take years for that to happen.

Note the fifth word of this column’s title: articles, not journals. Once access is primarily in electronic form, readers of the scientific literature not only don’t care about the publisher (as White rightly says)—they may not care much about the journal either. They want access to articles. More knowledgeable readers also want validation, some indication that these articles are legitimate scholarship.

Stevan Harnad proposes free access through universal self-archiving and open harvesting of article metadata, with journals retaining only the key function of refereeing and validation. He suggests that, at most, 10% of current journal prices should cover this limited role as a small but profitable enterprise, since most editors and referees volunteer their efforts. Go to www.text-e.org/conf, then Harnad’s paper on this issue and a lengthy, vigorous set of debates around the paper.

Andrew Odlyzko offers a more radical suggestion in Learned Publishing 15:1 (available on the Web). He seems to feel that journals should simply disappear, with Web links constituting a sort of infor-
nal refereeing process among self-archived articles. I find the “validation through linking” concept ludicrous for scientific literature, but the article appears in a respected publication.

Retreating from these levels—while noting that Harnad’s model is essentially in place for high-energy physics—librarians and scholars are mounting a range of initiatives to weaken the ability of large international publishers to raise STM prices at will. ARL’s SPARC initiative has helped found a number of new, less-expensive scholarly journals, most commonly back in the hands of universities and scholarly societies, competing head-on with established commercial titles. A growing number of electronic journals and collections of refereed articles are free to readers, with refereeing overhead and server costs covered through institutional sponsorship or author fees.

Tens of thousands of scientific scholars recently signed a manifesto asserting that they will no longer contribute papers to any journal that does not allow free (no-cost) posting of published papers six months after publication. Time will tell whether this initiative plays out.

I don’t have answers. I don’t think anybody does. It’s not simply a question of libraries and established publishers achieving a “greater degree of harmony” barring revolutionary changes in pricing and publisher policies. Too many libraries have been pushed to the wall and can go no further, and many scholars now recognize the plight of the libraries and are unwilling to see a complete abandonment of monographic acquisitions just to shore up STM periodicals for a few more years. Things are starting to give.
Constant readers know this all too well: I don’t claim to be a deep thinker, which may be one reason I have a deep mistrust of Grand Solutions. That, in turn, may be why I admire the efforts of Peter Suber and his Free Online Scholarship (FOS) Newsletter—but don’t find myself signing up for the whole package. Or maybe it’s that I don’t understand the whole package. I was reviewing two essays in the FOS Newsletter for possible inclusion in “The Good Stuff,” along with a related news report from the Chronicle of Higher Education. Somehow, those essays and that news report yielded this commentary.

The Sources

I recommend all three items for your consideration, even if you skip the rest of this essay. First, in the May 15, 2002 FOS Newsletter, a feature essay entitled “Why FOS progress has been slow.” It’s the second item in the issue and runs three print pages. Second, and a continuation of the first: “More on the big koan: open-access journals” in the May 23, 2002 FOS Newsletter—again, the second essay, but the first essay (on self-archiving) may also be relevant. Third, Jeffrey R. Young’s May 16, 2002 article in the Chronicle: “Journal boycott over online access is a bust.” I should add “Electronic access to scientific articles: Another perspective,” my “disContent” column in the May 2002 EContent, if only because it demonstrates that I’m not oblivious to the problem.

If, after you read these articles, you’re satisfied that your Grand Solution works for the future, keeps scholarship healthy, keeps previous resources available and libraries healthy, supports indexing and abstracting, and has a solid chance of success—well, then, I wish you well.

Some comments on the essays themselves. The May 15 commentary offers reasons that the “FOS movement” is slow going. Scholars tend not to understand the serials pricing crisis and assume that access barriers are isolated problems, not systemic issues. Scholars don’t un-
understand that the FOS movement embraces peer review, doesn't violate copyright, and should be economically realistic. Scholars want to publish in prestigious journals and most of those are still priced and printed—and scholars' role as authors prevails over their role as readers. The tenure process tends to reinforce current prestige rankings. Journal publishers still demand copyright and don't want to lose their roles (or profits), and the state of affairs constitutes enormous mass, resistant to quick movement, which Suber characterizes as a trio of vicious circles. If I take issue with any of these, it's the concept that print journals are inherently undesirable, and I'm not sure that's what Suber is saying.

The May 23 commentary begins with big news, the launching of *Journal of Biology* by BioMed Central as an open-access journal intended to compete with *Nature*, *Science*, and *Cell*. With a prestigious editorial board and strong backing, it's an ambitious move. It continues by noting a new BioMed Central list of authors who have published in its open-access journals—a way of showing that first-rate authors support open access. I admit to surprise at one sentence in Suber's applause for the launch of *Journal of Biology*: “Still, I long for the day when open access will be so ordinary that the launch of an open-access journal with a merely competent board will garner the interest and respect accorded to other competent journals.” In some fields (librarianship being one), this may already be the case. Where it isn't, maybe you need a Big Splash before the little drips can accumulate into anything meaningful.

There's no way to duck the third piece. The Public Library of Science made a huge splash when 30,000 scientists signed a pledge that, after September 2001, they would not publish in, subscribe to, or serve as an editor for any journal that didn't offer “unrestricted free distribution rights…[to articles]…within 6 months of their initial publication date.” While the PloS pledge wasn't a Grand Solution, it was a grand gesture. PloS leaders hoped that, at the very least, scholarly societies would buy into the six-month idea for their own publication.

In poker terms, publishers called what they must have perceived as a bluff. And PloS signers folded. They kept submitting articles to the same journals and serving on the same editorial boards. Not all of them, of course: Michael B. Eisen (Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and a PloS leader) knows of “about 100 cases” of scholars who have supported the boycott by refusing to submit work to a journal or
serve on editorial boards. One-third of one percent: that’s not even an ace high busted flush.

PloS is involved in new open-access journal initiatives, but that—as with BioMed Central—is the tough way to get open access. Challenging Science and Nature won’t be easy. (Science does offer free online access, but only after a year.)

My own article? [See previous chapter]

**Grand Solutions**

My article made fun of Odlyszko’s favored Grand Solution, where journals disappear and Web links become the “refereeing” process among self-archived articles. I wouldn’t be surprised if comments from people like Odlyszko, whose knowledge of libraries appears remarkably limited, led to the nonsense in a recent *EContent* article (cited elsewhere in this issue) that up to three-quarters of academic library expenses are for administration of print journals: Make all journals electronic (and gut the library), and you can keep publishers’ profit margins healthy. While I’ve consistently questioned Stevan Harnad’s economic assertions, his proposed network of archival repositories makes sense as part of the scholarly system—and it’s also (I think) a key part of FOS.

Note “as part of.” Open access journals are wonderful when they work, whether they’re based on $500 writer fees (which bother me in ways that may be irrelevant for scientific publishing) or other forms of support. The High Energy Physics archive seems to work, and replicating that model elsewhere should serve as a force to help improve access and possibly reduce the pricing power of publishers.

But SPARC also serves a purpose—and SPARC leads to priced journals, some of them in print form, not the pure “free online” model that Suber favors. As part of a network of efforts to make access to STM articles more affordable and more assured in the long term, SPARC is a good tool; in FOS terms, I have to assume that it’s a negative force.

I don’t believe that Science, Nature, or the modestly priced refereed divisional journals from ALA are going away. I don’t believe that they should (although I don’t know enough about the first two to know whether they’re overpriced for their content). I believe print journals make sense in many disciplines and know that the cost of print is not always (or, I suspect, typically) the reason for high prices.
I know that some publishers treat libraries as cash cows, particularly professional societies that charge cost-recovery prices to members and far more expensive prices to libraries. That needs to change, both for societies and for commercial publishers.

I believe it’s all part of a mix, and probably needs to stay that way. PloS was a grand gesture toward a Grand Solution. The gesture didn’t work. SPARC is a fairly modest set of initiatives that has resulted in some workable new journals—not free, and in some cases pricey by my lights, but bargains compared to their competitors. EJournals have been around for more than a decade, some of them successful, with a variety of business models; “open access” with author payment is one trend that may lead to a larger number of such journals. None of these promises a total solution—and maybe that’s a good thing.

Maybe I’m wrong and Peter Suber and/or Stevan Harnad are right. Harnad is fond of “inevitable” to define his preferred future, a huge strike against it in my vocabulary. Suber cares deeply about scholarly communication and fundamentally wants to see it work better. Both sets of initiatives look good to me as portions of a complex mix, but not as overall solutions. But then, I’m not a deep thinker.

**Glib Naysaying (Bibs & Blather, August 2002)**

Peter Suber prepared an interesting response to the lead essay in last month’s *Cites & Insights*. You’ll find that response under Feedback.

That wasn’t the only fallout from my essay. Stevan Harnad wrote a well-argued post to September98-Forum@listserv.sigmaxi.org, which made its way to me. Since he didn’t submit it as feedback to *Cites & Insights*, I won’t quote the whole thing (it was posted on July 2, and you may be able to find it in list archives), but I will quote one paragraph:

> Slow progress? Researchers and their institutions are to blame, for being so slow to realize what the optimal and inevitable solution is, and just going ahead and doing it. They will realize it, sooner or later. But glib nay-saying like Walt’s will get some of the historic credit for having helped to make it a little later rather than sooner.

I went back and read that again, then waited a few days to see whether Stevan Harnad would issue a post claiming that someone had forged his email address. Since that never happened, I went back to the original essay to examine my “glib nay-saying,” apparently so potent that this Webzine is slowing the whole pace of scholarly progress!
Here's what I said about Harnad and his self-archiving solution: While I've consistently questioned Stevan Harnad's economic assertions, his proposed network of archival repositories makes sense as part of the scholarly system—and it's also (I think) a key part of FOS. Note “as part of.” [Followed by other pieces of the puzzle]… Maybe I'm wrong and Peter Suber and/or Stevan Harnad are right. Harnad is fond of ‘inevitable’ to define his preferred future, a huge strike against it in my vocabulary…. Both sets of initiatives look good to me as portions of a complex mix, but not as overall solutions.

**That’s it.** I dislike “inevitable” (from Harnad or anyone else), I question the economic assertions Harnad’s always made and I don’t believe a network of archival repositories is a total solution. That’s some naysaying!

I don’t care for being scapegoated. If failing to fall in line 100% with a crusade, even while supporting the primary technique of the crusader, is “glib naysaying,” then I’m guilty. If anything in *Cites & Insights* is keeping scholars from self-archiving, an activity that I have never once opposed, then something’s gone horribly wrong. We already know they’re serving snowcones in Hades these days, but this is truly bizarre. Maybe those really are flocks of pigs flying overhead, not crows…

I do owe an apology to Andrew Odlyzko, with no “s”—I have trouble spelling his name right. Sorry.

**Feedback (August 2002)**

Peter Suber prepared a thoughtful commentary on my July 2002 essay, which he distributed to a Topica group related to the FOS movement. Here it is, in full, followed by my off-the-cuff response, his additional note, and my last word (this time around).

**Peter Suber’s Comments**

In the July issue of *Cites & Insights*, Walt Crawford devotes his opening essay to reflections on the FOS movement.

In the process he comments on:

1. my essay on why FOS progress has been slow, from FOSN for 5/15/02,
2. my follow-up in FOSN for 5/23/02,
3. Jeffrey Young’s article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* on the Public Library of Science,
4. and his own article in the May 2002 *EContent*, “Electronic Access to Scientific Articles: Another Perspective.”
He also comments on FOS positions taken by Stevan Harnad and Andrew Odlyzko. Here are some responses.

Walt writes:

If, after you read these articles [by Suber and Young], you're satisfied that your Grand Solution works for the future, keeps scholarship healthy, keeps previous resources available and libraries healthy, supports indexing and abstracting, and has a solid chance of success—well, then, I wish you well.

Yes, I'm still satisfied. That may go without saying. But Walt implies that my articles, at least together with Young's, cast doubt on the merits of FOS. (Young's article reported that the PLoS boycott was a "bust", but that the PLoS founders have not given up and plan to launch a series of open-access journals.)

What they do instead is show why progress has been slow. It's important to distinguish explanations of slow progress, and even recognition of obstacles, from grounds for pessimism. Martin Luther King repeatedly pointed out that progress toward civil rights was slow, but he never interpreted the obstacles as reasons to think civil rights were unattainable or undesirable. The analogy doesn't have to hold on all points to hold on the important point. Compared to the pace permitted by our opportunities, progress toward FOS has been slow. I enumerated eight reasons why, but none them implies that FOS is unattainable or undesirable. Neither does the failure of the PLoS boycott and the PLoS shift to a new strategy.

Like Walt, I want to keep scholarship and libraries healthy and preserve support for indexing and abstracting. I believe that all other FOS proponents do as well. FOS is not in conflict with these goals, just moving more slowly than it might. Or, if anyone does see a conflict between these goals and the goals of FOS, then I'd like to see a more specific account of it.

[Later], after summarizing my list of reasons why FOS progress slow, Walt adds,

If I take issue with any of these, it's the concept that print journals are inherently undesirable, and I'm not sure that's what Suber is saying.

Walt's suspicion is correct; that's not what I was saying. I criticized journals that still demand that authors transfer their copyright, but otherwise I didn't criticize any kind of journal. I merely pointed out that most of the prestigious journals are still priced and printed, which explains why most authors continue to submit articles to them. I also
pointed out that journals might be daunted by the prospect of adopting a novel funding model that would allow them to dispense with subscription and licensing fees.

Because print journals cost much more to produce than online-only journals, print journals rarely have open-access editions. However, it’s important that there is a growing number of exceptions, for example BMJ, Cortex, and the BMC journals. The main reason why print journals are not “inherently undesirable” is that they are compatible with open-access, even if the conjunction is uncommon. I’ve made this case in many places, most recently in the inaugural issue of the BMC’s Journal of Biology.

While print journals are not “inherently undesirable,” most of them are too expensive to adopt open access, the form of distribution required to maximize impact for authors and access for readers. But rather than cast them as enemies or obstacles, it’s more constructive to see them simply as the competition.

As the BOAI says in its FAQ,

Journals that do not wish to provide open access have nothing to fear from BOAI except competition. We do not endorse the piracy or expropriation of their intellectual property. We do not demand that they change their access policies and do not threaten them with boycotts or other sanctions if they do not change. We encourage them to offer open access, and will help find the money to defray the costs of the transition to open access for journals willing to make the change.... Our project is constructive, not destructive.... For our constructive activity to succeed, no institution or business needs to change its policies. However, we welcome the assistance of all who share our vision.

[Later], Walt criticizes Stevan Harnad:

[His proposed network of archival repositories makes sense as part of the scholarly system—and it’s also (I think) a key part of FOS.]

Stevan can speak for himself; but as I read him, he agrees with this. Self-archiving is only part of the solution and must be complemented by journals. It’s not self-sufficient because it doesn’t include peer review. Self-archiving is the component of the solution that provides immediate open access to new work, and that doesn’t depend on the (slow) adoption of new funding models by journals. It’s the component of the solution that doesn’t depend on anyone but the author and to some extent the author’s institution. But it needs another compo-
Open Access and Libraries

Incentives to provide peer review, and Steven is emphatic that peer review must be part of any complete solution.

[Again quoting from the July essay:]

But SPARC also serves a purpose—and SPARC leads to priced journals, some of them in print form, not the pure “free online” model that Suber favors. As part of a network of efforts to make access to STM articles more affordable and more assured in the long term, SPARC is a good tool; in FOS terms, I have to assume that it’s a negative force.

I love SPARC; it’s a very positive force.

First, SPARC lends its assistance to both free and affordable journals, not just the latter….

Second, even affordable journals count as progress. Again, to quote the BOAI FAQ:

We hope these initiatives [to make journals affordable] succeed, because their success will make scholarly literature more accessible than it is today. However, we believe that the specific literature on which BOAI focuses, the peer-reviewed research literature in all disciplines, can and should be entirely free for readers. If the initiatives working on affordable literature are persuaded by the case we have made, then we welcome them to join us. If they are not persuaded, then we wish them success in making progress toward wider access.

If Walt’s suspicion of grand solutions is based on a suspicion of haste in making fundamental change where the stakes are high, then I share it. However, I wouldn’t characterize the goal of open-access to peer-reviewed research literature as a grand solution in this sense. The main reason is that gradualism and flexibility are possible in selecting the means to this end. I endorse both.

So does the BOAI:

There is no need to favor one of these solutions [for funding journals] over the others for all disciplines or nations, and no need to stop looking for other, creative alternatives… While we endorse the two strategies [of self-archiving and open-access journals], we also encourage experimentation with further ways to make the transition from the present methods of dissemination to open access. Flexibility, experimentation, and adaptation to local circumstances are the best ways to assure that progress in diverse settings will be rapid, secure, and long-lived.

(If I keep quoting the BOAI, it’s because it represents the kind of FOS I advocate. This is no accident; I was one the drafters.)
Here’s how I put the case for gradualism—and incidentally, the benefits of slow progress—in a letter to the Chronicle of Higher Education for October 12, 2001. The letter responds to a Chronicle article by John Ewing and a Nature article by Richard Kaser [references omitted here], which both argued against haste in making fundamental changes to the scholarly communication system.

It is far-fetched to assume that the journal system will change suddenly or before we adequately understand what is happening. Free online scholarship is emerging gradually, one journal or archive at a time. The slow pace of change provides all the time we need to monitor our experiment, measure its impact, make midcourse corrections, and chart an informed future course.

[Finally], Walt: Thanks for your public reflections on FOS. I wish that all those who were unpersuaded were as open to persuasion as you are, and as willing to read and respond to the arguments.

Best wishes, Peter Suber, Professor of Philosophy Earlham College, Richmond, Indiana, 47374, Email peters@earlham.edu.

My Response

Peter,

I appreciate your thoughtful response to my essay. With your permission—I always ask permission these days—I’d like to include part or all of it as Followup in a future Cites & Insights. If I do so, I think my only real demurrers might be:

1. I don’t argue that FOS is a bust or will be a bust. I only argue that it is not a Grand Solution, but part of a network of efforts that should and probably will improve the price-of-access problem. This may be a terminology question.

2. Ditto OAI and Stevan Harnad’s self-archiving initiatives. I tend to take issue with Harnad because he tends to make sweeping (and sometimes unsupportable) statements, and particularly when, for example, he asserts that digital archiving is simply not a problem. (Cf. the text-e conference.)

3. I believe that the PLoS petition was demonstrably a bust, one that may have done more harm than good: It showed that hundreds of thousands of scientists were not, in fact, willing to back their asserted belief with action. My poker analogy was carefully drawn.

I don’t need to be persuaded that FOS is a valuable piece of the puzzle, a valuable small-s “solution” to the complex access situation.
Even as a non-scholar, but one deeply interested and involved in libraries and the pricing puzzle, I see that it’s a worthy set of ideas that made a difference and will probably make more difference in the future.

The distinction is between small-s “solution,” of which there are many, some of which do more good than others but most of which improve the situation, and the big-S Grand Solution, the “inevitable optimal” future of all scholarly communications (the quoted phrase being one of Harnad’s favorites).

I believe that many small-s solutions, including all but one of the ones I named in my commentary, will help—indeed, that they’ve already helped convince some of the big international publishers to moderate their enthusiastic price increases and, in some cases, improve long-term access.

I don’t believe that any one Solution makes sense as a universal, comprehensive answer. The world doesn’t work that way.

Based on this commentary, it appears that you don’t, either—in which case, there’s no argument between us.

Another Note from Peter Suber

I don’t argue that FOS is a stand-alone or self-sufficient solution. There are many kinds of scholarly literature unsuited to open access—all the writings for which authors expect payment, including textbooks, some monographs, and some software. But I do argue that open access is the best solution for the special body of literature for which authors do not expect payment—journal literature mostly, but also theses and dissertations, some monographs, some software, most gray literature, and all statutes and judicial opinions.

If arguing that open access is the best solution for a certain category of literature is a Grand Solution, at least for that category, then I’m advocating a Grand Solution. If recognizing other categories where open access is inappropriate means that I’m not advocating a Grand Solution, then I’m not. This may clarify the terminological problem.

In this sense I fully agree with your “network of efforts” position. But within the category of literature that authors give away, I support pluralism and experimentation of means to the end of open access, but no forms of pricing or distribution other than open access.

Getting In The Last Word

There is, in fact, a disagreement—but it’s such an arcane one that it isn’t worth pursuing. Peter Suber argues that open access is the best
solution for writings for which authors do not expect payment. I don’t disagree in principle. Is that achievable for all such literature? I doubt it, but that doesn’t make it undesirable—particularly when pursued the way Peter Suber and other FOS people do. In essence, the disagreement is one of those “big bets” that would take longer to settle than either of us is likely to be alive. Peter explicitly appreciates other “pieces of the puzzle” that work in other ways to reduce the cost of access to scholarship and improve its long-term prospects. What more can I ask?

Peter Suber is a serious participant in this complex situation. I’m an observer. I appreciate the time he took to respond to my commentary, his immediate posting of my reply to the same list, and his immediate permission to publish his comments here. I’ll continue to check the FOS Weblog (which replaced the FOS Newsletter, no longer feasible now that Suber’s sabbatical has ended) and include appropriate material here. The access situation isn’t going away any time soon, and I’ll continue to mention some of the many ways of alleviating intolerable costs and access restrictions—and, of course, making sometimes-ignorant comments on them as well.
The Access Puzzle: Notes on Scholarly Communication

October 2002

Maybe I should look at that rabbit and learn: “Run. Run away.” (Monty Python and the Holy Grail.) Skimming through half a ream of recent postings, Web pages, and articles on the “scholarly communications crisis” (CreateChange.org’s term), I see that better minds than mine are puzzling over these issues—and that some of them have The Solution.

I also see that my usual “on the other hand” style and my real sense that no single solution will suit all scholarly publishing will offend a few of those better minds (most of whom will never see Cites & Insights). One or two may claim that I’m damaging their cause by my ignorant naysaying. No, wait, that’s happened—no point in worrying about it now. I see a near certainty that people whose work I respect will wish I wasn’t so conflicted about the whole situation.

My sensible course is to close this document, paraphrase it in “Bibs & Blather,” redistribute some articles to other sections and abandon the “Access Puzzle” theme. But what fun would that be?

The Problem

CreateChange.org’s two overviews (one for faculty, one for librarians) set out the problem as well as any brief discussion I’ve seen. The faculty version begins:

Your system of scholarly communication is under siege. As a scholar, you are losing control of a system that has served you well but is now on the verge of collapse. The free flow of scholarly information, the lifeblood of scholarly inquiry and creativity, is being interrupted.

The discussion starts to get sticky right after that: “Fewer scholarly publications are available to scholars worldwide.” That’s not quite
The Access Puzzle

right without loads of clarification, much of which appears later in the document. Paraphrasing:

- More new scholarly journals keep appearing (which seems to negate the quoted sentence).
- Most scholarly journals are now published by commercial publishers with astonishingly high profit margins, and those publishers usually raise prices faster than inflation.
- That combination means most academic libraries are increasingly unable to acquire the journals their faculty and students need, and many libraries have slashed book acquisitions in a hopeless effort to keep paying for serials.
- Electronic access can make the situation worse, better, or both—but electronic access raises unresolved issues for long-term access.
- The result is that most institutions provide access to a smaller percentage of the scholarly literature than they should, or than they used to—and that percentage will keep shrinking. In that complex sense, the quoted sentence is right: Most scholars have less access to the literature of their field than they did in the past.

Most of you know this already—at least if you’re an academic librarian you should. Enough articles have addressed aspects of this problem. I’ve written about it since the beginning of Cites & Insights and both the May 2002 “disContent” and November 2002 “Crawford Files” talk about the issues. ARL’s supplementary statistics for 2000/2001, announced in late July, point up one financial issue: The 119 ARL libraries spent an average of 16.25% of their FY2001 budgets on electronic materials—five times as high a percentage as in FY93. That amounts to roughly $132 million, including more than $117 million for electronic serials—up from $11 million in 1994/95. Such a rate of growth can’t continue for another decade, although even raising that as a possibility is silly (growth curves don’t work that way).

The bullets summarize the scholarly-access problem (and it sure could use a sexier term!). They don’t point up my problem in splitting out access-related issues as a separate section—but I covered that problem in the lead Perspective in Cites & Insights 2:9, “Scholarly journals and grand solutions.” You could think of that perspective as the first edition of The Access Puzzle, and I’m not going to cover that ground again.
I didn’t believe in monolithic solutions then. Since that issue appeared, some wise people have explained to me in considerable detail why they’re not really proposing monolithic solutions. They’re only proposing single solutions for a tiny bit of all literature: Namely, scholarly communications where the author doesn’t expect payment. That essentially covers all refereed journals, and the single solutions seem posited on conversion of that entire tiny bit to the preferred method. That, to my mind, is a monolithic solution—and after all the explanations, I still don’t believe in monolithic solutions. I’m frequently wrong, but there it is.

I recommend the Create Change site for its clear overviews of the issues and range of suggestions for solutions. I’ll do my part here, every few issues, grouping related articles and communications much as I do in other topical sections.

For a much longer and more thorough examination of the issues, I strongly recommend “Seizing the moment: Scientists’ authorship rights in the digital age” by Mark S. Frankel, the report of a study by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. It came out in July 2002. As usual for a PDF printout (35 pages total), I don’t have the URL but you should have no trouble finding it. It’s a solid report with no axe to grind. Read it.

**PubSCIENCE: Going, Going, Gone?**

The Department of Energy is proposing to discontinue PubSCIENCE, its free index to more than 1,200 science journals. PubSCIENCE began in 1999 and appears through public/private cooperation. DoE says that freely searchable indexes from private sector providers now provide adequate coverage—Scirus and Infotrieve cover 90% of the literature covered by PubSCIENCE.

According to Peter Suber’s cover note when he copied the DoE announcement to fos-forum, “Killing PubSCIENCE and other government funded FOS has been the lobbying mission of the Software & Information Industry Association (SIIA), a trade association of commercial electronic publishers.”

Marydee Ojala covered the situation in an August 19, 2002 “NewsBreaks” article on the Information Today, Inc. Website. She notes that Scirus is owned by Elsevier and powered by FAST, while Infotrieve is an independent document delivery company specializing in science, technology and medicine (STM). “The long-term viability of both can
be called into question” for reasons Ojala explains. Infotrieve’s CEO says they weren’t consulted about the shutdown—but “we’re pleased that the government recognized we have a better value proposition than they do.”

Ojala’s story notes that 80% to 90% of U.S. scientific R&D is government-funded, making PubSCIENCE a plausible taxpayer benefit (modeled after PubMed)—and “the private sector never saw it that way.” SIIA calls it “an ongoing example of the inappropriate role of government in providing access to non-government information.” There’s more to her article (including some questions as to PubSCIENCE’s use levels); take a look.

ExLibris 151 (August 16, 2002) takes on this proposal, and the headline makes Marylaine Block’s opinion clear enough: “The assault on the public’s right to know.” It’s a tricky article; she accuses the entire private a&I industry of “pricing products out of the reach of most small libraries and colleges,” an accusation that hits me right where I work. The essay goes on to note other Bush-administration attacks on public information.

I had never heard of PubSCIENCE before early August—but I’m not a scientist and don’t read the scientific literature. I regard good indexing as important, whether full text is available or not. And I think the public-vs.-private issues here are complicated, but not when the current administration makes the call: “Public bad. Private good. End of discussion.”

**Open Access/Open Archiving**

I may have misnamed BOAI, the Budapest Open Access Initiative, in a recent article—using “Archives” instead of “Access” for the third word. That’s a natural mistake, since OAI is the Open Archives Initiative and the two seem interlinked to a confusing degree.

An FAQ for BOAI, available at www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/boai-faq.htm the last time I looked (but eventually to be at “soros.org”), is worth reading if you’re trying to understand what this is all about. It’s mostly well done, although it doesn’t satisfy me that the BOAI approach is a workable Grand Solution. I won’t try to summarize the FAQ—after all, it’s an FAQ and it’s only 13 pages long. There’s no question as to the basic philosophy here and behind FOS: “When authors do wish to give away their writings, then readers should not
have to pay access tolls to read them.” A simple statement that covers considerable complexity.

I’m not sure why the anonymous FAQ creators feel the need to snipe at authors of scholarly monographs, but snipe they do: “Most authors of scholarly monographs hope to make money from them, regardless of the true sales prospects.”

About halfway through the FAQ is one of those dangerously simple statements. “Open access does not require the infusion of new money beyond what is already spent on journals, only a redirection of how it is spent.” Does “redirection” mean stripping away the money that libraries spend retaining runs of print journals and the librarians that deal with the serial literature, as well as the “voluntary” abandonment of print journals? Those are the details, and they are devilish indeed.

Given the sweep of that simple statement, I must take issue with one question and answer near the end of the FAQ:

What is the intended impact of BOAI on journals that do not offer open access to their contents?

Journals that do not wish to provide open access have nothing to fear from BOAI except competition…

But “redirection” implies pressure—from somebody, if not from BOAI itself—to abandon print subscriptions so that the money can be spent supporting this competition. A later answer to a question about impact on libraries is disingenuous in the extreme:

We do not call on libraries to stop acquiring or curating priced literature of any kind. We do not call on libraries to change their serials policies… The BOAI is about a particular kind of access to a particular body of literature. It is entirely compatible with other kinds of access to other bodies of literature.

But of course, it’s that body of literature—scholarly articles—that bring library budgets to grief. BOAI does, in effect, call for priced scholarly journals to go away—and necessarily, if indirectly, calls on those who fund libraries to “redirect” funding away from libraries in order to pay for author fees. I don’t see that statement anywhere, but where else will the money come from?

I also find the final Q&A a bit unlikely:

What is the intended impact of BOAI on initiatives to make scholarly literature affordable rather than free?

We hope these initiatives succeed, because their success will make scholarly literature more accessible than it is today. However, we believe that
the specific literature on which BOAI focuses, the peer-reviewed research literature in all disciplines, can and should be entirely free for readers.

Noting that SPARC and related initiatives are directly and almost exclusively concerned with peer-reviewed research literature, this answer is self-contradictory. I consider this an entirely fair paraphrase of the two sentences: “We hope these initiatives succeed…but we believe they should fail because we have the only proper solution.”

**Recommended** as the clearest statement of what BOAI purports to be about. Maybe you won’t find the questions and contradictions that I do.

**Caveat: The Self-Archiving FAQ**

There’s one big caveat with that recommendation. The “Self-Archiving” section refers you to “our Self-Archiving FAQ.” I downloaded that one as well, from www.eprints.org/self-faq/

It’s anonymous, but the writer has adopted the most annoying aspects of one known writer’s style too perfectly for comfort. I can’t recommend this FAQ except as a way to be turned off by the whole self-archiving movement (in all its “optimal and inevitable” glory).

The equation of self-publishing with “vanity press” is a slap in the face to all legitimate self-publishers and reflects total misunderstanding of the publishing world. Vanity press publishing is specifically not self-publishing. It is, instead, publishing heavily subsidized by the author where the publishing company primarily exists to gain such subsidies rather than to publish and promote works. It’s not a subtle difference.

And, of course, self-archiving a “preprint” is precisely self-publishing until and unless the article is accepted and published. It’s not vanity publishing unless you pay a publisher to include your article in…oh, but wait, the whole idea of this Grand Solution is that authors pay to have their works published. Just like vanity publishing. But I would be wrong to equate BOAI with vanity publishing, just as this anonymous writer is dead wrong, offensively so, to equate self-publishing with vanity publishing.

The refrain that digital archiving isn’t an issue is also a familiar one, with such rhetorical excess as “biases and superstitions” to dismiss RLG, OCLC, the Library of Congress, and anyone else who worries about digital archiving.
The whole style of this FAQ is to belittle anyone who doesn’t buy into the anonymous writer’s absolute assurance, with oddly worded straw-man questions, sneering answers, and a litany approach that assures us that nothing poses a “rational deterrent to immediate self-archiving.” The author can’t distinguish between scholarly literature and serials in general, giving us this astonishing 100%-certain statement: “The serials literature is all going on-line anyway.” Since there’s no timeline attached to that prediction, there’s no way to disprove it, but there’s also absolutely no evidence that print magazines—the bulk of the “serials literature” in terms of overall copies, if not in terms of titles—are all going online.

Are you surprised that a.w. (anonymous writer) demeans librarianship? You shouldn’t be. He/she/it also takes a whack at societies that underwrite other activities through journal publishing—after all, some of their “good works are not essential,” and thus ready for the scrapheap of history. Of course the virtues of browsing runs of print journals are dismissed, and we learn that online browsing “can be every bit as serendipitous as on-paper analog searching and browsing.” Evidence? A.w. don’t need no stinking evidence; he/she/it is right in all he/she/it says.

“I worry about the self-archiving FAQ because it will turn thoughtful, reasonable people against the kind of supercilious know-it-alls who write such trash.”

A.w. does considerable damage to his/her/its movement through the appalling tone of this FAQ. Maybe that’s the intent: Maybe A.w. is a plant, paid by the big international publishers to undermine BOAI and its ilk. I don’t believe that for a minute, but it’s the best explanation I have for this sub-FAQ (which is almost twice as long as the parent FAQ).

Access-Related Articles


Here’s an interesting “small solution”—“guild” publishing as an alternative to peer-reviewed journals. The more general case is that “scholars will have a better chance to use Internet resources to improve their communications if more publishing models…are available for new projects.” That’s a “small solutions” approach that makes great.
The specific model is that of research manuscript series, for example the technical report series issues by many computer science departments. “A guild is a formal association of people with similar interests”; academic departments and research institutes contain or constitute such guilds.

On first reading, I was troubled by the “rich get richer” aspect of guild publishing: It pretty much excludes independent scholars. But then I reread the beginning and realized that I’d been reading too many Grand Solution papers. Kling, Spector and McKin are not proposing that “guild publishing” should be the model for scholarly publishing. They are suggesting that it offers one more way to improve scholarly communications. They say that clearly. I just read it badly. Recommended as an interesting small solution.


What’s SciX? In some ways, it’s an OAI-related European initiative—and it’s got a healthy subsidy, a million Euros (somewhere around a million dollars, depending on when you ask) to get started. There are some oddities in the paper—for example, a table lists the existing CuminCAD (or CUMINCAD—it varies) database as being “free”—but the screen shot clearly shows that only certain privileged folk are able to see the papers themselves, and you have to register to see abstracts. I suppose “free” means different things in different cultures. I wonder about this comment:

The Internet represents a threat to traditional publishers. While some years ago, the Internet was a first resource for obtaining scientific information, today it is becoming the only resource, particularly with young researchers.

The “first resource” assertion is footnoted—but to a self-citation in a non-refereed journal (the Journal of Electronic Publishing, which I admire), hardly the strongest proof. If the latter assertion is correct, it’s a sad day for the future of science.

I’m also surprised by what appears to be an attack on standards organizations and, separately, attacks on electronic journals and preprint archives. It’s always disturbing when people pushing one “solution” find it necessary to undermine other steps toward improving access. But then, this is a European paper in a British (government-
funded) e-journal, so I’ll put it down to cultural differences. Recommended for a European perspective, with considerable caveats.


This report comes from a committee of ACRL’s Science & Technology Section, which used a Web survey to “identify perceived strengths and weaknesses of current access methods to peer-reviewed electronic journals in the fields of science and technology.” In this case, we’re talking about access to the journals themselves—not to articles within the journals. Note also that “electronic journals” here means “journals available as online full text,” not e-journals as such. Thus, one common access technique is to add an 856 field to the cataloging record for the print serial, a record that won’t exist for a true e-journal.

It’s an interesting article, well worth reading, but the survey itself doesn’t prove much for several reasons. First, only sixty questionnaires were complete enough to be used; that makes conclusions highly tentative—as the writers acknowledge. Second, the field is changing rapidly in ways that make the choice of access less significant as long as it’s possible to go directly to an article from an OpenURL. That rules out the least useful of the five “techniques”—where you get dumped at the doorway to an aggregator rather than directly to a journal or its articles. Third, none of the access methods received whole-hearted endorsement. The “most preferred” method, Web lists of journal titles, excels only in that it had equal “preferred” and “not preferred” scores—while for all of the others, “not preferred” outweighed “preferred.”

I’m not saying anything that the committee doesn’t recognize—and for all its weaknesses, this survey provides the first data point in an ongoing set of investigations. Recommended.

**Feedback (November 2002)**

From Peter Suber:

In the October issue of *Cites & Insights*, Walt Crawford comments on several open-access initiatives, including SPARC’s Create Change, PubSCIENCE, and the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) and its FAQ. Here are some responses to his comments on the BOAI FAQ.

➢ Walt writes:
I’m not sure why the anonymous FAQ creators feel the need to snipe at authors of scholarly monographs, but snipe they do: “Most authors of scholarly monographs hope to make money from them, regardless of the true sales prospects.”

This isn’t a snipe. Everyone associated with the BOAI agrees that authors have a right to make money from their work. We don’t criticize anyone for trying. We draw a fundamental distinction between donated literature, for which authors do not expect payment, and undonated literature (for lack of a better term), which authors would rather sell than give away. Our mission is not to push works from the undonated category to the donated. We want to leave this decision up to authors. Instead, our mission is to provide open access to the works in the donated category.

Virtually all journal articles are in the donated category. So are dissertations. Textbooks are not, so we do not advocate open access to textbooks (rather than snipe at textbook authors for trying to earn some income). Monographs are an interesting intermediate case. Authors hope to make money from them, so they don’t consent to open access. Yet the sales are often too low to pay royalties, so that many monograph authors might well trade the low probability of revenue for the larger audience and greater impact of open access.

Speaking as the author of one monograph that made some money and one that didn’t, I believe that the language of the FAQ respects the two-sidedness of the phenomenon: these authors hope for some financial reward (which affects their consent to open access), but sometimes this hope is fulfilled and sometimes it is not (which affects the analysis of the bargain).

The BOAI does not advocate open access to monographs. The purpose of the sentence on monographs is to separate the kind of literature to which BOAI applies from other kinds of literature, in order to prevent misunderstandings. But it also functions to point out that the category of donated literature can expand or contract according to the considerations that affect an author’s consent.

Read the BOAI FAQ sentence in its full context: www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/boaifaq.htm#consent

By the way, “anonymous” isn’t quite the right word for the BOAI FAQ. The FAQ speaks for the BOAI, not for individuals, and so it is signed by the BOAI, not by individuals. I am the principal drafter, and wrote it with the feedback and comments of the other BOAI partici-
pants. But I did not work alone and I did not write in order to represent myself. If I make a point of mentioning the collaborative nature of the work, it’s not to deflect criticism or responsibility for a weak document, but to avoid taking undue credit for a strong one.

Parallel example: The Library of Congress Copyright Office FAQ is attributed to the Copyright Office, not to the individuals who wrote it. I don’t think anyone finds this misleading or evasive. [www.copyright.gov/faq]

➤ Walt writes:

About halfway through the FAQ is one of those dangerously simple statements. “Open access does not require the infusion of new money beyond what is already spent on journals, only a redirection of how it is spent.” Does “redirection” mean stripping away the money that libraries spend retaining runs of print journals and the librarians that deal with the serial literature, as well as the “voluntary” abandonment of print journals?

The answer is no. The redirection we have in mind is to pay for the dissemination of articles rather than for access to them, or to pay for outgoing articles rather than incoming articles. Dissemination fees should be paid by those sponsoring an author’s research—for example, foundations, governments, universities, and laboratories. As these institutions agree to pay for more and more outgoing articles, then everyone gains—these institutions themselves, as well as libraries and individuals around the world—by paying for fewer and fewer incoming articles.

The redirection is a subsidy making this literature free of charge for libraries and readers. Literature funded this way has a natural competitive advantage over traditional literature charging subscription fees. Many libraries will choose to drop expensive journals in favor of free journals of comparable quality and impact. Eventually, but not immediately, a second form of redirection may come from the savings realized by dropping expensive journals. But these savings will not be the first source of the redirection. In short, we do not advocate that libraries cancel any journals simply for the sake of funding an open-access alternative. They should only cancel journals when they believe it is wise to do so, using their customary criteria, and taking all relevant information into account.

Neither do we advocate that libraries save money by canceling preservation and access projects or firing librarians.
It’s important to keep in mind that the costs of dissemination are very low compared to the current prices charged for access. Hence, shifting from access fees to dissemination fees can support the same body of literature, distributed to a much larger audience, at a much lower overall cost. This means that the money already spent on access is more than enough to pay for dissemination. This is why we are confident that redirection will suffice and that the long-term sustainability of the dissemination model is not in doubt.

If Walt’s point was that the transition from access funding to dissemination funding will not be trouble-free, then I certainly agree. Because we’re not advocating the cancellation of priced journals in order to fund open-access journals, the funding will have to come from other sources, such as the author-sponsors listed above. Hence, initially, these dissemination fees will be added to the total spent on journal literature, rather than merely redirected from journal subscription payments. However, this is only a transition problem, not a problem with the long-term sustainability of the dissemination model. (The proof, as noted, is that the money already spent on access is more than enough to pay for dissemination.) The BOAI addresses the transition difficulties in part by raising special funds for the transition, starting with the $3 million committed by the Open Society Institute. I analyze the transition and redirection problems at greater length here, “Dissemination Fees, Access Fees, and the Double Payment Problem,” FOSN for 1/1/02 [makeashorterlink.com/?B2DC62302]

The transition troubles for open-access journals do not affect open-access archives, which are rapidly approaching a critical mass of endorsement and adoption: “Momentum for Eprint Archiving,” FOSN for 8/8/02 [makeashorterlink.com/?W5B012CD1] (Scroll to the second story.)

➢ Walt writes:

But “redirection” implies pressure—from somebody, if not from the BOAI itself—to abandon print subscriptions so that the money can be spent supporting this competition.

We don’t advocate any form of pressure other than competition. We hope to stimulate the existence of high-quality, peer-reviewed, open-access journals. When they exist, librarians will decide which expensive subscriptions they can continue to justify. We are not working to pressure librarians to make decisions that favor open-access journals. We’re working to make journals that librarians will favor.
Walt writes:

A later question about impact on libraries is disingenuous in the extreme: “We do not call on libraries to stop acquiring or curating priced literature of any kind. We do not call on libraries to change their serials policies…. The BOAI is about a particular kind of access to a particular body of literature. It is entirely compatible with other kinds of access to other bodies of literature.” But of course it’s that body of literature—scholarly articles—that bring library budgets to grief. BOAI does, in effect, call for priced scholarly journals to go away—and necessarily, if indirectly, calls on those who fund libraries to “redirect” funding away from libraries in order to pay for author fees.

The quotation from the FAQ is neither disingenuous nor misleading. We do not call on libraries to stop acquiring or curating any kind of literature. We do not call for a boycott of any kind of literature or any kind of publisher.

We do not call for priced journals to go away. That way of putting it suggests that we are making demands rather than making a better alternative, or that we are more interested in eliminating competition than in competing. As we put it elsewhere in the FAQ, “Our goal is not to put for-profit publishers out of business, but to provide open access to as much as possible of the peer-reviewed research literature….Our project is constructive, not destructive.”

The difference is partly one of emphasis and partly one of priority. We are working hard to bring it about that over time the balance of priced to free journal literature tilts decisively toward the free end. This will hurt some publishers. But the cause of this effect will be competition from high quality, peer-reviewed, open-access journals, not boycotts, demands, threats, or other forms of pressure.

We do not call on libraries to change their serials policies, because their subscription and cancellation criteria already include price alongside other factors like usage and impact. We’re creating open-access journals that appeal to the current criteria of libraries, because they are the right criteria. We’re not pulling strings to change those criteria or rig the decisions.

As I said in response to the last question, the redirection to pay for open access journals will not come from the forced cancellation of priced journals. We can’t force anything. All we can do is create an attractive alternative and let it compete. If librarians agree that it is attractive, and cancel some priced journals that are no longer cost-effective, then the savings may contribute to further redirection. But
even this portion of the redirection will have come from successful competition rather than boycotts, force, or pressure.

Here’s another perspective on this. When an existing product is expensive and you want to displace it with a free one, you don’t have to exert pressure or call for boycotts. Just produce the free one and let it compete. We believe that journal articles (both preprints and postprints) can be free for end-users. Arranging the subsidies to make them free for end-users requires no pressure or boycotts either, just clear presentation of the facts underlying this beautiful opportunity. The key facts are the two highlighted by the BOAI in its opening sentences: “An old tradition and a new technology have converged to make possible an unprecedented public good. The old tradition is the willingness of scientists and scholars to publish the fruits of their research in scholarly journals without payment, for the sake of inquiry and knowledge. The new technology is the internet.”

➢ The FAQ:

What is the intended impact of BOAI on initiatives to make scholarly literature affordable rather than free? We hope these initiatives succeed, because their success will make scholarly literature more accessible than it is today. However, we believe that the specific literature on which BOAI focuses, the peer-reviewed literature in all disciplines, can and should be entirely free for readers.

➢ Walt’s comment:

Noting that SPARC and related initiatives are directly and almost exclusively concerned with peer-reviewed research literature, this is answer is self-contradictory. I consider this an entirely fair paraphrase of the two sentences: “We hope these initiatives succeed…but we believe they should fail because we have the only proper solution.”

Here’s a better paraphrase: There’s a best solution (free access) and a second-best solution (affordable access). Both are superior to the status quo (expensive access).

We thought this was obvious, but perhaps it needs spelling out. If I prefer A to B and B to C, then I can back both A and B against C while consistently preferring A to B.

SPARC supports both free and affordable journals. It also helped draft the BOAI. There’s no contradiction here either. BOAI supports SPARC and SPARC supports BOAI.

Additional URLs:

➢ October issue of Cites & Insights: citesandinsights.info/civi13.pdf
This is Chapter 2 of the public dialog between Walt Crawford and me on open access issues. In the July issue of *Cites & Insights*, he reviewed several FOS-related articles, including two of mine. I replied in a June 28 posting to the FOS Forum, which includes my response to his skepticism that FOS might be part of the solution but not a “Grand Solution.” [makeashorterlink.com/?I3F213602]

**My Immediate Response**

Peter Suber’s commentary clarifies some important points. If I had read the BOAI FAQ on its own, with no more context than FOS News (“FOSN” in Peter’s commentary) and Suber’s other writings, I might not have raised some of the points. Reading the self-archiving FAQ, which is incorporated by definition into the BOAI FAQ, caused me to go back and reread the overall FAQ much more critically, perhaps too critically. (Note my comment in *Cites & Insights* 2:14 after recommending the BOAI FAQ: “Maybe you won’t find the questions and contradictions that I do.” In other words, maybe I’m reading it wrong: you should draw your own conclusions.) However:

- I continue to believe that “regardless of the true sales prospects” damages the FAQ. It serves no positive purpose and has the negative effect of suggesting that authors of scholarly monographs are fooling themselves—which is a snipe by my standards. If the purpose of the clause is to say, “For those authors who don’t expect to make money from monographs, we suggest that making them part of the donated category can give them greater impact,” then that should be said in a clear, positive manner.

- Yes, “anonymous” is the wrong term. The BOAI FAQ is properly signed by the issuing body. A good editor would have questioned my usage; I’m not always a good editor of my own writing. Sorry.

- The “redirection” commentary is particularly helpful—and as Peter notes in that commentary, the FAQ statement is true only in the long run, and only if BOAI succeeds.

- “Disingenuous in the extreme” may have been too strong. However, whatever the assurances of BOAI, I tend to believe that most
universities, faced with the prospect of paying publication fees for articles prepared by faculty and researchers so that readers won’t have to pay, will find the most logical source from which to take that money: The library. I’m satisfied that Peter Suber has no such intention and that BOAI offers no such intentional threat. I’m also keenly aware of unintended consequences.

- As to A, B, and C, this is a significant difference between Peter Suber and some other advocates of change, who seem intent on deriding solutions other than their own. See the self-archiving FAQ for examples.

Am I now satisfied that FOS is the Grand Solution? No—and that’s one reason I keep nudging people to read FOS-related material and consider it seriously. I don’t believe in Grand Solutions; that hasn’t changed. I believe FOS can be a significant part of a complex set of steps to improve access and ease financial pressures.
The Access Puzzle (January 2003)

Big deals, privatization, and intriguing partial solutions—a mixed bag of articles and events relating to STM journals, scholarly access, and the like.

PubSCIENCE

If you believe that open archives provide all the access mechanisms anyone need, this wasn't interesting—but if you believe in the worth of indexing, November 4 was a sad day, even though it involved what many regarded as a second-rate product.

On that day, the PubSCIENCE Website carried this message: “PubSCIENCE has been discontinued.” Not much more.

In addition to vivid, rapid commentary on various lists, blogs and discussion boards, I encountered a number of useful media items:

➢ William Matthews wrote “More sites targeted for shutdown” in the November 13, 2002 Federal Computer Week (www.fcw.com). He notes that the Software and Information Industry Association (SIIA), the industry association that succeeded in getting PubSCIENCED shut down “after more than a year of pressing Congress and the Bush administration,” the group is “looking into a couple of other databases and agencies,” in the words of SIIA public policy director David LeDuc. SIIA is, of course, “delighted with the [shutdown] decision,” and ALA and other library groups are less thrilled. Sue Martin points out that articles from some small scientific publications “will no longer be available” through freely-searchable indexes. Emily Sheketoff of ALA’s Washington Office expects the decision to cost libraries. The article mentions SIIA’s contention that researchers, not taxpayers, should pay for access
to articles—but fails to mention that 80 to 90% of scientific R&D is already paid for by taxpayers.

- On November 21, a CNet News item from Stefanie Olsen noted that PubSCIENCE included more than two million documents. For some reason, LeDuc seems to be the spokesperson for the Bush administration, while James Love calls the decision “corruption of U.S. Congress” and “an attack on the public domain.” This piece does note government underwriting.

- That same day, the ever-valuable Dan Gillmor’s column was titled “Corporate interests trump public domain for science info.” Gillmor quotes the Washington Post announcement of the shutdown and adds his mild-mannered comments: “The correct word for what has happened here is ‘theft.’ Later: “It’s as if the book publishers persuaded communities to shutter public libraries. (Not that they won’t try; e-publishing could lead to that by default.)” There’s more, recommended as usual.

- How much does the government save from this shutdown? Both other items have the same figure as Jonathan Krim’s November 21 Washington Post story: a whopping $200,000 a year. Ten cents per year per indexed article. This report quotes DoE officials who call the shutdown “a success.” A very silly quote from LeDuc attacks the suggestion that Scirus and Infotrieve could start charging for searches, now that the government competition has disappeared: “That’s not how the Internet works.” Bwahahah: Elsevier wouldn’t dare charge for online searching—that’s not how the Internet works. Funny man.

- ALAWON also commented on the shutdown (www.ala.org/wash-off/alawon/alwn.1189.html). It’s worth noting that SIIA touted the open comment period before the decision was made—and that there were more than 240 comments arguing against the shutdown as compared to seven in favor.

**Two from FOS—and a Mini-Perspective**

If you’re interested in the FOS movement, you really should read the FOS News blog (www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/fosblog.html). A couple of items are worth noting here:

- The September 15, 2002 FOS Newsletter has Peter Suber’s brief thoughts on measuring FOS progress. Well worth reading, wheth-
er you accept all the aims and arguments of FOS or not. (As you probably guess, I don’t—which is all the more reason for you to read Suber’s thoughts yourself.)

An interview with Suber appeared in The Technology Source and is available at ts.mivu.org/default.asp?show=article&rid=1025. Reading the interview helped me see why I’m bothered by aspects of FOS—e.g., while Suber sees that “the Internet [has] many very attractive advantages over print,” I wonder—perhaps too much—about the likely loss of bound backsets that bring new scholars up to speed in a field, the loss of journal issue as context for article (more significant in some fields than in others), and other aspects of the probable (in my opinion) near-elimination of print runs of scholarly journals if FOS succeeds as a universal solution. I also distrust the notion that we can rely on increasingly sophisticated software “to help readers to find relevant literature,” particularly based on “the advances in artificial intelligence,” as being equivalent or preferable to human indexing and abstracting.

I now see more clearly that one huge selling point for FOS and open archiving is the idea that open availability, even without professional indexing, makes a scholar’s work available to a vastly greater audience than in priced print journals. As a theoretical statement, it’s impossible to fault that claim—but it carries with it the smell of Michael Hart’s pronouncements about “giving away” trillions of dollars worth of ebooks. I do understand that open archiving does not inherently imply lack of human indexing services—although when participants in discussions (as was seen informally) suggest that shifting resources from libraries to departments would be a great way to encourage FOS, I see indexes as being the next to fall. If that’s true, then is it possible to measure whether actual readership and impact of an article is greater in an unindexed-but-open situation or an indexed-and-fairly-priced journal? Possibly not. If the related movements succeed, it would be too late for such studies.

Yes, I know I’m an old fogey in this regard. I see how much more valuable RLG’s world-class anthropology databases (now searchable as a single database) have become with the addition of OpenURL, offering students direct access to as much as two-thirds of the articles. I don’t believe open access without human indexing would provide the same value. (Yes, Peter, I know that FOS does not advocate that indexes disappear. Just as it does not advocate that moderately priced non-
profit journals disappear. I’m talking probable and predictable if possibly unintended consequences, not policy.) I also believe, in a second aspect of this quandary, that I have more actual readers for “The Crawford Files” in American Libraries, with its print circulation of 63,000, than for Cites & Insights, which theoretically could reach half a billion readers—and that the inclusion of American Libraries in a number of human-indexed databases makes that readership even higher.

A mini-perspective: I believe scholarship, as broadly defined to include those of us who aren’t professors in a given field but who wish to find out more about it, will suffer if any monolithic solution to the access problem succeeds in its entirety. I believe that the loss of browsable bound printed backsets for core humanities, social science, and even science journals will do damage. I believe that the loss of context, in some fields and for some journals, will be harmful. I believe that broad current awareness, breadth if you will, is likely to suffer when the set of core journals in a field becomes nothing more than a set of tags attached to pieces of the great article universe. I believe that some of these possible harms are probable (possibly unintended) consequences of concerted efforts to convert all scholarship to FOS/BOAI/Open Archive models. I also believe that such models appear to be exceedingly valuable as some of many counterweights to the monster publishing conglomerates and outrageously overpriced STM literature.

And I know I may be wrong about all of this. Head scratching ensues. Certainty must be nice. Too bad I’ve been losing most of it as I grow older.

**Big Deals**

I know it’s a bit late, but two items from the Chronicle of Higher Education are particularly worth noting. I was able to get to both of them through chronicle.com, the second and longer at “colloquy-live/2002/09/ejournal/.”

The first appears in the September 20, 2002 issue and is part of the chronicle.com/free Web portion, available to anyone. Entitled “Second thoughts on ‘bundled’ e-journals,” it’s by Andrea L. Foster and includes some provocative notes on the situation with some key Big Deals, particularly Elsevier’s ScienceDirect. Cornell is cited as a possible dropout from the deal, partly because Elsevier’s methodology makes it so difficult to cancel little-used journals and replace “unpopular Elsevier titles with high-quality journals not published by Elsevier.” A Virginia consortial
arrangement may also be cancelled. One key problem: Academic Press, recently acquired by Elsevier and merged into ScienceDirect. For the College of Charleston, current prices are just under $25,000 for online access to 130 Academic Press and about $15,000 for 37 print titles. With Elsevier’s new pricing, single-user electronic access to the 37 print titles would cost just about $120,000—and the print titles themselves would cost $43,000. That’s fairly startling; some would say that it shows unwarranted market power.

A long online colloquy on bundled e-journal subscriptions took place beginning at 1 p.m. on Thursday, September 19, with Kenneth Frazier as the primary guest and Andrea Foster moderating. The question: “Are academic libraries being well served by the deals they are signing for packages of electronic journals?” Both the article and colloquy transcript are highly recommended. Frazier, an early critic of Big Deals, admits that “the big deal was nearly irresistible for many academic libraries” and goes on to say that the huge databases of highly-specialized content may baffle undergrads: offering many times the content may not be such a good deal. In other exchanges, he questions the need for (and legality of) confidentiality in the publisher-university contracts, takes issue with the idea that a price-increase cap of 7% is some wonderful gift to libraries, questions the “article of faith” that having more journals is always better, and notes that Big Deals may interfere with digital archiving. He views big publishers as “less and less inclined” to worry about faculty and library concerns. It’s a long transcript (23 pages as I printed it), full of interesting, provocative questions and responses.

**New PLoS Journals**

The PLoS boycott didn’t work—but a new initiative should have some impact as one of the many steps that can improve scholarly access. The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation awarded $9 million to PLoS to launch new online journals. *PLoS Biology* and *PLoS Medicine* are in the formative stages, with a schedule to begin receiving submissions by this summer and publishing in the second half of 2003. A *Chronicle of Higher Education* note (December 18) includes a key detail not in the initial announcement: “The group will ask authors to pay about $1,500 per article to have papers published in either of the two journals.” That’s three times as much as the figure used by FOS. Given the claimed low costs of pure e-journals, one has to wonder why so much.
Access-Related Articles Worth Noting


You gotta love this one. A bunch of scholarly publishers within the AAP are funding an Edelman PR effort to “improve publishers’ image among librarians and academics” and “quash a newfound enthusiasm among some librarians for self-publishing research results online…”

What’s so great about traditional publishers? “Money for marketing, the prestige of a well-known journal, the expertise and mediation of an editor, and the management of peer review.” Hard to argue with three of the four—but how many scholars believe that Elsevier marketing money goes to promote access to their own scholarship? (And since when did librarians become the key movers in self-archiving movements?)

Pricing? “I really don’t see it as the key issue,” says Ted Nardin of McGraw-Hill. “My view of this program is that our objective is not to convey pricing but to convey what publishers are doing.” The article goes on to quote Kenneth Frazier, who doesn’t quite shoot a raspberry…

Recommended if only as a silly-season item: April in November.

So what if STM publishers are bankrupting libraries and preventing any monographic purchases? It’s just an image problem…


Huwe directs the library at UC Berkeley’s Institute of Industrial Relations and recounts that library’s experience with the Social Sciences eScholarship Repository, part of California Digital Library’s eScholarship initiatives. It’s a good article dealing with real-life issues—and there’s at least one “value point” that stands in bold opposition to the concept that anything other than peer-reviewed articles is vanity-press garbage:

“Pre-Prints” Have Innate Long-Term Value. Even though faculty research is aimed at peer-reviewed journals, books, or highly regarded policy series, working papers themselves retain historical and substantive value.

Well worth reading. Recommended.
Montgomery, Carol Hansen, and Donald W. King, “Comparing library and user related costs of print and electronic journal collections,” D-Lib Magazine 8:10 (October 2002) and “After migration to an electronic journal collection,” D-Lib Magazine 8:12 (December 2002). www.dlib.org. Montgomery is dean of libraries at Drexel, which deliberately moved away from print journals and to e-journals in almost all cases. These articles report on an IMLS-funded study on the impact of that decision. I might raise some questions about the allocation of costs and whether the Drexel case can be generalized, but Montgomery does not claim that the results are either final or without problems. Both reports are thoughtful and provide some interesting data points while raising some interesting questions. Recommended, with the caveats that you need to read carefully to see Drexel’s special circumstances (spelled out in the first article in detail) and be aware that the author believes that preservation is someone else’s problem.

Poynder, Richard, “Reinventing MCB University Press,” Information Today (November 2002). One talk I attended at the Charleston Conference represented partial findings from a study of price increases among library periodicals. I look forward to the final paper; meanwhile, it’s worth noting that the ten journals studied with the highest percentage increases all came from a single publisher: MCB University Press, now known as Emerald. As to the ten highest-impact journals—well, that’s a different story.

Poynder’s article discusses the Emerald “attempt, some claim, to shed [MCB’s] bad reputation.” John McDonald of Caltech argues that MCB’s success was based on undue exploitation of its customers: “raising prices systematically, over a course of years, until libraries noticed and moved to action.” It’s certainly true that within the library field, as De Montfort’s Jo Webb says, “MCB journals were notorious for their price rises, and the cost of their journals was much higher than the average in the sector.” Consider New Library World, which cost $80 when MCB acquired it. Currently? $5,799 for 12 issues and seven “dispatches.” (One Emerald journal that I’ve never heard of, Library Management, costs almost $10,000 per year.)

An admission of personal bias: I was still writing for Library Hi Tech News and serving on Library Hi Tech’s editorial board when MCB purchased the two and, almost immediately, more than doubled the
prices. I didn’t sever relations with the publisher at that point. In retrospect, I should have. Mea culpa. **Recommended.**


If you’ve never heard of LOCKSS, I **strongly recommend** that you read this clear, reasonably brief article on what it is and what it could do. If you have heard of LOCKSS but aren’t sure what it’s all about, go **read this article**. After I read it, I spent half an hour on the phone with Ms. Reich considering how LOCKSS could affect or support COWLZ and other grey literature. The answer’s indirect, but LOCKSS itself is exciting—particularly because it’s very much “one of many” partial solutions. Consider this paragraph, which of course won my heart immediately:

> The LOCKSS system will clearly not be the unique and ultimate solution to all e-archiving, or even all e-journal archiving, requirements. It is important that this **not** be the case. We are emphatic in our distaste for monolithic structures! We will have been successful if we provide over a period of years the assurance to libraries that their investment in paid access to e-journals is adequately safeguarded in those cases that warrant a small commitment of resources in computer storage and staff effort.


David Stern, director of Science Libraries and Information Services at Yale, offers a detailed and thoughtful discussion on a topic that won’t go away as long as there are paid journals and professional a&I services. I found very little to argue with here, and it’s good to see someone pointing out that OpenURL should end the need to pay for proprietary vendor-based services linking from indexes to full text. He also points out one of the problems with CrossRef, the “solution” that routes links through publisher sites. **Recommended.**

“Framing the issue: Open access,” ARL, December 9, 2002. www.arl.org

A good nine-page overall summary of issues surrounding open access with a substantial set of online resources. **Worth a look.**
Scholarly Article Access
(Formerly The Access Puzzle)

May 2003

Here’s what I was thinking about as I put together this section. Feel free to disagree with or ignore any of these points.

- If “output charges” for refereed articles (as proposed for FOS) are built into grant funding—the way library overhead should be, but generally hasn’t been—then one of my primary worries about FOS [that the money will come straight out of library budgets] may go away.

- It’s certainly true that disciplines that rely heavily on monographs, and the long-term health of library book collections, have been damaged by the absurd increases in journal costs. If those costs go down (and if shelf space is freed up) through FOS and other initiatives without destroying library budgets in the process, book collections might regain some health.

- If Richard Abel’s right—that journal articles are the raw material of scholarship—this would be a very good thing in most disciplines.

- However, there’s little question that some scholars see academic libraries as little more than intermediaries for scholarly articles.

- Thus, if libraries no longer play that role (thanks to overall FOS success), then faculty might be even less inclined than they already are to support library funding.

- If it’s also true—as I believe—that core journals are unlikely to become electronic-only or be replaced by FOS initiatives, at least for some decades, then one of my other qualms (the difficulty for a new scholar of getting up to speed when browsing the back run of core journals, when there are no bound print volumes) may go away.

- And if it’s true that most core journals in most (or many) disciplines are, or should be, produced by nonprofits and associations
and come with modest subscription prices, then the muddled future of the whole process might make more sense.

- Just as it's clear that some players in the current chaos simply assume that no university or college ever disappears, and that no academic institution would ever pull the plug on ongoing-but-unsupported computer systems (both of which strike me as dicey assumptions), it's pretty clear that nobody wants to look at actual paper consumption, overall costs, and ecological issues of print vs. electronic for heavily-read journals.

- Speaking of issues nobody wants to look at, here's a biggie. There's some reason to believe that refereed journals function similarly to highways: As one fills up, creating another one causes an increase in usage that fills that one up as well. Or, to drop the analogy, what portion of the two million (or three million, or whatever) articles that appear each year in refereed journals really don't add to the store of human knowledge? I think of two categories in particular: Articles written entirely for tenure-related reasons, with no expectation that anyone will ever read them; and “least publishable unit” articles or deli-slicing publishing, cases where a worthwhile research project is published in several (or many) slender articles instead of one or two major articles.

I’m not a scholar. I can’t get this all to make sense. I don’t even know how many of those bullets I completely believe, although I believe there’s some truth in all of them.

My own primary interests are in fields where monographs and books in general continue to be core to the fields, and where most core serial publications are, indeed, inexpensive (for individuals and for institutions) and mostly association-published. As a reader and sometime student of media, I find magazines more interesting than journals—and sometimes the lines are a little fuzzy there as well.

So, for now and the foreseeable future, I’m not even going to try to make sense of this. I’ll just highlight some interesting pieces on various aspects of scholarly communication at the article level.

**Free Online Scholarship**

Peter Suber has put together a concise “Timeline of the free online scholarship movement” (www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/timeline.htm). He begins with Medline in 1966, currently omits books, articles, and
speeches, and notes directly that the timeline is weak in the middle years. (At some point, Peter Suber and Charles W. Bailey, Jr., could profitably collaborate, given the quality of the work both are doing in related fields.) Recommended, both as a timeline and set of links and as an ongoing project that welcomes your input.

Suber, Peter, “Removing the barriers to research: An introduction to open access for librarians,” *College & Research Libraries* 64 (February 2003): 92-94.

*C&RL* is a print publication—but one with entirely reasonable institutional pricing. It’s a core mostly-refereed journal for academic librarians. I suspect it’s a lousy candidate for a FOS alternative. I suspect ACRL has no problem with self-archived articles or open access after publication.

It’s also the print home of this clearly written argument for FOS. If you’re not up to speed on what FOS is all about, you could hardly do better. If you are, it’s still one of the clearest pieces of pro-FOS argumentation I’ve seen. Does that mean I’m totally convinced? No—but the introduction to this section shows just how confused I am at this point. Recommended and available at www.earlham.edu/~peters/writing/acrl.htm for those outside the U.S. or the rare U.S. *Cites & Insights* reader without access to *C&RL*.


Oddly, David Prosser’s name doesn’t appear as a direct byline, but a heading says “Prosser attacks the kernel problem…” and Suber’s response identifies him by name. Presumably, UK serials folk know who “Prosser” refers to…

Prosser proposes a split option, one apparently in use for some entomology journals. If an author elects to pay a publication charge, the article becomes open to all immediately upon publication. If an author does not pay a publication charge, the article’s only available to subscribers.

Such a model would allow for some interesting work on the effects of open access; Prosser mentions that as one of seven advantages of such a model. He also clearly states four disadvantages and offers some potential scenarios.

Suber not only likes the idea (in a March 21, 2003 posting) but offers a additional advantages.
Recommended as an intriguing middle ground. I’m still not sure how print-vs.-electronic plays out in this scenario, but that really is a secondary issue. The split approach appears to reduce or remove many of the risks involved in converting to open access and, as a result, encourages movement in that direction without requiring an act of faith.

Related Articles and Events


*portal* is one of those odd pieces of the article access puzzle: A reasonably-priced journal created largely because of discomfort with price increases and other changes at the *Journal of Academic Librarianship*. I haven’t seen it often, partly because it’s not an open-access journal—but there have been times when it’s been freely available through Project MUSE, and I printed off a few articles during one of those times.

None of which has much to do with the article at hand, which includes ten dense pages of text followed by notes and survey instruments. The survey in question was web-based, done in spring 2001 and aimed at faculty and grad students. It includes enough prefatory material to show its relationship to other similar studies and to note that full-text access imposes its own overhead. Roughly 3,600 surveys were distributed; 1,232 were completed, a very good response rate and a large enough sample to be meaningful by almost any definition.

There’s too much here to summarize thoroughly, and I recommend reading the paper if you have access to *portal*. A few notes:

- Just over half of the faculty use electronic versions of print journals at least monthly; 31% never use them. 58% of faculty use library print journals at least monthly; 12% never do. Only 29% use pure e-journals at least monthly—and 42% had never used e-journals.

- Faculty regularly use electronic resources other than library services—particularly association websites, conference proceedings, and author’s websites. 10% of respondents use preprint servers.

- Most faculty—70%—want core journals to be available in both print and electronic form. The same percentage would prefer to see non-core journals only in electronic form.
The most popular reasons for moving to electronic access are getting a copy, access to back issues, convenience, reliable access, and access to full content. Problems are image quality, layout, and access to full journal content.

Science and technology faculty use journals (in all forms) more than faculty as a whole—but responses on preferred forms of access to core and non-core journals were comparable to faculty as a whole. 68% or sci-tech faculty want both forms of access to core titles; 75% want electronic-only access to non-core titles.

Good study, clear analysis, no apparent bias. An excellent article.


This article reports on interviews with 61 social science faculty members at the University of Michigan regarding their use of print and electronic journals. I could do without the introductory comments about “creating the digital library of the future while simultaneously continuing to fund, house, and manage the print library of the past and present”—particularly since Michigan maintains a healthy monographic print acquisitions budget.

That grump aside, it’s an interesting report—one that disclaims generalization. This group of faculty members (in economics, sociology, and anthropology) like e-journals but also like to print out the articles, particularly for serious study. One respondent wants everything online, and one historical sociologist doesn’t care about journals at all—just articles.

When it comes to books—they want books. Print books. Some of them even know why. Most of them maintain personal (print) journal subscriptions (for core journals?). One or two people might be happy to see journals fade away, but at least one pointed out the virtue of browsing print runs and getting a feel for context.

A couple understand that digital resources may not always be available—a concern that convinces one to keep a personal hardcover collection. Interestingly, while most “print partisans” (those who prefer paper journals to full-text access) are old fogies like me, one is a junior faculty member who finds printing individual articles ecologically unsound. She has a point. All in all, an interesting informal report on carefully done research. Worth reading.

This long article (23 single-space print pages, the last six of which are notes) is in a free online refereed journal. Willinsky (University of British Columbia) looks at the tax returns for 20 U.S. scholarly associations to analyze current publishing revenues against costs. It is, to be sure, very much an argument for open access, one that appears to regard print as hopelessly outmoded.

Willinsky uses “transitional” way too much for my taste, and I have no reason to doubt that he really sees a transition to an all-digital future. He appears to call for dropping print editions of journals, and does not seem to consider that this could ever be harmful to anyone except for-profit publishers. He does a pretty good job of making print sound quaint: “With print there was reason to make readers and libraries pay for elaborately published volumes, prepared in specialized print shops, well-bound on good paper…”

He poses a key question in a way that suggests “When will you stop beating your spouse”:

> The scholarly association has, then, to put the question to its membership: Is this organization devoted to maintaining its current revenue levels or is it devoted to serving the professional interests of its members in fostering the greater development and circulation of knowledge?

I would guess that some members in some associations might say it’s not so simple and should not be either-or. Associations mostly want (need!) to keep expenditures within revenues. Most effective associations need central staff and do a great many things besides publish journals. And the case for abandoning print has simply not been made across the board for all disciplines, except by assertion.

I can’t imagine that any association would be disturbed by a decrease in revenues that was matched by a decrease in expenses and that did not cause a reduction in services and effectiveness. But that’s a more complex issue.

There’s a lot of interesting material here. I may take issue with some of the assumptions and some of the argumentation, but that doesn’t mean Willinsky’s wrong or not worth reading. The article is certainly worth reading; draw your own conclusions. (Oh yes: One tidbit is that BioMed Central, claimed as a great success story in open access publishing, “is not yet a profitable venture.”)
Open-Access Journals

Scholarly Article Access, July 2003

The Public Library of Science announced its first journal in a May 8, 2003 message from Kerri Allen of SPARC. \textit{PLoS Biology} is set to begin monthly publication in October 2003 and began accepting submissions on May 1. The announcement doesn’t mention \textit{PLoS}’ extraordinarily high $1,500-per-accepted-article fee. It does note free online access—and a paper product that may or may not be reasonably priced: $160 for a 12-issue 2004 volume (with the three 2003 issues thrown in free). Is that a bargain? That depends on the number and quality of the papers in \textit{PLoS Biology}—but it’s certainly low enough to encourage subscriptions.

“Open access: Is there a way forward,” an address by Mary Case of ARL at the April 4, 2003 ALPSP seminar on open access, must have been interesting to hear. I downloaded the bullet points—and some of them give me pause. The very first point raises one of my standard red flags: “Open access is inevitable.” Well, then, very little point discussing it, is there?

As I read the expansion of the bullet points, one thing kept arising, although it’s never stated: An all-or-nothing attitude. That is, if \textit{everything} doesn’t move to open access, the whole peer-reviewed communications structure could collapse. That’s my own reading: It’s certainly never stated. Instead, we’re told that open access leads to “increased citations”—and that, if journal’s \textit{don’t} move to open access, “authors may increasingly use and cite open access non-peer reviewed literature hosted on institutional or disciplinary repositories.” But BOAI and all the other repository schemes I’ve seen focus on \textit{peer-reviewed} literature. The paragraph, one of the lengthiest pieces of text in this outline, appears to claim that the only way to save peer review as a central part of scholarship is for peer-reviewed journals to “move to open access early on.”
The “all or nothing” theme appears most strongly in section B.2., on libraries, where Case asks whether a move to open access will solve or exacerbate current economic problems for large libraries (ARL’s constituency). “One library estimated that its costs would increase tenfold for APS under the proposed fees. Neither the library nor the institution could absorb the increased costs.” The next point: “If all publishers migrated at once, it is possible that the curve would smooth out…” Later, Case admits that “acquisitions monies [are] likely to be reallocated within the university,” but will it only be acquisitions monies—and won’t that hit monographic purchases even harder?

Case suggests a transition period of “2-3 years,” then concludes, “Change will come through small steps made in concert by all members of the community.” Hmm. Maybe “All or nothing” isn’t that much of a stretch.

James E. Till published a “viewpoint” in the Journal of Medical Internet Research 5:1 (2003), “Success factors for open access.” (www.jmir.org/2003/1/e1/, downloaded May 7). He discusses the need to assess the impact of open-access research journals—and goes on to propose an “incentive model” whereby an agency that provides grants-in-aid establishes an eprint archive limited to reports by researchers who have received the grants-in-aid. The article proper includes a simple test of open access success—by taking the first 20 articles found on PubMed as related to Peter Suber’s “Open access to the scientific journal literature” in J Biol. Only one of the first 20 articles was openly accessible—but Till had access to ten (half) of the articles through licensed databases at the University of Toronto. The 20 articles were in 20 different journals.

The unconventional eprint archives are interesting. Till claims they would add an additional guarantee of quality, since the research projects (but not the reports!) would have been peer-reviewed by the agency. But he goes on to say that the agency should only “archive” eprints “temporarily,” either five years or until the report had appeared in “an appropriate journal.” In other words, these archives would serve no archival function and would do nothing to improve long-term access to scholarly articles. I fail to see the point—but I don’t fully understand what “medical internet research” is either, although I suppose there are new diseases related to the internet.

A pair of items appeared in the April 19 and May 3 BMJ, followed by lots of “rapid response” correspondence. (Since there’s no expansion
of BMJ on the printouts from BMJ.com, I take that as the true title of the journal. The first page of each listing includes this astonishing name for one of BMJ’s “collections”: “Other Journalology.” Journalology?)

The first is a news item by Susan Mayor, “Libraries face higher costs for academic journals.” That’s not news to academic librarians, to be sure. It includes comments such as Jan Velterop’s claim that high costs arise because journals are monopolies (Velterop is at BioMed Center!) and the Wall Street Journal’s report that Reed Elsevier showed a 43% net profit—an extraordinary rate of return—and “predicted double-digit per-share earnings growth this year.” (Elsevier reps say this is because it acquired Harcourt, not from price increases, and that “The problem is not the pricing of journals. It is the funding of research.” Just to clarify: “There were problems with the prices of some Elsevier journals in the 1980s and 1990s, but these had now been addressed.” It’s good to know that problems with Elsevier pricing have “now been addressed”!

Feedback on this news piece includes a howl of pain from a researcher at a small operation who regards $500 as far too high, much less PLoS’s $1,500, and two different grumbles from one man with two different identifications, who apparently doesn’t get along well with Biomed Central and doesn’t care for journals or for blind peer review. (He shows his disdain for journals by establishing a new one.)

The other piece is an editorial, “Scientific literature’s open sesame?” It strongly supports open access, notes BioMed Central’s 90 new ejournals and PLoS’s planned journals, discusses the high costs of current journals and—sensibly—argues for earmarking a portion of research grants to pay for author charges. That’s the only way open access can work without debilitating libraries, in my opinion. (I know nothing about biomedical literature; presumably, we really needed another 90 journals.) This editorial drew a bunch of responses, some of them fairly peculiar. The editor of Tobacco Control talks about the need to reject papers that are “highly unlikely to be of any interest to many other than those who’ve worked on the paper” and that are “uncitable.” Issues of affordability appear once again, at least for those not working at “large, well-funded institutions that will pay to publish as a form of self-advertisement.” One person says, “The idea of charging authors is frightening.” Peter Suber responds to some of the objections—but also says that objections to charges should be reserved “until we see journals charging submission fees…that are suspiciously high.” Peter doesn’t
think $1,500 is on the high side? One French author suggests that reviewers should be paid—and refereeing should be signed.

Related issues are discussed elsewhere—note particularly the Jefferson, Alderson, etc. paper on “Editorial peer-review…” below.

**Other Articles and Events**

There’s a new open archive for library and information science, E_LIS, touted as “the first international e-server in this area.” The announcement I saw was a January 20, 2003 posting in fos-forum. E-LIS plays all the usual notes: “It is a free-access international archive, in line with the Free Online Scholarship movement and with the Eprints movement, and it is based on the Open Archive Initiative standards and protocols.” (The actual announcement interleaves initialisms and addresses.) Housed in Italy, the site is at eprints.rclis.org.

As of late April 2003, there are 80 documents in the archive—42 of them by Antonella de Robbio, another eight by Gerry McKiernan. That leaves 30 for everybody else in the field. The documents are distinctly *not* limited to peer-reviewed journal publications, and no such claim is made.

Victoria A. Reich has another article on LOCKSS in the April 2003 *High Energy Physics Libraries Webzine* (library.cern.ch/HEPLW/7/papers/1/). It’s a good discussion of the reason for LOCKSS and how it would work. Worth reading.

I must have been referred to John Ewing’s “Predicting the future of scholarly publishing” (version 2.5, 12/09/2002) from the FOS weblog. Based on a talk at the August 29-31, 2002 Conference on Electronic Information and Communication, this paper notes that predicting the future is hard—particularly if you ignore the facts of the present. (I would suggest that predicting the future is nearly impossible even if you *know* today’s facts.) Specifically, Ewing believes that a “special group of experts” is promoting a radically different future for scholarly publishing by ignoring the facts. Ewing looks at scholarly publishing in mathematics. He notes that, from 1998 through mid-2002, mathematicians contributed 12,618 papers to the arXiv (the biggest repository in the field), while *Math Reviews* indexed more than 280,000 journal articles. He suggests that when mathematicians think about journals, they think about “the best known and the most visible”—what I’d call the core journals. But the 51,721 articles indexed in *Math Reviews* in 2001 came from 1,172 different journals—and only
half of those, with 60% of the articles, were journals considered sufficiently math-centric to be indexed cover-to-cover. In other words, 40% of the journal literature is outside the mainstream math journals. Four percent of the journals were primarily electronic (containing 2.5% of the articles)—and math is an area where e-journals have had early success. Mathematicians know that older articles are important: Of 336,201 citations to journal articles in articles published from 1998 to mid-2002, 53% were to pre-1990 articles and 28% were to pre-1980 articles. (This article suggests there are 25,000 STM journals, noting that the ARL source doesn’t seem to list any original source for that number. See the Jefferson article.)

Ewing then goes to suggest two alternative predictions for what “alternative models” (FOS, preprint archives, etc.) will do. In the first scenario, independent journals diminish further while the big commercial publishers expand and add features, consolidate “and eventually dominate the scholarly literature.” The second model is that independent journals are driven out—but commercial publishers close down as well, since alternative models have solved the problems of financing, covering dispersed literature, archiving, etc. Ewing says, “Many scholars hope for the second; only the first is supported by the facts.” Does FOS (and related models) require the second to succeed? That’s unclear.

Don’t take Ewing’s paper as literal truth—but don’t take it lightly either. He asks some questions that keep bothering me. “Who will watch over collections when enthusiastic volunteers move on? Who will pay the costs of ever-changing servers and software to keep papers accessible? Who will provide the huge sums for archiving—not only saving the bits but updating the format of millions of papers? Surely we should not rely on government agencies, which have an increasingly short-term view in all their activities.” Can we rely on the universe of academic institutions and their long-term commitments to all computing activities, even after those who began the activities have moved on?

Ewing doesn’t call for the status quo. He calls for cautious experiments and long-term thinking. He does call for skepticism. I particularly appreciate one statement: “Finally, be especially skeptical of the experts who demand that you are either with them or against them. Subscribe to their vision of the future or be branded a Luddite. This is a false dichotomy—resist it.”
Then there’s “Editorial peer-review for improving the quality of reports of biomedical studies,” by TO Jefferson, P Alderson, F Davidoff, and E Wager, originally published in The Cochrane Library 2003, issue 1. It’s a short paper (8 pages) with lots of background detail (14 pages of references and tables), covering 21 studies on the effectiveness of peer review (culled from an initial 135 reports). The overall conclusion:

At present there is little empirical evidence to support the use of editorial peer-review as a mechanism to ensure quality of biomedical research, despite its widespread use and costs. A large, well-funded programme of research on the effects of editorial peer-review is needed.

How much biomedical literature is there? This article cites a 1999 article by F. Godlee stating, “[O]ver 20,000 biomedical journals are now published globally.” Unless we are to believe that 80% of all STM journals are biomedical journals, one of the numbers in the essay you’re reading is wrong. Which one?

As you would expect, this piece drew some press. Robin Peek’s “Focus on publishing” in the April 2003 Information Today, “Could peer review be wrong?”, discusses the Cochrane report, the fact that Jan Hendrick Schon managed to have eight “false” articles published in Science over the past three years, and a new project of the Royal Society to “examine best practices in peer review.” A brief piece in the February 2003 BMJ notes the Cochrane report and adds a few interesting comments from Tom Jefferson, lead author on the report. “He said that there had never been any consensus on [peer review’s] aims and that it would be more appropriate to refer to it as ‘competitive review.’ Not only did peer review pander to egos and give researchers licence to knife each other in the back with impunity, he said, but it was also ‘completely useless at detecting research fraud’ and let editors off the hook for publishing poor quality studies.” The piece also includes a motherhood defense of peer review from Peter Lachmann: “Peer review is to science what democracy is to politics. It’s not the most efficient mechanism, but it’s the least corruptible.”
Sabo, SOAF, SOAN and More

Scholarly Article Access, September 2003

“To amend title 17, United States Code, to exclude from copyright protection works resulting from scientific research substantially funded by the Federal Government.” That’s the Public Access to Science Act, H.R. 2613, introduced by Rep. Sabo (D-Minn.) and sometimes referred to as the Sabo Bill.

The version of the legislation posted by Peter Suber to fos-forum on June 30, 2003 is brief and includes interesting elements. I didn’t know, for example, that

The United States Government spends $45,000,000,000 a year to support scientific and medical research whose product is new knowledge for the public benefit.

The key elements (omitting legislative plumbing) are additions to Title 17, Section 105 (copyright):

(1) IN GENERAL.—Copyright protection under this title is not available for any work produced pursuant to scientific research substantially funded by the Federal Government to the extent provided in the funding agreement entered into by the relevant Federal agency pursuant to paragraph (2) [Which requires a provision in funding agreements that states that copyright protection is not available for work pursuant to the research]

Sec. 4. Sense of Congress: It is the sense of the Congress that any Federal department or agency that enters into funding agreements…should make every effort to develop and support mechanisms for making the published results of the research conducted pursuant to the agreements freely and easily available to the scientific community, the private sector, physicians, and the public.

That’s about all there is to the act itself. The skeptic in me immediately notices two things:
“Substantially” isn’t defined—and, given that CIPA basically says “if the Feds help support one computer out of a hundred, all hundred must be filtered,” that makes me nervous.

Copyright and access are two different issues. STM journals may demand that copyrights be turned over to them; most magazine and book publishers (for example) make no such demands. Eliminating copyright does not provide access; it merely removes one barrier to such access. The final clause may attempt to deal with that, but absent funding provisions and actual plans, it’s a feel-good statement.

Early Reactions and Comments

Journal of Cell Biology

Michael J. Held, editor of The Journal of Cell Biology, called the bill “a thinly veiled attempt by Harold Varmus and the other founders of the Public Library of Science (PLoS) to eventually force all publishers into their open access publishing model. As this publishing model is unproven and may well be unsustainable, this is an irresponsible act.” He seems to assert that Sabo wants to “legislate the demise of the time-honored subscription-based business model,” although I’m not sure I see the connection.

The editorial goes on to note the costs of producing an online journal and the services provided by journals. He asserts that nonprofit publishers “are the natural allies of ‘open access’” and suggests that PLoS’ effort is splitting the scholarly community. I find it hard to argue with Held’s assertion that some people are pushing One Big Model of access to the detriment of all others. He notes that Rockefeller University Press, publisher of The Journal of Cell Biology, is part of HighWire Press, and that as part of that consortium all RUP journals are freely available online to developing nations—and to everybody after a six- or 12-month embargo.

I have two problems with one paragraph in Held’s editorial:

The power to coerce lies with those who pay the bills: the librarians. If librarians can act together they can insist on solutions that are both financially viable for publishers and morally acceptable for consumers. Meanwhile, authors who have work that is valid but of lower impact can vote with their words by publishing in no-frills open access sites such as BioMed Central, rather than in obscure for-profit titles that are bundled in large, expensive packages that libraries feel pressured to buy.
First problem: I’m not convinced that librarians acting in concert as suggested could take place without raising antitrust concerns—and I’m certainly not convinced that no commercial publisher would think of setting its lawyers on such a case. Second problem, regarding the last sentence: That’s quite a sneer you’ve got there, Michael! In one sentence you manage to dismiss anyone who publishes with BioMed Central as relatively unimportant—”work that is valid but of lower impact.”

Jan Velterop of BioMed Central posted a charming letter in response to Held’s editorial, noting that Held made the editorial freely available upon publication: “Thank you for making so abundantly clear what the benefit and power is of open access. Not so much by what you say, but definitely by what you do.” Velterop notes that open access business models (Velterop uses the plural) “are all about making that possible for any research article that the author feels warrants the widest possible dissemination.” He offers a PS for the “kind words about BioMed central, although the impact of the articles we publish is quite a bit higher (judging by the citations to them) than you seem to think, and our techies don’t think it’s ‘no-frills’ at all but instead, full of the functionality few others offer.”

Senior editors at PLoS also responded to Held’s editorial in a longer and less charming manner. The response claims that copyright is not used to protect the integrity of scientific literature, but that this protection comes from “rigorous standards of behavior within the scientific community” backed up by laws governing fraud. The letter sees exclusion from copyright as benefiting authors and the scientific community because it would ensure authors don’t transfer copyright to a publisher. Noting that Held is also aiming for access to literature, and admitting that the PLoS model is not yet proven, the editors offer this paragraph:

Where we disagree with Mr. Held is that, in our view, this concerted effort by funding agencies, a diverse group of publishers, librarians, and different governments to provide free and unrestricted access to the biomedical literature is a highly responsible act that reflects the common interests of the public and the scientific research community.

SPARC Open Access Newsletter

Peter Suber devotes much of the first SOAN issue (#63, July 4, 2003) to the Saba bill, or PASA if you prefer. As always with Suber, it’s a thoughtful discussion. You should be able to retrieve the newsletter from www.arl.org/sparc/soa/ or mx2.arl.org/Lists/ SOA-Newslist.html.
Suber calls PASA “the boldest and most direct legislative proposal ever submitted on behalf of open science.” He notes that “substantially” was deliberately not defined. “Hence, one agency could say that any publication based 25% or more on its grant must be in the public domain, while other agencies could set the threshold at 50% or 75%.” Or 5% or 10% or 1%? But Suber is not a cheerleader. Consider the next two paragraphs:

While PASA would be a giant step forward for open access, it may be bigger than necessary—for open access and for the political realities of Congress. For example, open access to research articles does not require open access to all the products of federally funded research, like software and new physical materials. Moreover, open access to research articles does not require that the articles be in the public domain. It only requires that there be no copyright or licensing restrictions (statutory or contractual barriers) preventing open access. Putting works into the public domain is a simple and effective way to remove these barriers. But consent of the copyright holder is equally effective.

The Creative Commons has many good examples of licenses that authorize open access and yet stop short of transferring works into the public domain. Since there is no need to jettison copyright in order to achieve open access, there is no reason to lose the votes of those members of Congress who would be unwilling to jettison copyright. Copyright also gives authors the legal basis to block the distribution of mangled or misattributed copies of their work, although in the real academic world authors rarely need copyright to preserve the integrity of their work.

Suber suggests that it’s plausible to allow government work to be copyrighted, so long as it’s done with open access provisions (the Creative Commons “By” license would probably suffice). He recognizes that a “host of objections to PASA could be neutralized by a different approach—and some of those objections have already surfaced.”

“Sabo’s office has made clear that PASA is a conversation starter.” I suppose it’s a Congressional habit to begin a conversation by entering a radical bill into the hopper, but it gives me the willies: I’ll never have the nerves be a Beltway Bandit.

Suber offers four suggestions toward advancing that conversation. Briefly, he proposes:

- Recognizing that copyright-plus-consent is all you really need
- Limiting the scope to peer-reviewed research articles and preprints (excluding software, etc.)
Noting that entering work into the public domain does not provide open access, it only clears legal blocks, and that PASA could require actual open access—that is, submitting research to open-access journals or depositing it in open-access archives.

Requiring Federal research grants to cover the fees charged by open-access journals.

Those suggestions would, I believe, change PASA from a radical proposal with no clear immediate benefit to a real-world proposal with real-world benefits. And would have avoided polarizing many could-be supporters by putting forth a needlessly extreme measure.

**InfoToday NewsBreaks**

Miriam A. Drake posted “Free public access to science—will it happen?” on July 7. (www.infotoday.com/newsbreaks/) She links the Sabo bill to PLoS’ new public awareness campaign (noted later) and quotes two PLoS founders, Harold Varmus and Michael Eisen. Drake also quotes Derk Haank, former chair of Elsevier Science, in a 2002 interview where Haank essentially dismisses any need for scientific information outside institutes. As far as Haank’s concerned, the general public neither wants nor needs what Elsevier publishes, and “you don’t do [research] as a self-proclaimed intellectual in your garden shed.” Drake comments:

But, the parents who need information about their child’s disease or the woman who wants the latest research results on breast cancer may not be part of an institute. They may not have access to a research library that subscribes to thousands of STM titles.

I would add (although Drake does not) that we may not yet be at the level of scientific perfection where it’s reasonable to dismiss any researchers not affiliated with appropriate institutions. There are almost certainly “self-proclaimed” intellectuals in various equivalents of garden sheds who do important work.

Drake also notes, “The bill is not likely to pass both houses of Congress.” No copyright-related bill is likely to pass this year. Drake’s first-rate discussion ends as follows:

History reveals that easy access to information makes a difference. Open and free access to basic knowledge results in the creation of useful knowledge that contributes to international health and wealth. New models of communication will require collaboration among universities, publishers, professional societies, and government. While Con-
gress is not likely to see the value of open access and sharing, many feel that the concept will succeed because the time is right.

But does the concept require that work be in the public domain, and does public access require or benefit from a monolithic solution? That's considerably less clear.

The Scientist

A July 16 story by Catherine Zandonella pulls together a range of reactions to the Sabo bill. (www.biomedcentral.com/news/20030716/04) Jerome H. Reichman of Duke calls it “a well intentioned but perhaps overly simple solution to a very complex problem,” noting that forcing research into the public domain might further erode scientists’ control over their publications.

Margaret Reich of the American Psychological Society pushes this concept: “The Sabo bill would weaken the right of scientists to be cited for their own work.” Technically, that’s true: Once work is in the public domain, anyone can do anything with it—including republish it as their own work under their own name. It’s unethical but not illegal.

Ann Okerson of Yale, an established expert on serial publishing and its costs, notes that articles written by federal employees (already in the public domain in the U.S.) don’t cost less to access than those written by University researchers. “What Sabo misses is any discussion of just how to develop the business models that would make research available for free.”

Allan Adler of the AAP takes a somewhat extreme stance, claiming the bill could be interpreted to apply to secondary descriptions of research in popular science books or documentaries. As David Carlson of the U.S. Copyright Office notes, that’s unlikely: Copyright protects expression, not facts. Other (unnamed) publishers appear to claim that lack of copyright “could destroy the incentive to produce works that bring science to the public”—a bizarre claim since scientists almost never earn royalties from scientific articles. As David Post of Temple notes, “Scientists are not making money off copyright.”

Association of American Universities

A July 18 letter from the AAU’s president to Martin Sabo opposes the bill. Reasons given include a claim that copyright protection is important to assure “the accuracy and authenticity of publication” and to maintain “other critical aspects of the publishing process” such as
compilation and archiving—although, as far as I can see, most work on archiving does not come from those who control copyrights.

The AAU letter cites the possibility that the bill would preclude copyright for computer software—which “would diminish the demonstrably effective incentives for universities and industry to collaborate in technology transfer.” Universities couldn’t profit as much by licensing and selling research byproducts, a profit made easier by the Bayh-Dole act.

The longest paragraph in the letter calls for a “thorough, objective” study of scientific publishing practices, and throws so many irons into this fire that it would virtually assure a study that would last for years and (I suspect) produce no useful results. The key sentence clocks in at an even 100 words; I won’t quote it here.

More from PLoS
The Public Library of Science itself, now a month away from its first publication, is doing something a little unusual for an STM publisher. It’s created a 30-second video, “Wings,” available at www.plos.org/video.html and aired in San Francisco, Washington, DC and Boston. The video “humorously provides a glimpse to the scientific progress that could be made if research and discoveries were openly and freely shared.” The PLoS announcement of the video makes it clear that PLoS is indeed the source of the Sabo bill.

If video spots on The Simpsons and Comedy Central’s The Daily Show aren’t unusual enough for a serious advance in scholarly communication, PLoS is also staging a songwriting competition to create a PLoS anthem. (That announcement, even more than the video announcement, suggests that PLoS really needs a good editor with an English or journalism background—but never mind.)

I swear, I’m not making these things up. The first announcement came through the FOS forum; the second, after it had changed to SOAF (see below). I’m fairly sure Peter Suber just passed them along; he’s not that much of a prankster.

Unfortunately, the Sabo bill, the video spots, and the PLoS anthem seem to follow in the wake of the famous PLoS bluff (er, petition): They suggest an organization far too concerned with theatrics, where the kind of substance evidenced by (for example) BioMed Central’s 90 open-access journals might be more useful. Those theatrics have a tendency to backfire. The PLoS petition demonstrated that
most scientists have no intention of abandoning their preferred STM journal outlets, no matter how many petitions they sign; the Sabo bill tends to polarize parties who might otherwise be able to agree on methods of improving access. It seems sad.

There may be more reason to be concerned about PLoS. The $1,500 fee is three times the $500 normally estimated for open access publishing. If we use the 28,000-journal estimate for refereed STM journals I’ve seen in recent articles, and a 100-article-per-journal average, the conversion of all journals to PLoS-style open access would involve annual costs of $4.2 billion (and rising), most of it paid by the foremost research universities and institutions of America and other industrialized nations. I’m not sure how $4.2 billion compares to the total spent on STM subscriptions and access by those universities, but I suspect it’s more, not less. Maybe the money would be coming from different sources—but if PLoS is right about costs, then this model may be more expensive than the current environment, outrageous profits and all. Something’s wrong here; I’m not sure what.

FOS to SOAF & SOAN

Terminology: ain’t it wonderful? Peter Suber did much to promote open access under the name “free online scholarship” through the FOS-Forum list at Topica, the Free Online Scholarship (FOS) Newsletter, and the FOS Weblog. Since Suber began his work, Open Access has become the commonly used term for the desired outcome. So Peter Suber changed the name of the FOS News weblog to Open Access News. The FOS Newsletter had been dormant, but was revived in July 2003 under SPARC’s sponsorship and with a new name, the SPARC Open Access Newsletter or SOAN. Finally, FOS-Forum became the SPARC Open Access Forum (SOAF). Suber moved all subscribers from the old locations to the new. To subscribe to SOAN or SOAF, visit www.arl.org/sparc/soa/index.html.

Suber himself is leaving his full-time teaching position at Earlham College to become a full-time researcher and writer on behalf of open access, partially supported by SPARC, the Open Society Institute, and Public Knowledge. You’ll see references to the OAN weblog, SOAF and SOAN in this and other sections of Cites & Insights as appropriate.

OAN is a collaborative weblog. Peter Suber is the editor and selects other contributors, but says he will rarely edit the contributions of others. A July 1 version of “About” for the OAN blog lists 16 con-
tributors and invites others. If you’re interested, the direct route is www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/aboutblog.htm, and the document includes detailed notes for contributors.

SOAN #63 (July 4, 2003)
I discuss the second long essay in this issue above, one early response to the Sabo bill. I just summarized the first essay—the set of announcements that create SOAF, SOAN, and the OAN weblog. If it isn’t already clear, I recommend SOAN—it’s worth reading without my interjections and includes a much deeper list of pointers to developments in open access than you’ll ever see here. It’s monthly, distributed as plain-text email, and you can subscribe by sending any message to SPARC-OAnews-feed@arl.org

The third (and final) essay has a great title: “Saving the oodlehood and shebangity of the internet.” It’s a serious essay about the “prodigality” of the internet making open access possible—but also making spam easy and cheap and piracy feasible. Steps taken to limit or eliminate spam or piracy could (can already, in some cases) interfere with open access: “We could be collateral damage in the war against piracy and spam.”

As Suber notes, many spam filters block all mass mailings without regard to their nature; there go emailed newsletters, lists and current-awareness services. And, of course, straightforward discussions of serious topics can trigger spam filters. “Challenge-response” spam blocks don’t help much: If Cites & Insights was emailed, I certainly wouldn’t take the time to respond to email challenges! He suggests that we “Watch the campaign against spam and mass infringement” and try to prevent “remedial overreaching.” Points well taken.

SOAN #64 (August 4, 2003)
Just one essay (and a humongous list of highlights and literature citations). It’s a good one, related to “The Bethesda Statements” below: “How should we define ‘open access?’” Suber begins:

(1) The most important element by far is that open-access literature is available online free of charge. This is the element that catalyzed the open-access movement, and the element that defined “free online scholarship.” To this day, it’s the only element mentioned when journalists don’t have space for a full story.

(2) But price isn’t the only barrier to access. Price barriers obstruct the free flow of information, and make it less useful, but so do a dizzying array of licensing restrictions that I have called “permission barriers.”
Most scientific research is still published behind both price and permission barriers. Open-access archives and journals bypass them both.

Suber discusses permission barriers at some length. As he notes, they’re more difficult to discuss than price barriers, particularly if you’re not intimately familiar with the area. But there’s more—excerpting the beginning of each additional numbered point:

(3) The major open-access initiatives differ on whether open access includes measures to assure long-term preservation.

(4) Similarly, the major definitions differ on whether depositing a work in an open-access archive or repository is part of the definition.

(5) The newer definitions recognize one further element: an explicit and conspicuous label that an open-access work is open access.

These are all important points if you care about open access, particularly if you think there’s more to it than insisting that everyone stick their papers in their own so-called archives.

Suber argues that preservation should be a separate desideratum; I would reluctantly agree.

Suber argues that deposit in an archive isn’t needed for works in open access journals. That’s connected to the preservation issue, and is reasonable only so long as open access journals last forever. I will state as a near certainty that some open access journals will fail (indeed, quite a few already have; they just weren’t called “open access”), and that when they fail their contents may simply disappear. Without archives—whether the LOCKSS variety, where journal contents become part of multiple self-restoring archives, or some other sort independent of the journal and with better long-term survival probabilities, access ceases to be open because there’s nothing to access.

The final point is important and one where (as Suber notes) Creative Commons may show the way. Make it simple, make it easy to understand and use it: A flag on or adjacent to the piece that identifies it as open access and links to a thorough explanation of what that means. “Some rights reserved” isn’t enough; the CC “By” license may be. Metadata is good, but as Suber says, you need explicit, eye-readable permissions as well.

After some additional discussion of the virtues of reasonably uniform definitions, Suber goes on to note four major barriers between open access and universal access:

(1) Handicap access barriers: most web sites are not yet as accessible to handicapped users as they should be.
(2) Language barriers: most online literature is in English, or just one 
language, and machine translation is very weak.

(3) Filtering and censorship barriers: more and more schools, employ-
ers, and governments want to limit what you can see.

(4) Connectivity barriers: the digital divide keeps billions of people, in-
cluding millions of serious scholars, offline.

I’m going to have to rein in my impulses for future SOAN issues, not-
ing highlights rather than quoting some of the best stuff. Suber is 
thinking and writing about these issues so well that quoting “the best 
stuff” will fill Cites & Insights. Better you should read the newsletter.

Another Open Access Newsletter

BioMed Central, which publishes 90+ open access refereed journals, 
has started its own newsletter, Open Access now. You’ll find it at 
www.biomedcentral.com/openaccess. The July 14 issue featured an 
interview with Gerry Rubin, a scientist who is also an open access ad-
vocate at Howard Hughes Medical Institute. That institute has an offi-
cial policy of paying charges for OA publishing, and Rubin makes one 
of those statements that always gets to me: “I think it’s inevitable that 
we switch to Open Access.” [Emphasis added.] Setting foobar aside (I 
mentally replace “inevitable” with “foobar” whenever I see it), the in-
terview is interesting and worth reading.

The July 28 issue notes the PLoS TV campaign—and, editorially, 
insists that “open access” requires immediate deposition in a public 
online repository. (See Suber’s comments above.) It goes on to note 
that Physiological Genomics is trying out the hybrid Prosser model. If 
the author (or institution) pays $1,500 up front, the article will be 
freely accessible online from date of publication. If not, the article 
won’t be. The article, which argues that such an agreement isn’t Open 
Access (but is it “open access” without the semi-religious caps?), notes 
that four Entomological Society of America journals have used this 
hybrid scheme since 2000, and that more than half of the authors 
choose to pay the fee. The biggest article in the issue is on public arc-
hives, with a focus on PubMed Central.

The Bethesda Statements

The Bethesda Statement on Open Access Publishing was released on 
June 20 and came from an April 11, 2003 meeting at the Howard
Hughes Medical Institute in Chevy Chase, MD. According to *Open Access now*, more than thirty people attended; two dozen signed off on the statement, which begins with a definition of open access publication and adds reports from three working groups. I quote the first in full, with excerpts from the reports.

**Definition of Open Access Publications**

An Open Access Publication[1] is one that meets the following two conditions:

1. The author(s) and copyright holder(s) grant(s) to all users a free, irrevocable, worldwide, perpetual right of access to, and a license to copy, use, distribute, transmit and display the work publicly and to make and distribute derivative works, in any digital medium for any responsible purpose, subject to proper attribution of authorship[2], as well as the right to make small numbers of printed copies for their personal use.

2. A complete version of the work and all supplemental materials, including a copy of the permission as stated above, in a suitable standard electronic format is deposited immediately upon initial publication in at least one online repository that is supported by an academic institution, scholarly society, government agency, or other well-established organization that seeks to enable open access, unrestricted distribution, interoperability, and long-term archiving (for the biomedical sciences, PubMed Central is such a repository).

Note 1: Open access is a property of individual works, not necessarily journals or publishers.

Note 2: Community standards, rather than copyright law, will continue to provide the mechanism for enforcement of proper attribution and responsible use of the published work, as they do now.

**Notes from the Statements**

The Institutions and Funding Agencies working group stated some beliefs and offered four recommendations, as follows:

To realize the benefits of [changes made possible by the Internet] requires a corresponding fundamental change in our policies regarding publications by our grantees and faculty:

1. We encourage our faculty/grant recipients to publish their work according to the principles of the open access model, to maximize the access and benefit to scientists, scholars and the public throughout the world.

2. We realize that moving to open and free access, though probably decreasing total costs, may displace some costs to the individual research-
er through page charges, or to publishers through decreased revenues, and we pledge to help defray these costs. To this end we agree to help fund the necessary expenses of publication under the open access model of individual papers in peer-reviewed journals (subject to reasonable limits based on market conditions and services provided).

3. We reaffirm the principle that only the intrinsic merit of the work, and not the title of the journal in which a candidate’s work is published, will be considered in appointments, promotions, merit awards or grants.

4. We will regard a record of open access publication as evidence of service to the community, in evaluation of applications for faculty appointments, promotions and grants.

The Libraries & Publishers working group offered seven recommendations or proposals in two groups, preceded by a note that called open access “an essential component of scientific publishing in the future,” presumably a recognition that it might not sweep everything else away. Here’s what was said, noting that the only library signatories were from the National Library of Medicine and the University of Virginia.

Libraries propose to:

1. Develop and support mechanisms to make the transition to open access publishing and to provide examples of these mechanisms to the community.

2. In our education and outreach activities, give high priority to teaching our users about the benefits of open access publishing and open access journals.

3. List and highlight open access journals in our catalogs and other relevant databases.

Journal publishers propose to:

1. Commit to providing an open access option for any research article published in any of the journals they publish.

2. Declare a specific timetable for transition of journals to open access models.

3. Work with other publishers of open access works and interested parties to develop tools for authors and publishers to facilitate publication of manuscripts in standard electronic formats suitable for archival storage and efficient searching.

4. Ensure that open access models requiring author fees lower barriers to researchers at demonstrated financial disadvantage, particularly those from developing countries.
Finally, the Scientists and Scientific Societies Working Group listed these six recommendations or proposals:

1. We endorse the principles of the open access model.
2. We recognize that publishing is a fundamental part of the research process, and the costs of publishing are a fundamental cost of doing research.
3. Scientific societies agree to affirm their strong support for the open access model and their commitment to ultimately achieve open access for all the works they publish. They will share information on the steps they are taking to achieve open access with the community they serve and with others who might benefit from their experience.
4. Scientists agree to manifest their support for open access by selectively publishing in, reviewing for and editing for open access journals and journals that are effectively making the transition to open access.
5. Scientists agree to advocate changes in promotion and tenure evaluation in order to recognize the community contribution of open access publishing and to recognize the intrinsic merit of individual articles without regard to the titles of the journals in which they appear.
6. Scientists and societies agree that education is an indispensable part of achieving open access, and commit to educate their colleagues, members and the public about the importance of open access and why they support it.

If #4 sounds a bit like the pledge of all those scientists who signed PLoS petitions, and who promptly ignored their pledge, there is a connection—but note that #4 lacks absolutes.

Just as only two libraries were represented at this meeting, it’s not clear that more than two or three scientific societies were represented. This was a small group with a strong PLoS and biomedical slant—but maybe that was the way to get things moving.

Early Reaction and Counterreaction

The first reaction I encountered was a letter from Jeff Weber, publisher of two American Welding Society publications, to Peter Suber, forwarded to SOAF. The letter is a little odd in some ways.

Open Access Publishing removes the protection of copyright law from publishing efforts. By offering free and open dissemination of research results, it invites alteration of conclusions, misinterpretation of research methods and scope, and misleading condensation of the original work. Moreover, it eliminates many existing systems for commentary on published works (such as published letter forums), which often are neces-
Weber also holds that allowing the public to reproduce articles “would surely result in widespread author attribution errors” and that the emphasis on immediate access to research findings would create pressure to speed peer review, “which could make it difficult to distinguish between flawed research and groundbreaking discovery. It would also make plagiarism harder to detect.” Weber doesn’t buy the idea that research should be judged on its merits rather than by the journal it appears in and claims that, because open access could remove some revenue sources for traditional publishers, it could “result in an end to traditional, formal research publication, and ultimately in less research being conducted.”

Stevan Harnad offered a fine and, for Harnad, remarkably concise response to Weber’s letter. As Harnad notes, Weber is simply wrong in claiming that open access itself implies loss of copyright protection. Harnad fails to see how open dissemination is more likely to lead to alteration, misinterpretation, or misattribution than any other publication. I don’t see that either. He also doesn’t see why open access journals couldn’t publish letters, although Weber may have a small point on that last: If the only source of funding is article fees, there’s a strong disincentive to publish anything but articles.

As Harnad also notes, open access journals don’t alter peer review—and nothing in the Bethesda statements seems to call for speed-up of peer review. And, of course, if open access publishing still results in name-brand journals, those journals will have as much clout with open access as in the current mode—a Harnad rejoinder that is weakened by point #3 from institutions and point #5 from scientists and societies.

Weber’s letter reads an enormous amount into the Bethesda statement, most of which is not there. The Bethesda statement comes from two dozen people, almost all of them in the biomedical community, almost none of them representing libraries, scientific societies, or traditional publishers. It states some useful definitions and proposals, ones that deserve discussion. Wider adoption, possibly with refinement, seems likely—as does reaction of various sorts. I rarely write stuff that’s even remotely scholarly, so most of this is not my fight—but I find very little to argue with in the Bethesda statements.
Items and Articles

- The *Journal of the Medical Library Association* has changed copyright policy, now asking authors for right of first publication and normal republication, but not for copyright assignment. That’s a good step. Notably, *American Libraries* has had similar policies for some time, as do most magazines. Authors who are *paid* for their freelance writing rarely give up copyright.

- Oxford University Press is taking a half step toward open access in *Nucleic Acids Research*. A key section of the journal will be author-funded with free access. If that works, the rest of the journal will move toward the open access model over the next four or five years.

- BertelsmannSpringer, a major European academic publisher, has been sold to two European equity firms, Candover and Cinven. The two firms own Kluwer Academic Publishers; the combined group would be the second largest academic publisher—still a whole lot smaller than Elsevier Science. Springer (remember Springer-Verlag?) publishes more than 700 journals and magazines and 4,000 new books each year. The new company will be called Springer. Some Europeans clearly don’t believe that academic libraries have actually hit the budget wall or that open access will transform the industry any time soon. I’m fairly sure they’re at least half-wrong.

- There’s another new initiative: the Information Access Alliance, supported by AALL, ALA, ACRL, ARL, MLA (Medical, in this case), and SPARC. (ACRL is a division of ALA, not a separate legal entity, but never mind…). The focus of this group appears to be a new standard of antitrust review when examining merger transactions in the (STM) serial publishing industry. The IAA site, www.informationaccess.org, offers several white papers, including one urging that the BertelsmannSpringer merger be blocked.

- Two steps forward, one step back: *BMJ* will begin charging for access to online content in January 2005. The case made for this change is falling library subscriptions to the print journal, combined with threats to other revenue sources.

- All universities in the United Kingdom are now institutional members of BioMed Central. This JISC-funded initiative (the Joint Information Systems Committee, which funds many UK higher-education information initiatives) means that all UK higher educa-
tion staff may submit papers to BioMed Central’s 90+ open-access journals without author fees. (Unrelated to this: In an email discussion, one professor suggested that articles in BioMed Central journals averaged one download per month; according to Jan Velterop of BioMed Central, the actual figure is 250 per month from BioMed Central servers, with more downloads probable from other sources such as PubMedCentral. That’s an impressive rate for scholarly articles.)

Romero, Michelle, “Open access and the case for public good: The scientists’ perspective,” *Online* 27:4 (July/August 2003): 32-3. This brief article introduces some of the issues in a magazine that hasn’t typically covered them. It’s written from a European perspective and includes a few statements that strike me as odd. For example: “The stated agenda: How to protect the shrinking public domain of information available to researchers…” But the public domain is not shrinking; it’s just not growing as rapidly as it should. For that matter, most people involved in open access initiatives aren’t particularly concerned with whether articles enter the public domain 50 years after a researcher’s death as opposed to 70. The point of open access is to have access now, while works are still absolutely protected by copyright.

Later, I read that “public funding for research has been shrinking for decades”—which is surely not true in all countries—and that academic partnerships with industry collide “with the idea that freely shared information—made available in the public domain instead of privatized by industry—in turn creates new knowledge that helps everyone.” Again, however, none of this information (in the U.S. at least) was ever in the public domain unless the research was performed directly by an agency of the U.S. government. The problem with access has to do with journal pricing and access policies, not with commercialization—at least as I’ve seen it discussed elsewhere. An odd brief piece; maybe I don’t understand the environment.


Here’s a surprise. When I printed off this brief piece, based on remarks presented at the 2003 Annual Meeting of the American Council of Learned Societies, I was ready to tear it into. Unsworth, who is now dean of GSLIS at University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (one of
America’s better-known library schools), seems to be advocating the death of the book.

Which is why I set these papers aside and come back to them later. That’s not what he’s doing at all. He is suggesting that the traditional scholarly monograph—a small subset of “books”—may not be economically viable and that maybe, just maybe, it doesn’t matter. I would take issue with some of the internal argumentation, which seems to say that an appropriate response to price-gouging by journal publishers is to stop publishing books, but I don’t know enough to argue that scholarly monographs, particularly those that can’t be self-supporting, are a good way to do scholarship. Nor am I sure that they’re not; I’m not a scholar, after all.

I do believe that one solution to some of the problems Unsworth is citing is print on demand, and that it’s probably premature to write off the monograph. I also believe that “stand-alone, single-author work on smaller problems” continues to be worthwhile, particularly in the humanities, even though Unsworth labels it “quaint.”

It’s short. I recommend you read it yourself and draw your own conclusions. Unsworth is likely to be heard from again within the library community; that seems to happen with library school deans.


This is a long, meaty article—23 pages in all, including 16 of primary text and four of substantive endnotes.

Willinsky begins by citing more than 1,000 purely-online peer-reviewed journals, of which 10 to 20% may be open access. He argues that scholarly associations are key players in determining the future of open access publishing, as they have “long been at the heart of academic journal publishing.” He then does something refreshing and important: Analyzes the current revenue situations of 20 professional associations, based on their tax returns, to consider whether it makes good sense overall for such associations to switch to open access models. “Good sense” means more than just revenue streams, as he points out: “The scholarly association has, then, to put the question to its membership: Is this organization devoted to maintaining its current revenue levels or is it devoted to serving the professional interests of its members in fostering the greater development and circulation of knowledge?”
It’s an interesting and complex exploration. I could argue with some of his assumptions and assertions, as would others. For example, is it generally true that “the principal benefit of joining most scholarly associations has been the ‘free’ or discounted subscription that comes with it”? That’s discouraging, if true. He does later note other benefits of belonging to scholarly associations.

His tabular analysis of publication costs and revenue, which excludes membership dues as part of journal revenue streams, concludes that 12 of 20 analyzed societies actually lose money on their journals—which is to say that membership dues heavily subsidize the journals. Part of that loss may be due to the commercial outsourcing that so many associations have done.

**Recommended.** Willinsky raises important issues for societies and offers some facts to back them up, although one could always argue with the facts.
Getting That Article: Good News

Scholarly Access Perspective, November 2003

This perspective started out as an open and somewhat puzzled question. To wit, is open access effective access—more specifically, will articles in institutional archives be readily available to people outside the golden circle of researchers within a specific field?

So I began editing this issue, I found a partial, positive answer. Let’s start with the situation.

Say I’m an honors undergrad or graduate student at a medium-size college or university. I’m interested in a fairly exotic topic—let’s say in anthropology. (I’m actually a music major, but there are certainly connections between cultural anthropology and music.) My college library subscribes to RLG’s Anthropology Plus through a consortium, although the anthro print collection is constrained.

I click on the database and enter my topic. I find half a dozen articles in four different journals, and it looks as though I should read all six. My college has OpenURL activated, so I click on the “e-links” or “get it” or “availability” button next to each citation. Here’s the situation:

- Journal A is an open access journal, and it’s in the knowledge base for the OpenURL resolver. Wonderful! I click through to the full text and print the article.
- Journal B isn’t open access, but it’s part of a JSTOR collection that my college subscribes to, and the article’s just old enough to be available. As far as I’m concerned, this is identical to Journal A (and the library has paid a semi-reasonable price for access in this case). I print this article as well.
- Journal C is on the shelves; it’s published by a nonprofit and doesn’t cost all that much. Going into the stacks is a hassle, but I can cope.
But the three best articles are in Journal D, and that one costs more than my college could afford either in print or online. Now let’s consider the situation from the authors’ perspective:

- Authors E and F published in Journal A, with their university coughing up the $500 fee. They know that the article’s available to anyone who needs or wants it.
- Authors G, H, and I published with Journal B; Authors J and K published in Journal C. They all assume that people will be able to get at the articles sooner or later.
- The best people in this particular area—Authors L, M, and N—published in Journal D, which they consider the most prestigious in their field. But they also deposited their articles in open archives: Authors L and M in a BOAI-compliant anthropology archive, Author N in his obscure college’s own BOAI archive.

Here was my question: How can I gain access to the three best articles—and how likely is it that I’ll be aware of the methods if I’m an undergraduate or anyone outside the field itself?

Will the OpenURL resolver point me to the articles by Authors L and M?
Will it point me to the obscure archive that holds the article by Author N?

The Need for Effective Access

Open access is one thing. Effective access is another.

If you believe scholarly articles exist solely to be shared among the inner circle, this is all laughable. Your colleagues surely know about your paper, and they know how to get to your archive (or to the shared archive). If not, heck, they can use the harvested indexes that cross archives.

I was trying to avoid straw men here. I was raising an honest question for which I didn’t have an answer. So far, nothing that I’ve read about the open access movement(s) has provided an answer.

Sure, some resolvers offer a title search against Google. That might yield the article, but in a few tests it was equally likely to yield discussions and commentary about the article from weblogs and other sources with higher pagerank. Even if you did get to the article, the mixture of stuff and junk on Google would make a good student
nervous about the veracity of the printout. “Trust in Google” is a singularly bad slogan for an open access revolution.

A Partial Answer

As I write this, I began testing a new home-brew OpenURL resolver against Eureka databases (a process that always begins with Anthropology Plus, as it happens). The first article checked was indeed in “Journal D”—a journal that’s so expensive that most smaller institutions don’t offer access. This university wasn’t one of them: It had Journal D in one of its aggregators.

But a little lower on the screen, this institution’s resolver offered to do a search on my selection of OAI harvester. It offered two choices: OAIster and SCIRUS. One of them led me to the paper on an institutional archive.

So the answer is: Yes, it’s possible. SCIRUS is both more and less than an OAI harvester, but OAIster, from the University of Michigan, appears to be the real deal. As of October 1, 2003, its index included 1,723,003 articles from 203 institutions.

With this feature offered in resolvers—and with librarians and onscreen help so that students understand the function—open access archiving does provide effective access. The best indexing tools (a&i databases) can lead to free-for-use full text even when the institution can’t afford the commercial full-text service.

It’s a partial answer because, to date, I’ve only seen one resolver that offers this option. (As of today, it’s also only a journal title or author name search, not the more specific article-title search—but that can change.) I believe more resolvers will do so in the future. I’m delighted to change this perspective from an open question to a piece of good news.
Scholarly Article Access
(November 2003)

No theme dominates the last two or three months—or if there is one, I’ve missed it. Do read the separate Perspective that raises—and partially answers—an access question.

The Sabo Beat

Open Access now for August 25, 2003 devotes half its space to “Sabo bill sparks copyright controversy”—a reasonably good (if slanted) discussion of the early issues. Sabo admits that “we haven’t quite sorted out” what “substantially funded means”—that is, the percentage of federal funding that would prevent copyright of research papers. The article says the bill is “supported by the Public Library of Science” but doesn’t say PLoS generated the idea for the bill, which seems likely. Sabo says, “Some of my staff brought the issue to my attention.”

Peter Suber notes that the act could require “actual Open Access,” either by requiring submission of articles to OA journals or requiring deposit in OA archives. Those aren’t the same thing, of course; one should guarantee effective access, while the other may or may not (see the essay).

Speaking of Peter Suber, the SPARC Open Access Newsletter for September 4, 2003 (issue 65) begins with a 10-page (as printed) essay on “The taxpayer argument for open access” and events related to Sabo. Suber offers the primary argument for open access related to publicly-funded research, then raises five objections and offers “at least five replies.” When a pronounced advocate for a position lists objections to that position, it’s always tempting to call them straw men, but I don’t think that’s true in this case. Here, very briefly, are the five objections (in bold) and notes on his responses; I strongly recommend that you read the entire essay.
Taxpayers can walk into a library that has paid for access and read journal articles without paying to do so, or receive copies by ILL: We already have free access to most research. As he notes, this is a red herring: It’s “free” access to paid copies, and those paid copies are damaging libraries. Additionally, few public libraries subscribe to much in the way of research journals—and there’s some evidence that some academic libraries are cutting back on public access privileges. (I haven’t read the cited evidence for this claim because Scientific American, where it appeared, doesn’t offer any form of open access. Don’t you love the irony?)

Open access to federally funded research only affects part of scholarly literature, mostly in the natural sciences. The answer is easy if you believe in non-monolithic solutions: “There’s no harm in solving a large problem one step at a time.”

Government grants pay for research and maybe articles. Journals add value through peer review, copy editing, etc. True enough—but the primary value of a scholarly journal is in the research and writing. Suber adds several refinements and comments—among them, that (some) OA proponents agree with publishers that they do add value and, less persuasively, that open archives don’t involve the same issues. “Open-access archives don’t perform peer review, copy editing, manuscript preparation, marketing, or publishing”—but if what’s in the archives hasn’t been peer-reviewed or copy edited, it’s hard to gauge the value.

The taxpayer argument only supports open access for taxpayers, not the whole world. Suber’s response is that this objection makes no sense if it is cheaper to provide open access to everyone than to restrict access. True enough—but Suber goes on to state “the simple fact that it costs less to provide unrestricted access to all internet users than to discriminate between authorized and unauthorized users and block access to the unauthorized.” That may be true (I’m inclined to believe that it is), but I don’t see proof or reference to proof. It’s a bandwidth-vs.-overhead issue, and neither one is free. I would certainly agree “we should not spitefully deny others a costless benefit” unless it damages us in some other manner.

Ordinary taxpayers don’t need to read peer-reviewed scientific literature and wouldn’t understand it if they did. “This may be true…but it’s beside the point.” It’s also an incredibly arrogant assumption. Elsevier’s Derk Haank and Pieter Bolman make that
claim right up front. The key responses—which Suber includes in his discussion—are twofold: (1) Some "lay people" can indeed understand and benefit from scholarly papers, and (2) It is not the case that all researchers are affiliated with wealthy institutions. He doesn’t emphasize the second response.

Suber admits that the “taxpayer argument” can be misleading, and I continue to believe that the Sabo bill is probably the wrong way to solve the problem, but the discussion clarifies a number of issues. In discussing additional developments, he cites one interesting figure, although it might be questionable (given the source): NSF says that 59% of U.S. university research is funded by the federal government. An enormous amount of research takes place outside universities—but that’s still an interesting figure.

For an in-depth discussion of issues related to the Sabo bill, I recommend Samuel E. Trosow’s “Copyright protection for federally funded research: Necessary incentive or double subsidy.” Trosow knows his stuff and provides a deep, detailed discussion. (publish.uwo.ca/~strosow/Sabo_Bill_Paper.pdf).

Here’s the key issue, in a nutshell, and the strongest argument for the Sabo bill that I’ve seen. If Physicist A is a government employee, any papers written based on research done on the job are automatically in the public domain (although, in practice, the government’s done a bad job of preventing assignment of nonexistent rights to publishers). If Physicist B, working for a university, is doing research that’s funded by the federal government, papers written based on that research are not in the public domain. What’s the difference?

At one point while reading the paper, I raised a natural question: Since university libraries suffer by having to pay again for the research done by university scholars (whether federally funded or not), why don’t universities control those copyrights and prevent the gouging? If that seems like an absurd question, consider that most universities (as far as I know) do require that patents developed on work-related projects be assigned to the university. The answer is, unfortunately, simple: Universities see patents as profit centers and don’t recognize how much money they may be losing through paying twice for copyright research. (And professors do make money writing textbooks, and would hate to lose that revenue stream.)

As with SOAN, there’s a lot more to Trosow’s paper. Well worth reading.
Open Access Continued

A cluster of items relating directly to Open Access, again in chronological order:

- Susan R. Owens contributed “Revolution or evolution” to EMBO Reports 4:8. It’s a reasonably well-balanced six-page look at Open Access—and it has yet another number for STM journals, but under another name: “Around 28,000 scientific periodicals exist at present.” Plucking a few interesting and peculiar quotes, we have Elsevier’s Derk Haank claiming that Elsevier offers open access, “but it’s paid for by the librarian.” That may be the most extreme misuse of the term “open access” I’ve ever seen! Haank claims, “In our experience with electronic publishing, the costs don’t go down, they go up.” Skeptical as I may be of extreme claims for digital-only savings, a competent transition should reduce costs at least slightly (assuming print costs are reduced or eliminated). But Michael Eisen from the PLoS crowd doesn’t thrill me either: “We are not just another Nature, Science or Cell. We are morally superior and what we are doing is better for the future of science.” [Emphasis added.] Morally superior? Right. As for the costs of OA journals, Eisen seems to claim that library subscriptions are currently paid for by “scientists’ grants when their institution takes its percentage to fund its library,” and you just need to “rechannel” this money. Fine—if institutions actually do channel 5% to 7% of research grants to library funds, but otherwise it’s another way to starve libraries. Owens points out that the OA model won’t do much for secondary journals, an issue I haven’t seen addressed by OA advocates. **Worth reading.**

- Peter Suber posted his article for the December 2002 World Summit on the Information Society, “Open access to science and scholarship” (www.earlham.edu/~peters/writing/wsis.htm). While there’s nothing really new here, it’s a fine brief summary that touches on some key issues—e.g., OA’s compatibility with copyright and print. **Worth a look** and useful to give people a very quick introduction to the concept.

- An August 19 piece at NewScientist.com, “Free online journal gives sneak preview,” is one of several arising from PLoS’ extensive PR campaign—in this case, releasing two papers from the initial PLoS Biology as “sneak previews.” The article quotes “competitors”
as claiming that PLoS will have to charge for online subscriptions to maintain quality. The more interesting coverage will appear in the next six months (and after a year), as PLoS necessarily moves from its Hollywood stunts to putting out top-notch publications—but what journalist is qualified to judge those publications?

- Catherine Zandonella published “Economics of open access” in The Scientist for August 22, 2003 (www.biomedcentral.com/news/20030822/02/), including quotes from Eisen, Michael Held of The Rockefeller University Press, and others—including Peter Suber. Held doesn’t believe $1,500 per article is enough to maintain a viable business model—but elsewhere in the article issues get confused, as certain “high-cost” elements (e.g., color pictures) really shouldn’t make much difference in online-only publishing. Joseph Esposito of SRI uses the I-word: “Consolidation is inevitable.” He says that consolidation could include commercial publishers taking over nonprofit and OA publishers—but that’s only possible if OAs and nonprofits are structured inappropriately. Unfortunately, Zandonella botches the paragraph based on Peter Suber’s remarks, paraphrasing that “even if open-access publishers were taken over by commercial enterprises, their previous output would remain in the public domain.” Suber would never have used “public domain” as a synonym for “open access,” and he immediately issued an SOAF posting clarifying that he doesn’t confuse the two. “I take pains to separate the two and to argue that open access is compatible with copyright.” He includes his entire response to Zandonella’s question, and you won’t be surprised that “public domain” does not appear anywhere in the comment. (His response also mentions LOCKSS favorably—but Zandonella didn’t mention it at all.)

- A Declan Butler piece in Nature 425:334 suggests that the New England Journal of Medicine is really not interested in open access—to the point of treating authorship with surprisingly flexible standards. The journal accepted a paper with many coauthors; one of those coauthors is a strong proponent of OA and a cofounder of PLoS. He insisted that the paper include the sentence “This article is published under the terms of the PLOS open access license.” When the galley proofs emerged, that sentence was missing. When this particular author said, “Then take my name—and those of three other coauthors—off the paper,” the editor withdrew acceptance. Then, the journal accepted a “new” paper that
differed only in omitting the four authors and acknowledging them as contributing to the experiments and sharing responsibility for the results. The OA-centric author calls it a “clear and documented case of editorial misconduct in the handling of an article.” The *NEJM* says that the OA advocate “knows well that the Journal cannot selectively ignore copyright laws so that individual authors can draw attention to a personal cause.” That statement is…well, walk behind a bull for a while and keep looking down, and you’ll see another example. To claim that opening access immediately on publication (*NEJM* isn’t a bad guy—they normally open free access after six months) somehow “ignores copyright laws” is absurd.

- In late September the Company of Biologists announced that it would move its journals to the Prosser hybrid: That is, authors can pay an up-front fee and have articles immediately accessible to all, or can publish free of charge and have articles openly accessible after six months. I would hope to see any number of journal publishers make such announcements, since the Prosser model is the most plausible way to move from traditional to OA publishing.

- SOAN 66 (October 2, 2003) features, among other things, a first-rate essay, “Not Napster for science.” I haven’t heard OA advocates use “Napster for science” as a quick description, but Peter Suber offers an eloquent discussion of why nobody should ever do so. Napster and its successors tend to contribute to copyright infringement, although that’s not the only use of P2P networks. Whatever my qualms about OA archives, copyright infringement is not an issue—and such archives don’t use P2P techniques. “When authors and copyright holders consent to open access, there is no infringement.” There can be no infringement: Consent eliminates that issue. There’s much more to the essay, well worth reading and saving.

**Alternative Publishing and Advocacy**

*ARL Bimonthly Report* 228 (June 2003) includes a fairly lengthy piece by Edwin Sequerra of NLM, “PubMed Central—three years old and growing stronger.” It’s an interesting piece, both for its thorough and readable description but also for its tone: “PubMed Central represents evolution not revolution. PMC is here to stay, but it does not spell disaster for academic societies or other publishers.” The article explains
the eligibility standards for journals to participate in PMC, the commitment required (and the publisher’s ability to restrict access for some period), the size of the archive (around 100,000 articles) and aspects of how it works, including the process of building and managing a digital journal archive. **Recommended.** Find it at www.arl.org/newsltr/228/pubmed.html.

ACRL has adopted “Principles and strategies for the reform of scholarly communication,” but since it’s an ALA web page I won’t attempt an address. The four-page statement defines scholarly communications, asserts that there’s a crisis, and offers extensive lists of supported “principles for reform” (a dozen in all) and “strategies” (18, ranging from development of competitive journals to maintenance of interoperability standards). This particular document doesn’t go nearly as far as the Sabo bill; instead, one strategy is “federal legislation that will require that federally funded research published in subscription-based journals be made openly accessible within a specific period of time (e.g. six months) after publication.” If I have a problem with the lists, it’s that there’s no indication of *preferred* strategies, but that may be appropriate for a terse statement.

I noted the founding of the Information Access Alliance in *Cites & Insights* 3:11. The website now includes an FAQ that’s worth looking at, even though (when I downloaded it) it seemed a little too specific to the Springer merger. The FAQ claims that research has shown that mergers within STM publishing have resulted in higher prices and that such mergers result in “lack of attention to editorial quality” and other problems. It explains why it isn’t enough to push for new models. I detect some wishful thinking in this question and first response:

Given that antitrust authorities approved the Reed Elsevier/Harcourt merger in 2001, what are the chances of stopping this merger?

We won’t know unless we try. If the user community expresses its dissatisfaction with the impact of the Reed Elsevier/Harcourt merger, then the chances are better. Note that the analysis of the Harcourt purchase was complicated by the emergence of digital journals and bundling—making it more difficult for the U.S. Department of Justice to forecast the future impact of the deal. This is less of a problem in 2003. But there is *more* activity in OA journals and other online-journals now than there was in 2001; SPARC offers some alternatives that weren’t there two years ago. One major unintended consequence of the push for alternative publishing models is that it substantially weakens any at-
tempt to prevent mergers on antitrust grounds. That was true in 2001; it’s probably truer today. The DoJ approved the Cinven/Candover purchase that will result in a merger of Kluwer and Spinger—but the IAA says it “will continue to push for revised analysis of publisher mergers.” I’m not sure how you can push for alternative models, claim they will be effective, and simultaneously claim that they should be ignored for antitrust reasons—the world doesn’t work that way.

Speaking of SPARC, it announced another “breakaway” journal in early September: Labor: Studies in Working Class History, founded by the entire editorial board of Labor History from Taylor and Francis. Duke University Press will publish the new journal beginning February 2004. This one seems a little tricky, given the numbers involved: Labor History costs $240 a year while the new journal will be $200 print, $180 online-only. The key element seems to be that Taylor and Francis wanted to increase the number of pages, presumably with intent to charge more for subscriptions.

The Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP), a trade association for not-for-profit publishers, has announced an unusual aggregated journal offering in cooperation with Swets Blackwell and Extenze. The package initially includes 247 journals from 25 publishers, with three broad disciplinary subsets. Pricing is guaranteed for three years and allows the choice of print-plus-online or online-only, with consortial arrangements as well. It’s an interesting “little deal” to compete with the “big deals” from megapublishers.

**Miscellany**

It’s easy to vilify big bad commercial publishers on access issues, including the gouging of libraries and other subscribers; sometimes it’s even justified. But that doesn’t mean that the nonprofit sector, including university presses, scholarly organizations, and the like should be presumed to be “good guys” in this complex area.

Take, for example, Harvard University Press. According to a brief Nature piece (forwarded on SOAF), Brian Fisher has a book deal with Harvard for a monograph on ants—and the contract says he can’t post material online for at least four years after the book is printed. Fisher recently helped launch AntWeb and wants to put some of the data from the book on the website. HUP officials are opposed, “worried that it will dent the book’s future sales.”
Fisher disagrees, believing that the material will increase them. The article cites the National Academies Press, which posts all its books online and has increased print sales. Lynne Withey of the University of California Press is somewhere in the middle—even though UC Press is a partner in CDL’s eScholarship program (Cites & Insights 3:3).

**Longer Articles**


Do we need to preserve e-prints at all? According to Pinfield and James, “many people from the e-prints community would say ‘no,’ or at least ‘preservation should not be a priority.’” This article comments on practical issues arising from the suggested answer—which, as you might expect, is Yes. Quoting from the conclusion:

> Digital information is lost when it is left unattended while hardware, software and media continue to develop. Without intervention, an e-print may be subject to media degradation within a few years. Even if the e-print is securely backed-up, a few more years will see the e-print’s content become inaccessible as software and hardware change. Without a strong institutional commitment, institutional e-print repositories will be unable to preserve their holdings, and they may also struggle to convince faculty to deposit work.

In case you’re wondering “e-prints” could also be defined as online versions of research papers, either pre- or post-print—but also other materials “which may not be formally refereed but are nevertheless important research output.” Let’s ignore for the moment the issue of how non-journal-stamped output can be known to be important or reliable.

Pinfield and James don’t dismiss the importance of getting papers submitted to the digital repositories—but they argue coherently for the (equal?) importance of establishing long-term preservation methods from the beginning.


I was able to download this article freely; whether you’ll be able to is another question. It’s a casually written, careful, and extremely depressing article—arguing at some length that the serials crisis will remain, because there simply will not be any substantial move from current journals to alternative models. Parks addresses each of the stakeholders in the current STM universe and concludes that none of
them have both motive and means to change the current model. **Worth reading** and thinking about. I’d hate to think Parks is right in general—but it’s a solid argument. (Among other things, he makes the clear case that shifting from print to electronic does nothing more than postpone the crisis, if that—particularly given that we’re talking about increased *prices*, not necessarily increased costs.) (The following article in the same issue, “Pricing the serials library: in defence of a market economy,” may also be interesting—but after reading it, I could not decide whether or how to annotate or recommend it. I *think* the author is arguing that the way to solve the serials crisis is to abandon individual university libraries—but that can’t be right, can it?)
The biggest news in scholarly access last fall may (or may not) be the tipping point—the point at which university libraries say “Enough!” to overpriced commercial journal packages. In other news…

**PLoS Publicity and Feedback**

I don’t know long it will take the Public Library of Science to publish as much refereed scholarly material as BioMed Central and others who’ve been doing it for years—but as a publicity engine, PLoS is unmatched. Is that a good thing? It may be too early to tell. Meanwhile, a few items from the process.

Jan Velterop of BioMed Central sent a “Dear Colleague” letter to BioMed Central update registrants on October 6. He noted the *Guardian* story on PLoS and Open Access, the problems that Open Access is trying to solve, and the reactions of conventional publishers to this “experiment.” (His quotes.) “At BioMed Central we have, since May 2000, been operating the same open access model PLoS are now using. Many of you have already published in BioMed Central journals, so you will know that we are a practical demonstration of how open access publishing can successfully meet the needs of the community by giving free access to quality research whilst maintaining an excellent service to authors and readers.” He goes on to note growing support for BioMed Central from various parties and “a growing acceptance of our Open Access journals in the research community—our submission figures topped 7000 manuscripts earlier this month. To us, this signifies that Open Access publishing, as operated by BioMed Central, is no longer an ‘experiment’ but viable and sustainable.”

An October 10 press release posted on SPARC Open Access Forum (SOAF), headed “Organizations laud innovative open-access publishing venture,” touts the first issue of *PLoS Biology*. The release
includes laudatory quotes from James G. Neal (chair of SPARC) and Harold Varmus (chairman of the board of PLoS); it also goes on to note other open access publishers, including BioMed Central.

“Dear PLoS Advocates,” the November 3 open letter begins, “‘If readership is the measure,’ began an October 20 Washington Post story, ‘last week’s launch of a new scientific journal, PLoS Biology, was a huge success.’ We’re glad the press noticed. In the 72 hours after PLoS Biology’s formal debut on October 13, one paper…was downloaded over 60,000 times.” The letter cites some other figures, including 12,236 downloads of the complete 65mB (PDF) issue. It notes conferences that PLoS planned to attend, announced two more Pre-Issue Publications (popular articles posted before the issue appears), and thanked “PLoS Advocates” (the A is capitalized, so I guess it’s a formal group) who threw ten launch parties. Given the extremes to which PLoS publicity has gone, how could the press not notice? The release raises a couple of questions—for example, are there actually 60,000 people who have any reason to read a scholarly article in biology?

That same day, David Dickson posted an editorial at SciDev.Net (www.scidev.net), “Communicating science in an electronic era.” He discusses the producer-pays model as a way of removing the barriers to access (particularly in developing nations) posed by expensive journals and notes PLoS as an example of this approach—not noting that PLoS is significantly more expensive for producers than, for example, BioMed Central journals. After noting the $1,500 charge, he immediately adds: “Critics argue that, while this may be a relatively small amount for a US researcher with a substantial grant from the National Institutes of Health, it could be a major disincentive for scientists in the developing world, for whom the sum could represent several months’ wages.” He does note that PLoS says it will waive the fee for those who can’t pay it.

The next paragraph offers a new criticism: Producer-pays publishing “reduces the opportunities to use income from scientific publishing to subsidise other professional activities.” Should societies be gouging libraries to subsidize activities? That question doesn’t appear here. And what of purely commercial journals? “It allows them to carry news and information about the scientific community that would not necessarily be covered in a producer-pays publishing model. The disappearance of such a service would be a major loss, particularly at a
time when scientists are being encouraged to increase their active interaction with society.”

Dickson follows by noting BioMed Central as a hybrid model, charging users for extra services beyond basic access—or, alternatively, moving traditional journals to differential pricing “in which price is broadly related to ability to pay. This, unsurprisingly, is the model favoured by most commercial publishers (and many scientific societies). These are keen to retain revenue from those ‘users’ of research that are still in a position to pay, but are also aware that their current pricing strategies discriminate against those in the developing world who are unable to do so.”

Note what’s really going on here: Institutions in the developed world are presumed to be “in a position to pay,” but the publishers will (and to a great extent already do) provide free or nearly-free access to journals in developing nations. In other words, the “new model” is charging what the market will bear—which differs from the old model only in that publishers can simultaneously beggar academic libraries and appear beneficent.

The editorial closes by saying it would be naïve to believe the future will belong to one model or another—and that from the perspective of developing nations, that’s a good thing. From the perspective of humanities students who see no new books on the shelves because library acquisitions budgets are sucked dry by big deals and other market pricing of STM periodicals, it may not be such a good thing. (SciDev.Net posts free articles from Nature and Science, which is disclosed in the editorial.)

New Scientist published an interview with PLoS’ Harold Varmus in early November. It’s a good interview and includes Varmus’ comment on societies using overpriced journals to subsidize activities:

I don’t believe that traditional business plans that depend upon the sale—the inappropriate sale from my point of view—of subscriptions to these journals should be how these societies finance their activities. To best serve their members they are simply going to have to adapt to the opportunities for much more efficient and useful publications of science by the internet.

An odd story appeared in USA Today on November 19—odd at least in one respect. It notes PLoS Biology (although the title appears quite differently), the skeptical stance of traditional publishers, and comments from Varmus and Vivian Siegel, editor of PLoS Biology (and for-
merly editor at Cell—see the separate Elsevier perspective). But then there's this:

Open access presents other problems, warns publishing executive Christopher Lynch of the New England Journal of Medicine. “Give the copyright authority away and the research might be used in any fashion and could be abused by commercial interests.”

I'm guessing that Lynch was aware his statement is, at best, misleading. PLoS requires use of the Creative Commons “Attribution” license, which does not “give copyright authority away.” For that matter, the dangers seem odd: “The research might be used in any fashion”? Such as to conduct other research? But the facts in published research are not copyrightable in any case. “Abused by commercial interests”? I use the Attribution-NonCommercial CC license because I don't want someone else republishing this work commercially without permission (and a fee)—but right now, the biggest “abuse” of research papers is the abuse to libraries and other subscribers from outrageous fees. Should PLoS require a license that allows commercial publishers to use papers without fees (as long as there's proper attribution)? I'm sure they had their reasons. Open access publishing does not imply abandoning copyright; USA Today should have provided a response to Lynch's comment.

The PLoS story will go on. You can be sure of that, given the group's penchant for publicity.

Other Open Access Notes

One way to gauge the success of a new idea is the amount of denunciation it receives from those most directly threatened by it. By that gauge, late 2003 was a banner period for open access publishing. Consider a few of the items that follow:

November 4: The Big STM Publishers

The International Association of Scientific, Technical, and Medical Publishers—Elsevier, Kluwer, Springer, and friends—issued a statement on open access. While these publishers “look forward to any new experiments in our field,” the association argues that “scientific research has never been more accessible than it is today” and includes these paragraphs:

Abandoning the diversity of proven publishing models in favour of a single, untested model could have disastrous consequences for the
scientific research community. It could seriously jeopardize the flow of information today, as well as continuity of the archival record of scientific progress that is so important to our society tomorrow.

It is the competitive and well-functioning market, and not governments, that must choose which business models and which publishers are best equipped to stay apace of the ever-increasing demand for information exchange.

Peter Suber had a few quick comments at SOAN. “It’s wishful thinking to call the open-access model ‘untested.’ OA archiving has been phenomenally successful for over a decade, longer than the web itself has existed, and OA journals are nearly as old. It is being tested around the world right now in every discipline.” He also notes that the current model “has been proven to be dysfunctional” and “has made the STM publishers more resented by their customers, the academic libraries, than nearly any other vendors of any other product.” To Suber, it is the current model that could jeopardize the flow of information, and the contrast between governments and competitive markets is false. “The scholarly journal ‘market’ is already permeated by government involvement, since it is based in large part on tax deductions for universities and their libraries and government grants for research.”

I would add that market analysts essentially admit that the STM market is not a competitive market: Each journal is a mini-monopoly and that Elsevier (in particular) and other very large publishers have huge and growing power. In the U.S., at least, I know of no serious suggestion that the government should mandate open access publishing. (Actually, open access journals go back more than a decade. Among others, the Public-Access Computer Systems Review, a peer-reviewed journal in the library field, began in 1990, and New Horizons in Adult Education, also peer reviewed, began in 1987.)


John Willinsky of the University of British Columbia offers *The nine flavours of open access scholarly publishing*, a seven-page discussion of the current situation. It’s an interesting discussion, but the web version suffers from serious formatting problems (or, rather, the complete lack of any formatting, so that paragraphs are distinguished only by short ending lines) and some typographical errors. One other problem: Of
the “nine types” of open access publishing, only four or maybe five are open access in any real sense.

He includes the following as open access flavors, which may make commercial publishers happy but undercuts the whole idea of open access:

- “Delayed open access,” as practiced by the New England Journal of Medicine and others, where access becomes free after six months.
- “Partial open access,” where some articles are available but most aren’t.
- “Per-capita open access,” where online journals are free in sufficiently poor nations.
- “Open access lite,” where abstracts are available for free but articles are not.
- The fifth, “open access co-op,” refers to SPARC—but SPARC has primarily sponsored lower-cost journals (I refuse to use “low-cost” to describe some SPARC-related journals). His idea is that “leading libraries would join in underwriting the direct serial expenses of open access journals on a long term basis,” and cites a German process.

Using that schema, open access has won! Any publisher that doesn’t offer one of the four so-called “open access” methods in the first four bullets will certainly be happy to do so if it gets libraries and OA advocates off its back.

**November 2003: “Open access? Open wallets!”**

This editorial, by Richard T. O’Grady of the American Institute of Biological Sciences, asserts that a nonprofit society publisher can only reduce overall publishing costs by 25% when paper publishing is abandoned. O’Grady also says that US grant awards “typically include very little, if any, money for publication costs” and that OA publishing would lock out scientists who are not externally funded or are funded through sources that will not pay publication charges.

Libraries and those who oversee their funding need to realize that, as they agitate for author-pay open access, their current budgetary and subscription decisions may well threaten the ability of many nonprofit scientific societies to continue producing high-quality, low-price journals and to reconfigure those journals for the online publication that libraries want.
Thus the headline, and thus the sense I get that there’s more going on here than “the ability of…nonprofit…societies to continue producing high-quality, low-price journals.” If all professional journals were low-price and truly nonprofit, libraries would not be “agitating” for changes in the model!

An article in *C&RL News* 64:10 (November 2003) makes this more confusing. The article, by Heather Joseph and Adrian W. Alexander, is “Two years after the launch: An update on the BioOne electronic publishing initiative.” Early in that article, we learn that BioOne, which currently includes 68 online journals, “represents the collective effort and financial commitment of five founding organizations”: SPARC, Allen Press, the University of Kansas, the Greater Western Library Alliance…and AIBS, the American Institute of Biological Science. BioOne provides “an academy-based alternative for the electronic publishing of journals by scholarly societies that lacked the financial and technical resources to become electronic publishers, and the continuing need for academic libraries to acquire high-quality scientific literature at a more reasonable cost.” And BioOne now includes “a small group of Open Access journals.”

Ah, but here’s the rub, late in the article: “As librarians have come to accept that BioOne will provide reliable and ongoing access to electronic journals, they are much more comfortable with dropping corresponding print subscriptions to the journals contained in the database.” Are the societies losing subscription revenues? “Thus far those cancellations have not come anywhere close to offsetting the additional revenue publishers have realized from the BioOne database, but the growing concern about this trend among BioOne publishers is palpable.”

Based on O’Grady’s editorial, I would say that’s right on the money. I won’t speculate as to the varieties of politics involved here!

*December 4: Elsevier and BioMed Central*

Jan Velterop of BioMed Central noted an interview in *IMI Insights* with Arie Jongejan of Elsevier, “Open Access: A step back in time?” According to Velterop, Jongejan tries to “expose a few ‘myths,’” and in the process “stretches Jongejan’s—and Elsevier’s—credibility to snapping point.”

The first “myth” is that traditional publishing models hinder access to content. Jongejan says it’s really about profitability, and that around 70% of the audience that might be interested in accessing Elsevier’s STM content can already do so. Velterop notes, “70% is not the
100% it should be”; any claim to know what parties “might be interested” in scholarly articles reflects “supreme arrogance”; and toll-access publishing limits the ability of scientists to “extract knowledge from the literature.”

Second “myth”: While open access supporters claim that traditional publishing favors readers that have funds over the ‘have nots,’ Jongejan claims that open access discriminates against authors based on ability to pay. Says Velterop: “In either case it is mostly the institutions who pay, not the individual readers or authors. The proposition of [Open Access] is that the money spent, in the aggregate…would be much better spent on making research available with Open Access.” He also notes that the Wellcome Trust, a major research funder, calculates that open access publishing charges would amount to less than one percent of funds granted. Jongejan expands on the “have not” issue by noting that authors in developing countries won’t have funds available—and that, thanks to the HINARI initiative, the poorest nations have free access to some of Elsevier’s journal. But, says Velterop, there are exceptions to developing-nation access to protect Elsevier’s profits—and BioMed Central (and some other open access publishers) routinely offer waivers to authors from developing nations.

Third “myth,” according to Jongejan: the “assumption that the current publishing process adds very little to the content being published. As far as Elsevier is concerned, refereeing and peer review is a key publisher offering and adds essential value to the content creation process.” Jongejan also says some open access players “take the role of review much less seriously” and mentions BioMed Central as an example. In this case, where Jongejan quotes a few words from BioMed Central’s peer review policy, Velterop—who I sometimes find a bit over the top—convinces me that Jongejan quoted out of context. That is, a BioMed Central policy designed to deter “least publishable unit” papers (what Velterop calls “salami slicing”) is used as a claim that BioMed Central allows partially-duplicative research.

The final “myth”: Jongejan claims that open access isn’t supportable—that “open access publishers will need to demand between $3,000 and $4,500 per article to cover publication costs.” That’s certainly more than the $500 (BioMed Central) to $1,500 (PLoS) range at present. But what’s happening here is simple, as Velterop points out: $4,500 is roughly Elsevier’s current revenue per published article—including profits, highly-paid executives, dozens of offices, the costs of
print publishing, etc. (Velterop says that BioMed Central is about at the breakeven point.)

Disclaimer: I have not seen the original article. But I have seen and heard similar misrepresentations of open access elsewhere, e.g., the claims that it means abandoning copyright (not apparently made in this case), the insinuation that it won’t have true peer review or copy editing, the idea that as long as libraries cough up sums they really don’t have, everyone who needs access already has it. I’m inclined to go along with Velterop’s leading sentences: “It is never a good idea to throw stones if you live in a glass house. Especially not if you don’t understand your target.”

Fall 2003: Professional/Scholarly Publishing Bulletin

This is an interesting little bulletin from a division of AAP. One article in the six-page issue describes PSP’s “outreach campaign” to “remind…key audiences of the invaluable and indispensable role that publishers play as allies of the academic community in disseminating scholarly information.” But not just any publishers. The new phase will “reaffirm the value of traditional fee-subscription publishing in the face of an aggressive media blitz by some supporters of the recently announced Public Library of Science.” The article says PLoS “purports” to facilitate broader dissemination of vital information” and that PLoS supporters have made “emotional and misleading public statements about the nature of traditional publishing.” So PSP will produce documents about “the real nature of publishing.” The campaign has four “crucial points”:

- “Publishers have helped lead the revolution in the dissemination of scholarly information” and found various ways to “make the latest research even more widely available.”
- Patients and other interested parties can get at content that they might not have been able to reach without the “significant investment made by publishers.”
- “Scientists typically rely on subscription-based journals more than any other source” because journals “filter and validate submissions, independent of any financial influence by the author or interested third parties.”
- “Copyright-protected journal articles, including those based in part on federally funded research, are a major economic driver of scientific endeavors that ultimately benefit everyone…” And,
somehow, copyright protection (turned over to publishers) “ensures that scientists and institutions are able to commercially develop published research into products, technologies, and treatment”—even though copyright does not protect facts and has nothing to do with whether research articles can be used to develop products!

There’s also a charming Chairman’s Corner that claims PLoS Biology must be “the most expensive journal launch ever,” noting that “time will tell whether this undoubted marketing success can be sustained and whether a continual attraction of high quality material will result,” and noting “concern in the original OA camp” [emphasis added] that the launch of OA journals “is diverting attention from the easiest, surest and quickest road to Open Access, namely author self-archiving.” The editorial then goes on to quote a certain notorious OA enthusiast grumbling about the focus on OA journals and saying that such journals are “reducing the perceived pressure to self-archive…”

Well, this is nice. It appears that the chairman of PSP is wholeheartedly in favor of Open Access, and presumably doing everything to make it work—but favoring one strategy. Then you get to the end of the article and the signature, which casts just the slightest bit of doubt on this: “Pieter Bolman, Elsevier.”

Fomenting dissension among the OA ranks? Not hard, given some of the personalities involved.

The Last Scholarly Article Access Roundup

I intend to reduce and refocus Cites & Insights coverage of scholarly article access and Open Access for several reasons:

- Peter Suber does a superb job of covering Open Access and related issues in SOAN, SOAF, and the Open Access News weblog. He provides fair (that is, intellectually honest) summaries of articles and news items even when he disagrees with them, and adds his own comments in an ethical, insightful and enjoyable manner. If you’re interested in Open Access—and many of you should be—you should be reading SOAN and the weblog. If you are, then there’s no need for me to cite items from SOAN unless they’re in an area where I can bring added value. I now find much of my coverage redundant.

- I am unwilling to deal with one of the major advocates of one aspect of OA, for a variety of reasons. That unwillingness weakens
my ability to provide coherent discussions of the field as a whole. Add “incomplete” to “redundant.”

As this issue indicates, there’s too much that I’d like to cover—and I lack the energy to do as much as I am doing. I have to cut back somewhere. An area where my work is incomplete and redundant seems like an obvious candidate.

Note “reduce and refocus,” not eliminate. I’ll keep reading and observing. When I see a cluster of items that I believe I can make more meaningful by bringing them together and providing commentary, I’ll include them—particularly if they relate to the part of article access that I personally care most about. That part is both narrower and broader than scholarly article access. It is the ability of libraries to maintain resources that current and future users need, and the ability of agencies to continue the kinds of added-value access that librarians and indexers provide.

As a humanist, I am appalled at the thought that universities and colleges have stripped book budgets (and budgets for typically inexpensive humanities journals and periodicals) to the bone in order to keep paying outrageous prices for STM journals. As an observer, I have a complex set of opinions about the various strains contained within the current controversies. As appropriate, I’ll continue to comment.
While several aspects of scholarly article access remain active, I believe one recent and ongoing story may be most important for librarians and libraries. A growing number of academic libraries are finally saying “Enough!” to Elsevier and ScienceDirect, and the faculty at some universities are lining up behind the libraries—and even, in at least one case, calling for scholarly boycotts.

California Digital Library and the Call for Boycott

The biggest splash may have come when the California Digital Library (which serves all University of California campuses) announced it was spending roughly $8,000,000 for electronic access to Elsevier journals: half of all the money it spends for ejournal access, for a whole lot less than half of the ejournals. Let me repeat: Eight million dollars in 2002. That doesn’t include the six Cell Press journals.

On October 19, two faculty members and researchers at UCSF sent an open letter to “colleagues and friends” on behalf of the UCSF Mission Bay Governance Committee. That letter, posted on the SPARC Open Access Forum (SOAF) and in various weblogs, begins by pointing out the need for effective online access to STM journals—particularly at sites such as UCSF Mission Bay, a subcampus that relies exclusively on electronic access. “UC has successfully negotiated contracts for almost every on-line journal. The glaring exceptions are the Cell Press titles.” The letter goes on to say UC has been trying to reach a deal since 1998, Cell Press is owned by Elsevier, and Elsevier reported 34% and 26% profits in 2001 and 2002 for its science and medicine enterprise. Then comes the $8 million dollars hammerblow and this:

Elsevier now seeks a new contract with annual increases several times above the consumer price index, plus an additional levy for the [six]
Cell Press titles that rapidly reaches $90,000 per year, with hefty annual increases thereafter. After exhaustive negotiation, the UC libraries, with the recent support of the UC Council of Chancellors, has declined to accept these rates.

After noting that Cell Press cites the potential loss of personal subscriptions as the basis for a high institutional price, the two get to the heart of the letter:

It is untenable that a publisher would de facto block access of our published work even to our immediate colleagues. Cell Press is breaking an unwritten contract with the scientific community: being a publisher of our research carries the responsibility to make our contributions publicly available at reasonable rates. As an academic community, it is time that we reassert our values. We can all think of better ways to spend our time than providing free services to support a publisher that values profit above its academic mission. We urge four unified actions until the University of California and other institutions are granted electronic access to Cell Press journals:

i) decline to review manuscripts for Cell Press journals,

ii) resign from Cell Press editorial boards,

iii) cease to submit papers to Cell Press journals, and

iv) talk widely about Elsevier and Cell Press pricing tactics and business strategies.

If you agree, please let Cell Press know why you take these actions. Our goal is to effect change, but to be effective we must stand together.

A few days later, Lynne Herndon, president and CEO of Cell Press, wrote a response claiming that the discussions “contain several misconceptions” but doesn’t say what those misconceptions are. Herndon claims that $90,000 breaks down to “roughly $1.50 per top quality journal per year for each active user within the UC system” by claiming that 10,000 UC researchers will actively use Cell Press content.

Cell Press site license pricing has been historically fair and reasonable. Except for the UC system, nearly every other major academic institution in the US has licensed electronic access to Cell Press content. We appreciate the current budgetary constraints facing the UC library system, however in fairness to our current customers we need to maintain our equitable pricing structure as it applies to all institutions.

On November 1, a new message appeared—this one from the UCSF Academic Senate and University Librarian, addressed to UCSF faculty, department chairs and directors. The new item didn’t focus on Cell Press,
but on ScienceDirect as a whole. UC is Elsevier’s second largest custom-
er—and “among the online publishers, Elsevier’s price increases have been the most severe.” This letter notes that 50% of UC’s total online budget pays for 25% of total online journal use, and notes other factors:

UC faculty members are important contributors to Elsevier’s journals: 10-15% of the content is written by UC faculty, 1000 faculty are on the editorial boards, and 150 UC faculty members are senior editors for these journals.

After discussing the difficult ongoing negotiations, the letter suggests that all UC faculty consider alternatives to publishing in and editing Elsevier journals. New initiatives, such as Public Library of Science and BioMed Central, promise high-quality peer-reviewed content at affordable prices. The Committee also suggests that faculty consider taking action by retaining certain intellectual property rights, such as including the right to post their work with an institutional repository.

It goes on to recommend that faculty members “give serious and careful consideration to their association with Elsevier and consider the following actions,” essentially the same as points i-iv above. “Authors may also consider crossing out the provision in a standard publication contract that gives exclusive ownership of a published article to the publisher and thereby retain the right to publish the work in an electronic medium (e.g. UC’s eScholarship Repository or others).” The original call, and other UC resolutions (including a strong one from UC Santa Cruz), continue to spread.

Elsewhere

According to a December 19 Chronicle of Higher Education report, the University of Missouri decided over the summer to stop subscribing to ScienceDirect. The University of Iowa is considering abandoning the big deal.

At North Carolina State University, the faculty and staff senates both approved a resolution opposing bundled content and “essentially authorizing the library not to renew its bundled deal with...Elsevier,” according to a December 8 Library Journal news item. NCSU’s deal costs $1.4 million—38 percent of the library’s serials budget for 11 percent of NCSU’s journals. NCSU’s Suzanne Weiner said the major issue was inflexibility:
“[Bundling] is becoming a real problem. Research libraries cannot afford to pay for content that we don’t want, and cannot afford to be locked in long-term. It’s not good fiscal management, and it doesn’t give us a good return on our investment.”

The NCSU Student Senate also passed a resolution of support—unanimously.

Harvard University announced that it was unlikely to sign a new multiyear ScienceDirect deal. According to Library Director Sidney Verba as of October 15, “We haven’t finished negotiating, but in all likelihood we will not be signing the renewal offer through NERL, in the way in which they have put it forward.” [NERL is the Northeastern Research Library Consortium, with 21 research library members.] Inflexibility and the inability to cancel unwanted serials were prime reasons. In Paula J. Hane’s wrapup of Elsevier cancellations in the November 17, 2003 Information Today Newsbreaks, she quoted Ivy Anderson saying that Harvard plans to cancel a substantial number of Elsevier journals.

In an ARL survey, 22 of 57 responding libraries indicating that they were “planning to cancel or were considering canceling a bundled package this year.”

According to a Cornell Chronicle story, Columbia University is maintaining electronic access—but will be eliminating almost all print copies.

Cornell University Library

Cornell University Library posted a superb and highly recommended web presentation from Ross Atkinson, “Issues in scholarly communication,” at www.library.cornell.edu/scholarlycomm/.

The problem: Over the past fifteen years, prices of serials have increased by 215% while the Consumer Price Index increased by 62%—and while Cornell’s Ithaca campus spends 149% more on materials than it did 15 years ago, it only manages to buy 5% more serials, even though there are 138% more serials. (Could that 138% figure be part of the problem?)

First among “the reasons” cited:

[T]he growing commercialization of scholarly publishing, especially in the sciences and social sciences. Commercial publishers charge far more for their materials than scholarly societies or university presses. Elsevier, which publishes mainly science journals, is the best example. Universities support research, and then scholars give that research to
commercial publishers, who sell that research back to universities for very large profits.

That page also cites cost pressures in traditional publishing—and the need for serious research libraries such as Cornell to purchase traditional materials as well as digital holdings.

“The solutions” page is worth quoting in its entirety (and, Ross, I hope I’m not exceeding fair use in this case…):

First, methods need to be developed that will allow us to rely far less heavily on commercial publications. This can be done in part by working with scholarly societies and university presses to ensure that they are able to publish quality scholarship at reasonable prices.

Second, methods presently used for the exchange of scholarly information in individual disciplines need to be reviewed, and practicable alternatives need to be developed and considered. Several initiatives are now underway to study or facilitate scholarly communications….

Third, scholars need to retain some rights to their own work, rather than signing them over completely to publishers. When submitting materials for publication, Cornell scholars should consider stipulating at the very least that their publications be freely available to the Cornell community for purposes of instruction and research. Preferably scholars should also negotiate to ensure that they retain the right to post their own publications on their own or on their institutions Web sites…

The next page is the longest (other than a well-chosen set of links on these issues, including Cornell’s wonderful “stickershock” page): “The Elsevier subscription.” Atkinson notes that libraries have “often been able to conceal” the rapid rise in scholarly journal costs “by canceling other journals, reducing purchases of monographs, and general reallocation.” But Elsevier’s pushing too hard. “We now pay ca. $1.7 million dollars for Elsevier journals. (Those journals account for less than 2% of the serials to which the Cornell Library subscribes, but that cost is equal to over 20% of the Library’s total serials expenditures including the Medical School.)” Cornell just can’t keep accommodating Elsevier’s increases “at rates that are invariably much greater than the rate of increase in our budget.”

Elsevier’s big deal works so that canceling anything causes the prices for other journals to increase substantially. “The only way to save any real money is to cancel a great many journals—inevitably eliminating access to some journals that scholars and students depend upon.” Atkinson notes that the pricing strategy is “understanda-
and a perfectly legal one—we’ve checked” but also very risky: “If we reach a situation in which we absolutely must save money, then we have no choice but to cancel a great many Elsevier journals.”

Special funding provided a one-time bailout for 2003—but that won’t work for 2004. “We can no longer subscribe to so many Elsevier journals…that we no longer need. We must now free up some of the money spent on Elsevier journals to pay for journals published by other publishers that are more needed by our users.” Cornell has tried to broker a reasonable agreement, “but Elsevier has been unwilling to accept any of our proposals.” Cornell plans to cancel “several hundred Elsevier journals in 2004.”

The last page states “six key issues about the crisis in scholarly communication.” Summarizing what are already terse statements: The current system is not sustainable. This has been a problem for decades. It’s not [just] a serials crisis; it’s a broader crisis in scholarly communication—but the biggest increases are in scientific serials. The problem can’t be solved by increasing budgets. Some publishers are using the demand for electronic access to further increase their control and prices. Finally, “the core of the crisis is neither economic nor technical, but rather cultural: it is driven primarily by the publishing conventions of the academy.”

A December 1 report at www.iwr.co.uk/iwreview is titled “Elsevier hits back at journal cuts.” The piece quotes Elsevier’s Erik Merkel-Sobotta claiming that negotiations were going much better than “all the hype written about them would suggest.” He asserted that the Cornell figure would be closer to 100 journals than the 200 suggested earlier, and that “It’s all about rationalising and making access to our journals more efficient.” And, of course, he justified the big increases as reflecting three-year lockins. Then there’s poormouthing the universities, as he did referring to Cornell, Harvard, and UC: “Not all universities are poor, and these certainly aren’t.”

The last word, for now, comes from the Cornell Chronicle for December 11. Cornell has dropped the big deal for 930 journals, and will instead subscribe to a smaller number (unstated) of individual titles. University librarian Sarah Thomas noted, “The big deal was an unsustainable model for Cornell. We were going to have to start canceling high-value journals from societies and nonprofit association publishers that we needed, in order to pay for Elsevier journals we didn’t need, but couldn’t cancel.”
The eclectic librarian (www.eclecticlibrarian.net) commented on Merkel-Sobotta’s poormouthing, including his claims that cancellations were just about dropping print versions in favor of e-only, and experience at e1’s own institution (unnamed).

When I looked into the pricing of online v. print subscriptions from Elsevier, there was no savings to go online only. They tout that on their website, but when we got into negotiations with them, we discovered that the online discount is almost exactly the amount they tack on for an electronic access fee. With our budget in shreds, we had no choice to cancel some of our most expensive and under-used journal titles. Coincidentally, many of those happen to be Elsevier titles.

I think what ticks me off most about the above quote [“But not all universities are poor, and these certainly aren’t”] is the assumption that if a university has money, it would want to throw a disproportionate amount of it at one publisher… I applaud institutions like Cornell University and the University of California for standing up and saying to the Dutch Pirates, “No more!”

The Numbers?

Peter Suber cited excerpts from Bear Sterns’ 9/29/03 report on Reed Elsevier in a SOAF posting. “Reed recently informed librarians that it is to hike science journal prices yet again in 2004, by 6.5%. Our channel check of science libraries suggests that users are under funding pressure but they will pay up. Pricing power in journals, together with margin expansion as revenues migrate on-line, are key to Reed’s ability to deliver earnings growth and hence its share price valuation… Reed’s Science business…is in our view a shareholders’ dream… We believe that science margins will increase from their already high level as libraries drop paper subscriptions and opt for internet-only access. We believe Reed’s only problem will be hiding this margin increase from regulators.” The report goes on to call each of Reed Elsevier’s journals “a mini-monopoly enjoying huge pricing power” and asserting that SPARC and Open Access journals won’t change the nature of publishing any time soon. [Emphases added.]

Libraries and academics have been trying for over a decade to develop new ways of disseminating academic knowledge and research, but the barriers to entry enjoyed by the incumbent journals are just too high (loyal readership, brand recognition, ‘boards’ of academics who peer review research), as is the value proposition (they bring order to an anarchic process—the development of knowledge.)
The analyst believes that libraries will “switch away” from society-published journals to journals “in the same niche supplied by a larger publisher who can use bundling strategies.” There’s a truly silly assertion—that, even though shifting to online-only means even bigger profits for Reed Elsevier, it’s “a win-win situation” because libraries can cut staff so much if they’re not handling print.

Things can change. In mid-October, another analyst (BNP Paribas) expressed “its concern regarding [Reed Elsevier’s] current subscription based access, as compared to the newer and more successful article-fee based open access system” and downgraded the stock.

*The Guardian* reported on December 12 that the British House of Commons science and technology committee planned to conduct an inquiry into scientific publication early in the new year. “The committee will look at access to journals, with particular reference to price and availability.” The committee will specifically “ask about the importance of open-access journals and whether the government should support the trend towards free scientific information. Such a move could spell disaster for Reed Elsevier.”

**Conclusions?**

I sense momentum. Iowa, Missouri, Harvard, Columbia, Cornell, UC Berkeley, UCLA, UC Davis, UC San Diego, UC San Francisco, North Carolina State: That’s a fairly impressive lineup.

I *hope* there’s momentum. I hope faculty members pay attention—that they find alternative routes to publication and support necessary cuts to keep the system alive. I hope some scholarly associations start to see that their first purpose in publishing should be to make scholarship widely available—and that accepting or matching outrageous commercial prices is no way to do that. (Some scholarly associations do see that, and quite a few commercial publishers aren’t gouging.)

My own absurdly optimistic scenario for a workable “endgame” in scholarly access has been forming in my mind, and will make it to paper or the web one of these months—either here or in *American Libraries*. It may not be a probable scenario, but it’s one many of us could live with. Could Elsevier live with it? Not at their current size, not at their current profitability. Somehow, sometime, something’s gotta give. Maybe the sometime is now.
Library Access to Scholarship

March 2004

You could consider this the new running head for SCHOLARLY ARTICLE ACCESS. That may change, but at least the new name emphasizes the aspect that concerns me most: The ability of libraries to maintain short-term and long-term access to (and collections of) the scholarly record.

The Tipping Point Continued?

I’m probably being too optimistic in viewing recent events as a form of tipping point toward the decline of the big deal and the stranglehold of big international STM publishers on academic library budgets. But I’m an optimist by nature. The May 2005 “Crawford Files” in American Libraries offers my own brief description of the future I’d like to see. Meanwhile, a few notable events since the January summary, in chronological order.

University of California

On January 7, the eleven university librarians of the University of California (including the 10th campus now being built and the California Digital Library) sent a letter to the UC Faculty Senate reporting the successful conclusion of negotiations with Reed Elsevier. Briefly, a new five-year contract provides access to 1,200 of Elsevier’s titles from all divisions, dropping 200 titles (formerly included in the big deal) that weren’t selected by any campus. The letter notes that the new contract has “arrested for now the price inflation that has been common in this market” but does not state the price. It goes on to discuss the ongoing need to address issues in scholarly communication, including this paragraph:

The economics of scholarly journal publishing are incontrovertibly unsustainable. Taming price inflation is not enough. Unless we change the current model, academic libraries and universities will be unable to continue providing faculty, students, and staff with the access they re-
quire to the world’s scholarship and knowledge. Scholars will be unable to make the results of their research widely available.

Ongoing action includes UC library work to stretch collections dollars through consortial licensing, inform librarians and faculty on the dimensions of the scholarly communications crisis and possible ways to address it, and support “alternative means for publishing scholarly materials that make high-quality peer-reviewed work available at an affordable price.”

Clifton B. Parker at UC Davis provided additional information in a January 6, 2004 report. The contract includes systemwide online access and a single print copy of each title to be managed in a regional facility, so that campus libraries can cancel Elsevier print subscriptions without depriving faculty of access to print journals as needed. “The net result is that the UC libraries will spend 25 percent less on Elsevier subscriptions in 2004 than they did in 2003 ($7.7 million in 2004 as opposed to $10.3 million in 2003).”

Triangle Research Libraries Network

A story posted January 14, 2004 on Library Journal’s website notes TRLN has announced it will not renew its Elsevier deal and calls this “another blow to the big deal.” TRLN officials said the decision not to renew the deal followed months of unsuccessful negotiation. I mentioned North Carolina State University’s faculty resolution opposing big deals last time around; Duke and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill form the rest of TRLN.

TRLN and member libraries had two principal objectives in the negotiations:

1. To regain and maintain control over library collecting decisions in order to meet the constantly evolving information needs of faculty, researchers, and students; and

2. To manage overall costs in order to keep Elsevier expenditures consistent with materials budgets that have not been increasing at anywhere near Elsevier’s annual inflation rate.

Elsevier’s final offer fails to meet both of these objectives.

Specifically, Elsevier insisted that libraries commit to zero cancellations, making collection policy inflexibly and “inordinately privileging the journals of a single publisher.” The memo notes that this would create a growing imbalance in collections and be detrimental to scholarly associations and society publishers. The problem was magni-
fied by Elsevier's insistence on “significant annual cost increases above TRLN's current contract terms,” which amounted to more than $4.5 million per year.

The memo anticipates the loss of access to 400-500 journals per campus and the need for campuses to cancel more local subscriptions. It goes on to note that the Elsevier situation is “only the most extreme symptom of a much larger problem.” As with UC (which the memo cites along with Harvard and Cornell), this is only the beginning:

We firmly believe that universities must respond to this economic crisis of the state of scholarly communication. Libraries must be empowered, through dialogue with the university community, to obtain appropriate research material without sacrificing content and budgetary decisions to the publisher. Future library negotiations should follow the principles adhered to in this particular process, that libraries must make collection decisions and manage costs.

After some details, here’s the telling conclusion: “[The libraries] will begin to explore with you new models of scholarly communication that may, in the long term, help reduce costs and make scholarly information more widely available.”

**MIT**

In an MIT Libraries memo downloaded February 6, the libraries note steps taken to “reduce the impact of two large commercial publishers on our ability to make responsible decisions in selecting information resources for use at MIT. Specifically, we declined three-year renewal contracts that would have required us to guarantee ongoing spending levels with Wiley InterScience and Elsevier Science.” MIT was offered a three-year renewal of big deals through NERL, the NorthEast Research Libraries Consortium. The two packages combined constitute one-third of MIT Libraries’ budget for serials (print and online alike) and include the usual zero-cancellation policy (or an alternative requirement to buy an equivalent new serial for each cancellation).

MIT took one-year deals, taking a hit in the process. Elsevier charges more for a one-year package. The Wiley package costs about the same but won’t include as much content. Both decisions provide MIT with flexibility to make decisions in the next two years “based solely on the specific needs of the MIT user community, without giving unfair advantage to specific publishers.”
Harvard

A February 5, 2004 article in the Harvard Gazette, entitled “Libraries take a stand,” notes that students and faculty logging on after winter break found fewer Elsevier periodicals. Director Sidney Verba’s comment on the decision to eliminate some Elsevier publications: “It was driven not only by current financial realities, but also—and perhaps more importantly—by the need to reassert control over our collections and to encourage new models for research publication at Harvard.” The article notes similar actions at Cornell, TRLN, and Johns Hopkins.

Some of the cuts were duplicate print subscriptions, as Harvard works more effectively to minimize needless duplication within its extensive library system. As with MIT, Harvard also arranges some consortial licenses through NERL—and decided not to take the NERL Elsevier license this year. The article goes on to quote Markus Meister, who serves on the PLoS board and discusses the need to change the structure of scholarly communications.

Connecticut

On February 9, the University of Connecticut Faculty Senate passed a resolution concerning access to the scholarly literature. “The business practices of some journal publishers [are] inimical to [access to the scholarly literature] and threatens to limit the promise of increased access inherent in digital technologies.” Noting that the rising cost of journals and databases increasingly constrains library collection development, the resolution calls on faculty, staff, students, and administrators to “take greater responsibility for the scholarly communication system.”

The resolution “encourages senior tenured faculty to reduce their support of journals or publishers whose practices are inconsistent with the health of scholarly communication” through the usual means: submitting fewer papers, refereeing fewer papers, resigning from editorial posts. It’s a gradual call, not a plea for complete boycott. The resolution calls for university groups to “reward efforts by faculty, staff, and students to start or support more sustainable models for scholarly communication” and adds supporting language.

Donald Knuth

This is a slightly different situation—the latest in a small but growing number of cases, perhaps higher profile among those (like me) who treasure Professor Knuth’s work in a range of fields.
Knuth sent a 14-page single-spaced letter to the editorial board of the *Journal of Algorithms* on October 27, 2003. He is a founding editor of the journal and has been involved with it throughout its nearly 50 volumes.

When founded, the journal was published by Academic Press, with whom Knuth has been involved to some extent since 1965. When Harcourt Brace Jovanovich acquired Academic Press, Knuth asked them to “do their best to minimize the [pricing] effect on libraries,” and says they did so during the next few years. Toward the end of the 1990s, however, the price started to increase fairly rapidly—and when Reed Elsevier purchased Harcourt, the increases continued or accelerated. (Knuth gives a chart showing not only the annual subscription price but also the price per page. It’s worth noting that even the 2003 price for the *Journal of Algorithms*, at $700, is low enough to be under the radar for many academic libraries—but that’s almost double the 1997 price.)

There’s a lot more to the letter—as Knuth admits, he’s never learned how to be brief, a failing with which I can identify. He believes the price per page should have dropped, since few mathematical journals still require typesetting or keyboarding—but it’s doubled, not only in this journal but in “virtually every other mathematics journal produced by commercial publishers.” He notes that journals produced by nonprofit organizations have generally kept costs steady. Notably, Knuth makes a direct connection between high prices and libraries: “My blood boils when I see a library being overcharged.” When he wrote a letter to Elsevier, it did what you’d expect: Ignored the letter and did not reply.

This is a very long letter. It includes quite a bit about the STM crisis, Open Access, alternative models, what have you; I wouldn’t even attempt to summarize the whole thing. It’s worth noting that Knuth likes print, in part because it’s the easiest way to browse through a range of articles. The letter is well worth reading and is available at www-cs-faculty.stanford.edu/~knuth/joalet.pdf

Knuth wanted the editorial board to vote on possible futures for the journal—to stick with it as is, switch to a nonprofit publisher (e.g., a university press), affiliate with a learned society (probably ACM or SIAM), or move to university hosting as a true open access journal.

The editorial board resigned. The new ACM *Transactions on Algorithms* will be launched with the same editorial board. Elsevier is es-
establishing a new editorial board and plans to continue publishing *Journal of Algorithms*.

Which, unfortunately, only goes to illustrate a key problem with alternative models: They do *nothing* to ease pressures on library budgets unless they either replace existing journals, cause those journals to become irrelevant, or weaken those journals enough that the publishers lower prices.

**BNP Paribas**

This equities firm issued a lengthy report on “the impact of the development of new communications technologies on the global professional publishing industry.” I’m not sure where or whether you can find the report, and it’s very much an investment report—but it’s also fascinating reading. The firm estimates professional publishing as a $40 billion industry worldwide, $20 billion of that in the US.

This report claims that first-copy costs (everything not directly associated with print publishing) represent 85% of the total costs of STM journals. I’ve claimed for some time that costs directly associated with print publishing represent only about 15% of the price for most books, but I’m a little surprised to see such a claim for cost (a very different animal than price) and for journals. The same paragraph also notes that median circulation per journal has fallen from 2,500 in the late 1900s to 1,900 at present, and that libraries now account for 85% of the sales of academic journals in the U.S.

I don’t understand this claim: “The serials crisis peaked in the late 1990s.” While publisher price inflation may have peaked then, I’d be hard put to find librarians who believe that the pressures on their budgets have eased in recent years!

The report has reasonably good commentary on open access publishing and some of the pressures around STM journals. It notes that some OA journals have already achieved very high impact factors. As you’d expect from an investment house, it dismisses the current publication charges for BioMed Central and PLoS as unsustainable, suggesting that $2,000 to $2,500 is a more plausible level—and even that would be an enormous improvement over Reed Elsevier’s current $4,400 revenue per article.

One chart is particularly telling: The estimated operating margins (“gross profit”) for various segments of publishing. STM journals run 35 to 40%; consumer magazines and book publishing, on the other
hand, are both in the 8 to 11% area, with trade magazines only a bit higher.

**Cries and Alarums**

Established publishers won’t let OA grow without casting every possible aspersion. *imi insights* for October 2003 includes Kate Worlock’s “Open access: A step back in time,” based on an interview with Elsevier’s Arie Jongejan. Jongejan is eager to challenge “myths and misconceptions surrounding the emotive area of open access.” What are those myths and misconceptions?

First, access: Jongejan claims, “Around 70% of the audience which might be interested in accessing Elsevier’s scientific, technical and medical content can at present do so.” So, as long as libraries cough up those ever-higher fees for ScienceDirect, there’s no access problem. Clear enough?

Second, “the perception that open access is a free and egalitarian business model.” Jongejan claims OA discriminates against authors based on their ability to raise funds.

Third, “the underlying assumption that the current publishing process adds very little to the content being published.” Jongejan mentions refereeing and peer review as important added value—and says he “believes that this is not always the case with some open access players, who take the role of review much less seriously.” He quotes a BioMed Central referee policy to back his assertion—although it’s very hard to read the quote as being less than proper refereeing.

“Jongejan does not believe that open access is either economically sustainable or more efficient than traditional publishing models” and claims OA publishers “will need to demand between $3000 and $4500 per article to cover publication costs.” Note that Elsevier currently averages $4,400 revenue per article, including 40% pure profit.

“Submitting with a cheque potentially compromises the review process,” and OA journals “can therefore be seen more as an author exposure service than a publishing operation, with a potential lack of peer review jeopardising quality control.”

Jan Velterop of BioMed Central had some pointed comments about this piece, beginning: “It is never a good idea to throw stones if you live in a glass house. Especially not if you don’t understand your target.” He says Jongejan’s statements “stretch Jongejan’s—and Elsevier’s—credibility to [the] snapping point.”
Do you need Velterop’s comment about Jongejan’s absurd assertion that access isn’t really an issue? “First of all, 70% is not the 100% it should be, and secondly, how would he define ‘the audience which might be interested…’? It betrays supreme arrogance to pretend that one knows, as publisher, who might be interested in the research articles that are published…” Velterop leaves out one key fact: The 70% is based on an unsustainable Big Deal system. Libraries simply cannot afford to provide access under those terms.

Velterop pushes data mining as an advantage of OA. I don’t know enough to comment, so I won’t. He does point out that the second myth is mostly nonsense—it’s almost always institutions rather than authors that pay, and OA publishers frequently waive fees for authors from developing countries.

Third is the disingenuous attack on the editorial integrity of OA journals. Velterop notes that the phrase used by Jongejan to suggest BioMed Central doesn’t require originality is actually intended to do the opposite—to prevent “salami slicing” (least publishable unit) articles.

And, of course, Velterop points out that Jongejan’s claim on actual OA costs is nonsensical. “Given their profit margins, Elsevier’s own cost per article must be well below $3000. And that includes print, postage, discounts to subscription agents, elaborate access-control measures, subscriber databases, sales forces…at least 65 offices, massive inefficiencies, plus, according to Jongejan, a cost of between $0.05 and $0.15 per download.”

The January 30 Chronicle of Higher Education includes “The promise and peril of ‘Open Access’” by Lila Guterman, with two sidebars. She discusses PLoS and its promise—but also some of the doubters. I have a lot of trouble with the first doubt (the claim by scientific societies that it’s appropriate for their activities to be underwritten indirectly by libraries), but agree with the second, at least as a potential issue:

What’s more, open access may not even save universities money. If the new publications multiply but do not immediately replace subscription-based journals, the transition period will be uneasy and expensive—and no one knows how long it will last.

“If we have to pay for both the existing journals and the author-pays fees, we’re going to get killed,” says Charles E. Phelps, provost of the University of Rochester.

Then she discusses a few budget realities—like the Journal of Comparative Reality at $18,000 a year, Brain Research at $21,000, or Nuclear
Physics A and B at more than $23,000. She quotes Carol Tenopir: “The subscription model where the library pays is beginning to break down.” And she goes on to mention several of the cases where faculty are now backing libraries in reducing subscriptions—Duke along with Cornell and UC. Naturally, Reed Elsevier is “trying to be as sympathetic as we can be.” And the provost at Carnegie Mellon says library woes are still not “very front and center” for faculty members at many universities: There’s a lot of education to be done.

The OA discussion is long and interesting, including some figures for Duke that are a bit startling—e.g., that PLoS-level author fees for scientists and social scientists could cost the university more than its entire current budget for serials, including those in the humanities and medical center. Naturally, Arie Jongejan is heard from. Bizarrely, AAAS says it would have to charge $10,000 per paper for Science to become OA because it has such a high rejection rate—but does anyone really expect Science or Nature to convert to the OA fee model (as opposed to providing open access to published articles)?

The article ends on a sad note that indicates just how much education is needed. Ricardo Pietrobon at Duke prepared a manuscript a couple of months ago that he intended to submit to a BioMed Central journal. “But, warning him that the journal might fold, colleagues at Duke talked him out of it. He sent the paper to a traditional journal instead.” Sigh.

One sidebar is truly strange, in commenting on the fear of traditional publishers that governments may legislate change. Here’s a statement from the International Association of Scientific, Technical, and Medical Publishers: “Abandoning the diversity of proven publishing models in favor of a single, untested model could have disastrous consequences for the scientific research community.” To which a natural response might be, “What diversity is that?” At least for the “moderates,” those who believe that OA journals can and should replace many, perhaps most, traditional STM journals, but neither will nor probably should replace all of them, OA adds diversity—particularly since there are many different kinds of OA journal.

**Highlights from Peter Suber**

If you care about OA, you should subscribe to the SPARC Open Access Newsletter. If you do, you’ve seen the items I’ll mention here. If you can locate Suber’s January 29 colloquy on “The promise of open
access publishing,” held by the Chronicle of Higher Education, you should. Suber handled friendly and hostile questions as adroitly as you’d expect.

In Issue 69 (January 2, 2004), Suber notes some of the highlights for OA in 2003, including the shift of objections to OA “from ideology to science”—that is, that most questions and objections are now ones amenable to empirical investigation. That’s as it should be. He also offers interesting perspectives on the virtues and drawbacks of proliferating copies. I’m not all that interested in the downside that “copies interfere with the measurement of traffic and usage,” particularly since I suspect that some of the very high OA usage numbers are meaningless anyway. As he notes, the only measures of impact that really work in a paper environment—citation analysis—are’t affected by multiple copies.

Issue 70 (February 2, 2004) includes Suber’s “predictions for 2004,” an ambitious set of 14 predictions. There are one or two I might quarrel with (now there’s a surprise), but not many more than that. I’m sure he’s right that there will be “more struggle over the exact definition of the term ‘open access,’” particularly given some of the personalities involved—and I’m also sure he’s right about this one: “There will be less unity in the OA movement, or at least less concern to preserve solidarity in every public discussion.” The question, then, is whether that’s a bad thing. I would argue that it’s a very good thing, and that it would be even better if OA moved from being a “movement” to being several growing and diverse subsets of an increasingly diverse publishing landscape. But then, I’m not that fond of movements (and am not ready to lump OA, open source software, copyright, and censorware into an “information commons movement,” as Suber apparently is).

Issue 70 also includes an interesting essay on open access in the humanities, a fascinating essay including nine significant reasons that OA won’t grow as rapidly there as in STM. I’m keeping the list for further consideration; to summarize it here would take almost as much space as Suber’s clear, tightly written original.
Library Access to Scholarship  
(June 2004)

Even with self-imposed limitations, there's a lot to catch up on. I've tried to group material into somewhat coherent topical groups, usually providing chronological coverage within each group. In the interests of length, I've split out pieces of the OA debate as a LIBRARY ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP PERSPECTIVE, THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK.

Unraveling the Big Deal

This process continues apace:

University of Maryland

On February 20, Provost William W. Dostler distributed a memo to the faculty on “Changes in access to journals published by Reed Elsevier.” The College Park campus has gone entirely to electronic access for Elsevier journals, and the Baltimore campus has lost its consortial access—in both cases, following “months of unsuccessful negotiations with Reed Elsevier.” Dostler quotes the objectives of the libraries in working with publishers:

1. to maintain and exercise control over library collecting decisions in order to meet the constantly evolving information needs of faculty, researchers, and students; and

2. to manage overall costs in a way that guarantees that no single publisher is exempted from the regular critical review, which ensures that all subscriptions provide reasonable value in relation to their budget impact.

Real-world figures: Last year, Elsevier print journals represented 10% of the current journal collection but took 30% of the print journal budget—more than $1 million in 2003, plus another $100,000 for electronic access. In order to be able to cancel lesser Elsevier print journals, Maryland had to abandon the Big Deal. There's more to the
memo about the need for change and players in that effort, specifically citing ARL, SPARC, and ICOLC.

**Stanford University**

The Committee on Libraries of Stanford University’s Academic Senate passed a motion on January 19 that endorsed four guidelines, including an explicit rejection of the Big Deal:

1. Faculty and libraries are encouraged to support affordable scholarly journals, such as by volunteering articles and labor in the production, review and editing of journal content.

2. Libraries are encouraged to refuse “big deal” or bundled subscription plans that limit the librarian’s traditional responsibility to make collection development decisions on a title-by-title basis in the best interest of the academic community.

3. Libraries are encouraged to scrutinize the pricing of journals and to drop those where pricing decisions have made them disproportionately expensive compared to their educational and research value. Special attention should be paid to for-profit journals in general and to those published by Elsevier in particular.

4. Faculty, especially senior faculty, are strongly encouraged in the future not to contribute articles or editorial or review efforts to publishers and journals that engage in exploitive or exorbitant pricing, and instead look to other and more reasonably-priced vehicles for disseminating their research results.

The full senate passed those (or similar) guidelines on February 19—with one dissenting vote.

**Indiana University Bloomington**

On February 27, the Faculty Council passed a resolution on journals, databases, and threats to scholarly publication that includes the following clauses:

The Bloomington Faculty Council

A) calls on all faculty, staff, and students of Indiana University Bloomington to work toward a more open publishing system by increasing their support of existing refereed journals and publishers whose practices are consistent with open access to scholarly communication and to support those who make such choices when considering tenure and promotion;

B) encourages faculty and staff to separate themselves from publishers with a narrow focus on profits at the expense of open scholarly publication;
C) calls on the university Libraries to educate faculty, staff, and students on the business practices of different journals and journal publishers and their impact on the health of scholarly communication and on our Libraries at Indiana University Bloomington

...D) encourages all faculty, staff, students, and university administrators to work closely with our librarians to find effective ways to maintain the excellence of our collections;

E) calls on librarians on all IU campuses to work together to provide the campuses with a rich and coherent array of electronic journals and databases at the most cost effective prices;

F) expects librarians to be aggressive in their negotiations with vendors and even to withdraw from negotiations where excessive price increases are demanded;

G) expects librarians to reduce significantly duplicate print/online subscriptions and to review and cancel subscriptions judiciously.

**Macalester, Carleton, Gustav Adolphus, St. Olaf, and more**

The SPARC Open Access Newsletter #72 (April 2, 2004) includes most campuses mentioned here and in previous roundups in a single chronological list, which includes action by Macalester College and “rumblings” from Columbia, San Jose State, University of Iowa, and University of Oregon, and provides loads of citations for more background.

In May 2004, Macalaster, Carleton, Gustavus Adolphus, and St. Olaf College issued a joint press release announcing their independent decisions to decline the Big Deal. All four colleges are private institutions in Minnesota and would have renewed a three-year deal through MINITEX. The press release notes, “We are all convinced that the escalating prices for many scientific journals are unsustainable and that the time has come for change.” They note that the “disproportionate amount spent for a small percentage of scientific journals was negatively affecting our ability to build a balanced liberal arts college collection.” The faculties of the colleges are supporting them “because they understand that it is in the long term interests of our institutions to reassert control over our collections and to encourage new, more sustainable publishing models.” There’s more to the press release, which goes on to encourage college communities to consider five steps:

- Avoiding publishing and reviewing for journals that are not moving toward an open access model,
- Retaining the right to distribute the results of their research broadly,
Establishing institutional archives,

Engaging in conversation about open access within department, campus-wide, with legislators and policy-makers, and in their scholarly and scientific societies, and

Adopting policies that signal that publication in quality open access journals is acceptable in the institutions’ systems of rewards and recognition.

Feedback

Randy Reichardt (University of Alberta) of the first-rate STLQ weblog (stlq.info) sent email to four listservs asking for reactions to cancellation of Elsevier’s big deals at various institutions. You might want to read the whole set of comments at stlq.info/archives/001357.html.

Excerpts from a few of the responses:

“I am not so sure that many of the Elsevier titles still publish ‘cutting edge’ research, or at least enough to justify the prices…”

“So far, faculty [at four eastern-US universities] have been satisfied with canceling lower use titles, maintaining a fairly substantial core of titles print + online, and using delivery services to cover the rest. Part of their satisfaction is that we have been able to invest in other priority areas…”

“Those top universities walking away from the ‘big deal’ have had a definite impact on our research faculty and library administration… Being able to point to MIT, Harvard, & Cornell is a huge reassurance [as this libraries considers walking away]”

“It is difficult to find anyone here with a good word for Elsevier… What interests me are that both long tenured faculty and brand new untenured faculty are equally unhappy with high priced publishers and have in fact made journal affordability an important factor in their publishing and editorial activities… The pioneering ‘just say no’ actions of these major research institutions is only the start. If I had one word to describe the situation, it is momentum. It is building and bursting forth.”

“We found [the Big Deal] unsustainable and pulled the plug last August… When we dropped back to just subscribed titles there was very little outcry, we like to think because we had carefully chosen and refined the list of subscribed titles over the years…”

“We are also canceling many Elsevier titles this year. Some professors are upset, but many are very supportive and are encouraging their fellow faculty members to publish in the less expensive titles…”
One institution offered ScienceDirect thought the cost was outrageous, and after meeting with the faculty library committee concluded that the “price was ridiculous for the content” and the faculty were “happy to get anything they needed through our excellent (their word) interlibrary loan system.” When faculty ask why the library doesn’t subscribe, the library says how much it would cost: “They immediately understand our decision. We usually do add something like ‘But if you really want an Elsevier journal we can see about subscribing to that title alone.’ Haven’t had any takers on that one.”

“We dropped ScienceDirect this year… Results: much pissing and moaning from faculty and students alike. I smile sweetly at them and ask what they would prefer to see cut instead, given that we were quoted a CY2004 price between $200,000 and $300,000.” (This from a smaller university.) “Most seem surprised but understanding or resigned, when they hear what it would have cost. A few have wondered aloud how Elsevier manages to sell its product at all.”

There’s more, but that’s the overall tone.

**PLoS and the Sabo Bill**

In January 2004, the Association of American Publishers issued a three-page statement, Copyright and public access to Federally-funded scientific research: The erroneous premise of open-access advocates and H.R. 2613. After summarizing the argument in favor of H.R. 2613 (the Sabo bill, which would exclude copyright for results of federally-funded research), the document says, in bold face:

The key points to understand, however, are that copyright promotes public access to the results of federally-funded scientific research, and that H.R.2613 would overturn federal laws and policies that (1) trust copyright to provide the incentives for public dissemination and access while (2) reserving a fallback right for government intervention in the extraordinary event that copyright in a journal article actually prevents such research results from being publicly disseminated and accessed.

That’s followed by seven bullet paragraphs asserted as “facts” and a two-paragraph conclusion. The facts, paraphrased for brevity, with some comments:

- Copyright protection does not extend to any fact, idea, procedure, process, system, method of operation, concept, principle, or discovery…copyright in an article protects only the author’s original
expression. That’s true. It’s also beside the point: If the articles are not readily accessible, the facts in them are not readily accessible.

- Federal law explicitly prohibits copyright for any work of the Federal government, but that prohibition does not extend to works funded by the U.S. government but authored by non-government personnel. Also true—which is why the Sabo bill was proposed. (Note that I don’t believe the Sabo bill is a good idea, at least as presently written, and that I also think it’s a red herring in the whole open-access discussion.)
- General policy allows recipients of Federal funding awards to copyright works developed under such awards, provided that the awarding agencies reserve a royalty-free, nonexclusive and irrevocable right to reproduce, publish or otherwise use the work for Federal purposes and to authorize others to do so. Also true, and one wonders whether the copyright transfers signed by authors include that provision.
- The Federal Acquisition Regulation includes a similar “balance.”
- “The fact that publication in a reputable scientific journal is effectively equivalent to official government dissemination of research results is explicitly acknowledged in federal regulations.” That may be true and provides a loophole for copyright transfer but doesn’t speak to the point of wide access.
- The “Grants Policy Statement” of the National Institutes for Health follows similar guidelines.
- The model advocated by the PLoS recognizes that copyright adheres in scientific research articles, and requires an open-access license (a Creative Commons license or something fairly similar) as part of publication. Again, so what?

The conclusion begins, “Current Federal laws and policies recognize that copyright provides strong incentives for the creation and dissemination of scientific papers based on the results of federally-funded research.” But there’s nothing in the bullet points (at least that I can see) that makes any such claim. Federal laws and policy may allow for the odd situation in which, if you do your work in a U.S. Government lab, the resulting papers are in the public domain while, if you do the same work, with the same funding, in a university or private lab, the papers are covered by copyright. Where is the evidence that that pecu-
liarity is a deliberate recognition that copyright provides incentives for creation and dissemination?

The next sentence makes a claim that is also not in evidence: “They establish workable arrangements that facilitate both public access to scientific literature and the right of researchers to assert copyright in the articles they write to publish such results in scientific journals.” Workable? It’s increasingly clear that even scholarly access to scientific literature is breaking down, and the forced assignment of copyright to publishers is part of that breakdown. Is copyright required in order to publish articles? I’m guessing that researchers in government labs also produce publishable research.

As far as I can see, the AAP statement has an odd disconnect between the evidence and the conclusions. I would regard it as an unsatisfactory research paper—but then, I’m no scientist. I don’t believe it’s particularly satisfactory as argumentation against the Sabo bill, either, even though I’m on the same side.

More members and grants

On March 15, a press release announced that 51 members of the Oberlin Group of Liberal Arts College Libraries have become institutional members of the Public Library of Science. That’s not all of the Oberlin Group members, but it does include institutions such as Amherst, Bowdoin, Bryn Mawr, Kenyon, Swarthmore, both Trinity College of Hartford, Connecticut and Trinity University of San Antonio, Texas, Wellesley, Whittier—and, of course, Oberlin.

Two weeks later, the University of California libraries announced their membership.

Both press releases included an interesting paragraph (with trivial changes) that relate to some attacks on open access (see related perspective):

PLoS provides a partial or complete publication-charge waiver for any author who requests it, no questions asked, regardless of whether the author is affiliated with an institution that is a PLoS member. Any such request is shielded from all PLoS editors and reviewers. [Emphasis added.]

In late March, the Open Society Institute and PLoS announced a new grants program to support OA publishing in developing and transition countries. These grants will reduce the cost of institutional membership in these developing nations (from Albania to Zimbabwe, with states as advanced as Turkey, South Africa, and Hungary included); all
institutional memberships cover publication charges for all researchers within the institution.

**Miscellany**

An editorial in the April 2004 *PLoS Biology* deals with the question, “Who pays for open access?” The editorial points out that publication charges are not a phenomenon unique to open access: “Many authors regularly pay several thousands of dollars in page charges, color charges, correction costs, reprint costs, and other fees to their publisher, even when such costs are entirely voluntary.” For example, most authors with articles in *EMBO Journal* pay more than $800 in excess page fees. A survey of authors in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, which already opens papers to free access after six months, found that almost half of the authors would be willing to pay $500 or more to make their papers freely available immediately on publication—and this is in a journal where, on average, the author pays around $1,700 in page charges.

So far, *PLoS Biology* is finding that roughly 10% of authors request fee waivers—and most of those offer to pay part of the fee. (The editorial also repeats key points—that there’s an absolute firewall between waivers and peer review, and that waivers are granted upon request, no questions asked.)

*PLoS* also produced a fascinating “brief overview,” *Publishing Open-Access Journals*, in February 2004. It should be available at www.plos.org. It includes a breakdown of PLoS’s production costs for published articles (which seem on the high side, but then so is their publication charge). There’s also extensive discussion of how to go about running an open-access journal. **Worth reading.**

**Stuff**

Begin with an article I probably don’t have access to, but would dearly love to read: Mohamed Gad-el Hak’s “Publish or perish—an ailing enterprise” in *Physics Today* 57:3. According to the February 22 note in the Open Access News weblog, Gad-el-Hak “pens a scathing critique of the scholarly publishing enterprise, citing familiar maladies such as excessive publication, cut-and-paste or recycled publications…and shoddily-edited manuscripts.” Gad-el-Hak looks at his own small segment of science, fluid mechanics, and finds “more than 200 periodicals and perhaps half a dozen worth reading.” He believes that re-
searchers should publish less often and that libraries and buyers should be more discriminating. Six out of 200? That's even less than the “5%-10%” estimate for first-rank journals that I used in the May 2004 “Crawford Files.”

Philip M. Davis proposed a worthwhile initiative at last year’s Charleston Conference: an eResources Value Site, where those libraries and consortia able (and willing) to do so could provide cost data, usage data, relevant access details, and appropriate size/classification information about an institution—all in the interest of developing awareness of actual pricing within STM journal access. His first-rate speech turns into an excellent brief article in *D-Lib Magazine* 10:2 (February 2004), “Fair publisher pricing, confidentiality clauses and a proposal to even the economic playing field.” The article is highly recommended and I hope Davis finds a way to bring this model for price awareness to fruition. (www.dlib.org/dlib/february04/davis/02davis.html)

Finally, Elaine Nowick (Nebraska) and Claudine Arnold Jenda (Auburn) offer a first-rate overview of the library STM crisis, some steps toward solutions, and the need for libraries to be more active in a refereed article in *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship*, Winter 2004: “Libraries stuck in the middle: Reactive vs. proactive responses to the science journal crisis.” You’ll find it at www.istl.org/04-winter/article4.html; it’s highly recommended. The authors write well, know their stuff, are willing to say the hard things, and offer some real examples of (small) partial solutions. This one’s a keeper: Go read it. (I’m not offering an extensive summary both because there’s so much material in this 14-page paper and because I want you to read the original—which is also true for Philip Davis’ piece.)
The Empire Strikes Back

Library Access Perspective, June 2004

Somehow that seems like an appropriate overall term for several clusters of material, including some of the proceedings and commentaries from a set of (U.K.) House of Commons Science and Technology hearings on STM publishing and a bunch of other commentaries specifically including part of an ongoing Nature debate. My sense in reading this is that open access publishing must be perturbing the STM oligarchy a lot; otherwise, they wouldn’t be so busy spreading misinformation about it.

In addition to notes here, I’ve seen other cases where representatives of commercial and scholarly publishers assert that open access journals don’t have proper peer review procedures embedded in their operating assumptions. Since this is clearly false—free scholarly journals have used proper peer review for more than 15 years, and it’s explicitly part of contemporary OA models—I have to wonder whether this is ignorance or malice.

One key question that may never be answered is critically important if you assume—as I do—that one way or another, a substantial portion of open access publication fees is likely to be diverted from library funding. The question is how many STM articles actually get published each year. That’s particularly important given the uncertain issue of how much has to be charged for each published article in order for OA journals to survive in the long run, and the wide range of such fees at present (the two dominant numbers being BioMed Central’s $500 and PLoS’ $1,500).

Some OA advocates assert 2.25 million articles a year. Elsevier claims 1.2 million articles a year. That’s a huge difference. If Elsevier’s claim that $4.5 billion is spent on STM journals is correct—that’s how Elsevier arrives at the $3,750 “cost” per published article overall—then consider two outcomes:
For 2.25 million articles a year, $1,500 fees (PLoS) yield a total cost of $3.375 billion dollars. Since publication fees won’t replace all of the money spent on STM journals (quite a few journals add value beyond refereed articles in their print editions, and even OA journals charge for that added value and for print subscriptions), it’s not at all clear that there would be any overall savings.

For 1.2 million articles a year, however, the total cost comes out to $1.8 billion, which would seem to assure overall savings to the community, even with lots of money spent on print extras.

Interestingly, PLoS’s own cost analysis (mentioned in the regular Library Access to Scholarship section in this issue) shows $870 per article as their total production costs, plus $20 to handle each submitted manuscript regardless of whether it’s published. I could poke at those numbers—e.g., if there are an average of six graphics per article, then why does the analysis show $138 per 11-page article for graphics layout at $12.50 per page—but never mind. (Based on PLoS’ analysis, a text-only journal should have total costs of about $565 per published article and $20 per submitted article.) PLoS arrives at a total cost of $1,070, assuming a 90% rejection rate. Note that PLoS’ model properly includes significant amounts for copy-editing and layout.

I would apologize for the length of this section—but as with other similarly long thematic sections, part of this is for the record. I want to be able to come back in two or three years and trace what’s happened without trying to return to primary materials, and I particularly want to be able to refute charges of strawmen or red herrings.

UK Hearings

I don’t have all the unedited minutes from the hearings and certainly lack most of the position papers. I’m going to ignore substantial portions of the hearings that had to do with aspects of STM publishing other than pricing, open access, and copyright.

Elsevier’s position paper

A good starting point may be Elsevier’s comments on evolutions in scientific, technical and medical publishing and reflections on possible implications of Open Access journals for the UK, dated February 2004 and apparently a position paper for the UK parliamentary hearings. I don’t
know whether the 15-page PDF will be available at any given point: It’s apparently already appeared, disappeared, and reappeared through at least one cycle.

“The current worldwide system of Scientific, Technical and Medical (STM) publishing has evolved over hundreds of years, and we believe it serves science and medical communities well.” I’d be surprised if Elsevier said the system was broken. “Hundreds of years” hardly says much about the relatively recent dominance of commercial publishing in STM, but never mind.

One ongoing quandary is just how many peer-reviewed STM journals and articles actually exist. Elsevier claims 1.2 million articles a year published by “some 2,000 STM publishers,” the articles then used by “millions of researchers.”

Elsevier asserts that 97% of UK researchers have direct access to around 90% of Elsevier journals—and that “UK citizens have access to all Elsevier journals and articles either directly through their local libraries, or via inter-library loan agreements.”

Then comes the attack on several fronts:

- The OA model “risks penalising the UK because British researchers produce a disproportionately high number of articles every year.” British researchers supposedly contribute 5% of all STM articles while British spending on journals is about 3.3% of the world total—if you believe Elsevier’s figures.

- OA risks “undermining public trust.” The subscription model “ensures high quality, independent peer review and prevents commercial interests from influencing decisions to publish. This critical control measure would be removed in a system where the author—or indeed his/her sponsoring institution—pays.” The specific claim is that, because publication fees are only for accepted papers, OA publishers would be under continual pressure to increase output “potentially at the expense of quality.”

- Even the highest OA article fees “cover only about 40-60% of the estimated total costs” to publish high-quality articles—which means “to provide all the revenue to publishers that they currently make.” The equation of costs with revenues is a constant in the empire’s counterattack.

- Universal access requires print, since only 11% of the world’s population uses the Internet and “only 64% of UK citizens have ever been online.”
Details include descriptions of the Big Deal in the UK, a claim that the STM publishing market is “highly competitive,” with 2,000 publishers publishing 16,000 “unique learned journals,” the assertion that no STM publisher “has disproportionate power,” and a more detailed discussion of why OA models won’t work.

“A wide range of supporting evidence shows that costs exceed $3,000 per article at existing quality levels... For example, the Open Society Institute suggests Open Access publishers will need to recoup $3,750 per article published... By contrast, Science magazine estimates that it would have to charge $10,000 per article in a pay-per-article model... Similarly, the American Journal of Biological Sciences estimates that the journal BioScience would have to charge $7,000 per article. “$3,750...is in line with Elsevier’s estimated mean costs per article across the range of its some 1,800 journals.”

Elsevier also takes credit for “nurturing new areas of science” by launching 31 new journals a year. The claims that article quality would suffer from OA are repeated and expanded. The significance of existing OA journals is dismissed with the note that “ISI, the industry standard that provides key data...on the quality of research, currently measures only two out of some 500 Open Access Journals...”

Elsevier claims that OA models would increase fraud and malpractice because individual researchers would lack the resources and legal expertise to identify infringements and pursue transgressors. “Publishers, together with their journal editors, have been vigilant in identifying and taking action against issues such as multiple publication and plagiarism.”

**BioMed Central’s response**

On or around February 23, 2004 Jan Velterop issued a set of comments on Elsevier’s position paper, noting that Elsevier seems “curiously ill-informed” about OA publishing.

Regarding UK researcher access, Velterop notes that this seems to assume that all UK researchers work for academic institutions. The UK National Health Service does not have Elsevier’s Big Deal, and smaller biotech (and other science and technology) companies surely have researchers but no assurance of Elsevier access.

Velterop’s response to Elsevier’s assertion that OA would penalize the UK—and would penalize major universities to the benefit of commercial organizations and the like—includes the following:
Scientists and institutions benefit from making their published research available to a wide audience—it is by publishing influential research that institutions acquire a reputation that brings them high levels of funding and top researchers. And the cost of dissemination is tiny compared to the cost of doing the research in the first place… In the traditional environment, the less well-off institutions, which publish little research, effectively subsidize (through subscriptions) the publication costs of better-off institutions, which publish a lot.

Velterop's response to the whole argument that OA models would undermine article quality and the peer review process is pointed, although the first sentence raises some questions about grade inflation:

If a student pays tuition fees, does that make his exam easier to pass? The overwhelming majority of the journals published by Elsevier have traditionally seen price increases proportional with the increase in their volume [and for other reasons]… As a result, they would benefit from a higher acceptance rate in the same way that they imply Open Access publishers do.

As regards OA viability, Velterop says Elsevier's estimates are based on inefficient operation of traditional publishers. Elsevier also claimed (which I didn't quote in detail) that their huge profits result in technological innovation as well as nurturing emergent areas of science to which Velterop responds: “It is not huge investment by a large corporation that best drives innovation in the online world. Open platforms drive innovation, as the internet has shown.” Later, he notes that OA publishing means that a publisher doesn’t have to demonstrate a commercially viable market for subscriptions in order to begin a needed new niche journal. “This allows journals to develop in new niches that would have been too small or too poor to support a traditional journal. BioMed Central has published several journals that show how the previous publishing models had failed to cover a particular area, e.g. Malaria Journal.”

Velterop mostly makes fun of Elsevier’s blather about print publishing and the non-Internet population. “It is somewhat bizarre that Elsevier imagines that the 89% of the world’s population who have never used the internet are somehow likely to have access to print copies of Elsevier journals.” In any case, as he notes, the most prominent OA publishers do offer print subscriptions, “and the logic that some people may want to pay for print has very little bearing on open access.” Taking on Elsevier's note that “only” 64% of UK adults have
ever used the internet (68% when Velterop looked), he asks, “How many UK adults have ever gone into a scientific reference library?”

I find his next two comments a little discouraging, frankly:

(a) Many of the libraries who receive a copy of BioMed Central journals that have a subscription component, such as Genome Biology, have asked us not to send the print, as they actively find print a problem.

(b) We offer any library the opportunity to receive, at cost, a print archival copy of all or a portion of the research that we publish. Not one library has so far taken us up on the offer. Print seems to be of rapidly decreasing importance to libraries. [Emphasis added]

I know: It’s STM journal literature. I’ve gone on record in the May American Libraries saying it’s probably a good thing that 90% to 95% of STM journals are likely to become electronic-only. Still…shouldn’t libraries take some interest in the only proven method for long-term retention of this information?

Velterop goes to town on the longer version of Elsevier’s attack on OA quality and significance. He notes that authors choose journals based on reputation, so every journal has an incentive not to damage its reputation; that many respected journals already have page charges (at least for color figures); and—again—that the temptation to accept more papers is precisely the same for subscription journals that charge more as they get bigger as it is for OA journals: More articles means more revenue.

Then he catches Elsevier in a flat-out mistruth: The claim that ISI only provides impact measures for two OA journals. “BioMed Central alone has 6 journals that currently have impact factors…ISI explicitly tracks 22 BioMed Central journals and several more of these will get impact factors in June 2004. And citations of the other 80+ BioMed Central journals are already captured and tracked in ISI’s cited reference database, so although ISI does not yet produce journal impact factors for these journals, if one wants to find out how many times an article has been cited, one can do so.”

The March 1 hearing

Adam Hodgkin described the hearing in a LibLicense post: “By my estimate, in addition to the Committee members and Expert Witnesses, there were 80+ citizens and interested parties in the Committee meeting room. Deep green and gilt wallpaper—worthy of a Lord Chancellor—four large chandeliers, leather back chairs…and three
enormous full-length portraits of 18th c. parliamentarians on the walls.” The first witnesses were from Blackwells, John Wiley, and Nature Publishing Group; two Elsevier representatives appeared later. Hodgkin draws particular note to the point at which Wiley’s Dr. Jarvis might have lost the sympathy of his audience: “when he appeared to be arguing that it was a good thing that the general public cannot get access to specialist scientific journals.”

The uncorrected transcript of the hearing was made available a few days after the hearing itself. I’m obliged to note that neither witnesses nor Members have had the opportunity to correct that record, and that the transcript is not yet an approved formal record of those proceedings.

In the uncorrected transcript, Jarvis makes it clear that Wiley doesn’t provide delayed open access—”we make quite a lot of sales of back-issue information.” Robert Campbell of Blackwell weighs in early claiming the dangers of OA: “We think there is a danger that an author-paid model could lead to lower standards.” He also claimed OA was not “popular amongst authors.” Nature’s Dr. Charkin repeats the bizarre claim that they’d have to charge “£10,000 to £30,000 per article” ($18,100 to $54,300) “to replace our revenues.” At least he recognizes that it’s revenues (not costs) that are being used to arrive at these estimates.

Campbell calls Britain a “net exporter of knowledge” based on the claim that it produces 5% of journal articles and only pays 3.3% of total journal subscriptions. I, for one, would assert that, if British researchers read 20 times as many articles as they produce, Britain must surely be a net importer of knowledge by any rational measure—and, based on the 5% to 3.3% discrepancy, that importation is being subsidized by the rest of the world.

The chair asked whether there was a demand for open access publishing. Seems like a simple question. Here’s the answer:

Dr. Charkin: We are just running a survey through all the authors to Nature to find out. We ran an open access debate about a year ago within Nature and there really was not overwhelming support. Clearly, there is some sort of a groundswell, but it certainly was not overwhelming, and early indications from procedures at the National Academy of Sciences in America and such like have not really supported the contention that it is huge.

Of course, the chair didn’t ask whether there was “overwhelming support” for OA; he asked whether there was a demand, which “a groundswell” would seem to affirm.
The chair dug into *Nature*’s absurd per-article costs. The response: “Very crudely, £30 million of sales: we get income of £30 million and we publish 1,000 papers a year.” That doesn’t speak to the advertising revenues of *Nature* or to the considerable portion of its content that is something other than refereed scientific papers. In essence, this representative is asserting that an author-paid model would mean abandoning all other forms of revenue and supporting all existing subscriptions and costs through the small pipeline from submitted papers—even though existing OA journals offer value-added features at a price.

Sure enough, Dr. Jarvis speaks out against access to STM articles on principle:

One of the things that intrigues me is that there is some evidence that some of the support for open access is coming from outside the research community. There are some very high-profile stories of members of the public who want to read this kind of information. Without being pejorative or elitist, I think that is an issue that we should think about very, very carefully, because there are very few members of the public, and very few people in this room, who would want to read some of this scientific information, and in fact draw wrong conclusions from it…. I will say again: let us be careful because this rather enticing statement that everybody should be able to see everything could lead to chaos. Speak to people in the medical profession and they will say the last thing they want are people who may have illnesses reading this information, marching into surgeries and asking things.

I omitted the middle section in which Jarvis wholly undermines his incredibly elitist argument: “I think the mechanisms are in place for anybody in this room to go into their public library, and for nothing, through inter-library loan, get access to any article they want.” So, on the one hand, we shouldn’t have open access because it’s too dangerous and, you know, doctors don’t want patients to be asking questions—and, on the other hand, we don’t need it because any member of the great unwashed can get anything they want anyway. All clear now?

One of the committee members didn’t buy it:

That is not what Dr. Virginia Barbour is saying, the molecular medicine editor at *The Lancet* [an Elsevier journal]. She feels that patients should be able to access papers about their medical conditions. What are you doing to ensure that patients who are not scientists have access to quality medical journals that could help them have a better understanding of their own illnesses?
Jarvis then says, sure, they can get access at no cost, but not immediately on their desktop screen at home. “Again I would take issue with that view. This is something that sounds like a very good idea, but there is a lot of information in the world which most of us need help with and to be talked through. You could get yourself in a terrible mess if you go and read this kind of information, which is pretty arcane, much of it.” (I’m guessing he either said or meant “arcane,” unless Wiley has unusually long publishing delays.) This stuff is too dangerous for lay people to read—and, to be sure, they can read it if they really want to. Better they should just use Google and believe whatever they find there, right?

Later discussions included pushing at price inflation and an attempt by at least one publisher to lay the blame for library budget problems at those damn librarians (albeit not in so many words) thanks to good old Andrew Odlyzko, who apparently still believes that the only worthwhile function of academic libraries is to move STM articles from one researcher to another. To wit, the problem with library budgets is “the library overhead.” “If you look at the whole system, two-thirds of the cost of journals is the library, not the publisher”—a true statement if and only if the only function of a library is to provide access to journal articles.

One interesting interchange came when a committee member noted that he was “old enough to remember when there were very few commercially published journals around, and when scientists and people in humanities published in the journals of their learned societies… The evidence shows that not-for-profit journals—and a lot of those are published by learned societies—are more highly cited than your journals are; but they are a damn sight cheaper. How can you justify it?”

Wiley’s Jarvis danced around the question in a remarkably convoluted statement—and, when the committee member pushed on the question again, asserted that scholarly societies “subvent their costs” through member fees. Amazing: Now the members of scholarly societies are subsidizing the journals, not the other way around!

Here’s another price point: For Blackwell, with a 15% profit margin, the total revenue per article came out to £1,250 ($2,262), a bit more than $1,500 but a lot less than $3,750—and Nature’s Charkin admitted that this figure was more or less accurate for Nature Publishing Group’s academic journals, albeit not for Nature itself.
Much of the rest of the hearing involved copyright. Here’s Dr. Jarvis’ definition of a copyright system: “the unimpeachable right of an author to publish their work wherever they want for no cost.” Hmm. I’d really like to publish *Cites & Insights* as an insert in *TV Guide*, since I’d reach a much larger audience; does copyright give me that right? (Bad example. How about *AARP Magazine*, with the nation’s largest circulation?) For that matter, I wasn’t aware that the author of a third-rate piece of pseudoscientific claptrap had the “right” to publish that work in, say, *Science*—but maybe I don’t understand copyright all that well.

Sure enough, later on we have the claim that publishers need copyright assignment to protect the authors from plagiarism and infringement. “If your author’s work is then stolen or changed, what publishers can do because of their scale and their reach is to do something about that. Individual authors would find it very difficult if their article was used and changed.”

The second session had as witnesses Crispin Davis and Arie Jongejan, both from Elsevier. Elsevier’s position paper includes many of their key arguments, but a few items may be worth noting. Elsevier feels put upon by this whole discussion of price increases: After all, the company is making much more of their backfiles available online and downloads keep increasing, so libraries are really getting bargains thanks to Elsevier’s beneficence. And, Elsevier says, every customer has a wide range of options: the Big Deal is just one of many choices.

According to Davis, *every one* of those 1.2 million articles “is in a respected journal, distributed to 250 countries round the world, reaching some 12 million scientists.” He’s making that claim on behalf of *every single refereed STM journal in the world*, an estimated 16,000. Every one respected, every one reaching 12 million scientists, every one distributed to 250 countries. Even those with three-digit circulations.

Naturally, Davis raises the specter that third-world institutions and authors wouldn’t be able to afford OA publishing; you’ll never see Elsevier recognizing that waivers exist. Davis also repeats the odd metric that, because Elsevier claims that UK institutions pay 3.3% of total subscription fees (which he rounds down to 3%), this means “we consume three percent of the world’s research.”

One questioner notes the charge that pharmaceutical companies are paying scientists to claim authorship for research articles they didn’t write. After Davis says that accepting such articles would be against their policy, Jongejan can’t help himself:
He may not be saying in so many words that OA invites fraud and malpractice, but I can’t think of any other way to read that sentence.

Elsevier also claims to be a moderating influence on pricing in STM publishing—which might even be true, since its “modest” 6% to 7.5% annual increases may pose a problem for other STM publishers that want to emulate Elsevier’s 34% profit margin but haven’t yet raised prices high enough. One questioner notes that when Davis worked in consumer goods he would have given his eyeteeth for 6-7% annual price increases. Davis says that libraries look at increased usage and realize they’re getting “fantastic value for money.” That’s why no institutions are questioning the Big Deal: It’s such a bargain.

The Open Society Institute responds

Elsevier’s position paper claims lots of evidence that it costs $3,750 to publish STM articles with proper peer review. They cite the Open Society Institute as a basis for that claim. On March 3, Melissa Hagemann of that society’s Open Access Project sent out a note to appropriate lists, saying in part:

Unfortunately, the [OSI] Guide has been misquoted to the effect that the authors estimate the cost of a published journal article at $3,750. Such a claim is incorrect. As the Guide text makes abundantly clear, the table containing this number serves only to illustrate a simple method by which such fees may be determined, and all the figures used in the illustration are identified as hypothetical.

Citing such a heuristic example will only be perceived as uncritical. As all the numbers in the Guide’s illustration are contrived and clearly identified to be so we obviously adduced no evidence to substantiate them. None of the numbers in the illustration are represented to be industry averages, nor can they reasonably be mistaken as such.

We ask that all those who have been misquoting the OSI Guide desist from doing so in the future.

Sally Morris of the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP) was unwilling to accept that statement, saying (in part):

I cannot imagine that the authors plucked a figure out of the air believing it to be misleading. Surely OSI/SPARC aren’t backing off this figure simply because publishers agree with them?
Until this discussion started, they had gone up considerably in many publishers’ eyes for having taken a much more rational approach to costs than had some other OA enthusiasts; it would be a pity to undermine this perception now.

To which David Prosser, director of SPARC Europe, responded (in part):

What I do know is that the guide authors did not want to mislead readers and that is why they described the figure as a ‘hypothetical example,’ a ‘sample author fee projection’ and a ‘simple illustration.’

They did not describe the figure as an ‘estimate of the average cost of publishing a paper across all journals’ or even as a ‘figure for a single journal.’ Unfortunately it is being quoted as such and that is why there was felt to be a need to issue a clarification.

Nobody at OSI, SPARC or SPARC Europe is ‘backing off’ from the figure in the business guide for the simple reason that none of us ever put it forward as an example of the real costs of publishing a paper!

Morris still wasn’t satisfied:

Illustrations illustrate something. The authors must have thought the illustrative figure was in the right ball-park, surely?

Prosser:

The table illustrates how to do the calculation—that’s all. It really is that simple.

Since Blackwell turns a profit with total revenue per article around $2,250—including all the costs of print subscriptions and licensing negotiations—it certainly seems reasonable to believe that $3,750 as a cost per article for purely electronic publishing was pulled out of thin air. Particularly since those responsible for that number say so.

Day two, indirectly

I didn’t read the transcript of the second day of hearings, but would note a few items from Richard Poynder’s April 1, 2004 report at Information Today. Vitek Tracz of BioMed Central: “The role of publishers in the process of publishing scientific papers is wildly, incredibly exaggerated and overblown. We publishers are facilitators. It is the scientists who do the research, who publish, who referee, who decide.”

Harold Varmus (PLoS) challenged the suggestion that OA would reduce access. Maybe developing countries don’t have computers at every desk, but “every institution has a desktop computer, and you
can download the appropriate articles.” Varmus would like to see public research funding made contingent on OA publishing for the results.

Nonprofit publishers—society publishers, by and large—are nervous. “They fear that any action by government to curb commercial publishers’ excessive profits could inflict damage on them.” Julia King (Institute of Physics) doesn’t believe OA as currently defined is a sustainable business model. The Royal Society issued a press release claiming that OA would require an extra $3.5 million annual funding.

Varmus accepted the possibility that OA was a potential threat to societies, which might have to adjust their business plans—that is, accept that library subscriptions should not be used to subsidize non-publishing activities. Varmus went a bit further: “Maybe there are too many societies.”

**BioMed Central issues another response**

Some time after the March 1st hearing, BioMed Central issued a 12-page document stating 11 “myths” about Open Access. After the first-page summary, each page includes a one-sentence myth, a direct quotation arguing that myth, and a response from BioMed Central. Without repeating BioMed Central’s response to Elsevier’s position paper, a few of the myth responses are worth noting.

- **Myth 4: Patients would be confused…** (See the Jarvis comments above). BioMed Central: “This position is extremely elitist. It also defies logic. There is already a vast amount of material on medical topics available on the Internet, much of which is junk. Can it really be beneficial for society as a whole that patients should have access to all the dubious medical information on the web, but should be denied access to the scientifically sound, peer-reviewed research articles?... Patients suffering from diseases are understandably motivated to put in the effort to learn more about their conditions, as the success of patient advocacy groups in the USA has shown. Patients absolutely should have the right to see the results of the medical research that their taxes have paid for.”

- **Myth 5: It is not fair that industry will benefit from Open Access.** (Jarvis’ claim that corporate subscribers would be big winners with OA because they don’t produce many research articles.) BioMed Central: “To say that they do not contribute significantly in terms of publishing research is inaccurate. Industry publishes a significant amount of research itself, and also funds
much research within the academic community that then goes on to be published.”

- **Myth 7: Poor countries already have free access to the biomedical literature.** BioMed Central: “The list of eligible countries has many notable omissions [such as] India, Pakistan and Indonesia… Countries such as Brazil and China… are also excluded from the eligibility list, even for discounts. There is an obvious explanation for these omissions. These larger countries have significant research programs, so publishers can generate substantial income by selling subscriptions to them. It appears that traditional publishers will only offer Open Access to the developing world when they can be sure it won’t affect their profits… Many low-income countries have already started their own Open Access journals. Meanwhile, BioMed Central currently offers a full waiver of the article processing charge to authors in low and low-middle income countries.”

- **Myth 9: A high-quality journal such as Nature would need to charge authors £10,000-£30,000 in order to move to an Open Access model.** BioMed Central: This only applies to Nature itself, and even there it’s wildly off the mark. In practice, a significant fraction of Nature’s revenue is spent to commission and produce the rest of its content—News & Views, book reviews, commentaries, etc. Even if the research articles were freely available online, this other content would drive healthy subscription revenue. This “front matter” is far more widely read than the research articles; it’s not clear whether making those articles OA would have any negative impact on subscriptions. Nor would it be likely to eliminate or substantially diminish Nature’s impressive ad revenue (included in the per-article calculations!), yet those are assumed to fall to zero in Nature’s calculation. And, for that matter, the supporting claim that Nature rejects 9 out of 10 research articles is misleading: Rejected papers can be passed along to other Nature Publishing Group journals (e.g., Nature Medicine) with the referee work already done, sometimes allowing immediate acceptance. BioMed Central does the same with its top-tier Journal of Biology.

- **Myth 11: Publishers need to take copyright to protect the integrity of scientific articles.** BioMed Central notes that it’s “exceptionally rare for a scientific publisher to use copyright law to defend the integrity of a scientific paper on behalf of an author. In fact BioMed Central knows of no situation where this has hap-
pened.” BioMed Central asserts, with some evidence, that the insistence on copyright transfer is to protect publisher profits by controlling access.

**Hearings continue, April 21**

The first session had library people as witnesses—Lynne Brindley (British Library), Peter Fox (Cambridge), Frederick Friend (Joint Information Systems Committee, JISC) and Di Martin (University of Hertfordshire). Note the same caveat as above: These are uncorrected transcripts. I’m only covering roughly the first half of the first session.

The chair noted that librarians say there is a crisis in the provision of scientific publications, but publishers deny it. “Tell me the truth. Who is right? They cannot both be right.”

Friend: “There is certainly a crisis, in that libraries are not able to buy all the content that they need to supply their users, and the reason for that is that the periodical side of our budgets is rising much more rapidly than the cost of other information. That is the key factor.” (He did not note that STM journals increase in cost much more rapidly than journals in the humanities or other periodicals.)

Fox offered a specific example: Ten years ago, scientific journals took 25% of Cambridge’s materials budget; that has gone up to 33% “and rising,” which means “taking about half a million pounds a year out of the resources available for purchasing books and journals outside the scientific area…”

The chair, in a lively mood, continued:

Publishers tell us that the problem lies with libraries and their failure to promote themselves to university authorities. They are saying you are bunch of wimps really, I guess. Is that true?

Brindley began, “That is an unacceptable comment, lacking in any evidence, frankly.” She noted the efficiency gains in university libraries and BI’s need to cope with 43% inflation in journals over five years.

The chair again: “it is rumoured that a lot of people say that with the digital age you do not need those vast ranges of buildings that you have now, and the huge acreage they cover…” Martin notes contrary evidence: “We have seen an exponential rise in use of digital information, but we have seen no reduction in usage statistics of our buildings, or indeed in our book loan figures.”

How about “overheads”—which, again, seem to be taken as “everything except the journal subscriptions.” Trained reference librarians?
Overhead. Selectors? Overhead. Buildings? Overhead. Martin notes that they’ve had a reduction in staffing even as they needed to add a new post to deal with licensing; she believes that overhead has been reduced. When asked if they could be more efficient, she says they’ve been being more efficient.

Brindley responded to a question suggesting all-digital publishing. “The evidence… suggested that we would be living, at least until 2020, with a very hybrid system of both digital and print publications… The evidence… is very much that people do still come in to consult material.” She also noted the problem of secure, long-term preservation of access to digital material.

One of the committee members asked why bundling (the big deal) is so unpopular with libraries. Fox: “Bundling requires us to buy journals that we do not necessarily want in order to acquire things that we do want, and is pushing more and more of our budget into the pockets of a smaller and smaller number of publishers… [It] is reducing the amount of money available for the output of the publishers that do not bundle.”

When asked about best and worst practices—and given the statements of publishers that they offer lots of flexibility—Martin noted that her experience does not show flexibility to be the case: “We find that publishers tend to approach us in terms of selling us a fixed product, and we have to negotiate very hard to get any flexibility within those products.” “The starting point is ‘take it or leave it’.”

Later, continuing the question of which companies are best and which are worst, Friend noted that ALPSP members are easier to deal with. Two examples of publishers that “have been very difficult to deal with”:

One would be Elsevier, where last year we [JISC] spent about six months doing national negotiations, and we are still spending another four months in sorting out the details at proposal level. You agree [on] a national price of, say, 5 percent [above] what you paid last year; but then, when the detail gets down to local level, you find that the reality is very different. That negotiation has been extremely time-consuming, and is still not resolved for many universities. Another example I can give you is the American Chemical Society, where we have had great difficulty on long-term access.

Are the universities finding that learned society publishing is being squeezed out or forced into bundling by the commercial houses?
Friend: “The short answer is ‘yes.’”

Friend believes bundling is on the way out, “and I see it being re-
placed by open access” in a gradual change.

Then there’s the supposed competitive marketplace and what it
means in reality.

Fox: “The problem is that we are in a monopolistic situation. If an
academic needs an article from a particular journal, an article from a dif-
ferent journal will not do; and therefore they have to subscribe to that
journal.” He went on to note that required copyright transfer main-
tained that monopoly. Then there’s the other problem: “The people that
are paying for the journals, i.e., the libraries, are not the people that are
[making] the decision whether or not they are purchasers.”

Discussion continued with problems of long-term access on elec-
tronic-only subscriptions (when you cancel a print journal, you get to
keep everything you already paid for; not so with most ejournal sub-
scriptions), licensing issues, limits on access, and UK tax issues.

Moving to open access, Friend has no doubts: “I am certain open
access is viable in the long term.” JISC has a membership with BioMed
Central to cover publication payment for authors in UK universities,
and is also putting money into institutional repositories.

Second session: Scholars

This group of witnesses included four professors and the chief executive
of the Authors’ Licensing & Collecting Society. It became clear that at
least some of the professors were editors for commercial journals and,
from appearances, seemed to have been well coached for the session.

Professor Williams (tissue engineering and editor of an Elsevier
journal), who does not believe he is conservative: “I do not see that
there is any significant problem in S&T publishing at the present time.
I think it is a very robust situation.” He noted nothing about library
costs, just that he finds online access very good.

On the other hand, Prof. Crabbe (biology) claimed to speak for
“colleagues not only in my own university but others” in being “totally
supportive” of OA, and “at the forefront of open access for scientific
community.” When asked about a split, Williams admitted there
was—and, in stating his opposition, came down hard on OA: “Right
now, in the way it is going—and I compare some of the journals
which I see in my own area with that which I edit myself—I see a very
big difference in quality. It is the quality of the science that is being
published and the quality of the publication media that is of greatest
interest to me.” Prof. Hitchin (math) chimed in, saying “up-front pay-
ments in particular are a big issue. They create large problems for cer-
tain disciplines in one of the open access models”—specifically,
problems for independent researchers not supported by grants.

Prof. Fry (microbial ecology) saw “tremendous problems with the
proposed models for open access”—both claiming that printed jour-
nals don’t really cost much more than internet-only journals (printing
and distribution is “a very small part of the overall cost”) and that OA
could hurt learned societies. He said that learned societies support the
majority of conferences and congresses, “largely from their profits
from publications.” In other words, the libraries are paying for the
congresses indirectly—and, for Fry, this was the proper way of things.

As to bundling, Williams saw the need for commercial publishers
to bundle—and Fry said, “Bundling has been extremely valuable for
the users of journals because it has increased their access to journals
eormously.” (Fry is publication manager for a society that publishes
through Elsevier, and gains enormously from online income as a result
of Elsevier’s bundling.)

There was more, most of which I’m not discussing here. The
scholars didn’t seem to think turning over copyright was an issue at all
(the licensing person wasn’t so sure). Institutional preprint archives
were discussed, with some jabs from “the current system works just
fine” people about “any old scientific garbage” being on such sites.
One committee member suggested that OA might result in “pressure,
direct, indirect, perceived or otherwise, on the journal to publish, with
less stress on the quality, and, secondly, to speed up, possibly to the
detriment of quality, the process of review and publication…” Prof.
Crabbe said flatly that, if that happened, no one would publish in
such a journal. “It only takes one journal, one paper, one bad paper in
a journal for that journal to get a very bad reputation.”

Prof. Williams also owned up to saying there was no reason that
all colleges and universities needed the same access to scientific publi-
cations—those not working at the cutting edge may not need access to
the highest quality publications. And, for that matter, he believed that
“[the vast majority of institutions] could not, in fact, understand what
we publish, and I think one has to be very careful in determining poli-
cy on the basis that everybody should have free access to what we
publish.” This variant on Jarvis’ earlier suggestion that it’s dangerous
for the public to have access to arcane medical research—this time saying that even most academic institutions ought not to have such access—was very nearly the ending point.

But not quite. Mrs. Carr (from the licensing society) responded:

Well, words failed me there, for a moment. I think if somebody does not understand what they are reading then they do not understand it, but not to have access to it, if it is the author's wish that they should, or indeed if the community needs it, must be a cause for concern. I am speaking there personally, in a sense.

And the chair closed with the kind of statement I just don't think you get in Congressional hearings in the U.S. (more's the pity):

I think you had better take him for a drink, Jane, and beat him over the head.

After which, of course, he thanked them all.

More Attacks and Counter-Attacks

According to a February 24, 2004 Open Access News post, Rudy Baum offered an attack on OA in Chemical and Engineering News, entitled “The open-access myth.” In the piece (which I haven’t read directly, but I know that Peter Suber’s reporting is trustworthy), Baum states the “myth” as this: “STM publishers add little value to the research the publish and therefore should not charge institutions for subscriptions to the electronic versions of their journals, or, at the very least, they should provide open access to the public a short time after publication.” While it’s true that some open access advocates diminish the value added by STM publishers, that’s certainly not a general stance of the movement; instead, OA advocates believe that up-front payments are a better way to pay for the value that publishers add.

Baum isn’t clear “what advantage is conferred by shifting the cost of publishing from libraries to researchers.” Suber responds that open access itself is the benefit. From my perspective, an equally important benefit is that such a shift makes the costs evident to the researches, which might yield savings through shifts to more cost-effective methods, which in turn might free up library funds—which might then enable libraries to carry out their whole range of missions (only one of which is transmitting STM articles) effectively.

Baum again: “The open-access movement’s demand that an entirely new and unproven model for STM publishing be adopted is not in
the best interests of science.” Suber notes that it’s certainly not entirely unproven, since OA journals have been around for considerably more than a decade—but another answer might be that most OA advocates do not demand that all STM publishing immediately convert to article-payment models.

**Stanford Report**

The Stanford Report had two Vantage Points in its February 26, 2004 issue, both from very high-profile Stanford professors. Donald Kennedy, president emeritus, Bing Professor of Environmental Science, Emeritus, and editor-in-chief of Science, says that “subscription journals are here to stay.” Early on, he misstates the general economics of OA publishers:

The “open access” movement means that neither individuals nor institutions, like libraries, will pay to receive the journal through subscriptions to the print journal or site licenses for the online version.

But many, perhaps most, OA journals do charge for print subscriptions, a charge to cover the cost of printing and postage. Online access is free—and site licenses are irrelevant, thus eliminating one significant cost to the publisher.

Kennedy says he thinks “it is a good thing that we will now have both models in play.” He also says that the “author-pays” model is plausible in biomedicine—but “in less populated and well-supported fields, such support is far less readily available.” He goes on to assert that a rising tide of OA submissions will make the author-pays model more difficult to sustain. “That’s because it costs almost as much to reject a paper responsibly as it does to accept one. The higher the rejection rate, the larger becomes the expense budget that must be met from the fixed revenue from author fees.” He goes on to mention additional costs for journals that add news and perspective pieces to refereed articles—which, to be sure, are part of the priced value-added extras in some OA models. The problem with the assertion is that it assumes that a rising tide of submissions means lower quality submissions in general, thus a higher rate of rejection. If there are more submissions and they’re good quality, there’s no problem: e-journals don’t have inherent page limits.

Kennedy hopes “that Science will continue to serve, as it has for many years, the world’s largest general scientific society.” He also says he hopes PLoS succeeds—and finishes by saying “I know of no normative standard by which their [model] or ours can lay special claim
to the moral high ground.” Personally, I see no plausible scenario in which Science will lose its stature or its subscription status; like Nature, it’s not a key part of the problem.

Patrick Brown, professor of biochemistry and cofounder of PLoS, offered a piece entitled “Free online scientific journals make sense.” He notes that the U.S. government spends more than $50 billion a year on nonclassified research and explicitly raises the issue of lay access to the results of that research:

But if your mother learns she has breast cancer and desperately wants to find what researchers have discovered about her disease, or when your daughter in high school reads a story in the New York Times about the latest research on climate change and wants to see it with her own eyes, they face a perverse and unnecessary obstacle. They, and countless others around the world who would benefit from timely access to scientific and medical knowledge, cannot freely access the published results of research financed by their own tax dollars.

He goes on to complain that, although Stanford has access to most of the scientific literature, they can’t “Google” the millions of scientific articles. He goes on to call the traditional STM business model “a vestige of an era when printing articles in paper journals and transporting them in trucks and boats was the most efficient way to disseminate new scientific discoveries and ideas.” Now, he says, research articles are “delivered much more efficiently and conveniently via the Internet” and concludes that charging for access is “therefore no longer economically necessary, rational, or fair.”

Brown throws in one argument that makes me cringe, since I believe its implications are clear:

An “open access” system for scientific publishing will not entail new expenses, nor should it place a financial burden on the authors. The governmental and private institutions that finance the research already pay most of the costs of scientific publishing indirectly—through the funds they provide to research libraries. These same institutions would accomplish far more with the same money by phasing out subscription payments to restricted-access journals and, instead, paying for open-access publication of the research they support.

There it is: Don’t add OA fees to research grants; take the money away from the libraries.
SPARC Open Access Newsletter #71

This March 2 issue begins with an “objection-reply” on the theme, “Whether the upfront payment model corrupts peer review at open-access journals.” It’s an excellent, detailed discussion. If you don’t normally read SOAN, I’d suggest you get this issue (www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/newsletter/03-02-04.htm) and read the first three pages. Much as I love to poke at weak points and overstatements in OA advocacy, I find no fault with anything in Suber’s multipart refutation of the “corruption” suggestion, one of the most common attacks on OA.

The next article offers “Top 10 priorities for the OAI community.” I don’t talk much about OAI, partly because of personal issues and the incredibly cavalier attitude of some leading OAI proponents toward libraries, but it’s a good list to consider.

Les Grivell: “Access for all?”

This viewpoint, which appeared in EMBO reports 5:3, is a useful overview of some of the issues regarding OA and OAI. It’s worth reading and should be readily available online. I think I detect a slant, but maybe I’m wrong, so I’ll just note that Grivell considers viewpoints on several sides of the issues and writes clearly.

The Nature Discussion: Access to the Literature

This Nature “web focus” began April 2 with an introduction from Declan Butler, European correspondent for Nature. You’ll find the whole thing at www.nature.com/nature/focus/accessdebate/, and I suspect new contributions will be added to the discussion after this issue appears. I reviewed the introduction and the first twenty documents in the debate, but only mention a few of those documents here. (Two of them were the Kennedy and Brown Vantage Points from Stanford Reports, discussed earlier in this section.)

Butler’s introduction frames the issues fairly and includes two paragraphs I find particularly telling:

One jarring aspect of proposals to reform scholarly publishing is that, all too often, they implicitly consider ‘journals’ as a single homogeneous entity, to which one universal publishing model can be applied. On the contrary, diversity is everywhere. In any discipline, journals range from high quality ‘must reads’ with high rejection rates—which in turn result in higher costs per published paper—to publications which add
little value to the articles as submitted, and are read by few apart from the authors themselves.

Journals are also published by a range of patrons, from individuals, and commercial publishers, to learned societies who use publication revenues to support their community in other ways. Likewise, a journal might be run largely by scientists working for free, or by professional editors. Some are electronic only, some have print editions. The list goes on. Any discussion of publishing models must surely take into account this heterogeneity. There is no one-size-fits-all solution.

One caveat, one that I would apply to the whole discussion about much higher costs for journals with high rejection rates. For most refereed journals (STM or otherwise), referees work for free. For many refereed journals, so do the editors. With electronic submission and routing, it’s reasonable to believe that the actual costs to the publisher for rejected articles should be very low. Most of the costs associated with published articles are for copy editing, preparation of graphics, preparation of metadata, and conversion of the article into a form appropriate for publishing (and, for print journals, printing and postage). But the cost per published article for all of that work is the same, regardless of whether the journal publishes four of every five articles submitted or only one of ten. If $1,500 is a plausible publication cost (and that seems high), wouldn’t $20 be a sufficient submission cost to make an efficient all-electronic refereeing system work?

Here’s the next-to-last paragraph—and you probably already know my answer to the questions: Yes and Yes.

Could these costs be paid for in other ways than the traditional reader-pays subscription model, and under what circumstances? Or will the outcome be a mix, with open access prevailing for certain types of publication, and elsewhere, market demand for greater access to the literature driving imaginative deals between publishers and libraries to make such access more affordable.

Sally Morris, ALPSP

ALPSP is clearly in a conflicted position on this whole issue, as this piece shows. It begins: “It is no accident that much experimentation with the Open Access journals model, where costs are covered by payments made on behalf of the author rather than on behalf of the reader, is being carried out by learned societies and other not-for-profit publishers.”
She goes on to express cautions, then turns to the critical issue—and the one where I’m least sympathetic to ALPSP and learned societies in general. She provides an argument in the second paragraph that I find remarkable and, at least for the U.S., wholly disingenuous.

Where [societies] do make a surplus—and not all do—it is typically invested in such activities as promoting public education, subsiding conference fees or membership subscriptions, and providing research grants and bursaries. If, as seems likely, the author-end cost-recovery model were further to reduce surpluses—which are already modest compared with some commercial publishers’ profits—these other services would inevitably suffer, and it is arguable that both science and society would be the poorer.

Some people argue that it is not right that library budgets should pay for societies’ other activities. But it is perhaps fair to ask where those library budgets come from: ultimately, they come from the taxpayer, meaning, primarily, business. If, on the other hand, these society services were no longer subsidized, who would have to pay? In many cases, it would be the individual scientist—paying more for society membership, more on conference fees and travel. The alternative of more direct subsidy from taxpayers’ money, whether to the societies themselves or to the individual scientists, might have considerable drawbacks in terms of independence and academic freedom.

Say what? Now, ALPSP works in the UK, and maybe the primary source of all library budgets in the UK is business taxation. I don’t believe that to be true in the U.S., and especially not for private universities. In any case, it’s a shell game: The thesis that it’s acceptable for societies to subsidize their own operations on the backs of libraries, while not rallying to improve library budgets. I argue that it is not right that library budgets should pay for societies’ other activities. Period.

Karen Hunter, Elsevier

She calls the essay “Open Access: yes, no maybe.” But what you’ll read is her assertion that even PLoS is “charging substantially below the actual cost of publication” with its $1,500 fee. Thus, for Elsevier to “experiment,” they would have to charge the “real cost of publication”—that is, the entire amount that Elsevier makes from print and electronic publications, including profit—and “we would be endorsing a model that at the moment is unsustainable.”

“We think that the so-called lack of access is a red herring.” After all, there’s always ILL—but not to the electronic version, given most licensing restrictions. She raises the usual hobgoblin of editorial inde-
pendence, those who lack the funds for publication payments, and the disruption of a model that “has evolved over centuries” (but has become primarily commercial over a very few decades). It’s a classic Elsevier piece, albeit slightly less heavy-handed than some.

Kate Worlock, EPS

After several other commentaries (including the two republished from Stanford Report), Worlock weighs in with “Open access and learned societies,” an unusually long piece for this debate. It has some gems: A survey found that 80% of scientists belong to at least one learned society. That means 20% of scientists find no learned society worth joining: A startling figure. There’s another estimate of how many refereed journals are out there: this time it’s 21,000. And one poll found 87.5% of responding learned societies getting a surplus from their publishing activities. If that’s true, Morris’ “and not all do” is true, but just barely.

Then things get weird. There’s an argument that one reason for membership is that scientists are “paying for exclusivity and receiving it” through their membership subscriptions to journals, and that membership would be less valuable if everyone has access. There’s a new counter-OA argument: Scientists want restricted access to articles!

Another numbers paragraph notes 765 journals in the Directory of Open Access Journals as compared to 21,000 journals in Ulrich’s—but weakens that by noting that the 21,000 includes monographic series. (DOAJ now lists more than 1,000 OA journals, so it’s at least 4% of the journal world at this point.)

Unfortunately, Worlock goes on to quote at some length the Open Society Institute “$3,750” cost. She then goes on to find that ALPSP benchmarks show a median cost of £450, which, at $815 or so, is considerably below PLoS’ $1,500 charge.

After that, there’s the usual anti-OA confusion: Societies will wish to continue print (and can, since there’s no bar to charging cost recovery for print subscriptions). The majority of journal authors aren’t dissatisfied with the present system (but libraries are going broke). Humanities research is cheap, making publication charges difficult to cover (but humanities journals aren’t the problem, as they’re relatively inexpensive in any case). “The move to open access is still very much an untested concept,” after more than a decade of journal publishing.

“Learned societies exist to foster and disseminate knowledge, and undertaking an open access experiment which could threaten the eco-
nomic survival of the society would be unlikely to be seen as an acceptable risk.” Doesn’t that reason for existence argue forcefully for experimenting with OA?

Jan Velterop, BioMed Central

His piece is “The myth of ‘unsustainable’ Open Access journals,” and he argues forcefully that the current STM publishing system is “unsustainable.” He quotes one of UC’s academic senates to that effect. He also notes that specific publishing-related services can be unbundled, each step charged for separately. This raises interesting possibilities: The print version of a journal might not come from the original publisher at all, for example. (The Creative Commons BY license required by some OA publishers makes this straightforward: Any other agency is legally free to reprint those articles for a price.)

Thomas J. Walker, University of Florida

Walker discusses hybrid publications, “open access by the article.” These are journals that charge for subscriptions, but if an author pays a publication fee, the online version of that article will be free for all use. For the Entomological Society of America, which began using this model four years ago, 62% of published articles were open-access last year; for another society, the figure reached 66% by 2003.

The publishing charges are very reasonable. The American Society of Limnology and Oceanography charges $350 for a 10-page article; ESA charges $124 for an 8-page article. More recent attempts at the hybrid models involve charges ranging from $995 to $2,160, “but I would argue…that these fees are unnecessarily high.” He believes the hybrid model offers many benefits, including increased loyalty from members—that is, scientists who want broad access rather than exclusivity.

John B. Hawley, Journal of Clinical Investigation

“Is free affordable?” To JCI, yes. The journal’s been around since 1924; when it went online in 1996, it immediately provided free and unrestricted online access. They’ve found that the policy is one “that the journal can afford.” It’s a detailed paper, including what’s involved in publication, the percentage of rejections (almost 90% for JCI), and other aspects.
...and many more

I’ve omitted quite a few for various reasons. We have the proud open access publisher saying, well, no, it’s not really sustainable and we’re pulling back. We have Thomson ISI saying that, as far as they can determine, there’s no correlation between the publication model and the journal’s impact: OA neither helps nor hurts measurable ISI-style impact—but it’s awfully early to say.

All in all, a fascinating ongoing debate.
Library Access to Scholarship
(September 2004)

One of the biggest events in the past few months is the publication of *Scientific publications: Free for all?*, the report of the UK’s House of Commons Science and Technology Committee (comments on some of this committee’s hearings appeared in the June issue). Notes on that report and early reactions appear in the final section of this roundup. Before that, it’s worth noting a few of the many developments in other areas of library access to scholarship—and offering a little perspective.

My primary interest in this section is freeing up library funds so academic libraries can maintain humanities subscriptions, buy monographs, other books, and media, provide access to gray literature, maintain technical services and reference librarianship, and in other ways preserve the record of the civilization and maintain themselves as libraries.

OA journals can help—if they’re represented in library catalogs and when they replace overpriced commercial journals or force those journal publishers to reduce prices. As for OA archives, as far as I can tell, these are likely to have either no effect on library costs or—when they have an effect—a potentially disruptive effect on scholarly communication.

As long as OA archives represent such a small percentage of the papers in a given subscription journal that libraries must retain their existing subscriptions, then the OA archives don’t help the financial problem at all. When a large enough percentage of the papers in a given journal are represented in OA archives, and the OA archives are harvested so that libraries can reasonably expect to find those papers via OpenURL or otherwise, then a growing number of libraries can, will, and must cancel their subscriptions to those journals. That has one effect in the short term, another in the slightly longer term. In the short term, profit-oriented publishers will raise prices for remaining subscribers, squeezing the biggest stones for as much blood as possible. In the slightly longer term, the subscription journal will fail—taking with it the full-text archives and the peer-review mechanisms. The
peer review mechanisms will be replaced, of course, as researchers migrate to OA journals. Full text archives may or may not be so easy to replace, unless LOCKSS and national-library archival agreements take care of the situation. The concept that libraries must and will retain expensive subscriptions as long as any significant papers are being published in those journals that are not available via other means is ludicrous in a world of limited library resources.

The Big Deal

Harry Kriz (Virginia Tech) forwarded an April 6 report from the Roanoke Times & World News, “Tech bargains its way to better journal deal.” The story recounts the collective bargaining of seven Virginia public university libraries to negotiate a new five-year contract with Elsevier. The local angle is that Virginia Tech receives some 600 additional scholarly journals. The universities recruited a lawyer to assist in the negotiations. Here’s the paragraph that startled me at first reading:

Under the $27 million contract, each library will have access to more than 1,800 Elsevier journals—roughly a 50 percent increase—for a price jump of just 5 percent. The contract also insulates the colleges from future drastic price increases for journals, some of which cost more than $10,000 a year.

$27 million dollars! That’s more than twice what the 10-library University of California system was spending with Elsevier before the Big Deal was renegotiated at UC. A little clarification was in order, which Kriz was able to supply from Paul Metz, Virginia Tech’s Director of Collections: $27 million is the total five-year price, making it $5.4 million a year. That’s still a load of money, and there’s the assumption that the 600 additional journals are needed and useful—but the group of libraries is spared annual price increases and negotiations.

Society Publishers

Some professional societies and groups representing those societies had comments after the “Free for all” report. Additionally, the odd multipart conversation about how profits from publishing sustain other society activities—and whether that’s a plausible economic scenario for the 21st century—continued.
Jan Velterop & European Geophysical Union

Jan Velterop noted a letter in The Guardian about a shift by the European Geophysical Union to publish its journals with full open access. “This is not only to be enthusiastically welcomed by the scientific community, but also a very strong indication that publishing with open access is not beyond the possibilities of learned societies with the political will to do so, in spite of frequent assertions to the contrary.” He also invited societies nervous about the hassles of going the open access route to contact BioMed Central “with a view to sharing [its] tried and tested tools and platform...without the need for any investment up-front.”

Velterop took issue with two statements by William Sturges, the letter’s author. Sturges is “not quite correct...in stating that open access is ‘driven’ by learned bodies ‘with for-profit publishers running to catch up.’ If only. Neither societies nor commercial publishers are as groups by definition on one side of the divide.” He reminds us that open access publishing on a serious scale was first done “by a commercial (i.e. unsubsidised) publisher: BioMed Central. Most for-profit publishers are not exactly ‘running to catch up’ and most societies are not (yet) driving the process.”

You could argue that “unsubsidized” and “commercial” are two very different animals. Certainly under U.S. law, most nonprofit organizations are unsubsidized. And while BioMed Central may be commercial, it’s hard to call it a for-profit enterprise until it manages to turn a profit. I have no such nits to pick with Velterop’s other disagreement with Sturges’ letter:

Another statement in the letter is unfortunately not quite correct, either, although, again, may be correct for the earth sciences. That is that the EGU journal would be the first “truly” open access one in that the peer-review process is open and published as well. In the medical sphere, BioMed Central’s journals as well as the British Medical Journal (BMJ) have been operating along these lines for years.

Blackwell and ALPSP

According to a Blackwell newsletter for July 2004, Blackwell carried out a survey with ALPSP on what societies do with their publishing surpluses. Sixty-eight societies responded. Most respondents (all but three) subsidize member access to journals—either free or at a reduced price. Surpluses also help cover general expenses, are rein-
vested in publishing, help reduce conference fees, and cover other activities.

Societies that do their own publishing clear an average 18% surplus from journal subscriptions, covering 32% of total society income. Societies using commercial publishers earn surpluses averaging 33% of society income.

Here’s the final paragraph of the article:

In the current debate on Open Access, the importance of journal profits to societies has been mentioned and indeed the right to make such profits has sometimes been questioned. This survey shows the significance of journals in the finances of societies and the benefits to members who use the journals.

David Goodman forwarded that paragraph to the SPARC Open Access Forum, adding this comment: “I would add a final sentence: Whether it is libraries who should fund these activities, is another question.” I sent him a note saying I planned to add a longer version of that response, and I’ve said the same in the past—that is, it is not reasonable for libraries to be expected to subsidize the activities of professional societies other than those for libraries—but there’s not much more to say. If it’s reasonable for universities to subsidize professional societies, that subsidy should be direct—not indirectly through overpriced journal subscriptions.

After writing these comments, I downloaded and read the survey report itself, “What do societies do with their publishing surpluses?” The nine-page report provides more detail on the numbers—for example, one-third of the respondents said they don’t make a surplus on their publishing—but doesn’t require much more commentary. It’s a descriptive article, not a combative one. In fairness, and since the newsletter piece did not raise the question Goodman wants to raise, I should quote the last paragraph of the executive summary, following the list of society interests that would not be as well served if there were no surpluses:

Whether library budgets (both academic—i.e. the taxpayer—and industrial) are the best way of serving these interests is a question which is currently being hotly debated.
American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (ASBMB)

In another contribution to Nature’s ongoing “web focus” on access to the literature, Bettie Sue Masters (University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio) and Judith S. Bond (College of Medicine, The Pennsylvania State University) commented on ASBMB’s practice.

The flagship journal is the Journal of Biological Chemistry (JBC), published since 1905. (The society is a year younger than the journal.) ASBMB now has 12,000 members and also publishes a monthly magazine and three other journals. JBC became available electronically in 1995, “the first biomedical journal to be available electronically” in conjunction with HighWire Press. “In 2001, JBC introduced Papers In Press (PIPs), which makes manuscripts available online the day they are accepted for publication, and permits free access to JBC papers to anyone.” Accepted articles typically appear online around 8 weeks before they appear in print—and stay available online. JBC now provides “free, on-line, full text searchable access to every published article since its inception in 1905,” and the sister journal Journal of Lipid Research also provides free online access to every article since its founding in 1959. Masters and Bond say ASBMB spent more than $700,000 to make this happen—made possible by the multiform business model of the journals. “Our expenses are paid by a combination of sources, primarily page charges to authors and subscriptions to individuals and libraries. In a recent survey of over a 1,000 JBC authors, over 80% preferred this mode of covering expenses to other models, such as authors or institutions paying all the costs.”

Open access works for ASBMB. Submissions continue to increase, as do citations. ASBMB maintains a significant full-time staff to support its publications. The essay includes a seemingly obligatory swipe at pure “author-pays” models, an unfortunate distraction from the rest of the discussion:

The subject of editorial independence cannot be ignored. Depending upon the business model, unless large submission charges are levied, there may be a tendency to lower the standards of peer review to permit more manuscripts to be published. There is risk, for example, in an author-pays-all-costs publication model that standards could be influenced by the acceptance rate of manuscripts.

That’s followed by a statement that a high standard is the creed for society publishers—but that’s equally true for any publisher who ex-
pects to build a reputation for its journals. I don’t disagree with a later statement: “As any believer in the free enterprise system would espouse, it is better to allow and, indeed, to encourage competition among various modes of publication.” But including the standard canard about lowered review standards is an unfortunate and, I would think, unnecessary part of such competition—particularly for a society that appears to be providing open access.

**Open Access Publishing**

BMJ announced 2005 charges—but ones that don’t affect OA status. To wit, full text of non-research items (Editorials, Reviews, Letters, etc.) will require subscriptions for online access from the 2nd through 52nd week of publication. All content less than a week or more than a year old will continue to be available for free online; original research articles will continue to be free; abstracts and extract views will continue to be free; and more than 100 developing countries will have full free access. This change seems consistent with OA principles: Refereed articles are freely available, with added value for a fee.

*Cell Communication and Signaling* published a brief article to review the reasons that the journal’s publisher is introducing article-processing charges (APC). Since the fee ($525) is levied only for accepted articles, this places CCS in the same business model as other BioMed Central journals. It’s a good brief review of the advantages of Open Access: [www.biosignaling.com/content/2/1/7](http://www.biosignaling.com/content/2/1/7)

The *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* announced the same hybrid option (or Prosser model) some other publishers have chosen, as an experiment through the end of 2005. If PNAS authors pay a $1,000 surcharge, their articles will be available for free via PNAS Online and PubMed Central immediately upon publication. At the end of the experiment, PNAS may continue as a hybrid publication, move toward full Open Access, or retreat from the option. The press release notes that PNAS “operates as a nonprofit, break-even operation.” (Authors from institutions with 2005 PNAS institutional site licenses will pay a $750 surcharge.)

Swets Information Services announced in early July that it would add BioMed Central’s Open Access journals to SwetsWise Online Content, which effectively makes the already-free full-text articles more conveniently available for some institutions.
Springer has announced its version of the Prosser model, which it calls “Open Choice,” for all of its journals—but at a price: The author charge is $3,000 (plus possible page charges for print editions), twice that of PLoS and almost six times that of BioMed Central. Springer’s CEO, Derk Haank, was formerly CEO of Elsevier. Jan Velterop was quick to note that the Prosser model is not Open Access—and that Springer continues to require a range of copyright and license agreements that make article use much more restrictive than in OA journals. An article in *Financial Times* (excerpted by Peter Suber) suggests just how sincere Springer may be. “A vocal minority of libraries and academics are also calling for a revamp of the traditional ‘user pays’ publishing model, which they claim is too costly for the end user. Instead, some are promoting a so-called open access model in which an author or sponsoring institution pays to have articles published that are then widely disseminated. Mr. Haank says the debate, which has pitted some open-access upstarts against the industry leaders, has taken on an ‘unhelpful,’ ‘almost religious’ emotional element… One rival says Springer’s plan represents little more than a ‘public relations initiative.’ It is an accusation Mr. Haank would likely deny, although he does appear to relish the challenge he is presenting to some academics to put their money where their protest are. ‘Let’s see how serious they really are…we expect that not more than 10 percent will be interested in this option,’ he says.” As Suber notes, “Haank sounds as if his plan is designed more to generate low uptake, and ground a rebuke to OA advocates, than to test the waters in good faith.” Sure sounds that way to this interested observer. “User pays” may be an even more misleading name for the current state of STM journals than “author pays” is for one OA publishing model: It’s not the users (primarily scientists) who pay, but the libraries.

Oxford University Press introduced a new OA journal, *Evidence-based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, with an unusual support mechanism: For the first decade, Japan’s Ishikawa Natural Medicinal Products Research Center will support the journal (which “will focus on traditional Asian healing systems”). OUP also announced that *Nucleic Acids Research* would move to full OA publishing beginning January 2005, with mandatory publication fees and immediate free access to articles. NAR is a high-impact journal and has been around more than three decades; the contribution fee is $1,500.

The director of the National Institutes of Health suggested at a late July 2004 gathering of journal publishers and editors that even-
tually, all NIH-financed research must be freely available to the public. Unsurprisingly, reactions included one from an AAP officer, who said that NIH’s recommendations could undermine the sustainability of the publishing industry and exert a “chilling effect” on NIH-funded authors. Barbara Meredith, quoted in a July 21 piece at the-scientist.com, said the AAP does not oppose open access, “but it does oppose the government’s decision to interfere with the free market by deciding how research should be published.” Apparently, the NIH recommendation really isn’t for full OA: It allows for a six-month embargo. Peter Suber had a good comment, noting that NIH is the largest science funder within the U.S. federal government: “The NIH does not work for the publishers. It works for the taxpayers.” At least that’s the theory. Reactions also included support from the Genetic Alliance, a coalition of organizations advocating for patient families.

SLA issued an odd “statement regarding open access” on June 5, noting that “SLA has traditionally supported accessible information, but not necessarily free.” The statement “encourages ongoing exploration of viable means to expand the availability of scientific and scholarly research,” but falls far short of endorsing OA. The British Columbia Library Association did formally endorse OA in a June 19 resolution—including a statement encouraging libraries to support OA by cataloging and providing access to OA journals, a necessary additional step towards making OA effective.

Brief Commentaries
Hodgkin is president and co-founder of xrefer, a “leading reference aggregator.” The “tipping point” he’s discussing is the next one after the one that starts to bring down the big deal. He quotes John Cox from the Charleston Adviser:

One thing I do know is that a number of major commercial publishers are involved in contingency planning if Open Access reaches the ‘tipping point’ at which the whole industry switches business models. Open Access will not lead to the demise of the large commercial publishers…

Hodgkin agrees with Cox’s implied prediction, that is, when this tipping point is reached there will be a decisive industry-wide switch to an OA model. I’m not nearly as convinced, but I’m not part of the in-
dustry. Hodgkin thinks the decisive moment will be “marked and accelerated” when one or two big publishers endorse and adopt the OA business model. “Scientific publishers respond to the needs of science and at some point the publishers, not the contributors/authors, will do the decisive tipping.” (I’d guess the biggest publishers respond primarily to the needs of stockholders, but never mind…)

He notes the advantage of being an early mover in OA if it looks likely to become a favored model; that there “will be considerable economies of scale” for players with the right infrastructure (although it’s unclear that an effective OA platform requires huge scale to be economical); that the costs of processing papers could be pushed below $100 per paper; and that other parts of scientific publishing could suffer if OA takes over—but not necessarily. He goes on to posit that efficient OA publishing could “encourage the publication of yet more papers” and thus increase the overload of primary research publishing. This might open up new opportunities for secondary and tertiary publishing—review publications, survey and background periodicals, major reference works with synthetic coverage, specialist databases and the like. His conclusion, which strikes me as perfectly reasonable:

“Publishers will not enjoy or acquiesce in losing their most profitable cash cow journals; but there are reasons for thinking that an open access world for primary research will still leave plenty of scope for profit-seeking and innovative scientific publishing.”

George Porter: Two Commentaries at STLQ

Porter offered two brief, cogent commentaries on two different aspects of access to scholarly communications on May 14 and May 26, 2004; you can find them at stlq.info/archives. The first, “The crisis in scholarly communication,” notes that the crisis is into its third decade—but recent years show a change in awareness and concern. Porter’s been “tracking the ripples” caused by the resignation of Donald Knuth and the rest of the editors of Journal of Algorithms (an Elsevier publication) and the ensuing launch of ACM Transactions on Algorithms (discussed here in the March 2004 issue). He sees one ripple in a Stanford Magazine article on the skyrocketing costs of scholarly journals and another in the Report of the Seventh meeting of the Committee on Electronic Information and Communication (CEIC) of the International Mathematical Union.
The May 26 commentary deals with a different set of issues: “When a journal ceases publication.” Porter asks the question, “What happens when a journal ceases to produce new issues?” For print, the received collection stays in place unless librarians decide to get rid of it—control is entirely local.

For ejournals and those only held as etext, however, the choices aren’t as clear. (Porter notes that some STM publishers play fast and loose with ISSN standards, making it harder to track journals.) When a print title changes publishers, libraries barely notice (and don’t usually update cataloging records)—but if an ejournal changes publishers, “volumes may disappear, be transferred, have redirects, or a number of other variations.”

Porter offers distressing examples. Springer Verlag published Nonlinear Science Today beginning in 1992, originally in print only. After becoming a pioneer in e-publishing, the journal dropped its print version in 1994—and ran into trouble, with four issues stretching over 1994 and 1995 and a single-issue “volume 6” in 1996. The articles continued to be available online—until Springer migrated to the SpringerLink MetaPress platform in July 2003. At that point, the website vanished; articles have apparently disappeared entirely. “Springer’s journal title list no longer acknowledges the former existence of the title. It’s simply gone, without explanation, without a trace.” Several other cases appear to be happier, at least so far.

Authors, publishers, and librarians are philosophically united, I trust, on the value of the intellectual record. This is definitely broader than simply ceased journals, but the solutions, which address the broader issue, may have a dramatic impact on the narrower.

Porter notes LOCKSS (see January, July, and August 2003 issues) as one partial solution. It has entered production as of April. A number of important publishers are participating, including Oxford University Press, Kluwer, Blackwell, Nature, and the ones you’d expect—but not Wiley, Elsevier, Taylor & Francis, IEEE, ACM, and a number of other important professional societies.

Time will tell if/when more publishers will discover enlightened self-interest. The prospects for growth in library participation are significant. I am less sanguine for the prospects of growth of publisher participation.

This editorial covers a lot of ground—belittling most web content, noting that most labor involved in academic publishing is unpaid, and noting that printed journals have real costs. Then Filman asks, “What keeps academics from just publishing on the Internet? Very little. Purely Internet journals are springing up.” Publishers recognize the need to make journals available on the web—but that’s constrained such factors as “the actual editing services offered by revenue-generating publications.” He seems to be posing a dichotomy: either traditional journals or internet publications with no revenue stream and, presumably, no editorial work.

“Academic publishers do add value.” Who doubts that? Filman contrasts this with “a world rushing toward the most economical way of doing things” and a population that “has come to believe that…information on the Web is naturally free.” Later: “The continued existence of the formal, paper-based, peer-reviewed publication depends on the (primarily University-based) research community’s resisting the powerful economic forces. Unfortunately, I bet society will take the less-expensive road in the long term.”

Maybe I’m reading too much into this editorial. Maybe Filman isn’t indirectly attacking ejournals and the OA model by directly coupling peer review with traditional publishing and failing to note alternative financial models. Maybe he isn’t implying that, if libraries stop paying whatever traditional academic publishers want, the result will be a loss of editing and quality. But that sure is the way this piece comes across.

Cockerill, Matthew J., “Delayed impact: ISI’s citation tracking choices are keeping scientists in the dark,” BMC Bioinformatics 5:93 (July 12, 2004).

This editorial expands on the statement in the title, with examples from BioMed Central, one of the premier early OA publishers. To wit, ISI’s “impact factor” is heavily used as a measure of STM journal quality—but no impact factor is available until the third year after ISI starts tracking a journal. (The impact factor is “calculated by dividing the number of current citations to articles published in the two previous years by the total number of articles published in the two previous years.”) ISI doesn’t track everything, which makes things worse.

This journal is used as an example. It started publishing in 2000 but ISI didn’t start tracking until 2002, so the first impact factor (for 2004) won’t appear until June 2005. But it’s possible to prepare an
“unofficial impact factor” by using ISI’s cited reference database, which includes all references in tracked journal articles. Using that methodology, the 2003 impact factor for **BMC Bioinformatics** would be roughly 4.9 (235 citations for 48 articles), which would place it in the top 5% of journals covered by ISI. A new author wouldn’t know that: The journal simply doesn’t appear in the 2003 *Journal Citation Report*. This situation with many newer journals may dissuade authors from publishing in those journals.

Cockerill expresses the hope that competition in citation analysis may encourage ISI to “reconsider its policy on citation tracking,” immediately tracking any peer-reviewed journal that meets basic quality standards and can provide reference list data in an appropriate form for automated analysis. “By doing this, ISI would provide a valuable impartial service to the scientific community.”


This is a new web page that attempts “to outline the current pricing models that are being tested for supporting Open Access to electronic journals.” The page links to a number of related pages. The author—presumably David E. Stern (maintainer of the page), although it’s not signed as such—says, “The major concern of the community should be maintaining a revenue stream to support the peer review process.” He goes on to discuss varieties of OA (and near-OA) in existence today, the nature and problems with author charges, and some alternatives.

If you’re thinking about revenue issues and the possibly disruptive effects of OAI and OA journals (see my editorializing at the top), I recommend reading this page—it’s just over three pages—and thinking about it. I’m not saying I agree with the summary; I’m saying this is a thoughtful discussion that leaves me feeling that I don’t know enough to have a useful opinion.

### Longer Articles and Commentaries


If you want a clear, concise understanding of what open access is all about, read this introduction. Better yet, offer it to others who either don’t understand or misunderstand open access. It’s clear, brief (seven
The legal basis of OA is either the consent of the copyright-holder or the public domain, usually the former. Because OA uses copyright-holder consent, or the expiration of copyright, it does not require the abolition, reform, or infringement of copyright.

OA literature is not free to produce or publish. No serious OA advocate has ever said that OA literature is costless to produce, although many argue that it is much less expensive to produce than conventionally published literature, even than online-only toll-access literature.

OA is compatible with priced add-ons.

OA is compatible with peer review… Removing access barriers and reforming peer review are independent projects. OA doesn't presuppose any particular model of peer review…

The chief difference between [OA journals and OA archives or repositories] is that OA journals conduct peer review and OA archives do not.

A common misunderstanding is that OA journals all use the “author pays” business model.

We can be confident that OA journals are economically sustainable because the true costs of peer review, manuscript preparation, and OA dissemination are considerably less than the prices we currently pay for subscription-based journals. There’s more than enough money already committed to the journal-support system. Moreover, as OA spreads libraries will realize large savings from the conversion, cancellation, or demise of subscription-based journals.#

OA archives are economically sustainable because they are inexpensive.#

OA is a kind of access, not a business model.

Open access is not synonymous with universal access.

Libraries. OA solves the pricing crisis for scholarly journals…#

I could raise mild questions about the seventh, eighth, and last of those excerpts (each marked with a # at the end of the quoted section):

- While I’m as confident as Peter Suber that OA journals are economically sustainable (if only because some of them have been around for quite a long time), the argument here supposes that money spent on subscriptions will become available for OA funding mechanisms. That begs the “freeloader” question—those pri-
vate enterprises that never publish research in scholarly journals but make heavy use of such journals, and schools that have few publishing scholars but subscribe to many journals. The final sentence is what I hope for—but it's only directly related to OA journals, not the full scope of OA, and there may be a substantial problem getting from here to there.

- Yes, OA archives are economically sustainable—but are they politically sustainable? That depends on making them integral parts of the ongoing academic missions of the institutions. If an institution closes down a department (which does happen), what motivates it to keep that department’s OA archive active? (This argues for making libraries the political center of institutional archives: No academic institution worthy of the name will close down its library, although many have been systematically underfunding their libraries.)

- OA in and of itself does not solve the pricing crisis for scholarly journals. OA archiving does nothing at all to alleviate the crisis. OA journals may help, to the extent that they replace or force reductions in the price of commercial journals. Otherwise, OA journals increase library costs (albeit slightly): a journal that isn’t cataloged and represented in the library’s full-text pointers is not “there,” no matter how free it may be—and these technical services steps, called “overhead” by some, are not free.

Those nits picked, this is a solid introduction and, I think, about as short as a real introduction to OA can be. Suber plans to revise it; with luck, you’ll see an even better version than the one I downloaded.

King, Donald W., “Should commercial publishers be included in the model for open access through author payment?” *D-Lib Magazine* 10:6 (June 2004).

This is an opinion piece, not a refereed article, a distinction *D-Lib* is careful to make. While King makes the unfortunate simplification of “author payment” for publication-fee schemes, he does say that OA publishing “appears to have real merit and warrants careful examination and testing—a view I have not always held. However, I also believe it is counter-productive for author payment advocates to denigrate commercial publishers (and profit) and exclude them from the open access model. To do so diminishes the chance of success for the model in the long run.”

Obviously I’ve been missing something in the OA discussions. Peter Suber certainly doesn’t argue that for-profit publishers should be
excluded. Jan Velterop considers BioMed Central to be a for-profit publisher. I don't remember seeing this argument from PLoS (although I haven't read all of that group's position papers). Loath as I am to ever raise the issue of straw men, I wonder just which advocates King is talking about?

“The commercial sector has made too many contributions to science to dismiss the sector as being irrelevant and basically self-serving.” I’ve certainly never seen a claim that commercial publishers are “irrelevant,” although “self-serving” strikes me as a fairly accurate description of most of them. There’s nothing wrong with being self-serving as long as you serve others as well.

Once we get through some historical comments, we get to a discussion of actual article processing costs that I find questionable. King asserts that an article processing cost of $3,000 per article is “not atypical for traditional science publishers,” later says that traditional publishers indicate a cost of “from $2,000 to $4,000 with all costs included,” and offers this expert opinion: “I believe that it may typically be in the $3,000 to $4,000 range…”

Based on what little evidence I’ve seen (some of it mentioned in previous issues), “$3,000 to $4,000” is only plausible as a “cost” range if you include as part of “article processing” all corporate overhead, all sales offices, all current profits, all costs of maintaining subscriptions, and all current corporate salaries: In other words, everything except printing and mailing. In other words, $3,000 to $4,000 represents the high end of per-article revenue (except for megajournals like Science)— and even there, Blackwell (for example) claims a much lower figure. PLoS's tables suggest that $1,500 is on the high side for article processing with a 90% rejection rate; BioMed Central expects to become profitable at $525 per article.

King also says, “The investment necessary to replace an existing commercial journal tends to be about $100,000 for start-up, capital requirements, future research and development, and operations. Thus total investment to replace all commercial journals would be on the order of hundreds of millions of dollars…” Here again, I think you need more evidence that an e-journal with no subscription handling, sales force, or other overhead needs such a large startup fund, particularly given the growing numbers of inexpensive shared platforms for manuscript control and publishing workflow. Some established play-
ers are only too happy to work with new OA journal publishers to minimize startup costs.

I don’t know whether to recommend this or not. I agree that commercial publishers should be involved in OA experiments and conversions (and so do most OA advocates that I know of). I don’t believe King’s asserted cost for article processing has been or, in fact, can be demonstrated: It’s implausibly high and assumes that today’s high profit margins, huge corporate overhead, massive subsidies for non-publishing activities of society publishers, and costs of maintaining subscriptions and restricted electronic access should all be maintained in an OA world. Maybe I’m reading it wrong.


While this presentation carries a somewhat-unnecessary copyright notice, it also carries a Creative Commons Attribution License note, allowing unrestricted use with proper citation: You could use this in a for-profit book without asking Johnson.

It’s a good piece from a SPARC official, well worth reading for a library perspective on OA. Johnson points out that the STM pricing crisis has been going on “for as long as most of us can remember” and that, in the print world, “this was seen mainly as a library issue,” largely invisible to faculty. It’s becoming a broader issue. Quoting Ross Atkinson: “This is not a serials crisis, but rather a broader crisis in scholarly communications.”

Johnson notes Big Deals and increasing library resistance to such lock-in forces, including a Goldman Sachs survey that nearly a quarter of librarians planned to cancel or reduce Elsevier ScienceDirect subscriptions, with another third demanding price cuts. He notes the extent to which, paradoxically, the largest publishers can actually gain market share by increasing prices, as libraries are forced to cancel other subscriptions to retain the top journals from the biggest players.

Johnson calls OA “a scalable solution that addresses the economic dilemma of libraries at the same time as it exploits the potential of the networked environment.” He refers to OA as “an outcome that may be supported in a range of ways with an infinite variety of business models.” A table from J. Willinsky shows not two but nine types of OA,
although not all of them represent true open access. He quotes Alastair Dryburgh on the likelihood that the high-profit commercial publishers will be early adopters of OA journal publishing: “They may in fact need to be dragged kicking and screaming into the new world.” Dryburgh thinks this could happen either because funding bodies insist on OA or because effective harvesting of OA archives for a significant proportion of the literature leads to the kind of disruptive changes suggested in my editorial comments (“subscription attrition will turn into a rout and open access will become the only viable model for the publication of primary research”).

Johnson says—and Peter Suber also notes, below—that the Sabo bill never progressed, “but it sent shock waves through the scientific publishing industry.” That’s probably good on both counts. Discussing scholarly societies and OA, Johnson notes, “many societies…are profoundly skeptical of open access… Typically they fear the disappearance of surpluses from institutional subscriptions that support other activities of the society.” He goes on to discuss the American Society for Cell Biology, which runs a profitable annual conference and is moving toward open access. How fast will societies move? One major society has a white paper entitled “Open Access to [society’s name] Publications by 2020?” That’s all deliberate speed with a vengeance!

Perhaps the greatest obstacles to open access today are: the risk that journal publishers will not recover sufficient revenue to cover their publishing costs or generate a sufficient surplus; and lack of author awareness of the benefits of depositing their work in open access repositories.

Libraries and their institutions are in a position to do something about these obstacles. For example, they can: Establish institutional repositories; Help faculty archive their research papers…; Help open access journals…become known…; Insure that scholars…know how to find open access journals and archives…; As [OA journals] proliferate…libraries can cancel over-priced journals…; Engage funding bodies in a discussion of [OA]; Familiarize faculty, staff, and administrators with the issues. [Note: These clauses are shorter versions of bullet points in the original.]

Johnson concludes, in part: “The essence of the case for open access is the notion that the public good—the societal benefits derived of our research investment—is better served when barriers to sharing of research have been removed. That belief aligns well with library values.” Indeed.
As always, if you’re interested in OA, you should be getting SOAN, so I’ll point out just a few highlights from these three issues.

June’s issue focuses on Elsevier’s postprint archiving permissions (which are tricky but may still be a “breakthrough”), asserts that authors are the key players in making OA happen and suggests “author-centric strategies for achieving OA,” and proposes “unbinding projects” to provide retrospective open access to the key research articles on various topics, based on authoritative bibliographies.

In July, Suber continues to discuss Elsevier’s new policy and some of its implications—and here notes that “OA to the literature” in the form of archiving isn’t inherently “the kind of OA that helps libraries.” (Am I getting through, or is Suber hearing this grump from others as well?) That lengthy discussion is the only long essay in the issue, which as usual includes summaries of major OA developments and links to relevant articles.

August includes lead stories on “two of the most significant open-access developments in our history. It’s uncanny how similar they are and how, without planning, they were announced in the same week, reinforcing each other’s message and momentum.”

The second development is the UK House of Commons report discussed below. The first, which had slipped entirely under my radar (“NIH” doesn’t even appear in my running index for this volume), puts some teeth behind the NIH comments noted earlier. To wit, the U.S. House Appropriations Committee has adopted a recommendation for next year’s federal budget that would have NIH put a condition on its research grants: Articles based on NIH-funded research would be deposited in the freely-available PubMed Central six months after publication—and if NIH paid any part of the publication costs, the article would be deposited (and freely available) immediately upon publication. The first part is a baby step toward OA, establishing a limit to publishers’ embargo periods; the second is a huge step forward if it survives the legislative process.

Suber offers “ten annotations to help understand the proposal.” The annotations are well worth reading (a constant reminder for SOAN, but worth repeating in this instance). The ninth and tenth deal with some early and seemingly inevitable attacks on the proposal—first, that it diverts funds from NIH’s research mission; second, that we
should “let the market work.” The diversion of funds argument—from the executive director of the American Physiological Society—includes an estimate that the new scheme would cost NIH $75 to $100 million (per year?); an estimate labeled “too high by at least an order of magnitude” by the director of PubMed Central. Suber’s response to the “let the market work” objection is one I consider nearly unassailable: “Almost every observer not paid by publishers believes that the journal publishing system is dysfunctional and unsustainable… Insofar as it’s a market, it has failed.” And, to be sure, this calls for mandated OA archiving, not OA publishing; by itself, it does little to undermine overpriced journals.

Suber goes on to contrast this plan with the unfortunate Sabo bill: “Procedurally it’s still alive but politically it’s been dead for some time… It died because it was written so that even OA proponents could not line up behind it.” The NIH proposal does not affect copyright law, doesn’t accidentally include materials that need to be excluded, and appears to be a nonpartisan or bipartisan effort. Suber calls it “an extraordinary step forward.”

In summarizing the UK report, Suber compares the U.S. and UK developments; it’s a good comparison that I won’t bother to repeat. Esposito, Joseph J., “The devil you don’t know: The unexpected future of Open Access publishing,” First Monday 9:8 (August 2004).

You may have seen references to this article in various weblogs. I believe a thoughtful, careful, eloquent, dispassionate evaluation of Esposito’s arguments and assertions is warranted. I’m afraid I can’t provide it. The forest of red on these 16 pages after I made my preliminary pass seems to rule out dispassionate comment.

A first-pass commentary ran to more than 2,000 words. It was more of a rant than a commentary. I’m not sure Esposito deserves that much space. Doing a little checking, I realized that he also wrote an article about a year ago in First Monday—one that, after struggling with a CHEAP SHOT commentary for a while, I finally chose to ignore entirely.

I am not, as you might already guess, recommending that you read this as a serious treatment of the likely future of OA publishing or publishing in general. After reading it the first time (and washing my hands afterwards), I set it aside in the hope that someone else would provide the deconstruction this construct so richly deserves. I still hope that.
I find Esposito’s treatment sneering; insulting to libraries, researchers, and the public; and singularly devoid of fact or logical argument. He’s one of those who appears to see libraries as nothing more than article-pushers; he seems to think that libraries only license publications (which will come as a shock to acquisitions librarians); he implies that OA is coupled to loss of copyright; and he dismisses peer review as an artifact of the Gutenberg era. He claims OA advocates assert that it will “reduce costs to zero or some modest mark-up over zero,” a claim I’ve certainly never seen for OA publishing advocates. He accuses OA advocates of having the “Change One Thing worldview,” an unjustified insult to Peter Suber, George Porter, Jan Velterop, the founders of PLoS and many other thoughtful advocates. He seems to equate OA publishing with weblogs and vanity publishing. He dismisses the usefulness of research papers outside the closed circle with a sentence that deserves direct quotation: “By definition, if someone without sophisticated training (that is, our Man in the Street) could even understand a research paper, then it can’t be a research paper.”

Esposito’s thesis (a dignified term given the sneering tone of much of this paper) is that OA will vastly increase the cost of scholarly publishing because publishing’s really all about marketing, and once researchers are paying for it themselves, they’ll pay oodles more to get more visibility and lots of added services. Or something like that. I’m so angry by the time I get to that part of the paper that I may not be following it properly. Not recommended.

**Scientific Publications: Free for all?**

Volume 1 of this report is impressive—and long: 107 pages of small type, the equivalent of a fair-sized book. The conclusions and recommendations come to 82 numbered paragraphs filling 10 pages. Any serious commentary on the publication would take at least ten Cites & Insights pages, even assuming I was qualified to do the commentary. Instead, here are just a few interesting points raised within the document, not including the conclusions and recommendations (which appear in boldface within the report proper)—not that these are all new points, but they show a little of the considerable depth of the UK committee’s understanding of the situation. There are also some warnings scattered throughout—including an explicit note that “author-pays” funding, in the UK at least, is likely to come straight out of library budgets. You might refer back to the June commentaries and
note the extent to which the committee took commentaries seriously—or not:

- Peculiarities of the [STM article] market: “The point of purchase is not always the same as the point of use. Libraries purchase journals on behalf of their community of users. This characteristic of the market has the effect of insulating readers from the consequences of fluctuations in journal prices… There is a lack of substitutability in the market…”

- “We understand that many journal articles are esoteric… Nonetheless, we cannot see what damage could be done by allowing the public to examine the articles for themselves. Unlike Dr Jarvis, the possibility of better-informed patients ‘marching into surgeries and asking things’ does not fill us with horror.”

- “Rising STM journal prices also have an impact on the library’s provision of other information.”

- “There is widespread discontent amongst libraries with bundling.”

- “Usage does not equate to usefulness. Niche journals publish research of minority interest that is nonetheless of great importance to those who work in the field.”

- “It has been argued that public money is used at three stages in the publishing process: to fund the research project; to pay the salaries of academics who carry out peer review for no extra payment; and to fund libraries to purchase scientific publications.”

- “The rate of £11 ($20) per article reviewed strikes us as an acceptable basis for an analysis of costs.”

- [Credit Suisse First Boston]: “We estimate that printing and distribution costs are 15% of total costs.”

- In the UK, printed publications are exempt from 17.5% Value Added Tax. Digital publications are not.

- “We found it worrying that academics did not take an interest in what happens to their research after it has been published…. Academics have no financial incentives to self-archive.”

- “We suspect that the costs per article of author-pays publishing supplied to us by commercial publishers are exaggerated.”

- “Any transition to an author-pays model would entail the transfer of some of the library’s funds to the research funders to enable them to meet publication costs.”
“If learned societies are valued by their communities, which we believe to be the case, members are likely to remain loyal irrespective of the publishing model employed by their society.”

“Provision of STM journals in the UK is unsatisfactory.”

The Recommendations

Peter Suber’s summary of the 82 recommendations runs to 12 pages as printed out from his SOAF posting. What follows is further excerpted from Suber’s July 19, 2004 posting (with the first part modified in the August 2, 2004 SPARC Open Access Newsletter). I’m leaving out most of the recommendations (and particularly most UK-specific recommendations) in the interests of space.

Here’s my summary of the major recommendations:

1. The government should provide funds for all UK universities to launch open-access institutional repositories.

2. Government funding agencies should require faculty receiving research grants to deposit copies of their articles in their institutional repositories.

3. The government should create a fund to help authors pay the processing fees charged by open-access journals. The committee is not yet ready to endorse the upfront funding model for OA journals (which it unfortunately calls the “author-pays” model), but wants to create such a fund in order to promote further experimentation with the model.

4. The government should develop a wider, long-term strategy that includes open-access journals “as a matter of urgency.”

5. Journal prices are unacceptably high and publisher justifications for them are not credible. The Office of Fair Trading (the UK office investigating monopolistic business practices) should monitor the journal publishing industry and issue biennial public reports on the “state of the market.”

6. The government should investigate whether leaving copyright in the hands of authors would have a “disproportionately negative impact” on authors or research. If it would not, then government funding agencies should require their grantees to retain copyright in articles based on funded research.

7. All these steps can and should be undertaken without jeopardizing “rigorous and independent peer review.”

8. The government should fund the British Library to take on the long-term preservation of digital scholarship.

A few excerpts from the conclusions and recommendations:
8. All researchers, regardless of the nature of their institution, should be granted access to the scientific journals they need to carry out their work effectively.

10. Teaching is a crucial university function. Universities should be permitted, within reason, to derive maximum value from the digital journals to which they subscribe by using them for legitimate teaching purposes. We recommend that future licensing deals negotiated by the Joint Information Systems Committee explicitly include provisions to enable journal articles, whether print or digital, to be used for teaching purposes.

11. It is not for either publishers or academics to decide who should, and who should not, be allowed to read scientific journal articles. We are encouraged by the growing interest in research findings shown by the public. It is in society's interest that public understanding of science should increase. Increased public access to research findings should be encouraged by publishers, academics and Government alike.

12. We are not convinced that journal articles are consistently available to members of the public through public libraries.

13. Digitisation should facilitate, not restrict access.

16. We recommend that the Joint Information Systems Committee develop an independent set of measures, agreed by subscribers and publishers alike, to monitor trends in journal pricing. This will help exert pressure on the publishing industry to self-regulate more effectively and will give libraries and other users greater knowledge when they are deciding which subscriptions to take.

17. It is not for us to pronounce on the acceptability of the profit margins secured by private sector companies. Nonetheless, high publisher profit margins need to be set against the context of faltering library budgets and an impending crisis in STM journals provision…

20. Increasing usage rates do not equate to an increased ability for libraries to pay for journal bundles. The recent availability of usage statistics should not be used as a justification for publishers to raise their prices.

21. Although libraries may aspire to provide access to every scientific journal, they cannot afford to do this. It is inevitable that difficult choices between a number of journals with lower usage rates and impact factors will have to be made. Nonetheless, these decisions should be made in response to local user needs rather than as a side effect of bundling.

22. Current levels of flexibility within the journal bundle do not present libraries with value for money…

24. We do not doubt the central importance of peer review to the STM publishing process. Nonetheless, we note a tendency for publishers to
inflated the cost to them of peer review in order to justify charging high prices...

26. We are persuaded that the costs to publishers associated with digitisation will reduce over time. Consequently, we would no longer expect these costs to be used as a justification for steep increases in prices...

37. Pressure on library journal acquisitions budgets has resulted in cancelled subscriptions and has contributed to a decline in book purchasing. This compromises the library's ability to provide the full range of services required by its user community.

38. There is undoubtedly some scope for libraries to make efficiency savings, as there is for most organisations. Nonetheless, the valuable services provided by the library are expensive and staff-intensive. It is unlikely that libraries will have more to spend on acquisitions until they see an increase in budgets.

41. It is disappointing that many academics are content to ignore the significant difficulties faced by libraries. Until they start to see the provision of journals as, in part, their problem, the situation will not improve.

42. Elsevier is no sudden convert to Open Access. The company has seen the direction of trends in publishing and has acted accordingly to minimise criticism of its current policies. We are in little doubt that Elsevier timed the announcement of its new policy on self-archiving to pre-empt the publication of this Report...

43. Institutions need an incentive to set up repositories...

47. Institutional repositories should accept for archiving articles based on negative results, even when publication of the article in a journal is unlikely. This accumulated body of material would be a useful resource for the scientific community...

54. Peer review is a key element in the publishing process and should be a pillar of institutional repositories...

58. We see institutional repositories as operating alongside the publishing industry. In the immediate term they will enable readers to gain free access to journal articles whilst the publishing industry experiments with new publishing models, such as the author–pays model.

60. The evidence produced so far suggests that the author–pays model could be viable. We recommend that Government mobilise the different interest groups to support a comprehensive independent study into the costs associated with author–pays publishing...

62. Although early indications are positive, it is too early to assess the impact that author–pays publishing has had on access to scientific publications.
66. In order to succeed, most author–pays publishers, like everyone else, will have to publish articles of a high quality. It is not, therefore, within the interest of journals at the higher end of the market to lessen the rigour of peer review. Nonetheless, there is a risk that lower quality journals might seek to reduce their quality threshold in order to generate profit. Were the author–pays publishing model to prevail it would be vital to ensure that peer review was not compromised in order to retain confidence in the integrity of the publishing process.

67. The introduction of a submission fee would be an important step towards ensuring the quality of scientific publications and we strongly recommend that author–pays publishers introduce this system.

73. We are satisfied that, by scaling publication with research costs, the author–pays publishing model would ensure a fairer global distribution of the costs of publishing research findings.

75. Institutional repositories should be a key component of any long–term strategy to ensure the preservation of digital publications.

76. The British Library has a crucial role to play in the preservation of digital publications, both strategically and practically. This is an expensive process…

82. As is the case with any process, peer review is not an infallible system and to a large extent depends on the integrity and competence of the people involved and the degree of editorial oversight and quality assurance of the peer review process itself. Nonetheless we are satisfied that publishers are taking reasonable measures to maintain high standards of peer review.

Early Comments and Reactions

A flurry of press releases and articles followed the report. BioMed Central, SPARC and PLoS were pleased with the report; some commercial publishers were not. Sir Crispin Davis of Reed Elsevier called it “daft” and asserted that universities did not have the time or inclination to create their own archives, according to The Guardian. Davis claimed the academic world wasn’t responding to OA—“it’s been around five years and its market share is still around one percent.” Jan Velterop asserted that OA publishing will be “the most predominant model for scientific research within the next five years,” according to an August 11, 2004 Jemima Kiss item at dotJournalism.

The IEE “expressed grave reservations regarding the Science and Technology Committee’s call for scientific publishers to move to an
open-access publishing model…” IEE’s July 21 release cited three “fundamental problems”:

First, such a model inevitably increases the pressure to publish, as the more that is published the greater the revenue. There is therefore a risk of undermining the peer review process leading to a reduction in quality.

Secondly, the charge to authors will be substantial, making it less likely that outstanding work from poorer countries will be published.

Thirdly, large commercial organizations with substantial research activities publish relatively little…but are major purchasers of published material. Under the present model, they pay a fair price for this. However, under the ‘author pays’ model they will have free access. This will remove income from the system and inevitably increase the charge to authors.

Will there ever be a press release questioning OA publishing that doesn’t use the first “fundamental problem,” one of the myths that will not die—and one that’s nicely addressed in the report? Similarly, there seems to be a need to ignore the fact that virtually all OA publishers automatically waive fees for authors from poorer countries. The third issue was specifically addressed in the report—which, notably, does not call for scientific publishers to move to OA publishing! My father’s an engineer; I’ve always assumed that engineers cared deeply about facts. I find this press release terribly sad.
Library Access to Scholarship
(November 2004)

As usual, the last couple of months have seen lots of talk (on lists, weblogs, e-sources and in print) and maybe some action, although the action's not final as I write this.

Stirring the Pot

Sometimes it’s hard to take statements at face value. Consider “How To Access Medical Information,” a two-page August 2004 statement from the Professional/Scholarly Publishing Division of AAP, the Association of American Publishers. This statement informs us that “publishers and their library partners have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in the past decade to improve access to the biomedical journal literature.” “Library partners”—what a wonderful turn of phrase! The publishers create electronic services to “deliver this information directly to the desktop of physicians, researchers, and other health professionals” and “other communities get access” because publishers kindly make those services available through libraries, “either under license or via free access.” (It's that “under license” that accounts for much of that “hundreds of millions of dollars,” of course.)

Eight bullet points follow to show how committed publishers are to making “medical research results widely and readily available.” Publishers “actively participate in literature retrieval systems”—and you have to read that one carefully indeed. It highlights PubMed, “a free web-based service with data about the biomedical journal literature” [emphasis added] and “web links that enable both medical research professionals and the general public to locate the full text of the articles, which are made available from the publishers’ own web sites.” Note that “made available” may and typically does mean “at the price publishers choose to charge.”
“Publishers enable electronic access to their journals via flexible licensing arrangements…” and “most licenses let libraries give free access to any member of the public who is permitted to use the library on a walk-in basis. In the United States, most state-funded university libraries are open to the public.” Those “flexible” licenses come at enormous cost, of course.

“Publishers endorse the practice of interlibrary loan”—but the bullet point is silent as to whether electronic licenses allow for ILL (which varies). “Publishers offer free and immediate alerting of published research via their own websites”—and here full-text articles are mentioned, with prices stated thus: “often as low as $3.” Other bullets note that publishers work with document delivery services (almost always at a price), that “many” medical publishers make full-text articles available for free “either immediately, or within a period of months or a year after the publication date,” that they participate in “innovative licensing arrangements” to encourage access in developing countries, and that they’ve created new services to bring the most relevant research to the attention of practitioners and consumers—mentioning in particular HighWire Press and WebMD. I wasn’t aware that HighWire Press was created by publishers (I thought it was Mike Keller’s idea carried out by Stanford University Libraries), but what do I know? The closing paragraph:

The cooperative and aggressive actions of publishers to improve access to the medical literature means that in contrast to the situation a decade ago, where access was limited to the hundreds or thousands of paper copies in circulation, tens of millions of researchers and physicians now have desktop access—and the latest advances in medical research are made available rapidly to the interested public through their libraries or the publishers themselves.

A wonderful statement—but its timing, shortly after the NIH proposal to mandate OAI archiving for all that medical literature funded by NIH grants, strikes me as a little too convenient. If you read the statement quickly, you’d think all that medical information was readily available to everyone for nothing or almost nothing. You’d be wrong. All in all, this strikes me as a cleverly worded attempt to establish that all’s right with the world, and those government bureaucrats and OA meddlers are just trying to solve a problem that doesn’t exist. Maybe I’m paranoid, and this is actually nothing more than a sincere attempt by AAP/PSP to publicize their services. If so, I apologize in advance.
For the rest of this essay, I’m going to do something I should have done back in June: Provide a numbered key to the standard arguments against OA publishing (as opposed to unique arguments such as “it distracts attention and money from OAI archiving”), so I can simply list the numbers used in specific pieces. For this issue at least, here’s a subset of those arguments:

1. STM publishing has developed over centuries and works just great as it is.
2. $1,500 (or $500 or $525) can’t possibly pay the real costs per article; OA isn’t sustainable without charging ($3,000, $4,500, whatever).
3. OA publishing weakens or undermines peer review.
4. Research grants don’t include publication funding.
5. OA/article-fee publishing gives well-funded scientists advantages over others.
6. OA/article-fee publishing will prevent scientists in developing nations from publishing.
7. OA publishing undermines professional societies that subsidize their activities through journal profits.

I'm qualifying 5 and 6 because not all OA publishing involves article fees; quite a bit is sponsored in some other manner.

Martin Frank, Executive Director of APS (American Physiological Society in this case) published “Open Does Not Mean Free!” in The Physiologist 47:4. He offers arguments 1, 2, 4, and 5. Additionally, he suggests that it’s unrealistic to expect NIH to come up with the “full cost of publication at a time of budgetary restraints.” Interestingly, Frank cites the scientific journal arena as “over 5,000 scientific journals,” one of the lowest numbers I’ve seen. I tend to agree with Frank’s final statement, but I’m not sure that it has much to do with NIH’s proposal to require the equivalent of OAI archiving for government-funded research results, which if done in government laboratories would automatically be in the public domain:

We believe that a free society allows for the co-existence of many publishing models, including an author pays model, and therefore believe that it would be foolish and dangerous to do away with one model for another that remains largely unproven.
Now if I could only find the dragon that Frank’s trying to slay—the powerful advocate who calls for immediately shutting down all traditional journals.

Fred Spilhous, another professional society Executive Director (American Geophysical Union this time), sent a letter to The Economist in August objecting to their article on Open Access (which Spilhous puts in scare quotes). He calls it a “utopian vision” containing “fatal flaws.” He uses argument 3 and adds suggestions of government interference with publishing and some other odd questions. He calls the results of OA “scavenging in a huge garbage heap.” Peter Suber’s quick commentary includes the note that arguing government interference at the point of publication is odd—since most funded research is already funded by governments. Suber also notes that “upfront funding” (i.e., article-fee funding) is not the only funding model for OA journals.

Remember Springer’s disingenuous “Open Choice” initiative, where it offers free access if you pay a mere $3,000 per article? Derk Haank “blasted critics” of the initiative and, of course, emphasized Argument 2. His response to the objection that Springer still insists on taking copyright? Don’t laugh: “Copyright is not that important to us, but we are using it here as a mechanism to protect the author from having articles taken by other commercial publishers.” Right.

Speaking of Martin Frank (a few paragraphs back), he and two other APS officials wrote “A not-for-profit publisher’s perspective on open access,” which will appear in Serials Review 30:4. It’s an invited paper, available as a 16-page manuscript. The article describes “A decade of progress” in “how far STM publishing has come in terms of providing electronic access to information” (a variant of #1), including APS’ own experience; includes a section on “Government-run scientific publishing” that somehow manages to include PLoS; and continues with a bunch of reasons that OA is a bad thing. I would say that the article is valuable as a history of APS and non-profit experience—but in fact, only about four paragraphs (less than one page) are about APS. This is mostly another anti-OA screed. It’s a different one, though: I only recognize #1 and #2 from the standard list, although #2 is driven into the ground. Other arguments include flat assertions that PLoS and BioMed Central institutional memberships are paid for by libraries (certainly not true of national memberships); that somehow allowing a tradeoff between prepaid membership fees and per-article processing charges is directly comparable to (or at least no less objectionable than) “using
subscriptions as ransom for access”; and a direct attack on the NIH/centralized repository approach based on the idea that modern searching means it doesn’t matter where documents are deposited.

Some elements of the article are simply strange, such as the early statement that “ten years ago…the era of online publication had not yet begun,” which for a 2004 paper is truly ahistorical. (I just looked up the Public-Access Computer Systems Review special issue on e-journals, which included essays relating to at least six of the e-journals already in existence: It appeared in early 1991. E-journals go back at least to 1987.) Somehow, the fact that STM content is far more accessible now than it was in the past (true) is offered as the answer to those who say that government-funded science should be fully accessible. I see some confusion, I think deliberate, between OA publishing and OAI archiving. The escalation of claims for the true cost of online publishing is escalated once more, with a claim that the cost per article of *Journal of Clinical Investigation* is around $6,000—that’s expensive processing! And the numbers involved with APS’ experiment in “author-pays” publishing seem a little odd. *Physiological Genomics* will make papers immediately available for a $1,500 fee; otherwise there’s a one-year embargo, Only 10% of authors have paid the fee. But the institutional online subscription price for *Physiological Genomics* is $205. That price raises the question: What are the true costs of article processing for that reasonably priced online journal? $1,500 seems high—but I don’t have access to the full set of numbers.

At the same time, much of the article is reasonable, at least to my mind. If Michael Eisen of PLoS really did call it “morally superior” to *Nature*, *Science*, and others, you can count me out of that particular crusade. The authors say “Not-for-profit journals are not generally seen as the source of the cost increase problem,” and I believe that’s true—noting that some journals issued under the aegis of professional societies are most definitely profitable, whatever their tax status.

*The Creative Librarian* commented on this article in a September 22, 2004 post. CT notes some of the good points but also notes, “The authors seem to be blind as to how bad the [library costs for subscriptions] problem has gotten… The current model they consider a ‘successful evolution’ is actually an unsustainable house of cards.” “The problem with most of the article is that the authors do not distinguish between the not-for-profit publishers, who according to this article have been reasonable in price increases, and the for-profit set who
seem to be trying to drive libraries bankrupt. It’s possible that a separate set of rules needs to be made for not-for-profits but the authors offer no solutions other than living with the problem and hoping it will sort itself out.”

Another in our parade of Society Executive Directors Against Open Access Publishing, (SEDAOP?), John H. Ewing offered his “point of view” in the October 1, 2004 Chronicle of Higher Education: “Open access to journals won’t lower prices.” He does admit that journals publishing is in crisis, then asserts that OA arguments represent “misdirection” of the sort magicians use. Further, he says it’s a mistake, based on “information must be free” ideology.

I see versions of arguments 1, 2, 3, 5 and 7. He deals with access issues, in part, as follows: “Of course, e-mail makes it possible for another scholar to ask an author for a copy of an article and receive it the same day.” Problem solved—as long as you’re part of the inner circle and therefore (a) know of the article, (b) know or can find out the author’s email address, and (c) are yourself of a stature such that you can assume the author will respond to your email instead of deleting it unread. Ewing also says, “Commercial publishers are delighted by the inadvertent misdirection because it diverts attention from the exorbitant prices they charge.” While I am aware that some OAI advocates don’t care about exorbitant journal prices, I will assert that no library advocate of OA, whether OA publishing or OAI archiving, has had their attention diverted from the prices of the big commercial publishers.

Part of me wants to buy into Ewing’s essay because he directly addresses the problem I care most about: Costs to libraries. His solution?

Scholars and librarians have to stop dealing with high-priced journals, as authors, editors, referees, or subscribers. Soon the publishers of less-expensive journals will grow, and those of more-expensive journals will decline. The less-expensive journals will publish more papers, making them more efficient, and society publishers will earn slightly more profit, which they can reinvest in their disciplines.

If only it were that simple. If every ARL library simply stopped all of its subscriptions to journals published by Elsevier, Springer, and others of their ilk, that would certainly solve the STM-related budget problems of those libraries. Let’s not mention the problems that would be caused by that solution, particularly for scholars at those institutions that have substituted access for ownership and don’t have back
print runs of the journals involved. Would the libraries survive the
campus political firestorm to enjoy their improved budget status?

Finally (for this section), here’s “Electronic cultures and clinics:
Reasons to be hysterical (and hopeful),” the 2004 Elsevier Library
Connect medical library lecture, given May 25, 2004 at the Medical
Library Association Annual Meeting by Dr. Richard Horton, editor-in-
chief of The Lancet. It’s a transcript of what must have been an engag-
ing talk. Indeed, I found the first nine pages (of 15 total) fascinating,
and was taken aback to read the claim that one of the key OA declara-
tions (“Berlin II”) apparently calls for the replacement of conventional
scholarly communications, which is overreaching. Unfortunately, after
that, we get arguments 1, 3, 7, 2, and 5 (in that order), with an aston-
ishing $10,000 per paper offered as a realistic number. Additionally,
Horton makes a statement that I will assert is untrue and am certain is
unprovable. He quotes a statement from a Wellcome Trust report,
“Open Access means that for learned societies they have quote, noth-
ing to fear.” To which he says: “Not one person who works in a learned
society believes that.” Not one? There is not a single learned society in
the world with one employee who believes OA can’t harm the society?
There are no learned societies that have adopted OA and can’t be
harmed by its progress? Even the mighty Elsevier editorial offices don’t
have that kind of competitive intelligence.

The Nature Discussion Concludes

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK in Cites & Insights 4:7 discussed seven of the
first 25 (or so) essays in an ongoing Nature “Web focus: Access to the
literature.” That discussion has now apparently concluded, given the
unsigned 35th essay that’s unsigned and seems to comment on the fo-
rum as a whole. You can get to the whole set of essays at
www.nature.com/nature/focus/accessdebate/. A few comments on the
last six essays, in numeric order:

Sally Morris (ALPSP) and Christine Baldwin

“What do societies do with their publishing surpluses?” That question
introduces the results of a survey of society publishers—admittedly
skewed toward UK societies and those publishing through Blackwell
Publishing—and discusses some consequences of reducing those sur-
pluses. It’s an expanded form of #7, and as usual says nothing to the
question of why libraries should be held responsible for funding all
those other activities. (I discussed this survey in *Cites & Insights* 4:11, the most recent *LIBRARY ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP* essay.)

**Ian Rowlands, Dave Nicholas, Paul Huntington**

These three, from the Centre for Information Behaviour and the Evaluation of Research (you can guess it’s British!), offered “Journal publishing: what do authors want?” It’s based on a huge survey—91,500 authors who had published in ISI-indexed journals over the past 18 months, with 3,787 fully completed responses. While the responses are interesting, they mostly support the sense that most scholars still don’t pay much attention to library budget problems or, in fact, the outrageous prices charged for the journals in which they publish. Those are someone else’s problems—and maybe that’s how scholars should react.

Most scholars want to “narrowcast”—they want to reach researchers in their own fields. Most (but only 74%) want to reach researchers in other fields, and a slim majority (56%) want to reach education professionals. Only 40% care about reaching policy makers and 18% care about reaching the general public. Scholars want “the imprimatur of quality and integrity that a peer-reviewed, high-impact title can offer, together with reasonable levels of publisher service.” What other results would we expect?

Some other numbers are double-edged swords. The essay says authors are “generally happy with their access to the journals literature”—but only 61% say they can “currently get hold of most or all of the titles they need.” That leaves 39% who are shy of access. Sure, there’s more access than five years ago (although 11% say it’s worse). Then there are the “author-pays” possibilities, limited to the 18% of authors who knew something about OA and worded rather nicely: “If all journals were Open Access, what do you consider would be a reasonable payment to have your paper published in the best journal in your field?”

49% of authors still said “nothing,” with another 46% offering less than $1,000; only 6% of the largest group of respondents (medicine, allied health and veterinary science) would be willing to pay more than $1,000, and no field showed more than 19% (earth and planetary sciences, but that’s really 13 respondents!). Overall, only 16% were willing to pay more than $500. The authors add commentary suggesting that most scholarly authors don’t really think that pub-
lishers add much value—which may help explain their disinclination to see author payments.

**John Ewing, American Mathematical Society**

Here’s Ewing again—and this time it’s personal. His essay, “The orthodoxy of Open Access!,” could be considered libelous if he named names. Here’s the statement:

The proponents of OA are not just offering one more good idea; they are promoting the one true faith, and they demand that we all become converts.

He quotes the Budapest Initiative, PLoS, and Harold Varmus. I would say he reads quite a bit into their statements, but—more importantly—there’s a lot more to OA than PLoS/Varmus and Budapest. He goes on to squeeze versions of 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 into a relatively short essay. Ewing raises some good points, but does so in such an offensive manner that I’m hard put to recommend the essay. Maybe I’m wrong: Maybe you can only be an OA proponent if you adhere 100% to the Budapest/PLoS line (assuming that’s a single line). But, to quote Ewing, I’m not Dopey…and I don’t believe it.

**Bernard Ross, Association of Computing Machinery**

Ross entitles his essay “Electronic publishing models and the public good” and comes to an unusual early conclusion: He believes that authors are on the side of OA and don’t care about publishers, while librarians find themselves more closely allied with publishers. I believe the survey cited above (Rowlands et al) suggests fairly forcefully that most authors know nothing of OA and that, of those who do, most won’t support the economic model. On the other hand, I agree with some of his reasons librarians might understand the concerns of publishers: librarians know that publishing isn’t free, appreciate publications, believe that publishers add value, and understand that electronic publishing can be complicated. I suppose librarians “have shared similar anxieties about being disintermediated along with publishers”—but some publishers seem as willing to dismiss the contributions of libraries and librarians as are some within the OA camp. (Whenever someone calls the 70% of academic library budgets that goes for salaries and the like “overhead” I want to scream, but who would hear me?)

On the whole, I think this is a good essay, worth reading and thinking about. He uses the higher range of cost estimates for articles
($1,500 to $5,000), but contrasts that with estimates of the actual research cost per article published: $50,000, $150,000, or $250,000 to $300,000! Given the amount of least-publishable-unit publishing that happens, those are truly astonishing numbers. I wonder about this comment: “As Open Access costs shift away from the user to the producer, scientists find themselves becoming publishers.” I don’t understand: By that logic, libraries are currently the publishers, and I don’t believe that to be true.

A declaration of interest at the end raises a touch of argument #7, but only a touch.

Kate Worlock, EPS

At its start, this essay—"The pros and cons of Open Access"—appears fairly even-handed, but as it continues I note that arguments against OA are seldom refuted, while statements for OA seem to carry direct counters. Arguments 2 (at great detail, but in a form that biases the discussion hugely toward traditional publishing) and 7 predominate, and Worlock throws in the association of OA with Stewart Brand’s silly “information wants to be free.”

Unsigned: “Experiments in publishing”

Nature is a traditional publisher. Why would we expect that the publisher’s summary of this discussion would be even-handed? Arguments #2 and #7, and an indirect but strong whiff of #1, show up along with direct attacks on (Nature’s interpretation of) the NIH proposal and a pretty good indirect roundhouse on the UK study. Most of this essay is a checklist of “how publishing adds value.” It’s a good list, worth reading as a reminder of why effective refereed publishing and dissemination will have non-trivial costs, no matter what the publication model.

National Institutes of Health

Action and discussion on the NIH open-access plan continue. A few points along the way:

- On August 24, 2004, a press release announced the formation of the Alliance for Taxpayer Access, “an unprecedented coalition of public interest groups” that will urge NIH and Congress “to ensure that peer-reviewed articles on taxpayer-funded research at NIH become fully accessible and available on line and at no extra cost to the American public.” The new group does represent a broad
range of groups, including AALL, ALA, ACRL, ARL, the Medical Library Association, SPARC and a number of other library associations and university libraries, but also many health and disease-specific advocacy groups. Details are at www.taxpayeraccess.org.

Two days later, a group of 25 Nobel laureates sent an open letter to Congress “to express our strong support for the House Appropriations Committee’s recent direction to NIH to develop an open, taxpayer access policy requiring that a complete electronic text of any manuscript reporting work supported by NIH grants or contracts be supplied to the National Library of Medicine’s PubMed Central.” That lengthy sentence does state the precise support in full; it’s followed by several paragraphs about the importance of science and the need for consumers to have access to current research. It cites the same $30 article fee as the ATA statement, but this time it’s “or more” rather than “as much as.” The letter also explains why PubMed Central access “will not mean the end of medical and scientific journals at all” and notes that mandated open access would only apply to NIH-funded research. The laureates include 18 winners in Physiology or Medicine and 7 in Chemistry.

In early September, Peter Suber offered a first take on the September 3 plan from NIH and how it differs from the July 14 House Appropriations report language. The September plan drops the requirement for immediate access if NIH paid any part of the article’s publication cost, substituting OA within six months or sooner. It details what gets deposited at PMC and what NIH funding triggers the OA plan—notably including articles whose underlying research “was supported in whole or in part by NIH funding,” a potentially tricky requirement. The September plan offers a range of specific goals from NIH, including improving the health of Americans, sharing and supporting public access to results of NIH-funded research, and balancing the need for access with the ability of publishers to preserve peer review, editing and quality control.

A September 13 news report from Library Journal notes that NIH director Zerhouni recently met twice with stakeholders, but that some lawmakers were backing off their call for immediate access—and that Senator Arlen Spector said that he would not add a call for public access to the Senate version of the appropriations bill.
Rudy Baum, editor-in-chief of *Chemical & Engineering News*, attacked the NIH plan forthrightly in a September 20, 2004 editorial, “Socialized science.” He says NIH director Zerhouni “seems hell-bent on imposing an ‘open access’ model of publishing on researchers receiving NIH grants” and this action “will inflict long-term damage on the communication of scientific results and on maintenance of the archives of scientific knowledge.” If that’s not enough, Baum says it’s “the opening salvo in the open-access movement’s unstated, but clearly evident, goal of placing responsibility for the entire scientific enterprise in the federal government’s hand. Open access, in fact, equates with socialized science.” So here we are: Red-baiting as the latest anti-OA tactic. I’ll admit that I’ve never seen an OA document that would support Baum’s astonishing charge, but I haven’t seen them all. Baum also asserts that subscriptions really aren’t subscriptions at all anymore—they’re access fees, and e-publishing “shift[s] primary responsibility for maintaining the archive of STM literature from libraries to publishers.” Which then gives Baum license to suggest that if OA squeezes revenues, publishers could “decide to cut costs by turning off access to their archives.” Baum repeats that the “unspoken crusade” of OA advocates is “to socialize all aspects of science, putting the federal government in charge of funding science, communicating science, and maintaining the archive of scientific knowledge.” Hot stuff, if ludicrous from what I’ve seen of (most) OA advocates.

A September 21 editorial at Data Conversion Laboratory has a nice way of telling part of the story, as in its lead sentence: “Government committees in the U.S. and U.K. are taking steps to promote free online access to scientific literature.” I don’t see the qualifier “taxpayer-funded” in that sentence, although it does appear in describing the Nobel letter. But here’s the first subhead: “Unfair government intervention.” That’s a paraphrase of AAP’s statement, which (as usual) says AAS doesn’t oppose OA publishing, “but only its premature and unwarranted imposition through government mandate.” Every description of the NIH plans that I’ve seen call for the equivalent of OAI archiving, albeit at PubMed Central—and, recently, with a six-month moving wall. That is not OA publishing, but then this editorial explicitly defines OA as being author-pay publishing. The editorial quotes a range of society publishers and includes a list of resources titled “the issues laid
bare.” It’s quite a “balanced” list: Statements from AAP/PSP, AAP’s Pat Schroeder, and a pro-publisher Guardian editorial, along with a pointer to DOAJ.

- September 23 brings a letter from BioMed Central’s Jan Velterop to NIH’s Elias Zerhouni. Velterop notes that roughly 15% of BMC’s articles indicate some form of NIH funding—and that all BMC articles are deposited immediately at PubMedCentral. He argues BMC as a counter-argument to “the reservations expressed by traditional publishers as to the economic sustainability of an open access publishing model.” He also endorses the six-month delay as “a sufficient and appropriate help” for traditional publishers to adjust to a new model.

- Barbara Quint cheers on the NIH in her “Up Front” column in the October 2004 Information Today, calling the plan “the day of liberation” and “only the first of many.” The column is typical Quint, with strong opinions and strong language to state them.

- The October 2, 2004 SPARC Open Access Newsletter (issue #78) leads with “A busy month of action on the NIH open-access plan.” You’ll find loads of links to various documents and statements in the essay. Interesting points: the U.S. Chamber of Commerce supports the NIH plan, as do the American Association of Universities and National Academy of Science—but the CC endorsement is the most startling. The New England Journal of Medicine has an endorsing editorial—but still calls for journals to hold copyright “in order to block the redistribution of mangled copies of the text” (a rationale for copyright transfer that I’ve never quite understood). John Regazzi of Elsevier gave a typical Elsevier “yes, but” response: “No one can argue against giving the public access to NIH information…but…the NIH proposal is moving too fast.” Since Elsevier now allows OAI archiving, which differs from the NIH plan primarily in using distributed rather than centralized archives, things are already complicated. Suber notes that the current NIH plan “requests” rather than “requires” article deposit at PMC—but that there’s reason to believe failure to do so would endanger future grants. There’s also a preliminary estimate for the cost of the larger PMC digital library: $2.5 million (per year, I assume), not the $100 million suggested by some critics.

The deadline for a full plan is December 1. I see nothing in the NIH plan that calls for OA publishing, which makes the tenor of some criti-
cisms a bit odd. What’s currently planned is a publisher-friendly mod-
ified version of OA archiving, differing from OAI archives in two key
respects: There’s a six-month “toll access” wall, and papers are either
deposited in a central repository or appear in publisher archives with
pointers from that repository.

That same October 2 *SOAN* includes fascinating notes from 1974
about the dangers that photocopying poses for STM journals—
remember the Williams & Wilkins suit? He also offers “a haiku intro-
duction to open access,” a “mercifully small sampling” of 15 haiku. I’ll
quote the first, second, and last:

If you publish it,/and readers can’t afford it,/does it make a sound?
They don’t pay authors/editors or referees./Then they want the rights.
The current system/evolved over centuries./So did dinosaurs.

**Miscellany**

It appears that LOCKSS is making progress; Project Muse is involved,
half a dozen OA journals are cooperating, and both HighWire Press
and Berkeley Electronic Press are experimenting. For more informa-
tion, see lockss.stanford.edu/projectstatus.htm

Carol Tenopir offered “Open access alternatives” in the July 15,
2004 *Library Journal*. She notes, “Open access publishing can have
many definitions, and pros and cons vary with the definitions.” Some
OA advocates would argue that OA has fairly precise definitions—see
notes on *SOAN* 77 under “Longer articles and items.” I tend to like the
looser formulations, as long as they’re not too loose. While Tenopir
includes a touch of #6 in her discussion, she offers a reasonable over-
view, cautioning that “no one answer is a panacea” and that it isn’t
time to throw out any of the options.

*PLoS Medicine* “goes live” October 19. “There is no doubt in our
minds that open access is *the* future of medical publishing,” says the
press release [emphasis added]; multiple models have little place in
the PLoS worldview.

**Longer Articles and Items**

SPARC Open Access Newsletter 77 (September 2, 2004)
Peter Suber’s lead essay, “Praising progress, preserving precision,”
wants to maintain strict definitions for OA while welcoming initiatives
that widen access without meeting those definitions. “The best-known part of the BBB [Budapest, Bethesda, Berlin] definition is that OA must be free of charge for all users with an internet connection. However, the BBB definition doesn’t stop at free online access.” What else? The Budapest statement is long; the Bethesda and Berlin statements add permissions in briefer form. For a work to be truly OA, the copyright holder must consent to let users “copy, use, distribute, transmit and display the work publicly and to make and distribute derivative works, in any digital medium for any responsible purpose, subject to proper attribution of authorship.”

So is Cites & Insights OA? Apparently not (even if it was scholarly)—because I don’t automatically agree to let users republish this material in priced publications. It appears that, in Creative Commons terms, true OA only allows the “By” license, not the “Noncommercial” license. But Suber goes on to say that BBB does not require removing barriers to commercial re-use, even though I can’t see anything in either of the statements that would allow such a barrier. More to the point, this essay is concerned with the “false sharpening” of the OA definition. He doesn’t think that derivative works and commercial re-use should be required parts of OA, even though he personally prefers both. (I’ve reread the cited definitions four times now, and I still can’t see how an OA publication can pass the definitions and prevent commercial re-use…and that’s a shame.)

Suber goes on to praise initiatives that, by his standards, aren’t really OA—but do improve access. That is, I think, appropriate. I’m not surprised that most abusers of OA definitions are commercial publishers, including the truly bizarre case of Thomson Derwent offering a fixed fee for use and calling that “open access licensing.” Maybe we need a clearinghouse for “enhanced access” initiatives.

Suber wants to educate newcomers and maintain clean definitions. I think that’s great. I also think the BBB statements are difficult to read cleanly, at least based on my inability to read them the way Suber reads them. Clarity would be useful, and that clarity might be achievable by referring to a Creative Commons license. BioMed Central makes it easy (if perhaps tightening OA too much): You have to agree to a “By” license to publish in their journals. If there was common agreement that “By-NC” was the minimum standard—thus allowing copying, noncommercial redistribution, and all the rest—I think there might be more clarity. Creative Commons and the OA groups are
all working to increase access to creative works; maybe it makes sense for OA to refer to CC’s careful legalisms.


This ongoing chronological bibliography may be worth bookmarking and checking every few months. I downloaded the September 15, 2004 version. There’s very little annotation, but it’s a good brief bibliography on a narrow—but important—subject.

Antelman, Kristin, “Do open-access articles have a greater research impact?” College & Research Libraries 65:5 (September 2004): 372-82.

C&RL isn’t (yet) open access, but I believe Antelman posted the PDFs of this article to an accessible repository as soon as that lack was pointed out. The short answer is Yes—“across a variety of disciplines, open-access articles have a greater research impact than articles that are not freely available.” For the longer answer, read the well-prepared, well-written article.


Cornell produces a lot of scholarly articles: More than 3,600 a year, according to the dynamite appendix to this study. Cornell University Library spends a lot on scholarly journals: $4 million, or half of Cornell’s entire serials/database expenses. Of that $4 million, 43% goes to Elsevier—and 16% of Cornell-authored articles appear in Elsevier journals. Remove Elsevier, Kluwer, Wiley, and Springer, and Cornell’s journal expenditures go down to $1 million—although 70% of Cornell-authored articles appear in all the rest of the journals.

The CUL task force sought to bring some facts and clarity to the table, meeting weekly for the first half of 2004 to discuss issues, coordinating research, and compile the report. While the resulting report is only one data point, it’s an unusually thoughtful and detailed one—and it’s one from an institution that could logically stand to pay more in a universal OA publishing system, at least if the true cost per article turned out to be $1,500 (or any sum above $1,100). (Here’s a direct statement: “It is unlikely that CUL will save money under any producer-payment scenario.”)
The report looks at a range of possible scenarios, takes a clear-eyed look at costs and benefits, includes an extensive bibliography, and is well worth reading. Strong OA advocates will not be happy with the results—but maybe they should pay attention, since this is as carefully considered a case as I’ve seen.

Specific recommendations include fostering and supporting OA initiatives “that respond to or resonate with real needs of specific scholarly communities,” applying carefully-stated and sensible selection criteria in considering OA projects, and continuing an environmental scan on the state of OA—and raising awareness among scholars. Here’s the paragraph that precedes the specific recommendations:

While the traditional subscription model has certainly been abused by some publishing interests, our Task Force is convinced that subscription can still serve as an equitable model for disseminating scholarship under some circumstances, particularly when administered by scholarly societies, university presses, and academic libraries. We have concluded that the Open Access and subscription models can coexist and are in fact likely to do so for the foreseeable future. The pragmatic approach our Task Force is recommending for CUL should be understood as a continuation of the course the Library has taken up to now vis-à-vis Open Access publishing: a flexible, experimental approach that commits to support specific, viable applications tailored to particular needs, pursued as a key component of a diversified strategy of scholarly communications reform.
2004 saw much debate and some progress on library access issues and scholarly access in general. This roundup begins with a fairly solid step forward for scholarly access, followed by an apparently-faltering step and a variety of notes and papers.

**NIH: Moving Forward**

Quoting from Peter Suber’s *NIH open-access plan, frequently asked questions* (www.earlham.edu/~peters/ fos/nihfaq.htm) as downloaded October 14, 2004:

On July 14, 2004, the U.S. House Appropriations Committee adopted a set of recommendations for next year’s federal budget. One key recommendation would have the effect of providing open access (OA) to articles based on research grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Here are the most important specific provisions from the report:

- Articles based on NIH-funded research must be deposited in PubMed Central (PMC) at the time they are accepted by a peer-reviewed journal for publication.
- PMC will provide open access to the article six months after the article is published.
- The committee directs NIH to submit a plan by December 1, 2004, to implement this recommendation in FY2005.

On September 3, 2004, the NIH released its plan, *Enhanced public access to NIH research information*, for a 60 day period of public comment ending on November 2.

On September 17, 2004, the NIH published the same text in the *Federal Register*, for another 60 day period of public comment ending on November 16.
I quote from Suber’s FAQ because it’s a detailed commentary on the NIH plan and because (as I noted in a September 2004 LIBRARY ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP) the NIH plan had slipped entirely under my faulty radar until late August. I devoted two pages in Cites & Insights 4:13 (November 2004) to action and discussion on the plan. It was attacked by some editors as “socialized science,” supported by many within the scientific community, and misinterpreted as most OA proposals are misinterpreted.

The original House report called for immediate open access if the NIH paid any part of the costs of an article’s publication. NIH’s draft dropped that provision. The proposal isn’t true OA, given the six-month embargo. It’s a centralized, delayed modification of green (OAI) access. According to Suber’s FAQ, no journal has said it would refuse to accept articles based on NIH-funded research. A preliminary estimate of NIH costs to carry out this initiative comes to $2.5 million, “about 0.008% of the NIH’s [$28 billion] annual budget.” (That’s American billions: thousands of millions.)

The NIH plan is a modest step. That didn’t stop publishers from raising objections. The PSP prepared a template “grassroots memo” for members to use opposing the NIH plan. Peter Suber’s comment (Open Access News, October 22, 2004): “[The template] must be intended for external constituents, since it makes claims about the NIH and its OA plan that the NIH will know to be false.”

The template begins by calling the NIH plan “the proposed radical new policy” and includes some highly questionable assertions. Six-month-deferred access will cause people to cancel subscriptions, which will force publishers to institute author fees. Loss of overseas subscriptions will jeopardize U.S.-based journals and “ultimately could force U.S. taxpayers to foot the bill for open access by readers around the world, and will provide a windfall benefit for those corporations and institutions that now willingly purchase and benefit from (but do not themselves produce and publish) original research.” Further, the NIH has not “clarified” the cost of “implementing this government-operated repository.” Except that PubMed Central has already been implemented and NIH has offered an estimate of the costs of the initiative. The template goes on to claim that the issue is not access. It adds a set of “questions the NIH has not addressed,” most of which appear to be typical anti-OA red herrings. For example, one bullet raises issues of academic freedom and the authors’ right to select jour-
nals for publication—neither of which is affected by the NIH proposal. Another bullet comes close to stating as simple fact that access with a six-month embargo after publication will put societies out of business and force adoption of author-paid publishing. Somehow, “journals with longer publication cycles” will be especially damaged by a clock that starts ticking after publication. It’s an astonishing document, encouraging PSP members to proliferate a series of bad arguments.

The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) issued its own FAQ (signed by Prue Adler, associate executive director) on October 25, 2004. (www.arl.org/info/openaccess/ARLFAQ.html) This FAQ explicitly says the NIH proposal “is not an open access proposal.” The brief FAQ (two print pages) is clear and to the point, and certainly answers most questions raised in the PSP “grassroots” template. Four days later, Adler wrote to NIH on behalf of ARL, expressing the association’s strong support for the proposal, focusing on six issues, “how the proposal: reflects the way scientists conduct research and discovery; allows some libraries to provide additional resources to their users; creates an archival resource for biomedical literature funded by NIH; provides significant protections to commercial and not-for-profit publishers; follows congressional and administration policy; and expands and improves public access to biomedical information.”

The SPARC open access newsletter 79 [SOAN] (November 2, 2004) begins with a “brief update on NIH plan.” In that essay, Peter Suber predicted that the conference committee to reconcile FY2005 appropriations “will leave the House recommendation intact” and notes that NIH will be free to adopt the plan in any case—unless the committee approves language opposing the plan.

Elsevier provided its own response to NIH in mid-November, one that seems to mirror the PSP template in suggesting dire threats to the “ finely balanced, high quality system [of STM publishing] that works well” if a six-month access policy is established. Instead, Elsevier calls for a 15 to 18 month “guideline” and urges NIH “not to make any requests of authors within the first year after publication.” This is exceedingly odd given that Elsevier claims to support green OA immediately upon publication—although, admittedly, in institutional repositories rather than the centralized PubMed Central.

Also in November, the International Association of Scientific, Technical & Medical Publishers released a comment opposing the NIH plan, raising the same set of questionable objections. Meanwhile, No-
bel laureates, more than 600 patient advocacy organizations, SPARC, ALA, and many others outside the STM publishing industry sent expressions of support.

On November 20, the appropriations conference committee acted. As cited in SOAN 80 (December 2, 2004), this language was included:

The conferees are aware of the draft NIH policy on increasing public access to NIH-funded research. Under this policy, NIH would request investigators to voluntarily submit electronically the final, peer reviewed author's copy of their scientific manuscripts; six months after the publisher's date of publication, NIH would make this copy publicly available through PubMed Central. The policy is intended to help ensure the permanent preservation of NIH-funded research and make it more readily accessible to scientists, physicians, and the public. The conferees note the comment period for the draft policy ended November 16th; NIH is directed to give full and fair consideration to all comments before publishing its final policy. The conferees request NIH to provide the estimated costs of implementing this policy each year in its annual Justification of Estimates to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees. In addition, the conferees direct NIH to continue to work with the publishers of scientific journals to maintain the integrity of the peer review system.

Peter Suber notes that this language says NIH would “request” deposit of works and deposit would be “voluntary.” That’s not the original mandate, but the draft plan promises to monitor deposits and could remove future funding from those who do not deposit articles. “The conferees said nothing to discourage that kind of monitoring or that consequence of non-compliance.” Suber also notes that the concern in working with publishers is “to maintain the integrity of the peer review system,” not profits, surpluses, or the existing publication model. “Despite intense lobbying by publishers, the conferees did not oppose the plan, delay it, or modify it. They did not even remain silent about it…”

Suber goes on to say that we won’t see results immediately, given the way NIH funding works. Nonetheless, “this is the largest single step toward free online access in the history of the OA movement,” given that NIH is the world’s largest funder of medical research. (That same issue of SOAN includes three pages of links to comments and stories on the NIH plan.)

That’s where things stand now. Barring surprises, the world’s biomedical literature should become significantly more accessible begin-
ning late next year. It’s not a revolution, but it is the single largest evol-
utionary step to date. (It’s worth noting that the Wellcome Trust, a
major research-funding agency, plans to mandate OA archiving on a
similar six-month-delay basis.)

**UK: Standing Still**

Here’s one I did cover to some extent: Hearings by the UK’s House of
Commons Science and Technology Committee on STM publishing,
resulting in a set of recommendations. Notes on the hearings appear in
a LIBRARY ACCESS PERSPECTIVE in *Cites & Insights* 4:7 (June 2004), pag-
es 12-20. The committee issued an impressive report from those hear-
ings, *Scientific publications: Free for all?*. I offered brief notes from the
107-page document, some of the 82 recommendations, and a few res-
ponses in *Cites & Insights* 4:11 (September 2004), pages 13-16.

The UK report also called for green OA with an independent
study on the virtues of gold OA. While perhaps more radical than the
modest NIH proposal, the UK report was not revolutionary or de-
signed to overturn Elsevier and its friends—but it might as well have
been, for all the reports and the response. The government did not
receive the report with open arms. As reported at *NewScientist.com* on
November 4, “The UK government has rejected calls from an influen-
tial committee...” The government response appeared to dismiss OA
models. Members of the committee were unhappy. Chair Ian Gibson
said, “The [department of trade and industry] is apparently more in-
terested in kowtowing to the powerful publishing lobby than it is in
looking after the best interests of British science.” The UK Publishers
Association and Reed Elsevier both welcomed the government re-
sponse. (Elsevier spokeswoman Catherine May added, “Obviously we
do have enormous sympathy for the position of academic librarians
whose budgets are under pressure.” Under pressure by no publisher
more than Elsevier, to be sure.) The government response says, “The
government is not aware that there are major problems in accessing
scientific information, or that there is a large unsatisfied demand for
this.” The government also rejected the committee’s call for an inde-
pendent government-supported study into OA publishing.

Richard Wray put it this way in a November 9 analysis in *The
Guardian*: 
The government yesterday threw away an opportunity to carry out a thorough review of the way scientific research is disseminated. Instead of engaging constructively with the Commons science and technology committee and assessing the potential impact of moves toward “open access” to research, the government—led by the department of trade and industry—sided with the traditional subscriptions-based journal publishers.

Wray faults the government for failing to “properly read the report” and says the response “seems to have been based on a non sequitur.” He describes the two OA routes briefly and notes that the committee primarily recommended green OA (self-archiving) with a coordinated network of repositories—but the government’s rationale for dismissing self-archiving was based on arguments against gold (“author-pays”) OA publishing.

Malcolm Morgan (a media analyst at Investek [UK]) celebrated the government response in a Media Week [UK] piece. His thoughtful comment: “Hurray! The needless undermining of a robust UK industry ultimately serves no one.” He notes that the response “goes out of its way to praise Reed Elsevier—the ‘Evil Empire’ of the open-access debate—for the level of investment being made in digital development for the industry…” He suggests that academic publishers ought to “tread carefully and not trumpet…price increases so publicly in future.” Not that Elsevier and the other big UK publishers shouldn’t continue to gouge libraries, to be sure (that’s just healthy profit-taking): they should just be less open about it.

SOAN 80 discusses the government response with Peter Suber’s usual clarity and balance. “The short way to describe [the response] is that the government rejected every recommendation that required practical action or funding even if it approved some of the report’s goals ‘in principle.’” To Suber, “the true setback is that the primary recommendation for OA archiving was dismissed without any serious effort to respond to the committee’s evidence and arguments.” Meanwhile, JISC and other government agencies may move forward with OA-related initiatives already in place—but the chance for a larger-scale investigation and coordinated repository creation was lost.

Suber also compares the UK and US outcomes and offers reasons the outcomes were so different:

(1) National licenses in the UK spread journal access more uniformly throughout the country. Even though the absolute level of access is insufficient, there is less inequality of access and there may be less institu-
tional interest in finding alternatives to the current subscription process.

(2) In the US, the NIH awards research grants and sets policy about how or under what terms to award research grants. In the UK these functions are separate. Hence it’s easier for the NIH to follow the natural interests of research funders in OA. Insofar as the UK Research Councils have been given an opening to adopt a similar policy, we can be optimistic that they will do so.

(3) The major publishers of subscription-based journals are headquartered in the UK (Elsevier, Taylor & Francis, Blackwell, and if you count Candover/Cinven, then also Springer and Kluwer) and have more lobbying clout there than in the US. It’s not clear how far this clout would have gone if everyone had appreciated the distinction between OA archiving and OA journals.

I have the committee’s “fourteenth report,” which brings together the government’s response and those of five other bodies, together with a few conclusions and recommendations. It’s 66 pages long; you can find it readily enough on the internet. I’m too lazy to go through the government response (36 pages) in any detail. It is worth noting that the Consortium of University Research Libraries (CURL) and Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) response “strongly support[s] the general thrust of [the committee’s] recommendations” and expresses specific support for many of the recommendations. A fairly long JISC response points out relevant actions that JISC has identified and intends to address, including steps to establish more institutional repositories and explore digital preservation. JISC is also funding “a study of the advantages and disadvantages of a range of different publishing models.” Full disclosure: Members of CURL are also members of RLG, my employer; thus, since RLG is a membership organization, I could be said to work indirectly for CURL members.

**Short Pieces**

A press release from Thomson Scientific notes their new white paper on OA journals in the ISI citation databases. The Web of Science includes 237 OA journals as of November 1, 2004—not a big chunk of the 8,700 journals in the databases, but roughly 20% of all OA journals. Since Thomson’s staff adds only about 10 to 12% of all journals evaluated (of 2,000 evaluated each year—are there really *that* many new refereed journals each year?), that’s a good showing.
Another press release, this time from BioOne, notes that BioOne is adding journals to the LOCKSS Program with the entire BioOne collection available within the next year. The release notes that more than 80 libraries and 50 publishers are already involved in LOCKSS.

SOAN #79 (noted above) includes a good essay, “Journals: please post your access policies.” Suber asserts (correctly) that OA isn’t going to disappear, even though models used for OA may change and some forms may not be sustainable. Given that access issues will continue, he suggests one sensible step: “Journals should post the details of their current access policies on their web sites.” He then goes on to detail why that’s a good idea and how short some journals fall of doing so now. Yes, access policies change—but changing one web page shouldn’t be that difficult. It’s a long, detailed, well-written discussion, worth reading in the original—particularly if you’re a journal publisher.

“Washington DC principles for free access to science.”
www.dcprinciples.org.
I’d heard about the DC principles but hadn’t seen the slick sheet until the Charleston Conference. “The Washington DC Principles is a commitment from 50 (and growing) medical/scientific societies and publishers to provide free access and wide dissemination of published research findings.”

The sheet claims that these publishers provide “what has been called the needed ‘middle ground’ in the increasingly heated debate between those who advocate immediate unfettered online access to medical and scientific research findings and advocates of the current journal publishing system.” The central section contains the seven one-sentence principles, in one case augmented by a set of subpoints; to the left are covers from 100 journals published by those behind the principles.

“Middle ground” is an interesting claim for this group, since the members defend the “current journal publishing system” with considerable vigor. Thus principle 6: “We strongly support the principle that publication fees should not be borne solely by researchers and their funding institutions…” Then there’s principle 7: “As not-for-profit publishers, we believe that a free society allows for the coexistence of many publishing models…”—but that comes right after a principle that directly attacks the alternative model being proposed. I guess the societies mean “many publishing models as long as they’re all the traditional model.” Principle 3, the one with subpoints, lists the DC folks’ idea of “free access”: Some articles are free online immediate-
ly; full text is available after some delay; content is free to (some) low-income nations; articles are “free online through reference linking between these journals”; and content is available for indexing by major search engines. The only significant item in that list is the second, which commits the publishers to free online access “within months of publication.” How many months? That’s up to the publishers.

Apart from the hypocrisy inherent in the pairing of principles 6 and 7, the most difficult principle here is #2: “As not-for-profit publishers, we reinvest all of the revenue from our journals in the direct support of science worldwide, including scholarships, scientific meetings, grants, educational outreach, advocacy for research funding, the free dissemination of information for the public, and improvements in scientific publishing.” In other words, “we use our publishing profits to support the organization.” Not to sound like a broken record, but the only sane librarian response has to be: It’s unreasonable to demand that academic libraries foot the bill for those other society activities.

Yes, I know, most society publishers aren’t the villains in this drama; many society publishers keep prices as low as possible and expect only modest profits. That doesn’t change the facts.


Efron, president of the American Statistical Association, ponders the values of print journals and dangers to their continued existence. Although he finds himself using online versions more these days, he believes that key print journals (such as *JASA*, ASA’s primary journal) serve functions that pure ejournals may not do as well.

I’m sympathetic to this argument since Efron mentions browsing (still easier and faster in a set of print volumes) and pure ease of reading. He notes that the “worst factor” of print journals (page limitations) may be a boon to the profession as a whole by causing key journals to act “as magazines that direct our field’s attention rather than just report it.” He wonders about “grade inflation” in ejournal refereeing, but doesn’t dwell on that or attack ejournals.

He does quote one silly statement from a journal editor regarding the NIH plan (that nobody would purchase subscriptions to a journal if the papers were available for free six months later), but admits “Maybe that’s overblown.” But he does raise legitimate questions about losing print journals—a loss that’s not automatically inherent in any
flavor of OA. ASA apparently isn’t a villain: its per-page cost is “less than one-tenth as much as some of the commercial journals.”

In the end, Efron doesn’t expect all print journals to disappear, “but they may have to improve to survive.” An interesting perspective.


Here’s another statistics association (Institute of Mathematical Statistics) that’s made a move ASA’s considering (as noted in Efron’s piece): Posting all IMS articles in their entirety on arXiv. This two-page piece, in the form of an FAQ, briefly describes arXiv, explains why IMS has established the new policy, notes the slight differences between the arXiv versions and published journal pages, and discusses other factors. IMS has had a green OA policy for some time; the new policy makes arXiv placement part of the publication process. One answer says IMS doesn’t believe it will lose many subscriptions by placing all of its journal articles on arXiv. The FAQ encourages authors publishing in other journals to “look carefully at publisher’s contracts, and modify them as necessary to retain the right to post your own versions of the paper on your own homepage, or, what is much better for long-term access, in an open access digital repository such as arXiv.”

Articles

I’m not offering commentary or summaries. I’m just noting one article and a set of articles (the latter being freely available—but only through August 2005) that many of you will find worth reading.


Gatten is Dean of Library and Information Resources at California Institute of the Arts; Sanville is Executive Director of OhioLINK. This discussion notes OhioLINK’s “big deals,” their methodology for retreating from such deals, and the possible impacts of such retreats. Carefully done, worth reading.

Serials Review 2004, special issue on Open Access: Issues, ideas, and impact

David Goodman served as issue editor for this collection of articles, working with Connie Foster to make it happen. The articles come from some of the biggest names on several sides of the OA discussion;
this is not a simple set of calls for “OA now.” I downloaded 11 of the twelve articles with plans to comment, but there’s just too much here—and you can read it all yourself. In all, it’s pages 257 through 328 of *Serials Review* volume 30. (*Serials Review* is an Elsevier publication.) I may return to these articles later; I’ve certainly saved them for use elsewhere as appropriate. A balanced editorial effort by Goodman, and a landmark special issue. Go get the articles while you can: This will be the free “sample issue” at *Serials Review’s* website for at least nine months after publication.
The big story in January was “NIH: Moving Forward,” a “fairly solid step forward for scholarly access.” As of December 2004, it appeared that the National Institutes of Health would move forward with a plan in which investigators doing NIH-funded work would be asked to submit final peer-reviewed copies of accepted articles; the NIH would make them publicly available at PubMed Central after six months. It wasn’t complete open access, but it was a step.

Too big a step, apparently. Once again, NIH leads off LIBRARY ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP—but with a classic “two steps forward, one step back” situation.

NIH: Less Certainty, Still Progress

Most observers expected NIH to post their new policy in December 2004 or, later, January 11. That date slipped. Meanwhile, AAP’s Professional/Scholarly Publishing Division (PSP) took another whack at the NIH proposal in a November 15, 2004 letter from Pat Schroeder to NIH director Elias A. Zerhouni, reprinted in the Professional Scholarly Publishing Bulletin 5:3 (Winter 2004). Schroeder notes an October 28 meeting between Zerhouni and “our biomedical journal publishers”—and goes on to urge him “to recognize how diverse medical publishing really is.” In boldface, the letter provides this take on NIH’s modest proposal for voluntary delayed archiving:

AAP strongly believes that it is premature for NIH regulations to fix or bias any specific model at this time. More time is needed to see how the many new publishing models being tried evolve in the reader/author marketplace. Government regulation is likely to foster a rigid dissemination system less able to respond to new and enabling technologies.

Schroeder discusses a proposed initiative between PSP and patient advocacy groups “whereby access to original research studies might be
provided to patients and their families in an appropriate context”—which raises the question of why hundreds of patient advocacy groups backed the NIH proposal. She claims the proposal raises unanswered questions about “the disruption of useful journal business models, the risk of censorship and the integrity of the scientific record”—pretty much the standard anti-OA claims, wholly lacking in evidentiary support. Worse, she issues this bizarre interpretation of the UK fiasco:

The United Kingdom engaged in such a process and determined that a competitive global publishing marketplace marked by diverse business models and innovation already exists. They concluded that there was no justification to intervene in a way that would support open access over other business models that already disseminate peer-reviewed scientific research.

To put it another way, using reality-based thinking: The findings of the committee that carried out the “deliberate, participatory process” Schroeder calls for were summarily dismissed by the UK government.

It seems important to PSP that NIH “always link to the final, published articles on the individual publisher’s website and not….make articles freely available until after a period of time compatible with the individual publisher’s business model, as determined by that publisher.” The first clause argues specifically against PubMed Central as a repository, for reasons that aren’t apparent to this reader (who would note that articles on publisher’s sites could always be removed from public access if it suits the publisher—or if the publisher goes out of business). The second is, essentially, a plea that NIH do nothing to improve access. The letter also includes the mandatory indirect suggestion that any change in the current system will somehow “adversely impact” the peer review system.

Mid-January

One supposed reason for the delay in NIH’s policy announcement was that a new Secretary of Health and Human Services, Michael Leavitt, was going through confirmation hearings. Open Access News notes a January 21 Washington Fax report that Leavitt assured the Senate Finance Committee that he supports the principles behind NIH’s policy but “knows very little about the specifics.” Senator Wyden (Oregon) commented that NIH was going to “reduce substantially a proposal to make research that the taxpayers have funded available to the country” and urged that the apparent 12-month embargo window
in the forthcoming policy be reduced to the original six months—and that it be a requirement, not a request.

Another Washington Fax article that day noted the claim of journal publishers that “some journals, particularly those that publish infrequently, might be put out of business.” Zerhouni still called the new policy a “breakthrough”—“creating for the first time the precedent and the right for a federal agency to have a venue or pathway for its scientists to publish and give access to the public.”

SPARC e-News (December 2004-January 2005) notes a January 18 Washington Post report that the NIH policy “has been scaled back…under pressure from scientific publishers, who argued that the plan would eat into their profits and harm the scientific enterprise.” It also notes a January 11 letter from the Alliance for Taxpayer Access expressing disappointment in the delayed announcement.

February: Policy and early reactions

On February 3, 2005, NIH issued a press release, a policy implementation statement, and a more extended Policy on enhancing public access to archived publications resulting from NIH-funded research, notice NOT-OD-05-022.

The press release notes that the policy is “designed to accelerate the public’s access to published articles resulting from NIH-funded research” and says it “calls on scientists to release to the public manuscripts…as soon as possible, and within 12 months of final publication.” A bit later, Zerhouni admits that the new policy is voluntary. The release notes that PubMed Central is “a stable archive of peer-reviewed research publications…to ensure the permanent preservation of these vital research findings” and that it secures “a searchable compendium of these research publications that NIH and its awardees can use to manage more efficiently…”

The three-page implementation memo is a lightweight call: “Beginning May 2, 2005, NIH-funded investigators will be asked to submit voluntarily to PubMed Central (PMC) the author’s final manuscript upon acceptance for publication…” It defines “author’s final manuscript” as “the final version accepted for journal publication…[including] all modifications from the peer review process” and notes that, at the time of voluntary submission, authors “will specify the timing of the posting of their final manuscript for public accessibility… Posting for public accessibility through PMC is strongly en-
couraged as soon as possible (and within twelve months of the publisher’s official date of final publication.”

Later, the policy explicitly excludes “book chapters, editorials, reviews, or conference proceedings,” and clarifies that it’s only asking for publications resulting from currently funded projects. As to versions, “the publisher may choose to furnish PMC with the publisher’s final version, which will supersede the author’s final version”—and the publisher can agree to a shorter embargo than the author chose. The new submission policy fulfills the existing requirement to provide publications as part of progress reports—but NIH still wants hardcopy of “submitted but not yet accepted” manuscripts (which don’t go into PMC).

The 14-page Final Policy Statement goes into more detail and includes NIH responses to many of the public comments received. You can find that document at grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-05-022; it’s interesting background. Publishers and other “commenters” raised all the objections you’d expect; the NIH has sound answers in every case. One response addresses the OA issue:

Some commenters believed that the NIH Public Access Policy constitutes an open access model of publishing. The NIH Policy is not a form of publishing; rather, it creates a stable archive of peer-reviewed research publications resulting from NIH-funded research.

Interestingly, although we have PSP proclaiming how much it favors eventual access, “some commenters also noted that the vast majority of journals currently offer no free public access at all, thus arguing that a 6-month waiting time is too aggressive.” Six months is certainly much sooner than “never,” and for that matter so is a year. There’s a lot more here, including the fundamental answer to publishers who assert that “their” copyright is being undermined: To wit, although NIH isn’t relying on it, the government-purpose copyright license gives NIH absolute rights to reproduce, publish, or otherwise use copyrighted works resulting from NIH funding “for Federal purposes, as well as to authorize others to do so.” Do Federal purposes include seeing to it that Federally-funded research is disseminated to the widest possible audience? Why not?

Technically, SPARC Open Access Newsletter 82 (February 2, 2005) came out a day before the policy was published, but Peter Suber had a pretty good idea what that policy would include (since it was pretty much the January 11 policy, just delayed). Suber notes that the NIH is retreating and that “the weakening is unjustified and harmful.” He
calls the weakening “just the latest in a series of concessions to publishers that take us further and further from the public interest in the free and immediate dissemination of publicly-funded medical research” and that, long as it is, the “12 month figure is an illusion,” since deposit is now voluntary. The upside is that the NIH’s request appears to be a strong one—and that it could result in faster access than the original fixed six-month embargo.

But, Suber notes, “[M]any publishers will demand that authors choose late release or even exercise their option to deny the request and never deposit in PMC at all.” Suber criticizes the policy “because it invites publishers who dislike the policy to voice a preference contrary to the NIH’s preference and (to that extent) because it creates an untenable, high-risk dilemma for authors.” Suber provides seven pages of comments and two more of links to related articles; as usual, you should look at his full commentary.

With the policy out, the Alliance for Taxpayer Access issued a release declaring, “The just-announced policy falls short of their expectations and long-standing recommendations.” Key concerns: the policy is entirely voluntary; it lacks any definitive time frame; it puts grantees in “the untenable position of trying to meet the contradictory expectations of their funding agency and their publisher.” Rick Johnson of SPARC notes that the policy isn’t what they hoped for—but they’re eager for it to succeed. Others offer similar comments.

Then there’s the DC Principles gang, which issued a release calling the NIH rule “a missed opportunity,” decrying the “waste of research dollars,” and asserting that NIH “should take advantage of the fact that most not-for-profit publishers currently make all their content…available for free to the public within 12 months.” The release claims the public “would be better served if NIH created an enhanced search engine that works like Google to crawl the journals’ full text articles and link to the final published articles residing on the journal websites”—asserting, with no evidence at all, that this would offer “significantly more assistance to those seeking medical research results than a database of NIH-funded manuscripts can provide.” It goes on to claim that the PubMed Central version will be “an unedited version.” Naturally, the enormous cost of expanding PubMed Central is mentioned several times but never enumerated—since, at $2 to $4 million out of $38 billion, it’s an odd 0.01% sort of enormous burden. That’s “costly and duplicative”—and PMC will somehow “harm the
scientific societies” and “put authors at risk of inadvertently violating copyright agreements.”

I’m immediately struck that “most” is not “all” (some nonprofit publishers do not make their content available), that current availability is not assured permanent availability, that nonprofit publishers do not make up the whole of biomedical journal publishing—and that NIH explicitly invites publishers to avoid the “dual version” problem by submitting the final published version.

Peter Suber commented on the release the next day, at Open access news. His comment: “To me this shows that the recent concession to publishers—lengthening the permissible delay past six months—did not reduce publisher opposition, and therefore was not worth making.” Suber also notes some other reactions. The editor-in-chief of the Journal of the American Medical Association said, “I think it’s great. This is nothing new for us. If it’s important, we make it free to everybody in the world and everything [in JAMA] is free after six months. A spokeswoman for the New England Journal of Medicine noted, “Any material that’s six months old or older is available on our Web site to the general public free of charge.”

The Public Library of Science issued a release noting that the policy “could, and PLoS believes should, have been stronger in several respects” but that it still sets an important precedent. PLoS “urges all other funding agencies…to adopt the progressive components of the NIH policy, and to accompany them with stronger incentives for compliance and shorter periods of allowable delay.” PLoS also urged scientists to seize the opportunity and noted the virtues of open-access publications. The other big OA publisher, BioMed Central, also welcomed the announcement and anticipated “that many other funding bodies worldwide will now follow the example set by NIH.” The press release naturally included a mild sales pitch for BMC journals, noting that those who choose to publish in them “are assured that the published version of their paper will be placed in PubMed Central for them, immediately and without any need for additional work from them.”

That’s where it stands. As Suber and others have noted, now it’s a waiting game—to see whether there will be a significant increase in publicly available biomedical literature within the next year or two. NIH-funded research accounts for about 10% of the articles in the 5,000-odd journals indexed by PubMed; that would still be a substantial increase.
Editorial Policy and SOAN

Before proceeding to a few noteworthy items and articles, I should note an ongoing deliberate change in Library Access to Scholarship. As a rule, I plan not to repeat coverage in the SPARC Open Access Newsletter unless I feel the need to add my own comments or unless it’s an integral part of some subtopic I’m covering. I’m probably not the first to suggest that SOAN is effectively the medium of record for OA, but it’s true—and in my experience, Peter Suber’s clear advocacy does not cause him to cover OA-related issues in a prejudicial or biased manner.

If you care about Open Access, you should be reading SOAN. If you’re reading SOAN, you don’t need a redundant summary from Cites & Insights.

I’m sure there will be accidental repetitions, and my take on events is frequently different than Peter Suber’s. That’s hardly surprising. My primary interest is finding ways for libraries to free up enough money to maintain healthy monograph budgets and retain specialized indexes and other services; Peter’s primary interest—at SOAN at least—is spreading Open Access while fairly and honestly covering the controversies surrounding OA. The two goals may be complementary (more so for gold OA, less for green OA), but they’re not identical. Now, on with the items that I found intriguing or important—and that I don’t remember Peter covering!

Shorter Pieces

In January, I noted the special issue of Serials Review on Open Access—and that the articles in that issue are freely available at the moment. As Steve Hitchcock noted on the SPARC Open Access Forum (SOAF), that does not mean that Serials Review (in full or for this issue) is gold OA. The articles will become unavailable at some point, at least from the publisher. Unless they’re archived by authors, this is “sample access,” not OA.

In an early January posting on SOAF, George Porter (Caltech) noted some indicators that the cost of scholarly journal publishing might not always be as high as $1,500 or more. Apparently, the cost of IEEE Electron Device Letters comes out to $186 per page—and given that the journal prefers brief manuscripts, that averages out to $750 per article. The editors seem proud that they’ve encouraged “elimina-
tion of verbose sections from published materials and consequent improvement in overall quality.”

Also in January, Nature Publishing Group changed its self-archiving policy—in a way that might also be two steps forward, one step back. In 2002, NPG went green OA (of a sort), allowing authors to post their papers on their personal web sites immediately. The new policy allows and encourages authors to submit their manuscripts to the relevant funding body’s archive and to their institutional repository—but six months after publication.

HW Wilson showed some explicit support for gold OA by adding 38 OA journals to its Education Full Text database. That’s significant if you believe—as I do—that professional abstracting and indexing of journal articles is essential to effective access. Quite a few topical indexes already include OA journals, to be sure (I know of at least ten in RLG’s Anthropology Plus, for example). It’s a trend to be applauded.

Malcolm Getz asserts that research libraries can save money—perhaps as much as $2.3 million per year—through OA publishing, in “Open-access scholarly publishing in economic perspective,” Journal of Library Administration 42:1 (2005). I haven’t seen the (39-page!) article yet and may not have occasion to, but it should be interesting. Presumably the set of assumptions is much different from that used for Cornell’s study (see below).

In early February 2005, the Berkeley Electronic Press announced that the University of California’s eScholarship Repository has logged its millionth full-text download. The repository includes working papers and monographs as well as peer-reviewed articles. The press release says UC’s repository “is believed to have been the first institutional repository” to reach the million-download mark. 98% of readership comes from outside the University of California.

Also in early February, the University of Nottingham and University of Lund announced the Directory of Open Access Repositories (DOAR), a new service to “categorise and list the wide variety of Open Access research archives that have grown up around the world.” Lund operates the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). Given the fractious nature of OA support these days, it’s hardly surprising that some OA advocates labeled DOAR redundant, a label denied by DOAJ principals.

By any measure I can think of, open access is making progress: Millions of articles are in harvestable repositories and there are more than a thousand open access journals. It’s not setting the world on fire,
which may or may not happen, but there's steady, significant progress. Not according to Sir Crispin Davis of Reed Elsevier, however—at least according to a February 18, 2005 story at www.money.telegraph.co.uk. According to this piece by Philip Aldrick, Davis reported the company's full-year results, noting that “The ‘open access' threat to the system of researchers subscribing to Reed's scientific journals also appeared to diminish. For the first time in seven years, the publishing method lost market share.” Peter Suber finds that statement incomprehensible; so do I. I can't think of any plausible measure by which OA is doing worse now than it was a year ago. (There's another terrifying statement in the article if you’re an academic library or consortium with Elsevier's hands deep in your pockets: “This year will be a good one as the US education market comes out of its cyclical trough.” That's great, of course, if it's true—but it sounds as though Elsevier is primed to take every advantage of improved library fortunes to improve its own.)

SOAN 81 (January 2, 2005) includes Peter Suber's quick review of 2004 in OA. The dozen points cited are all worth reading. He notes that 2004 was the year funders started to at least consider mandating OA archiving for the research they fund, that some universities are starting to mandate such archiving, and that a significant number of subscription-based journals “turned green.” He's probably right in saying 2004 saw OA move from the periphery to the mainstream—and certainly right that we're starting to see a variety of studies and reports on the economics of OA. Unfortunately, “2004 was also the year in which some publishers chose…to jack up the belligerence.”

Suber also posted two excellent notes on his FOS site, each of which prints on a single (double-sided) sheet of paper, each of which should be printed and saved by anyone concerned with OA or working with an OA repository. The base URL for both is www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/. The first, “A very brief introduction to Open Access,” is precisely what it says. Some might argue with the last sentence in Suber's description of OA repositories: “The costs of an archive are negligible: some server space and a fraction of the time of a technician.” I see nothing to argue with in the description of OA journals, which ends with this inspirational sentence: “There's a lot of room for creativity in finding ways to pay the costs of a peer-reviewed OA journal, and we're far from having exhausted our cleverness and
imagination.” Append “brief.htm” for this one, which will also point you to Suber’s longer overview of OA.

The second, “How to facilitate Google crawling,” offers specific pointers (prepared with Google’s cooperation) to make it easy for Google to crawl all of an OA repository. It’s not a long or complicated list—ten bullets with two sub-bullets in one case—and it should be easy to carry out. I love this one: “Browse interfaces should be built as a bushy tree with links to actual articles as the leaves.” Append “googlecrawling.htm” for this vital one-sheet document.

**Longer Articles**


This article “examines the effects that present decisions about open access (OA) will have over the next ten years.” It’s similar to Goodman’s presentation at the Charleston Conference, where he attempts to model likely outcomes of various publishing futures. I’m not sure I fully understand the models, or how Goodman arrives at his projections, but the article and charts are decidedly worth reading.

Goodman considers what might happen, both with adoption of OA journals (“gold OA”) and with possible mass cancellations of commercial journals—either because of “green OA” (self-archiving) or simply because even the wealthiest libraries can no longer accommodate the pricing policies of the biggest STM publishers. He anticipates either the NIH decision (in its earlier form) or the UK proposal and asserts that the U.S. and UK would “inevitably” adopt whatever was adopted in the other country—and that required OA would become universal in the top publishing nations if it was first adopted by France or Germany.

Some of the economic analysis is particularly interesting, such as Goodman’s explanation for the extreme rise in commercial journal prices:

Publishers’ prices have almost always increased faster than library budgets. This is due to positive feedback: publishers’ costs increase each year; they know that a comparable price increase will cause a certain number of subscribers to cancel, and therefore they increase the price to cover both. The obvious result is accelerating cancellations in all following years.
As any engineer can tell you, positive feedback is inherently unstable: It leads to breakdown, one way or another. This analysis offers yet another reason why the STM journal system is broken—despite the rosy claims of its largest commercial adherents.

There’s a lot to think about in this 11-page paper (including two pages of charts). In every scenario, Goodman believes OA will eventually become nearly ubiquitous—with a 90% rate somewhere between 2008 and 2015 (or later), depending on the scenario.


The last two pages of this report have been used repeatedly as evidence that OA doesn’t make economic sense for libraries. That’s a shame. Those two pages offer an estimate of Cornell costs in a 100% OA journal model (assuming that all “author-pays” costs come out of the library’s budget, with no subventions from research funding agencies), concluding that breakeven is at $1,100 per article. That is, if the average cost per article turns out to be less than that, Cornell would save money in an all-OA environment; if it’s more, Cornell would spend more. At $1,500 per article, Cornell would spend about $1.5 million more than in the current model.

But that’s just the appendix. Change the set of assumptions and the numbers change. The report is **worth reading on its own merit**—and the report is most certainly not an attack on OA journals. From the executive summary: “Open Access publishing should not be regarded as an ultimate solution to the science serials crisis, but it can no doubt offer a pragmatic solution in specific cases. We should be discussing whether OA publishing is better than the current subscription model, and if so, for whom.”

Maybe research libraries should support OA publishing even if it does cost more: “There may be overriding ethical arguments for removing barriers to access.” It won’t much matter what the library believes if the scholars don’t support that belief: “Where Open Access does not respond to felt needs on the part of scholars and their disciplines, it is unlikely to gain support of authors.”

The report recommends that Cornell University Libraries “Foster and support viable Open Access publishing initiatives that respond to or resonate with real needs of specific scholarly communities”; consider
OA strategies and projects based on whether the approach seems likely to be cost effective, meets the needs of user communities, and minimizes detrimental effects; continue environmental scanning regarding OA issues; and establish a standing committee to monitor developments.

Read the report carefully; it’s well-written and full of interesting nuggets. Although one OA evangelist seems to deny the existence or possibility of overlay journals (where a journal consists of a table of contents referencing archived papers), this report notes at least three such journals. The report is inclined to take publishers at their word regarding article costs (I’m tempted to call these prices, a quite different animal), but notes the wide range of “costs.” One comment on BioMedCentral is a bit snarky, but a little snarkiness improves a task force report. (Page 10, third paragraph, fourth line: You really should read the report!)

There isn’t one scholarly publishing community or academic community; there are many. That’s not news, but it sometimes seems to escape observers and participants. This task force understands that basic fact. They get that the so-called “crisis of scholarly communication” is really an STM serials pricing crisis—which indirectly creates a crisis in the humanities because libraries don’t have enough money left to buy specialized scholarly monographs.

Good stuff, carefully done. The appendix is just that: An appendix representing one set of calculations. Pay more attention to the first 21 pages (before a four-page bibliography).
NIH issued the final version of its public access policy, such as it is. Beyond that, discussions and resolutions concerning open access continue, as do articles and policy statements. Nothing breathtaking to report, and those of you who subscribe to the SPARC Open Access Newsletter (SOAN) may already know all of this.

NIH Policy and Reaction

SOAN 83 (March 2, 2005) covered “the final version of the NIH public-access policy” as its lead story. As noted in C&I 5:4, Peter Suber already discussed what he expected that final policy to be. He hoped that some of NIH’s concessions to publishers would be rolled back, but they weren’t.

Suber notes a few key points:

- The policy took effect on May 2—for all outstanding NIH grants, not just new ones. “That means that we can expect to see some articles based on NIH-funded research show up in PubMed Central (PMC) fairly soon after May 2, even if the rate of deposit is initially slow.”
- The policy’s three purposes are to create a stable archive of peer-reviewed research publications, secure a searchable compendium of those publications, and make published results of NIH research more readily accessible.
- NIH asks for an electronic version of the author’s final manuscript (which may or may not include a journal’s copy-editing changes) and PMC will accept corrections and necessary revisions. PMC will also cheerfully accept the publisher’s final version, which will supersede the author’s final version—and will accept that before the author’s original timing.
While the permissible delay after publication has gone from six to 12 months, NIH will exhort authors to choose the shortest possible delay: “Posting for public accessibility through PMC is requested and strongly encouraged as soon as possible…”

NIH offers language for authors to include in copyright agreements—but also believes that it could claim the right to deposit articles in PMC under the government-purpose license in the Code of Federal Regulations.

There are no penalties for non-deposit—but some publishers still decry the policy, saying that a “request” from a funding agency is intrinsically coercive. As Suber notes, it may not be any more coercive than the journal’s request to delay PMC deposit. “There is dangerous potential in this policy to create painful and career-jeopardizing dilemmas for researchers who will have to choose between snubbing their funder and snubbing their publisher.” Some journal publishers have already said that they’ll accept their authors’ decisions on deposit of NIH-funded papers.

The flexibility offered by NIH is explicitly intended to make life easy for publishers more than for authors. “The ‘final’ version of the policy is not really final.”

PMC content will be free to everyone, not just U.S. taxpayers.

The NIH policy is nowhere near what it could or should have been—but it is a significant precedent. Suber suggests future steps: Lobby to make the request a requirement (with no more than a six-month delay), get Congress to monitor compliance, get other funding agencies to adopt similar but better policies, encourage journals to allow immediate release.

Early Reaction

SPARC sent its directors a message on the NIH policy on February 25, 2005. The message notes that the NIH policy may raise questions and create concerns on campus and suggests that the library has an opportunity to provide information, offer direction, and advocate for increased access. Suggested actions include providing a link to the NIH policy page on the library’s scholarly communications page (www.nih.gov/about/publicaccess/), contacting leaders of appropriate departments to make sure they know about the policy and help them prepare, and contact others about the benefits of early deposits.
The message includes a set of key points, some tailored to the academic community—e.g., “The policy applies only to peer-reviewed articles…not to letters to the editor, editorials, or other submitted materials” and “The policy is not a mandate regarding how and where to publish research articles.”

Was AAP/PSP mollified by the substantial weakening of the NIH policy? It’s hard to say, but that group issued a March 2, 2005 press release that stressed the “millions of dollars” publishers invest “to support peer review, editing, abstracting, indexing, distribution, archiving, searching, access, and innovation. The NIH must avoid duplicating those efforts—otherwise taxpayers will truly ‘pay twice’ for redundant versions of information or imitative platforms and tools.” And, later, this gem:

As the NIH goes forward with its plan, it must be careful to distinguish a professional and scholarly publishing environment from one in which “free” access is subsidized through regulation. NIH fostering immediate free public access to content would risk undermining free market investments and models that have proven essential to authors and researchers.

These are interesting quotations. Almost all peer review is unpaid effort (with some exceptions, as in some economics journals). Abstracting, indexing, searching, and access are typically the roles of third parties (such as PubMed), not journal publishers themselves (or at least not entirely journal publishers). Publishers have not historically claimed to provide guaranteed archival services—and there’s a lot of question as to whether any private enterprise can make such a guarantee. As for taxpayers paying twice—I suppose it’s possible that biomedical journals never appear in more than one full-text aggregation likely to be held at a given institution, but that would make the field almost unique. The quoted paragraph is both a subtle assertion that government-funded research should not be freely available (although, if it is done in government labs, it can’t be copyrighted) and a blatant claim that the free market outweighs all other considerations.

Roy Rosenzweig, vice president of the Research Division of the American Historical Association, used the NIH policy as the basis for “Should historical scholarship be free?” in the April 2005 Perspectives (www.historians.org/Perspectives/issues/2005/0504/). It’s a fairly long and thoughtful article that offers a range of possible actions for historians interested in future access. Worth reading.

Andrew Richard Albanese wrote, “After a flawed policy, what’s next for librarians and open access?” in Library Journal (April 15,
2005). He recounts a Midwinter session on the NIH proposal, including a “star”—Sharon Terry, noting what she and her husband went through to access medical literature regarding their children’s cancer. He notes the weakened final policy—and then goes on to quote Stevan Harnad, who—as usual—treats any concerns than his One Single Answer as “muddled” and as “bungling.” After all, librarians worry about being able to afford any form of access. But Harnad doesn’t care: “Open access is separate from the serials crisis” and they must be disentangled. SPARC, on the other hand, pushes for a viable scholarly communications system.

Sadly, Harnad gets more space in Albanese’s piece than those interested in real-world solutions. Harnad’s absolutism shines through when he says, “SPARC gets it about 90 percent right. But that ten percent it gets wrong could hold us back ten years or more.” That’s classic Harnad: If you don’t agree with me 100%, you’re an obstacle.

I’ve been the brunt of Harnad’s absolutism and I’m sick of it. Harnad was a pioneer in advocating his own flavor of OA: He deserves credit for that. He now acts as a divisive force, belittling any actions to improve the survivability of the scholarly communications system (which should include libraries) if those actions aren’t 100% in accordance with his own pet project. He believes he’s steering people into the One True Path toward OA; I believe he’s damaging and quite possibly delaying the whole process through his extremism and single-mindedness.

An endnote attached to the article considers a panel at AAP/PSP’s annual meeting. Sad to say, the anti-NIH crowd continued its stance. Martin Frank “eloquently questioned both the legality of the NIH measure and its practicality” and suggested the NIH policy would put researchers in the position of “having to choose between pleasing their funding agency or their publisher, both of which are equally important career-wise.” That threat is particularly interesting coming from the author of the DC Principles for Free Access. If those principles mean anything at all, one would think that a 12-month embargo would be well within their parameters. I suppose Frank has helped to clarify the meaning of the DC Principles—that is, apparently, pure hypocrisy.

Olaf Sparre Andersen of The Journal of General Physiology included an odd comment in an editorial announcing some changes in that journal—which charges significant page charges already. After announcing the changes, he comments on the NIH policy, notes that
only some of JGP’s articles (more than half) will be in PubMed Central and grumbles about the “burden” of the new policy on authors and readers—because “NIH/NLM does not wish to receive PDFs of the published articles,” thus placing a burden on authors to make sure the PMC version is correct and a burden on readers to verify its correctness. Fine, except that it’s not true. As Peter Suber notes, NIH is perfectly happy to receive the final publisher’s PDF, has said so, and will replace the author’s version with the publisher’s version when received. Andersen could presumably have checked this. Given that JGP’s own availability policy offers free access after a year, I fail to understand the point of the editorial except to snipe at NIH.

As noted in SOAN 85 (May 2, 2005), NIH started accepting publications on May 2. The policy is not OA. It does improve potential access. For some reason editors still feel the need to object to the policy.

**Shorter Pieces on Access Issues**

Blackwell announced Online Open in February 2005. It’s a two-year trial of hybrid publishing—optional front-payment OA on an article-by-article basis. The price is high, $2,500 per article, but Blackwell seems to be doing it right. Subscription prices for journals in the trial will be adjusted based on the number of “author-pays” articles expected.

The Columbia University Senate unanimously passed a Resolution concerning “Open Access” on April 1, 2005. After several Whereas clauses, it is resolved:

“1. That the Senate put on record its support for the principle of open access to the fruits of scholarly research;

“2. That the Senate urge the University to advance new models for scholarly publishing that will promote open access, helping to reshape the marketplace in which scholarly ideas circulate, in a way that is consistent with standards of peer review and scholarly excellence;

“3. That the Senate urge the University to monitor and resist efforts to impose digital rights management regimes and technologies that obstruct or limit open access, except as necessary to secure rights of privacy;

“4. That the Senate urge the scholars of Columbia University to play a part in these open-access endeavors in their various capacities as authors, readers, editors, referees, and members of scientific boards and learned associations, etc., (a) by encouraging and collaborating with publishers’ efforts to advance open access, (b) by retaining intellectual
property rights in their own work where this will help it become more widely available, and (c) by remaining alert to efforts by publishers to impose barriers on access to the fruits of scholarly research.”

A solid statement—but Stevan Harnad saw another chance to pounce, after claiming (absurdly, based on the record) that he does “not at all enjoy having always to play the role of carper and fault-finder.” His comment on this and a University of California resolution: “What was missing from both was the core component of a targeted university OA policy, the only component with the capacity to move universities to 100% OA rather than continuing to drift aimlessly, as they do now”—that is, self-archiving, preferably required. Harnad goes on to dismiss the need for reform in either scholarly publishing or copyright, and calls it “nothing short of absurd to keep harping on retaining copyright and favoring ‘alternative venues’ instead of simply adopting a policy of self-archiving all university journal article output.” Classic Harnad: anything other than The Solution is “absurd.” Indeed, he seems to label the Columbia resolution another “false start” that “keep[s] heading us off in the wrong directions.” Wrong, of course, according to Stevan Harnad.

Case Western Reserve University’s faculty senate also adopted a Resolution on open access. Its background statement defines Open Access journals succinctly and clearly. After a few Whereas clauses, the resolution “urges the University and is members to

“Support Open Access publishing in their educational, research, editorial and administrative roles, by encouraging their professional societies to move toward Open Access publishing, aiding in forming and providing editorial assistance to peer reviewed Open Access journals, and favoring such journals when submitting their own research,

“Encourage the University’s libraries to reallocate resources away from high-priced publishers,

“Support the consideration of peer-reviewed Open Access material during the promotion and tenure process,

“Post their work prior to publication in an open digital archive and seek to retain particular copyright rights enabling them to post their published work in a timely fashion, and provide institutional support to those seeking to do so, and

“Establish infrastructure to sustain digital Open Access publication.”

For Case Western Reserve, the emphasis is squarely on OA publishing, with archiving distinctly secondary.
A Wired News story on April 11 notes that OA journals continue to grow, with at least 1,525 in business. Then there’s the usual nonsense: suggestions that front-payments will “turn journals into servants to authors, like the vanity-press publishers,” with Dr. Jeffrey Drazen of the New England Journal of Medicine sniping that “who pays the fiddler calls the tune.” But Randy Dotinga (who wrote this piece) isn’t buying it: “Traditional journals face their own potential conflicts of interest. They are, after all, generally supported by advertisers with agendas.” The story goes offtrack in the next paragraph: “Indeed, journal subscription prices are already so high—some charge hundreds of dollars a year…” In STM, at least, “hundreds of dollars” is the mark of relatively inexpensive journals. Maybe Dotinga found “thousands and sometimes tens of thousands of dollars” too incredible to print. The story also quotes Blackwell’s president saying that the $2,500 Open Online fee “wouldn’t pay for all the costs associated with electronic development, peer review and distribution.”

Rudy M. Baum of Chemical & Engineering News continues to raise the Red flag. His May 16, 2005 editorial is entitled “More socialized science” and calls open access “a shell game, the unstated goal of which is to transfer responsibility for publishing and archiving the scientific literature from the private sector to the federal government.” He goes on to suggest “BMWs should be free” as a reasonable analogy to the idea that scientific information should be free. He calls the suggestion “absurd”—and I agree the analogy is absurd. There might be some worthwhile points in the editorial (not new points, to be sure), but after Baum calls OA advocates socialists, it’s hard to take anything in the editorial seriously. It is, in fact, crap like this that makes me nervous about being an OA independent: If the opponents consistently get it this wrong, should I just sign up with the most rigid adherents?

Jan Velterop, publisher at BioMed Central, has left to return to work as a consultant—and as an advocate for OA publishing, as noted in Information World Review for May 18. Velterop’s been a strong advocate, but his statements in the IWR piece are troubling. First, he says “there are really only two publishers [BMC and PLoS] involved,” which is a slap in the face to the many other bodies that have published OA journals since before BMC and PLoS began. It gets worse, from my perspective:

Velterop said OA needs renewed energy and a new focus to speed up its adoption. “Originally, OA was confused by librarians as being about the
drive for lower prices. I think the two have very little to do with each other, and the attention on prices has been to the detriment of OA adoption by society publishers.”

He goes on to say that targeting authors and librarians for OA advocacy is mistaken. So Velterop appears also to ignore the issues of long-term survivability for a library and publishing system in favor of a single-minded approach—to be sure, a different single-minded approach than Harnad’s. Velterop dismisses library concerns; probably not a wonderful idea. But then, he cites Springer Open Choice as “the best OA model.” If that means that Velterop now believes $3,000 per article is a “reasonable price” for OA publication, it’s no wonder Velterop wants to steer the discussion away from any thought of saving money for libraries.

In later list postings, Velterop opines that publishing is more important than reading, which adds a whole new flavor to the discussion. In another post, he suggests “The value of a full-text article is diminishing” because abstracts and underlying data are increasingly freely available. “The knowledge embedded in articles will, before too long, be represented in disambiguated semantic maps of the articles rather than in the articles themselves.” Here, explicitly, the importance of archival and confirmatory articles “is a function of their existence rather than their being read. Knowing that they have been published will be enough.” What need for STM libraries, or even archival systems, if all that’s important about an article is that it was published? A new use for write-only memory? (That last note refers back to a groundbreaking “research” paper presented at LITA’s Fuzzy Match Interest Group back when that group was active. I don’t have publication data; there may not be any.)

I was charmed by the title of a new OA journal from CSA and the National Biological Information Infrastructure: *Sustainability: Science, Practice, & Policy*. What better than a journal about sustainability helping to make scholarly access and libraries sustainable?

**DigitalKoans**

Charles W. Bailey, Jr., founder of the Public-Access Computer Systems List (PACS-L) and founding editor of the *Public-Access Computer Systems Review* (an early gold OA refereed e-journal [first published in 1990]), has been involved with scholarly electronic publishing for a very long time. His *Scholarly Electronic Publishing Bibliography* and as-
sociated weblog combine to offer a deep, broad, well-organized ongoing bibliography of the field.

Recently, Charles began a second weblog, DigitalKoans (www.escholarlypub.com/digitalkoans/), with the motto “What is the sound of one e-print downloading?” I think it’s fair to suggest that library access to scholarship will be a significant focus of the weblog, at least given the first few postings.

On April 26, Charles posted “How green is my publisher?”—discussing his own attempts to retain copyright for his scholarly writings and what he found when he tried to self-archive a recent work. It’s a great post (they all are—go read them yourself), and indicates that self-archiving of articles in supposedly “green OA” journals may not be straightforward.

Here’s what I found. My “preprint distribution rights” allow “posting as electronic files on the contributor's own Web site for personal or professional use, or on the contributor's internal university/corporate intranet or network, or other external Web site at the contributor's university or institution, but not for either commercial (for-profit) or systematic third party sales or dissemination, by which is meant any interlibrary loan or document delivery systems. The contributor may update the preprint with the final version of the article after review and revision by the journal's editor(s) and/or editorial/peer-review board.

…The agreement also states that the e-print must contain a fair amount of information about the publisher and the paper: the published article’s citation and copyright date, the publisher’s address, information about the publisher’s document delivery service, and a link to the publisher’s home page.

Charles concludes that this policy does not allow him to deposit the article in an disciplinary archive such as E-LIS or the upcoming “universal repository” hosted by the Internet Archive. His own website won’t be OAI-compliant, and Houston doesn’t yet have an OAI-compliant institutional repository. He also finds the amount of required publisher publicity a bit excessive. He makes four points. Excerpting from each:

- “There are swirling currents of complexity beneath the placid surface of color-coded copyright transfer agreement directories… ‘Green’ may not always mean ‘go.’”
- “It would be helpful if such directories could identify whether articles can be deposited in key types of archives…”
“If claims are going to be made about the number of ‘green’ journals, maybe more consideration about what ‘green’ means is in order…”

“Although copyright transfer agreements have always been a confusing mess, now we want authors to actually read and evaluate them…. And [ir] managers…need to make sense of them postfacto to determine if articles can be legally deposited…”

You can guess what happened next: Harnad commented, briefly for Harnad although the comment is almost as long as the post. Harnad begins in all caps: “THE LIGHT DOESN’T GET ANY GREENER—AND NEEDN’T: JUST GO AHEAD AND SELF-ARCHIVE!” All caps, exclamation points scattered throughout, an absolute denial of any real issues: All proper marks of a zealot. Harnad considers the restrictions on “3rd-party archives” “perfectly reasonable.” He repeats, as he has hundreds of times, that it is “cheap and easy for any university to create an OAI-compliant institutional archive.” He repeats his theme that nobody should worry about the preservation of contents. He thinks the publisher requirements about information are “just fine too,” lumping publisher’s address, an ad for the publisher’s document delivery service, and so on with “full reference information.” And he appears to label Charles’ suggestion of standardized copyright transfer agreements as a “red herring.”

The next day, Charles Bailey posted “Not green enough,” responding to some of Harnad’s comment. He notes that 94% of universities do not have institutional repositories—a problem neatly solved by disciplinary archives and the Internet Archive repository. So, to Harnad’s “no problem,” Bailey replies, “We would have to believe that it doesn’t matter if articles are archived in OAI-PMH compliant repositories or archives…” Taking on the “cheap and easy” mantra, he cites cost estimates for some actual IRs: $285,000 per year at MIT, $100,000 at Queens University, $200,000 at the University of Rochester, and between 2,280 and 3,190 staff hours (thus, presumably, at least $60-$75,000 for moderately-paid computer staff) at the University of Oregon.

“I think that Stevan will find that few academic libraries are not going to worry about permanence.” Charles notes that librarians are aware that publishers are corporations, which change priorities, merge, and fail: “Publisher archives” are sometime things. Charles distinguishes between providing a citation and “providing a fair amount of advertising information for the publisher.” And, unsurprisingly,
Charles objects to having understandable standard copyright transfer agreements called a “red herring.”

Apparently, Harnad struck back; I did not read the “extensive comments” provided (one can only take so much!). In “Two views of IRs,” posted April 29, Charles posits two very different views of institutional repositories that may be the crux of his disagreement with Harnad:

In Stevan’s view, the sole purpose of an IR is to provide free global access to e-prints… (I’m unclear about Stevan’s position about independent scholars who will never be able to self-archive in an IR because they are not affiliated with any institution…) IR managers who hold other views are obstructing progress because they are wasting time on nonessential issues, not correctly perceiving the urgency and simplicity of his self-archiving solution, and unnecessarily delaying the progress of OA.

My view of the basic function of an IR is best summed up by two quotes…

“…a set of services that a university offers to the members of its community for the management and dissemination of digital materials created by the institution and its community members. It is most essentially an organization commitment to the stewardship of these digital materials, including long-term preservation where appropriate…” [Clifford Lynch]

“An [IR] includes a variety of materials produced by scholars from many units… Some [IRs] are also being used as electronic presses…” [Charles W. Bailey, Jr.]

Given this vision of IRs, I see them as more technically complex than Stevan…

Later, Bailey notes that getting faculty to voluntarily deposit e-prints won’t be easy and that a “significant subset of universities will want some type of basic vetting of the copyright compliance status of submitted e-prints.” He notes that Johanneke Systema of Oxford University, commenting on “How green…,” agrees that “green doesn’t automatically mean go”—and that Systema must check publisher policies even when the SHERPA Romeo list indicates “green OA.” Bailey does not assume that his view of IRs as relatively complex and expensive will prevail over Harnad’s “$2000 linux server and a few days’ one-time sysad set-up time” view.

DigitalKoans followed up with a list of links to the 20 institutional repositories among the 123 ARL member libraries and a series of posts
under the title “The view from the IR trenches,” offering cogent points from articles published by early adopters of IRs. Those are short, well-done extracts.

DigitalKoans in general is **highly recommended.** After I wrote the section above (this essay has been germinating for a while), he posted “The spectrum of e-journal access policies: Open to restricted access” (May 13, 2005). He suggests a first-cut model for journal access policies, offering five levels. Briefly:

- **OA journals, color “green”—true OA with appropriately minimal licensing.**
- **Free access (FA) journals, which he calls cyan: Journals that provide free access but don’t use something similar to a Creative Commons “attribution” license.**
- **Embargoed access (EA) journals, “yellow”—those that offer access after some period.**
- **Partial Access (PA), “orange”—ones that offer access to some articles, but not all.**
- **Restricted Access (RA), “red”—ones that charge for any access.**

He notes that many DOAJ journals are cyan rather than green, and would like to see a more nuanced breakdown of the spectrum.

Dr. Klaus Graf noted agreement in a brief comment. Stevan Harnad weighed in with a comment longer than the original post, “A plea for chrononomic parsimony and focus on what really matters.” You already know “what really matters” to Harnad—self-archiving and nothing else. “Who cares” about distinctions in copyright and economic policy? He dismisses the nature of licensing for OA journals: If the articles are free, “It doesn’t matter.” He goes on and on and on. He makes it clear that Harnad, *and Harnad alone*, defines the OA movement: “It is irrelevant (to the open access movement) what the publisher says about the website where the author may archive his own article.” Thus, if you find that relevant (as it is to anyone interested in a robust, survivable future), you’re not part of the OA movement: Harnad says so. He ends with a classic Harnad slap: “The only relevant color there is Red—as in Herring.” (There’s also the usual slew of self-citations, proving Harnad’s points by quoting the expert Harnad.)

Bailey thanks Harnad for his extensive comments. He goes on to admit that, viewed from Harnad’s perspective, his spectrum of policies is a waste of time—and notes that he doesn’t remember suggesting
that it was a new OA model. “That said, Stevan’s view that open access equals free access (period) is not, as he well knows, universal, and his green and gold models are based on this premise.” Bailey goes on to quote portions of Suber’s “Open Access Overview”—which is a good deal more complex than Harnad’s black-and-white model. Bailey also has the temerity to suggest that Harnad is not consistent. None of which is really Bailey’s point:

[W]hile I admire Stevan’s unflagging advocacy of open access (by which he really means free access), open access is not the only issue in the e-journal publishing world that is of concern to librarians to whom this missive was mainly addressed. This is because librarians, while hopefully working to build a better future, have to deal with the messy existing realities of the e-publishing environment to do their jobs and to make decisions about how to allocate scarce resources…[skipping some important discussion for the same of brevity]

Stevan’s model has colors, but, in reality, each color is black and white: Gold and nothing, GREEN and grey. All or nothing. And, as long as you accept his premises, it works, and it allows him to focus on his free-access goal with single minded determination, undistracted by the knotty complexities of the e-scholarly publishing environment. Long may he run.

For those who have a different view of OA or who have broader concerns, it’s too “black and white.”

Go read the posts. I’ve left a lot out.

Longer Items (a Suber Trio)

SOAN 83 includes “Reflections on OA/TA coexistence.” It begins, “Open access (OA) and toll access (TA) have coexisted for as long as there has been OA. So the question is not whether they can coexist, but whether they will coexist forever or only for some transition period.”

Suber doesn’t offer a prediction and explains why it’s difficult to do so. He notes that OA and TA are inherently compatible: “[T]wo journals, even in the same research niche, do not directly compete with one another for readers…journals are not fungible…” He also understands the complexities of compatibility—for example, “journals in the same niche compete for submissions even if they don’t compete for readers.” “There is clearly a tipping point, even if we haven’t reached it yet, after which libraries will cancel high-priced TA journals because their niche is adequately served by high-quality OA journals.”
Suber believes that coexistence reduces the efficiency of both OA and TA. I’m not sure I agree, but Suber (as always) makes an excellent case. He offers several other points regarding competition and coexistence—and notes that in physics, OA and TA have coexisted for 14 years. “This isn’t just a little OA coexisting with a lot of TA. OA archiving is the default in physics, and yet TA journals in the field are not only surviving but thriving.” Skipping over quite a few points worth considering, I reach Suber’s note that “the system in which all or most journals are TA cannot survive” because published knowledge is growing too rapidly—and the current system “is already dysfunctional and has been for 10-20 years.”

SOAN 84, April 2, 2005, begins with “Helping scholars and helping libraries” and continues with “Getting to 100%.” Scholars and libraries are close allies in the campaign for open access, but they pursue OA for different reasons. For scholars, the primary benefit of OA is wider and easier access for readers and larger audience and impact for authors. For librarians, the primary benefit of OA is saving money in their serials budget.

He goes on to offer examples of how specific initiatives help scholars more than they help libraries—and wonders whether a move to OA will ever save money for libraries. “We know what kinds of OA initiative will help scholars—namely, ever kind. But what kinds of OA initiative will help libraries save money in their serials budgets?” A tough question, made tougher because Suber admits that he wants libraries to save money because libraries will be “the best source of funds for the long-term sustenance of OA.” If academic libraries have no other collection shortfalls—such as monographs in the humanities—then maybe Suber’s right in saying, “the best way to spend the savings is on the OA alternative that made the savings possible.” But if that’s not true—as seems to be the case—then it’s more complicated.

“The inevitable question is whether I, and all others who want to help libraries, want to harm publishers. The answer is no.” Suber can speak for himself, but I would suggest that some who want to help libraries would be only to happy to harm some publishers, specifically those that have been draining academic libraries of every last drop of budget. I agree that most balanced participants do not support initiatives “whose direct purpose is to undermine publishers”—but consider this closing statement as well:
Certain services, like peer review and wide and easy distribution, are indispensable for science and society. But no particular journal or publisher is indispensable.

“Getting to 100% offers a “progress report” on some of the obstacles for OA. He notes that most OA journals, at least those in the DOAJ, do not charge up-front fees: They’re supported through other means such as institutional subsidy. That finding calls into question the Cornell study.

He also discusses IR issues, including the lack of OAI-compliant repositories at many institutions—and uses that discussion to announce the Internet Archive-based “universal repository.” But as Charles W. Bailey, Jr. notes, many publishers don’t appear to allow deposit in any repository outside the author’s institution.

Finally, here’s one you really should download (and copy as needed): What you can do to promote open access, www.earlham.edu/%7Epeters/fos/do.htm. The version I saw was revised on April 5, 2005. It’s divided into sections for elements within universities, journals and publishers, foundations, and others. It’s not short, but it’s all bullet points and nicely organized. Major bullets for university libraries include “Launch an open-access OAI-compliant eprint archive…,” “Help faculty deposit their articles in the [IR],” “Consider publishing an open-access journal,” “Consider rejecting the big deal…,” “Help OA journals launched at the university become known to other libraries…,” “Include OA journals in the library catalog,” and more. The document includes loads of good ideas; you don’t need to do all of them to help.
The best sources for news and perspectives on open access continue to be Peter Suber’s *Open Access News* weblog, [www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/fosblog.html](http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/fosblog.html) (and the monthly newsletter from Suber that’s publicized on the blog); Charles W. Bailey, Jr.’s *Scholarly Electronic Publishing Weblog*, [info.lib.uh.edu/sepb/sepw.htm](http://info.lib.uh.edu/sepb/sepw.htm); and Charles’ other blog, *DigitalKoans*, [www.escholarlypub.com/digitalkoans](http://www.escholarlypub.com/digitalkoans).

Those aren’t the only sources. In her new job, Dorothea Salo’s been offering some fascinating posts at *Caveat Lector*, [cavlec.yarinareth.net](http://cavlec.yarinareth.net), about the realities of running a DSpace installation. There are others.

One source has disappeared. As noted by Peter Suber on August 15, BioMed Central has ceased publishing *Open Access now*. That newsletter lasted a total of 23 issues between 2003 and today. BMC says that, since the newsletter began, “[O]pen access has truly come of age and has acquired unstoppable momentum. As a result of this success, *Open Access Now* is no longer being published…” Suber agrees that OA has unstoppable momentum but notes that he’ll miss the newsletter for its “wonderful interviews” and “very useful profiles of OA initiatives.” Suber also wants to see “more voices and perspectives [on OA], not fewer.” The archive continues to be available, if you want to check out the 23 issues (they’re all brief and professionally formatted).

Suber’s desire for more voices and perspectives is natural and proper. If OA is to serve as an effective counterbalance to overpriced STM publishing and means to provide access for more people to more papers, it needs to be discussed broadly. Two things that might help encourage more people to discuss and implement OA more broadly:

- It would help if people didn’t fear attack when they show more interest in OA publishing than in self-archiving.
- It would help if it was possible to discuss the *actual* costs of building and maintaining digital repositories that will serve scholarship
in the long run without being hammered by persistent claims that it costs essentially nothing to self-archive, and that self-archiving is all OA really needs.

I’ve said these things before, even naming name (yes, that’s a singular) and I have no reason to believe repetition will help. So here are my own notes on a selection of miscellaneous items and articles related to various aspects of scholarly publishing and library access, with a topical focus on the continuing struggle of various agencies to encourage or require OAI archiving. First, the miscellaneous items:

- On May 11, the Cornell University Faculty Senate endorsed another resolution concerning scholarly publishing. This one calls OA publishing “an increasingly effective option for scholarly communication.” It calls for faculty to become familiar with pricing policies for journals in their specialties (a first-rate idea!), consider publishing in OA journals or reasonably-priced journals with brief embargo periods, and deposit articles in an OA repository, and for the library to do its best to resist exorbitant subscription prices. It also “strongly urges tenured faculty to cease supporting publishers who engage in exorbitant pricing, by not submitting papers to, or refereeing for, the journals sold by those publishers, and by resigning from their editorial boards if more reasonable pricing policies are not forthcoming.”

- C. Kelty of Savage Minds (savageminds.org) posted “Recursive public irony” on May 24, 2005. Kelty’s article “Geeks, social imaginaries and recursive publics” appears in Cultural Anthropology. The irony: One of Kelty’s friends, part of a group discussed in the article, spotted it at AnthroSource—but couldn’t get at a copy because the friend isn’t a member of the American Anthropological Association and wasn’t ready to pony up $12 for a copy. As Kelty notes, the research was partially funded by NSF, “and any self-respecting American Taxpayer should balk at paying a second time for research they have already funded.” Even Kelty can’t get a copy of the article online although he has affiliations at Rice, MIT, and Harvard: None of them subscribe to AnthroSource—and his AAA membership doesn’t seem to get him in. The association absolutely forbade a Creative Commons amendment to the standard author contract, with a message including this comment: “unlike the many commercial, for-profit publishers against which Creative Commons pits itself.” Kelty calls that suggestion “asinine.”
The Canadian Library Association passed an OA resolution on June 17, encouraging both branches of OA and calling for CLA itself to implement OA. (Is ALA next? It should be…)

BioMed Central issued a press release on June 23, 2005, “Open Access journals get impressive impact factors,” and the title describes the release pretty well. Tony McSean of Elsevier found it necessary to beat down the enthusiasm, arguing that the impact factor results are “unremarkable…and certainly do not provide evidence to support the common assertion that the open access publishing model increases impact factor scores.” I recommend Charles W. Bailey, Jr.’s July 11, 2005 DigitalKoans posting as a fine summary of the “controversy” and some sound reactions, including Charles’ note that comparing young OA journals to old, well-established traditional journals is tricky—and David Goodman’s comment that the real point here is that BMC titles “are at least as good as the average [of traditional journals] and the best of them well above average. For a new publisher, that is a major accomplishment.”

Speaking of DigitalKoans, you should also read the August 4, 2005 post entitled “The economics of free, scholar-produced e-journals.” Charles knows this stuff: He founded Public-Access Computer Systems Review in 1990. The first internet-published scholarly e-journal probably dates back 18 years to New Horizons in Adult Education. Since then, quite a few of these low-overhead ejournals have appeared. They’re OA—but they’re not “author pays.” The brief essay discusses the economics of such journals—which are increasingly plausible in an age of dirt-cheap storage, inexpensive server hardware, and free and cheap software.

Elsevier never stops spinning. If it’s really so sure OA doesn’t threaten it, you wonder why Crispin Davis feels the need to assure financial analysts that “authors are really not very interested” in using OA journals and that “researches themselves don’t like” open archiving. Peter Suber says Davis is “wrong on the facts” (in an August 5 Open Access News posting) and offers specific rebuttals.

Ending up back at DigitalKoans, “The e-print deposit conundrum” appeared August 25. Another fine essay, considering ways to encourage scholars to take the few necessary actions to deposit their articles in digital archives; again, well worth reading.
Heads up: The Open Content Alliance and its ambitious plans. I’m mentioning it here as particularly noteworthy (and access-oriented); I plan to look at OCA together with developments in Google Print in the near future.

NIH, RCUK, Wellcome: Building the Archives

Long-term library access to scholarship, including the scholarship published in monographs, requires the kind of financial relief that OA publishing could potentially provide. OA archives may or may not provide financial relief, but they serve open access.

Several initiatives work to improve access by causing more research articles to be deposited in such archives. It now appears predictable that any such initiative will be met with resistance from both commercial and association publishers, raising cries and alarums about the terrible dangers of encouraging OA archiving. These notes cover a few items over the past several months relating to three somewhat-overlapping initiatives:

- NIH’s policy encouraging PubMed Central archiving for all papers predominantly funded by NIH, but allowing up to a year’s embargo for access. There’s also the matter of PubChem, an NIH-created open access database of information about organic molecules and their biological impact.

- The Wellcome Trust policy that, beginning October 1, 2005, papers from new Wellcome Trust-funded research projects must be deposited in either PubMed Central or the future UK PubMed Central within six months of publication—a policy that will extend to existing projects in another year. The Wellcome Trust is a huge nongovernmental funder of biomedical research in the UK, spending £400 million per year and producing almost 3,500 papers each year, so this is a significant boost to OA. (As Peter Suber notes in SPARC open access newsletter 90 (October 2, 2005), Wellcome’s policy “does not require publisher consent and therefore does not accommodate publisher resistance”—which should also be true of NIH and RCUK policies.)

- A draft policy by Research Councils UK (RCUK) to mandate self-archiving for articles produced from RCUK-funded projects—but a policy that allows for embargoes.
PubChem comes first because the American Chemical Society wants to restrict its content, fearing that it will interfere with sales of ACS' SciFinder Scholar and Chemical Abstracts Service.

In early June, Nobel laureate Richard J. Roberts wrote a widely-distributed letter pulling out of a January 2006 ACS-cosponsored conference in India because of ACS' opposition to PubChem. Roberts, an advisor to PubChem, asserts that it is “in no way a threat to anything ACS is doing” but rather complements ACS activities “and provides for the biological community an important resource that is not provided by CAS.”

My only interpretation of the recent actions by the ACS Board and management is that it is no longer trying to be a scientific society striving towards the goals of its Congressional charter, which is to represent the best interests of the scientists who form its membership. Rather it seems to be a commercial enterprise whose principle objective is to accumulate money…. [T]he recent actions of the ACS are a disgrace to its image in the USA and around the world.

Madeleine Jacobs, director and CEO of ACS, responded in a public letter the next day, calling Roberts “hardly a disinterested party” and claiming to “correct the misinformation that has been deliberately propagated by NIH staff and its consultants.” Jacobs says “This is, after all, a controversy about science.” Her letter—which is available in the SPARC Open Access Forum archives—claims that ACS does not oppose PubChem but “want[s] it to stay with its stated mission.” Jacobs’ reading of that mission says that PubChem would only provide access to data generated by one specific project. She goes on to state that PubChem duplicates the CAS Registry and includes a paragraph asserting a long-time conspiracy:

It appears that there are individuals in the Library of Medicine who, for 25 years, have wanted to own the CAS Registry, and now that ACS, along with sister organizations, helped get NIH's budget doubled, they finally have the money to simply replicate the Registry. This is not speculation. We have strong evidence in the minutes from the ACS Board of Directors meetings in the 1979-80 timeframe, in the clear recollection of Dr. Mary Good….and in current information from people inside the Library. So there is much more going on than would first appear.

There it is: NLM conspired to put CAS Registry (which, incidentally, began with NSF grants) out of business. A startling charge, if true. But that’s not the most startling statement in this letter. Try this one:
We question the premise that the federal government should be the funder, publisher, and repository of all scientific information. That's what is happening now with NIH and the National Library of Medicine. Yes, Rudy Baum has called this “The Socialization of Science.” Concerned citizens should be alarmed.

I'm alarmed—alarmed that a society of chemists is headed by someone capable of making such exaggerated claims. Jacobs goes on to note that NIH's $30 billion budget dwarfs the ACS budget and says NIH “should use its money to support research grants to advance its mission.” (I would suggest that using one-one hundredth of one percent of that money to assure access to research results might be considered an effective way to advance NIH's mission, but I'm not ACS.)

Jacobs goes on to defend the absurd lawsuit against Google: “The lawsuit against Google is about the use of a name we have had in the marketplace for many years: SciFinder Scholar. It is strictly about unfair competition, not about its product per se.” So ACS still asserts that “Google Scholar” represents unfair competition for “SciFinder Scholar”!

Steve Heller wrote an open letter responding to Jacobs: “As for disinformation, you are way ahead of us all. You can add untruths, distortions, and misleading statements to that as well.” Heller asserts first-person knowledge that Jacobs' conspiracy claim is false, notes that there is essentially no duplication of information between PubChem and CAS Registry, and puts the “$30 billion budget” number in context:

How dare you use the total NIH budget of somewhat less than $30 billion to say that the $3 million of PubChem funds (most of which has nothing to do with chemicals) are competition or will put CAS out of business. [Emphasis added.]

And give me a break—who can really take you seriously when you say 12 NLM employees can/will put 1300 CAS employees out of work? It is an insult to most every CAS employee to imply that they do so little that 1 NLM staff member can put 100 of them out of work.

Heller also has some choice words about the Google suit. I don't know the truth of all this; I do know that Jacobs' letter is so heavy-handed that it's hard to take seriously, particularly as she assualts a Nobel laureate.

Apparently ACS is trying to get Congress to restrict PubChem. A June 14 letter from the University of California Academic Council to Congressman Ralph Regula (chair of the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies of the
Committee on Appropriations) notes that such restrictions are apparently being considered and points out the importance of PubChem. The letter includes a worry about “the chilling effect that the ACS campaign might have on creative attempts to increase access to science” and notes UC’s considerable contributions to ACS publications (2,300 articles in the last 2.5 years, 72 editorial positions, etc.)

This particular dispute may be resolved, if we’re to believe a piece in Chemical & Engineering News (an ACS publication). It notes that ACS is looking for assurance that PubChem won’t disseminate “information on the commercial availability of compounds” and asks for steps to assure that PubChem data is “pertinent and derived from established, bona fide sources.” This “olive branch” may or may not have anything to do with the heat noted above.

The weakened NIH public access policy has had some unfortunate side-effects. Some traditional publishers are “complying” by insisting on either a six month or twelve month embargo and (generally) refusing to allow the published versions of articles to be deposited. In some cases, the new embargo periods are longer than those previously required by journals—and some publishers and associations seem to imply that they’ve lengthened the embargoes in order to comply with NIH policies. SPARC Open Access Newsletter 86 (June 2, 2005) begins with an excellent discussion of the situation.

Unfortunately, submissions haven’t started out all that well. A July 15, 2005 press release from the Alliance for Taxpayer Access gives these figures:

Based on annual data, NIH funding is responsible for about 65,000 scholarly articles a year. Therefore, NIH grantees could have chosen to place approximately 11,000 articles on PubMed Central—making this taxpayer-funded research available free to the public. However, statistics provided by NIH this week show that only three percent of this number, or 340 articles accepted for publication, have been submitted by NIH grantees.

It’s early—July was only two months into the process—but those are appallingly low figures, suggesting that the voluntary process may not be working.

Then there’s the proposed RCUK policy—and here the response from ALPSP is so predictable that it’s hardly worth recounting. This from ALPSP News:
The proposed RCUK policy for mandated self-archiving would accelerate the move to a disastrous scenario in which the free availability of ‘good enough’ versions of journal articles will allow cash-strapped librarians to save money by cancelling subscriptions.

This will destroy journals’ financial viability, and thus their ability to support quality control processes (including peer review) and all the other benefits which flow to both authors and readers from inclusion in a prestigious journal. And this in turn will deprive learned societies of a vital income stream which helps to support all the other activities which benefit both their own research communities and the general public.

Disastrous scenario. Destroyed viability. Threat to peer review. And the indirect assertion that it is the responsibility of “cash-strapped libraries” to subsidize the non-publishing activities of professional societies.

One wonders what ALPSP believes “cash-strapped libraries” will do if ALPSP and its allies succeed in making sure that there are no alternatives to current journal prices and practices. Stop buying monographs altogether? Lay off staff? Or, ahem, cancel subscriptions even if that means less access?

ALPSP’s full response has the usual claim, “ALPSP encourages the widest possible dissemination of research outputs”—but ALPSP’s actions belie that claim. That response produces a powerful sense of déjà vu, with the usual self-serving rhetoric. The short form, a letter to the chair of the RCUK Executive Group, is even terser than the ALPSP News item: “We are convinced that RCUK’s proposed policy will inevitably lead to the destruction of journals.” The letter also “absolutely reject[s] unsupported assertions” that self-archiving “does not and will not damage journals”—and manages to twist ArXiv experience in a way that suggests actual damage.

Naturally, OA advocates refuted ALPSP’s critique. An August 30 piece in the Guardian quotes both sides to some extent, and includes a surprising concession (sort of) from Sally Morris of ALPSP: That “those physics journals where 100% of content was open access had not lost subscriptions yet” (“yet” being several years after ArXiv began)—but added this oddity: “but there was a worrying trend of academics no longer reading the journals.” And this curious formulation about peer review, not as a direct quote:

Journals organise the all-important peer review process, which is the quality control for research—although the academics involved do it for free—and this has to be paid for somehow, she pointed out.
Ah. So it’s not the cost of peer review, it’s the cost of organization. When submissions and refereeing are handled electronically, that cost should amount to a modest spreadsheet or database (say, MySQL or Access) and a tiny amount of someone’s time to track papers and results: The kind of thing that a good administrative assistant in an academic department could handle in a few hours a week for a midrange journal handling 100-200 submissions a year.

As reported at Open Access News, ALPSP met with RCUK representatives on September 16. ALPSP says it’s “reassured that RCUK have agreed to explain to grant recipients why publishers might find it necessary to impose an embargo…for deposit of articles in order to protect subscription and licence sales, and also to insist that such embargoes must be observed.” ALPSP also says RCUK will be “consulting publishers over the specification of the research which will be conducted over the next two years, to evaluate the likely effects of the policy…we hope that the research will be sufficiently objective to ensure that publishers do provide data on the effects, if any, on downloads, subscriptions/licence sales, and other measures of journal sustainability.” Does this equate to “RCUK backed down”? Probably, at least to some extent. Here’s Peter Suber’s comment, given as a “PS”:

It looks like the RCUK will not close the “copyright loophole” in the current draft, which allows publishers to impose embargoes. Instead, it may even let publishers reword it to suit themselves.

Big initiatives can turn into baby steps, but those steps still constitute forward motion.

**Articles and Essays**

Gad-el-Hak, Mohamed, “Publish or perish—an ailing enterprise?” *Physics Today* 57:3 (March 2004): 81-82.

In June 2004, I commented about “an article I don’t have access to, but would dearly love to read”—this one. Dr. Gad-el-Hak (Virginia Commonwealth) became aware of that comment and sent me a copy. It’s an opinion piece and a lovely one, two dense pages of tight writing with strong opinions.

Gad-el-Hak begins with three events: An annual report from an engineering school whose dean “proudly listed 52 papers that he wrote in the course of the year”; a physics professor introduced “as the author of 80 books”; and a book Gad-el-Hak was asked to review that
“was clearly never seen by a copyeditor and was mostly a shoddy cut- and-paste job from the author’s doctoral dissertation—and worse, from the publications of others,” priced at $100 for a 200-page book. He suggests a “syndrome of what is ailing academic publishing today.”

Part of the problem is that publish-or-perish seems to emphasize quality over quantity; Gad-el-Hak says that at some institutions the process has “deteriorated into bean counting.” He notes the results: “Many articles...remain without a single citation five or more years after publication.”

Although more difficult to measure, I presume even more papers remain unread by anyone other than their authors. The way some papers list their authors today, some articles may not even be read by all their respective coauthors.

He offers one measure of possible shortage or oversupply of journals within a field: “If, say, 80% of the journals in a given field accept 20% of the submitted papers, there is probably a need for those papers. If, on the other hand, 80% of the journals accept 80% of the manuscripts submitted, perhaps there is an excess of journals in that field.” Note that this measure is independent of the number of journals in a field.

Gad-el-Hak says, “Hopping from one journal to another until something is eventually accepted for publication is fast becoming a pastime for some researchers.” That’s another way of putting something I believe: In too many fields, peer review doesn’t determine what gets published, only where it gets published. In Gad-el-Hak’s own specialty, fluid mechanics, there are at least 250 English-language journals—of which five, all from nonprofit organizations, have reasonable impact factors.

Gad-el-Hak offers “a few modest suggestions” for reform, including these:

- Resumés submitted to promotion and tenure committees should be limited to listing only 5-10 significant publications...
- Coauthors should contribute meaningfully to a publication...
- Researchers should decline to review or to serve as editors for what they suspect to be mediocre journals.

He also says a camera-ready manuscript should be a red flag for evaluating the quality of a book, but that one’s tricky, based on my own experience of preparing final camera-ready pages for half a dozen
books that went through full manuscript and copy editing before that final copy was prepared.

A forceful, interesting, worthwhile essay. Highly recommended.


Corrado (College of New Jersey) offers a useful summary of what open access, open source, and open standards are all about and their benefits for librarianship. I wonder about his use of J. Willinsky’s “nine flavors of open access,” only three of which would be considered OA by most people in the field, and I’m a bit surprised that he ignores NISO in discussing open standards. Despite those qualms, it’s a good piece (fully OA since it’s in an OA ejournal—and yes, this is a refereed scholarly article). Recommended.


Shelton focuses on OA itself in a relatively brief, readable article. She says BioMed Central and PLoS “are in the center of the open access movement,” and that may be true of one arm of OA, but there’s a lot more to OA publishing than the high-profile BMC and PLoS. Yes, they get most of the publicity, but they don’t account for the bulk of OA journals. Citing them and only them as “Open access leaders” (except for a closing paragraph about NIH and PubMed) gives short shrift to the many initiatives that preceded and accompany these two. Recommended.

Bailey, Charles W., Jr., “Key open access concepts,” www.escholarlypub.com/oab/keyoaconcepts.htm

This excerpt from Bailey’s Open access bibliography: Liberating scholarly literature with e-prints and open access journals (an OA publication available at the same address, replacing the last segment with “oab.htm”), is what its title implies: A relatively terse, very readable discussion of key concepts. Bailey gets the restrictive definition of OA as defined by BOAI right on the money. That definition of OA is restricted to peer review and requires not only free access but no restrictions (other than attribution and integrity) over reuse. A Creative Commons BY-NC license isn’t good enough, since it restricts commercial reuse.
While Bailey also gives BMC and PLoS more prominence than other OA publishers, he mentions the Directory of Open Access Journals before mentioning the two publicity leaders. He glosses over one event at the start of PLoS slightly:

Its first activity was to circulate an open letter that was intended to convince biomedical publishers to make their journals freely available within six months of publication. Roughly 34,000 scientists from 180 countries ultimately signed the letter, pledging not to publish in (or otherwise support) journals that did not meet this requirement by September 2001. When this letter did not invoke the desired response, the Public Library of Science began to publish its own open access journals.

All this is true, but there’s one missing piece of “did not invoke the desired response”: When publishers called the (possible) bluff of the 34,000 signatories, the letter was exposed as meaningless. Best estimates are that no more than 1% or 2% of the signers took any action beyond signing the letter.

**Highly recommended.** If you read all three of the articles noted above, you’ll gain a fair background in what OA means—and should move on to the sources noted at the start of this section to keep up with current activities.


I’ve talked about LOCKSS before. This massive paper tells you how it works. Here’s the abstract:

The LOCKSS project has developed and deployed in a world-wide test a peer-to-peer system for preserving access to journals and other archival information published on the Web. It consists of a large number of independent, low-cost, persistent Web caches that cooperate to detect and repair damage to their content by voting in “opinion polls.” Based on this experience, we present a design for and simulations of a novel protocol for voting in systems of this kind. It incorporates rate limitation and intrusion detection to ensure that even some very powerful adversaries attacking over many years have only a small probability of causing irrecoverable damage before being detected.

I won’t attempt to summarize or comment, except to note the key design principles (expanded in section 2 of the paper): Cheap storage is
unreliable; no long-term secrets; use inertia; avoid third-party reputation; reduce predictability; intrusion detection is intrinsic; and assume a strong adversary.

If you find those principles mysterious but intriguing, go read the paper (it’s nicely-formatted PDF). If you’re interested in LOCKSS and have a mind for technical details, go read the paper. Highly recommended (for some readers).

(www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/DisciplinaryDifferences and Needs.doc)

This lengthy report looks at the needs of academic researchers in different disciplines for information resources; it’s based on a survey of 780 UK research academics. The summary of key findings alone runs to four pages (44 findings), including these (among many others):

- “19. In terms of the single most essential resource, what stands out is the importance of journal articles for the medical and biological sciences; the importance of e-prints (pre and post) in the physical sciences and engineering; the broader mix in social sciences and the particular importance of books in languages and area studies.
- “36. The overwhelming majority of researchers in all disciplines do not know if their university has an institutional repository.
- “39. There is a high level of awareness of current debates about open access across the board.
- “40. The majority of researchers in all disciplines favour research funding bodies mandating self-archiving.
- “42. A surprisingly large minority of scholars think traditional peer review is ripe for replacement. The majority for traditional peer review was smallest in medical and biological sciences and social sciences.”

Obviously that’s just a taste of an in-depth report. Recommended for those interested in how different disciplines approach research and publication, at least in the UK.
Library Access to Scholarship
(May 2006)

It’s been too long since the last installment—partly because of special issues, partly because others are covering this area so well, including the fairly new blog noted below. It may also be time for another overview essay, placing these pieces and my own perspective in the context of open access and similar issues. That essay makes sense as a separate. For now, it’s time to catch up on items small and large.

Notes and Announcements

A team of librarians from several Canadian universities and NYU has started OA Librarian, oalibrarian.blogspot.com, “Open Access resources for librarians.” The founding group includes Heather Morrison, Marcus Banks, Lesley Perkins and Andrew Waller. Quoting from the introductory post (November 9, 2005):

The blog is designed to gather together major search sources for freely available information in library and information science. See the top right hand corner of the blog, which features links to the DOAJ LIS journal collection—52 titles as of today, along with links to E-LIS and D-LIST, as well as key advocacy resources particularly relevant to libraries and librarians. The result is a combined pathfinder/news resource blog. The idea is to bookmark the page, for handy reference particularly to the free resources, a tool which will become of greater importance as the OA resources grow.

Since the founding, four more bloggers have joined the team, one from Turkey. This international crew seems to be posting selectively and thoughtfully. It’s in my Bloglines subscription; it adds another source to complement DigitalKoans and Open Access News.

This one’s interesting as something to watch: The impact of open access on library and information science (a research project). It’s a project proposal from Cheryl Knott Malone and Anita Coleman.
(both at the University of Arizona’s School of Information Resources and Library Science), setting forth a three-year project to try to answer the question, “To what extent does open access improve the impact of an article?” The brief document sets forth the proposed approach, interesting partly because it looks at articles in library science rather than the hard sciences.

- ACRL has announced that College & Research Libraries will be freely available after a six-month embargo, with retrospective issues (PDF) available back to 1997. C&RL articles are peer reviewed. The press release notes “ACRL supports open access to scholarship as a principle for reform in the system of scholarly communication” and that ACRL encourages author self-archiving of published articles in institutional and disciplinary archives. The new provision doesn’t make C&RL an OA journal by current definitions, but it’s a step in the right direction. (Where’s Information Technology and Libraries, the scholarly journal of my home division? Some articles from March 2004 and before are available online…which is a long way from OA.)

- The Council on Library and Information Resources has issued Acquiring copyright permissions to digitize and provide open access to books. The 72-page report by Denise Troll Covey can be ordered for $25 or downloaded for free.

- The Directory of Open Access Journals issued a press release January 13, 2006, when the directory reached 2,000 journals. As of this writing, it’s up to 2,182, including 596 journals for which DOAJ provides article-level searching. The press release notes that DOAJ maintains standards: “during the last 6 months of 2005 50 titles were removed.”

- Hindawi Publishing converted 13 of its subscription-access journals in mathematics to OA on February 22, 2006. “All current and back volumes of these journals are immediately available free of any subscription or registration barriers on the Hindawi web site” and all new articles are published under the Creative Commons Attribution (“BY”) license. Peter Suber noted that this was the largest bulk conversion of non-OA journals to OA in the history of open access; it brought Hindawi up to 25 OA journals. (Since then, Hindawi has converted at least four more journals.)

- A group of librarians, college administrators, and scholars issued a call to action to preserve online scholarly journals, noting that
such journals “could vanish into oblivion should publishers go out of business or face other calamities.” The ACRL Board endorsed that message in February 2006. A Chronicle of Higher Education story notes that OhioLINK is archiving some online journals and that six libraries and nine publishers are running a pilot LOCKSS program. The story says a recommendation to demand archival deposit by publishers as a condition of licensing electronic journals “is likely to be controversial.” If that’s true, it’s unfortunate and, one would think, self-defeating.

An April 6, 2006 DigitalKoans post summarizes three open source e-journal management systems, for those wishing to publish new OA journals: HyperJournal, Open Journal Systems, and (in development) DPubS (Digital Publishing System). Earlier, Peter Suber noted a free platform hosted by Scholarly Exchange, (www.scholarly-exchange.org), using Open Journal Systems software and providing hosting and support financed by “contextually appropriate on-screen advertising.” It’s an interesting concept (a journal can avoid advertising by paying a minimal fee, and so far the ads are typical sidebar “Ads by Google”). As of early April, two journals are using the platform and four others plan to convert to it.

On April 10, the Public Access Working Group (an advisory panel to NIH) reaffirmed its support for strengthening of the NIH public access policy, calling for the policy to be mandatory and for the maximum embargo to be six months. That is, NIH should require that all NIH-funded works be made available (and accessible) in PubMed Central within six months of publication.

JSTOR noted in April 2006 that Blackwell Publishing was lengthening the “moving wall” for access to past issues of six Blackwell journals, changing four from three years to ten years and two others from five years to ten years. That makes JSTOR’s collections less useful (because less current). I’m sure it will be discussed further. Even three years is a long way from open access (particularly since JSTOR’s not exactly free either), but decisions to make back issues less readily available are always disturbing.

Brief Commentaries

It’s a bit late and wholly unsurprising, but Peter Suber noted on October 26, 2005 that the DC Principles Coalition issued a press release on
October 25 on its latest effort to “roll back the NIH public-access policy” (in Suber’s words). The coalition says the proposal “would allow the NIH to bring vast amounts of research findings to the public efficiently and at no cost” by having NIH link directly to publisher websites—after the publisher’s chosen embargo period, of course. “The transparent linking system would make it easier for the public to view more than 1 million research articles and would avert the need to create a new taxpayer-funded publishing infrastructure within the NIH.” Suber notes that the proposal has “repeatedly been offered to the NIH and repeatedly rejected” as it doesn’t provide integrated searching, undercuts NIH’s efforts to shorten embargoes, allows publishers to lengthen them at will, and offers no guarantee of continuing free access. I’ve offered my view of the DC Principles before; that (negative) view hasn’t changed.

Another October item emphasizes just how serious the serials pricing crisis really is, and the extent to which it threatens long-term access to scholarship. The University of Pennsylvania cancelled 2,255 journal subscriptions. Despite a $13.1 million budget for acquisitions (including electronic access), the library can’t keep up with increasing prices. As reported in The Daily Pennsylvanian, “officials blame big publishing companies, which they say have raised prices as the companies have bought up academic journals over the last two decades. In 1993, journals accounted for 64 percent of the materials budget. This number has increased to almost 70 percent in the 2005 materials budget.” The article goes on to cite one particularly interesting subscription price, given that most reports talk about journals costing as much as $4,000 to $6,000 a year: Tetrahedron, an Elsevier journal, costs $31,600.

Still catching up from October 2005, T. Scott Plutchak reported on the experience of the Journal of the Medical Library Association in moving to open access (which it did in 2001/2002). Some of Plutchak’s notes (as excerpted by Peter Suber and further excerpted here):

Between June of 2004 and May of 2005, the number of unique users accessing the Journal of the Medical Library Association (JMLA) and its predecessor, the Bulletin of the Medical Library Association (BMLA), on the National Library of Medicine’s PubMed Central (PMC) system averaged just over 20,000 per month. When I first saw these numbers on the PMC administration site, I was astonished. The members of the Medical Library Association (MLA) itself (who we might presume are the main audience of the JMLA) number only about 4,500, and the
print run of the journal is generally in the neighborhood of 5,000 copies. It seemed likely to me that the number of unique readers in any given month would be just some fraction of that core audience. I wondered if PMC has some kind of formula that they use to translate the number of IP addresses into number of readers, so I emailed Ed Sequeira, the project coordinator, at PMC. Further astonishment! He...told me that, from surveys that they have done, there are half again as many actual users per IP address.

Thirty thousand unique readers?...I can think of few things more likely to gladden the heart of an editor than this kind of evidence of the reach and impact of the journal on which he lavishes so much time and attention. I have no doubt that we would not be seeing these sorts of numbers if the *JMLA* were not freely available on the Web. From the standpoint of readership and reach, MLA’s experiment with open access would appear to be a resounding success. But much of the discussion of open access during the past few years has focused on the risks. What of those?...

So I looked at the revenue and membership figures for the last ten years. I wanted to examine the trend lines and see if anything appeared to change significantly around 2001/02, when the *JMLA* went up on PMC... Subscriptions had been falling for a decade, but the drop from 2002 to 2003 was far more dramatic than the previous declines. The number of subscriptions declined again in 2004, although not as dramatically, but revenue went up slightly, thanks to a modest rate increase. Whether this indicates a trend or not is still too early to say....

Perhaps more worrisome from the standpoint of the long-term health of the association is the impact of an open access journal on the members' willingness to remain members. Here, the results are more encouraging. Total membership has declined during the entire period, but the biggest drop occurred in 2000/01, just before the PMC debut....To probe the views of members further, I worked up a quick online survey....I asked what degree of impact the *JMLA*'s free availability had had on their decision not to renew their membership. Seventeen respondents fit in that category. Fourteen indicated little to no impact, two were neutral, and one indicated that it had had a major impact. When I asked the current members if the *JMLA*'s free availability would make them more or less likely to renew their membership, 61% indicated that it would have no bearing; but, for 30%, it would make them somewhat to much more likely to renew. On the downside, 5% felt that it would make them much less likely to renew....Other questions in my survey indicated that the free availability would make people much more likely to read articles from the older issues and would make po-
tential authors more likely to submit manuscripts. These, of course, are the things that an editor loves to hear....

Despite what I said near the beginning of this editorial, it is too early to label the experiment an unqualified success. But has the attempt been worth it so far? I look again at the PMC statistics. Twenty to thirty thousand unique users? Has it been worth it? Oh, yes!

As Suber notes, the full editorial (“an exemplary report of a journal OA experiment”) includes judicious qualifications on the data. If you read T. Scott’s blog (tscott.typepad.com/tsp/) you’ll know to except thought and care.

Moving on to November 2005, the Georgia State University blog on issues in scholarly communication quoted the text of six slides on open access from a presentation by Erik Engstrom, Elsevier’s CEO. Engstrom says “Frustration drove desire for new publishing models” and “Transformation is dramatically increasing number of journals accessed, productivity for researchers and reducing effective price per article.” He labels open access journals “Author pays” and offers “delayed open access” and self-archiving of manuscripts as other models. He does not appear to admit that OA journals can be anything but “author pays,” says such journals represent less than one percent of current articles, that OA journal launches have declined since 2001, and that Springer’s Open Choice model only attracted 24 articles in its first year. He asserts that OA inhibits authors in developing countries from submitting articles and that a “major study questioned peer review and editing standards” (that’s the ALPSP study; see below). But then there are the beneficent publishers: **Less than 2%** of articles are available via “delayed open access,” less than 1% within the first year. As for open archiving, he asserts a “stable 5% of article manuscripts,” denying the possibility of any growth in archiving. “Repositories useful in several ways but unlikely to benefit research productivity.” In short, it’s the same-old same-old, just as you’d expect from Elsevier: There’s no real problem, OA doesn’t work, subscriptions provide significant benefits including “improving cost efficiency.” Fairly new CEO, tired old message.

Speaking of Elsevier, Chris Leonard (“Publishing Editor within Elsevier with responsibility for theoretical computer science journals”) runs a blog, Computing Chris. A November 21 post suggests “14 steps to the perfect CS journal?” based on Leonard’s discussions with people in the field. The list in general is interesting—but it’s betrayed by the very first one:
1. FREE ACCESS—at least at the point of use. Subscribers access the journal for 1 year, then all articles are available to everyone who wants them?

“At least at the point of use”: That is, as long as enough libraries pony up, their users will have “free” access. When someone who doesn’t have institutional access questioned his terminology, he repeated the standard line: “Free at point-of-use means that you as an end user don’t have to pay. If you are a student or researcher, your institute may subscribe to journals and pay a price for them, but you personally don’t.” He goes on to suggest that a one-year embargo “ensures that libraries get the benefit of subscriptions”!

I’d refer you to the blog itself for the rest of the discussion…but “runs” turns out to be the wrong tense. Leonard left Elsevier four days after that post—and the blog has disappeared entirely.

Heather Morrison comments on “trends in refereed journals/open and toll access“ in her *Imaginary journal of poetic economics*. She notes that Ulrich’s includes 1,253 scholarly peer-reviewed open access journals, 5% of the total—and that the largest number of startups was in 2004, not 2001 as claimed in the ALPSP study. DOAJ listed 2,009 OA journals at that point, possibly because Ulrich’s tends to include primarily English-language journals. There’s another list from Jan Sczepanski with more than 4,700 open access journals—but it’s quite likely that most of those aren’t peer-reviewed. One sidenote: If you look at the start dates for refereed scholarly journals in general, “peaked in 2001” appears to be true there as well—although 2004 made a strong comeback after the decline of 2002 and 2003, it’s still lower than 2001.

The March 2, 2006 *SPARC Open Access Newsletter* features “Three gathering storms that could cause collateral damage for open access”: The webcasting treaty, growing opposition to net neutrality, and “the end of free email.” In each case, Peter Suber provides a few paragraphs as to why these could be threats and offers extensive links. Worth reading directly.

**Clusters and Longer Items**

Clusters? Groups of discussions by the same person.
Dorothea Salo (Caveat lector)

Salo’s been writing a series of fascinating, instructive posts relating to her work managing an institutional repository. Her blog is always worth reading, and recently it’s had heavy relevance to access issues. I’m highlighting just a few; it’s worth checking her archives for others.

A March 1, 2006 post, “Registering,” starts out seeming to be about writing styles. Salo hates writing in “formal-publication register” and finds it natural to drop into “blog register,” and boy, can I empathize with that, since I was never any good at formal-publication register, even in my books. But she moves beyond that to grump about Stevan Harnad’s attitude, seemingly echoed by Richard Poynder, regarding purity of open access efforts. “Just because OA isn’t the only thing I do doesn’t mean I don’t do OA!” There’s a lot more here, much better read in the original.

Harnad will apparently always believe that self-archiving is The Solution, that it’s inevitable and optimal, that OAI repositories cost almost nothing to set up and run, and that everything else is a distraction. I think Salo’s rejoinder is on the money: “And if self-archiving is such a lovely…solution to everybody’s problems, why isn’t everybody doing it?...The world is more complicated than Harnad would like it to be.”

Salo goes on to note, correctly, that it’s nonsensical to suppose that publishers are handling or should handle article archiving. “Publishers have never been involved with preservation; it’s been a library function as long as there have been libraries.” And she’s certainly right (in my opinion) to assert that shoving librarians (or multipurpose IRs) out of the OA arena can only damage OA, probably severely.

Two days later, Salo offered “Open access outside libraries.” This also has to do with Harnad’s apparent attitude that library-based IRs aren’t the right place to do OA and that OA should instead be done in little departmental repositories.

My first question is this: If faculty cannot even drag themselves to deposit material into IRs where the library has done all the tech work for them up-front, how will they be convinced to start them? It is assuredly technically simple to do, but the complexity of the technical process is not and has never been the problem. The complexity of the social process is the problem, and I fail to see how Harnad’s proposal solves it.

She also notes it’s unlikely that departmental repositories would stay “pure” OA repositories for very long. When budgets got tough, de-
parts would see the repositories as content management systems for all sorts of content. Then there's the "100%" problem:

To achieve his stated goal of 100% OA to the peer-reviewed journal literature via departmental repositories, Harnad will have to convince every department and research unit on every college and university campus everywhere containing faculty who publish in the peer-reviewed journal literature to open a repository.

Since IR adoption isn’t close to universal among academic libraries (where it would seem to be a natural), that’s a tough job. There are also other issues—duplication of effort, for example.

Salo also considers, thoughtfully and in some detail, other ways that OA might work while bypassing librarians, such as state- or countrywide repositories. Such have their own problems.

March 8: “What is an IR for?” It’s a careful discussion that I find difficult to summarize. Part of it continues the argument against those who believe that nothing but peer-reviewed literature should be held in IRs that contain OA literature, but there’s a lot more. Go read it.

For now, let’s close with “Marketing an IR” (March 18). In this case, she’s recommending “a cheap, agile, multifaceted, flexible IR marketing campaign over a single sweated-over Master Communication Plan.” That makes a lot of sense: Single messages have a way of failing, and IRs (and OA) are about many different things. (For example, I care about OA as a possible way to improve library ability to purchase books and humanities journals; others don’t consider that part of the equation at all.) Here’s the end of a short, upbeat post:

Don’t bother with long involved planning sessions. Don’t bother with marketing committees at first (though later on, it may well help to share information). Brainstorm a page of ideas, pick some to try, and try them. When some don’t pan out, pick others. Embrace serendipity. Listen to and act on what people tell you about the IR, and about faculty beliefs and practices.

And have fun! Laugh! I’ve caught a few people, I firmly believe, just because I enjoy and believe in what I’m doing and it shows when I talk about it.

Maybe Caveat lector is another reason I don’t feel much pressure to cover open access and related issues in any great depth: It’s being done so well elsewhere.
Jan Velterop at The Parachute

The parachute is a great title, explained by the motto: “It only works when it is open.” Velterop’s new position, pushing an expensive form of author-choice OA for one of the immense for-profit journal publishers, makes things trickier, but he’s still worth reading.

A February 21 post entitled “Too many papers, too many journals” discusses the ongoing issue of “journal fragmentation.” Velterop poses the question as “how much scientific information should be made available, i.e. published?” As posed, it’s hard to disagree with his answer: “I think it should be as much as possible. There is no place for ‘quantity control’ of information.” He goes on to note that, in some respects, not enough information is being published—e.g., negative results rarely get published (although that may be changing).

But ‘information’ is not the same as ‘amount of articles.’ We all know about ‘salami-slicing,’ when a given amount of information is published in a number of articles, where putting them in just one article would be perfectly reasonable and possible. This is of course a consequence of the ‘publish-or-perish’ culture that has taken hold of science.

He discusses publish-or-perish and the quest for the highest possible Impact Factor; it’s an interesting discussion. Seeking the highest IF creates a “major inefficiency” because it results in too many “speculative submissions” to journals with very high Impact Factors, rather than directly submitting articles to the most appropriate journals. “This in turn has lead to overburdening of peer-reviewers, high rejection rates, time-wasting” and other problems.

I take mild issue with the next paragraph, in which Velterop says, “In the modern world, journals are just ‘tags,’ ‘labels’ that are attached to articles.” That may be true for virtually all STM journals; it has certainly not been true historically for some journals in other fields, where the journal itself is more than the sum of its refereed articles. It trivializes the journal qua journal; maybe that’s the way the world is going, but I don’t have to like it. Velterop also seems to dismiss browsing, which has always been one use of a field’s top journals.

A March 8 post poses the question “What is an OA journal?” He notes Thomson Scientific’s count of 298 OA journals in the ISI Web of Knowledge and DOAJ’s March 8 count of 2,089 such journals.

What, however, are ‘Open Access Journals’? Do they exist? What’s the definition? Journals that publish OA articles, or journals that publish only OA articles? Same question with regard to Open Access Publishers.
What does exist is publishers who publish journals in which open access articles appear. Not necessarily all the articles in a journal and not necessarily all the journals in a publisher’s portfolio.

I guess I’d say there are both OA journals (in which all peer-reviewed articles are OA, although other portions of the journal might be fee-based) and there are journals that publish some OA articles. They’re not the same.

While the Bethesda Statement may be correct in saying that OA is a property of individual works, I believe it’s worth making distinctions at the journal level as well. I’m not inclined to call a Springer journal an “OA journal” if 1% of the articles in that journal are OA; I’m inclined to call it a journal that publishes some OA articles. And I’m certainly not inclined to call a publisher an “OA publisher” because 2% of their journals are OA, or because 5% of their articles are OA.

Is there a cutoff? I think so. For a given journal, it’s simple: If every peer-reviewed article is true OA (available online in final published form as of the date of publication and permanently thereafter), the journal is an OA journal regardless of how much other stuff it sells for a subscription price. Otherwise, it’s not—which doesn’t make it bad, just different. And if more than half of a publisher’s journals are OA journals, it’s reasonable to call it a “mostly-OA publisher”—but not “an OA publisher” unless they all are.

Peter Suber, the SPARC Open Access Newsletter

It’s awfully tempting to quote huge chunks of the January 2, 2006 SOAN, where Suber reviews “Open access in 2005” and offers his “Predictions for 2006.” This is seriously good stuff—and it would double the length of this section. Here are just a few tastes of each section, sometimes paraphrased (combined, the sections run to 12 pages in all: 6,600 words, all worth reading.

- 2005 was the best year to date for university actions in support of OA [with a dozen universities adopting major OA policies or resolutions and two institutions mandating OA to their research output].
- 2005 was the year that funding agency OA policies made the transition from proposal to practice.
- OA archiving continued to worry some publishers…[who have] so far been unable to provide evidence that [fears of undermining subscriptions] are justified.
OA journals picked up speed [with many examples noted].

More for-profit businesses demanded that the government stop providing open access to publicly-funded information.

OA is taking to wikis to collect, organize and share information—including “mutant wikis” that add quality control measures.

Books about OA are starting to emerge.

Confusion between depositing work in an OA repository and publishing in an OA journal continues; Suber calls this JAM, the Journal-Archive Mixup.

“2005 was definitely the biggest year to date for book scanning and digitization. In fact, the book-scanning news, even when it was not about OA, swamped the OA news and persuaded many people that it really was about OA.” (I’ll argue that some book digitization is most certainly about OA, namely the OCA.)

Textbook pricing is becoming visible as another crisis—and OA textbooks might yet emerge.

“The term ‘open access’ is starting to seep out into the general scholarly culture that isn’t working for OA so much as simply using it.” This is good in that scholars are becoming familiar with the concept, not so good if you’re trying to stay current on OA news.

First 2006 prediction: rapid recent growth of OA’s several aspects will continue, and 2006 should be a major year for funding agency OA policies.

“Many of the publishers who agreed to permit postprint archiving had two beliefs, one of which was false at the time (that repositories are ghettos where content is hard to find), and one of which is becoming false (that authors will not archive their postprints in large numbers). The first belief underestimated OAI interoperability and crawling by Google and Yahoo, and the second underestimated the incentives and mandates from funders and universities. Because these beliefs are giving way, some publishers will look for ways to revoke their consent to postprint archiving. If they can’t bring themselves to ban postprint archiving, or to retreat from blanket permission to case-by-case permission, then they may put embargoes on it, as Nature has done.”

“Different publishers will continue to take just about every conceivable position in the landscape, from strong support for OA to strong aversion.”
People may “get” that fewer than half of OA journals charge “author-side” fees—and that many more subscription journals than OA journals do so.

The curve of OA public domain books could pass the journal curve this year—and could “reach roughly 100% ages before the journal curve reaches 100%.” (I question whether the journal curve or the book curve will ever reach 100%, but that’s me.)

Open file formats will enter the OA conversation—but Suber believes OA should be format-agnostic.

“The web and libraries will each be superior to the other in some valuable respects, and only people who deny half of this two-sided truth will be behind the times—and needlessly hampering their research.” (Agreed, as long as it’s seen as a two-sided truth—but libraries may also have new and interesting roles in improving web-based research.)

The facts about Open Access

If you care about OA, you’ve already heard about this report from ALPSP, with research by the Kaufman-Wills Group. You can get the entire study or the overview from www.alpsp.org/publications/pub11.htm. I’ve only read the introduction and overview.

Sally Morris wrote the introduction, so you might not be surprised by the starting sentence: “Discussion of Open Access tends to be strong on rhetoric but short on facts.” Peter Suber, Stevan Harnad and many others would dispute that. Morris admits that “we” (ALPSP) had not realized how long-established some OA journals are, and that the study “dispel[s] the notion that Open Access journals do not carry out peer review of copy-editing”—a notion that, as far as I know, has only been suggested by publishers and those wholly ignorant of OA journals. Morris admits to surprise at “how few of the Open Access journals raise any author-side charges at all;…author charges are more common…among subscription journals.”

But then there’s this: “Is Open Access publishing a financially viable model? It is impossible to draw any firm conclusions, of course. However, from the evidence we have collected this seems by no mean certain.” The evidence is that a majority of OA journals are covering their costs. Consider the percentage of restaurants that never cover costs (and shut down): Does that mean that restaurants are not as a class financially viable?
The report itself includes some wording that suggests anti-OA bias. “Some [individuals] feared that the growth rate of Full Open Access journals signified the demise of Subscription Access journals.” [“Full Open Access” is ALPSP’s synonym for OA journals, as opposed to those that make a few articles available or make them available after an embargo period, which ALPSP would like us to think of as “Optional Open Access” or “Delayed Open Access.”] In looking at DOAJ titles, “it was apparent that a good percentage of journals were published by a small number of publishers”—very much like commercial journals!

Table 3, contrasting “general characteristics” of “Full” Open Access vs. “Other journal cohorts,” is charming (all emphases in this paragraph added). OA journals are “Relatively new, established within the last decade” (frequently but not always true, and literally true for only half of those surveyed) while “Other journal cohorts” were “Established 40 years ago” (one of those meaningless averages). Here’s the “Publisher” comparison: On one side, “Self-published by a non-profit organization, academic department, or individual”; on the other, “Published by a non-profit association, or perhaps a commercial publisher.” “Self-published” is a loaded term, particularly within academia; I fail to see how an organization-based OA journal is any more or less “self-published” than a subscription journal. Also, “perhaps” certainly understates the significance of for-profit publishers in the non-OA field. (Actually, the summary is simply wrong. The next page says “the majority (55%) of the Full Open Access journals responding were published by commercial firms.” The writers get around this by excluding the two big commercial OA publishers.)

There’s a lot more. The first conclusion is as you’d expect: Despite the fact that most OA journals had upward-trending revenues, that over 90% met or exceeded the expectations of the publishers, and that most of them were at least break-even, “It is too early to tell whether Full Open Access is a viable business model.” Third: “Peer review and copy-editing may be less rigorous with Full Open Access journals.”

A Forbes.com report on this study highlighted that first question: “But a new study questions whether many of these ‘open-access’ journals will manage to survive.” The Scientist’s report highlighted “concerns about peer review”—and Sally Morris managed to toughen her stance: “What they [BMC] call peer review is not doing what peer review is supposed to do.” (Morris also asserted, in the study’s introduction and elsewhere, that it is unlikely to be the case that OA journals will “do better over time,” unlike subscription journals, although
there's no clear evidence for this OA-bashing statement.) It is worth noting that both reports cite assertions from OA advocates that the ALPSP report is one-sided.

Later, BioMed Central responded to the study, saying in part:

The two most serious problems with the report are that it inaccurately describes the peer review process operated by BioMed Central's journals, and it also draws unjustified conclusions concerning the long-term sustainability of open access journals. The overview of the report incorrectly states that BioMed Central does not operate external peer review on most of its journals. In fact, all of BioMed Central's journals operate full peer review using external peer reviewers....the BioMed Central/ISP group of journals is reported to offer online manuscript submission on a lower percentage of journals than other journal groups. The report picks up on this as a surprising finding, suggesting implicitly that open access journals are lagging behind in this regard. In fact, BioMed Central offers online submission of manuscripts on every one of its journals. Not only that, but BioMed Central's manuscript submission system is widely praised by authors, many of whom tell us that it is the best online submission system they have used....

Since BMC is specifically cited as one using internal review, the publisher's denial does raise questions about the report.

Sally Morris also penned a “Personal View” in the January 2006 Learned Publishing, “When is a journal not a journal? A closer look at the DOAJ.” Her study makes much of the apparent fact that OA journals publish fewer articles (on average) than subscription journals, although the relevance of this fact is unclear. This study cites the possibly-true but probably-irrelevant fact that the number of new entries into DOAJ peaked in 2001 (then went down significantly in a couple of slump years, and has since rebounded to near-2001 levels, and might pass those levels this year). Morris may be right that some OA journals “have published far fewer articles than would be acceptable to subscribers under the traditional model,” but then, they aren't operating under the traditional model. There's nothing wrong with an online-only journal that's freely available publishing a few select papers each year; it's much more problematic when an expensive journal does lots of “combined issues” and otherwise fails to deliver value for money.

**Parallel universes: open access and open source**

This article by Glyn Moody, published February 22, 2006 on LWN.net, “Your Linux info source,” is an oddity—drawing parallels
and distinctions between OA and open source software from a perspective that seems to suggest that open source software has won over commercial software.

Moody doesn’t downplay the importance of OA: “At stake is nothing less than control of academia’s treasure-house of knowledge.” Moody calls Stevan Harnad OA’s “visionary—the RMS figure” (open source people presumably know who RMS is; those initials, presumably those of Richard Stallman, are never expanded in the three-page article). We’re told “open peer commentary” as a form of peer review is “routine today,” which may surprise journal editors.

The article has problems. “The first open access magazine publisher [BMC]…appeared in 1999.” That can only be true based on an unusual reading of “publisher,” since born-OA journals precede that date by a full decade (and BMC wouldn’t call its publications “magazines”). Moody says that OA journals “need” page charges “in order to provide the content free to readers,” true for a minority of OA journals, and says the charge is “typically $1000 per article.” One commenter manages to turn this into $1,000 per page and see it as a submission charge, not a publication charge; another comment seemed to place this mistake in the article itself (and, for all I know, the article could have been corrected invisibly). One knowledgeable commenter notes that Harnad “fiercely and insistently resists the idea of any similarity” between OA and open source software.

Where is the Open Access Foundation?

It’s only a blog post (March 16, 2006 on Richard Poynder’s Open and shut?)—but it’s 3,700 words not including comments, making it article-length by any standard. Poynder believes OA needs a proper organization to make sure definitions stay consistent and the like. He points out the confusion being caused by sloppy (self-serving?) statements from journal publishers—e.g., that Biochemical Journal is OA because raw manuscripts are posted on acceptance (although published versions have a six-month embargo).

Poynder goes on to discuss “what is an OA journal?” at some length, and gently raises questions about Jan Velterop’s agenda as Springer’s Director of Open Access. He notes various attempts to redefine OA. It’s an interesting and careful treatment.
The state of the large publisher bundle

This April 2006 article in ARL Bimonthly Report 245 gives findings from an ARL member survey taken in November and December 2005. Most ARL libraries (89 of 123) responded; 93% of those have licensed bundles with at least one of the five largest journal publishers, and on average they have bundles with three of the five. (Only 21% of the respondents have Taylor and Francis bundles; a surprising 7%—six ARL libraries—have no such bundles.)

The report offers some of the reasons for bundles; for 114 of the 283 contracts, “alternative non-bundled forms of access to the content were prohibitively expensive.” Remember that ARL represents the largest and generally best-funded universities in North America. To quote the study, “This suggests that libraries may be making the best of a bad situation.”

Do libraries save money by abandoning the print versions of bundled journals? In 62% of the responses, savings were less than 10%.

There's more here. Worth reading.

Surveying the e-journal preservation landscape

Another article in the same ARL Bimonthly Report, by Cornell's Anne R. Kenney, reports on an ongoing “landscape analysis for preserving e-journals.” The article notes ten initiatives, including LOCKSS and CLOCKSS but also a number of less well-known initiatives. The group involved has developed a set of key concerns based on interviews with library directors and is now developing a survey of the archiving initiatives. A final report is expected this August.

This research is important work (as are the initiatives); the Cornell group appears superbly qualified to carry it out and produce useful results. Definitely worth following—and this relatively brief article will introduce you to some digital archiving initiatives you may not have heard of.

Open Access and libraries

That's the title of Charles W. Bailey, Jr.'s introduction to OA, available as a preprint and to be published in Electronic Resources Librarians: The Human Element of the Digital Information Age. A somewhat similar and shorter piece, “What is Open Access?” is also available as a preprint; that piece will appear in Open Access: Key Strategic, Technical and Economic Aspects.
Both offer clear overviews of OA—the key statements (the “three Bs” from Bethesda, Berlin, and Budapest), what it is, what else might grow out of it, strategies, journals, repositories, and why it matters. It’s clearly written, easy to read, well-documented, and well thought out.

I recommend the longer article; it goes into more detail on varieties of journals and possible roles for libraries in supporting OA. I certainly prefer Bailey’s “color code” for journals (excerpted and paraphrased here) over ALPSP’s varieties of “open access”:

- Open Access journals (green)—those that meet all OA criteria including Creative Commons’ Attribution licenses.
- Free Access journals (cyan)—ones where all articles are freely available, but that don’t require the Attribution license. (So, for example, if C&I was scholarly, it would fall in the “cyan” category.)
- Embargoed Access journals (yellow)—ones where all articles eventually become available.
- Partial Access journals (orange)—ones where some articles are freely available.
- Restricted Access journals (red)—ones with no free access to journals.

Bailey uses ALA divisional journals as examples of the last two cases; in one case (Partial Access), C&RL has now shifted to “yellow,” but in the other case (Restricted Access), it would be nice if publicity caused LAMA (and LITA) to rethink their practices.

Journals in the time of Google

Lee C. Van Orsdel and Kathleen Born wrote this April 15, 2006 Library Journal overview of some events in the world of academic journals, appearing with LJ’s Periodical Price Survey. It’s a good once-overlightly, with a number of notes on open access issues. Here’s a paragraph that seems worth repeating in full:

Journal prices still have the power to shock. In January, the editor of Journal of Economic Studies, an Emerald Press title, resigned when he realized that his journal’s $9,859 sticker price was wholly out of line both with the market and with his own sensibilities. The title is not indexed in Social Sciences Citation Index, yet it cost around three times as much as the next most expensive journal in the field. The energy for dealing with a broken market, however, seems to be shifting toward institutional repositories and OA publishing models and away from the futile hope that high-priced publishers will come to their senses and reduce journal prices.
Thinking About Libraries and Access

Libraries—public and academic—need to provide both strong physical collections and access to resources beyond those physical collections. Academic libraries should do their best to assure long-term access to resources in all disciplines, including those disciplines where the primary publication method is the monograph. I believe libraries should pay more attention to gray material in an era where the lines between traditional and untraditional distribution and publication are growing ever fuzzier. Libraries should acquire, organize, and secure long-term access to the things that make us a civilization, the thinking, knowledge and wisdom set down in articles, books and other media.

Effective long-term access involves several interrelated issues, including:

- The money to acquire physical resources and provide access to other resources, and to pay the professional staff to determine what to acquire.
- The means—money and procedures—to assure effective access, through cataloging and other organization and discovery techniques.
- The wherewithal—determination, money, and procedures—to preserve physical works and digital resources and assure that future generations can use those resources.

The standing head for Cites & Insights discussions of events and commentaries related to issues of access to scholarship is Library Access to Scholarship, not Open Access and Libraries. That standing head reflects my primary interests when it comes to talking about access, open or otherwise: How trends in access affect libraries’ ability to maintain long collections, provide long-term access, and provide
access to resources in all disciplines (not all disciplines at equal collection levels in all libraries, of course).

Think of it this essay as an extended answer to the question, “Why do I write about library access at all—and why don’t I stick to open access?”

I’m tempted to bring in related issues—for example, the role of the Open Content Alliance and Google Book Search in improving discovery for books (and, for OCA, access to public domain books). But I’d like to keep this fairly short, so I’ll note that a lot of the other things discussed in C&I also relate to library access to scholarship.

**Fundamental Assertions**

I would not dissuade anyone from focusing on open access to scholarly articles (with or without capital “O” and “A”) and improving both “green” and “gold” aspects of such access. That’s important work. Peter Suber sustains a high level of clarity and completeness in discussing and advocating both forms of open access; Charles W. Bailey, Jr. and (more recently) the bloggers at OA librarian add to that effort, as do others. Many other librarians and scholars are engaged in creating and building OA journals (“gold” OA) and encouraging scholars to deposit their articles in OAI digital repositories (“green” OA). More power to them. Library access involves more and, in some ways, less than open access. My interest is in libraries’ long-term ability to serve the full range of human creative activity.

Scholarship and the stuff of libraries are more than just refereed articles

Science, technology and medicine (STM) consume most of the serial budgets of most academic libraries—indeed, STM journals consume most of the acquisitions and access budgets of most academic libraries. But refereed STM journal articles aren’t all there is to science, technology and medicine, and certainly not all there is to scholarly and human creativity.

Even in STM, monographs play a role, as do working papers, datasets, and other “gray” materials that don’t fit into the refereed-journal-article mold. Outside—in the humanities and social sciences—monographs and other books may be the primary means of communicating progress. For that matter, serial publications other than refereed scholarly journals play significant roles in the record of human creativity that should be the stuff of libraries.
The current journal model is broken

Too many STM journals cost too much money, and increase in price at too rapid a rate, for libraries to sustain the level of access they need. The cost of STM journal access distorts library budgets, driving out both the less expensive journals and the monographs and other resources. The current model, with several large commercial publishers dominating the field of STM publishing and charging what they believe the market will bear, is unsustainable: It is already breaking down, with even the wealthiest libraries canceling large numbers of journals.

It is apparent that some major commercial publishers fully intend to charge what the market will bear. They have succeeded in acquiring most of the highest-profile journals, including many that were originally modestly priced society-published journals, and in raising prices so as to assure profit margins far in excess of those enjoyed by most book publishers and companies in competitive industries.

I am not arguing that these publishers don't add value. Clearly, they do. I am arguing that the subscription model simply will not stand: That it is already breaking down and will continue to break down, probably at an accelerating rate.

The current model is also broken from a philosophical perspective: It makes it more difficult for scholars, especially independents and those at smaller institutions, to keep up with work in their field.

Open access strives to correct the philosophical breakage. Green OA, however, does nothing to address the financial breakage—which means it fails to address library issues, vital to long-term effective access. Worse, some green OA evangelists regard library issues as irrelevant and even treat with disdain library efforts to improve green OA—if those efforts also meet other needs of the libraries and their academic communities. More about that in a moment.

The breaking model damages secondary players first

Unfortunately, there's some reason to believe that it isn't the big commercial publishers and their overpriced journals that will be hit first as the subscription model continues to crumble. The first to go tend to be journals with smaller audiences and lesser reputations, including many of the more reasonably priced journals and those in the humanities.

The breaking model can cause one specific economic dislocation—and clarifies another economic distortion. The economic dislocation: Journal subscriptions shove out monograph and other
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acquisitions. Some libraries have protected monographic budgets, and that may be a partial solution. The economic distortion is more sensitive: Libraries have been underwriting professional societies indirectly, and can no longer afford to do so.

That’s clear from the surprising alignment of professional society publishers, most of which are by nature nonprofit and intended to promote scholarship, with the commercial publishers in opposing effective steps toward open access. The professional societies admit that profits from non-member journal subscription prices, frequently but not always moderate in comparison with the worst for-profit prices, are used to subsidize other society activities. They argue that loss of those profits will undermine those activities and is, thus, a blow against scholarship. The only plausible response, from a library perspective, is that it is wrong to expect libraries to subsidize professional societies outside the field of librarianship. If other professional societies deserve subsidies from universities, those subsidies should be requested and provided as subsidies, and should be provided out of appropriate departmental budgets—not out of the library acquisitions budget. “That’s the way we’ve always done it” isn’t good enough.

Open access publishing is progressing, but slowly

We didn’t call it “gold OA” in 1990, but that’s when I was first involved with a refereed scholarly ejournal free to all readers, The Public-Access Computer Systems Review (it wasn’t the first such journal). Since then, thousands of open access journals have been started and more than two thousand survive.

That’s a lot—but it’s a small portion of the total scholarly journal landscape and a smaller portion of the total article output.

Open access journals can relieve cost pressures on libraries. Open access journals can reduce the cost structure of the entire scholarly publishing enterprise. Libraries may even be sensible candidates to carry out the modest organizational tasks involved in publishing an electronic-only open access journal.

But open access journals aren’t growing rapidly—and aren’t displacing commercial journals to a noticeable extent. They may be slowing the rate of increase of overall journal costs, but they are not apparently reducing overall costs. Some argue that a complete shift to open access journals could even increase costs to some libraries or universities, but that analysis assumes two questionable points:
It assumes a very high cost per published article, at least $1,500, even though some open access journals that charge author-side fees have considerably lower fees. Sharp analysis and real examples are required to determine just how much an electronic-only journal, paying only for copy editing, markup, and disk space (since most editors and referees work for free, open source journal publishing software is freely available, and there’s no need for contract offices) should actually cost.

It assumes that all open access journals will be paid for by direct author-side charges, even though most open access journals don’t currently charge author-side fees (and many subscription journals do charge author-side fees), and even though author-side fees could reasonably be built into research grants.

There are several possible reasons for the slow growth of open access publishing. One factor may be the astonishing level of “untruthiness” set forth, on an ongoing basis, by many within the scholarly publishing community: For example, arguments that open access journals will undermine peer review, reduce editorial quality, or in some other manner damage scholarship.

Open access archiving is neither inevitable nor trivial

“Green” open access—either preprint or postprint versions of published articles, deposited in digital repositories that follow OAI models to allow metadata harvesting—has done well in some disciplines, but isn’t taking over the world.

Green OA does little or nothing to solve library budget problems, to be sure. To the extent that single-minded green OA advocates dismiss journal publishing and library budget problems as irrelevant, they may encourage a catastrophic failure of the existing publishing system and the portion of peer review carried out by that system, rather than a slow slide and conversion from subscription to open access. Such a failure would be unfortunate for green OA, as it would eliminate the chief sources of “branding” for the papers in the repositories.

That dismal scenario aside, the fact is that academic libraries can, and in a growing number of cases will, play a role in making green OA work: To wit, providing professional-quality institutional repositories that have the institutional and staff support to be maintained for the long run. Good institutional repositories aren’t cheap (although the software itself may be free), but they are sustainable for the long term,
unlike “server in a closet” departmental repositories with no firm base of funding or firm long-term programmatic support.

**Library-based repositories should go beyond articles—and doing so doesn’t damage the articles**

One of the oddest arguments in the sometimes-fractious OA community is that institutional repositories should only hold refereed scholarly articles. Library-based digital repositories are likely to go much farther, and probably should: They can and should include supporting datasets, work in progress, and other digital materials created within the repository’s scope that don’t fit neatly into the refereed-article slot.

As long as it’s possible to identify refereed articles, as it always is in any good OAI repository, I can think of no plausible argument for restricting the repository to refereed articles. The arguments for broader inclusion are clear: Such inclusion helps justify the costs of the repository, makes it stronger for long-term use, and improves the library and its parent institution by providing access to important scholarly resources.

If *Time Magazine* sits next to *Tetrahedron* on a periodical shelf, that adjacency certainly does not make the articles in *Tetrahedron* less scholarly, nor is it likely to confuse readers of either periodical. How, then, can the presence in a digital repository of digital objects that aren’t refereed articles—and don’t have the metadata of refereed articles—possibly damage the refereed articles in that repository? It can’t, and any argument that such sharing of repository space is somehow inappropriate should be viewed skeptically.

**Conclusions?**

I don’t have any—or at least I don’t have any that haven’t been stated here, in previous LIBRARY ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP pieces, or elsewhere. Some will disagree with the assertions here, and they may be right.

I’m an optimist by nature. I believe scholarly publishing and academic libraries will survive for the long term, but with significant changes in both. For that matter, I believe many commercial journals will survive—although, with luck, some will be supplanted by open access journals, either as true journals or as wrappers for sets of repository articles. *Science* and *Nature* probably aren’t going away, in print or electronic form. *Tetrahedron* and the *Journal of Economic Studies?* Don’t ask me.
Pioneer OA Journals: The Arc of Enthusiasm, Five Years Later

Open Access Perspective, Part 1: October 2006

They weren’t generally called Open Access journals in 1995: If that term existed before 2001 or 2002, it certainly wasn’t the standard name for free online scholarship. But there were examples of free online scholarship, some dating back to 1987. In the May 2001 Cites & Insights, I explored the question: “Do free scholarly electronic journals last?”

The title of that essay, GETTING PAST THE ARC OF ENTHUSIASM, revealed one finding I had suspected going in: It was not unusual for one of these pioneering efforts to start out with a bang, fueled by the enthusiasm of its founders, and fade away in an “arc of enthusiasm,” with articles and the journal itself disappearing after a few years.

In the course of the 2001 essay, I casually asserted a definition that’s been cited elsewhere: If a journal lasts at least six years, it can be considered a “lasting” title even if it later goes out of business. More than half of the open access journals founded in 1995 or before that were refereed and “visible” (see below) were still publishing six years later; that’s a good record. I thought it would be interesting to see how they’re doing after five more years. Thus, this update.

Background

The original article is still available (and in this volume). These extracts describe how I arrived at the original findings.

ARL’s Directory of Electronic Journals, Newsletters and Academic Discussion Lists for 1995 includes 104 items that appear to be free refereed scholarly electronic journals. Those journals still publishing in 2000, a minimum of six years, can be considered lasting titles. Some electronic scholarly journals started years before.
While 1995 may seem like ancient times for the Web, Mosaic (the first widely-available browser) was well established by then. Most academic libraries had Internet access, many used various forms of electronic communication, and more than a few were building Web sites.

Fifty-seven of the 104 journals in the 1995 ARL Directory had Web or Gopher addresses (URLs). Seventeen of those addresses still worked in early 2001. Finding the others proved fascinating and frustrating. After working with a variety of tools, I found Eureka and Google most useful. The RLG Union Catalog via Eureka provides a good first cut answer as to whether a journal has been noticed by academic libraries or the Library of Congress. For nineteen titles, not a single record could be found, a bad sign for academic significance. For most of the others, I could click on a cataloged Web address to locate the journal itself—and most of those addresses worked. Where Eureka failed (through lack of records, lack of URLs, or dead URLs), Google usually succeeded—not always in finding the journal itself, but finding evidence that the journal did exist at one time.

Early free electronic journals have done better than might have been expected. Eighteen were misdescribed or have changed direction. Ten are missing in action—or have nothing but e-mail addresses, which makes them invisible to the larger scholarly community. Five are so confusing that their status is unclear. Twenty seen to have fallen prey to the arc of enthusiasm: after a few good years, the journals have died or become comatose. Two journals ceased for reasons other than declining interest. Twenty-one journals still publish a small but steady flow of manuscripts. Twenty-eight journals still publish substantial numbers of refereed articles.

Of 86 titles that were available as free refereed scholarly journals in 1995, 49 (57%) still publish six years later. Given the difficulties of coordinating refereed journals and the problems inherent in "free," that's a remarkable record.

Reviewing this material, I find that three of the 86 titles actually began publishing in 1996 or later. Those three have been eliminated.

**Checking the Survivors**

This time around, I wasn't working from a published list, which means I didn't have the original URLs. Instead I used three freely available tools, in this order:
The Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), probably today’s primary access point for tightly-defined OA journals (scholarly, refereed papers, free to download and copy).

Worldcat.org for journals not present in DOAJ, using a phrase search for the journal title, checking URLs in the Details view or on library catalog pages.

Google, again using a phrase search, for cases where no Worldcat.org links yielded live results. (There were no cases where Worldcat.org didn’t yield a result of some sort.)

I skipped 18 “misdescribed” publications because they were either not journals, not scholarly, or were priced (not free online) in 2001. I also skipped two journals known to have ceased for reasons other than the arc of enthusiasm (one because the publisher, DEC, was purchased by Compaq, the other because the online version didn’t work out).

I checked ten journals flagged as “Mysteries” in 2001 because “I was unable to find any working Web presence for them as e-journals in early 2000 or early 2001.” All ten are still mysteries. I could not locate archival issues in nine cases. In the tenth case (SPEED) there appeared to be four issues all prior to 1997—but attempting to reach them froze my PC, so I’m not willing to assert that they’re actually there.

I no longer believe the distinction between “small successes” and “strong survivors”—based on an arbitrary cutoff of 10 or more refereed papers per year—makes sense. In some narrow fields, half a dozen good papers each year represent a significant contribution.

This year’s discussion looks at long-term availability for dead and live journals and breaks them into five groups:

- **Special Cases**, journals that don’t currently qualify as open access.
- **Oddities**, cases where I wasn’t sure what to make of the situation. Originally five journals. Two of the five have become visible and moved to the Arc of Enthusiasm, leaving three oddities.
- **Arc of Enthusiasm**, cases where I was able to find the publication in 2000, 2001, or 2006, but where the publication lasted less than six years. Some journals originally in this category have restarted and are now in Surviving Pioneers; others lasted six years or more, a respectable life for a journal, and are now in Ceased Pioneers. Unfortunately, several of the fourteen journals now in this catego-
ry don’t have visible archives (or at least I couldn’t find back issues).

- **Cceased Pioneers**, eleven open access journals that lasted at least six years but have no recent content.

- **Surviving Pioneers**, journals that began no later than 1995 and have content as recently as 2004, with articles freely accessible. This combines the former “small successes” and “strong survivors” categories. I’m sad to say that eight of the 51 journals originally in these categories or that moved into these categories disappeared before 2004—and three more noted immediately below (“special cases”) no longer qualify as open access (and in two cases may have been misdescribed originally). That’s about a 25% failure rate—not ideal, but not terrible. 40 of the original 86—46%—have survived as OA journals for at least a decade.

Journals within each category are listed alphabetically with notes on publication patterns (usually providing number of issues and number of apparently formal articles each year). I also note which of the three web sources first provided useful access: DOAJ if not stated, WorldCat, or Google. (I have no doubt that WorldCat would have provided access in all DOAJ cases and that Google would provide access in nearly all cases.)

Publication patterns beginning in 1993 appear as year: issues/articles or, for journals that don’t have issues, year: articles. For 2006, partial results as of the first week of September appear [in brackets]. “Many” appears when there are dozens of articles or article-equivalents in a year and the articles aren’t numbered. A “+” after the number of article-equivalents indicates that the journal includes significant amounts of other material such as book reviews. Some of these journals began earlier than 1993.

When a live archive is available, I note “Full archive back to” and the earliest date apparently available (in **bold** if earlier than 1993). In most but not all cases (not annotated), early articles have been reformatted in HTML—but there are some ejournals where fairly recent issues are still ASCII-only (and at least one where the archive is a Gopher site).
Special Cases


Oddities


*InterJournal*. DOAJ. Pattern: in early 2000, 225 accepted items on Web site, dates on individual articles. In early 2001: 620 manuscripts, of which 328 are supposed to be final. Divided into three parts: CX: Complex systems (318), PX: Polymer and Complex Fluids (20), BG: Genetics (2). Status in 2006: While the site is live, it mostly hangs. Other than a note about “server migration” in 2005, the status of this publication is vague. Unable to verify existence of archive in 2006.

*RhetNet*. WorldCat. Tiny amount of odd material on Web site; appears to be wholly inactive since mid-1997. As of 2006, the archives only partly work.

The Arc of Enthusiasm

Some of these journals may have started before 1993, the point at which I started checking issue and article patterns. Some of these could come back to life, to be sure—but most seem to follow a pattern that becomes familiar. “Ceased” indicates that the journal explicitly ceased publication as opposed to fading away.


International Journal of Continuing Education Practice. WorldCat. One issue (1994); formally ceased 1/95. Now a priced journal from MCB University Press. Single OA issue continues to be available.


Psychiatry On-Line. WorldCat. As of 2000, there were 51 papers. As of 2006, there appear to be 100—but the papers I checked aren’t dated, so I can’t determine whether this is an ongoing operation. Full archive, but it’s not clear that these are refereed papers.


Some of these are more drawn-out examples of the arc of enthusiasm. Others may have ceased for any number of reasons. I consider them all qualified successes—except where archives aren’t available.


Surviving Pioneers


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1/4]. While the journal dates back to 1991, the web archive goes to 1996. I was unable to use the earlier FTP archive.


**Is This the Universe?**

Probably not. See Part II of this PERSPECTIVE.
Pioneer OA Journals:
Preliminary Additions from DOAJ

Open Access Perspective Part 2, October 2006

Part I of this PERSPECTIVE updates an investigation based on ARL’s 1995 directory. Did that directory cover the known universe? Certainly not—maybe not even close. I don’t know of any sure way to find all other ejournals that began before 1996 and ceased before 2006, or of any way to develop a comprehensive list of OA as of 1995—but it is possible to locate open-access scholarly journals that claim a pre-1996 start date and still publish: DOAJ, the Directory of Open Access Journals.

Checking during the first two weeks of September, I found 189 additional journals in DOAJ with dates of 1995 or earlier. I list those journals below—but it’s not as simple as saying “229 scholarly journals started providing open access by 1995 and are still publishing.” That would be wonderful, but I’m nearly certain it’s not true:

- Some of these journals don’t offer full OA: They retain copyright restrictions that restrict downloading and copying articles.
- Some don’t have full-text archives dating back to 1995.
- Some have full-text archives dating back to 1995 or before, but began offering online access in 1996 or later (some as recently as 2005), and say so on the website.
- Some have strong indications on the website that OA began in 1996 or later—for example, earlier articles are PDFs that are clearly scanned copies of print articles. I would guess most SCIELO journals fall into this category, since SCIELO apparently began operations in 1998.
- Quite a few are indeterminate: I couldn’t conclude whether they were actually available online in 1995.

Several of these began long before 1995 as print journals; that’s also true of a few of the journals in Part I. A print journal that started pro-
Pioneer OA Journals II 297

viding online free access in 1995 is still a pioneer in OA, even if it’s not technically a pioneer ejournal.

The list that follows includes all 189 journals. I provide some details, including country of publication for most journals not published in the U.S., Canada, Great Britain, or Australia. At the end of each description is my bracketed conclusion or opinion as to whether or not the journal was online and OA by the end of 1995, as follows:

- [Not OA]: This journal doesn't qualify as open access even by my loose definition, or at least didn't in 1995.
- [-]: I'm reasonably certain that this journal was not available in full-text form online prior to 1996, either because the website says so or based on internal evidence. I could be wrong.
- [+]: I'm reasonably certain that this is a pioneer—that articles were available in full-text form online by the end of 1995. I usually offer more detail on publication patterns for these cases.
- [?]: Unclear based on the evidence of the website, or because I couldn't reach or navigate the website.

This is a preliminary list...

I also checked NewJour archives for these titles, but only on a positive basis—if an ejournal that was questionable, not findable, or appeared to have started online life later than 1995 was cited in a NewJour posting from 1995 or before, I accept that citation as sufficient evidence. I have not used NewJour as negative evidence: There are several reasons why a journal with OA access in 1995 doesn't have a 1995-or-earlier NewJour posting to that effect.

“Claims” dates are from DOAJ. “Founded” dates are from website information or by subtracting years based on the first online volume number.

A-B


Across the Disciplines. Claims 1994. Actually founded 2004 as a merger between two earlier journals, one founded 2000, one founded 1994 (see Language and Learning Across the Disciplines). [-]


Acta Mathematica Universitatis Comenianae. Slovak Republic. Founded 1931. Two issues per year, 12-14 articles per issue in samples checked. OA archives back to 1991. [?]

Acta Phytotaxonomica Sinica. China. Founded 1951. 2-4 issues per year, 1951-1976; 4 issues per year, 1976-1983; six issues per year since 1984; each issue has quite a few articles. Full archives back to 1951. [?]


Agroalimentaria (Caracas). Venezuela. Founded 1995. 22 issues since 1995, typically 6-10 articles per issue plus reviews, etc. Full archive back to 1995. [+]


Anales de Psicología. Spain. DOAJ says 1990. Print journal began 1984, OA only back to 1999 (and requires registration). [-]

The Annual of Urdu Studies. Founded 1981. Site indicates that online availability began 2001. 21 volumes in 26 years (including every year since 1991) with substantial mix of articles, fiction and other features. OA archive back to 1981. [-]

**C-E**


*Arte, Individuo y Sociedad*. Spain. Founded 1988 in print. Annual, with quite a few articles per issue (around 120 articles to date). Archive back to 1988, some PDFs are scanned copies of print pages. [?]


*Bioscience*. Founded 1975. Six-month embargo before online availability. [Not OA]  


have 10-30 articles each, plus other material: Clearly strong and growing. Full archive back to 1990. [?] 

**Canadian Bulletin of Medical History.** Founded 1984. Two issues/year; typically 20 to 36 articles per year through 2000, with as many as 52 articles per year since. Full archive back to 1984. [?] 


**Cancer Control.** Founded 1994, online access beginning 1995 (free in both print and online form). Typically six issues per year, substantial number of articles in sampled issues. OA archive back to 1995. [+] 

**The Cato Journal.** Founded 1981. Three issues per year, substantial number of articles per issue. Full archive back to 1981. [?] 

**Cervantes.** Founded 1981. Typically two issues per year, substantial content (four to six articles, plus many reviews and theme articles). Full archive back to 1981. [?] 

**Chinese Journal of Physics.** Taiwan. Founded 1963. Two issues per year 1963-1975, four per year 1976-1987, variable (typically six+) since 1988. Significant number of refereed articles and other content in each issue. Full archive back to 1963. [?] 

**Chronic Diseases in Canada.** Founded 1980?. Online material begins 1995. Quarterly, several articles and other material in each issue. OA archive back to 1995. [+] 

**CIC Cuadernos de Información y Comunicación.** Spain. Founded 1995. Quarterly. 118 articles published to date. Full archive back to 1995. [+] 


**College Quarterly.** DOAJ says 1993, but did not shift to online publication until 1997. [-] 

**Colombia Médica,** Colombia. DOAJ says 1994. Founded 1970. Back-issue access does not work (yields empty-result Google search!); impossible to verify. [?] 


Current Research in Social Psychology (CRISP). Founded 1995 (originally plain ASCII). One issue per article; over 140 articles to date. Full archive back to 1995. [+]

Current Science. India. Founded 1932. Does not appear to have gone online until 1999, although all back issues have been scanned and are available. (Monthly, with enormous content.) [-]

D-Lib Magazine. Founded 1995. Great stuff, but a magazine, not a journal: Solicited articles. [Not OA]

Dermatology Online Journal. Founded 1995. 28 issues since 1995, handful of original articles and other content in each issue. Full archive back to 1995. [+]


e-Journal of Instructional Science and Technology. Founded 1995 (without the “e-“). Published somewhat erratically, with twelve issues between 1995 and 2005, totaling 66 papers and “current practice papers.” Full archive back to 1995. [+]

Early Pregnancy: Biological and Medical. Claims 1995, but no full text found before 2000 or after early 2003. [-]


E.I.A.L., Estudios Interdisciplinarios de America Latina y el Caribe. Spanish (Israel?) Founded 1990. 2x/year since 1990. Varying but substantial number of articles and other content. Full archive back to 1990. [?]

Electronic Journal of Information Technology in Construction. Founded 1995 but published first article (of 177 to date) in 1996. [-]


Elore. Finland. Founded 1994. 2x/year since 1995. Clearly growing, with a few articles in each issue, more (perhaps 10+) in recent years. Full archive back to 1994. [+]

Environmental Health Perspectives. Founded 1993 as a monthly refereed-research publication (1972-1993 as proceedings). Several articles (and other content) per issue. Full archive back to 1972. [+]


Especulo. Revista de Estudios Literarios. Spain. Founded 1995. 33 issues to date, with growing number of papers (e.g., 5 in #2, 9 in #8, 23 in #11, 27 in #15, 35 in #19, 60 in #24, 78 in #29). Full archive back to 1995. [+]

ETRI Journal. South Korea. Founded 1978? First PDF (as opposed to scan) availability) 1994. Quarterly, typically four to ten papers per issue (and other content). OA archive back to 1993. [+]


Eurosurveillance. Appears to be reporting rather than journal papers, at least in 1995. [-]


F-I


Fizika B. Croatia. Full online access began in 1998. [-]

Florida Entomologist. Founded 1917. Online since 1994. Quarterly, appears to be >100 papers per year. OA access back to 1994. [+]

Future of Children. Founded 1991. 35 issues to date, substantial number of papers per issue. Solicited articles; refereed status unclear. Full archive back to 1991. [+]


Gazeta de Antropologia. Spain. Founded 1982. Offered by year; 6-11 papers per year in 1980s (missing some years), 11-17 in 1990s, 21-40 per year in recent years. Full archive back to 1982. [?]


Geofizika. Croatia. DOAJ says 1989. Abstracts back to 1984; PDF for all articles 1986-7 and 1989-present. Typically 6-10 papers per year through 1992, 4-7 per year (or two-year period) since. OA archive back to 1989. [?]

IBM Journal of Research and Development. Founded 1957. Quarterly 1957-1964, 6x/year 1965-present, typically a dozen or more papers per issue. Full archive back to 1957. [+]

IBM Systems Journal. Founded 1962. Quarterly since 1964 (with some combined issues); sampled issues typically include 10-12 papers. Full archive back to 1962. [+]

Indian Journal of Dermatology, Venereology and Leprology. India. Founded 1940. DOAJ indicates 1995 for online access. 6x/year, appears to have more than a hundred papers per year. OA archive back to 1990 (abstracts back to 1961). [+]


Information Research: an electronic journal. 1995. Quarterly, four to 10 or more papers per issue. Full archive back to 1995. [+]


Interdisciplinary Information Sciences. Japan. 1995. Twice yearly (most years), est.10-20 papers per year. Full archive back to 1995. [+]

International Family Planning Perspectives. Founded 1975. Online since 1995. Quarterly. Sampled issues have 4-6 papers per issue. OA archive back to 1995. [+]


International Journal of Speleology. Italy. DOAJ shows 1964, but link doesn’t work. Unable to find live website via Google. [?]

Interstat. 1995. Issued whenever one or more papers are accepted in a month. Distinctly not “arc of enthusiasm”: 11 papers 1995-6, 8 to 9 each year 1997-2000, but 20 to 26 each year 2000-2004; after a dip to 18 in 2005, 27 have been published in 2006 through August. Full archive back to 1995. [+]

Investigaciones Geográficas. Spain. Founded 1983. Online access may have begun 1995. 38 issues, typically six to ten papers (and other content) per issue. Full archive back to 1983. [+]


J-L


Journal of Applied Mathematics and Stochastic Analysis. India. Hindawi publication, OA access much more recent than 1995. [-]


Journal of Chemical Sciences. India. DOAJ shows 1977, but back issues only to 2000. [-]


Journal of Distance Education. 1986 (came online at later date). 32 issues 1986-2004; sampled issues have 4 to 8 papers each. Full archive back to 1986. [?]

number of papers in each issue (six or more in sampled issues). OA archive back to 1978. [?]  


*Journal of Physical Therapy Science.* Japan. Founded 1989? Apparently online since 1995. Twice a year, with eight to twelve papers in sampled issues. OA archive back to 1995. [+]


*Journal of Political Ecology: Case Studies in History and Society.* Founded 1994. Anywhere from 2 to 8 issues per year, with 3-4 papers per year (perhaps more in some years), plus many book reviews: Most issues consist entirely of book reviews. Full archive back to 1994. [+]

*Journal of Postgraduate Medicine.* India. Founded 1955? DOAJ shows 1980 (v. 26). Quarterly, with varying but substantial number of papers in each sampled issue. OA back to 1980. [?]  


*Journal of Research in Rural Education.* 1982, became open access in 2004. [-]

*Journal of Research of NIST.* Founded 1905? Online since 1995. 6x/year, 4-10 papers in sampled issues, including conference reports. OA archive back to 1995, with growing pre-1995 archive. [+]

*Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music.* Founded 1995. Annual (with extra issues), 39 papers to date, plus many reviews. Full archive back to 1995. [+]

*Journal of the Korean Chemical Society.* Korea. Founded 1949. Irregular early years, 6x/year 1971-1992 and 1997-present, 12x/year 1993-1996; sample issues showed anywhere from 7 to 20 items (presumably papers; mostly in Korean). Full archive back to 1949. [?]


Liber Annuus. Israel. Founded 1951. Annual. Substantial number of papers per volume (dozens). OA archive back to 1991; abstracts back to 1951. [?] 

Livestock Research for Rural Development. Colombia and Vietnam. Founded 1989 in diskette form. 30 papers/year in early years, growing since 1996: More than 100 papers/year in past three years. Full archives back to 1989. [+]

M-N

Mappemonde. France. Founded 1990. Became Mapp@monde in 2004 (separate linked site). 4x/year, typically 8 to 15 papers per issue (more in earlier years). Full archive back to 1990. [?]

Marine Ornithology. Canada. Founded 1976 as Cormorant. Online since 1988?. 2x/year, 10-14 papers in sampled issues. OA archive back to 1988. [+]


Matematicki Vesnik. Serbia. DOAJ says 1993, but online files were posted beginning 1999. [-]

Mathematical Physics Electronic Journal. Spain. Founded 1995 as ejournal: emailed ASCII abstracts, then PS and/or PDF papers. 66 papers since 1995. Full archive back to 1995. [+]

Mathematical Problems in Engineering. India. 1995. Hindawi; converted to OA recently. [-]

The Mathematics Educator. 1990. (DOAJ link not operational; found via Google.) 2x/year; sample issues have 4-6 papers each. Full archive back to 1990. [?]

McGill Journal of Medicine. 1994. 2x/year, small number of papers (2-4 per issue?) plus other content. Full archive back to 1994. [?]
Mediators of Inflammation. India. 1992. Hindawi; converted to OA recently. [-]

Medical History. Founded 1957. Quarterly, typically half a dozen papers (and other content) in each sampled issue. Full archive back to 1957. [?]

Medicina Legal de Costa Rica. Costa Rica. Online since 1995? 15 issues since 1995, sampled issues have 8-15 papers each. OA archive back to 1995. [+]

Le Médiéviste et l’ordinateur. France. 1990. Clumsy menu for apparent archives from 1990 to 2003 (no recent content); online content range not clear. [?] 

MedULA. Venezuela. 1992. Quarterly in 1992, either one or two actual issues each year since. Apparently very brief papers; typical annual compilations sampled are 40 to 60 pages total. Full archive back to 1992. [?]

Michigan Telecommunications and Technology Law Review. Founded 1994. 15 issues, typically 3 to 5 papers per issue. Full archive back to 1994. [+]

Missouri Journal of Mathematical Sciences. 1988. DOAJ link fails, but NewJour shows very early OA. 3x/year, half a dozen papers per issue. Full archive back to 1988. [+]

MMWR (Three titles in DOAJ). Available back to 1983, but appears to be primarily reports, not papers as such. “Recommendations and Reports” archived back to 1990, samples show 14-16 reports per year. [-]


Monthly Labor Review. Founded 1915. Monthly, with three to six articles (and other material) in sampled issues. OA archive back to 1981. [?] 

New England Law Review. Founded 1965. OA 1995. 4x/year, substantial number of papers in each issue. Note: Small black-on-dark-blue type for archives and other links are so hard to read and recognize as links that I initially marked this as “apparently not OA,” since on less than a big, bright LCD display, there are literally no visible links to full text. [+]

New South Wales Public Health Bulletin. Founded 1990. Typically six to 12 issues per year, two to four brief articles in sampled issues. OA archive back to 1990. [?] 

Nonlinear Processes in Geophysics. Founded 1994. Two to four actual issues (four numbered issues) per year 1994/2000, with 20 to 29 papers per year; four to six actual issues per year since 2001, growing steadily from 37 papers in 2001 to 89 in 2005 (43 in first half of 2006). Full archive back to 1994. [+]
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Notices of the American Mathematical Society. 1995. 11x/year, with two or three articles (and other content) in each issue; calls itself magazine, not journal. OA archive back to 1995. [+]  
Nueva Sociedad. Argentina. Founded 1972. Full-text online begins with the November/December 1995 issue. 64 issues since November 1995, with substantial number of papers in each sampled issue. OA archive back to late 1995, with contents/abstracts back to 1972. [+]  
Nutrition Bytes. Founded 1995: papers by first-year medical students at UC-LA. 2x/year, 4-8 papers/issue. Full archive back to 1995. [+]  
Papeles del Psicólogo. Spain. Founded 1981. 95 issues since 1981, six to twelve or more papers in sampled issues. Full archive back to 1981. [?]  
Papers on Social Representations. Austria. DOAJ says 1992 but site indicates online access began in 1999. [-]  
Polar Bioscience. Japan. Founded (under different name) 1987. Annual (missing 1988); anywhere from ten to 30 or more papers per year. Full archive back to 1987. [?]  
Publications of the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, University of Belgrade. Series Mathematics. Serbia. Founded 1956 with different title. Current English-language journal began 1990, but was not online until 2005. [-]  
The Qualitative Report. Founded 1990, online “a couple of years later.” Erratic with a few papers each year until 2000, more regular and more papers since (137 between 2002 and 2006). Full archive back to 1990. [+]
The Raffles Bulletin of Zoology. Singapore. Founded 1928 (different title); 1988 with current title, but not online until 2005. [-]


Review of Biblical Literature. DOAJ says 1970, but first accessible reviews date from 1998. (Only online as review database.) [-]


Revista Cubana de Enfermería. Cuba. DOAJ shows 1995. Scielo and Google links return empty pages, either initially or from overall contents list. (Note: Same conditions apply for 7 other journals with titles beginning “Revista Cubana” and DOAJ dates of 1995.) [?]

Revista de la Educación Superior. Mexico. Founded 1972. 138 issues to date, substantial number of papers in sampled issues. Full archive back to 1972. [?]


Revista Médica del Hospital Nacional de Niños Dr. Carlos Sáenz Herrera. Costa Rica. Founded 1966? Typically 6-12 papers in each sampled year; more in 2004; none since 2004. OA archive back to 1995. [?]

Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Geológicas. Mexico. Founded 1975 (title varies). Internal evidence suggests online since 2000 (all earlier articles appear as scanned PDFs). Two or three issues per year; each recent sampled issue has substantial number of articles. Limited OA (equivalent to Creative Commons BY-NC-ND license). Full archive back to 1975. [-]


S-Y

Sankhya, the Indian Journal of Statistics. Founded 1933. DOAJ says 1993. Appears to be scanned papers (6 issues/year, varied number of papers in

**Scandinavian Journal of Information Systems.** Scandinavia (multinational). Founded 1989. Full archive back to 1989. While site seems to indicate online availability as of 2004, there’s a *NewJour* notice from 1995. [+]  

**Séminaire Lotharingien de Combinatoire.** Austria. Founded 1980 (first papers in 1981), online as of 1994. 24 issues (some not yet complete) with 197 papers between 1994 and now. OA archive back to 1994. [+]  


**Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology.** Founded 1995 under different title. “Quarterly” to 1999, 3x/year 2000-. Typically half a dozen articles per issue. Full archive back to 1995. [+]  

**Technikfolgenabschätzung - Theorie und Praxis.** Germany. Founded 1995 under different title. Two to four issues per volume, substantial number of articles per issue. Full archive back to 1994. [?]  

**Technology Electronic Reviews.** Founded 1994 under different title. Entirely reviews, no refereed articles. Publication pattern suggests arc of enthusiasm but with ongoing renewal attempts. Anywhere from one to 12 issues per year, typically half a dozen reviews per issue. Full archive back to 1994. [+]  

**Telos.** Spain? DOAJ says 1992. Unable to navigate site sufficiently to locate archive or find full text for current articles. [?]  


**Theory and Applications of Categories.** Founded 1995. 228 papers in 16 volumes to date, with growth in recent years. Full archive back to 1995. [+]  

**The Trumpeter.** Founded 1983. Internal evidence suggests online since 1995 (start of individual HTML articles). Typically quarterly, with substantial number of articles per issue; diminished 1998-2001, but growing since. Full archive back to 1983, but only scanned issues prior to 1995. [+]
**Putting It All Together**

Counting up the conclusions/opinions (noting that one question mark represents three related journals, and that another represents eight Cuban journals that I couldn’t reach), we find:

- Five out of 189 don’t appear to be true scholarly OA—they have restrictive copyrights or they’re not refereed scholarly papers (including reviews). That’s not a bad rate, given how rapidly DOAJ has grown recently.
- Evidence suggests (or in some cases the site flatly states) that 37 (20%) weren’t OA as early as 1995, but have since provided retrospective access to papers. It’s possible that I’m wrong on some of these.
- Evidence suggests that 84 (44%) were OA as early as 1995, and in some cases a few years earlier. I could be wrong about some of these.
- For exactly one-third of the journals—63—I couldn’t form a firm opinion. My guess is that most of these became available later than
1995, with retrospective availability of earlier papers, but I’m not confident of that guess.

Add it up and we see that at least 121 and possibly as many as 184 journals publishing refereed scholarly articles and reviews were available in OA form in 1995 (some years earlier) and lasted at least a decade, showing articles at least through 2004.

How many free online journals came and went between 1995 and 2004? It would be delightful to say that the mortality rate was only 13%: the 25 ceased journals in Part I and the three in Part II, out of the maximum plausible number for 1995 (66 in Part I, 147 in Part II). But that benign picture is certainly far too optimistic.

The oldest surviving scholarly ejournal I’m aware of, *New Horizons in Adult Education*, began in 1987. Thus, this year marks two decades of sustaining free ejournal publishing. It would be fascinating and, I believe, worthwhile to try to track the ejournal landscape through the first of those two decades—or, more realistically, to see what emerged during the first decade (1987-1996) and what happened to those early ejournals. But that’s another story.
Library Access to Scholarship
(December 2006)

If you care about open access, you should be reading the SPARC Open Access Newsletter (SOAN). Period. The excellence and breadth of Peter Suber’s coverage, and the fairness of his commentary, are primary reasons LIBRARY ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP appears so rarely: It’s largely superfluous.

If you really care about open access, you should make sure these four blogs are in your bookmarks or your aggregator subscriptions: Open access news, DigitalKoans, OA librarian and, although it covers considerably more than OA, Caveat lector. (Open access news may make more sense as a bookmark, given the volume of coverage and the way it’s organized.)

There are others, but those will provide broad, deep coverage.

Here’s another wildly incomplete selection of items, with my commentary as an OA independent scattered among the notes. The big story is another legislative attempt to encourage open access to federally funded research—and the usual reactions to that proposed legislation.

Federal Research Public Access Act

Senators John Cornyn (R-TX) and Joe Lieberman (D-CT) introduced FRPAA on May 2, 2006. According to Peter Suber’s coverage (beginning in SOAN 97), “This is [a] giant step forward for OA, even bigger than the CURES Act that Senator Lieberman introduced in December 2005.” Some details (excerpted from SOAN):

- FRPAA applies to all federal funding agencies that spend more than $100 million/year on research grants to non-employees. At the moment, 11 agencies fall into this category: the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), National Science Foundation (NSF), and the cabinet-level Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Homeland Securi-
ty, and Transportation. NIH is part of Health and Human Services, so it’s covered.

- Agencies have one year from the adoption of the bill to develop OA policies. They may host OA repositories or ask grantees to deposit their work in any OA repository meeting the agency’s conditions of open access, interoperability, and long-term preservation.

- FRPAA applies to the final version of the author’s peer-reviewed manuscript, which must incorporate all changes introduced by the peer-review process. Publishers can opt to replace the author’s manuscript with the published version when the agency decides that the published version advances the agency’s “goals...for functionality and interoperability.”

- FRPAA applies to manuscripts arising from “research supported, in whole or in part from funding by the Federal Government” including projects with multiple sources of funding and those with multiple authors, as long as one is covered.

- Agencies must insure free online access to these manuscripts “as soon as practicable, but not later than 6 months after publication in peer-reviewed journals.”

- Agency policies must apply to agency employees as well as agency grantees, but work by employees will be in the public domain, labeled as such, and released to the public immediately upon publication.

- The OA mandate does not apply to lab notes, preliminary data analyses, personal notes, phone logs, classified research, revenue-producing publications like books, patentable discoveries, or work not submitted to journals or not accepted for publication.

- Agencies will maintain OA bibliographies of publications resulting from their funded research, with active links from citations to OA editions.

- Nothing in the bill modifies patent or copyright law.

- Instead of (or perhaps simply before) relying on copyright-holder consent as the legal basis for disseminating copies of the articles, the agencies must “make effective use of any law or guidance relating to the creation and reservation of a Government license that provides for the reproduction, publication, release, or other uses of a final manuscript for Federal purposes.” Two existing licenses may come into play.
Suber’s comment on that last:

Don’t let the technical detail of this section disguise its importance. The NIH recognized the existence of a government license to provide OA to NIH-funded research, but deliberately decided not to use it. Instead, it relied on publisher consent, with the effect that it accommodated, if not invited, publisher resistance. By relying on government licenses instead, FRPAA makes publisher dissent irrelevant.

➢ Once a year, agency heads will report on their public-access policy to the Senate. They must assess the effectiveness of their policies in providing free online access to the agency’s research output, list published papers to which the policy applies, list papers made freely available under the policy, and report on delays or embargoes between journal publication and free online access under the agency policy. All reports and lists must themselves be OA (4.f.3).

➢ The rationale for the bill: “Congress finds that the Federal Government funds basic and applied research with the expectation that new ideas and discoveries that result from the research, if shared and effectively disseminated, will advance science and improve the lives and welfare of people of the United States and around the world.” Moreover, “the Internet makes it possible for this information to be promptly available to every scientist, physician, educator, and citizen at home, in school, or in a library.”

Could FRPAA be stronger? Sure. As Suber notes, it doesn’t currently provide for processing fees charged by (some) OA journals; it doesn’t directly require deposit in an OAI repository immediately upon acceptance; and it doesn’t address noncompliance. But the policies required by FRPAA could very well address those issues.

It’s a good bill—Suber calls it “superb.” He says, “It’s informed by the arguments for OA and the shortcomings of the NIH policy.” What are its chances? Suber notes bipartisan support, that the boldest ideas (a mandate rather than a request, and a six-month deadline) were both approved by both houses of Congress in its instructions to the NIH, and evidence that NIH’s weak policy doesn’t harm journals—but also doesn’t yield much participation.

In the same issue of SOAN, Suber notes that NIH Director Elias Zerhouni testified before the NIH-appropriating subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee on April 4, 2006.

Rep. Ernest Istook (R-OK) pointed out the low compliance rate for the NIH public-access policy and asked what we could do to improve it. Ac-
cording to an observer present for the testimony, Zerhouni responded that “it seems the voluntary policy is just not enough” and that he will have to review the recommendations of the NLM Board of Regents. Those recommendations, of course, included a shift from a request to a mandate. At the same time, however, Zerhouni said the 6 to 12 month embargo is “a different issue” and affects the economic viability of publishing and peer review. He called the 6-12 month period “the sweet spot” and said “I don’t think we should do anything at the expense of peer review.”

It’s a shame Zerhouni finds it necessary to repeat the usual “endangering peer review” myth.

Immediate responses and later notes

Publishers were all over FRPAA within a few days. A May 8, 2006 New York Times article begins with a solidly anti-FRPAA bias:

Scholarly publishing has never been a big business. But it could take a financial hit if a proposed federal law is enacted, opening taxpayer-financed research to the public, according to some critics in academic institutions.

That first sentence is questionable—although I suppose you could twist definitions enough to call Elsevier and Wiley something other than “big business.” Most of us, I suspect, assume that anything measured in billions of dollars per year (or even hundreds of millions) qualifies as big business. The second sentence does have a key phrase—“taxpayer-financed research,” the kind of thing that perhaps ought to be available to, ahem, taxpayers—but makes a point of citing critics as being “in academic institutions.” Oddly, though, at least the first two objections are from publishers—or, rather, societies acting as publishers. They’re high-minded: One says “advertising promotion” may be affected if articles are freely available and another brings up the paternalistic “can ordinary citizens be trusted to interpret scientific data?” theme. Suber comments on the “pettiness of the publisher objections” and—well, I can’t say it any better:

Should we really reduce the effectiveness of the enormous US public investment in research in order to help journals measure traffic and charge for ads? Should we really reduce access for scientists in order to paternalize non-scientists who may not understand the literature or care to read it? Let’s get serious. It’s not about journal advertising or journal subscriptions, and it’s only secondarily about lay readers. It’s about $55 billion/year in research, making it available to all the researchers who can apply or build on it, and making it as useful as it can possibly be.
Michael Carroll (Villanova University, on the board of Creative Commons) commented on the Times article in a same-day post at Carrollogos. He finds the elitist argument “particularly galling”...the idea “that taxpayers cannot be trusted with open access because they might harm themselves by misreading or misunderstanding an article written by specialists for specialists.” He looks at analogous arguments: Voters shouldn’t get information about the war on Iraq because they might misunderstand the complexity of modern warfare; they shouldn’t have access to hurricane readiness info because meteorology is complex. (I could see officials arguing the first example!)

Barbara Fister also commented in a May 10 post at ACRLog, “Never been a big business? Don’t tell Elsevier shareholders.” Fister is sympathetic to the scholarly society argument that they might lose profit that now provides “membership perks,” but finds the ad argument odd—and is nicely snarky about the “misunderstanding” argument. She finds that argument a little dubious—"It’s not that [ordinary folks] will benefit by reading them, because for the most part they won’t, but that they will benefit because scientists will have greater access to them. And that public good is why we fund their research in the first place.”

I’d disagree in part: In fact, “ordinary folks” have benefited from greater access to medical literature, if only so they can ask questions and probe beyond initial findings.

On May 9, Jeffrey Goldfarb of Reuters reported that Wiley, Elsevier and others “are launching an offensive against newly proposed U.S. legislation that would require them to make much of their research available for free within six months of publication.” [Emphasis added.] Wrong, FRPAA would not make one iota of Elsevier’s or Wiley’s research available; it would make taxpayer-funded research available, as the second paragraph notes.

This article is another one with a clear slant, informing us that publishers invest “hundreds of millions of dollars” and charge subscriptions for “up to hundreds of dollars a year.” If only STM journals ran “up to hundreds of dollars a year,” rather than thousands and sometimes tens of thousands! But AAP/PSP’s chair (I hate to give his last name) informs us that this mandate “will be a powerful disincentive for publishers to continue these substantial investments.” PSP wants an “independent study” on the effects FRPAA might have “on research quality and taxpayer costs”—which makes no sense at all unless PSP is somehow suggesting that making research publicly available will lower its quality.
And, of course, we can all get to the papers anyway: “the general public can find the journals at libraries and nearly all researchers access it through their universities or companies.” PSP’s chair even suggests that NIH “wanted to show limited compliance to gain a mandatory policy”—and a different AAP official raises the “peer review” alarm. As to balance in this particular article, there’s almost three times as much text supporting the AAP/PSP view as providing FRPAA arguments; the piece reads more as advocacy than as journalism.

Peter Suber posted a May 9 AAP/PSP press release that may be the source of the Reuters story. The press release goes further. Quoting:

Publishers argue that the legislation, if passed, will seriously jeopardize the integrity of the scientific publishing process, and is a duplicative effort that places an unwarranted burden on research investigators... The provisions...threaten to undermine the essential value of peer review... "Full public access to scientific articles based on government funding has always been central to our mission."... Americans have easy access to [STM literature] through public libraries [and other means]... [FRPAA] would expropriate the value-added investments made by scientific publishers... [It] could well have the unintended consequence of compromising or destroying the independent system of peer review."

There’s more, most of it the same tired old myths including the “centrality” of “full public access” to PSP’s mission and the easy availability of STM literature through public libraries.

Suber offered a ten-point rebuttal to the press release in a May 10, 2006 Open access news posting—a vivid discussion peppered with “false” and “begs the question.” FRPAA isn’t duplicative; AAP/PSP clearly doesn’t behave as though full public access was its policy; STM literature isn’t generally available in public libraries (and not fully available in academic libraries); most peer review is done for free and not endangered by OA; and calling for another study is, at best, disingenuous. But go read the post; Suber handles justifiable anger at these repeated myths with élan and eloquence.

May 11, 2006: The Scientist chimes in with “Publishers, societies oppose ‘public access’ bill.” Martin Frank of the DC Principles Coalition says FRPAA unfairly puts authors “between the agency that funds the research and the publisher” if the publisher refuses to grant “re-publication” rights—but as Suber notes, no member of the DC group has refused to publish federally funded research. In any case, the government has a license and legitimate cause to enforce its policy, which should eliminate this threat from publishers.
I find this case sad. The American Anthropological Association came out against FRPAA. The AnthroSource Steering Committee disagreed; it sent AAA a letter indicating support for FRPAA. As recounted at Savage minds by a member of the committee, AAA sat on the letter for two months, at which point this member said that if AAA didn’t publish the letter, it would appear on the blog—and posted it. A few weeks later, AAA disbanded the AnthroSource Steering Committee.

Here’s an unfortunate one, showing how much Jan Velterop has changed since he went to work for Springer. In a May 16, 2006 post at The Parachute, he calls the bill “a bit of a dog’s dinner” and says, “The six months’ embargo is a perilously short period of time for most publishers to recoup their costs via subscriptions.” He admits to “assertions” that such an embargo poses no threats and that immediate self-archiving is safe. He notes ArXiv and the continued health of physics journals but calls it “evidence” only with scare quotes. Astonishingly, Velterop goes further in his Amazing Shrinking Parachute role:

I know of assertions that not all OA journals charge authors anything at all. This is undoubtedly so, but a quick look at those journals leaves one with the inescapable impression that ideas about scaling up that mode of operation to anywhere near the bulk of the serious journal literature firmly belong in the realm of unlimited impossibilities. [Emphasis added.]

Even the PSP-funded study found the fact that most OA journals do not charge author-side fees. The second sentence, stated without examples, is unfortunate, as it appears to dismiss such journals as inconsequential. Frankly, Velterop comes off here much more as an employee of a Big Commercial Journal Publisher than he does as an OA advocate.

Skipping over some other examples of misleading (and typical) anti-OA rhetoric, I come to a striking Viewpoint in the Spring 2006 Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship (which is, with no apologies to Jan Velterop’s dismissive comment, an outstanding open access journal that charges no author-side fees because its minimal costs are covered by the Science and Technology Section of ACRL, the Association of College and Research Libraries). David Flaxbart notes the introduction of FRPAA and continues:

Naturally, it didn’t take long for the publishing industry’s lobbyists, led by the eminently hissable American Association of Publishers, to shake off their cocktail-circuit stupor and begin frothing at the mouth at this dangerous exercise in socialist engineering. They immediately trotted
out their tired and discredited mantras about the loss of subscription revenue, removal of investment incentives, and threats to peer review, in addition to the accusations that the government is trying to fix a system that—for them at least—isn’t broken.

After citing some of the rhetoric from the AAP and labeling as “absurd” the claim that Americans have easy access to the STM literature, Flaxbart continues:

It is sad that some of the loudest anti-OA rhetoric is coming from some non-profit publishers and societies who should really know better by now, and whose pretense at protecting the integrity of science has long since been exposed as a ploy to protect their revenue streams. We all know who they are. Claims of imminent bankruptcy are disingenuous at best, especially those coming from publishers rolling in cash. Societies that depend on money from library budgets to fund most of their activities need to divert their energies to looking for new sources of revenue, because the golden goose is on life support.

The claim of threats to the system of peer review also seems particularly weak now, given the recent well-publicized hits that system has taken in the wake of high-profile scandals such as the Woo Suk Hwang case in stem cell research. Editors have scrambled to explain that peer review isn’t really intended to catch fraud after all. Knowledgeable observers can understand the finer points of their arguments, but these are lost on an increasingly skeptical public. Journals are actively abdicating any responsibility for investigating fraud, which further erodes their credibility. Publishers’ persistent defense of this tattered fig leaf of “added value” is starting to sound rather desperate.

As Flaxbart notes, FRPAA’s future is uncertain—but even the proposal is cause for celebration.

The June 2006 SOAN includes a followup on FRPAA, noting that a Harris poll in late May 2006 showed that an overwhelming majority of Americans want OA for publicly funded research: 83% wanted their doctors to have such access, 82% wanted everyone to have it. Suber also notes what I couldn’t help but notice: “Some mainstream news media covering the proposal give much more space and detail to publisher objections than to the proposal’s own rationale or to the supporting arguments…” His take: “It’s as if these media companies were dedicated to business news rather than general news.”

An August 31 post at T Scott notes a letter opposing FRPAA being circulated for signatures among senior leadership of some research institutions—“clearly in response to the supporting letters signed by prov-
posts from around the country.” Scott says the DC Principles group is behind the letter, since earlier versions are on their website. He’s not surprised by the letter or the fact that it’s getting a few signatures. He also believes these people, most of them involved with society publishers, “sincerely believe that FRPAA threatens the health of the societies to which they have devoted a significant portion of their attention and time throughout their careers. They are not wrong to be concerned.”

Scott goes on to say that some journals will fold and it’s “disingenuous of open access partisans to argue that FRPAA and related efforts don’t represent a serious threat.” But he says the tide is changing in any case; “traditional subscription-based publishing is on the wane, and societies whose economy is based on it are going to have to make radical changes.” Academic librarians should be worried as well because “we need [the societies] to weather this transition successfully…. Yes, we need open access; but we need strong, vibrant and effective scholarly societies, playing a critical and key role in managing the scholarly communication process.”

Maybe so—but, once again, those societies can no longer fund themselves through library subsidies. That was never an appropriate financial model, and it’s simply unsupportable at this point. If societies need subsidies, those subsidies need to be in the open; they cannot continue to be hidden subsidies taken from library budgets. (Dorothea Salo comments on Scott’s post in a September 25, 2006 Caveat lector post. Her stance is pretty much the same one I’ve been repeating: “Libraries are not responsible for supporting society activities unrelated to the scholarly literature.” She goes on to add more commentary—and notes, as I would agree, that the responsible scholarly societies with reasonably-priced journals are “not the problem and never were,” and OA is “not about [them] right now.”)

The last item, for the moment, is a press release from ARL dated October 25, 2006: “Higher education and library leaders voice support for free access to federal research.” The release notes a forum on “Improving Access to Publicly Funded Research” and voiced support during that forum. David Shulenberger of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges notes the evidence of journals that already provide open access immediately or after brief delays: “That evidence is not consistent with an apocalyptic collapse of the subscriber base.” SPARC and ARL officials spoke to the critical need for public access; Duane Webster of ARL called FRPAA “an essential step toward
broadening access to widely needed information resources.” The release also notes work at MIT and UC to aid faculty in retaining rights—and Clifford Lynch’s note that other universities should provide institutional support for faculty negotiations with publishers.

Research Information

The June/July 2006 issue of Research Information featured a cluster of nine commentaries on open access from a range of (mostly British) perspectives. You’ll find the lot online (www.researchinformation.info/, go to previous issues, June/July 2006). A few notes on some of the commentaries:

- Martin Richardson of Oxford Journals, which now offers Oxford Open as a hybrid option but also publishes some OA journals without author-side fees, says the firm is experimenting with models and claims not to have a “preconceived idea about which model is best.” They don’t believe there will be one single model (a sensible conclusion, in my opinion). So far—it’s only been offered for a year or so—only 10 to 20% of authors have chosen the “author-pays” option in the life sciences, with lower percentages elsewhere. Richardson says there will be more research projects, and makes some sensible statements: “I don’t see any effect to the peer-review process. We do the peer review and accept papers before we discuss with authors how the paper will be funded… Most models don’t really involve the author or reader paying. It is the librarian or funding body…. Our view is that there is not a right or wrong way.”

- Michael Mabe was with Elsevier and is now CEO of the International STM Association. He starts out much as you might expect: When asked how he defines open access, he comes up with this gem:

  Giving a definition goes to the heart of the problem with open access. In principle it is free availability to everybody on the world-wide web. However, many academics think they are accessing open-access material or publishing in open-access journals when in fact there simply appear to be no barriers because their library has already paid for the subscription. In the industry as a whole there has not been an appreciable increase in downloads for open-access articles. This demonstrates that research papers are generally by academics for academics and they have access anyway.

  Given that bafflegab (don’t OA advocates claim proof that the start of the second paragraph is false?), you won’t be surprised that
Mabe says Elsevier’s position is “quite neutral”—but, of course, “many open-access journals are not sustainable and there is a concern about whether the articles that they hold will still be there in 10 or 15 years time.” That, to me, is a new strawman: Oppose OA—which inherently supports institutional repositories, LOCKSS and other archiving initiatives, and pretty much any archiving technique—because the articles might disappear! There’s a lot more, but it’s painful to summarize, including comments about “true costs” rather than existing profits and overhead structure, claims that OA will exclude “different people” from the equation, an astonishing discussion of institutional repositories (they’re for “showcasing a university” and “the material will not necessarily be kept in any useful way,” plus “it is potentially parasitic to traditional publishers”), and dismissal: “I am not sure that open access in the sense of an author-pays model is going to have much future.” Mabe is consistent on one thing: Anything that might threaten the profit and overhead structures of today’s journals is “clearly damaging the research process.” Expect the International STM Association to be just as OA-friendly as AAP/PSP.

Robert Terry of the Wellcome Trust is, as you might expect, friendlier to OA. “We want the digital versions of papers to be available to all in an unrestricted way and for them to be available forever by putting it in an archive or institutional repository.” Wellcome is also strong on subject-based archives. Terry looks forward to text mining of subject archives to “enable new facts to be discovered.” He’s less excited by the future of institutional repositories. As for OA in general: “Open access is better for research.” That’s followed by what may be a non sequitur: “Publishing research in journals worked very well in a paper-based format but people do not work like that now.” Since Wellcome’s guidelines call for archival deposit “on the day of publication or no later than six months after publication,” and since Terry goes on to note that it makes funding available to publish in OA journals, I don’t understand the link with journals becoming irrelevant. Terry says the biggest challenge is the researchers—“There is a lot of passive inertia. They either don’t know or don’t care about open access. They publish work in journals but they don’t even know how much the subscriptions cost.”

Tim Smith publishes the New Journal of Physics—an OA journal published by a traditional publisher, the Institute of Physics Pub-
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It’s been around since 1998 and growing since around 2001: “We expect to publish more than 300 papers in 2006.” Smith regards it as prestigious (the Impact Factor in 2004 was 3.095 and rises every year), and it has a high rejection rate (70% rejections). “[O]ver 40,000 articles are downloaded each month and on average an NJP paper will be fully downloaded more than 700 times within one year of publication.” That’s “very high” when compared to other (subscription) IOPP journals. The author-side charge is £600 per article; 85% of articles are paid for (some are subsidized). IOPP hopes that the journal will be self-sustaining within five years.

Matthew Cockerill is publisher at BioMed Central. He says the life sciences have “really led open access” (hasn’t physics been a leader with ArXiv?) and OA “is driven partly by the frustrations at the barriers in the toll-access model.” Cockerill notes, “Many areas of research are funded by taxpayers but they do not see the results.” He says BMC has proved that online-only and open-access can compete with print subscription journals. The number of articles is doubling every 18 months and “authors have also been very pleased with download statistics.” There are some 150 BMC journals; the current “realistic article-processing charge” is £750. BMC is expanding beyond biomed—“we already publish several chemistry journals and have had interest from the physics and social science communities.” While OA is still small, it’s growing; “We see this as a model whose time has come.”

Alma Swan is director of Key Perspectives, a consultancy. She’s written on OA and says “dissemination of research results is a part of the research process and should be funded from within that.” On the other hand, she has no problem with high profits for publishing companies. Swan focuses on institutional repositories as the way to achieve OA.

Jens Vigen heads CERN’s library. CERN’s view is “that everything should be freely available to everybody, without any embargo.” That’s been the practice of CERN since its founding, and high-energy physicists started distributing preprints in the mid-1950s. To Vigen, a six-month embargo would be “a bit of a step backwards,” as the community is “used to immediate release of preprints, six to 12 months before publication” [emphasis added.” Vigen notes, “Publishers tell us that the physics pre-print archive
does not affect their subscriptions”—but later does support a strawman: “Open-access publishing could disrupt the peer-review process” (Vigen adds: “but it could actually make it more stable if the funding bodies got involved”). Vigen expects to see charges of “perhaps $1000 per article” and considers this “affordable” from the viewpoint of funding research.

A Few from Open Access News

It’s hopeless to summarize the excellent commentary Suber throws in with his extensive citations. Here are a few notes of interest, if only as ways to entice you to go to the originals:

- April 24: Suber critiques an article by William H. Walters on institutional journal costs in an OA environment because its cost analysis appears to have some of the same flaws as the Cornell study: Assuming that all OA journals charge author-side fees, that all such fees will be paid by the universities, and that the average fee will be $2,500 (an assumption that Walters refines). The first two assumptions are clearly incorrect.

- April 27: Commenting on a Jonathan Zittrain lecture that calls for universities to encourage their faculties to publish in OA journals, Suber says universities would be “much wiser to encourage or require OA archiving”—which may be true, but I have to fault one statement: “There’s no reason for universities to steer faculty away from subscription journals, at least when these journals consent to the OA archiving of peer-reviewed postprints.” I’ll assert that there is one very large reason: Without a shift toward OA journals, today’s crippling subscription prices will continue to make libraries more expensive and, on the whole, less valuable to their universities (because they have so little money left for anything beyond STM licenses).

- May 30: Suber cites John Udell citing John Willinsky on education and the internet. “Among his themes, Willinsky talks about how he, as a reading specialist, would never have predicted what has now become routine. Patients with no ability to read specialized medical literature are, nonetheless, doing so, and then arriving in their doctors’ offices asking well-informed questions… ‘They don’t have a context? They build a context.’” The “access to research is
dangerous for laypeople” strawman has always been elitist and patronizing; this is one example of why it’s also probably false.

- August 22: BioMed Central broadens into chemistry—and the Royal Society of Chemistry’s director of publishing strikes back, saying authors have “absolutely no interest” in OA publishing and that it’s “ethically flawed,” raising the risk of “substandard science” because peer review won’t be rigorous and, sigh, risking the loss of the scientific record if journals go under. Suber gives clear answers to the usual canards.

- September 5: Richard Charkin of Macmillan raises an odd “issue” regarding OA: “None of this answers the fundamental question of why paying for publication is likely to result in better scientific literature than the existing subscriber system.” As Suber notes, that’s not an issue: OA improves access to the literature. OA could indirectly improve the literature by improving the chances that researchers know what’s been done before, but “better scientific literature” isn’t the claim of OA.

Notes from Dorothea Salo

In my office cubicle, my woodcarving of Don Quixote sits tall on his spanioned nag grasping his spear, his beard jutting proudly forward. He reminds me that I am predisposed to tilt at windmills. Sometimes I ought to lean back in my saddle with my hands folded over my paunch and survey the situation, like Sancho beside the Don.

Thus begins a first-rate May 12, 2006 Caveat lector post (“How are we doing?”) on the likely future of open access. “I think the world will change in our direction. Utopia, certainly not. An entirely open-access landscape, certainly not. A world where many more people have unfeathered access to much more research and scholarship—yes.” [Emphasis added because it’s such an important point: “100% OA” is just not in the cards.] Then Salo offers some reasons.

She thinks for-profit publishers are fighting on too many fronts—and their repeated lies about OA aren’t working. As Salo notes, once the anti-OA forces lose one significant legislative battle, the whole landscape starts to change. Salo would be “honestly shocked to see nothing pass in the US or Western Europe within ten years.” [Emphasis in the original.] So would I—and, unfortunately, I think you need to use a five- to ten-year horizon to be sure of a major victory. (I’d love
to be proved wrong—to have FRPAA pass within the next three years, to have comparable British efforts take hold. Heck, I hope I’m wrong.)

Salo also notices the emergence (growth?) of grey literature and the open data movement, where publishers really don’t have a plausible counter-argument.

Slowly but surely, the environment is changing in an open-access direction. That’s what I see. I don’t see what can stop it. And as the environment changes, more and more researchers will make independent self-interest-based decisions to play along.

I think Salo’s also right to feel that the continued indifference of most researchers isn’t so bad: At least the researchers aren’t, in general, actively opposed to OA. “If the slumbering behemoth had ranged itself behind the publishers, we’d be outright dead in the water.” But that hasn’t happened and isn’t likely to. Meanwhile, although “the pace and nature of this change are glacial,” change is happening. Yes, some OA journals will fail (some already have)—but it appears that most will succeed. Sure, some publishers will abandon overpriced “hybrid” experiments and claim that their failure proves OA doesn’t work—but unless the big publishers hire every OA advocate (which is, I suppose, possible) their credibility on this issue is shrinking all the time. Meanwhile, OA institutional and subject repositories are growing (slowly but surely), new OA journals are springing up and some established ones are prospering, and some journals are converting to full OA or something close to it. I don’t believe we’ll ever get all the way there, but progress is happening.

A few days later (May 16, “That’s the stuff,”) Salo discussed “Citation advantage of open access articles” by Gunther Eysenbach (May 2006 PLOS Biology), a research article that finds:

This comparison of the impact of OA and non-OA articles from the same journal in the first 4–16 mo after publication shows that OA articles are cited earlier and are, on average, cited more often than non-OA articles.

It appears to be a careful study: All articles studied (toll and OA) are from one high-impact, widely available hybrid journal (PNAS); all are newly published; other factors were canceled out. “And guess what. Even taking all that into account, there’s still a significant and measurable advantage for open access.”

There’s a joker: Articles published as OA have higher impact than self-archived or otherwise openly-accessible OA articles. “Gold beats
green,” in other words. Salo buys that for newly published articles: “It’s just plain easier to find an article via a publisher’s website than on the open web.” Salo thinks that will thin out over time, and she’s probably right.

The next day (May 17), Salo takes on Harnad (at least indirectly). She admits to being “anti-for-profit-journal-publisher,” and “[i]t blows my mind when Harnad et alia want to trust them with long-term e-journal archiv[ing]. I just cannot fathom it.” As she notes (and she’s worked for a service bureau), publishers don’t understand preservation and have never been in the archival business. She offers a wicked little proposal (a fine one at that):

If the repository I run has to go through NARA/RLG certification to be a trusted digital repository, why shouldn’t publishers who want their electronic archives to be the e-copy of record have to do that, too? Libraries can write that into their contracts: “get NARA/RLG certified, participate in LOCKSS or Portico, and/or give us copies of the bits.”

If we’re to trust them with the scholarly record, they’re going to have to prove they’re trustworthy. Libraries can relax, responsible publishers can show they’re responsible, steps can be taken to cover for the irresponsible ones. Everybody wins except the slackers. I like that.

I don’t track Stevan Harnad (for reasons that will be obvious to long-time readers), but he was apparently distraught over the Eysenbach article and an accompanying editorial. A back-and-forth followed. Salo offers comments on May 25; I strongly recommend reading them directly (and referencing the back-and-forth linked from Salo’s post).

Basically, while Salo agrees with Eysenbach that OA is more complicated than Harnad seems to accept, she’s less convinced that journal-as-community continues to be a strong argument. She notes the virtues of depositories to promote interdisciplinarity and the greater ease with which “green OA” can capture datasets. But that’s an unfair summary. Go read the original, which ends:

In short, green and gold open access should not really be considered competitors; they are complements, and a great deal of the green-vs.-gold fuss verges on the ridiculous. I look forward to more thoughtful work and commentary such as Eysenbach’s.

Jumping ahead to September 3, Salo discusses peer review (the hook to OA being that some anti-OA forces wrongly claim OA threatens peer review). She notes comments by Bob Holley in a fine Info Career Trends piece about peer review. For Holley—and for me when I’ve
been a peer reviewer—gatekeeping is not the only or primary role. Holley rarely concludes that a paper’s unsuitable and lets it go: “This has happened only about three times in all my years of peer reviewing.” Holley goes on to note ways in which a good peer reviewer aids the author by finding and pointing out errors, problems and inconsistencies that can be corrected before an article is published.

This is true in my experience, from both sides. The few peer-reviewed articles I’ve written were improved thanks to reviewers’ comments. I’ve offered comments in reviewing articles that did, I believe, lead to improvement.

There is, as it happens, a connection to some of the more radical alternatives being proposed: That is, the suggestion that we’d do just as well with “post-publication peer review,” comments and critiques following online publication. Salo:

If we admit that improving papers before they see the harsh light of day is one (though not the only) function of peer review, then post-publication measures come up short, don’t they? By design, they hit a paper once it’s been enshrined in the scholarly record as final.

I still think it quite possible to come up with peer-review systems that take advantage of the breadth of reviewing talent available via the Internet to improve the quality of the scholarly record while avoiding some of the cronyism, bias, and outright error that plague the existing system. Unless we acknowledge all the functions of peer review, though, whatever systems we come up with will not serve even as well as the present one.

Three days later, Salo offers critical comments on a new book on OA, noting that it lacks an essay on what open access will do to and for libraries. She’s working on a proper review; these are notes along the way. I can’t do them justice (and haven’t seen the book); the post, “Libraries and open access,” appears September 6 and justifies reading on its own merits.

**A Handful of DigitalKoans**

Charles W. Bailey, Jr. has been posting useful essays including these four, well worth reading:

➢ “How can scholars retain copyright rights?” (July 3, 2006, with a “More” on July 4) offers the list of exclusive rights provided by copyright and basic strategies for dealing with copyright transfer agreements. It’s easiest to choose a narrow rights license (magazine
agreements are typically very narrow; ALA divisional publications offer both an appropriate narrow license and a less appropriate copyright assignment); if that’s not possible, you’ll need to amend the agreement you’re offered—or replace it entirely. Bailey links to examples in each case.

“Open access to books: The case of the Open Access Bibliography” (July 9, 2006) discusses 16 months’ experience with Bailey’s book of that title, published as a $45 print book and as a freely available PDF version (under the CC Attribution-NonCommercial 2.0 license). Bibliographies reach narrow audiences and only a fairly small group really cares about OA. “The question is: Was it worth putting up all of those free digital versions of the books and creating these auxiliary digital materials?” (Bailey provided separate PDFs of key portions at additional sites, HTML versions of some portions, and eventually an HTML version of the whole bibliography.) The numbers are convincing (Bailey doesn’t provide print sales, but as he notes, “most scholarly publishers would be delighted to sell 500 copies of a specialized bibliography.”) In the first three months, the book was downloaded more than 29,000 times in PDF form—with another 15,000 since then. In all, more than 44,500 copies of the complete book and more than 31,000 sections have been distributed. That’s impact!

“The American Library Association and open access” (July 23, 2006) is a detailed analysis of the topic—both at the mission level and in terms of actual performance. While there are two gold OA journals (one of which isn’t listed on ALA’s periodicals page), most divisionals are green OA (most support self-archiving). “As a whole, the American Library Association appears to support the open access movement to a limited extent. If this is incorrect and its support is strong, ALA appears to be having difficulty making its commitment visible and “walking the talk.” That’s true—and the first thing ALA could and should do is scrap the copyright assignment agreement altogether and use the copyright license agreement or even narrower licenses.

“Overcoming obstacles to launching and sustaining non-traditional-publisher open access journals” appeared on August 14. Bailey notes the long history of such journals, back at least to 1987, and that new open source journal digital publishing systems make it more attractive to start up OA journals. But there are
still obstacles: Such journals are new, digital-only, typically lack branding, typically publish fewer articles, may not be indexed well, may lack citation impact, still require copy editing, and may “depend on the continued interest of their founders.” He offers comments and in some cases suggestions to overcome these obstacles, concluding that OA journals are more likely to succeed and survive “if they are produced by a formal digital publishing program that has the firm backing of a nonprofit organization.”

The copy editing point may need repeating: It’s not too difficult to set up a peer review system, but good copyediting requires skill and time. “Novice editors can easily underestimate how much copy editing is required to produce a high-quality journal and how demanding this can be.”

Other Notes

In “Open access, quo vadis?” (July 12, 2006, The parachute), Jan Velterop concludes that “open access is just not all that attractive to individual researchers when they publish their articles.” He says that “with pain in my heart.” He goes on to note proposed mandates—but then he goes off track, as far as I’m concerned. He agrees that research funders “have the power to impose OA on their grantees, and maybe the duty.” Followed by this gem:

And as they mostly pay the bill for library subscriptions anyway (indirectly, via overhead charges of institutions, but they pay nonetheless), they could simply re-route that money to OA article processing charges and reform publishing in the process.

There’s the Velterop Formula for Assured Springer Wealth: Rip off the libraries. First is the questionable assumption that most library subscriptions are funded in a way that can be traced back to NIH, Wellcome, or other research funding institutions. Second is the direct suggestion: re-route that money.

If you take the view cited by at least one economist that the main purpose of academic libraries is to provide journal articles, and if the first assumption could be proven, maybe that suggestion is reasonable—if you’re willing to abandon other library functions. I’m not. Velterop wants to “flip the model” and makes the highly questionable claim that assured funding for high-priced author-pays publication would cause “real competition” and “put downward pressure on prices
and upward pressure on efficiencies.” How so? Journals don’t follow standard economic models, because each one is a monopoly. Velterop calls this “reforming publication,” but as long as that “reform” assures the huge profits and overheads of commercial publishers at the explicit expense of academic libraries, it’s the kind of reform Tammany Hall would love.

Francis Ouellette posted a hard-hitting list of “Top 10 things you should do to support the Open Access of scientific publications” at bioinformatics.ubc.ca/ouellette/open_access/top_ten/. Some of them:

10. Publish in OA journals.
7. Only review for OA journals [and for OA articles in hybrid journals]
2. When reviewing papers, give the authors a hard time for citing closed access publications when there are better ones that are OA.
1. If you are looking for a position in Academia, and you find yourself in front of a departmental chair- person that tells you they will not grant you tenure if you publish in OA journals, don’t take that job.

The suggestions may be extreme (especially “8. Move to a country that has signed the Berlin Declaration on Open Access”), but they’re worth thinking about.

Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe posts “You can change a contract” at ACR-Log on October 5, 2006. She discusses advice in the ACRL Scholarly Communication Toolkit on modifying contracts and offers her own experiences. She’s been offered interesting reasons for copyright-assignment contracts; she’s learned to respond. “The reality is of course that to negotiate from a position of real strength, you have to be willing to walk away from the opportunity…” Hinchliffe thinks we need more success stories and offers her own.

It’s a hard road in some cases but, I agree, a necessary one. Within the last two years, I had one case in which a minor piece—already written—was signed away because of a promise I’d already made (see, Dorothea, it happens to all of us). It won’t happen again if I can possibly help it.

When a publisher wants a copyright assignment, offer a fair alternative (see Charles W. Bailey, Jr.’s advice) and explain why you’re offering it. If the publisher insists, insist back. This does require that you be willing to walk away—to lose the publication offer. But you know what? There are other places to publish, places that do offer narrow rights assignments. I absolutely agree with Hinchliffe’s closing:
I think we need to share our stories and not just principles if our community is going to move forward on this. I look forward to hearing from others.

Andy Powell posted “Pushing an OpenDOAR” at eFoundations on October 27, 2006. OpenDOAR is a directory of open access repositories that now has a search service based on Google’s Custom Search Engine. The announcement for the services says:

> It is well known that a simple full-text search of the whole web will turn up thousands upon thousands of junk results, with the valuable nuggets of information often being lost in the sheer number of results.

Powell wondered about that assumption: “simply repeating it over and over doesn’t necessarily make it true!” So he selected ten papers from eprints.org, as randomly as he could, and used the title of the paper to construct a known-item search on the OpenDOAR interface and on Google.

The results are interesting if anecdotal (as Powell admits): Google did just fine, even without phrase searching. Twice Google did significantly better than OpenDOAR (the paper showed up third or fifth in Google, not in the top ten at OpenDOAR). Twice OpenDOAR did better, but in both cases the paper was within the top five at Google. The other six papers were #1 on both engines. Powell concludes that full-text exposure to the web search engines is critical—as are consistent links. As for metadata, it’s important—but not primarily for regular searching.
Open Access and Rhetorical Excess

Library Access to Scholarship, April 2007

This started out as a typical periodic roundup on OA and related areas, covering topics where I feel I can add value to the excellent work done by Peter Suber, Charles W. Bailey, Jr., Dorothea Salo, Heather Morrison and others.

It turned into a themed essay when I realized that the first topics all featured rhetorical excess of one sort or another and I needed to quote substantial portions of some items to provide reasonable context. In the end, I couldn't even cover all the rhetorical issues and keep this at a reasonable length.

There's nothing new about rhetorical excess in the open access battlefields. The big publishers and some of their society kin have long engaged in misleading rhetoric on open-access issues. On the OA side, rhetorical styles range from Peter Suber's and Charles W. Bailey, Jr.'s calm analysis, through Johnny One-Note's incessant pounding away at a single theme and repetitious phrasing, to an overheated and offensive approach taken in one recent speech.

I don't believe the facts have changed that much. Neither have misleading statements of those opposed to open access. Some tactics have changed, generally not for the better. Two particularly interesting cases at the moment are at extremes: The “pit bull” hired by publishers to assault OA and the astonishing equation of traditional publishing with slavery.

Since I consistently urge readers who care about access to read Peter Suber, Charles W. Bailey Jr., Dorothea Salo, Heather Morrison and others, I'll also urge you to read the first essay in Cites & Insights 6:8 (June 2006) if you haven't already or if you've forgotten it. You can also get PERSPECTIVE: THINKING ABOUT LIBRARIES AND ACCESS at cite-
sandinsights.info/v6i8a.htm. It’s short. It sums up my own rhetorical stance and beliefs, for what they’re worth.

I’m going to quote a small portion of LIBRARY ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP from November 2004 (C&I 4:13) because it illustrates how little change there’s been in the rhetoric for and against open access:

“For the rest of this essay, I’m going to do something I should have done back in June: Provide a numbered key to the standard arguments against OA publishing (as opposed to unique arguments such as ‘it distracts attention and money from OAI archiving’), so I can simply list the numbers used in specific pieces. For this issue at least, here’s a subset of those arguments:

“1. STM publishing has developed over centuries and works just great as it is.
“2. $1,500 (or $500 or $525) can’t possibly pay the real costs per article; OA isn’t sustainable without charging ($3,000, $4,500, whatever).
“3. OA publishing weakens or undermines peer review.
“4. Research grants don’t include publication funding.
“5. OA/article-fee publishing gives well-funded scientists advantages over others.
“6. OA/article-fee publishing will prevent scientists in developing nations from publishing.
“7. OA publishing undermines professional societies that subsidize their activities through journal profits.

“I’m qualifying 5 and 6 because not all OA publishing involves article fees; quite a bit is sponsored in some other manner.”

There are other arguments, of course—OA is socialist, OAI mandates mean the government’s trying to take over scientific publishing, an astonishing new “OA is censorship” claim and the increased pitch of internecine battle within the OA “community”—but these seven continue to dominate anti-OA discussions. They’ve all been discredited thoroughly and repeatedly, but they keep raising their ugly heads.

Publishers under Siege!

Who knew the Public Library of Science was so much more powerful than Elsevier, Wiley and the rest of the Association of American Publishers? (Who knew Elsevier was an American publisher, for that mat-
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...ter?) Those poor beleaguered publishing houses are trembling under the might of PLoS, PubMed Central and the rest of the OA behemoths.

Why else would we have this story from Nature (also a commercial publisher): “PRs ‘pit bull’ takes on open access” by Jim Giles, published January 24, 2007 and corrected January 25, 2007 (www.nature.com/news/2007/070122/full/445347a.html). Excerpts:

The author of Nail ‘Em! Confronting High-Profile Attacks on Celebrities and Businesses is not the kind of figure normally associated with the relatively sedate world of scientific publishing. Besides writing the odd novel, Eric Dezenhall has made a name for himself helping companies and celebrities protect their reputations, working for example with Jeffrey Skilling, the former Enron chief now serving a 24-year jail term for fraud. ...[His] firm, Dezenhall Resources, was also reported by Business Week to have used money from oil giant ExxonMobil to criticize the environmental group Greenpeace. “He’s the pit bull of public relations,” says Kevin McCauley, an editor at the magazine O’Dwyer’s PR Report.

Now, Nature has learned, a group of big scientific publishers has hired the pit bull to take on the free-information movement, which campaigns for scientific results to be made freely available... From e-mails passed to Nature, it seems Dezenhall spoke to employees from Elsevier, Wiley and the American Chemical Society at a meeting arranged last July by the Association of American Publishers (AAP)...

The consultant advised them to focus on simple messages, such as “Public access equals government censorship.” He hinted that the publishers should attempt to equate traditional publishing models with peer review, and “paint a picture of what the world would look like without peer-reviewed articles.”

Dezenhall also recommended joining forces with groups that may be ideologically opposed to government-mandated projects such as PubMed Central, including organizations that have angered scientists...

Susan Spilka, Wiley’s director of corporate communications, said Dezenhall explained that publishers had acted too defensively on the free-information issue and worried too much about making precise statements. Dezenhall noted that if the other side is on the defensive, it doesn’t matter if they can discredit your statements...

“We’re like any firm under siege,” says Barbara Meredith, a vice-president at the organization. “It’s common to hire a PR firm when you’re under siege.” She says the AAP needs to counter messages from groups such as the Public Library of Science (PLoS), an open-access publisher and prominent advocate of free access to information... Minutes of a 2006 AAP meeting sent to Nature show that particular attention is being paid to PubMed Central...
Brian Crawford, a senior vice-president at the American Chemical Society and a member of the AAP executive chair...[said]: “When any government or funding agency houses and disseminates for public consumption only the work it itself funds, that constitutes a form of selection and self-promotion of that entity's interests.”

There you have it: AAP is under siege by PLoS and PubMed Central. Public access equals government censorship because government-funded research would be more accessible. And, of course, Big Lie #3. Let's call “open access equals censorship” Big Lie #8, although #1984 might be more like it.

Early reactions and followups

Dorothea Salo offered a calm, reasoned comment on this piece in “On the Association for American Publishers, Caveat lector, January 25, 2007, saying in part:

I think that's the action of a terrified group of amoral scumbags who see the future rushing in and will do whatever they can think of to stop it. I think it's the action of a terrified group of amoral scumbags completely bankrupt of actual insight or innovation and utterly desperate to keep their current unjustifiable profit margins. I think, in short, it's the action of a terrified group of amoral scumbags. I am just that appalled.

If I were a scholarly publisher, I would distance myself from this fiasco far, fast, and publicly... and if my rep on the AAP had been involved in any way other than “vigorous opposition,” that rep would be fired immediately—not just from representing the publisher to the AAP, but altogether. Elsevier, Wiley, ACS, and (it would appear) others have a lot of explaining to do.

[Is it just me who hears Desi Arnaz in that last sentence? Probably. Hey, we need digressions now and then, especially when rhetoric strays as far from the truth as the AAP initiative.]

Peter Suber was all over the story in a series of Open access news posts. First he quoted most of the Nature piece and offered his first reactions (modified to reflect a 1/25 change in the Nature story, and reacting also to portions I didn't quote above):

1. I've read this several times and still find it incredible. Why would the AAP pay $300-500k for advice on how to misrepresent the issue? The next time you see an AAP press release on OA, ask yourself this question.
2. Does the AAP even need the advice? It has been falsely identifying government archiving with government censorship, and falsely identi-
fying threats to publisher revenue with threats to peer review, at least since the debate over the NIH policy in 2004…

3. I hope that publisher-members of the AAP will disavow these tactics and that journalists and policy-makers will understand the difference between intellectual debate and media message.

4. Kudos to Nature for uncovering and reporting this story.

Since then he’s cited and linked to reactions from all over, including many more than I’ll note here. If you follow OAN posts since January 24 you’ll find a wide range of commentary, including a slashdot thread. I’m generally citing sources that I follow anyway, plus a few that were simply too choice not to mention. Even though this may seem like a long section, it’s a small sample of many commentaries!

Christina Pikas (Christina’s LIS rant) offered a quick comment on January 24 with an addendum on January 29. On the 24th, Pikas noted:

So this plays on a couple of irrational fears 1) articles published open access will not get respect (and therefore tenure, promotion, etc) 2) articles published open access aren’t any good and can’t make it elsewhere—we so know this isn’t true as many high impact, high quality journals have open access articles. The government censorship bit is absurd.

On January 29th, she linked to a CHM-Inf post by Brian Crawford including these comments:

I want to assure you that our purpose is to communicate important information about the added value that publishers bring to the scholarly publishing process-information not widely known or appreciated by policy makers. Scholarly publishers have been slow to recognize that the misleading soundbite messages and aggressive lobbying tactics of those who wish to influence government and public policy have been orchestrated and funded by organizations wishing to advance their own agenda. That they continue to do so without regard for the very real risk of damage to science and the public, should peer-reviewed publishing be compromised by unnecessary government intervention, needs to be countered with clear and concise messaging of our own.

An astonishing example of how misleading the accusations against publishers can be appears in today’s Washington Post…where reporter Rick Weiss asserts that the AAP has “…for years waged an intellectually nuanced battle against medical associations and advocates for the ill” and also quotes a SPARC representative who accuses us of engaging in a “disinformation campaign.” Nothing could be further from the truth. AAP/PSP, acting on behalf of its member and other publishers, is actively involved in facilitating author participation in the current voluntary
NIH public access policy, and has offered to assist NIH as it struggles to implement its own policy…

Regrettably, the news reports above were somehow stimulated by reporters gaining access to internal emails and background information shared within AAP/PSP and among those volunteer publisher representatives who have worked so hard to support the health and vitality of our industry by helping to improve our education and outreach. The inappropriate disclosure of this information is very disturbing to me personally, and I regret that it has led to such a gross misinterpretation of our motives and methods.

And ending with a statement from AAP/PSP that I’m quoting in full here:

Some commentators have expressed surprise that the publishing industry is making its case about an important issue that could affect the future of research and science. We believe it's important to be clear about serious unintended consequences of government mandated open access.

Private sector non-profit and commercial publishers serve researchers and scientists by managing and funding the peer review process, disseminating authors’ work, investing in technology and preserving millions of peer-reviewed articles as part of the permanent record of science. Peer review is the complex and expensive system that provides the checks and balances necessary to ensure that what is made publicly available has been verified by experts. Peer review helps keep science independent of politics or ideology. Thanks to publishers, scientists today have more access to more peer-reviewed articles than ever before. We don’t believe there is a credible substitute that can provide the same level of contribution and support to science.

There are proposals under consideration that would mandate more government involvement and put this system at risk. Legislation that would undermine the quality, sustainability and independence of science would have consequences on all those who rely on sound science.

The AAP/PSP will continue to ensure that all sides of the debate are heard.

Pikas’ comment is that the reply “actually seems to dig them into a deeper hole and confirm they’re not behaving themselves as a non-profit society publishing to promote science.” I see the deeper hole: It was inappropriate for others to reveal that AAP/PSP is paying big bucks to a pit bull. Crawford’s message also says SPARC is lying (no amount of charitable reading can turn “nothing could be further from the truth” into anything but an accusation of lying) and asserts that AAP/PSP has
been helping out NIH in its “struggles,” which I’m sure NIH finds comforting. David Goodman responded on the same list, noting that the “inappropriate disclosure” revealed “what you wished to conceal.” He has more to say, mostly undermining AAP/PSP’s arguments.

Heather Morrison’s take is “Stop fighting the inevitable—and free funds for OA!” (January 25, Imaginary journal of poetic economics.) I’m never fond of “inevitable” and don’t believe 100% OA is either inevitable or likely, but her point is an interesting one: The amount spent on pit-bull lobbying would cover the direct costs of 785 OA journals done using Open Journal Systems. That figure leaves out some real-world costs of journal publishing (e.g., human effort for editorial tasks and peer-review administration, which may not always be donated) even for nonprofit ejournals, but it’s an interesting point nonetheless.

Andrew Leonard pulled no punches in the title of a January 26, 2007 Salon story: “Science publishers get stupid.” The tease: “How’s this for doublespeak: ‘Public access equals government censorship’?” It’s a short, lively article, best read in the original—and you should also read the comments (15 single-spaced pages worth when I printed this out on January 30, 2007), which Leonard calls “extraordinarily good—much better than my own post, I have to confess—with multiple viewpoints expressed.” I must quote one blockbuster sentence from Leonard’s article, after noting that his column isn’t obliged to show the restraint of Nature’s reporter:

Which means I’m free to point out that any publisher of scientific research who even begins to entertain the notion that free access to scientific information can or should be equated with government censorship should be mocked mercilessly in every publication, online or off, free or subscription required, evanescent as a blog or solid as a hard-copy Encyclopedia Britannica, from now until they beg forgiveness from every human on this planet for their disingenuous mendacity.

Now that’s writing!

As for the comments, they range broadly. Several wondered how peer review would happen with OA or implied that it wouldn’t. One managing editor confuses the issue by focusing on print costs (as does another defender of the current system). One raises the old (and not entirely empty) claim that peer review enforces orthodoxy. One calls scientific publishers “leeches” with special scorn for Elsevier. At least one failed to understand that OA publishing is still publishing—it’s not just articles sitting on scientists’ personal websites. Mary McFadden
confidently states absolute falsehoods (“Authors have to pay to submit to open access journals”) and things that are false for almost all STM journal publishing (“Publishers pay their writers”), and seems to equate OA with tobacco companies. Here’s a gem: “In the open access model a published paper, even a bad, ridiculous or dangerous one, is regarded as equal to any other.” Andrew Leonard notes a forthcoming book from Eric Denzenhall that speaks of a “frenzy of anticorporate witch-hunts” and calls for companies to bring out “the brass knuckles” against detractors.

Barbara Fister reacted to Brian Crawford’s final statement in the Nature piece, the one ending “that entity’s interests,” in a January 26, 2007 ACRLog post “Truthiness in publishing”: “What?! Dude, those are my interests. I paid for them.” Fister notes that the issue is not how illogical the arguments are: “they’re supposed to cue anxiety attacks. They seem to have forgotten that they’re dealing with fairly smart people, though.” As she notes, the “censorship” claim is a double-edged sword: Make all articles available via open repositories and it goes away. Dorothea Salo does a nice translation of the AAP/PSP posting and statement in a January 28, 2007 Caveat lector post, best read in the original.

The AAP/PSP move and its repercussions were discussed well beyond the library community. As you’d expect, comments and reactions included a lot of issues that can serve to cloud the access situation. One post at Savage minds seems ready to throw all media operations out as pointless intermediaries (seemingly ignoring the difference between STM journals, where content is contributed or subsidized, and most other media, where at least creators are paid for their contributions). One response appears ready to toss out peer review as well, apparently feeling link analysis will do just fine—another voice for the idea that the truth is determined by popularity. (“Creation scientists” should love this idea, since they’d be such strong tenure candidates.) This particular commenter also seems to say internet-based systems are a “largely unknown world to the people in their forties, fifties and sixties,” tossing a remarkable chunk of gen-gen into the discussion. (Didn’t think you were already a washed-up old technophobe at 41? Now you know: Welcome to the Luddite Society.) As you’d expect (since part of the post was about one association’s involvement with AAP/PSP), one commenter objected that people might
not join the association if free access to the journals wasn’t there as an incentive—and later raised the free-rider issue.

I added one parenthetical comment in the preceding paragraph because the popularity of creationism in the U.S. has always seemed like a good argument against “peer review by link count” as a reasonable methodology. As I’m looking through notes, I see “Open access, toll access, and intelligent design” on OAN (January 28, 2007), where an ID “scientist” asserts that being against OA favors “Darwinists” while ID proponents are “systematically excluded.” Suber notes that the OA movement has no interest in removing peer review and other forms of quality control—and suggests OA might “undermine support for intelligent design by spreading knowledge of science beyond the narrow sphere reached by high-priced subscription journals.” That sounds good, but I think it’s a little too optimistic. Any daily newspaper with a good science reporter should be handling these issues well. *Scientific American* costs $25 per year; *Discover* $20, *Popular Science* $12—and, for that matter, the primary weeklies aren’t that costly for enthusiastic individuals (*Science* and AAAS membership is typically $110 to $140, *Nature* $200 or $338 for two years, *New Scientist* $64). There’s plenty of free scientific literature online, including websites for most of these journals. OA may do a lot of things, but I don’t believe it will improve general scientific literacy among the general population. Willingness to read and think counts a lot more than high subscription prices in these areas.

The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) weighed in with an undated issue brief, “AAP PR campaign against open access and public access to federally funded research,” (apparently issued February 1, 2007, based on the creation date in the HTML version). A background summary closes with these comments on Brian Crawford’s followup statement:

Statements such as these are puzzling and raise questions concerning the actual role of publishers in the scholarly communication process. They present opportunities to engage in conversation with faculty, researchers and staff about the changing nature of scholarly communication and the contributions various communities make to the communication process. For example:

- the library community, not the publishing community, has been responsible for the preservation of the record of science.
- peer review is accomplished by members of the Academy.
The brief offers four of the “simple messages” and clear commentary on each one. The four:

- Equating public access to federally funded research and/or open access with the destruction of the peer review system.
- Publishers are “preserving millions of peer-reviewed articles as part of the permanent record of science.”
- Public access equals government censorship.
- The government is seeking to nationalize science and be a publisher.

The first is our old friend Big Lie #3; the response notes “Publishers’ own studies have found that open access journals are peer reviewed as frequently as comparable subscription journals.” Regarding the second, ARL notes “the library community, not the publishing community, has historically played the role of steward in preserving the permanent record of science”—and that when JSTOR began digitizing backfiles, they discovered that “publishers rarely had complete sets of their own journals.” Oops. Fortunately, libraries used to have those complete sets. Some still do.

I love the first sentence of ARL’s response to Big Lie #8: “The logic of this claim is perhaps impossible to parse.” ARL then explains what’s really happening with NIH and PubMed Central, but it’s hard to top that “Wha?” reaction. Then there’s the fourth, which I’d call Big Lie #9—but it’s so outlandish it’s hard to believe anyone could take it seriously. The government is a publisher, of course, and has been for a very long time—and if “nationalizing science” is a big concern, PSP should be calling for an end to NIH and other Federal funding for science. Oddly, I have heard no such call.


And these closed journals are hardly the kind of people whose pockets you’d want to line. Reed-Elsevier, for example, is one of the largest academic journal publishers in the world—they even own the Lancet—and they are the same company that runs the DSEI international arms fair in London, selling vile weapons to murderous regimes for cash profit extracted from very real suffering and pain, in countries that you will never visit on holiday.
Whew. Loads of comments—54 as of February 12, adding 25 pages to the less-than-two of the column. Notes on OA in physics, one that offers #5, 6, and 7, one that assumes “general taxation” will have to pay for OA. One from a marine biologist pointing out that he writes for free, he does peer review for free, but there’s institutional inertia against publishing in OA journals. Knowledgeable comments pointing out real issues of funding. Claims that Biomed Central is lowering standards to make more money. One commenter tells people to “go to the British Library” as a solution (for Brits) to access issues.

The Other Extreme: Publishing as Slavery

I find it hard to even type those three words, so extreme is this particular case. Here’s part of how it was reported in the PLoS publishing blog (February 18, 2007, thanks to Peter Suber for the link):

In a characteristically provocative talk last week, Richard Smith, who is on the Board of Directors of PLoS, accused traditional subscription-based publishers of acting like slave owners. And he compared open access advocates to abolitionists.

Richard was speaking at the BioMed Central Open Access Colloquium, alongside other “abolitionists,” including my colleague Ginny Barbour, Senior Editor at PLoS Medicine. The talks have all been archived on the colloquium website.

In his slavery analogy, Richard recalled the famous George Yard meeting. On 22nd May 1787, 12 men met in a printing shop at 2 George Yard in the City of London determined to end slavery. At that time, said Richard, more people were slaves than were free and the British economy depended on slavery. Yet by March 1807 slave trading was abolished in the British Empire.

Today’s traditional publishers, he argued, are the slave traders. The research articles and many of the academics who write them are the slaves. “And the shock troops of open access—Paul Ginsparg, Harold Varmus, Vitek Tracz, Pat Brown, Mike Eisen, Stevan Harnad—are the abolitionists,” he said.

At the end of this report, Gavin Yamey (who wrote it) signals agreement:

For the sake of global scientific progress, human development, and poverty alleviation, it is surely time to end the slavery of traditional publishing.

While I’m no friend of Stevan Harnad (after the things he’s called me, such friendship would be difficult), he deserves credit for this fast, forthright response in the post’s comments:
The slavery/abolition analogy is tasteless and totally unjustified. If OA proponents wish to help OA, let them promote OA rather than vilifying publishers.

Even though Harnad’s one note is OAI, which doesn’t inherently disturb the current publishing regime, he’s right on the money here. The analogy falls into the same category as Holocaust/Nazi analogies—it benefits nobody and tends to stop rational discussion, while trivializing one of history’s great tragedies. It’s also nonsense. Elsevier and Wiley do not place scientists into indentured servitude. There are alternative journals—and if there aren’t, it’s not that hard to start one. Unlike Harnad, I’m perfectly willing to vilify publishers—but within the bounds of reason.

I admit to considerable surprise at Peter Suber’s commentary on the Yamey post and the Smith analogy: There is none, or at least none I could immediately find. Some participants at Liblicense rightly condemned the analogy (“repulsive” was one term used), but I haven’t seen an outpouring of outrage that even approximates the justifiable unhappiness with AAP/PSP’s extreme.

If OA advocates fail to react as strongly to outrageous assertions on one side as they do to outrageous acts on the other side, that serves to trivialize the movement (as another commenter on Yamey’s post noted). The effect on Tom Scott seems clear. His February 20, 2007 post is entitled “Sinking to a new low” and says he’s “kind of had it up to here with the whole thing.” I disagree with Scott’s equation of AAP/PSP’s PR situation (where the person hired seems to be telling them to lie, lie and lie again) with the OA working group’s lobbying efforts (unless Scott can cite an example of lies on the part of OAWG or the lobbyist).

But I can see where Scott’s coming from. If I was actively involved in pushing OA, the report on Smith’s speech (and the relatively muted responses) would hit me like a punch to the gut. Maybe it’s because, like Scott, I don’t see OA as either a moral imperative or the most important issue in scholarly publishing (although it’s right up there). Maybe it’s because these two extremes (and a couple more to come, see below) make his final paragraph somewhat plausible:

And some publishers and some open access advocates will remain locked in a deathstruggle of rhetorical spin, relying on their lobbyists and their public relations flaks to help them craft their soundbites, convinced that it’s those bastards on the other side who have absolutely
crossed the line, while they themselves are managing to stay just barely on the side of truth and justice. And if they have to push that line a little hard sometimes, well, it’s all in the service of a good cause—whether that be eliminating the slavery of traditional publishing or preventing the complete collapse of scholarly communication as we know it. It is, after all, the most important issue of our time.

I do consider Dorothea Salo a friend but her comment on Scott’s post left me lukewarm:

Um, the identity of the AAP’s PR guy didn’t bother you? Or the particular tactics he was endorsing?

I wasn’t thrilled by Smith’s presentation either, I may say; it was at the very least unacceptably racist. But a thoroughly tasteless analogy is still a bit less than an open lie like “OA = government censorship” in my book.

“Wasn’t thrilled” is a little short of the flat denunciation Smith’s presentation calls for. The lesser of two evils is still evil.

Still More Rhetoric

Here’s another declaration from a bunch of publishers—this time, the International Association of Scientific, Technical & Medical Publishers. Peter Suber ran it unabridged (except for signatures) on February 13, 2007 at Open access news, and I’m doing the same in the interests of fair play:

Many declarations have been made about the need for particular business models in the STM information community. STM publishers have largely remained silent on these matters as the majority are agnostic about business models: what works, works. However, despite very significant investment and a massive rise in access to scientific information, our community continues to be beset by propositions and manifests on the practice of scholarly publishing. Unfortunately the measures proposed have largely not been investigated or tested in any evidence-based manner that would pass rigorous peer review. In the light of this, and based on over ten years experience in the economics of online publishing and our longstanding collaboration with researchers and librarians, we have decided to publish a declaration of principles which we believe to be self-evident.

1. The mission of publishers is to maximise the dissemination of knowledge through economically self-sustaining business models. We are committed to change and innovation that will make science more effec-
tive. We support academic freedom: authors should be free to choose where they publish in a healthy, undistorted free market

2. Publishers organise, manage and financially support the peer review processes of STM journals. The imprimatur that peer-reviewed journals give to accepted articles (registration, certification, dissemination and editorial improvement) is irreplaceable and fundamental to scholarship

3. Publishers launch, sustain, promote and develop journals for the benefit of the scholarly community

4. Current publisher licensing models are delivering massive rises in scholarly access to research outputs. Publishers have invested heavily to meet the challenges of digitisation and the annual 3% volume growth of the international scholarly literature, yet less than 1% of total R&D is spent on journals

5. Copyright protects the investment of both authors and publishers. Respect for copyright encourages the flow of information and rewards creators and entrepreneurs

6. Publishers support the creation of rights-protected archives that preserve scholarship in perpetuity

7. Raw research data should be made freely available to all researchers. Publishers encourage the public posting of the raw data outputs of research. Sets or sub-sets of data that are submitted with a paper to a journal should wherever possible be made freely accessible to other scholars

8. Publishing in all media has associated costs. Electronic publishing has costs not found in print publishing. The costs to deliver both are higher than print or electronic only. Publishing costs are the same whether funded by supply-side or demand-side models. If readers or their agents (libraries) don’t fund publishing, then someone else (e.g. funding bodies, government) must

9. Open deposit of accepted manuscripts risks destabilising subscription revenues and undermining peer review. Articles have economic value for a considerable time after publication which embargo periods must reflect. At 12 months, on average, electronic articles still have 40-50% of their lifetime downloads to come. Free availability of significant proportions of a journal's content may result in its cancellation and therefore destroy the peer review system upon which researchers and society depend

10. “One size fits all” solutions will not work. Download profiles of individual journals vary significantly across subject areas, and from journal to journal.
I find the second sentence suspicious, unless IASTMP is claiming that no STM publishers are part of the DC Principles group or AAP/PSP or, for that matter, Elsevier, ACS and others who have been far from silent. I suppose “largely” could be the key—no doubt there are many smaller STM publishers who have, in fact, remained silent. Then there’s that “agnostic” word “beset” to describe the “propositions and manifestos.”

Some of Suber’s reactions:

Is it odd to criticize evidence-free proposals in the same document in which one declares 10 principles to be self-evident?

There are dozens of empirical studies supporting OA…

Publishers who call for evidence have to live by evidence. For example, that means not asserting without evidence that OA archiving will undermine subscriptions and peer review (see Principle 9). It means acknowledging the evidence that OA journals perform peer review. It means acknowledging the evidence that in physics, the field with the highest levels and longest history of OA archiving, the Institute of Physics and the American Physical Society have found no cancellations attributable to OA archiving.…

The only reason why authors of scholarly articles need copyright is to assure proper attribution and the integrity of their work. In every other way copyright is an access barrier that limits their audience and impact. Could the publishers be confusing authors of journal articles with authors who earn royalties from their writing?…

Principle #5 is a red herring, as far as I can tell, since very few OA advocates call for abolition of copyright—and especially since most publishers seize STM article copyright from the creators, something they couldn’t do in mainstream publishing. #6 is tricky: “rights-protected” is the key phrase, and there’s no indication that publishers will act to preserve (which hasn’t typically been their duty). #8 is also a red herring, since nobody’s arguing otherwise—but note the omitted case here: Electronic publishing may indeed have costs not found in print publishing, but it should eliminate much larger costs directly associated with print publishing. And, of course, despite the public-service claims of #1, we’re talking about price rather than cost—and some STM publishers are extremely profitable by any measure.

#9 is remarkable. These publishers are so “agnostic” they’re now claiming that even a 12-month embargo is insufficient—and, of course, if a journal is cancelled, that somehow destroys the whole peer review system, since apparently nobody except established publishers is
capable of doing peer review. (“Peer review” appears four times in this set of “self-evident” principles, with not the slightest admission that there’s nothing magical about the process preventing OA publishers and new publishers from carrying it out.)

Heather Morrison takes particular issue with the first sentence in #1 in a series of Imaginary journal of poetic economics posts on February 13, 2007. She calls it “extremely misleading” to call this “the mission” since many publishers clearly have other key goals such as profits. She quotes from the strategy and vision statement of Elsevier: “a goal of achieving higher levels of revenues and earning growth”—with nary a word about “maximum dissemination of knowledge.” Wiley’s About page says nothing about dissemination of knowledge, but does talk about investing. McGraw-Hill’s mission statement mentions “provid[ing] essential information and insight that helps individuals, markets and societies to perform to their potential” but mostly talks about growth, financial performance and shareholder return. I imagine Morrison could carry this on for a while. The primary mission of any stockholder company is to make money (unfortunately—it gets in the way of long-term planning). There’s nothing wrong with profit, to be sure.

Charles W. Bailey, Jr. discusses the Brussels Declaration in a February 15, 2007 post at DigitalKoans. He boils it down to “the scholarly publishing system ain’t broke, so don’t try to fix it,” and notes that it makes even less of an effort than the DC Principles to offer any strategies for eventual free content (other than datasets). Here’s much of the rest of his comment:

Sadly, it suggests that the “Brussels Declaration” publishers fail to fully understand that the decades-old serials crisis has deeply alienated several generations of librarians, who are their primary customers. Publishers count on libraries being captive customers because scholarly publishing is monopolistic in nature (e.g., one journal article does not substitute for another article) and, consequently, demand is relatively inelastic, regardless of price. However, it is a rare business that thrives by alienating its customers…

Driven by endless library serials cuts for journals in their disciplines, a growing belief that scholarly literature needs to be freely available for global scholarship to flourish, and excitement over the new potentials of digital publishing, scholars increasingly want to change the system as well. As has often been noted, the open access movement is not anti-publisher, but it is publisher-neutral, meaning that, as long as certain crit-
ical functions (such as peer review) are adequately performed, it does not matter how freely available scholarly works are published.

In my view, publishers add significant value to scholarly journals and other works. Some of these value-added functions are currently difficult to replicate; however, given technological advances in open-source digital publishing software, the number of these functions has been dwindling. A key question is: How long will it be before the most difficult production-oriented functions can be easily replicated, leaving non-technical functions, such as branding and prestige, to be dealt with?...

The clock is ticking…

As William Walsh (cited by Peter Suber) notes (in a Georgia State University Library blog):

- Number of times peer review is mentioned in the press release 3
- Number of times peer review is mentioned in the declaration 5
- High-priced advice given to publishers by Eric Dezenhall: “[A]ttempt to equate traditional publishing models with peer review.”
- Number of OA models incompatible with peer review 0

**Speaking of DC Principles**

That group of nonprofit publishers still opposes any action that would actually improve OA. Peter Suber excerpts a February 20, 2007 press release opposing FRPAA (I’ve excerpted his excerpts):

A coalition of 75 nonprofit publishers opposes any legislation that would abruptly end a publishing system that has nurtured independent scientific inquiry for generations. One such measure, the Federal Research Public Access Act, introduced in the 109th Congress, would have required all federally funded research to be deposited in an accessible database within six months of acceptance in a scientific journal….

In essence, such legislation would impose government-mandated access policies and establish government-controlled repositories for federally funded research published in scientific journals....

“The long tradition of methodical scientific inquiry and information sharing through publication in scholarly journals has helped advance medicine to where it is today,” said Martin Frank of the American Physiological Society and coordinator of the coalition. “We as independent publishers must determine when it is appropriate to make content freely available, and we believe strongly it should not be determined by government mandate.”…
The Coalition expressed concern that a mandatory timetable for free access to all federally funded research could harm journals, scientists, and ultimately the public. Subscriptions to journals with a high percentage of federally funded research would decline rapidly. Undermining subscriptions would shift the cost of publication from the publisher who receives subscription revenue to the researcher who receives grants. Such a shift could:

- Divert scarce dollars from research
- Result in only well-funded scientists being able to publish their work
- Reduce the ability of journals to fund peer review
- Harm those scientific societies that rely on income from journals to fund the professional development of scientists

“By establishing government repositories for federally funded research, taxpayers would be paying for systems that duplicate the online archives already maintained by independent publishers,” Case noted. “The implications of the U.S. government becoming the world’s largest publisher of scientific articles have not been addressed,” she added...

I see Big Lies 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 (#7 isn’t a lie, it’s just a bad argument against OA) and the “archiving equals publishing” nonsense that could be Big Lie #9. Peter Suber offers extensive notes in a same-day post, noting that “there’s nothing new here” and the major arguments have been answered repeatedly. But, you know, keep OA advocates on the defensive and the truth doesn’t matter.

And here’s the AAUP!

This one surprised me: AAUP Statement on Open Access, dated February 2007. The full statement (6-page PDF) is at www.aaupnet.org/aboutup/issues/oa/statement.pdf. Much of it appears to call for broader exploration of OA beyond articles to scholarly monographs. There’s this gotcha in the summary:

Bypassing this laboratory stage of experimentation and development and plunging straight into pure open access, as attractive as it may sound in theory, runs the serious risk of destabilizing scholarly communication in ways that would disrupt the progress of scholarship and the advancement of knowledge.

That may be true, and to the extent that there have been calls for all scholarly publishing—monograph and article alike—to go OA immediately, it’s a point worth discussing. I haven’t heard many such calls, but the full statement suggests that an American Council of Learned Societies report does make such a call. I glanced through the 51-page ACLS report (you can download the PDF or request a free print copy
from www.acls.org/cyberinfrastructure/), and I don’t see a call for “plunging straight into pure open access,” but I didn’t read it word-for-word.

AAUP’s statement is interesting and worth reading. It notes that National Academies Press is doing very well with its “read books online for free, pay for PDFs or print” model. Two pages of the statement offer “points to be kept in mind” when discussing “the more radical approaches that abandon the market as a viable basis for the recovery of costs in scholarly publishing and instead try to implement a model that has come to be known as the ‘gift economy’ or the ‘subsidy economy’.”: “BOAI-type” open access will require large contributions from authors or other sources (and drops in the humanities equivalent of #5); overall costs won’t change all that much but mostly shift (a comment that notes that 17% to 20% of the “publishing costs” of monographs relate to manufacturing); required full OA article publishing “will undermine existing well-regarded services like Project MUSE”; university presses cover 90% of their operating costs from sales—and only 15% to 20% of those sales are to libraries; and the fifth—a tricky one that seems primarily to oppose open access in general:

5) If commercial publishers should decide to stop publishing research under the constrained circumstances envisioned by advocates of free-to-user open access, what happens to the journals abandoned by these publishers? How many of them could universities afford to subsidize through faculty grants? How much could universities with presses increase the output of their presses to accommodate the monographs now published commercially? The answer so these questions could involve significant new capital investments. In addition, the case of scholarly societies under BOAI-style open access is particularly worrying. As non-profit organizations committed to supporting effective scholarly communications and professional standards in their fields, these societies provide a wide range of services to scholars and scholarship, including annual conferences, professional development opportunities, recognition of scholarly excellence, and statistical information on such matters as enrollment and employment in their fields, as well as respected publishing programs. Whether a given society’s publishing activities underwrite other services or must be supported by other revenues, funding for essential professional and scholarly activities would be jeopardized by a mandated shift to free-to-user open access, increasing the financial burdens on individual scholars as both authors and professionals.

There’s old friend #7 in all its glory, and my response is the same as ever: It is unreasonable to expect libraries to underwrite the activities of profes-
sional associations (other than library associations), no matter how beneficial those activities may be. If they need underwriting from academia, that underwriting should come from the appropriate departments.

Otherwise, assuming that “abandoned journals” would move immediately to e-publishing, I believe the answers to the first two questions can be straightforward (the second may be better answered by university-published OA journals than by faculty grants). As much as I want to see STM journal subscription costs move partly to enable libraries to maintain better monographic collections, there would be significant capital available for new investments—which would not need to cover the high profit margins of the commercial publishers or their high overheads.

This statement deserves more discussion. I haven’t seen all that much so far. I’d want to poke at some details in the first point, specifically the claim that a 250 page monograph with no illustrations involves publishing costs of “close to $20,000 to $25,000” even if no printing is done. Assuming scholars prepare monographs using word processing, that is one heck of a lot of copyediting and markup!

If ACLS is calling for an end to print monographs sold for fair prices, I think they’re going too far, but I didn’t see that call in their report. If anyone’s saying we should immediately shut down conventional publishing and move to all-OA, all-the-time, right now, for all scholarly communication, I’m on AAUP’s side. I believe the truth lies somewhere in between—and note that most of the AAUP statement is not full of rhetorical excess. Maybe the AAUP statement serves as a slightly calmer end to the set of heated items covered here.

There’s More—but Not This Time

I had to omit a bunch of fascinating stuff I lump under “internecine warfare,” with green OA advocates harrumphing against gold OA, gold OA pushers (particularly those striving to maintain existing revenues through other means) demeaning green OA, green-OA purists opposing broader use of institutional repositories or assuming preservation roles for repositories, and back-and-forth about the real issues and costs of publishing and peer review. There are also some longer pieces I’d love to comment on.

Not this time. I suspect most of you lack the patience to read 10,000 to 15,000 words on library access to scholarship in one issue of C&I, even if they came to some satisfactory conclusions). I know I
lack the patience to write that much on this topic in one or even two issue cycles. OA is neither going away nor suddenly becoming all consuming. We’ll discuss more of this later. Meanwhile, as always, if you care a lot about OA, pay attention to the people who cover these issues full time.
First a few more bits of “opposition literature,” albeit less extreme than some discussed in C&I 7:4, April 2007. Marc H. Brodsky, executive director of the American Institute of Physics, offers “Fair and useful copyright: A primer” in the Professional Scholarly Publishing Bulletin for Fall 2006. Brodsky reminisces about filling out copyright-transfer forms as an author: “I probably thought it was for my benefit more than anyone else’s. While that turns out to be true, it is also an oversimplification…” I’ll agree “give us your copyright: it’s for your own good” is an oversimplification!

He offers to fill in “a few basic concepts all authors should understand because the future of their societies may depend on their decisions.” That’s not quite the same as protecting the author or improving scholarship as such: Now the society is the focus. Brodsky goes through some law and history, then returns to the society focus. Transfer of copyright from author to publisher is “a very positive ingredient for a scientific journal. It gives the society important freedoms of action available no other way.” [Emphasis added.] If authors retain copyright and license some nonexclusive rights to the publisher, that “would undermine the subscription value” of a journal—by making the scholarship more widely available, although that’s not the emphasis Brodsky wants to provide.

Brodsky asserts four “forces” driving OA—none of which seem to have anything to do with broader access to improve scholarship. No, in Brodsky’s world, OA is driven by ideologues “who feel ‘information should be free’”; by funding agencies who want to mandate “free access…without paying for the reviewing and editing costs incurred by publishers”; by libraries “whose budgets cannot keep up with the growth of research and the materials that they and their patrons want”; and by “technologies, which lower some of the barriers to entry for publishing and make it easier to post copies of almost everything.”

Brodsky clarifies that last point: he asserts that electronic publishing is more expensive than print publishing—print-specific costs total

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less than 15% of total production costs and “extra production costs for
electronic-specific production, such as tagging and linking, more than
eat up that 15%.” I find that hard to believe, although publishing-
related costs can be as malleable as movie studio “costs.”

Did you notice the little trick in one of the other OA “forces”
(none of which seem to have anything to do with improved access!):
Library budgets can’t keep up with “research growth,” not “subscription
price increases.” It gets worse: Brodsky imputes motives to OA
advocates. “There are many who would like to see publishers of costly
journals fail, and attacking copyright has become one element of a
strategy towards that end.” Naturally, Brodsky tells authors that OA
would not result in “wider promotion, dissemination and acceptance
of their results” because, after all, it’s publisher branding, marketing
and distribution that really count.

The piece ends with an AIP “Position on Open Access & Public
Access.” It’s a remarkably “fearful” statement. Two (of four argumenta-
tive) bullets in full:

➢ “AIP is fearful of and against government mandates that provides
[sic] rules in favor of one business model over another.
➢ “AIP is against funding agencies mandating free access to articles after
they have undergone costly peer review or editing by publishers.”

The first two sentences of the last bullet: “AIP is also fearful about
what government agencies might do with articles they receive under
any deposit system. AIP is fearful of mission creep with government
agencies using the deposited material beyond the goal of open
access…” That’s three “fearful”s in a half-page statement!

The Spring 2007 issue of the same bulletin includes an editorial
by Brian D. Crawford (whose comments also appear in C&I 7:4). I’ll
refer you to Open access news for March 26, 2007 for the full statement
and Peter Suber’s extensive commentary. Crawford tosses around the
term “myth-slingers,” seems to attack Nature’s coverage of PSP’s PR
decisions (without citing inaccuracies) and reduces arguments that
government-funded research should be openly available to this: “The
truth is that all this debate boils down to is some people wanting
something for nothing—or claiming not to need to pay the tailor for
making the suit, because they provided the starting fabric.” As expertly
dissected by Suber, it appears Crawford is trying to take the advice of
the PR man: “If the other side is on the defensive, it doesn’t matter if
they can discredit your arguments.” Crawford says, “The hypocrisy is
breathtaking.” I agree, but would suggest he’s looking in the mirror when he says that.

In May 2007, AAP/PSP, IASTM and ALPSP jointly released a position paper, “Author and Publisher Rights for Academic Use: An Appropriate Balance.” It’s an odd position paper, particularly if you believe “balance” means something other than 100% fidelity to one extreme. Of course there’s the claim that publishers need to hold copyright so they can “enforce copyright claims with respect to plagiarism and related ethical issues” (I’d love to see an accounting of such enforcement). We are told publishers “are in the business of making content available to the widest possible audience, provided they can do so in financially-viable fashion,” certainly not pricing as high as the market will bear in the interest of highest possible profit; exclusive rights are “critical to administering the scientific record.” Much is made of potential “waste” from deposit systems.

Key to this whole statement is that it focuses on researchers’ own reuse of their material, not broad access to that research. Here’s the balance statement:

* Academic research authors and their institutions should be able to use and post the content that such authors and institutions themselves provide…for internal institutional non-commercial research and education purposes; and

* Publishers should be able to determine when and how the official publication record occurs, and to derive the revenue benefit from the publication and open posting of the official record (the final published article), and its further distribution and access in recognition of the value of the services they provide.

There’s the balance. Authors and their institutions can use their submissions internally; publishers control everything else. It’s about as unbalanced a statement of “balance” as I’ve seen (and, of course, Peter Suber points out some of the problems on May 9, 2007).

Since this discussion of opposition follows from the earlier discussion of extremes, it’s worth noting a followup on “the other side.” I was unhappy with Dorothea Salo’s failure to denounce a tasteless analogy used by a major OA proponent, and said so. Salo responded with “Caught, and an apology, and thanks” at Caveat lector on March 23, 2007. She offers reasons why she was wrong—failing to read more deeply about the incident beyond Tom Scott’s reporting, as a result failing to spot how deeply wrong the analogy was—and, by failing to
nail Richard Smith for descending to such tactics, hurting the “smart, articulate arguments for my side of the OA debate.” She also explains how it could happen, and I hear just what she’s saying. I want to thank Dorothea Salo for the public apology, for the clear explanation, for her consistently thoughtful and honest approach to OA—and, to be sure, for indirectly helping convince me to write On Being Wrong in C&I 7:6 (June 2007), a brief essay I’m particularly proud of.

**Money**

For one purist approach to open access, it’s not about money at all—it’s only about fully open access to article-length scholarly literature. The most purist version says it’s not really OA unless people are free to do datamining on the text and republish text for profit (with attribution). So, for example, if Cites & Insights was scholarly (OK, stop laughing), it wouldn’t qualify as OA even though there’s no charge to the end user and redistribution is explicitly allowed under the Creative Commons license—because the CC license is BY-NC and “noncommercial” is too restrictive for one OA definition. And one camp of OA says library budgets aren’t an issue at all; we can have full OA while letting the big sci-tech publishers drain every dollar they can from library coffers.

That’s not my approach to OA. These pieces are called *Library Access to Scholarship*, not Open Access; I’m primarily interested in OA as a way to improve library abilities to provide access—not only to article-length scholarship but also to monographs and literature outside the “scholarly” circle. So I’m very interested in the money and a little impatient with the camp that says “oh, we don’t want to disturb current journal pricing; we just want full access.”

The problem with money and open access is that it’s so complex—and, in the case of actual publishing and distribution costs, so opaque. We regularly hear numbers cited for the cost of handling a scholarly article—but those numbers are pretty clearly based on dividing total revenue by number of articles, which is at best a misleading way to state costs. Total revenue for a journal includes profit (or the nonprofit equivalent), corporate or societal overhead and potentially a whole bunch of other things that have nothing to do with the actual costs of refereeing, editing, markup and dissemination (whether print or electronic).
Bill Hooker posted “Open question on open access” at Open reading frame on November 15, 2006 (www.sennoma.net/). He quotes “Mark D” on this issue:

The problem is, I haven’t seen any hard data that documents the cost of peer review, redaction, and publishing. Everyone throws numbers around as if they were confetti. We are all, supposedly (publishers and librarians) in the scientific/technical community, yet so very few people take a scientific approach to this issue.

The first step on the road to open access should be a review of the processes and costs associated with scientific publication. Sounds like a good paper for the library association journal. Any librarians out there that want to tackle this paper?

And as for the publishers, if they really do wish a dialogue, then why don’t they reveal their redaction costs? Any takers out there in the publishing world?

Hooker follows that quote with this—which disagrees with Marc Brodsky’s claim near the top of this article:

Online publication dramatically lowers costs relative to printed journals, but it is not free. Copyediting is still required, peer review must be coordinated even though the actual reviewing is done by authors for no charge, and the digital objects (articles, data, etc) must be created, archived and maintained in an accessible format. There are surely other important costs, too, that do not occur to me right now. All of this costs money, but the Big Question of OA is: how much money?

Hooker cites a bunch of figures—but some of those figures, from commercial publishers, almost certainly represent desired revenue, not actual costs. As it stands, the question remains open: Just what does it cost to run an OA scholarly journal? There is no single answer, to be sure. The range offered is so wide as to be more infuriating than helpful—from PLoS’ $2,000 to $2,500 charges (why would second-tier PLoS journals be cheaper to process manuscripts for than first-tier ones?) to BioMed Central’s $1,000 to $1,800—and down to Hindawi’s $500 or so (Hindawi charges $60 to $120 per page). Hindawi claims to be profitable; PLoS is supposed to be nonprofit. In any case, informed comment requires more than raw numbers. For example, more than half of OA journals don’t charge “author-side” fees at all: What do their budgets look like? Informed comment requires analysis of where the money goes and whether the costs make sense. To do such analysis requires open access of a different sort—to the balance sheets in some depth.
Hooker concludes:

It would be very informative to see inside the finances of a variety of OA publishers. Knowing what publishers charge, as above, does not tell us what it actually costs to run the journals. Beyond saying “we are showing profit,” Hindawi does not seem to be forthcoming on that issue. I take it as read that for-profit ventures charge what the market will bear, but when the market in question is largely scientists and their allies (librarians, clinicians, &c.), it seems logical that the market should look for data on which to base decisions about just what it will bear. Commercial entities rarely have open-access balance sheets, but perhaps OA publishers could take the lead there as well?

Peter Suber comments in a November 17, 2006 Open access news post, noting that estimates of some publishers “test our credulity” (e.g., £30,000 or nearly $60,000 per article for Science) but also that different estimates count different aspects of the publishing process—and different publishers have different levels of overhead and efficiency. Suber also notes that OA publishing has (or may have) fewer expenses than non-OA publishing (e.g., no subscription management or marketing). He cites a 2002 study giving $400 as an average cost of peer review per published article; this is mostly the cost of facilitation and should be coming down as clerical tasks are automated.

Paying for green OA

A reminder: “green OA” is OA archiving—as opposed to “gold OA,” actual OA journal publishing. In the lead article in SPARC open access newsletter 108 (April 2, 2007), “Paying for green open access,” Peter Suber notes that “some publishers want to charge for OA archiving and at least one foundation is willing to pay for it.” He notes that this could slow green OA, “either by the direct imposition of new and needless costs or by confusing policy-makers about the economics of green OA.”

First the American Chemical Society (ACS) re-announced its hybrid journal program, AuthorChoice, and reminded us that authors who wish to self-archive must pay the AuthorChoice fee. Then Elsevier and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) agreed that when an HHMI-funded author publishes in an Elsevier journal, HHMI will pay Elsevier a fee to deposit the peer-reviewed postprint in PubMed Central six months after publication.

ACS lets authors deposit articles in independent repositories—but does not let them retain copyright, will not promise to reduce subscription prices in proportion to AuthorChoice uptake—and, the killer here, will
charge the AuthorChoice fee “even to authors who want to self-archive.” Notably, ACS was never a “green publisher”—and about a week before the ACS announcement, Wiley announced a hybrid (that is, “author-pays” OA options within toll journals) program with the same effect. Wiley charges $3,000 for OA archiving, depositing the published version upon publication. ACS charges the same (seemingly high) fee but with discounts for ACS members and subscribing institutions.

At both publishers, these fees pay for gold OA, and I should make clear that I have no objection to charging for gold OA. On the contrary; if we are to have it, we must pay for it (through author-side publication fees, institutional subsidies, or some other way). However, I do object to charging for gold OA when authors only want green OA. It’s like offering a car with a free bicycle to people who only want to buy a bicycle.

Green OA need not be the published version; it can be a preprint or the peer-reviewed but not copy-edited version. When ACS official Adam Chesler was asked explicitly whether the same fee would apply for self-archiving of the peer-reviewed manuscript (rather than the published version), he said yes. “Chesler’s answer makes the ACS policy even worse than it seemed at first. It’s bad enough to force authors to pay for gold OA in order to get green OA; at least they really get gold OA too, wanted or not. But under this new wrinkle in the policy, even self-archiving authors who don’t get gold OA must pay for it.”

What about Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) and Elsevier? Part of Suber’s commentary:

The Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) is similar in many ways to the Wellcome Trust (WT), although it has kept a lower profile in the OA debates. The WT is the largest private funder of medical research in the UK, and the HHMI is, or was, the largest private funder of medical research in the US. (I haven’t seen recent figures but HHMI might have been overtaken by the Gates Foundation.) HHMI agreed long ago to pay publication fees at fee-based OA journals, and may have been the first funder anywhere to do so. With PLoS, it convened the 2003 meeting that produced the Bethesda Statement on Open Access Publishing. Now it’s about to adopt an OA archiving mandate for HHMI-funded research.

The WT OA mandate requires deposit in PubMed Central (or its UK equivalent, UK PMC) and the forthcoming HHMI mandate will do the same. However, Elsevier allows OA archiving only through the author’s personal web site or institutional repository. That’s why HHMI and Elsevier first sat down to talk.
If neither side revised its policies, then HHMI-funded authors would have to shun Elsevier journals and Elsevier journals would have to shun HHMI-funded authors. Both organizations would gain from a compromise. But unfortunately that fact alone didn’t determine which side had to budge. In this case, it was HHMI and it caved. It’s a shame because it had considerably more bargaining power than Elsevier…

HHMI will pay Elsevier $1,000 for each article published in a Cell Press journal and $1,500 for each article in any other Elsevier journal.

Suber discusses possible consequences if HHMI had not caved in. He also notes that Wellcome Trust signed a similar deal—but Wellcome Trust pays more ($3,000 and $5,000) and gets more—immediate OA to the published version instead of embargoed OA to an unedited version. For that matter, Cell Press seems to be expanding its embargo period as part of the deal. Here’s how Suber sees the HHMI-Elsevier deal: “I have to conclude that HHMI was ripped off. Or if that’s too negative, Elsevier got a fantastic deal.”

Part of Suber’s conclusion:

I’m not saying that the distinction between green and gold OA is immutable. Of course the two types can be blended. One blend—the best for researchers—would charge no fee to the depositor and provide immediate access to the published edition. Another blend—the worst for researchers—would charge a fee, impose an embargo, and limit access to the final version of the author’s peer-reviewed manuscript.

The problem with the HHMI-Elsevier deal is not that it blurs the distinction between green and gold but that it needlessly adopts the worst blend for researchers. The problem with the ACS deal is that it artificially clamps green and gold together and forces anyone wanting green to pay for gold to get it.

Learned Publishing, April 2007

This issue includes a guest editorial and article related to costs, both of which can be read free from the website (in PDF form; look for “Learned Publishing” and go from there). The guest editorial, by Rick Anderson, is entitled “Open access—clear benefits, hidden costs.” It’s a tricky editorial, coming from a librarian but effectively undermining what one might assume to be library interests. It’s also a very strange editorial, as Peter Suber notes: How often is a guest editorial accompanied by a press release and a call for “supporting signatures”? Indeed, the editorial ends with a box stating the following:
ALPSP strongly supports the sentiments in the above Editorial; in particular we agree that, while open access to the scientific research literature may offer benefits to society, the true costs of a change of business model must be investigated.

We would like to encourage other organizations and individuals to show their support for this statement by adding their names to the list of signatories… The Washington DC Principles for Free Access to Science Coalition…is one of the first signatories.

The DC Principles Coalition is, I’m afraid, notorious for its misleading statements and adamant opposition to anything that might actually improve access to science (see C&I 5:1 and several more recent essays); ALPSP is also hardly known as an objective observer in this area.

Some of what Anderson has to say:

There is no question that OA offers potentially significant benefits to society. All other things being equal, free public access to scientific information is clearly a good thing. But all other things are never equal, and to know whether and to what degree any particular OA solution is really a good thing requires a calculation not simply of its benefits, but of its net benefits once costs are taken into account…

In the case of an OA journal, costs are most commonly borne by authors....

In fact, mandates that result in widespread and effective OA will inevitably drive at least some publishers out of business, whether or not such an effect is intended by those who promote OA.

…A solution that provides universal access without supporting publishers may be perfectly acceptable. [This stance assumes] that publishers add no value to the scholarly information chain, and can therefore be harmed with impunity and without concern for negative consequences to the scholarly community in general...

In fact, most STM publishers are not profit-seeking corporations from outside the scholarly community, but rather learned societies and other non-profit entities, many of which rely on income from journal subscriptions to support their conferences, member services, and scholarly endeavours—as well as the peer-review and publishing activities that will remain important in a self-archiving environment. In other words, a publishing system that undermines the ability of publishers to make money in the marketplace thereby may also undermine scholars and scientists in their ability to do their work....

In summary: OA offers real benefits to society. However, the net value of those benefits cannot be determined unless its costs are computed
as well. The purpose of this statement is not to call on participants in
the scholarly information chain to fight against OA, but only to move
forward while taking full account of costs as well as benefits, and to
work towards solutions that offer a net benefit to society....

There’s more (including raising the specter that diverting 0.5% of NIH's
budget to support author-side charges means a significant reduction in
medical research). Readers of previous LAS sections or the better OA
literature will have spotted problems right off the bat. Peter Suber took
apart this editorial far better than I can. Some of his comments:

No serious OA proponent has ever said that it makes costs disappear.
OA does shift costs, and some shifts are better than others. But OA
does more than shift costs; it also reduces them...

In the case of an OA journal, costs are most commonly borne by authors....This
is untrue and I’m surprised to see it asserted in an ALPSP journal with
the unusually strong ALPSP endorsement represented by the call for sig-
natures. For it was an ALPSP-sponsored study that showed that only a
minority of OA journals charge author-side publication fees.

I’ll add here that there is absolutely no reason to believe that most au-
thor-side charges would actually be paid by authors…and I think Rick
Anderson knows that.

The argument that OA archiving might not harm publishers has...been
based on the evidence from physics, the field with the highest levels and
longest history of OA archiving. Not only have the American Physical So-
ciety (APS) and the Institute of Physics Publishing Ltd (IOPP) seen no
cancellations to date arising from OA archiving, they both host mirrors of
arXiv, the premier OA archive for the field. (Now for my standard de-
murrer: while there’s no evidence yet that high-volume OA archiving will
kill subscriptions, it might really have this effect in some fields and, if it
did, it would still be justified.)

...Speaking for myself, I've never denied that journals add value. To me the
question is not whether a journal adds value but how to pay for the most
essential kinds of added value without creating access barriers for readers.

Suber agrees that a “move forward” ought to take into account the full
costs—and he and other OA advocates have been willing to make that
case. “However, I doubt this will make the debate any easier to resolve
than it has been up to now.”

Suber doesn't take Anderson to task for the segment beginning
“In fact, most.” I will and have already: While society publishers are
neither the primary “villains” in the current publishing scheme nor the
primary targets for OA, it is nonetheless unreasonable to claim that libraries should be propping up conferences, member services and other non-publishing aspects of societies (other than library societies). If subsidies are needed, they should come from the departments related to the society, _not_ hidden in subscription prices. And, of course, tossing in peer review in this case is an indirect hint that OA might reduce or eliminate peer review, although Anderson doesn't include this common canard as a direct statement.

What of the article—"The cost of journal publishing: a literature review and commentary" by Donald W. King? It's long (22 pages), detailed and inconclusive. King distinguishes between price and cost; unfortunately, he also tends to use scare quotes around some OA claims (such as that subscription prices pose a “barrier” to access, a claim that seems self-evident enough to remove those quote marks). King knows his numbers and his research methodology (in this case primarily a literature review), and I recommend the article for those wishing to study these issues further—but I don’t have a lot to say about it here. I think it’s clear that you can’t use a single cost (e.g., the price of a “journal publication system”) as the basis for asserting proper OA costs per article. I think it’s also clear that some publishers will legitimately be far more efficient than others, and that at some point some levels of inefficiency may be insupportable.

**Conclusion and Apology (of Sorts)**

That’s less than half the source material in my LAS folder. There’s some fascinating stuff on institutional repositories and how they are (or aren’t) used. Peter Suber has done some long pieces on last year’s progress and this year’s probabilities that richly deserve excerpts and comments. FRPAA seems likely to be resurrected—and that leads to preemptive stuff like a Wired News article that appears balanced but seems to provide much more space to quotes from opponents than proponents.

Maybe I’ll get back to some of those other access elements in a later issue. Maybe they’ll become so aged that I’ll let them go. In either case, now is not the time. For those of you who want to follow OA in more depth, you already know the mantra. Read Peter Suber’s blog and newsletter…[and other blogs].

This section is incomplete. It always will be. I’m just being more explicit than usual.
PRISM: Enough Rope?

Library Access to Scholarship, October 2007

PRISM: Partnership for Research Integrity in Science & Medicine. What a noble name! How could such a partnership be anything but desirable?

Here’s the group’s August 23 press release, offered without interstitial commentary:

The formation of a coalition of scholarly societies and publishers was announced today in an effort to safeguard the scientific and medical peer-review process and educate the public about the risks of proposed government interference with the scholarly communication process.

The Partnership for Research Integrity in Science and Medicine is a coalition launched with developmental support from the Professional & Scholarly Publishing Division of the Association of American Publishers (AAP) to alert Congress to the unintended consequences of government interference in scientific and scholarly publishing.

The group has launched a website at http://www.prismcoalition.org, where it articulates the PRISM Principles, an affirmation of publishers’ contribution to science, research, and peer review, and an expression of support for continued private sector efforts to expand access to scientific information. (http://www.prismcoalition.org/prism/about.htm)

“We are enthusiastic about this initiative and the potential of our new website to educate policy makers and citizens about our efforts to increase access to information, to alert them to the very real threat to peer review that ill-considered government interference represents, and to explore the ways in which we can safeguard peer review as a critical component of scientific integrity,” said Patricia Schroeder, president and CEO of AAP. “Only by preserving the essential integrity of the peer-review process can we ensure that scientific and medical research remains accurate, authoritative, and free from manipulation and censorship and distinguishable from junk science.”

Recently, there have been legislative and regulatory efforts to compel not-for-profit and commercial journals to surrender to the Federal gov-
ernment a large number of published articles that scholarly journals have paid to peer review, publish, promote, archive and distribute. Mrs. Schroeder stressed that government interference in scientific publishing would force journals to give away their intellectual property and weaken the copyright protections that motivate journal publishers to make the enormous investments in content and infrastructure needed to ensure widespread access to journal articles. It would jeopardize the financial viability of the journals that conduct peer review, placing the entire scholarly communication process at risk.

“Peer review has been the global standard for validating scholarly research for more than 400 years and we want to make sure it remains free of unnecessary government interference, agenda-driven research, and bad science,” said Dr. Brian Crawford, chairman of the executive council of AAP’s Professional & Scholarly Publishing Division. “The free market of scholarly publishing is responsive to the needs of scholars and scientists and balances the interests of all stakeholders.”

Critics argue that peer reviewed articles resulting from government funded research should be available at no cost. However, the expenses of peer review, promotion, distribution and archiving of articles are paid for by private sector publishers, and not with tax dollars. Mrs. Schroeder pointed out that these expenses amount to hundreds of millions of dollars each year for non-profit and commercial publishers. “Why would a federal agency want to duplicate such expenses instead of putting the money into more research funding?” she said.

The PRISM website includes factual information and reasoned commentary designed to educate citizens and policy makers, to dispel inaccuracies and counter the rhetorical excesses indulged in by some advocates of open access, who believe that no one should have to pay for information that is peer reviewed at the expense of non-profit and commercial publishers.

Featured on the PRISM website are backgrounders on peer review, dissemination and access, preservation of the scholarly record and new approaches publishers are taking along with discussion about the risks of government intervention to the sustainability of peer review, copyright infringement, the possibility of selective bias in the record of science, federal budget uncertainties and inefficient allocation of government funding that duplicates private sector investments. Importantly, the site has information to assist the public in making their concerns known to Congress.
“We want to share as much scientific and medical information as possible with the entire world. That’s why we got into this business in the first place,” Mrs. Schroeder said.

Anyone who wishes to sign on to the PRISM Principles may do so on the site.

Going to the PRISM website and searching for other members of this “coalition,” I’m forced to conclude that, at least at present, PRISM is simply another name for AAP/PSP. Peer review must be under direct attack, given the number of times it’s mentioned in the press release—and isn’t it good to hear that publishers are in business “to share as much scientific and medical information as possible with the entire world,” when some of us might have mistakenly thought that Elsevier and others had profit as a primary concern.

If you’ve been following open access issues or even the limited coverage here in Cites & Insights, you might hark back to AAP’s hiring of PR consultant Eric Dezenhall—at which point a connection becomes almost inevitable.

Since I did PRISM the courtesy of quoting its entire press release, I should do as well for Peter Suber’s same-day commentary to providing a clear picture of what’s happening here. (The first paragraph of the press release is slightly different in Suber’s version than in the version currently on the PRISM website. That version speaks of bringing together “like minded scholarly societies, publishers, researchers and others” in an effort to…then follows as here.)

Peter Suber’s Response

August 23, 2007 Open access news post “Publishers launch an anti-OA lobbying organization”:

Comments.

1. Pat Schroeder and Brian Crawford defend peer review when it is not under attack, and they attack public access to publicly-funded research without showing that it would undermine peer review. As they have many times before, they cloak their concern about publisher revenue with concern about the “integrity” of scholarship and peer review. This is straight out of the playbook of the PR consultant Eric Dezenhall, who advised the AAP “to equate traditional publishing models with peer review.”

2. But asserting that traditional toll-access (TA) publishing equates with peer review, or implying that OA will undermine peer review, doesn’t make it so. I’ll have more to say about this in the September issue of SOAN, next
week. [PS update, 9/2/07: My SOAN response is now online.] Meantime here are some point-by-point responses to the press release.

3. “Recently, there have been legislative and regulatory efforts to compel not-for-profit and commercial journals to surrender to the Federal government a large number of published articles that scholarly journals have paid to peer review, publish, promote, archive and distribute.” The word “surrender” here is false and dishonest. Recent legislative and regulatory efforts have encouraged free online access to peer-reviewed manuscripts within 12 months of publication. A few efforts, which have not yet passed, would require this kind of free online access. But every one of these efforts (1) has applied to the final version of the author’s peer-reviewed manuscript, not to the published edition, and (2) has been scrupulous to avoid amending copyright law or interfering with the transfer of copyright. Under these policies, researchers may still hold copyrights to their writings, may still transfer their copyrights to publishers, and publishers may still hold and exercise those copyrights. (The OA policies have not changed existing law that publications by government-employed researchers, as opposed to government-funded researchers, are uncopyrightable.) These policies don’t require publishers to surrender their articles or their copyrights. If authors transfer copyright to publishers, which is still the custom, then publishers remain the exclusive rights holders for the life of copyright. The policies only require that the version on which they may hold copyright coexist with a free online copy of an earlier version, starting 6–12 months after publication.

4. “[OA policies] would jeopardize the financial viability of the journals that conduct peer review, placing the entire scholarly communication process at risk.” As usual, this is unargued. If we look at existing evidence, as opposed to existing fear, then we have to come to the opposite conclusion. Physics is the field with the highest level and longest history of OA archiving, and in physics TA publishers have publicly acknowledged that they’ve seen no cancellations attributable to OA archiving. In fact, two publishers of TA physics journals, the American Physical Society and Institute of Physics have launched their own mirrors of arXiv, the premier OA archive in the field. Yes, it’s possible that the consequences of high-volume OA archiving in other disciplines will differ from the consequences in physics. But why not start with the evidence, or at least acknowledge the evidence, before turning to unargued fear-mongering?

5. “The free market of scholarly publishing is responsive to the needs of scholars and scientists and balances the interests of all stakeholders.” Calling the current system a “free market” is another distortion. (So is the claim that it balances the interests of all stakeholders, but I’ll leave that to one side here.) Most scientific research is funded by taxpayers. Most researcher
salaries are paid by taxpayers. Most TA journal subscriptions are paid by taxpayers. And publishers receive both the articles and the referee reports as donations from authors and referees. Publishers don’t actually say that government money and policymaking should keep out of this sector, because that would really undermine their revenue. What they want is government intervention in all these areas except public access to publicly-funded research. What they want is the present arrangement of government subsidies for the work they publish, government subsidies for their own subscription fees, volunteer labor from authors and peer reviewers, double-payments from taxpayers who want access — and the label “free market” to wrap it all up in.

6. “Why would a federal agency want to duplicate such expenses instead of putting the money into more research funding?” Another distortion. Some publishers are providing OA to some content when it’s sufficiently old. But this is a far cry from providing OA to virtually all publicly-funded research within 6–12 months of publication. If the AAP is saying that the voluntary efforts of publishers will approach what the proposed OA policies would mandate, then the duplication argument starts to make sense. But in that case they have to stop arguing that OA to publicly-funded research would kill their revenues, kill their journals, and kill peer review. They can’t have it both ways.

7. And what about government spending money on OA archives instead of research? It’s true that government OA policies have costs, and at research funding agencies these costs may reduce the overall research budget. But put the costs in perspective. The US spends about $55 billion of public money every year on unclassified research without the tiny investment needed to make the results available to all who could use, apply, build on, or benefit from them. How tiny? The cost of implementing the NIH’s policy is $2-4 million/year, or about 0.01% of its $28 billion/year budget. It’s a bargain, and the alternative is to undermine our investment by locking away expensive research where few can use it. Studies by John Houghton and Peter Sheehan have shown that diverting a bit from the research budget in order to make all funded research OA hugely amplifies the return on investment: Quoting Houghton and Sheehan: “With the United Kingdom’s GERD [Gross Expenditure on Research and Development] at USD 33.7 billion and assuming social returns to R&D of 50%, a 5% increase in access and efficiency [their conservative estimate] would have been worth USD 1.7 billion; and...With the United State’s GERD at USD 312.5 billion and assuming social returns to R&D of 50%, a 5% increase in access and efficiency would have been worth USD 16 billion.”
8. “We want to share as much scientific and medical information as possible with the entire world.” This is clearly not true. They want to sell as much as they can and only permit sharing that does not jeopardize sales.

9. “[T]he expenses of peer review, promotion, distribution and archiving of articles are paid for by private sector publishers, and not with tax dollars.” This is almost true. The costs of facilitating peer review by unpaid volunteers are paid by the journals. But (as noted) public subsidies for research, researchers, and subscriptions all benefit journals and help pay these costs. Moreover, the NIH pays $30 million/year directly to TA journals in the form of page and color charges —about 10 times the amount needed to provide OA to the agency’s entire research output. But like the publishers, let’s suppose that these subsidies didn’t exist. The OA policies are still a good balance of public and private interests. Publishers provide the costs of peer review and taxpayers provide the costs of research, which are often thousands of times greater than the costs of peer review. Here’s how I finished the argument in an article earlier this month:

“But if publishers and taxpayers both make a contribution to the value of peer-reviewed articles arising from publicly-funded research, then the right question is not which side to favor, without compromise, but which compromise to favor. So far I haven’t heard a better solution than a period of exclusivity for the publisher followed by free online access for the public. This compromise-by-time is buttressed by a second compromise-by-version: publishers retain control over the published edition for the life of copyright while the public receives OA to the peer-reviewed but unedited author manuscript. Publishers who want to block OA mandates per se, rather than just negotiate the embargo period, are saying that there should be no compromise, that the public should get nothing for its investment, and that publishers should control access to research conducted by others, written up by others, and funded by taxpayers.”

**Update.** I was so busy responding to the press release that I failed to point out that the PRISM home page makes another Dezenhall argument:

“What’s at risk: Policies are being proposed that threaten to introduce undue government intervention in science and scholarly publishing, putting at risk the integrity of scientific research by: …opening the door to scientific censorship in the form of selective additions to or omissions from the scientific record; …”

(According to Nature, Dezenhall also advised the AAP “to focus on simple messages, such as “Public access equals government censorship”.”)

The Orwellian censorship argument doesn’t need or deserve an answer. But if you want one, here’s how I answered it in SOAN for February 2007:
“[FRPAA, like other OA mandates,] only applies to articles that have already been published in peer-reviewed journals....[I]t’s about archiving copies, not manipulating originals. Hence, the possibility of censorship doesn’t come up. The originals will be in libraries and independent web sites around the world, wherever the publisher’s market reach, distribution system, and preservation back-ups have managed to place them. If some of the published originals are not in fact copied for OA archiving, or if some copies are removed after deposit, that would be regrettable (and violate the policy). But it would not affect the originals at all. It would not delete them from libraries and independent web sites around the world, shrink the range of their distribution, change their access policies, or reduce their visibility. To use the word “censorship” to describe the incomplete copying of literature already published, distributed, stored, curated, and preserved in independent locations is incoherent newspeak. Or (to play along), if occasional non-archiving really is a kind of censorship, then publishers who want to defeat an OA archiving mandate like FRPAA want systematic non-archiving and mass censorship.”

Odd as it is to devote the first 2,600 words of a C&I essay to quotes from other sources, it seems necessary to frame this situation and discussion. And, of course, Peter Suber thinks about these things much more deeply and knowledgeably than I ever will. (As usual, it's tempting to just say “Go read Suber,” but I know Open access news has a lot of copy and some people who read C&I aren't going to follow Suber directly.)

Before noting some of the other commentary on PRISM, it really is worth noting something about PRISM’s site. As of September 15, 2007, the “Correspondence” section includes only items appearing prior to the formation of PRISM—it’s as though there’s been no correspondence of any sort since then. Similarly “In the news”—everything except the PRISM press release precedes August 23, 2007, although I’m checking this 20 days later after scores of items have appeared. And one item under “Forum” is testament to the fratricidal instincts of some OA leaders, unfortunately but also unsurprisingly. (There’s a breathtaking essay on “Myth vs. Fact” elsewhere on the PRISM site—but you can peruse that on your own.)

The PRISM Principles

Here are the PRISM Principles:

Society benefits from the creative output of researchers, clinicians, academics, scholarly publishers and others engaged in the pursuit of scientific discovery and the distribution of accumulated knowledge.
Scientific knowledge is sharpened and refined by the system of quality control known as peer review—a process that has stood the test of time as the best means by which the public’s investment and trust in science are assured through demonstrated academic excellence and scientific integrity.

Scientific knowledge should incorporate new research as part of the scholarly record based on merit alone—not tradition, ideology, or political expediency. Society is best served when the pursuit of scientific knowledge takes place in an environment of intellectual freedom—where objectivity and independence are guaranteed, and where published expression is protected from governmental or other controls, and is free of censorship or bias.

Scientific knowledge must be documented and preserved in perpetuity, free of alteration, political or ideological pressures, or the threat of uncertain funding.

Research funding is best spent on new and important research studies, and should leverage rather than duplicate the valuable publishing infrastructure built over decades by private sector publishers working in partnership with the research community.

Research results should be disseminated as broadly as possible, accomplished in a way that safeguards scientific integrity and the sustainability of investments in peer review, dissemination, archiving, and knowledge preservation. Raw research data should be made freely available to other researchers and those who funded the original research.

Society is best served by sustainable business models and reasonable copyright protections that provide positive incentives for publishers to continue innovating in their distribution of scientific knowledge, investment in peer review, and exploration of preservation technologies.

The free market of scholarly publishing is dynamic and competitive, responsive to the needs of scholars and scientists, and balances the interests of all stakeholders in making research widely available. It encourages publishing innovation and diversity, and should remain free from government mandates that favor particular business models.

It’s hard to object to the first three principles. The fourth one is interesting, given that “preserved in perpetuity” has never been part of the role of publishers and is far more likely via a combination of OA, projects like LOCKSS and multiple repositories.

The fifth principle would be interesting if it made any sense, but Suber’s addressed that one already. The sixth principle is tricky: “the sustainability of investments in…dissemination” is the only real issue here, since neither scientific integrity nor peer review are at all under
attack and since publishers historically do not handle archiving or knowledge preservation.

What can you say about the last two principles? That we haven’t had “reasonable copyright protections” since at least 1976—and that copyright protections are supposed to encourage new creation, not protect publisher profits? That the “free market” of scholarly publishing is no such thing? That “investment in peer review” is mostly nonsense? Go back to Suber’s commentary; it covers the Principles pretty well.

What’s going on here? Nothing terribly surprising, if a touch disappointing. AAP hired a bulldog PR person whose advice was to keep hammering on simple points even if they were known to be deceptive. AAP created a new “coalition” that appears to be carrying out the bulldog’s advice. If you pay good money for advice, you’re inclined to take that advice.

Nonsense like this couldn’t happen at all except for one unfortunate truism of open access, both within the academy and (I’m afraid) within librarianship. That truism: Most people just don’t care. But that’s a separate essay…maybe next time around.

Enough Rope?

So is PRISM just the AAP/PSP Lobby, and will it succeed in preventing effective steps toward OA? Maybe not. Consider a few of the reactions—ignoring most of those who amplified Peter Suber’s crisp responses. You might also look up the lyrics for Randy Newman’s “Big Hat, No Cattle” (readily available on the web, last time I checked); for some reason, PRISM strongly reminds me of the protagonist of that song.

August 24, 2007

Tom Wilson commented at his Information research weblog, saying, “The commercial journal publishers are really in a state of panic” but feeling that “it isn’t going to fool many on this side of the Atlantic.” A little more of Wilson’s optimistic commentary:

...Free OA, scholarly journals operate the same peer review process as do commercial journals: if they didn’t scholars wouldn’t publish in them, but free, collaboratively supported journals are growing in number and take away submissions from the commercial journals, which will find it harder and harder to maintain quality. So - in panic - they are lying to you, because, rather like the neo-con supporters that the
same lobbyists worked for, the big lie is the only strategy. Perhaps Karl Rove has gone straight from the White House to PRISM?...

What this recent initiative by the publishers points to is that the only sure way for the scholarly communities to take charge of the scholarly communication process is to rid themselves of their commercial exploiters and promote the publication of free, collaboratively produced and subsidised journals. Forget the Green and Gold routes insofar as they depend upon the acquiescence of the business world and go for the Platinum Route - it is the only way to take charge, and you have been exploited long enough.

Perhaps ‘PRISM’ really means, ‘Publishers Resisting Intellectual Solidarity in the Market’!

A few days later, Wilson resigned from the editorial boards of two journals published by supporters of PRISM—including one that he founded.

Mike Simpson (University of Wisconsin-Madison) had interesting “translations” of the fifth and seventh Principles (among others) at a splash quite unnoticed (www.ice-nine.net/~mgsimpson/asqu/):

#5: Translation: “Please don’t devote any of the incredibly scarce resources that you have left over after you finish paying our protection money to attempt to escape the less-than-zero-sum game that we’ve constructed for you.”

#7: Translation: “Look, our lobbyists are already doing a bang-up job getting us the laws we want, the ones that help us collude with the bought-and-paid-for representatives that you so helpfully democratically elected, to sustain the magnificent cash-flow from you to us that is the hallmark of any successful business enterprise. Don’t muck about with anything different — leave it to us, we’ll take care of the innovation in this system, thank you very much.”

Bill Hooker at Open reading frame (www.sennoma.net) had another suggestion for the real meaning of PRISM: “Publishers Relying on Insidious Subversion Methods.” A bit of his August 24, 2007 post: “This is disgusting. This runs counter to everything that science, academia, scholarship (and scholarly publishing!) stand for.”

August 26 and 27, 2007

On August 26, the online community manager of PLoS-ONE put together a nice compilation of extracts from more than two dozen early commentaries under the title “This PRISM does not turn white light into the beautiful colors of the rainbow” at A blog around the clock (scienceblogs.com/clock/). It’s quite an array. Jonathan Eisen thought
“this must be a spoof” but recognizes that’s not true: “PRISM is for real. It is the last gasp of a dying breed—publishers who refuse to do what is the right thing for science and society… I think this is a sad day for [AAP].” Peter Murray-Rust is especially disappointed because “a few of the conventional publishers have taken a positive view about the future.” Dorothea Salo of Caveat lector had a calm, measured response, saying (in part): “I think it’s the action of a terrified group of amoral scumbags completely bankrupt of actual insight or innovation and utterly desperate to keep their current unjustifiable profit margins… If I were a scholarly publisher, I would distance myself from this fiasco far, fast, and publicly… and if my rep on the AAP had been involved in any way other than “vigorous opposition,” that rep would be fired immediately—not just from representing the publisher to the AAP, but altogether. Elsevier, Wiley, ACS, and (it would appear) others have a lot of explaining to do.” There’s lots more.

John Dupuis commented on PRISM in an August 27, 2007 Confessions of a science librarian post (jdupuis.blogspot.com), starting with this comment: “Oh, this is a sad, pathetic story.” Dupuis quotes some of PRISM’s material and calls it “the actions of the representatives of an industry that’s scared of the future, that can’t come to grips with the sea changes happening in the world around us, that can’t adjust to how those changes will affect their businesses. And they definitely want what they perceive to be the status quo: big revenues, huge profits and a near monopoly on scholarly publishing.” After noting sources of refutation, Dupuis talks about the makeup of AAP/PSP’s executive council—the usual suspects (Elsevier, Wiley, Kluwer, McGraw-Hill, Springer, Thomson)—but also IEEE, ACS, MIT Press and others. He offers some specific advice for librarians:

So, what can we librarians do to make ourselves heard? First of all, I’m not going to waste much breath on trying to persuade the Elsevier’s of the world to get on board. They’ll be the last to convert. What I think is the best plan is to work on the societies.

* If you’re on a library advisory group for a society, use that forum to explain the benefits of OA to society members and to explore with the society the kinds of business models that can work
* At conferences, talk to the society reps and explain your displeasure with PRISM and how you think they’re playing the game of the commercials
* Advocate with your faculty, explain the controversy to them and get them to advocate for OA with their societies
* Money talks. If at all possible, don’t subscribe to journals just because they are from societies, even if they don’t make sense

Within a couple of days of the PRISM news release, at least one AAP/PSP member had opted out. Mike Rossner of Rockefeller University Press sent an open letter to AAP that begins:

I am writing to request that a disclaimer be placed on the PRISM website (http://www.prismcoalition.org/) indicating that the views presented on the site do not necessarily reflect those of all members of the AAP. We at the Rockefeller University Press strongly disagree with the spin that has been placed on the issue of open access by PRISM.

So far, I’ve been unable to find any such disclaimer on the PRISM site. That means the so-called coalition is explicitly failing to pay attention to its own members.

**PISD**

Then there’s the Partnership for Integrity in Scientific Dissemination (or Dis-semination on the site, pisdcoalition.org). It is a rather charming spoof site, “established by a concerned group of biomedical scientists to combat the steady encroachment of Open Access (OA) publishing initiatives on the profit margins of traditional publishers.” Here’s PISD’s take: “The PISD Coalition maintains that OA is not in the best interest of science. After undergoing extensive mediation and couples counseling, the PISD Coalition can confidently assert that scientific information does not want to be free. It wants to stay just where it is: safe and warm in the Reed Elsevier vaults, protected by the long arm of intellectual property law, earning massive profits for traditional publishers.”

The site has one page—an FAQ—which, if read with care, is a fairly strong commentary on PRISM. One of the most interesting responses to these questions: “Why disparage OA? Isn’t there evidence that Open Access is good for science?” The response:

Proponents of OA like to point out that most empirical studies assessing the impact of OA on scientific dissemination have found a favorable effect of OA over conventional, closed-access models. There’s no question that it sounds convincing when a library scientist claims that papers that are freely available online are cited significantly more often than papers that aren’t—sometimes twice as often! But there are at least two problems with such ‘data’ that OA advocates won’t tell you about.
First, all of the studies on OA have a common problem: they make assumptions. It’s important to realize that assumptions can be wrong. For example, most of the data favoring OA are based on long-term projections. OA advocates might say things like “if self-archiving online continues to increase at the current rate, 95% of scientific articles will be freely downloadable by 2021, increasing total citations by 350%.” Ninety-five and three-hundred-and-fifty may sound like fancy numbers, but the reality is that to achieve the projections OA advocates make, a lot of assumptions about the future have to hold. The problem is that not only do we not know that these assumptions will hold true, we don’t even know what other factors might come into play that OA advocates haven’t thought to include in their models! To paraphrase a famous man, there are known unknowns—things we know that we don’t know—and unknown unknowns—things we don’t know we don’t know. Contrast that with what we do know for sure—namely, that if OA gains substantial support from the scientific community, commercial publishers will lose hundreds of millions of dollars. Isn’t it silly to give up hundreds of millions of dollars in return for a basketful of unknowns?

Second, many of the studies on OA have been conducted by scientists. It’s hardly surprising that studies conducted by scientists tend to favor positions that scientists incorrectly believe to be in their best interests! To obtain a balanced viewpoint, you would have to have an equal number of studies conducted by impartial groups that have extensively consulted publishers to obtain their side of the story. Unfortunately, there aren’t very many published studies that favor a conventional publishing model over OA. That shouldn’t be surprising either considering who the editors of scientific journals are: they’re scientists! Isn’t it ironic that scientists are conspiring to eliminate the very same publishing industry that stacks the deck in scientists’ favor, and against itself?

And in response to “Don’t subscription costs present a problem for researchers and institutions that may not be able to afford access?”:

We don’t think so. By way of analogy, consider the debate over medical care. Everyone agrees that the high cost of medical services in the United States renders health care prohibitively expensive for a small but lazy segment of the population that refuses to work hard enough to make a better wage. But you don’t see anyone arguing that America should throw out privatized health care just because some people are lazy! Similarly, we don’t think the fact that some researchers work at small universities that can’t afford subscriptions to many journals is a disincentive for those researchers. If anything, it’s an incentive to publish more articles and get hired by a richer institution. Thus, subscription costs provide a direct benefit to the scientific enterprise by providing a kind of quality control
on scientific personnel. While we don't know exactly how important this influence is in the grand scheme of things, cursory estimates provided to us by a consulting firm suggest it's very large.

**A Few More Reactions and Actions**

I could quote dozens, maybe scores of reactions—nearly all derisive. There was a brief brouhaha because PRISM used images licensed from Getty and initially displayed the “non-cleared” versions (with visible Getty watermarks), but that was little more than a sideshow. (Yes, pointing out copyright infringement by a group devoted to tight copyright is ironic—but still it's a sideshow.)

Andrew Leonard of *Salon* wrote “Science publishers get even stupider” on August 28, 2007. Leonard harks back to Dezenhall:

> Despite my rhetoric, I can't say I actually believed that the publishers would take Dezenhall's advice. But that is exactly what has happened… I stand by my original opinion. [AAP] and everyone associated with it should be ashamed of trying to protect their profit margins by slandering the open access movement as government intervention and censorship. Research paid for with government funds should be freely accessible to the general public. Peer review will survive. PRISM, however, will be doomed by its own weasel words, which represent a betrayal of everything science stands for.

I find it hard to believe Leonard is that naïve. AAP paid Dezenhall serious money for advice. It must have known what kind of advice it was paying for. Why should anyone be surprised when AAP took the advice?

Two striking reactions appeared on September 4, 2007. Dorothea Salo posted “Next time? Think.” at *Caveat lector*, noting that she talked to a roomful of publishers in December 2006—and warned them about the likely payback for underhanded tactics. Portions of her post, which you really should read in the original:

> These were not junior editors or wet-behind-the-ears interns. These were the wheelers and dealers, the top brass, the VIPs…

> A lot of my audience represented folks whose publishers are nominally (key word, that) part of the PRISM initiative. Maybe, as has been suggested, they didn't know their employers were pulling this stunt. Me, I'm dubious; it's the little guys who are protesting and backpedaling right now. But if they were at my talk, there is no excuse for saying they didn't know PRISM would blow up in their face.

> Because I told them.
I told them about the American Anthropological Association, which was in the middle of a messy crack-up over open access… Don't shoot yourself in the foot, I said; lay your cards on the table and discuss, don't be arrogant, because AAA has weakened itself with this and you'd be shocked at how easy it is for you to do the same.

Huh. Ain't that starting to sound familiar.

When the Dezenhall thing broke, I told 'em again. Get away from this, I said, far away. I didn't say “it will win you no friends and make you plenty of enemies” because honestly, I thought that was obvious.

Guess not.

Look, here's one last free clue, big-pig publishers. We in the open-access movement are, by and large, pit bulls. We are mean. We are scrappers. We are stubborn as mules; we have to be to stick it in this business. We bite as well as bark. Most dangerously of all, we are idealists, and despite a couple of embarrassing exceptions, we keep our noses clean… And most of us, unlike you, have very little to lose…

You are not in a good place to be messing with us, okay? We won't always win, but we always fight—and we don't have to win every time to erode your position and bolster ours. When you make it this easy for us—not to mention fracturing your own base, you idiots, how could you think that would not happen?—you lose. Big.


I wrote the draft of this PERSPECTIVE on September 5, 2007. Since then, here's some of what's happened:

- The Oxford University Press has distanced itself from PRISM.
- Rockefeller University Press is seeing the connections and has also withdrawn its support of the DC Principles coalition.
- The Copyright Alliance, a Big Media group pushing extreme copyright, issued a misleading press release arguing against the NIH archiving provision.
- Brian Crawford ingenuously said “We did not expect to have encountered the sort of criticism we have seen thus far” and claimed that PRISM was “a way to have a very productive dialogue.”
- James D. Jordan, president and director of Columbia University Press, resigned from the AAP/PSP Executive Council after vocally opposing the PRISM launch.
- Stephen Bourne, CEO of Cambridge University Press, made it clear that Cambridge “has in no way been involved in, or con-
sulted on, the Prism initiative” and called the PRISM message “oversimplistic and ill-judged.”

There are two long pieces you must read in the original. I can’t do justice to either one in a summary. Those two pieces will conclude this sad story as well as anything. PRISM is a stunt—an underhanded stunt that may have been predictable. I believe it’s a stunt that will backfire badly. I hope it will have the effect of alerting scholars and librarians to the sheer deviousness of some (certainly not all) scholarly publishers and to the need for reform within the scholarly communication system. Open access may not be all of that reform, but it’s a significant part of it.

That said, go read “Watch your language” by Alma Swan, posted September 4, 2007 at OptimalScholarship (optimalscholarship.blogspot.com), an impassioned commentary by one who finds herself “very sad and, secondarily, disappointed.” After that, read Issue 113 of the SPARC Open Access Newsletter (www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/newsletter/09-02-07.htm). The prime essay, “Will open access undermine peer review,” runs 12 single-spaced pages and offers well-documented, detailed discussion of the strawman that PRISM and other anti-OA forces keep raising again and again and again.
The biggest news since the last Library Access to Scholarship should have been formal passage of the NIH policy as a requirement for NIH-funded research—but that may be overshadowed by the actions of Harvard University’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Harvard’s action may indeed be a “game-changer,” as the saying goes.

I’m not going to cover the NIH policy, which is now a mandate to deposit articles from NIH-funded research into PubMed. Unfortunately, it’s a mandate that allows for up to 12 months’ embargo, which weakens it considerably. To date, the voluntary NIH policy has had miserable results, apparently yielding about 4% compliance. You can find more than enough reporting and commentary on NIH elsewhere.

There’s always too much stuff to cover even at my lightweight level, so this time I’ll focus on two things: the Harvard mandate and institutional repositories.

The Harvard Vote

On February 12, 2008, Harvard’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences unanimously approved a motion that is, effectively, an open access mandate—the first such mandate in a U.S. university and, according to Peter Suber, “one of the first anywhere to be adopted by faculty themselves rather than by administrators.” It’s worth quoting the motion in full (from Suber’s Open access news, which has a wealth of links on the motion and reactions to it), given its likely significance:

The Faculty of Arts and Sciences of Harvard University is committed to disseminating the fruits of its research and scholarship as widely as possible. In keeping with that commitment, the Faculty adopts the following policy: Each Faculty member grants to the President and Fellows of Har-
Harvard & Institutional Repositories

The motion before the FAS [Faculty of Arts and Sciences] in support of open access to scholarly articles concerns openness in general. It is meant to promote the free communication of knowledge. By retaining rights for the widest possible dissemination of the faculty's work, it would make scholarship by members of the FAS freely accessible everywhere in the world, and it would reinforce a new effort by Harvard to share its intellectual wealth.

The University Library has taken a leading role in that endeavor. Far from reserving its resources for the privileged few, it is digitizing its special collections, opening them to everyone online, and cooperating with Google in the attempt to make books in the public domain actually available to the
public, a worldwide public, which extends everywhere that people have access to the Internet…

The motion also represents an opportunity to reshape the landscape of learning. A shift in the system for communicating knowledge has created a contradiction at the heart of academic life. We academics provide the content for scholarly journals. We evaluate articles as referees, we serve on editorial boards, we work as editors ourselves, yet the journals force us to buy back our work, in published form, at outrageous prices. Many journals now cost more than $20,000 for a year’s subscription.

The spiraling cost of journals has inflicted severe damage on research libraries, creating a ripple effect: in order to purchase the journals, libraries have had to reduce their acquisitions of monographs; the reduced demand among libraries for monographs has forced university presses to cut back on the publication of them; and the near impossibility of publishing their dissertations has jeopardized the careers of a whole generation of scholars in many fields. It would be naïve to assume that a positive vote by the FAS on February 12 would force publishers to slash their prices. But by passing the motion we can begin to resist the trends that have created so much damage....

The Harvard University Library will set up an Office for Scholarly Communication to make the open-access repository an instrument for access to research across all disciplines in the spirit of the “one-university” environment that the HOLLIS catalog now provides for holdings in all the libraries, more than 80 of them, throughout the University system… By mandating copyright retention and by placing those rights in the hands of the institution running the repository, the motion will create the conditions for a high deposit rate.

What further sets Harvard’s proposal apart from the others is its opt-out provision....Whereas other repositories depend on faculty opting in by volunteering to provide digitized copies of their work, the Harvard system would have all faculty members grant a non-exclusive permission to the President and Fellows of Harvard to distribute their articles. The system would be collective but not coercive. Anyone who wanted to retain exclusive rights to her- or himself could do so by obtaining a waiver…

Darnton notes that the deposit rate at the University of California under a voluntary system is about 14%—and it’s much lower elsewhere. UC is considering a similar proposal.

Suber calls this a “permission mandate rather than a deposit mandate”—instead of requiring faculty to deposit articles themselves, it requires that they give the university non-exclusive permission to host articles. Suber says this is the first permission mandate anywhere.
He likes the model. As he notes, it’s usually the university library that handles the actual deposits—and who better? Suber’s February 12, 2008 post offers a number of other good points on the virtues of the Harvard approach.

Peter Suber’s final bullet, in the February 12, 2008 post, deserves quotation in full:

Publishers who dislike the idea could respond by refusing to publish work by Harvard faculty. But that will not happen. Harvard is inserting the wedge and making it easier for other universities to follow suit with similar policies.

There’s a term that can be applied to any scholarly journal that boycotts work by Harvard faculty: Suicidal. Can you image the effect on any journal’s reputation once it became known that it would reject Harvard articles because it couldn’t live with Harvard’s retention of copyright?

For UC to follow suit would be wonderful: The likelihood of serious journals rejecting work from UC Berkeley, UCLA, UC San Diego or any of the other campuses in their specialties is also nearly zero. Add, say, any three or four of Yale, MIT, Cornell, Princeton, Columbia, Stanford, Michigan, Penn, Duke, Chicago, Toronto, Wisconsin and the University of Texas (I could go on…), and you’d have a clear case for journal publishers: “Deal with OA…or die.”

Early reactions

I’m going to ignore the one-note advocate whose reaction was to tell Harvard how it should have written the motion. It’s too predictable: If it’s not 100% my way, it’s flawed, perhaps fatally flawed. I’m only offering tastes of a few of many reactions, mostly positive. As usual, Peter Suber is the go-to source at www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/

Naturally, the AAP’s Allan Adler grumped about mandates. Gavin Baker noted the significance of this being a faculty vote. “This is the strongest indication yet: Yes, Virginia, scientists do want open access.” David Weinberger likes the mandate but isn’t wild about the opt-out provision. Mike Carroll called the Harvard policy “huge” and stressed its bottom-up nature.

T. Scott Plutchak posted “The Harvard vote” at T. Scott (tscott.typepad.com) on February 13, 2008:

I’m inclined to think that the Harvard vote may be more significant than the passage of the NIH policy. That it is driven by the faculty ra-
ther than being imposed from the outside is a very positive sign. Most important, however, is that a major university is taking a significant step towards managing its own scholarly production.

He contrasts this with the NIH situation, where he’s hearing that commercial publishers are trying to buy up even more society-published journals, using as one selling point that they can handle the “headaches” of dealing with NIH’s policy. He notes Springer’s encouragement of scholars to write the high “Open Choice” fees into their grants as one way of accommodating NIH—and assuring lots of revenue for Springer. (As Suber notes later, Springer already allows archiving without fee or delay, which is all NIH requires.)

I don’t fault the commercial publishers at all—they’re being creative and taking advantage of the changing terrain as best they can. But I continue to worry about the small publishers and the societies and continue to believe that it was a grave error on the part of the open access movement not to seek alliances there… If the Harvard vote represents a movement on the part of faculty toward taking more control of their own scholarly production, then that’s a very good thing.

A number of people and newspapers called on their own universities to follow suit.

Stan Katz wrote a surprising post at The Chronicle Review’s Brains- torm blog. The key paragraph:

The point I want to make about the Harvard proposal is that it can be seen as a move to undercut nonprofit publishers as well as the commercial behemoths (if it is truly a proposal to post all Harvard faculty articles on the university Web site). Depending on the details, it might also be a proposal to bypass peer review, unless Harvard plans to set up its own peer-review process. What social science and humanities faculty have to debate is the merits of entering the world of preprint article circulation that has served the scientists so well. Our scholarship is, I think, significantly different than that of the scientists. Both copyright and publisher peer-review have a long and useful past in our world, and we would do well to think through the implications of abandoning them — though it is hard to imagine that this is what Harvard actually has in mind.

Sigh. There’s “endangered peer review” again, together with “abandoning” copyright. Comments on the post took issue with his assertions. On the other hand, one university press person claimed that resources to publish humanities journals open access “don’t exist, at least not yet”—which makes me wonder about the hundreds of humanities open-access journals already in existence.
Paul Courant at Michigan took issue with complaints that Harvard’s policy might endanger society publishers:

It is somewhat troubling that some academic publishers and academic societies have expressed concern that the Harvard mandate will put them at mortal risk, while merely trimming the profits of the big commercial publishers. Plainly, we in the academy have an interest in robust nonprofit scholarly publishing, but we should not fall for the idea that the only way for nonprofit publishing to survive is through policies that assure huge profits to the big players. (There is an analogy to agricultural policy here. In the name of preserving the “family farm,” governments around the world provide billions in subsidy to agribusiness.)

It’s enormously amusing that Patricia Schroeder, president of AAP, while saying “I don’t think anyone is quaking in their boots” because of the Harvard mandate, also said this: “publishers may not be quite as excited to take articles from Harvard.” Bwahahahah… oops, sorry.

Peter Suber devoted a solid eight pages to Harvard’s mandate in the March 2008 SPARC Open Access Newsletter (www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/newsletter/03-02-08.htm), including direct commentary and many links to other sources. It’s what you’d expect from Suber: comprehensive, fair, insightful and absolutely worth reading. Also essentially impossible to summarize. He points out details of the Harvard situation that I’ve omitted and offers extended commentary on the long-term meaning of Harvard’s action. He believes the policy will spread. Frankly, I can’t imagine it won’t—and I’d love to see the University of California act sooner rather than later.

Would you be surprised that ALPSP, AAP/PSP and STM issued a statement that appears to suggest mandates such as Harvard’s are unnecessary and possibly harmful? You shouldn’t be. Peter Suber deals with it nicely in a March 11, 2008 post at Open access news.

Dorothea Salo wrote two posts at Caveat lector relating to the Harvard situation, on February 13 and 14, 2008 (cavlec.yarinareth.net). Excerpts from both:

A friend of mine, wholly unconnected with academia or libraries or scholarly publishing, IMed me last night about Harvard’s bold faculty-governance move. “This will make waves, won’t it?” he asked.

I hope so. I surely do hope so. This could change the Great Game in repository managers’ favor. I am in complete agreement with T. Scott Plutchak that this could turn out bigger than the NIH public-access policy…
I am suddenly bullish on IRs, for the first time in quite some time. Mind you, I will turn bearish again if Harvard turns out to stand alone, as is quite possible—I don’t see a mad rush to copy MIT’s OpenCourseWare initiative. However, the policy spadework done by SPARC and John Ober’s crew and others has specifically been in a research rather than teaching context, so perhaps Harvard’s example will prove easier to follow than MIT’s.

While the AAP and certain of its members spent gobs of money in Washington futilely trying to stop the NIH policy from sprouting teeth, Harvard quietly flanked them. I didn’t know the Harvard permissions policy was even on the table until a few days before it passed. Judging from the lack of concerted response from scholarly publishing, they didn’t see it coming either.

I would be afraid, very afraid, right now if I were a journal publisher who believed my profits depended on preventing widespread self-archiving or playing dog-in-the-manger with copyright. The Harvard policy puts publishers in an extraordinarily weak position. They can’t denounce it; that’s tantamount to denouncing faculty, which would be utterly suicidal. (Publishers can and do slag librarians. They can and do slag government. They can’t slag faculty, and they know it.) I don’t think they can sue; even if they could win in court (which I rather doubt, though standard not-a-lawyer disclaimers apply), the hideous publicity from suing Harvard would stick like tar. They can’t prevent eager librarians at Harvard from setting up and filling a repository. Even their standard lines of FUD won’t work—they can’t seriously spin this as “a vote against peer review,” because really, is Harvard going to do anything that damages peer review? Of course not! All the publishers can realistically do is plead poverty, and a look at their lobbying budgets and profit margins scotches that argument.

At Harvard itself, publishers are impotent. The sly cleverness of Harvard’s strategy has me in awe. Since we know that arguments based on increased impact and altruism make no headway with faculty, Harvard went straight for the jugular: faculty’s sense of ownership over their work…

Stopping other institutions from following in Harvard’s footsteps is a completely different game from stopping legislation in Washington. There are no words for the fiasco that attempting to bribe faculty would create, as faculty are not lobbyists or legislators; the opprobrium the AAP faced over PRISM would be a wet firecracker by comparison…

Exacerbating the problem are consortia such as the CIC, and state university systems with a unified voice on these matters such as California. Not only need publishers keep their eye on individual institutions, they need to block policy and advocacy efforts coming from collections of
institutions. I'm sorry, they just can't, not with the worst will in the world.

No, I have a feeling the deafening silence coming from publishers right now is deliberate. Their only realistic hope is that the Harvard policy sinks like a stone in a vast sea of institutional indifference, and the best way for them to create that outcome is to keep their mouths shut so that the initial flurry of coverage and interest fades quicker.

The ball is in our court now, we open-access advocates. We can't let Harvard's fusillade go quiet. Come on, Cornell. Come on, California. Come on, MIT and Yale and (dare I say it?) Wisconsin. Let's do this thing.

The University of California seems well on its way. For MIT, it would seem a natural progression from existing initiatives. In terms of world-class campuses—well, that would be four more right there. What publisher will say, “Sorry, but we’re not accepting papers from UC or Harvard”?

Faculty ignorance of open access

Is it possible to overstate the significance of Harvard's vote being by the faculty, not an administrative fiat? I wonder. As I was finishing up the notes above and getting ready for the next section, I ran into some old items I'd saved but hadn't used yet.

In an April 13, 2007 post at Open access news, Peter Suber points to a UK report “Researchers' use of academic libraries and their services” (www.rin.ac.uk/researchers-use-libraries). Key paragraph:

Despite all the activity and progress on open access over the past couple of years...researchers remain largely unaware of the issues and arguments, and this was reflected in the focus groups and other discussions we carried out for this study. Of the researchers we consulted, only about 1 in 10 were able to show that they fully understood what is meant by open access....

Making this finding unsurprising: “Our survey shows a significant discrepancy between the proportion of librarians who say their institution has an open access institutional repository (52%) and the proportion of researchers who believe that their institution has such a repository (15%).” Peter Suber notes: “On the one hand, it's very discouraging, especially after all this time. On the other hand, it supports our claim that the problem is ignorance, not opposition. My experience is that it only takes a couple of minutes to excite faculty about OA, once you get their attention. The hard part is—still—getting their attention.”
Here in the U.S., at least according to Dorothea Salo, even the librarians aren’t up to speed. As she says in a May 16, 2007 Caveat lector post, “Paying for OA” (excerpts):

I’ve said before that academic librarians are sadly ignorant about open access; our discipline’s research literature lags well behind others in progress toward OA…

In my experience, academic librarians have a strong, largely implicit, and (of course) completely erroneous belief that “you get what you pay for.” In the long run, it’s possible that making them set aside some of their budget to support OA will turn them into advocates—they’re paying for it, so it must be all right. But in the short run, open access smells funny to them, much as it does to many faculty.…. But maybe that’s changing…at least if the Harvard vote, a similar Oregon vote and activities at UC and elsewhere mean anything.

The Green Road: Institutional Repositories

I keep repeating my general advice for library people who are interested in open access (and more of you should be!): Read Peter Suber’s Open access news blog and SPARC Open Access Newsletter, and maybe some other blogs related to OA—I’ve listed them before.

Here’s more specific advice, if you’re interested in institutional repositories from a library perspective: Read Caveat lector (cav-lec.yarinareth.net). Dorothea Salo does this stuff for a living. She cares deeply about what she does. She’s a little discouraged at times. She’s forthright and honest all the time.

I rarely deal with IR issues; as far as I can tell, the most recent mention was in early 2006—and that discussed several of Salo’s posts. Meanwhile, I gathered printouts of a few items where I thought I could add value by noting them. That stack now includes 20 printouts—and, except for a D-Lib Magazine article from March/April 2007, all of them are Caveat lector posts.

Here’s this section in a nutshell. “A Cornell study showed that Cornell’s DSpace institutional repository wasn’t being used or populated very well and attempted to find out why. Dorothea Salo keeps on saying worthwhile and challenging things about IRs, how they do or don’t work, and how they can or should work.” Or you could just read “Innkeepers at the Roach Motel” (digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/22088), but Salo says she’s going to do a major rewrite.
Tempting as it is to stop right there, I’m inclined to offer a few notes & observations along the way. We start in December 2006 and move forward from there. I won’t be adding much commentary. To do so would mostly display my own ignorance.

**Google and journal backruns**

In late 2006, Google offered to digitize journal backruns for free. Peter Suber wrote about it, finding Google’s offer considerably less than ideal, but possibly still a good thing. Dorothea Salo wasn’t as sanguine, in a December 17, 2006 post:

> I see a ton of downside, so much downside that I don’t think any self-respecting journal should take this deal. I do agree with Suber that should Google’s offer be accepted by a lot of publishers, open access would benefit hugely, at least in the short term—and to be honest, knowledge of that immediate short-term benefit is making it very hard for me to write this post…

> My stubborn objection to the shape of this deal stems from my ebook days, and boils down to this: never, ever, EVER agree to a digitization deal that doesn’t leave you in control of a copy of the bits…

There’s a lot more to the post and if you’re interested in that issue you should go read it—but it’s not directly relevant to IR issues. Her key argument: Google wasn’t giving a copy of “the bits”—the digitized journal—back to the publisher, and she thinks the Google project could get in the way of proper preservation plans for journals. Those plans could easily involve institutional repositories, on their own and as part of LOCKSS or similar projects.

A day later (December 18, 2006), after Peter Suber noted that Salo hadn’t suggested an alternative route for journals lacking a digitized backrun, she posted “What to do?” Excerpts:

> If I were in those shoes, here’s what I’d do: sit back and wait, at least for now. I think Suber is right that OCA or someone else will come up with a better deal. If enough publishers express their wariness to Google, Google itself may come up with a better deal! The opportunity cost of waiting is negligible, so why rush in?

> Journal publishers will have figured this out already, but for those playing along at home: Google’s deal only works for journals who consider open digital access an acceptable publication and dissemination mechanism. Not all journals will agree with that, be it because of book-smeller bias or a perceived need to continue to charge rents on the backrun. Moreover, a Google deal makes only limited sense for a journal with no plans to pub-
lish current runs electronically. I don’t know how many journals that actually is, but it must be larger than zero.

If none of those concerns applied to my journal, however, I’d be looking for a better OA partner than Google while I waited. Not a few journals in this situation will have formal or informal affiliations with institutions. Those institutions have libraries. Do those libraries have publishing-services or conversion or scanning outfits? Do they have an institutional repository? How about an OJS installation? If they do, that’s assuredly where I would go first. (Would I, as a repository manager, welcome a newly-OA journal backrun? With open arms! And I can give it OAI-PMH exposure as well as Google juice. Can Google?)

The hard part is going to be funding. Library digitization arms are often cost-recovery outfits, though repository storage, bandwidth, and preservation are generally free to the storer. (We’re libraries. Storage and preservation are our job.) Still, for a journal that has no OA backrun, I would think grant funding could be had, or even institutional funding for a particularly interesting journal (or a particularly prominent faculty member, as many journal editors are). If this journal-digitization thing catches on, I wouldn’t be surprised to see funds earmarked at some grant agencies precisely to take digitized backruns OA…

I’m leaving out a lot. What’s here is what’s most directly relevant to the role of IRs in making open access work—and the relationship of most IRs to libraries.

Dancing with them what brung ya

That’s the title of a February 1, 2007 post in which Salo comments on one of Peter Suber’s predictions for OA in 2007. First, she quotes one of Suber’s predictions:

I’m tempted to predict a continuing tension between the narrow conception of institutional repositories (to provide OA for eprints) and the broad conception of IRs (to provide OA for all kinds of digital content, from eprints to courseware, conference webcasts, student work, digitized library collections, administrative records, and so on, with at least as much attention on preservation as access). But I have to predict that the broad conception will prevail. Universities that launch general-purpose archiving software will have active constituents urging them to take full advantage of it. The good news for OA is that many institutional interests, beyond the OA interests, will converge to fund and maintain the IR. The bad news for OA is that the project of filling the IR with the institution’s research output could, without vigilant stewardship, drift downward on the IR’s priority list.
She agrees with the prediction—but she’s annoyed that “he even had to raise the matter” and notes that there’s not even a shred of evidence for Suber’s “bad news” possibility. Excerpts of what else Salo has to say:

Just for a moment, imagine that academic libraries holding print resources were suddenly told that their sole priority—not top priority, mind you, but sole priority—was the acquisition and dissemination of the peer-reviewed journal literature.

I’ll wait for every single academic librarian who reads Caveat Lector to stop laughing uproariously. As a bonus, I’ll even talk down the government-documents and special-collections librarians who are readying their torches and pitchforks. The simple reality is that academic libraries are multiple-purpose organizations serving many and diverse constituencies with many and diverse materials…

What’s more, we wouldn’t have it any other way. So if the green road to OA wants to dance with academic libraries—and green-OA does want us on its dance card, because it would not exist and cannot at present survive without us—it will have to accept the other digital baggage we bring with us. Student papers. Digitized collections. Webcasts. Learning objects. Et cetera.

There are certainly discussions worth having about whether standard IR technology is the best tool for some of these things…These are different discussions, however, from “OA concerns the peer-reviewed literature and nothing else!”

I refuse to be defensive about archiving more than peer-reviewed journal literature in the repository I run. I have never considered the peer-reviewed journal literature the end-all of research anyway, and I do not agree that open access to it solves every single pressing problem in scholarly communication…

For my own part, I am quite convinced that IRs and their managers in academic libraries have a larger mission and many more opportunities than the peer-reviewed literature offers. That shouldn’t anger those whose sole or primary cause is OA to peer-reviewed literature. It should reassure them, because it is excellent evidence that academic librarians such as I will continue an active commitment to IR technology and to advancing OA, with support from the institutions we work for.

Assailing academic libraries and librarians gains narrowly-focused green-OA advocates nothing whatever. Instead, they should consider dancing with them what brung ‘em.

I remember vividly, some years back, a discussion about the future of academic libraries in which one self-assured non-librarian came very
close to saying that the function of an academic library is to move peer-reviewed articles from their creators to their readers. It’s not quite as outlandish as Salo suggests.

**Are they being used?**

Stepping away from Caveat lector for the moment, we have a 22-page D-Lib article by Philip M. Davis and Matthew J.L. Connolly: “Evaluating the reasons for non-use of Cornell University’s installation of DSpace.” (www.dlib.org/dlib/march07/davis/03davis.html) As described, Cornell’s institutional repository (DSpace, also what Salo’s running at Wisconsin) is “largely underpopulated and underused by its faculty. Many of its collections are empty, and most collections contain few items.”

The authors did a three-part evaluative study of institutional repositories, comparing seven other DSpace installations to Cornell’s and interviewing faculty members. They go through the study and results in considerable and somewhat depressing detail. Here’s the conclusion:

While some librarians perceive a crisis in scholarly communication as a crisis in access to the literature, Cornell faculty perceive this essentially as a non-issue. Each discipline has a normative culture, largely defined by their reward system and traditions. If the goal of institutional repositories is to capture and preserve the scholarship of one’s faculty, institutional repositories will need to address this cultural diversity.

Will the Harvard mandate increase understanding elsewhere? Time will tell.

Underuse and underpopulation are running themes with Salo, to be sure.

**Disciplinary culture, libraries and IRs**

On May 17, Salo considered an interesting disconnect: The area where the serials crisis is most acute, the area where IRs should find a natural constituency—namely, science, technology and medicine—is an area where scholars are not heavily invested in academic libraries. Excerpts:

E-journals and article databases are a transparent service to these researchers; surveys have shown that because the access technology is the same—that is, the web browser—they simply cannot distinguish between a resource on the free web and a resource that their libraries have paid dearly for. (OA, of course, is muddying the waters somewhat, which should not be construed as an argument against OA.) Books? They don’t use books...
These researchers do not see the library, do not go to the (physical) library, do not care about the library, do not think about the library. So insofar as institutional repositories are a library service (and as I have repeated ad infinitum, they are that nearly everywhere they exist, at least in the United States), they are just as invisible as every other library service. Small wonder I have an outreach problem! My key constituencies just never think to look in the library for me.

The arts and humanities tell a different tale. The library is a major locus of arts and humanities research, with librarians a major part of the faculty's working lives, both as scholars and as teachers. This means in practice that librarians often play a key role in introducing arts and humanities faculty to technologies that can help them... In my nearly two years doing this work, I have actually had more contact with humanities scholars than STM researchers, and I am quite willing to believe that's partly or wholly because the library impinges more often and more deeply on their consciousness.

That's a sad analysis. I wonder if it's true everywhere? One of her responses is to “market to STM departments' local IT staff, who are both less contemptuous of the library than those they serve and more likely to see the IR as a solution to genuine problems they have.”

**Broken repositories**

Dorothea Salo has become the most vocal library voice talking about institutional repositories—and I don't believe she set out to have that level of prominence. Salo runs a DSpace IR at the University of Wisconsin. She believes in IRs as part of open access and she believes in open access. “I'm still convinced, mind you, that open access is not a windmill—it's viable, it's necessary, and it will happen under various guises.”

She's been vocally unhappy with the IR situation, as expressed over a number of posts. While she sums it all up in “Roach Motel,” there's some virtue to glancing at the developing position. So, for example, portions of a September 5, 2007 post:

Institutional repositories as a class are in serious trouble. They are not producing the outcomes they promised—or, indeed, much of any outcome in many cases. They are sucking up library staff time and development muscle, and libraries haven't enough of either commodity to waste on a non-productive service.

Fundamentally, the value proposition on which IRs were sold to libraries was in error. **Voluntary self-archiving in institutional repositories simply does not happen in the absence of deposit mandates.** From a library perspective,
this changes the picture from the original “build it, step back, and they will come” to “make a tremendous ongoing investment in marketing and library-mediated deposit services that may never pay off if other libraries at other institutions don’t do likewise.” It’s only sensible that many libraries back away from the latter commitment.

If we in the open-access movement don’t confront our error head-on and make plans for routing around it, I predict with unhappy confidence that many if not most IRs will wither and die, and few more will open. As I said, that’s not necessarily a deathblow for open access, not at all. I do think it would be a sincere pity…

Perhaps if we had built repository systems that weren’t unusable lumbering dinosaurs, that were designed around daily faculty reality rather than the idealized vision of self-archiving, we might have earned some uptake on grounds of immediate practicality rather than hopes of changed attitudes. But we didn’t, so we’re stuck.

An example: mediated deposit. Repository systems blithely assume that the person pushing the buttons to make a deposit is the same person with authority to grant the repository’s license—that is, a person with intellectual-property rights over the content. This is wishful thinking. In most repositories, most deposits are done by a third party, be it a librarian, departmental staff, or a faculty member’s graduate-student assistants…

How much more uptake would we have if we could offer a service enabling departmental IT staff to batch-deposit papers which (once individual faculty have responded to the email requesting licensure) appear magically as prettily-formatted HTML citations on faculty and departmental web pages? It’s technically feasible. We haven’t done it because we’ve fixated far too strongly on the “self” in “self-archiving.”

How much more uptake would we have if we maintained a system that welcomes and cares for unfinished work as well as curating and displaying the finished products of that work? I can say with some authority that I’d have a great many more preprints and postprints if faculty could find their preprints and postprints in the first place!

Salo saw one hopeful sign in December 2007. She was one of the speakers at a NISO/PALINET workshop, “Getting the most out of your institutional repository”—and, as she says in a December 5, 2007 post, it “was sold out, packed to the gills. I was fair shocked, after hearing one librarian say at ASIST that her boss had said “No, I don’t want one of those institutional repositories—they all fail.”

In the same post, she offers some cautionary notes. First, she disagrees slightly with one of Peter Suber’s predictions (“more OA reposi-
I do not think that there will be significantly more open-access institutional repositories in the United States at the end of 2008 than there are today. This is only a slight disagreement with Peter Suber, because he didn’t specify IRs, just open-access repositories, and there likely will be a few more of those, especially outside the States. I also think that if, as Suber suggests, self-archiving hits the tipping point once we get an NIH mandate and a few mandates like it, institutional repositories will not be winners. Nothing will counteract scholars’ natural gravitation toward their disciplines.

I also predict that there will be at least one high-profile IR failure in the United States before the end of 2008… It could be an outright closure, which will touch off a furious debate about repository succession planning that we really should have had years ago. It could be a more graceful handoff, or a consolidation into a consortial repository. It could be a major defunding; the repository’s materials will remain accessible, but staff time and money thrown at the repository will be reduced significantly or eliminated…

Why?

Institutional repositories are money pits, and the returns are negligible. The cost-per-item-archived is absurd. Libraries may be idealistic, but they’re not stupid, and they do move on from failed experiments, especially when those experiments have a heavy technology component.

There’s much more, having to do with commitment and how current IRs actually work.

A December 11, 2007 post notes another part of the problem: “Repository software developers charge gaily into development work without understanding how libraries work, or how repositories work inside libraries.” A few bits from a five-page post:

First, the usual open-source “scratch own itch” development model doesn’t work as well in libraries. The reason for this is that with a few exceptions, librarians are not programmers and do not think like them…

Second, the community-based development models that are so fashionable just at present in the repository community are equally if not more precarious. This just isn’t how libraries are accustomed to acquiring their software and having their needs met!…

What are libraries accustomed to? RFPs. Vendors. Hosted services. Black boxes. Fee-for-service, not fee-for-input…
Third, this is not a good time to be asking libraries for resources for repositories. Institutional repositories are in enough trouble as it is…

Fifth, most libraries don’t have any library technologists.

I’m skipping over some posts, including an interesting January 11, 2008 post (“Jeremiah, not a bullfrog”) that says a lot about why Salo’s been writing this stuff.

A persona approach

Here’s a case where there is just no way I can add value—and summarizing the posts could subtract value. Salo wrote a series of posts beginning January 24, 2008 (“Meet Dr. Troia”) and continuing through January 30, 2008 (“Solving Cassandra’s problems”). She describes several personas, then uses them to look at repository design in a different way. If you care about this stuff, go read the posts.

In Closing

What? I didn’t discuss “Innkeeper at the Roach Motel”? No, I didn’t. I read it but I’m not going to comment on it. Here’s what you need to know about the article, which is available through Wisconsin’s DSpace repository and will appear in Library Trends this year:

- It’s moderately long—just under 10,000 words, or about 12-14 Cites & Insights pages.
- It’s important and well written.
- You’re better off reading it directly than getting my inadequate summary and comments.

There’s much more to talk about on OA, much less the broader issues of library access to scholarship. I think these two themes are related. You can draw the lines.
Library access to scholarship isn’t just about open access, even though OA-related issues make up the bulk of this occasional section. It’s about budget equity (is money available for reasonably-priced monographs in the humanities?), format equity (which cuts both ways, given the apparent disdain of a few academic librarians for print and the historical record), the long view and more.

What’s happening? Briefly, Harvard Law has adopted an OA mandate that may be even stronger than Harvard Arts & Sciences; Stanford has adopted an OA mandate; publishers continue to grouse about the NIH green-OA semi-mandate; the number and significance of full-OA journals continue to grow; and institutional repositories continue to be problematic for any number of reasons.

I started out planning to devote most of this edition to ongoing controversies, many artificial—but a group of “interesting items” at the start turned into the article itself. Maybe next time. Meanwhile, a look at a few interesting items, one of them distinctly newsworthy, from the past ten months.

Open Access Library Journals

Wayne Bivens-Tatum posted this on October 1, 2007 at Academic librarian (blogs.princeton.edu/librarian/). He notes a post on ACRLog about the difference between words and deeds among faculty when it comes to access—and among librarians too.

This problem has bothered me for a long time… Years ago I decided that whenever possible I would write only for open access library journals. As an academic librarian who has discussed these issues with professors and tried to promote the idea of open access, I have also wondered why so few library journals are openly accessible.
That includes the offerings from the ALA… It especially bothered me that the ACRL publications weren’t openly accessible, though that seems to be changing. C&RL is mostly accessible now…

Back to Fister’s question, why don’t we put our words into action? I suspect it’s for the same reason most other fields don’t. If one has to publish to keep one’s job, and publishing in the most respected journals is the best way to impress people, then that’s where people will try to publish if they can. Why take a chance on Library Philosophy and Practice or E-JASL when you can publish in standard journals like the Journal of Academic Librarianship that people have heard of. I suspect that fear keeps people from changing, the fear that publishing in a little known journal won’t look as good come review time.

That summarizes one key problem for OA journals quite neatly, and it’s a tough problem to overcome. I should include the closing line—which, with two grotesque exceptions, is true: “There is one silver lining to this cloud. At least library journals don’t cost $10K a volume.” (Actually, Library Management and Library Review both cost more than $10K a year.)

Who are These People?

That’s the question T. Scott asks in a January 24, 2008 post at T. Scott (tscott.typepad.com), discussing email he received inviting him to join the advisory board for a new journal. He’d never heard of the journal or the publisher, Scientific Journals International. When he checked, he found that the editorial advisory board for the journal was indeed impressive and long—but something didn’t feel right:

My first clue that something was amiss comes in the 2nd paragraph of the email:

The volunteer Advisory Board provides advice and guidance for the ongoing development of SJI. The members receive periodic emails about the developments of various SJI journals. There are no regular responsibilities for the Advisory Board members. Occasionally, you will receive an email that requests your input on new ideas, decisions or changes in the policies, procedures and guidelines of SJI. If you feel that the issue is not in your area of interest (since SJI publishes journals in all disciplines), or if you do not have the time, you can simply disregard the message.

What a deal! List my membership on the advisory board on my CV, and then ignore all of the messages that I get from them.
Nowhere on the website could I find any indication of who is actually behind these journals. There’s a business address in St. Cloud, Minnesota, but no one is named. 

I started looking into the various journals---there are many. Turns out that very few of them have actually published any articles. Click on a journal title and most of them will say: “Coming soon...” As soon as they get some submissions, I suppose. 

So what’s the scam? Open access, I’m sorry to say. The opening page reeks of a high-minded dedication to assisting “researchers, writers and artists to cope with the publish or perish reality in the academia.” They promise rapid turnaround and quick peer review. 

Of course, they have to charge a processing fee… They point out that their processing charge is much lower than what various other open access publishers charge---just $99.95 (add $99.95 for each additional author). Somehow, I don’t think they’re viewing this as an incentive to limit the number of authors per paper… 

It’s got to be the open access movement’s worst nightmare, living proof of the most hysterical charges leveled by the most rabid opponents. Do the people who have signed on to these advisory boards think that they’re supporting open access by lending credence to this? 

Go to the site, you see “more than 100 peer-reviewed open-access journals” and this truly odd statement: “Names of the chief editor or associated editors are not published on SJI Web site. Authors or reviewers cannot contact the editors to influence the review process deliberately or unintentionally.” I must admit that I’ve never heard of a journal hiding its editors’ names for any reason, much less this purported reason—particularly while touting its huge advisory and review boards. A fair number of journals do have issues—but there’s an odd feel to the whole thing. 

It’s not the only one. Near the end of March 2008, thousands of us received a list post asking for our involvement in a new open-access “society” aiming to launch 350 OA journals by the end of 2009. This society also plans to have “world summits.” The website is an astonishing piece of work, one that scarcely inspires confidence on the seriousness of the enterprise. 

For all I know, SJI and the “society” (which shall go nameless) are both entirely legitimate, just misunderstood. And the library field certainly has its own subscribe-now/publish-later publishers using the traditional methods. But it’s certainly true that efforts such as this give off, at best, mixed messages.
Open Access Directory

I have no such qualms about this one: a Wiki serving as “a compendium of simple factual lists about open access (OA) to science and scholarship, maintained by the OA community at large.”

By bringing many OA-related lists together in one place, OAD will make it easier for everyone to discover them and use them for reference. The easier they are to maintain and discover, the more effectively they can spread useful, accurate information about OA.

That’s from the main page, at oad.simmons.edu/oadwiki/. Peter Suber and Robin Peek (Peek teaches at Simmons’ Graduate School of Library and Information Science) launched the wiki in April 2008 (work clearly began before then—more than 60 pages were created before April 20, 2008, although some of those are stub pages). Early content came from lists that Peter Suber has been maintaining; more are being added over time.

If you’re interested in OA, OAD should be in your Firefox favorites or IE bookmarks. It’s worth noting that a “list” at OAD isn’t typically just a bunch of bullet points—it’s a bunch of bullet links, e.g. “Institutions that support open access.” In some cases, each link is to a page within OAD—for example, the under-development “University actions” list (which needs some copyediting) already includes more than 20 institutions, each with a detailed description (and links) of what the institution has done to date.

What is not in OAD, by design: “The lists will not include articles, narratives, opinions, or graphics.” In other words, this is facts—leaving plenty of room for opinion elsewhere. It is also, by design, a “historical record for the OA movement.”

Since OAD is a MediaWiki wiki, you can find out a lot about how it’s being put together and used. That’s a good thing, particularly for a platform within the “open movement.” As you might expect, content in OAD is licensed under the Creative Commons “Attribution” license—you can use any of it in any way you choose, as long as you credit the original.

Go. Look at it. Use it. If you’re one who can do so, register and add to it. Good stuff.

And yes, it is free of argumentation. Which in this case is as it should be.
What constitutes open access? Is Cites & Insights an open access journal? (It’s not scholarly, so the point may be moot, but…) That depends. Here’s the first paragraph of Peter Suber’s April 29, 2008 post at Open access news (www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/)

The term “open access” is now widely used in at least two senses. For some, “OA” literature is digital, online, and free of charge. It removes price barriers but not permission barriers. For others, “OA” literature is digital, online, free of charge, and free of unnecessary copyright and licensing restrictions. It removes both price barriers and permission barriers. It allows reuse rights which exceed fair use.

There’s a tricky word in that second definition: “unnecessary.” For some advocates, the only plausible restriction is attribution—and when it comes to datamining, that may not even be a reasonable restriction. Still, it’s a start—and C&I qualifies under the first but not the second. (I think there may be another distinction: Neither definition addresses datamining barriers. As PDF documents, Cites & Insights issues don’t lend themselves to datamining, and I’ve heard that raised in other cases as an objection.)

In any case, Suber and Harnad (who, for better and worse, are the two big names in OA) have come to a compromise (Harnad favors the first definition, Suber the second):

We have agreed to use the term “weak OA” for the removal of price barriers alone and “strong OA” for the removal of both price and permission barriers. To me, the new terms are a distinct improvement upon the previous state of ambiguity because they label one of those species weak and the other strong. To Stevan, the new terms are an improvement because they make clear that weak OA is still a kind of OA.

A little more:

Stevan and I agree that weak OA is a necessary but not sufficient condition of strong OA. We agree that weak OA is often attainable in circumstances when strong OA is not attainable. We agree that weak OA should not be delayed until we can achieve strong OA. We agree that strong OA is a desirable goal above and beyond weak OA. We agree that the desirability of strong OA is a reason to keep working after attaining weak OA, but not a reason to disparage the difficulties or the significance of weak OA…

We agree that there is more than one kind of permission barrier to remove, and therefore that there is more than one kind or degree of strong OA.
We agree that the green/gold distinction refers to venues (repositories and journals), not rights. Green OA can be strong or weak, but is usually weak. Gold OA can be strong or weak, but is also usually weak.

So where does C&I fit? It can’t get much more explicit than this:

An article with a CC-NC license is strong OA because it allows some copying and redistribution beyond fair use (even if it doesn’t allow all copying and redistribution). My own preference is still for the CC-BY license, but we shouldn’t speak as if CC-NC were not strong OA or as if there were just one kind of strong OA.

Thus, other than the non-scholarly angle, C&I is strong OA—but not as strong as it could be, since I still include the “NC” clause.

Later, Suber and Harnad realized that they picked “infelicitous terms” for the distinction. As of this writing, they appear to have settled on “gratis” and “libre”—the first for what they were calling “weak OA” (removing price barriers to access) and the second for what they were calling “strong OA” (removing price and permission barriers). I can’t say the terms do much for me, but I’m not the intended audience.

Open Access: Doing the Numbers

Richard Poynder has been producing an impressive set of interviews and other posts at Open and shut? (poynder.blogspot.com), fleshing out the contemporary history of OA and its leaders. This piece appeared June 11, 2008; it’s four pages long with another five pages of comments. It is well worth reading in the original, as Poynder attempts to address a hard-to-answer question that’s fairly vital to libraries attempting to maintain and improve access to scholarship.

Namely, what’s all this actually cost? “All this” meaning the actual costs of publishing papers—which may not be in the same league as costs claimed by commercial publishers. As Poynder notes, some high-profile gold OA journals have substantially increased their article-processing charges: Biomed Central has gone from $525 in 2001 to $1,700-$1,900; PLoS went from $1,500 to $2,100-$2.750.

Read the article carefully and skeptically. One claim from the UK seems improbable on its face—that somehow moving from subscription-based publishing to OA publishing would increase the total cost of the system, which can only be true if existing profits and corporate overhead not only stay in the system but actually increase.
Poynder does provide one apparently-real number, from the American Physical Society. Joe Serene, APS' treasurer/publisher, says it costs $1,500 to publish the electronic version of a paper, split roughly equally in five parts:

- Editorial costs (including peer review)
- Electronic composition and production
- Journal information systems, “which support everything from manuscript receipt through electronic posting, mirroring, and archiving of the published papers”
- Central publication management
- Essential overhead expenses

One could poke at those figures, to be sure—but it would be much more worthwhile to have some other sets of numbers from other publishers (including university publishers and smaller societies).

So the question remains: Can OA reduce the costs associated with scholarly communication? If so, how, and when? If not, what are the implications of this for the “scholarly communication crisis?” These are important questions. But without accurate numbers to crunch we really cannot answer them adequately. Wouldn’t it be great therefore if other publishers decided to be as “open” as APS in discussing their costs?

One thing is for sure: If OA ends up simply shifting the cost of scholarly communication from journal subscriptions to APCs without any reduction in overall expenditure, and inflation continues unabated, many OA advocates will be sorely disappointed. And if that were to happen, then we can surely expect to see calls for a more radical reengineering of the scholarly communication system.

Poynder gets that last paragraph right. In the comments, Julian Fisher says the true costs of e-publishing are “frighteningly low”—he says “two orders of magnitude less than many publishers are charging.” Fisher’s article making that case appears in the Spring 2008 *Journal of Electronic Publishing*; you can find it at hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.3336451.0011.204. The article comes up with estimates of $64 to $76 per article—but you need to read the article carefully and consider the assumptions.

**The Invisible Parts of Publishing**

T. Scott pushes on difficult issues in this June 12, 2008 post at T. Scott. We often have a tendency to glibly think (in the world of scholarly publishing, at least) that nothing of significance happens between the
completion of peer review and the appearance of the published version (whether that be in print or digital form). Some of the ire directed against publishers (in the vein of, “the authors don’t get compensated, the editors and peer reviewers work for free, and then you have the audacity to charge me for the final product?”) stems from this fundamental misunderstanding. But, as Tom Richardson pointed out in his presentation at CILIPS last week, at the New England Journal of Medicine (along with most other publishers), there is an army of copy-editors and illustrators and fact-checkers who come into play after the article has been accepted, all of whose skills are needed to put that article into final form and make sure that the authors’ intent is conveyed in the very best way possible. You can’t do that kind of work with volunteers.

And then there’s the matter of getting somebody’s attention. Take any article from the latest issue of NEJM, Nature, or JAMA. Do you really think that if you posted it on a website and invited comments (even in some mediated way so that it approximated serious peer review), and used those comments to modify and further develop the piece, it would get anywhere near the attention that it would get from having been published in one of the high-profile journals? We have a tendency to ignore the critical importance of brand in helping people make their way through the morass of content that is available.

There’s more. I don’t agree with everything here—e.g., is it really the case that most commercial STM publishers do rigorous fact-checking on scholarly articles?

Still, Scott’s saying something here that needs to be considered. (Please note: I’m referring to the June 12, 2008 post with the title above. There’s another OA-related June 12, 2008 post, and I’m nowhere nearly as enthusiastic about that one, partly because in my experience the other author referred to very definitely has axes to grind and has been grinding them for years.)

A Look Back

Full title: A Look Back at Nineteen Years as an Internet Digital Publisher. Author: Charles W. Bailey, Jr. (www.digital-scholarship.org/cwb/nineteen-years.htm). It prints out as six pages.

Get it. Read it. Here’s the introduction:

In 1989, the Internet was much more fragmented than it is today, and the primary information access tools were e-mail, FTP, mailing lists, and Usenet newsgroups. In March 1989, Tim Berners-Lee wrote “Information Management: A Proposal,” which tried to persuade CERN officials to
support a global hypertext system (it was not called the World Wide Web until October 1990, when he coded the first server and browser). Gopher servers, which represented a significant advance in information access, would not become available until 1991, and NCSA Mosaic, an early Web browser that ignited interest in the Web, until 1993.

In June 1989, I began my scholarly digital publishing efforts, launching one of the first e-journals on the Internet, The Public-Access Computer Systems Review: a journal that, if it has been published today, would be called an “open access journal,” since it was freely available, allowed authors to retain their copyrights, and had special copyright provisions for noncommercial use.

The paper includes an abbreviated chronology of Bailey’s digital publishing efforts—starting with the PACS-L mailing list (the list started six weeks before the journal was announced—the first actual journal issue arrived in January 1990) and continuing through June 2008.

I don’t remember just when I signed on to PACS-L. According to the list archive, I posted my first message on July 28, 1989. I do remember being on the editorial board for The Public-Access Computer Systems Review (“PACS Review”) throughout its history—and contributing a column, “Public-Access Provocations,” in twelve of the issues during the journal’s five substantial years. I also prepared the print versions of the first five volumes, issued as paperbacks through LITA. While PACS Review wasn’t the first OA journal—that was probably New Horizons in Adult Education, which began in 1987—it was one of the pioneers. (Noteworthy: Volume 2, Number 1 of PACS Review, in 1991, included a cluster of eight articles on early OA journals.) Technically, PACS Review wasn’t peer-reviewed until late 1991.

For PACS Review, publishing an internet journal meant distributing ASCII files using list software: Not the most beautiful results, but it worked and yielded some excellent work at very little cost.

That was only part of Bailey’s involvement. He also published an early directory of “Library-Oriented Lists and Electronic Serials,” and in 1996 began publishing the Scholarly Electronic Publishing Bibliography, a free ebook that’s in its 73rd version as of July 2, 2008.

There’s more, to be sure, and I refer you to Bailey’s own history for the rest. He’s been a pioneer in the field, has provided sustained energy and clarity—and I’m proud to call him a friend.
As we were bluntly reminded by the House Judiciary Committee, there’s a gap between what we’d like to focus on regarding access to scholarship—and what we’re forced to pay attention to. I’ll suggest we should be focusing on these issues, among others (and note that some folks are doing a fine job of focusing on them):

- Success stories in institutional repositories and finding ways to make such repositories effective and sustainable.
- Investigating actual visibility and effectiveness of “green OA” through different means—that is, the comparative improvements in article impact through availability through institutional repositories as compared to subject repositories such as arXiv and PubMed, and what we can do to make the two comparably effective (if they’re not now).
- Investigating and demonstrating real costs for gold OA and the range of such costs under different scenarios.
- A bunch of other issues, a number of them noted in “Open access issues” on the Library Leadership Network (libraryleadership.net)

Have I mentioned lately that the Library Leadership Network, my “day job,” has a fine collection of articles on open access designed to help leaders get up to speed? The article noted above will guide you to the others—eight in all as of this writing.

I’d like to summarize progress in some of these areas. It’s fun to write about wonderful new developments. Unfortunately, we also need to stay aware of the direct threats to open access and its advances. Here’s a key truth:

- The enemies of open access have large budgets, are well organized, and have shown little reluctance to bend the truth or repeat discredited statements. And they don’t give up.
Enemies? Isn’t that a strong word? Well, what else would you call PRISM, to take one example? And what else would you call the forces behind September’s House hearings on the NIH policy?

There are billions of dollars a year at stake—small potatoes in the world economy, but big numbers for academic libraries and scholarly publishing. If open access really works, it’s going to shift some of those dollars. I’ve long held the possibly-naïve hope that some of that shift could improve the ability of academic libraries to maintain strong monographic collections and to conserve and preserve their collections and services. That’s mostly why I still write about library access to scholarship.

The companies and associations now taking the lion’s share of those billions don’t want to give them up. The extreme cases—a small group of mostly-European for-profit STM publishers with very high profit margins—make noises about supporting open access, but seem intent on doing so only in ways that will assure that their revenues and profits continue to grow. They’re joined by a fair number of associations that have grown to rely too heavily on journal profits to fund other association activities, forcing libraries and their institutions to subsidize the associations. Some of those associations are clearly unwilling to reduce or abandon those subsidies—and their spokespeople are in some cases willing to attack OA even more sharply than the companies making the bulk of the profits. I won’t call these people useful fools; I assume they know what they’re doing.

I’d accumulated some items over the past two years dealing with opposition and extremes. The second part of this essay will note and comment on some of those items. But first, there’s the immediate case—attempts by publishers to get Congress to undo the NIH archiving policy that Congress mandated, weak though that policy is.

**The NIH Mandate**

It’s a shame the National Institutes of Health could just spring this radical mandate to seize control over research while nobody was watching. Which is to say:

- In July 2004, the House Appropriations Committee adopted a set of recommendations including one instructing NIH to develop a policy requiring free online access to articles based on NIH-funded research, no later than six months after publication of
those articles in peer-reviewed journals. Note the date: July 2004, more than four years ago.

- In September 2004, NIH released a draft policy for a 60-day comment period.
- With full awareness of Congress, NIH released a final version of the policy to take effect in May 2005—more than three years ago. These policies allowed up to a one-year embargo and constituted a request, not a requirement. Compliance was very low—below 4% as of January 2006.
- As Peter Suber put it in early 2006, “Congress asked for a strong policy and NIH delivered a weak one.” NIH also noted that 100% compliance—all NIH-funded papers being deposited in PubMed in a timely fashion—would cost $15 million, a tiny portion of NIH’s $28 billion budget.
- Slowly, ever so slowly, Congress and the NIH started moving from the ineffectual request for deposit to a requirement, a mandate.
- That mandate was finally achieved, in an omnibus spending bill signed in late December 2007—still with up to a year’s embargo, but with a requirement for PubMed deposit. Initial indications are that the mandate is working: A much higher percentage of NIH-funded papers are showing up in PubMed, sooner or later.

There were ever so many different attacks during that 3.5-year period. I suspect PRISM and the DC Coalition both have more to do with NIH than anything else. Still, after a very long period, a very modest mandate (that the public should eventually be able to see the results of the research it has paid for) became real.

So the publishers started using different tactics.

**NIH’s acid test (and Surprise!)**

Two posts by Dorothea Salo on Caveat lector on July 15 and 16, 2008 respectively (cavlec.yarinareth.net), with additional material from July 15, 2008 and July 19, 2008 posts at Open access news. The story involves the NIH mandate and the American Psychological Association—and a more direct publisher pushback than most of us had seen previously.

Here’s what Salo excerpts from the APA policy statement as of July 15 (NOT-OD-08-033 is the NIH deposit policy):

Authors publishing in APA or EPF journals should NOT deposit, personally and directly, Word documents of APA-accepted manuscripts or...
APA-published articles in PubMed Central (PMC) or any other repository. As the copyright holder, APA will make necessary deposits after formal acceptance by the journal editor and APA.

In compliance with NOT-OD-08-033, APA will deposit the final peer-reviewed manuscript of NIH-funded research to PMC upon acceptance for publication. The deposit fee of $2,500 per manuscript for 2008 will be billed to the author's university per NIH policy. Deposit fees are an authorized grant expense. The article will also be available via PsycARTICLES.

Salo's summary:

If you want to comply with the law demanding deposit in PubMed Central for an article we're publishing, you pay us $2500. Do not complain, do not pass go, do not deposit the article yourself (which is free). She calls this the acid test for NIH, and says that unless NIH acts, other publishers will set similar fees. "There's no risk in it for them until you create one." Peter Suber came down hard on the APA decision, saying, among other things:

No author or author-sponsor should ever have to pay a fee to deposit an article in an OA repository... [The NIH] certainly doesn't require publishers to charge fees. The APA is simply being dishonest when it says that it will bill its fee to universities "per NIH policy"... The foulness of this policy wouldn't matter if NIH-funded authors simply steered clear of APA journals...

And here's where it gets interesting. One day later, the APA statement was gone. In its place:

A new document deposit policy of the American Psychological Association (APA) requiring a publication fee to deposit manuscripts in PubMed Central based on research funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is currently being re-examined and will not be implemented at this time. This policy had recently been announced on APA's Web site. APA will soon be releasing more detailed information about the complex issues involved in the implementation of the new NIH Public Access Policy.

APA will continue to deposit NIH-funded manuscripts on behalf of authors in compliance with the NIH Public Access Policy.

Salo's comment:

I hear through the grapevine that librarians were going to faculty who edit APA journals and asking whether they liked what they saw. If that worked, which is admittedly still to be determined, it suggests that such outreach should be standard procedure in cases like this. Find the
editors on your campus, lay out what’s going on, ask whether it’s all
right by them.

A few days later, Suber discussed the “new interim policy”—which is
spelled out in a little more detail on the current site. To wit, APA will
deposit the final peer-reviewed Word document (not the published
article) for NIH-funded research “at the appropriate time,” presumably
after a year—but will deposit the published article immediately for re-
search funded by Wellcome Trust…but then, Wellcome is paying
$4,000 per article for that immediate access.

It’s unfortunate (but predictable) that Stevan Harnad saw this as
another excuse to attack the NIH mandate because it uses PubMed
rather than institutional repositories—as always, Harnad sees One
True Way and does his best to strike down any heresy, no matter the
damage to open access as a whole. (Harnad appears to defend
APA’s action—and accepts APA’s assurance that it didn’t say what it
explicitly said in the July 15 statement, withdrawing its former “green OA” poli-
cy for NIH-funded articles.)

This was a sideshow—an instructive sideshow and one that might
show the power of concerted action by scholars, but a sideshow none-
theless. This year’s main event came in September 2008…

All the notes that follow come from a series of posts at Peter Suber’s
Open access news for September 5, 2008 through September 16, 2008
(www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/), although some of those posts cite other
sources. The full series of posts and other linked items tell the story in
far more detail than I’ll offer here.

Publishers go to Congress to undo the NIH policy

Suber quotes extensively from a September 5 story by Andrew Alba-
inese at Library Journal. Excerpts:

In less than a week…the Subcommittee on Courts, the Internet, and In-
tellectual Property of the House of Representatives’ Judiciary Committee
is scheduled to hold a hearing on what sources tell LJ is a legislative at-
tempt to redress publishers’ concerns that public access policies —
namely the recently enacted policy at the National Institutes of Health
(NIH)— conflict with copyright and intellectual property laws…

The legislative hearing comes after publishers succeeded in adding a
key phrase to the NIH public access mandate just before the bill’s pas-
sage in December, 2007—that the NIH policy be implemented “in a
manner consistent with copyright law.” As LJ reported then, that simple
phrase appeared to position publishers for a possible legal or legislative challenge to the policy.

In recent months, the possibility of a legal or legislative challenge began to seem almost certain...

Anticipating such a challenge, officials at SPARC and the Association of Research Libraries, however, have strongly denied that the NIH public access policy conflicts with copyright, last year preparing a memo of their own...

Suber links to a current SPARC analysis of the NIH policy and copyright law (www.arl.org/sparc/bm-doc/nihpolicy_copyright_july2008.pdf). He notes careful wording in one of the anti-NIH complaints—not that the policy actually infringes copyright (it doesn’t) but that it infringes a right publishers don't have for NIH-funded research. Here's part of Suber's rewording of publisher complaints:

“OK, the policy doesn't violate the letter of copyright law, but it violates the spirit, which is that our ability to profit from research we didn't conduct, write up, or fund should not be put at risk just so that publicly-funded research can be made more useful, by reaching everyone who can make use of it, or just so that taxpayers don't have to pay twice for access... [T]he spirit of copyright law is that [authors] should transfer all of their rights to publishers. We've grown to depend on it... The government should protect us from risks created by new new and better ways of doing things. It violates the spirit of copyright law for a government agency like the NIH to put the taxpayers' interests ahead of our private interests as an industry.”

**The bill and the hearing**

The Fair Copyright in Research Works Act (HR 6845) was introduced on September 9 and the subcommittee held a hearing on September 11. Briefly, the bill would prevent any mandate similar to the NIH policy for any “extrinsic work”—which appears to mean not only any research funded in any part by anybody other than the Federal government, but also any research where there's “meaningful added value” from anybody other than Federal agencies. It's not just NIH; it's any Federal agency—and it pretty much eliminates those agencies’ rights to require access licenses.

Suber's initial take is that the bill didn't seem likely to be passed this year, given elections and all—but it's a “stalling tactic” that diverts OA energy and could “change the narrative” so that media and policymakers talk about “changes in copyright” rather than increases in access.
One blogger (Karen Rustad) may have gotten it in one as to why this bill even earned a hearing, given that the NIH mandate involves contract law and doesn’t at all affect copyright:

The only reason this has even made it to public comment (I think) is a bunch of representatives feeling slighted because a bill passed Congress without going through their committee (the Subcommittee on Courts, the Internet, and IP—the measure was part of an Appropriations bill, so it went through that committee). The grumbling at the opening of the session about how important their committee is, prestige of the Appropriations committee be damned, rah rah rah, I think bears this out. So the representatives have been receptive to the patently ridiculous argument that the NIH mandate changed copyright law and, thus, should have fallen under their purview.

The subcommittee involved includes “Hollywood Howard” Berman, who I’ve mentioned in various copyright-related contexts, and Rep. Conyers (who introduced the bill and is also fairly consistently in favor of increasing the reach of copyright under all circumstances). No party issues here: extreme copyright advocates are on both sides of that line.

Later that day, another OAN post notes statements from our friends the DC Principles Coalition and AAP’s PSP division and from the Copyright Alliance. An excerpt from the DCPC/PSP letter:

A recent congressional mandate at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) forces publishers to surrender their copyrighted scientific journal articles for free public access twelve months after publication and sets a dangerous precedent. This mandate in effect reduces copyright protection for this important class of works to only one year…

It does no such thing, to be sure, but that’s never bothered these groups.

The letter from Patrick Ross of the Copyright Alliance is worse:

The mere fact that a scientist accepts as part of her funding a federal grant should not enable the federal government to commande the resulting research paper and treat it as a public domain work….T]aking the scientist’s copyrighted interpretation of the data is not fair to other funders, and it is certainly not fair to the publisher. A publisher improves the work through a rigorous peer review process and develops it for publication. Authors and publishers don’t need the feds playing Rumpelstiltskin by returning after a year to take their children away.

That publisher has earned the right as a copyright owner to pursue a return on his investment, a pursuit made more difficult when its copyright term is essentially reduced to one year.
As Suber notes, “surrender” is a dishonest description, and indeed the NIH policy has no effect on the published version. Suber traces “surrender” back to PRISM and its “dishonest advocacy.” But Suber also notes “commandeer” as an escalation of rhetorical excess (noting “It would be at least as accurate to say that the traditional publishing model commandeers publicly-funded research, and holds it for ransom”) and the deceptive use of “public domain.”

Still later on September 11, Suber posted excerpts from stories on the hearing in *Library Journal Academic Newswire*, quoting some interesting notes from statements. Allan Adler (AAP) says “government does not fund peer-reviewed journal articles—publishers do.” That’s wonderful sophistry, since what publishers fund is the copy-editing and markup (most peer review is done for free), not either the research that led to the articles or the writing of the articles themselves. When a SPARC representative noted that peer review is done for free, with the main cost to publishers being “sending some emails,” Martin Frank of the American Physiological Society made a rather astonishing statement. He said APS spent $13 million a year to publish 14 journals (I wonder whether that’s expenses or revenues, but never mind) and that “sending those emails” accounts for about 20% of the publishing costs—or $2.6 million a year. Man, that’s a lot of email, or a lot of something. In his statement, he also said “The NIH has become a publisher.”

The copyright office came in on the side of the publishers. Ralph Oman said that in his opinion the NIH mandate would “destroy the market” for commercial scientific journals (which should be entirely out of his domain) and cause a “dilution” of copyright. He even referred to “the hairy snout” of government, saying it should be kept out of science publishing—but, oddly, nobody seems to think that NIH should keep its “hairy snout” out of research itself, which costs many times as much as the publishing (NIH figures $300,000 per article). A SPARC representative and the head of NIH both defended the mandate—and the SPARC executive director offered a personal anecdote, noting that her five-year-old son was diagnosed with diabetes and she was able to access worthwhile information thanks to NIH’s policy.

**Stuff from September 12**

There was a lot of activity the day after the hearing—OAN has seven posts throughout the day, some of them citing multiple sources. A few highlights, if that’s the right word:
A Chronicle of Higher Education report uses dramatic terms: “A life-and-death battle is going on over public access to federally financed research—life for taxpayers and many scientists, and death for publishers. Or so each side claims....” The writer notes who’s missing from the hearing: Scientists—but 33 Nobel Prize winners submitted an open letter calling the publishers’ move “wrong” and NIH’s policy “enlightened.” Martin Frank is quoted saying “Articles should not be taken from those of us responsible for their creation”—which is an interesting way to put it, since naïve citizens might assume that researchers create the articles, not journals. (Suber calls Frank’s claim “breathtakingly one-sided.”)

The American Chemical Society explicitly supported what was now being called the “Conyers bill.” The writeup on this story makes it clear that all peer-reviewed articles would be “extrinsic work” even if the research is wholly funded by Federal agencies—because the peer review and publication process represents non-government funding. Neat.

Science Magazine covered the hearing, noting that NIH says compliance has risen to 56%. The report includes a statement from Jonathan Band (representing ALA) noting the bill’s sweeping provisions as a fatal flaw—and this startling pair of sentences: “Representative John Conyers (D–MI)...questioned the need for the policy when the public can already obtain the papers through a subscription or at a library. Moreover, most journals make their content free after 12 months.” If the second sentence is true, there is no plausible reason for journals to object to the NIH mandate; the first is the kind of “let them eat cake” argument you wouldn’t expect from a Michigan Democrat, and ignores the fact that “a library” really only means some larger university libraries in all too many cases.

The American Association of University Presses, AAUP, sent a letter favoring the Conyers bill. The letter’s heavy on the phony “diminishing copyright” claim and, frankly, brings nothing new to the table. Later, the executive director of Rockefeller University Press wrote to disagree with AAUP’s stance and say the press “strongly opposes your efforts to overturn the NIH mandate.”

A piece in Government Executive clarifies the turf warfare at play—Conyers’ outrage that the House Appropriations Committee didn’t consult with his subcommittee before “pushing through” the mandate (after a mere three years of discussion and feedback).
That piece says Howard Berman did not publicly endorse the bill—and a sidebar suggests that he might actually oppose it. (Suber notes that, since the NIH mandate has nothing to do with copyright, there was no reason for the Appropriations Committee to consult Conyers’ group. You think?)

-Apparently, Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R-VA) has an interesting idea: NIH should only post unreviewed articles to PubMed Central with a disclaimer. I didn’t say it was a good idea—and this was a case where Martin Frank and NIH’s Zerhouni actually agreed the move would be unfortunate (“disastrous” was Frank’s term), given the high rate of rejections in scientific journals.

- A post by Michael Carroll notes that the Conyers bill would do more than reverse the NIH mandate: It would implicitly amend existing law and repeal longstanding contractual provisions for Federal contracts. He notes that a group of 47 law professors, all copyright specialists, sent the committee a letter noting that there’s no basis for the claim that NIH’s mandate is inconsistent with copyright. The letter notes that the NIH mandate is part of its funding contracts, not a copyright issue—and that the author chooses to accept NIH funding (and the contract) long before a publisher can enter the picture, so it’s not possible for the mandate to take intellectual property away from the publisher.

The close—for now

By September 16, it was fairly clear that the Conyers bill wasn’t going anywhere for now. A Library Journal Academic Newswire report quotes Howard Berman saying the bill would be held “until at least next year.”

Over the following days, some of the letters to the House panel and other reactions popped up. A group of mostly library folks (AALL, ALA, ACRL, ARL, Public Knowledge, SLA, SPARC and others) noted the worth of the NIH policy and clarified that it did not affect copyright law (enclosing the SPARC policy brief noted earlier).

Ars Technica had its usual lively (and frequently dead-on) reporting, including Howard Berman’s apparent shock when Elias Zerhouni informed him that NIH “hands out $100 million a year to grant recipients specifically to cover the cost of publishing their results” (remember: a higher percentage of toll-access journals charge author-side fees than do open access journals), supposed “surprise…that authors were not paid by publishers for the transfer of copyright,” and this:
If anyone was thinking that policies related to publicly funded scientific research were free of politicking and rampant self-interest so frequently involved in the copyright and intellectual property battles, the hearings would have erased them....

Paul Courant compared the Conyers bill to the Clear Skies Act, “an odious piece of corporate welfare wrapped up in a friendly layer of doublespeak,” noting:

It would make it illegal for U.S. government agencies to seek any rights at all in the research that they fund. This is anything but fair. Indeed, it is manifestly unfair to the taxpayers who ultimately pay for the research, and on whose behalf the research is conducted...

The people of the United States pay good money to learn about the world. It would be a travesty if Congress decided that the interests of a few publishers were more important than the research investments of the American public, and that’s exactly what this bill would do.

There was lots more—almost all of it decrying the Conyers bill. But it’s never really over. The Alliance for Taxpayer Action called on citizens to contact their Representatives and Senators to make sure HR6845—and the provisions in the bill—are defeated. The call (quoted at OAN on September 18, 2008) spells out what’s wrong with the Conyers bill. A comment notes that the language of the bill could still be inserted into other legislation.

Other Opposition

Let’s look at some other opposition to open access (or commentaries on opposition) over the last year or so.

Death knell for peer review?

Richard Poynder published “Open access: death knell for peer review?” on October 15, 2006 on his blog, Open and shut? (poynder.blogspot.com) It is, as with most of Poynder’s solid journalism, a carefully done, thoughtful and fairly long piece. (Well, not C&I long, but long for a blog post.)

He notes the argument made by publishers that OA threatens peer review. He considers the two forms of OA: “green” OA, where the published paper is in a traditional journal with traditional peer review—and “gold” OA, where the paper is in an OA journal...with traditional peer review.
Since both methods still require that papers are peer reviewed, OA advocates point out, publisher claims that making research OA necessitates foregoing the peer review process is factually inaccurate.

I'm not really an OA advocate—at least not a strong one—and I have never been able to find any truth in assertions that OA would weaken peer review.

There is, however, a second strand to publishers' claims that OA threatens peer review. If OA is forced on them, they say, they will not be able to survive financially, either because they will discover that there is no stable long-term business model for OA publishing, or because the increasing number of papers researchers post in institutional repositories will cause academic institutions to cancel their journal subscriptions. This poses a threat to peer review, they add, since if publishers exit the market there will be no one left to manage the process.

However, these claims are also rejected by OA advocates, who argue that most publishers have already accommodated themselves to self-archiving. Indeed, they add, there is no indication at all that self-archiving negatively impacts journal subscriptions. Nor is there any reason, they say, to believe that a sustainable OA business model cannot be found.

In a way, this could settle it: There is simply no objective basis for the claim that OA would weaken peer review. But Poynder takes it one step further:

But supposing publishers are right, and OA does eventually cause peer review to be abandoned? Would it matter?

He notes objections to the conservatism of peer review and even publisher statements calling the process flawed.

In fact, it seems that the most that can be said of peer review is that we have failed to come up with anything better. Following the decision by *Science* to retract papers it had published by Dr Hwang Woo-suk — after it was discovered that he had faked claims that he had obtained stem cells from cloned human embryos — for instance, publications consultant Liz Wager said of peer review “it's a lousy system but it's the best one we have.”

Poynder then notes moves by some publishers to “open review,” where the names of the reviewers would be known to authors, and the “more radical approach” of *PLoS ONE*, where papers undergo a less rigorous peer review and are subject to post-publication review on the web.

*PLoS ONE* referees are asked to answer a simpler question than that asked by traditional peer review. That question is: “Has the science in
this paper been done well enough to warrant it being entered into the scientific literature as a whole?"

But you can be even more radical—as in Philica:

Philica has no editors, and papers are published immediately on submission—without even a cursory review process. Instead, the entire evaluation process takes place after publication, with reviews displayed at the end of each paper.

As such, the aim of the review process is not to decide whether or not to publish a paper, but to provide potential readers with guidance on its importance and quality, and so enabling particularly popular or unpopular works to be easily identified.

Importantly, argues Philica, its approach means that reviewers cannot suppress ideas if they disagree with them.

The evaluation process involved “recursively weighted reviews.” Unlike PLoS ONE, there are no author-side fees, since overhead is nominal. (Philica uses a filter: Only academics are allowed to submit reviews.)

There’s a lot more to Poynder’s 4,200-word post. Worth reading.

Hearing from IASTM

The International Association of Scientific, Technical & Medical Publishers (www.stm-assoc.org) represents the biggest STM journal publishers and some others. Last October, it published a position paper on why publishers seek copyright transfer: “to ensure proper administration & enforcement of author rights.”

That’s right: It’s not for the publisher, it’s for the author. Bullets point out that authors “are rarely in a position to defend themselves against infringers, plagiarists, pirates and free-riders” and that everyone benefits from the broadest possible dissemination (which, IASTM claims, is facilitated by “the publisher”). There are other possible benefits, some probably legitimate (although some, such as subsidiary rights management, simply do not require turning over the copyright—I say as the author of several books and many articles where I did not turn over copyright but did authorize the publisher to handle subsidiary rights).

I suspect most scholars who write journal articles aren’t too worried about copyright infringements, “pirates” or “free riders”—they’re not getting paid for the articles anyway. They want dissemination, impact and credit: Plagiarism is indeed a concern. Has IASTM or any publisher ever provided proof that they’ve acted to prevent plagiarism? If so, this claim might be more meaningful. As for broadest possible dissemina-
tion—well, it simply beggars belief to claim that a closed arrangement (turning over copyright) results in broader dissemination than, say, a typical freelance writer’s contract (for which the writer is paid) or true OA. I can post all of my paid magazine columns, for free, a year after they’re published—because I hold copyright and assigned typical freelance rights to the publisher.

In April 2008, the organization published An Overview of Scientific, Technical and Medical Publishing and the Value it adds to Research Outputs, a 16-page treatise. You can download it from IASTM’s website.

It's an interesting piece of work. I'm surprised to see publishers suddenly claiming they provide preservation services; that's not something STM publishers have traditionally seen as their purview. Nonetheless, the benefits section seems good. Then we get to “There is no publishing ‘for free’” and some tricky commentary. Somehow, the full costs of “editorial office management systems” become assigned to peer review management and we’re told that editorial work within universities is typically charged back to publishers.

Then there’s “STM Publishers and the Goal of Open Access.” Right off the bat, OA is called a “visionary goal” and IASTM asserts a rigid set of required characteristics for any new business models—some of which essentially says “we have to make our money, no matter what.” They throw out fairly high numbers for the costs of IRs—and when there's a firm statement, as from NIH, they undermine it with something like “it is widely believed that their estimates of current and projected costs may be a considerable underestimate and do not include important elements such as staff time.” The source? “It is widely believed.” They headline the ARL Spec Kit that found one startup cost estimate as high as $1.8 million—the extreme end of a range gets the featured number.

The piece goes on to argue against systematic or interlinked self-archiving—in other words, green OA is fine as long as it’s wholly ineffectual. We’re also informed that embargo limits are unacceptable because they don't fully secure subscription revenues (while, in a nicely ironic touch, also not fully realizing the OA goal of immediate availability).

Maybe I'm misinterpreting. Maybe this is an objective overview of the topic—not a nicely done case of special pleading against any effective form of OA and for assured profits. I just find it hard to read that way.
The science and the say-so

I've generally avoided commenting on Joseph Esposito's writing. I slipped twice—once in September 2004, discussing a First Monday article, and again in Spring 2006 only because his article was part of the return of Journal of Electronic Publishing. His articles consistently make me so angry, because of the writing and ideas, that I'm never sure I can comment on them in a reasonable fashion—so I've learned to not read them, even if they're in journals I otherwise respect (like JEP, for example).

Alma Swan doesn't have that privilege, particularly since Esposito mentions her work in some of his writing. She wrote this post on December 21, 2007 in OptimalScholarship (optimalscholarship.blogspot.com), responding in part to a post on Esposito's blog.

In one case, Esposito states that OA proponents imply that librarians are stupid—because some proponents say libraries won't necessarily cancel subscriptions to journals whose contents are available via OA.

But that misses the point: we say that cancellations won't necessarily occur because that is what we observe, in real life. It is true that it is somewhat perplexing and seems to fly in the face of logic. Why would you, in these days of straitened circumstances for libraries, continue to pay for a journal whose articles are available for nothing?

I'll admit I also find this perplexing—and don't believe it to be likely for the long run. Still, the example is clear enough: arXiv has contained the contents of many journals in some fields of physics for 15 years, and the journals haven't seen mass cancellations. (Swan points out that arXiv isn't just preprints: More than half of the articles are postprints.)

There are a number of straightforward reasons...for preferring to continue to subscribe to journals—journals are more than just articles and contain other types of content that people want to read; they contain the final polished-up versions of articles whereas OA versions are simply the author's final product; there is no guarantee that every article from a journal will be made OA by its author. Some of these may not hold up forever. We will start to see which journals have true added value—that is, something that customers will pay for—and which are just a collection of articles: the marketplace will reveal that. There are also other reasons, ones not so straightforward and certainly not so easy to describe. They are to do with allegiances to certain publishers, particularly specific society publishers who are viewed as 'the good guys' and thus worthy of loyalty; they are to do, partly, with the sorts of deals that publishers are prepared to offer in every individual case; and then they
are very much to do with the views of faculty, without which no librarian makes a final decision on what to cut and what to reprieve. And faculty have very strong views on these things, not all of them based on logic or evidence. Even high-energy physicists have feelings.

Then there’s a statistic, one Esposito belittles. It came from a 2003 study commissioned by JISC and included a “What would you do…” question of the sort Swan prefers not to ask. The question was what respondents would do if their employer or funder required them to make their work open access, and there were three options: Comply willingly, comply reluctantly or not comply.

Here’s Esposito’s comment:

It was found that 81% of researchers say that they would comply with mandates. Now, what does this prove exactly? More than 81% of Americans comply for the most part with the U.S. Tax Code, but that is hardly indicative of support for the current administration or the way monies are spent. What it does reveal is a healthy respect for the punitive powers of The Man. In OA circles, however, a forecast compliance with a mandate is viewed as the equivalent of democratic support.

But, as Swan points out, one rule when using the work of others is to be accurate in citing that work. In fact, the results were that 81% said they would comply willingly. Another 14% said they would comply reluctantly. (Five percent said they would not comply.) So Esposito’s comment only makes sense if he uses 95%, not 81%.

Swan agrees that the survey only provides a starting point. Where’s the testing? Turns out that’s been done too, by Arthur Sale, measuring the amount of material being deposited in Australian university repositories under different conditions. The results were as predicted.

There’s another long section having to do with the “open access advantage”—the likelihood that OA will enhance visibility, access and citations—but you’ll have to go read Swan’s post (and Esposito’s) to see what’s going on there.

The American Chemical Society and Open Access

That’s the title of a Viewpoint by Bob Michaelson (Northwestern) in the Winter 2008 Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship, one of ALA’s first gold OA publications (www.istl.org). It’s short and clear, and well worth reading. Michaelson isn’t a hot-blooded OA supporter; he even says “it is not yet clear how Open Access (OA) publishing may find a business model.” But he recognizes its importance and says, “We must therefore sustain a serious conversation among all players—researchers,
funding agencies, libraries, and publishers--about potential implications, both beneficial and detrimental, of various sorts of OA.”

Unfortunately, serious conversation is ill-served by some publishers’ strategies, including, regrettably, those pursued by the American Chemical Society.

Editorials in Chemical & Engineering News as far back as 2004 denounced OA as “socialized science”—whatever that is supposed to mean. In 2005 Nobel Laureate Richard J. Roberts published an open letter announcing his resignation from ACS out of disgust at the Society’s opposition to OA.

Michaelson’s particular scorn is reserved for the Dezenhall episode—AAP/PSP’s hiring of the aggressive PR man, his advice that they focus on slogans (regardless of truth), the founding of PRISM and the disavowal of PRISM by several leading university presses.

If the ACS regrets its association with PRISM’s misstatements, they don’t show it. After a long legislative fight, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) was able to secure passage of a mandate on open access for NIH-funded research within a year of publication… But as reported in LJ Academic Newswire, the ACS threatens a legal battle. Executive Director Madeleine Jacobs makes the claim, according to Chemistry World, that “the policy would result in conflicts with copyright law and intellectual property rights,” resurrecting the claim that it could “interfere with scientific peer review” and adding that it would “adversely affect the sustainability of scientific journals.” It seems to me that all of these claims are nonsense. LJ Academic Newswire notes that the library community refuted ACS’s copyright claim in July 2007. As Peter Suber has repeatedly discussed, peer review is entirely compatible with open access.

If the ACS is to be a party to discussions of OA, they must stop getting their policy advice from PR flacks and start making rational contributions to the discourse. Otherwise they will continue to poison the waters, and deservedly will be accorded no credence.

An excellent commentary. Will ACS pay attention? That seems unlikely, based on a long track record.

**Difficulties and Extremes**

I’ll close with a few other items on difficulties and extremes, with the hope that the next episode of LIBRARY ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP can focus more on the positives—such as considerable growth in OA publishing.
Open access fundamentalism

Another one from Alma Swan’s *OptimalScholarship*, this time posted May 7, 2007. (She doesn’t post that often—so far, 11 posts in 2007 and three in 2008—but when she does, she has something worthwhile to say.) This post was the very first post on the blog, and is far more than an “I’m here!” announcement.

Basically, Swan says she’s arrived because an Outsell person has called her “a fundamentalist” and “shrill.” “And what they say is that if people who disagree with you start calling you names, then they are taking you seriously.” (I’ll have to remember that.)

Now first, let me say that I really like the ‘fundamentalist’ bit. I have always strived to avoid the superficial, speculative and emotional end of the spectrum and to base the views that I hold on facts, so far as I am able. So yes, I do fundamentalism. The ‘shrill’ label sits less easily, though.

That’s an interesting reading of “fundamentalist,” and I rather like it. She notes that the Outsell person, David Worlock, was critiquing an invited essay Swan wrote for *American Scientist* on how OA can advance science. What made her essay shrill?

I was asked in my essay to define the ways in which Open Access advances science and there I was, thinking that I’d done so in moderated terms, supporting each point I was making with good data and reasoned argument. I detailed four ways in which science is advanced by Open Access: it enables greater visibility and, as a result, impact; it moves science along more quickly; it enables new ‘Web 2.0’ semantic technologies to work on scientific output, generating new knowledge by data-mining and text-mining scientific output in the vast single information space that Open Access provides; and it enables new tools that can measure impact and effectiveness in brand new ways, a boon to research managers and funders across the world.

Apparently Worlock claims publishers will do OA better: “As publishers move to contain, embrace and even capitalise on the access and availability issues, they are doing so in ways that save time and energy for researchers whose concentration is upon the science involved, and its communication to small, close-knit communities of fellow workers whom they reach at conferences and via e-mail links.” Of course, OA is about far more than those close-knit communities; emailed preprint copies can pretty much handle them. OA is about open access, not just access for the inner circle.
Swan portrays Worlock as suggesting that gold OA is nearly stagnant, which is certainly not true. She also notes a cute finish to Worlock’s article, where he says you can obtain Swan’s article for $12 if you’re not a member of the society. Which is true—but omits the fact that the article is also available in HTML form for free (and always has been), that it’s available on her institution’s IR, that it’s on her consultancy’s website...all for free. “Must have just slipped his memory.”

So, of course, I had to go read Swan’s article to test for signs of shrillness. You could read it also: www.keyperspectives.co.uk/openaccess-archive/Journalpublications/American_Scientist_article.pdf.

Whether I read charitably, closely, or with intent to do damage—I will be damned if I can find anything shrill, unreasonable or even particularly opinionated in the article. It’s rife with proof for claims and has a remarkable amount of data for such a short piece. But shrill? I’m sorry, but I just don’t see it.

“open access” is not good enough

That’s how Peter Murray-Rust titled a June 10, 2007 post at petermr’s blog (wwwm.ch.cam.ac.uk). Excerpts:

I have ranted at regular intervals about the use of “Open Access” or often “open access” as a term implying more than it delivers. My current concern is that although there are are tens of thousands of theses described as “open access” I have only discovered 3 (and possibly another 15 today) that actually comply with the BOAI definition of Open Access. The key point is is that unless a thesis (or any publication) explicitly carries a license (or possibly a site meta-license) actually stating that it is BOAI compliant, then I cannot re-use it. I shall use “OpenAccess” to denote BOAI-compliant in this post and “open access” to mean some undefined access which may only allow humans to read but not re-use the information I do not wish to disparage the important efforts to making scholarly information more widely available, and I applaud the general direction and achievement of the groups below. I appreciate that the copyright of historical content normally is held by the student author and it’s certainly very valuable to have “access” to it. But it is not OpenAccess. And unless specific policies are put in place to add specific BOAI-compliant licenses then future theses will also be non-compliant...

By contrast let’s look at “Open Source” which applies to software and has been highly successful in liberating the field. It’s very widely used in academia and elsewhere...
In general the term “Open Source” is completely self-explanatory within a large community. I can describe my software as OS and everyone understands what I mean. There are some licenses (e.g. GPL) which require additional freedoms but they don’t invalidate the above. By contrast if someone describes something as “open access” it simply means that I may--as a human--and at some arbitrary time in human history--read the document. It does not guarantee that I can save my own copy, that it will be available next week, that it will be unaltered in the future or that versions will be tracked, that I can create derivative works, that I can use machines to text- or data-mine it.

So I believe that “open access” should be recast as “toll-free”--i.e. you do not have to pay for it but there are no other guarantees. We should restrict the use of “Open Access” to documents which explicitly carry licenses compliant with BOAI.

Peter Suber responded in some detail, and the recent suggestion of “gratis” and “libre” may relate to this confusion. The problem here is attempting to narrow OA to include only completely reusable material. For the purposes most often touted by OA supporters—universal access to research papers, greater impact, etc.—open readability is the key. Data mining is a much different issue—and, interestingly, Stevan Harnad (who commented basically saying that Murray-Rust should go ahead and do some of the things he believes to be ruled out) rejects derivative works as part of OA.

Murray-Rust is “arguing that the level of emphasis throughout the community should be higher.” That’s fine, but it raises the question of whether the best, in this case, is the enemy of the good. Insisting on the right to datamine and to create derivative works, and the insistence others have added that commercial reuse shouldn’t be limited, leaves only attribution between OA and the public domain—and with datamining, I have to wonder about attribution.

The proposed distinction between gratis OA and libre OA (discussed in C&I 8:8, August 2008) may not quite achieve Murray-Rust’s aims—but it avoids the considerable harm to OA as a movement that could come from saying you can’t call it Open Access unless all permission barriers are removed.

Open, online journals ≠ PDF?

To some extent, this is a related item—Andy Powell’s August 6, 2007 post at eFoundations (efoundations.typepad.com/efoundations/). Since
Powell’s blog has an explicit CC “BY” license and it’s a concise post, I’m quoting the entire post:

I note that Volume 2, Number 1 of the *International Journal of Digital Curation* (IJDC) has been announced with a healthy looking list of peer-reviewed articles. Good stuff.

I mention this partly because I helped set up the technical infrastructure for the journal using the Open Journal System, an open source journal management and publishing system developed by the Public Knowledge Project, while I was still at UKOLN--so I have a certain fondness for it.

Odd though, for a journal that is only ever (as far as I know) intended to be published online, to offer the articles using PDF rather than HTML. Doing so prevents any use of lightweight ‘semantic’ markup within the articles, such as microformats, and tends to make re-use of the content less easy.

In short, choosing to use PDF rather than HTML tends to make the content less open than it otherwise could be. That feels wrong to me, especially for an open access journal! One could just about justify this approach for a journal destined to be published both on paper and online (though even in that case I think it would be wrong) but surely not for an online-only ‘open’ publication?

I use PDF for *Cites & Insights* to preserve typographic and layout integrity. I suspect journal publishers may do the same—and that, as with *Cites & Insights*, their layout and work flow may yield perfect PDFs readily, where workable HTML/XML might take quite a bit more effort. Indeed, the first comment (from Dorothea Salo) suggests that point: “Go find ‘em a workflow that produces good HTML as well as PDF, and I’m sure they’ll sign right on.”

BioMed Central notes that they use both PDF and HTML—and that more than 90% of accesses to full-text articles are for the PDF versions. Cornelius Puschmann offers a long comment coming to PDF’s defense for several good reasons: e.g., HTML’s interpreted nature “gives you a virtual guarantee that it will render incorrectly in somebody’s browser,” printing HTML is still horribly inconsistent, PDF is arguably more portable for complex documents, insisting that online journals should shun PDFs “means giving readers less reliability when it comes to printing and file mobility”—and there are lighter-weight PDF readers than Adobe. (My feeling is that Reader 8 is much less demanding than earlier versions.) Others come to PDF’s defense as well—including an OA journal editor who notes the extra time re-
quired to convert manuscripts to HTML. That editor notes that most readers appear to want PDFs.

I must admit that it pains me to see the number of times the rare full-issue essays in *Cites & Insights* are downloaded in HTML rather than PDF, because I suspect they’re getting printed—and they use at least 50% more print space in HTML form. I’m still of two minds about providing HTML versions of essays, particularly since I can’t afford the time to make them as good-looking and readable as the PDF versions. Word2007’s filtered HTML is better than Word2000’s, and that was good enough for my purposes. I admire Tom Wilson’s ejournal—but I reject the idea that C&I is stone age or that my issues damage the Internet. Of course, I don’t claim full (libre) Open Access, and it’s somewhat irrelevant because these aren’t scholarly research articles.
No, I don’t believe journals are dying. I needed a snappy title for a set of topics related to access. Since these topics do relate to journals, in one case suggesting that they be replaced with a very different medium, and since “death of X” predictions seem to be all the rage….well, there it is.

Leading off with some semi-informed notions

I was thinking about the requisites for 100% success of either color of open access, setting aside for now the gratis/libre distinction. Here’s how it seems to me, noting that this may be a terribly naïve view.

- **Gold open access** (where readers can access refereed article portions of journals, from the publishers in final published form, at no cost) seems, in the long run, to require one success and one transformation: The near-universal success of gold OA journals and transforming author attitudes. As part of that success, by the way, I’m assuming some revolution in understanding actual publishing costs and reforming them. I’m assuming that charging author-side fees equivalent to the asserted “costs” of traditional journal publishing (which somehow seem to equal the total income of the journals) is not going to hack it in the long run. Transforming author attitudes? Because the biggest traditional publishers have managed to corral too many of the highest-impact journals, scholars need to look beyond the traditional impact factor when deciding on submissions.

- **Green open access** (where readers can access some version of articles from repositories at no cost) seems to require a different success and transformation: The universal success of institutional and
topical repositories—and a different (and equally difficult) transformation in author attitudes. In this case, scholars need to believe that it’s worth their time to (a) make sure they have the rights to deposit papers in repositories and (b) take steps to do so.

Gratuitous statements by OA advocates to undermine topical-repository mandates and suggest that institutional repositories don’t cost anything to establish and operate don’t get us there—but help assure that we never will get there. There doesn’t seem much question that IRs are in trouble; that doesn’t bode well for green OA as the only or even the primary answer. And nonsense like the reintroduced Conyers bill threatens to undermine what progress has been made on what should be the low-hanging fruit for repositories: research funded by the Federal government, which—if it was carried out in Federal labs—would automatically be in the public domain.

Lately, I’ve been trying out FriendFeed—and some of my subscriptions are librarians who subscribe to scientists. That means that, one way or another, I wind up seeing more commentary from scientists (on FriendFeed and in linked blogged posts) than I’m used to. Once in a while, it’s truly discouraging—for example, a presumably informed scientist using “open access” (in scare quotes) to mean Wikipedia-style crowdsourcing as opposed to peer review. What does that tell me? That the continuing campaign to sell the absolutely false notion that OA journals aren’t peer reviewed is working where it matters most: Among the scientists. (In an earlier FF discussion, a scholar directly said OA journals wouldn’t count until they were peer-reviewed…and wasn’t immediately corrected.)

About the Conyers bill

I’m not going to attempt general coverage of the Fair Copyright in Research Works Act, which has nothing to do with “fair copyright” and everything to do with undermining NIH on behalf of the big international publishers and their society-publishing allies.

What’s the point? Patrick Ross of the Copyright Alliance issued a thoroughly misleading statement speaking of commandeering, treating copyright works as public domain and violating publisher rights. After the hearings on the bill last year—hearings that raised important issues—Conyers reintroduced an unchanged bill, essentially ignoring all input and criticism. James Boyle wrote a charming imaginary dialogue as to how Congresscritters could ignore the combined views of Nobel
laureates, most legal scholars, empirical evidence and everything else to favor the special interests of publishers.

There are side discussions that might be fascinating to discuss—but are, in the end, distractions. As usual, Peter Suber links to most important sources of commentary on both sides (or all sides) of the issue in Open access news (www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/); searching for “Conyers” or “NIH” should yield most of the posts.

Are Print Journals Obsolete?

The first post noted here goes back a long way—to March 28, 2007, on T. Scott (tscott.typepad.com/tsp/). T. Scott Plutchak used the title “No more print?” and notes that the American Society for Cell Biology was considering discontinuing the print version of its journal and asking for feedback (in a post by Mark Leader).

Some of what ASCB said:

We welcome comments from the library community about the value of print journals and the adequacy of LOCKSS, Portico, and PubMed Central as archives of electronic journals. We are also curious about whether librarians would be interested in a print-on-demand option for obtaining archival print copies if regular print subscriptions were discontinued.

The impetus for discontinuing the print edition is a desire to reduce author charges, especially for color figures. The cost of producing the print edition greatly exceeds revenue from print subscriptions. Author charges (page charges and color charges) are the largest source of revenue for the journal. In effect, authors are subsidizing the print subscriptions.

Portions of Plutchak’s commentary:

At my institution, we’re canceling as much print as we can anyway. One of our criteria is the adequacy of the preservation/archiving plan, and I’m glad that Leader mentions several. I’ll confess to a fondness for LOCKSS, largely because of the philosophy behind it. The National Library of Medicine has a statutory responsibility to preserve the biomedical literature, and I have a great deal of confidence in PubMed as a perpetual archive. I’m not as familiar with Portico, but it seems to be pretty promising. My advice to ASCB would be to participate in all of them. We’re still early enough into all of this that we don’t know what the best long-term solution will be.

We’re also concerned with perpetual rights to material should we ever end our subscription/license altogether. The notion of offering a print-on-demand option for archival copies is an intriguing one, although not one
that I think we'd avail ourselves of here. As Leader points out further on in his message, ASCB considers the online journal to be the journal of record anyway and “[m]ore than 60% of the articles include supplemental data or videos online.” I’m not sure why someone would want to keep archival copies of the print issue under those circumstances…

We certainly don’t need to keep the print to satisfy our user base. Two years ago we stopped getting any print for our ScienceDirect titles. I did not get a single question, comment, or expression of concern from faculty or students. We’ve reached the point where librarians tend to worry a lot more about the print than the people who use our libraries do…

The rest of the post has to do with the low institutional prices for the journal (at the time, $578 per year for online access to about 5,400 pages per year) and why open access advocates lump publications such as this into an “all-or-nothing approach to open access.” I won’t get into that discussion here—and, in fact, I agree that any move to 100% gold OA should end with low-cost society journals, not begin with them.

I’m including this here because it’s clear that, for this class of journal in Plutchak’s library (and doubtless many others like it), print has become an anachronism—but there do need to be reliable preservation mechanisms, including LOCKSS. (Based on the rest of the post from Leader, the print version of the online journal was substantially incomplete in any case.)

ASCB made the decision: In 2008, the print version disappeared—and in 2009, the journal went from monthly to twice-a-month publication, entirely online. The price? Still reasonable for its size: $514 to $714 per year, depending on category of institution.

**FO: Open access journals**

Jumping forward a year, we get this July 9, 2008 by Vernon R. Totanes (“Vonjobi”) at Filipino librarian (filipinolibrarian.blogspot.com/). The post is about several aspects of OA, but I’m excerpting portions relevant to this particular discussion.

In “Open Access in the Third World,” I predicted that “the traditional journal will eventually have to be abandoned” and that “in a Third World country like the Philippines, it is, in my opinion, the only way to go.”

That’s followed by comments on two sites listing online journals (he finds it unfortunate that there are two rather than one combined site) and a set of links from both sites with flags for those journals that make some or all articles freely available.
The message here is that, for some nations at least, online journals may be the only realistic way to publish peer-reviewed articles. For other nations and fields, print may already be a less-satisfactory alternative.

**Paul Courant on informal peer review**

Two important aspects of journals are the assertion of peer review for articles—and, for leading journals, a brand of apparent quality and importance. Take away the journal entirely and you may take away the second—but what about the first?

Paul Courant offers some clues in “On the meaning and importance of peer review,” posted sometime around October 12, 2008 on Au Courant (paulcourant.net/). (I’m not including all of his primary argument, which is that the academy, not publishers, pays nearly all the costs of peer review.) Excerpts:

Broadly, peer review is the set of mechanisms that enable scholars to have reliable access to the informed opinions of other scholars, in a way that allows that those informed opinions themselves to be subject to similar vetting.

Scholarship requires reliable and robust peer review, and the academy engages in peer review in a variety of ways, both direct and indirect. Peer reviewed publication is one method, and a fairly powerful one at that. If you read a paper in (for my field) *Econometrica* or the *Journal of Political Economy*, you are reasonably confident that accomplished scholars in the field have made a judgment that the paper is of high technical quality and worth reading, and that experienced scholars have made a judgment that the paper is of interest beyond its narrow subfield…

Similarly, the appearance of an article in a leading specialized journal, or of a monograph in a prestigious series published by a scholarly press, conveys valuable information (at least to the cognoscenti in the field) about the quality of the book or paper.

The peers who undertake the reviews are genuine peers. They are scholars whose judgment is trusted by experienced members of editorial boards, who are themselves generally senior scholars in the relevant field(s). Such people engage in peer review pretty much all the time… They could no more not provide “peer review” then they could give up reading and writing. Peer review is part and parcel of what serious scholars do.

I’d guess (and I would love to see a serious study) that the fraction of time that scholars spend engaged in formal peer review of publications—journal articles and monographs—is less than half of the time they spend on peer review in total. Moreover, the work that has traditionally been
done under the aegis of publishers is increasingly being done in other settings. In fields where it is customary to post working papers on the web, interesting papers generate a good deal of peer review in the form of commentary from peers…. Given that publication in the literal sense (making public) is now easy and cheap in the technical sense, it seems almost certain that informal review will grow relative to formal review…

A record of publication in strong peer-reviewed settings conveys valuable information to tenure and search committees, chairs, deans, and provosts. But the fact of the matter is that we pay equal attention to other reviews, including (for some fields) those required to obtain research grants, and (for some fields) post-publication reviews that appear in journals and other venues. We also take very seriously the opinions of ad hoc reviewers, inside and outside of our institutions, who prepare and evaluate the case for promotion and hiring. Take away the information conveyed by publication venue, and these tasks become more difficult, to be sure, but by no means impossible. And the essential part—close reading of the work by peer reviewers—remains intact.

That commentary may lead directly to the second subfocus of this section: Should professional journals evolve into blogs?

Why professional librarian journals should evolve into blogs

Marcus Banks argues this proposition in a February 10, 2008 post at Marcus’ world, focusing on a field that may be scholarly but usually isn’t all that scientific.

In the last few months I’ve attempted to lead the transition of the journal Biomedical Digital Libraries (BDL) from publication on BioMed Central to publication via the Open Journal Systems (OJS) platform…

Something funny happened on the way to OJS: I became firmly convinced that the traditional journal model is antiquated for sharing research and knowledge among librarians. A better course is to develop and nurture excellent blogs, with multimedia capabilities and guaranteed preservation of the postings. This could be an entirely new blog that starts from scratch, or an established journal that evolves into a blog…

My arguments:

1. As…Walt Crawford notes, blogs are among the most vibrant library literature today. I agree…and believe there is no reason why all of the rigor traditionally associated with journals could not be maintained on a blog contributed to by multiple authors.

2. Peer review should be a post-publication process, rather than a pre-publication process that sometimes drags out for many months…
The argument for pre-publication peer review is that it filters out poor research. This is a legitimate concern when the research in question is about a new and potentially deadly medical intervention. Library research is not like this; peer review can occur via community conversation.

Counter-arguments:

1. Most people will prefer to publish in established journals rather than an unestablished blog. Of course this is true, which is why the evolution to a blog paradigm would take a long time.

2. All of the supporting structures—from PubMed citations to tenure requirements—favor the traditional journal… This is certainly true now, but—ultimately—what is a scholarly journal but a means of communication among people of similar interests and backgrounds? Why can’t blogs achieve the same goals?

3. Blogs are ephemeral… The proof of the viability of a scholarly blog will be in how long it lasts. But even if the blog failed, that would be a function of a lack of commitment among the people involved…

One commenter, Jane Blumenthal, wonders whether blog authors—who might generally agree—are the same people as article writers, but supported the change: “One of my big frustrations is the gap between research or project and publication or presentation. What we read in our journals and hear at our meetings is usually at least a year old. Can we continue to afford that much time lag?”

Another, James Jacobs, sees a possible hybrid model, notes that blogs could include prepublication peer review and offers several additional arguments:

- Blogs cut down the costs of publication/distribution (and can, if one chooses, be a revenue stream with google ads, sections for highlighted vendors etc.)
- Blogs are more easily found and searchable in popular search engines
- Blogs speed up community input, which makes articles all the more interesting, lively, and contextual.
- Blogs are closer to the ideal of “scholarly communication” than paper journals with necessarily long publication cycles…

Is it really the case that open access journals aren’t readily searchable as part of Google and friends? Banks responded to prepublication review by noting that this still slows down access:

I can see no harm in getting those papers out earlier—philosophically, at least. Practically speaking, people don’t want to injure their reputations by offering up less than polished work. Who can blame them?
I’m calling for a professional shift that values speed of new ideas over polished presentation (while recognizing that the polish has a place too). This will be a long time coming, but I think it’s worth it.

Reactions

David “Medical” Rothman gathered some reactions to Banks’ post in February 12, 2008 and February 25, 2008 posts at davidrothman.net.

➢ Dean Giustini liked the idea but noted: “My only reservation is when research methods are used such as randomization and the articles would need to go through peer-review.”

➢ T. Scott Plutchak, a longtime journal editor, had reservations: “Although there is something appealing about this idea, when I think about the actual articles that I was involved in editing, I’m not at all sure that this would be a good thing… I’m not at all sure that it would be a service to the library community if all of those articles that I read through in their first iterations had simply been posted to a blog and opened up for comment. The few experiments that have been done in the last couple of years with post-publication review have not been overwhelmingly successful… Rather than providing vibrant post-publication review, I’m afraid that posting unedited articles for comment would result in much good work being buried and ignored. But the terrain continues to evolve rapidly, and the opposition of blogs to traditional journals is probably a false distinction. The traditional journal is rapidly morphing into something else, while adopting features that we associate with blogs (the ability to provide rapid responses being the most obvious)… Marcus is pushing the right questions, and everyone involved in scholarly publishing, at whatever level, should be thinking creatively about how to make the communication and discussion of projects and ideas more effective.”

➢ Banks responded to Plutchak’s post, in part: “I’m not wedded to the idea of a ‘journal as blog’ as we understand blogs now. My real hope is for much faster communication, and a recognition that some level of review can be post-publication.. ‘Peer review’ in this sense would be about improving the kernel of the original idea…The big difference is that comments would be public; to me that’s OK.”

The conversation went back and forth in one of those comment streams that’s highly thoughtful—and might undermine Plutchak’s continuing assertion that open comments “will always
draw a high proportion of junk.” With one remarkably juvenile (but brief) exception, that wasn’t the case here.

The longest response came from Rachel Walden, who is a blogger, a medical librarian and an editor at JMLA (which Plutchak formerly edited). Some of her notes (excerpted from excerpts in Rothman’s January 25, 2008 post):

I don’t see any reason why librarianship journals…should be singled out as a specialty…so I’ll talk about this more generally.

1) I believe there is value in having a final version of a manuscript on the record. Getting things out quickly isn’t the only goal in publishing a paper, or shouldn’t be. A larger goal is to contribute to the body of knowledge on a topic, in a way that can be cited and referred to and built upon in the future…

2) “The argument for pre-publication peer review is that it filters out poor research.” Marcus seems to believe that this isn’t an issue for library research, or at least that the stakes aren’t high enough to matter. I would ask whether librarians seeking tenure and professional respect are really willing to hang themselves out there like this, simply assuming that what they’ve done is good enough for public consumption. Like Scott, I believe this simply isn’t true…

3) Peer review takes work. When a committed board of peer reviewers exists with a demonstrated interest in the process and a deadline for providing feedback, and an editor does the work Scott mentions prior to publication, it is a certainty that an author will receive feedback. Blog comments are an unreliable thing…

4) Related to #3, it would be important to determine whether a manuscript was just open to whoever felt like commenting (or not), or if peer reviewers would be assigned drop by and comment. Would they be allowed to do so anonymously? Could an editor comment anonymously?...

I’m not saying it couldn’t be done. These are just a handful of issues I see as barriers that would have to be considered. Ultimately, I think part of the question is whether we’re so determined as authors to put our unfiltered thoughts out there as fast as possible, or whether we’re really interested in being accountable and on the record and contributing to the professional knowledge base in a substantial way, even if it takes a little longer…

Rothman commented on this, noting an issue with wiki pages (but versioning means you can cite a sort-of-fixed version) and continuing:

When it comes to technology topics, I think that getting the information out quickly is especially important because the technology changes so dang quickly…
I think that library technologists would probably be mostly comfortable throwing their work onto the Web for immediate criticism and would, in fact, rely on their peers to examine their work critically…

So if Marcus moves forward…I'd suggest making technology its focus…

(Rothman cited one blog as a possible example, but that hasn’t worked out very well…)

**Why blogs aren’t journals**

Dorothea Salo posted this on May 26, 2008 at *Caveat lector* (cav-lec.yarinareth.net/), after seeing a post elsewhere that harked back to Banks’ posts. Noting Banks comment, “[W]hat is a scholarly journal but a means of communication among people of similar interests and backgrounds?” Salo responded (in part):

Aha. That’s what a journal was, way back in the day. It’s not what a journal is…

Journals started because the round-robin letter-sending arrangements by which research results were communicated among gentleman scientists got to be too unwieldy to manage. They started out as pure communication vehicles. No peer review… This meant that quite a few of the articles were pure snake oil. No credentialing; gentleman scholars didn’t need credentials. No discipline boundaries, really; that had yet to shake out. Just pure, untrammeled 200-proof communication.

If this sounds like the blogosphere, especially the biblioblogosphere…well, it should. I would argue that librarianship has glommed onto the blogosphere far faster than other nominally or genuinely academic disciplines precisely because a lot of us are a lot closer to “gentleman scholars” than we are to today’s notion of an academic…

So what does that mean? Well, the gentleman-scholar eventually gave way to the professional academician, who suddenly had to defend his value in a marketplace if he wanted to get paid. So he had to mark his territory…, prove he could produce (publish-or-perish) and prove that what he produced was any damn good (peer review). All of this is fine and dandy, but it reduces the communications efficiency of the journal medium by quite a lot. It’s hard to yell out “Eureka!” in a modern journal. *By design.*

Enter the conference, the listserv, the preprint server, and yes, the blog. Just because the academy needs to puff up its CVs doesn’t mean it *doesn’t* need to communicate efficiently. Other means of communication came in to fill the void…
But there is a line, still, between the blog and the journal... Journals have beta-readers, people who read your stuff in order to help you improve it before it hits the newsstands. Blogs don't.

I once read a peer-reviewer stating that the publish/don't-publish decision was the least of his considerations as he read articles. His chief goal was to make the article better: clean up the logic, clean up the language, ask fruitful side questions, et cetera. Even at non-peer-reviewed publications, a good editor can do yeoman's work as a beta-reader...

We haven't figured out how to do beta-reading in the blogosphere yet. Until we do, that's one genuinely important way in which the blog is inferior to the journal.

It's probably not the only way. Y'all can find the arguments about long-form versus short-form blogging on your own. I do tend to think that the blog is hostile to the kind of extended argumentation that the journal article is good at...

There's one other problem with blogs as a scholarly medium that I'm frankly appalled that a passel of librarians and library-school professors didn't come up with: the scholarly record. Remember that? That thing that's supposed to outlast ephemeral thoughts and ephemeral media? That thing that allows us to check that when X writes "Y said Z," we can go back and read whether Y actually did say Z? That thing that academic libraries are partly in business to protect?

Yeah. That. A blog can disappear in a heartbeat or a DNS blip, irrespective of its quality... If pieces of the record vanishing altogether into the ether isn't bad enough for you, I know bloggers who regularly redact their stuff, for matters far more important than grammatical miscues or adding corrections. Catching them out can be quite a trick.

We haven't solved that problem, either. We've barely even made a stab at it. Until we do, blogs can't do something genuinely important that journals (pace the problems of e-journals) do: persist.

I haven't seen much more on this theme since May 2008. (It may be out there, but I haven't noticed it—and it's very difficult to search for, since the haystack of posts about blogs as personal journals hides the needle of blogs substituting for scholarly journals.)

You may notice that I didn't interleave these excerpts with a lot of commentary. That's partly because I think the discussion is an interesting sideshow in the larger circus of possible futures for scholarly journals, partly because I don't write in scholarly journals. Nor, for that matter, do I read a lot of them.

Not that I don't have some thoughts:
Blogs as article carriers would seem to be OA by default.

Blogs as article carriers don’t necessarily save that much in time or money as opposed to other e-article publication systems. I don’t know anything about Open Journal Systems; I do know there’s no reason a peer-reviewed ejournal can’t post articles the minute peer review, editing and layout are all complete, using the journal “issue” (if there is one) as an overlay set of contents pointing to already-published articles. You could do that on a protected wiki. You could do it on a blog. You could do it on almost any CMS. There is, in short, nothing magical about blog publication.

You certainly can send an article through peer review before posting it on a blog—that’s how In the library with a lead pipe works. But that means having provisions to do so, and I don’t see that the blog medium really aids that process. Blogs are pretty good for post-publication review, as discussed by Banks. But I find myself on the side of Plutchak and Salo, both as a sometime peer reviewer and as an editor: Good peer review should improve the quality (editorial, logical and sometimes scholarly) of articles before they’re public. (Cites & Insights would be a better publication if all the copy went through some other editor—but it also wouldn’t exist, given the realities of time, energy and cost.)

On the other hand, there’s peer review and there’s peer review. I didn’t quote one particularly telling comment in Salo’s post about the editorial quality of one supposedly peer reviewed ejournal—but it’s an opinion with which I heartily agree. Peer review can and should improve manuscript quality; that doesn’t always mean it does.

The persistence issue is a real one—but here I’m not on Salo’s side. There’s nothing about blogs that makes them inherently more ephemeral than ejournals. I’ve seen peer-reviewed ejournals disappear without a trace because they lacked sound long-term archival solutions and ceased to be of interest. (I’ve written about such disappearances in the context of very early ejournals.) There’s no reason that blog-journal hybrids (jourgs? blournals?) can’t be archived. (Actually, to assure that a given version can always be retrieved, a wiki with automatic versioning might be a better medium.)

In the end, there are four related discussions going on here, I think:

1. Does prepublication peer review offer enough advantages to prefer it to the immediacy of publishing on submission?
2. Will postpublication review, through open comments or other means, offer the same assurance of quality that peer review should offer?

3. Is a blog an inherently good or poor medium for article-length scholarship?

4. Are blogs inherently more ephemeral than ejournals?

I don’t know the answers to any of those. I do know that blogs don’t inherently support some of the extra stuff that scholarly articles use heavily (endnotes, references, bibliography); there again, a wiki with appropriate extensions may actually be a better medium. (Yes, footnote plugins are available for WordPress—and MediaWiki also requires an extension to do references properly.)

There’s also a semantic issue. Could you publish a solid journal using WordPress with a few extensions? Almost certainly. Would the result be a blog? Well, it would use blogging software...
Library Access to Scholarship  
(November 2009)

It’s been seven months since the last Library Access to Scholarship—and that edition barely touched issues of open access, focusing solely on the (possible? desirable?) death of journals. Realistically, it’s been a full year since Cites & Insights has had any discussion of open access and the controversies and updates swirling around the concept.

It’s time to catch up—and maybe it’s time to give up. More on that at the end of this jumbled essay, consisting of excerpts from dozens of items on aspects of OA, with my own comments as appropriate. How many items? I began with more than 90, winnowed that down to 69, and probably ended up with around 60.

Items are arranged by general topic and, typically, chronologically within a topic. Most italicized subheadings are blog post or article titles. Almost everything is from the past year, sometimes going back earlier in 2008. Don’t expect neat narratives in each section; in many cases, these are items I thought worth noting even if they don’t connect very well. As is general practice in C&I, I use sentence capitalization for most blog names—and only provide URLs when they’re not readily discoverable.

**Mandates, Policies and Compacts**

Harvard has an OA mandate. NIH now has an OA mandate, upgraded from a request that wasn’t being heeded. Many would like to see a broader Federal government OA mandate for government-sponsored research. These are mostly relatively smaller items in that overall landscape.

*Freedom, Google-juice and institutional mandates*

Andy Powell (of eduserv) posted this February 10, 2009 at eFoundations. He discusses a thread on a forum asserting that, in Germany, freedom of research *forbids* institutional mandates—it wouldn’t be le-
gal for a German university to mandate that faculty deposit research papers into an institutional repository.

One response, from Bernard Rentier, said:

No researcher would complain (and consider it an infringement upon his/ her academic freedom to publish) if we mandated them to deposit reprints at the local library. It would be just another duty like they have many others. It would not be terribly useful, needless to say, but it would not cause an uproar. Qualitatively, nothing changes. Quantitatively, readership explodes.

To which Powell says the web isn’t like a library, so the analogy isn’t a good one. After trashing OAI-PMH as irrelevant (“If we ignore the rarified, and largely useless, world of resource discovery based on the OAI-PMH”) Powell asserts that within the “real world,”

[t]here is a direct and negative impact of mandating a particular place of deposit. For every additional place that a research paper surfaces on the Web there is a likely reduction in the Google-juice associated with each instance caused by an overall diffusion of inbound links.

So, he says, if a scholar prefers to “surface their paper” somewhere else on the web, but is also forced to put it in the IR because of a mandate, they will “probably see a negative impact on the Google-juice associated with their chosen location.” He also objects to thinking of a repository as “part of a library” rather than as “a true part of the fabric of the web.” In summary, he regards repository mandates as “a disservice…to the long term future of open access.”

Right off the bat, I wonder how the desideratum for scholarly success has shifted from publication, to impact, to readership—and now to Google-juice? Is it really likely that a paper existing on two sites will be read less frequently than the same paper existing on only one—or is it likely that the paper will be read more frequently but in more distributed fashion?

In any case, Powell recognizes he was partly wrong (the first version of the post appeared a day earlier): Google joins multiple instances of a research paper in its indexing, at least in many cases. Which “somewhat” weakens his argument for “dispersion of Google juice.” So he throws in other arguments—e.g., that W3C argues against having different URIs for the same resource. Still, it seems Powell thinks Google PageRank is important—and that maximizing GPR is a valid scholarly enterprise. This is, to me, a rather startling shift in the aims of the scholarly enterprise. The comments are inter-
interesting, including one that pointedly says, “I don’t get promoted on PageRank.”

On the way to a mandate

“An interesting thing happened on the way to universal open-access mandates…”

That’s how Dorothea Salo begins this February 18, 2009 post on the dearly departed Caveat lector (cavlec.yarinareth.net, because there’s more than one blog with that title). She notes the sad history of university resolutions in favor of OA, beginning in 2007:

As a symbolic action, this was lovely and welcome. As an instrument for making more journal articles open-access, it was perfectly useless. Not only was there no actual requirement that faculty retain rights (which of course tends to mean they won’t do it), there was no reporting or recording involved anywhere (that I know of, anyway).

As a result, most resolutions had little or no effect, at least in terms of increasing access to the articles. So Harvard took a different route: A mandate to deposit copies of all articles.

Personally, I’m still not sure the average faculty member covered under that resolution is completely cognizant of the [the deposit requirement], and I do still believe things could get ugly once they figure it out. I hope not…

But she’s mostly interested in a Boston University faculty move—an open access plan that isn’t a mandate or resolution:

Instead, it is a fascinating middle-ground. It mentions gold as well as green OA. It mentions building a faculty publications database, not just an IR; this is important because like it or not, faculty publications databases have real-world uses for faculty and administrators that IRs simply don’t. It takes on tenure and promotion practices straightforwardly.

It is, in short, a start toward a university-wide open-access strategy. That’s fascinating, and to the best of my knowledge, completely novel. The breadth of the conversation is certainly a vast improvement over the library starting an IR all by itself that it then doesn’t promote or work to fill. It’s also an improvement over putting all the local open-access eggs in one basket, whether that basket is an IR or an author’s addendum or a gold-fee fund…

Noted here as part of a mandate thread, but note that last sentence when we get to philosophical discussions (or knockdown drag-out Green vs. Gold battles) later.
How we’re walking the OA walk

From ACRLog, on May 17, 2009, by Barbara Fister at Gustavius Adolphus College—a story about a smaller college and the library faculty at that college.

The good news about open access keeps coming. Here at ACRLog, we’ve followed the trend since Harvard’s Arts and Sciences faculty adopted an open access resolution. Boston University and MIT have made similar resolutions… Recently Oregon State University librarians adopted an open access mandate, followed quickly by the University of Oregon…

Well, at our last librarian’s meeting we adopted our own Open Access Pledge. It’s not as sophisticated as the ones that have been making news. We are a small library, with only six librarians, and we haven’t had the time or money to start up an institutional repository. We also, quite frankly, don’t have a terribly sophisticated grasp of all the OA arguments, the copyright issues, and the color choices. (Green? Gold? What about mauve?)…

…Our pledge is simply to make every effort to ensure that our scholarship is freely available online, either because the publisher posts its content online (as does Inside Higher Ed or Library Journal), it’s a truly OA journal, or because the publication agreement allows self-archiving, which most credible library publications do. We also pledge to do the work of self-archiving, which really isn’t a lot of trouble for librarians who are tweaking the web daily. It mystifies me that so few librarians can be bothered.

This wasn’t a simple decision. Half of the department is on the tenure track. Their continuing employment depends on establishing professional credibility through publication. But we feel strongly that this is the right thing to do, and that taking these simple steps won’t damage the ability of our emerging scholars to thrive…

The comments are generally positive. When one asks where (without an IR) library faculty plan to post their articles, Fister mentions server space—but fails to note that there is already at least one topical repository, E-LIS, with more than 9,500 articles as of late September 2009.

Here’s the pledge itself:

The Gustavus library faculty believes that open access to scholarship is critical for scholarly communication and for the future of libraries. For that reason we pledge to make our own research freely available whenever possible by seeking publishers that have either adopted open access policies, publish contents online without restriction, and/or allow authors to self-archive their publications on the web. We pledge to link to and/or self-archive our publications to make them freely accessible.
Librarians may submit their work to a publication that does not follow open access principles and will not allow self archiving only if it is clearly the best or only option for publication; however, librarians will actively seek out publishers that allow them to make their research available freely online and, when necessary, will negotiate with publishers to improve publication agreements.

**Open Access mandates: Judging success**

That’s Richard Poynder’s title for a May 23, 2009 article at *Open and shut?* He notes the spread of institutional mandates and wonders about compliance.

> [W]hat level of compliance can we expect from these mandates? After all, a mandate is only as good as the compliance rate it achieves. And how do we judge success so far as compliance is concerned anyway?

Poynder notes (and links to) analyses by Arthur Sales within Australia indicating a 70% compliance rate within two years of a mandate—and the clear effects of NIH’s move from request (5% compliance) to mandate (around half of NIH’s target in the first year or so).

A mandatory self-archiving policy at the University of Stirling has not yet achieved anything like ubiquitous compliance—but deposit rates in the University’s IR have jumped from 20 per month to 120 per month.

Poynder poses several questions deserving of medium-term study by impartial observers:

- Can we expect the NIH compliance rate to match the levels reported by Sale in Australia by next April (i.e. two years after it became mandatory)?
- Can we expect the surge of new mandates to achieve the same levels of compliance reported by Sale?
- Is there any significance in the fact that many of the new mandates are being introduced by library faculties, and can we expect that to affect compliance rates?
- Will the fact that many of the new mandates are self-imposed affect compliance rates? (Will it make them appear more voluntary than mandatory?)
- Will the fact that many of the new mandates include opt-outs affect compliance rates? (Will that make them appear more voluntary than mandatory?)
- What is full compliance so far as a self-archiving mandate is concerned? (Is Sale’s 70% level the objective, or should the research community be aiming higher?)
What other questions should we be asking, particularly when trying to judge the success of a mandate?

All excellent questions, none with simple answers.

**Are the Harvard open-access policies unfair to publishers?**

That's the provocative title of Stuart Shieber's June 9, 2009 post in his excellent new blog, *The occasional pamphlet* (blogs.law.harvard.edu/pamphlet/). Getting past a one-word two-letter answer that might be sufficient, some excerpts from Shieber's discussion:

Recently, the representative of a major scientific journal publisher expressed to me the sentiment that the position that Harvard faculty have taken through our open-access policies—setting the default for rights retention to retain rights by default rather than to eschew rights by default—is in some sense unfair to subscription-based journals that require embargoes, that we are favoring one scholarly publishing business model over another and setting up an unlevel playing field…

Shieber summarizes the policy and its waiver provisions, noting that the publisher in question felt the policy was unfair because OA publishers didn’t need the author to obtain a waiver while toll-access publishers did.

Of course, as a private company, Harvard is well within its rights to set up its policies to favor whatever it wants, even if third parties are disadvantaged… But I for one am not interested in unfairly advantaging one business model for scholarly publishing over another, and in any case, the argument that the Harvard policy does so is fallacious.

Before describing why, let me mention again that there is a different issue that I will not address here, that immediate open access of author's manuscripts endangers the subscription-based business model. That is a separate issue, with a set of standard arguments and counterarguments…

This other argument is different and seems to rely on an assumption that the Harvard policy is an undue intervention, whereas without the policy, there is no intervention. It seems to go something like this: In designing a system of rights allocation between author and publisher, the approach in which all rights are transferred to the publisher with the publisher selecting some rights to provide back to the author is the privileged position, and any other arrangement involves some kind of intervention. But what makes that the privileged (nonintervening) position? Why isn't the privileged position an approach in which all rights are transferred to the publisher subject to a nonexclusive limited noncommercial license to the author, with a publisher's requirement for exclusive transfer of all copy-
right being the intervention? It is true that one was the status quo ante for some time, but that is a historical contingency, and gives it no privileged position as consisting of the appropriate default position. There is in fact no privileged position one way or the other. All choices of design involve intervention. There are just a large variety of possibilities, which the actions of various stakeholders choose among.

I’d go further: Why isn’t the privileged default position for scholarly articles the same as it is for most (paid) nonscholarly articles in most periodicals—where the only transfer of rights is for first serial publication, with the writer retaining all other rights? That might also hinder immediate green OA (or it might not), but it has an honorable history.

Another way of thinking about the issue is this: The faculty must make a decision about what portion of their rights they retain by default: none, a few, a lot, this subset, that subset. A decision is inevitable; there is no option of making no decision. The status quo ante made a decision, namely that no rights were retained by default. The Harvard policy makes a different decision, that a nonexclusive limited license is retained by default; some other policy might state that exclusive rights are retained by default. But one way or another, a decision must be made. The faculty are obviously inclined to make decisions that benefit them as they perceive it, and have done so. The change is not from making no decision to making a decision, it is from making one decision to making another that the faculty perceives as preferable…

I appreciate that some publishers may not like the waiver process, and I do not begrudge them that view or think it is unreasonable. But preferring X to Y doesn’t mean that Y is unfair.

There’s more to the original post (and, as with other Shieber essays, it’s worth reading). I’ve always been taken with the concept that publishers might decline Harvard submissions because of the mandate—a policy decision that would, I believe, be somewhere between idiotic and suicidal. (I have no evidence that this has ever happened, nor do I think it likely.)

Quantifying the value of peer review

If most OA bloggers are believers (or steadfast opponents) and I’m an independent, T. Scott Plutchak revels in the title “OA heretic.” In this June 10, 2009 post at T. Scott, he advances an interesting argument against the NIH mandate. Excerpts:
...Despite all of the blather and charges and countercharges we still haven’t really sorted out the relationship between the value of peer review, the role of the publishers, and the impact on the public good.

Explicit in the NIH policy is that peer review has substantial value—so much so, that NIH does not want any manuscripts deposited that have not gone through a rigorous peer review process and gotten the stamp of approval from a recognized peer review authority—i.e., a publisher. In developing the policy, NIH could have come up with their own vetting mechanism, but instead they quite sensibly chose to rely on the experts in managing peer review. (And don’t be fooled by the oft repeated truism that “peer review is all done by volunteers anyway.” If it were that simple, why wouldn’t NIH just set up their own peer review system?)

But, T. Scott, you’re not denying the truth of the truism (outside of a few special cases). Maybe NIH has not set up their own peer review system because (a) such systems already exist and (b) if they did, they would immediately be charged with unfair government competition. I call straw man.

But here’s where it gets sticky. In “the old days” (when everybody understood what the rules were), publishers gained control of copyright in exchange for managing the peer review process. They were then entitled to use that control to develop revenue streams that would compensate them for the value that they were adding to the system. Copyright gave them control of the distribution of the work to which they had added value. Under the terms of the NIH policy publishers are expected to give up that control. And it irks them.

So it’s a simple quid pro quo: Peer review management (not peer review—publishers don’t do that) in trade for all rights? I suspect most scholars never saw it that way. And the NIH policy does not take away control. It provides one exception for one class of papers. An exception, by the way, that would be automatic for government-funded research done in government facilities.

Publishers add value in many ways... All of the elements that visually distinguish the final published article from the author’s manuscript version can be useful and worthwhile. The public access policy says that the publisher is still free to get compensated for all of those things, as if they were the totality of the value that the publisher adds.

But the publisher has already lost control of what is most important—the imprimatur that says that this article has gone through the peer review process and has been accepted as worthy. Since that process doesn’t necessarily result in significant changes of expression, it’s not part of the co-
The *most important* aspect of journal publication is “this article passed peer review”? Maybe.

It is argued that this is not an unfair “taking” since the publisher has the right to refuse to grant the license that allows the author to deposit with Pubmed Central. Puh-leeze! This is, no doubt, technically and legalistically true. But since when is a choice between complying with a policy and going out of business a real choice? “Dear publisher—we respectfully ask that, for the benefit of the common good, you give up control of the most significant element of value that you add to the scholarly communication process. We don’t actually have any way of compensating you for that, so you are perfectly free to refuse to do so—in which case, you will, of course, be put out of business since you will no longer receive the manuscripts that are your bread and butter, but them’s the breaks. Good luck.”

Again, remember that publishers only *manage* peer review—but, according to Scott, that’s the “most significant element of value” that they add. What he’s asserting here is that government-funded research is the “bread and butter” of medical publishers, but that it’s unfair to publishers for taxpayers to assert any rights in what they’ve paid for.

…and while everyone involved in the debate agrees on the fundamental importance of peer review, and everyone seems to agree that it ought to be managed by the traditional peer review authorities, the pro-policy advocates have not directly confronted the fact that the policy does require publishers to give up control of something of great value without providing anything in return. Wouldn’t it be more constructive to acknowledge this fact and try to develop policies that account for it in some way, rather than dodging behind legalisms and hyperbolic rhetoric?

Really, I’m just lookin’ for a little intellectual good faith here.

Am I being too hard on T. Scott? Perhaps, but I don’t think so. I think his claim (that managing peer review is the *primary* value added by publishers and is so important that it *alone* justifies seizing all rights in publicly-funded research) is extreme. Or, say, wrong.

The first comment suggests that publisher management of peer review might not be such a big deal (and that, down the line, NIH indeed might set up a peer review process if it’s needed). The third, from another interesting recent voice in OA commentary (Bill Hooker), suggests that *everyone* should be entitled to be paid for the value they add:
My standard rate for peer review is $25/hr. For OA journals, I will continue to review for free.

I would comment that $25/hour is awfully cheap…

**The OA policies of June**

This brief item by Peter Suber appears in the July 2, 2009 SPARC Open Access Newsletter. In full (excluding links):

By my count, June 2009 was the richest month ever for OA policies. We saw new OA mandates adopted at the University of Bergen, the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and University College London. The University of Kansas and the nation of Lithuania adopted near-mandates. Older mandates were revealed at the University of Geneva, Roehampton University, and the US Institute of Education Sciences. An older mandate took effect at the National Cancer Institute of Canada, an older non-mandate was strengthened to a mandate at the Canadian Breast Cancer Research Alliance, and implementation began for an older mandate in Ukraine. The largest proposed mandate ever, the Federal Research Public Access Act, was re-introduced in the US Senate. Not counting calls for mandates and other policy recommendations, that comes to 12 developments in six countries (Canada, Lithuania, Norway, Switzerland, UK, Ukraine, and the US)—in one month alone.

For comparison, the second richest month was October 2006, when we saw six adopted OA mandates, two proposed mandates, two adopted near-mandates, and one adopted mandate limited to data, or altogether 11 actions in five countries (Austria, Canada, China, the UK, and the US).

Coming in third was January 2008, when we saw three new mandates, two start dates for previous mandates, one public disclosure of an older mandate, one tightening of an older mandate, and three near-mandates, or altogether 10 developments in eight countries (Australia, Canada, EU, Italy, Japan, Russia, Spain, Switzerland, and the US).

My only comments: Actions aren’t necessarily mandates—and mandates don’t necessarily spell success, although they usually improve levels of deposit. (This assumes that deposit constitutes success, which is another question—one I don’t intend to discuss.) Still, it’s evidence of momentum.

Maybe this last item is even more evidence, albeit in a very different direction.
A compact for open-access publication

That’s the title on a September 14, 2009 news item from Harvard University Library (hul.harvard.edu/news/2009_0914_compact.html). Since it’s a press release, I’m offering it in full, with notes following:

Five of the nation’s premier institutions of higher learning—Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the University of California, Berkeley—today announced their joint commitment to a compact for open-access publication.

Open-access scholarly journals have arisen as an alternative to traditional publications that are founded on subscription and/or licensing fees. Open-access journals make their articles available freely to anyone, while providing the same services common to all scholarly journals, such as management of the peer-review process, filtering, production, and distribution.

According to Thomas C. Leonard, university librarian at UC Berkeley, “Publishers and researchers know that it has never been easier to share the best work they produce with the world. But they also know that their traditional business model is creating new walls around discoveries. Universities can really help take down these walls and the open-access compact is a highly significant tool for the job.”

The economic downturn underscores the significance of open-access publications. With library resources strained by budget cuts, subscription and licensing fees for journals have come under increasing scrutiny, and alternative means for providing access to vital intellectual content are identified. Open-access journals provide a natural alternative.

As Dartmouth Provost Barry P. Scherr sees it, “Supporting open-access publishing is an important step in increasing readership of Dartmouth research and, ultimately, the impact of our research on the world.”

Since open-access journals do not charge subscription or other access fees, they must cover their operating expenses through other sources, including subventions, in-kind support, or, in a sizable minority of cases, processing fees paid by or on behalf of authors for submission to or publication in the journal. While academic research institutions support traditional journals by paying their subscription fees, no analogous means of support has existed to underwrite the growing roster of fee-based open-access journals.

Stuart Shieber, Harvard’s James O. Welch, Jr. and Virginia B. Welch Professor of Computer Science and Director of the University’s Office for Scholarly Communication, is the author of the five-member compact. According to Shieber, “Universities and funding agencies ought to provide equitable support for open-access publishing by subsidizing the
processing fees that faculty incur when contributing to open-access publications. Right now, these fees are relatively rare. But if the research community supports open-access publishing and it gains in importance as we believe that it will, those fees could aggregate substantially over time. The compact ensures that support is available to eliminate these processing fees as a disincentive to open-access publishing."

The compact supports equity of the business models by committing each university to the timely establishment of durable mechanisms for underwriting reasonable publication fees for open-access journal articles written by its faculty for which other institutions would not be expected to provide funds.

Additional universities are encouraged to visit the compact web site and sign on.

Cornell Provost Kent Fuchs offers his perspective on participating in the compact. “As part of its social commitment as a research university,” Fuchs says, “Cornell strives to ensure that scholarly research results are as widely available as possible. The Compact for Open-Access Publishing Equity could increase access to scholarly literature while at the same time ensuring that the valuable services that publishers provide are supported.”

A full account of the motivation for the compact can be found in the article “Equity for Open-Access Journal Publishing,” published in the open-access journal Public Library of Science Biology.

“Supporting OA journals is an investment in a superior system of scholarly communication,” states Peter Suber of the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) in Washington, DC, and a fellow of Harvard Law School’s Berkman Center and Harvard University’s Office for Scholarly Communication. “Before this compact, a number of funding agencies and universities were willing to pay OA journal processing fees on behalf of their grantees and faculty. It’s significant that five major universities recognize the need to join the effort, extend fee subsidies to a wider range of publishing scholars, enlist other institutions, and start to catch up with their long practice of supporting traditional—or non-OA—journals.”

Summing up the compact, MIT Provost L. Rafael Reif observes, “The dissemination of research findings to the public is not merely the right of research universities: it is their obligation. Open-access publishing promises to put more research in more hands and in more places around the world. This is a good enough reason for universities to embrace the guiding principles of this compact.”
The Compact website is at www.oacompact.org/ and uses COPE as an acronym (for Compact for Open-Access Publishing Equity). The compact itself is brief (160 words!), but includes 14 hyperlinks that expand it considerably. Based on some of those links, I’m guessing a fair amount of additional fleshing-out is intended (e.g., it’s odd to have an FAQ page consisting entirely of a search box and introductory sentence).

This is about mandated institutional support for Gold OA, a very different approach to institutional mandates for Green OA. These are early days—the mandate appeared just a week before I began writing this article and the day I’d decided to stop collecting material—but this one should be unusually interesting to watch.

The Colors of OA

You could call this “philosophical discussions on the best approach to open access,” but at times that feels like calling the Civil War a philosophical discussion on the best approach to labor relations. This time, it’s not Blue vs. Gray, it’s Gold vs. Green—even if the most thoughtful participants are almost always in the middle.

For those who need a quick reminder, Green OA is, basically, self-archiving or repository deposit of peer-reviewed articles—and Gold OA is, basically, journal articles that are freely readable from the journal itself. Gold OA means journals don’t charge subscription fees for electronic access to peer-reviewed articles—although they can certainly charge for other things. Green OA means some peer-reviewed version of an article is freely available somewhere on the web.

Stevan “One Note” Harnad repeats, over and over and over and over again, at considerable length, that Only Green OA Matters (and it should be his version of Green OA, with repositories that magically cost almost nothing to run) and that any effort toward Gold OA is a diversion from The One True Path. These days, almost everybody else—except those trying to throw badly argued landmines into the whole procession—argues for some blend of the two. Herewith, a few brief incidents on the colors of OA.

Two-thirds full?

Dorothea Salo, Caveat lector, September 3, 2008. Salo refers (and links) to “a typically well-presented examination of journal prestige and how it plays out in toll-access/open-access faculty mindshare” by Peter Suber in the September 2, 2008 SPARC Open Access Newsletter.
That article is worth reading; as usual, Suber writes well and thinks carefully—even if you may not always agree with him. One keen (in the non-slang sense) line: “I start with the rough notion that if journal quality is real excellence, then journal prestige is reputed excellence.”

Suber notes that universities have motivated faculty to publish in high-prestige journals, because such publications count more for promotion and tenure (and possibly for funding). But that may be the wrong motivation—and, given history, it’s a tough obstacle for Gold OA advocates:

If journal prestige and journal quality can diverge, then universities and funders may be giving authors an incentive to aim only for prestige. If they wanted to create an incentive to put quality ahead of prestige, they haven’t yet succeeded.

Suber quotes himself from a year earlier on the effect of rewarding publication in high-prestige journals:

By rewarding faculty who win a journal’s imprimatur, mindful of the journal’s prestige but heedless of its access policies, universities [and funders] shift bargaining power from authors to publishers of high-prestige journals. They give publishers less incentive to modify their standard contracts and authors greater incentive to sign whatever publishers put in front of them.

As the discussion continues, most high-prestige journals are “toll access” (that is, aren’t Gold OA)—and most authors will choose prestige over OA, not realizing that they may not have to choose (that is, many toll-access journals permit self-archiving, Green OA).

There’s a lot more to Suber’s discussion on how excellence can diverge from prestige and related issues—you need to read the article. But let’s get back to Salo’s commentary—which has mostly to do with one item in Suber’s article stated as common knowledge: “About two-thirds of toll-access journals already give blanket permission for [self-archiving] and many of the others will give permission on request.”

Salo says:

This just isn’t true, not unadorned, and I wish we’d stop waving it around. For it to be true, SHERPA/ROMEO (from whose database of publisher policies this datum is derived) would have to cover the entire toll-access journal universe. It doesn’t. It doesn’t even come close. Sure, it covers the behemoth toll-access publishers, but there are two problems with extrapolating from a set of data weighted heavily toward them: first, disciplinary coverage on SHERPA is extra-spotty in areas the behemoths
can't profit from (notably the humanities); and second, I have to date seen zero evidence presented that the behemoths' policies are typical of non-behemoth publishers. I don't think they are, myself, though I'm willing to be wrong.

So Salo does a thought experiment, using personas she established earlier on (noted briefly in an earlier C&I)—the scholar “Dr. Troia” and repository librarian “Ulysses Acqua” both at “Achaea University”:

So let's see how this plays out with Dr. Troia and the repository librarian Ulysses Acqua. Dr. Troia comes to Ulysses with her CV and says “Let's put all this in the Achaea U repository!” Ulysses is of course thrilled, but because he is a responsible librarian, he explains carefully that someone has to check whether her publishers permit it. Chances are, he says honestly, that most do and a few won't.

Stepping out of frame for a moment—I've had faculty disengage right then and there, when they realize that they probably won't be able to get their complete publication record in. This is what they typically want—to use the repository as a publication-list proxy—and we often can't give it to them. Stubborn resistance on the part of certain repository-software packages to creating metadata records that do not include full-text files does not help this problem one little bit.

Let us say that Dr. Troia, though understandably disappointed, gives Ulysses the go-ahead to do the checking for her. She naturally assumes that this is a service Ulysses offers; it doesn't even occur to her that she ought to do this herself. Ulysses asks diffidently if she will let him see the publication agreements she has signed. “I needed to keep those?” she asks. This being the answer Ulysses expected (he is not so naïve as he was when he started his job), he smiles, reassures her he can manage without them, and makes a list of the journals she has published in. Let us suppose, somewhat unrealistically, that of those journals present in SHERPA/ROMEO, the distribution of permissive and forbidding publishers exactly mirrors the distribution of SHERPA/ROMEO as a whole: that is, two-thirds allow self-archiving in some form, while one-third forbid it.

Dr. Troia has published in some mildly obscure and boutique basketology journals, especially early in her career. Chasing down as much information as he can about them costs Ulysses about half a day's work. A couple have shut down entirely; being a pragmatic soul, Ulysses figures they're not terribly likely to sue him, and puts those articles on the “yes” pile. One more has transferred ownership twice since Dr. Troia published there. Ulysses groans, researches the old owner and the new (neither of whom is in SHERPA), and decides that on balance, this journal should probably be a
“no.” On one journal, Ulysses can find no information at all. His policy for such cases (discussed with his administration) is not to archive, though he is aware that some maverick repository managers do otherwise…

When he is done, Ulysses has about five-eighths of Dr. Troia’s published articles in his “yes” pile. This isn’t a bad or atypical result; depending on discipline, it can be anywhere from less than half to around 85%. He might be able to up the percentage a little bit if he were to negotiate with individual publishers, but he’s tried that before, and the few positive results don’t justify the time expenditure. He suspects the publishers would be more amenable if Dr. Troia were to contact them rather than a mere librarian, but he knows better than to ask it of her.

Now comes the fun part. Ulysses returns to Dr. Troia with a list of the articles that he needs her to provide preprints for, and another list of articles that he needs postprints for. At first Dr. Troia is confused; she can just download the publisher’s version online, won’t that do for him? Ulysses, his heart sinking, shows her a SHERPA page for one of the journals on the preprint-only list. He’s fairly sure he knows what’s coming, and sure enough, she says, “I couldn’t find half these articles in draft if I tried.” Because she’s a nice person and likes Ulysses, she doesn’t add, “and whyever would I bother trying? What a waste of time.”

This leaves Ulysses with just the dead-journal articles and the articles archivable in publisher-PDF form… Let’s say one-quarter of Dr. Troia’s CV, and that’s fairly generous.

Ulysses isn’t thrilled with that result. More importantly, neither is Dr. Troia. You tell me how likely it is that she’ll be darkening Ulysses’s door after that.

The glass is not two-thirds full, folks. For the faculty I’ve dealt with, it’s often more than half-empty.

I’ve quoted almost all of the post because you need to think it through to see the import: That is, under normal circumstances, even “two-thirds OK” may turn out to mean that an IR manager can’t do what a scholar actually wants—and keeping scholars interested is vital to having Green OA work. (I left out Salo’s link to a SHERPA list of publishers that will support archiving PDFs, which she’s grateful for. The URL is www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/PDFandIR.html but I’ve been consistently unable to reach the server.)

Peter Suber commented on Salo’s post in “Talking about majority of TA publishers which permit postprint archiving” (Open access news, September 4, 2008). Some of his comments:
I do often say that about two-thirds of TA journals permit postprint archiving. I’ll defend the claim, at least after I correct it. But first I can acknowledge that it’s shorthand. When I have time and remember to add them, I add these qualifications:

First, it represents surveyed journals. Among unsurveyed journals, there are likely to be journals that do, and journals that don’t, permit postprint archiving. We don’t know their proportions yet. Second, the number represents journals that consent in advance to postprint archiving without requiring case-by-case requests. Many that do not consent in advance will still consent if asked individually, however. Elsevier routinely granted individual requests until mid-2004 when it decided to offer blanket permission instead. Third, it represents the journals that consent to postprint archiving, not preprint archiving. If we count the journals that consent to preprint or postprint archiving (or both), the figure rises to 93% [written in February 2006].

I base the claim on the numbers reported by SHERPA. The numbers are also summarized by EPrints. But be careful when comparing the two sources, because they use the color signifiers differently.

Dorothea is right that SHERPA doesn’t survey all publishers, although it’s steadily increasing the number it does survey. As of today, it surveys 418. Dorothea suggests that the SHERPA numbers are “weighted heavily” toward the “behemoth” publishers. But while there are many commercial publishers, there are only half a dozen behemoths. Any survey of 418 publishers covers far more than the behemoths. (Maybe we differ on what counts as a behemoth.) However, it may still be true that the SHERPA numbers reflect some kinds of publishers more than others. I don’t know and I’d like to know.

She says, “I have to date seen zero evidence presented that the behemoths’ policies are typical of non-behemoth publishers....” If we revise this to refer to the SHERPA-surveyed publishers, rather than behemoth publishers, then I agree. We’re in the same boat and we’d both like to see someone do the research. Meantime, I’m sure we both want SHERPA continue its long-term survey of publishers.

The numbers fluctuate as SHERPA adds more publishers to the survey. I used to give exact percentage figures, but when I noticed the fluctuation I decided to use looser expressions like “about two-thirds”. When I started using the expression, the SHERPA percentage was between 62 and 67%. Today it’s 56% (publishers allowing postprint archiving alone or both preprint and postprint archiving), which I would not say is “about two-thirds.” This is a reason to downsize my loose expression (and check the latest number more often). But...
The journals published by the half-dozen behemoths may outnumber the journals published by the next 400+ publishers in line. However, the SHERPA number I've been using refers to the percentage of publishers who allow postprint archiving, not the percentage of journals. This suggests that when I want to talk about the percentage of journals, as opposed to publishers, I should revise my number upward, not downward. At the moment, I don't know how the upward correction and downward correction net out. If anyone has done the math (if 56% of this set of publishers permits postprint archiving, then what percentage of the journals they represent permits postprint archiving?), I'd like to hear from them.

One more thing I don't know and would like to know: Is the reported percentage of publishers who allow postprint archiving in decline, or is this just an artifact of the order in which SHERPA surveys publishers? Does it mean that publishers are retreating to less-green policies, or does it mean that unsurveyed publishers are less often green than the surveyed publishers?

I fully agree that the limited number of green journals, and the complex and arbitrary restrictions which even some greenish publishers put on self-archiving, are obstacles to progress.

What I notice immediately is that none of Suber's comments relate directly to Salo's argument, other than the final paragraph. Salo responded, thanking Suber for clarifying the “two-thirds” claim and getting to the real point (and here, I am paraphrasing much of what she says for reasons of length and to avoid having to provide too much backstory):

I don't think we should be highlighting [the two-thirds claim (much less the derived claim “Green OA is compatible with TA journals”) regardless of its truth value, and my Achaea U parable was intended to demonstrate why not: publisher permission to self-archive is not filling repositories or otherwise furthering green open access, and that being the case, we have no reason to celebrate it, or to continue pursuing such permissions from other publishers.

The name of the game is to get the scholarly literature onto the web—that is, to make it openly accessible. Salo doesn't believe that getting a publisher to permit self-archiving achieves that aim, and believes that claiming victory for getting such permissions undermines the credibility of OA advocates. She even suggests that big publishers may be granting blanket permission as a cynical ploy, imagining a hypothetical strategist:

“Sure… let the repository-rats have their preprint and postprint permissions, why not? It's hard enough to pry a usable manuscript out of
faculty when they want it published. They think some poor schmuck librarian can do it? Hah. We haven’t conceded one damned thing—nothing whatever of substance will become open access because of this—but we smell like roses anyway. Win!”

Why would publishers believe this? Because faculty don’t manage their own publications effectively (do you keep copies of all your publication agreements? I sure don’t), practices tend to be even worse when computers are involved—and, as a result, “most preprints and postprints are lost forever.” Also, as creatures of habit, many faculty will happily sign over rights to publishers (they’ve always done it, so why not?) but will “scrutinize an institutional repository from every conceivable angle—from an initial instinct of distrust, to boot—and most will refuse to bite.”

The result? Go back and read the parable. The faculty member assumes most of her publications would go into the IR easily and without fuss—and when that proves to be a false assumption, the repository librarian gets the blame. “Sure, sure, it wasn’t entirely Ulysses, it was also the green-OA movement trumpeting the “two-thirds” line, and nobody meant any harm by it—but all she sees is Ulysses and his perfidy. Poor Ulysses, his own movement has hung him out to dry.”

Again, there’s more to the post—but that’s enough of the sequence to get the overall message. Which, I believe, is this: In the real world, “green OA” is a whole lot tougher than it seems—permissions don’t constitute deposits and may not do that much to facilitate them.

**Will OA progress lead to Pyrrhic victory?**

This time, instead of using a Salo title to lead into a Suber piece, I’m using a Suber title—a March 11, 2009 Open access news post—to lead into a Richard Poynder article it references. The Poynder article “Open Access: Whom would you back?” appeared March 10, 2009 on Open and shut?—Poynder’s valuable OA blog.

Poynder’s article raises a colorful question:

Should Green and Gold OA be viewed as concurrent or consecutive activities?

Poynder notes that, as you’d expect, Suber regards them as complementary (not competitive) activities, thus concurrent. And, to be sure, that “self-styled archivangelist Steven Harnad” regards them as competitive and argues—strenuously and ever so repeatedly—that Gold
OA should only be considered after Green OA succeeds (which he calls “inevitable”).

Poynder reads Harnad as saying that only Green OA can resolve the affordability problem, through a twisted progression that makes sense only if you allow a huge set of assumptions (such as that reducing publisher costs will reduce publisher prices!).

Poynder suggests that, rather than Green OA eventually creating Gold OA by default, it could work the other way around: “Gold OA could marginalize, and eventually overtake, Green OA.” He then notes hybrid OA as a Trojan horse, enabling publishers to appropriate OA as their own and “defang the OA movement at large.” And notes that publishers accepting Green OA have also been insisting on embargoes—sometimes fairly long embargoes—and resisting effective OA mandates such as the NIH policy.

Poynder seems to suggest that Jan Velterop has been an effective agent for “ambushing the OA movement” through overpriced and institutionalized Gold OA, in more than one position. He concludes that this series of events (and more) can lead to publishers embracing OA while retaining (or enhancing) their profits—at the expense of libraries and other institutions. Meanwhile, green OA seems stuck at about 15% in the real world—never mind the permissions.

Poynder says “It is hard not to conclude that while the research community may win one battle (access) it is set to lose another (affordability), and in so doing lose the war.” Why? Because the same publishers will continue to control peer review at locked-in high prices. He suggests the need for a “more radical revolution” than OA.

After reading the whole article, I’m less than convinced by Poynder’s reasoning, but it’s clear that he’s coming down on Harnad’s side:

If Green OA wins the race, the research community can hope to finally free itself of both the access and affordability burdens that have for so long dogged it, and publishers will be forced to give up some of their profits. The research community will have won the war.

However, if Gold OA wins the research community will have freed itself of the access burden, but failed to free itself of the affordability burden. Publishers will have won the war.

Comments on the article itself are interesting, including a truly odd one from Harnad speaking of his many disagreements and noting the fine overall quality—as he should, since Poynder comes down on Harnad’s side! Suber offers a long set of notes on Poynder’s article—
close to 2,000 words, unusually long for an OAN post. Excerpts (omitting some important but long arguments):

“[I]t seems that Gold OA could marginalise, and eventually overtake, Green OA.” I didn’t see the argument for this conclusion…

“Hybrid OA was set to become…a tool that would enable publishers to infiltrate the movement, and appropriate Gold OA. And today it looks as though it could defang the OA movement at large.” I saw no evidence for this statement either…

“[W]hile most subscription publishers had by now agreed to sanction author self-archiving (for political reasons alone), they invariably insisted on an embargo period, from six to twelve months, sometimes longer.” I believe this is untrue. Publishers who insist on an embargo for green OA are still a small minority of publishers who allow green OA…

Suber doesn’t buy terming institutional Gold OA arrangements as an “ambush [of] the OA movement” and won’t accept that such arrangements are overpriced without evidence.

While we explore the many gold OA business models, and look for ways to make the revenues high enough to cover expenses without excluding authors, it’s critical to remember one thing. Green OA doesn’t face these problems, can be achieved faster and at lower cost than gold OA, and is not undermined by the progress of gold OA.

Richard seems to agree on the urgency, speed, and efficiency of green OA, but he seems not to agree that it’s under no threat from gold OA. Indeed, like Stevan Harnad, Richard may think the virtues of green OA make it unnecessary to pursue gold OA at all, or unnecessary to pursue gold OA until green is further along. But that’s where we diverge. We should pursue both at once, and I still haven’t seen a good reason not to…

It’s relevant to point out here that most OA journals charge no publication fees or institutional memberships at all. I’ve argued that even fee-based gold OA is not the threat that Richard seems to think. But even if I’m entirely wrong about that: fee-based gold OA is a minority of gold OA, and no-fee gold OA doesn’t pose any of the threats that Richard describes.

One general point in conclusion: I never saw the need to distance the access problem from the affordability problem. It’s true that they are separate problems in the sense that we could solve the access problem without solving the affordability problem (e.g. with expensive OA journals). That is the prospect which alarms Richard. But the urgency of solving the affordability problem has given the OA movement some of its most stalwart allies and most enduring incentives. If Richard is saying that we should address both problems at once, I fully agree, though
we may differ in some of our reasons. We should address both at once in part to avoid the Pyrrhic victory Richard describes, in part to recruit and retain indispensable allies, and above all to apply a very elegant solution (complementary green and gold OA) to a very serious problem.

Elsewhere, Ivy Anderson of the California Digital Library refutes some of Poynder’s comments (not quoted here) about UC’s Springer institutional deal.

Sigh…

The next piece in my lead-sheet stack is from Peter Suber, but it consists of unannotated excerpts from another Harnad screed arguing that we must not “squander” funds on Gold OA when all efforts should be spent on universal Green OA mandates. (There’s something about “universal mandates” that makes me squirm, frankly; it’s the kind of thing that doesn’t sit well in an even semi-democratic society.) But I’m going to leave this one with just one quote, typical of the reason some—including repository managers—despair of Harnad’s effect on OA and repositories in general:

Green OA self-archiving can be accelerated and scaled up to universality (and this can be done at virtually zero cost) by the research community alone… (Emphasis added.)

Sigh. As Harnad himself said years ago, repeating the same statement over and over (and over and over…) again does not automatically make it true. Dealing with Harnad, even indirectly, helps push some of us out of discussing OA altogether, from sheer frustration if not antipathy.

OA and strategy

Bill Hooker adds an interesting and important voice to the open access discussions, particularly taking on sloppy research being done elsewhere and bringing a scientist’s mindset into play. His blog is Open reading frame; you’ll find it at www.sennoma.net (it operates under a CC 0 license, that is, “public domain as far as I can make it so”—I could legally, if not ethically, quote his entire posts without even giving him credit).

This post appeared on June 19, 2009. He cites an exchange of posts related to Stuart Shieber (“tireless architect” of Harvard’s self-archiving mandate) and his speeches on open access, related to the five-institution Compact discussed earlier in this article. You can guess what Harnad has to say: “it is still a strategic mistake to focus on journal economics, and on new ‘compacts’ for university funding of OA
journal publication fees, instead of stressing the all-important priority [that is, Universal Mandated Green OA].” There’s more, to be sure (1,618 words in all), but that’s the boldface, repeated message.

Shieber responded indirectly, with “The argument for gold OA support,” posted June 11, 2009 at The occasional pamphlet. Shieber raises two questions: “Are green and gold open access independent of each other? In particular, is worry about gold OA a waste of time, and are expenditures on it a waste of money?” and explains why he believes the answer to both questions is No.

Shieber’s essay is, while (inevitably?) briefer than Harnad’s note, still fairly long (1,350 words) and rich enough in argumentation that it needs to be read in the original (direct URL: blogs.law.harvard.edu/pamphlet/2009/06/11/the-argument-for-gold-oa-support/). He explains why it’s inadequate to assert that universal mandates would make affordability less urgent and even more inadequate to claim that “supply and demand”—that is, the market—will solve affordability problems.

Shieber deals with the real worry of scholars that, if green OA puts publishers out of business, effective peer review and branding might also vanish—and finds that one way to assuage this worry is by providing a “reasonable alternative business model”: Gold OA.

In summary, a university that commits to the open access compact will more easily be able to answer objections against green OA policies specifically because it has an approach to long-range support for gold OA publishing, not in spite of it. The two models are inextricably tied. I, like Professor Harnad, am interested in facilitating the adoption of green OA policies. I proposed the open access compact in large part because I expect that adoption of the compact will lead to more green OA policies. The open access compact is therefore contributory to the promotion of green OA, not a sidetrack to it. I of course encourage universities to adopt green OA policies before gold OA support, but given that dystopian fears of faculty are preventing adoption of such policies, an open access compact that might assuage these worries should not be delayed.

He also argues against Harnad’s claim that any support of Gold OA is “a needless waste of scarce research funds”—and that’s a detailed discussion that needs to be read in the original.

The fourth of six comments comes from (who else?) Steven Harnad, beginning with an ALL-CAPS SHOUT and linking to a full response while providing a mere 400-word summary. It’s classic Harnad, although it makes clearer that Harnad now assumes “institutional subscription collapse” as the mechanism for Green OA (eventually, may-
be) improving affordability. He also calls payment for Gold OA “incoherent.” The full Harnad response? A classic, more than 4,400 words (that is, more than three times the length of Shieber’s essay), and full of Harnad’s standard arguments. Every time Harnad says green OA is “cost-free,” another IR manager loses their wings…

Which, circuitously, brings us back to Bill Hooker…and I find that my best course is to point you to the post itself. He sees strategic errors in Harnad’s lengthy set of assertions and conclusions and concludes that “the optimal strategy seems to me to be the one adopted by Harvard: a Green OA mandate and careful (fiscally responsible) support for Gold OA.” There is, of course, a lengthy comment from Harnad. And, at that, I’ll let the colors fly…

**Numbers**

Numbers mystify many people in any case, and the numbers surrounding OA can be more mysterious than most. Phil Davis managed to make a “case” for Gold OA being a terrible deal for universities by selectively choosing numbers and universalizing them. Publishers have come up with outrageously high fees for Gold OA by equating their revenues with costs and dividing by—well, in some cases even a smaller number than the actual number of published articles, apparently. (Some Gold OA publishers seem to justify what appear to be very high fees with no clear numbers at all.)

But even the non-mystical numbers are fuzzy at best. For example:

- If it’s true that 20% (25%?) of scholarly journals are now Gold OA (is that true?), is that a more or less useful number than the percentage of refereed articles published in Gold OA journals?
- Now ask the same question for non-fee Gold OA journals: What percentage of refereed articles (or of refereed articles published in Gold OA journals) appear in non-fee journals?
- How about the same questions for “toll access” journals?
- Has anyone done a coherent correlation analysis between impact factor and author-side fees? Between subscription prices and impact factor?

There probably are good answers to some of those questions, but as a part-time OA independent and observer, I’ve missed them. But some people are trying to be a bit more rigorous about some of these numbers, including the examples that follow.
What percentage of open-access journals charge publication fees?

Most of the questions posed above are second-order questions. First it’s important to get clear answers to first-order questions, such as the one above, addressed in Stuart Shieber’s May 29, 2009 The Occasional Pamphlet post.

In the popular conception, open-access journals generate revenue by charging publication fees. The popular conception turns out to be false. Various studies have explored the extent to which OA journals charge publication fees. The results have been counterintuitive to many, indicating that far fewer OA journals charge publication fees than one might have thought…

The first study of what we’ll call the “publication-fee percentage,” by Kaufman and Wills, showed that fewer than half of the OA journals they looked at charge publication fees. The figure for publication-fee percentage they report is about 47%… Following on from this, Suber and Sutton provided a figure of 16.7% for scholarly society journals charging publication fees.

Bill Hooker came up with a clever way of calculating a figure for publication fee percentage, by taking advantage of the publication fee metadata hidden in the “for authors” journal listings at the Directory of Open Access Journals to calculate the figure as of December 2007. Here are his totals:

Charges: 534 (18%)
No charges: 1980 (67%)
Information missing 453 (15%)
Total (excl. hybrids) 2967

Depending on the disposition of the “information missing” cases, Hooker’s study indicates that 18-33% of OA journals charge fees.

Shieber wrote a routine to automate this analysis as much as possible: “The method is effective, if inelegant.” He revisited DOAJ on May 26, 2009—working against a substantially larger body of OA journals.

Here are the results computed by my software, as of May 26, 2009:

Charges: 951 (23.14%)
No charges: 2889 (70.29%)
Information missing: 270 (6.57%)
Hybrid: 1519 (26.99%)
Total: 5629
The numbers are consistent with those of Hooker's study some 16 months earlier. You'll see that the total number of full OA journals is up from 2967 to 4110, and the number with missing information has been halved from 15% to about 7%. The reduction in those with missing information seems to have gone more to those with fees than those without, so that the percentage charging fees is up some 5% and those not charging fees only up 3%. Again, depending on the “information missing” cases, the range of fee-charging journals is 23-30%. Assuming that the missing information cases are similar in distribution to those that were resolved over the last year, the figure would be about 27%. That leaves 73% of OA journals, the overwhelming bulk, charging no fees.

Shieber does more than provide what appear to be clean, up-to-date figures. He includes the Python script used to do the analysis, so anyone else can replicate or update the study. (Ah, the benefits of having a computer scientist deeply involved in OA…)

Naturally, Harnad—ever out to undermine Gold OA (or Green OA if it’s not done The Harnad Way)—responds by claiming that the vast majority of top Gold OA journals charge fees. The link he cites doesn’t provide evidence for that assertion; it’s just an assertion.

Author-side fee comparison: OA vs TA.

My sense is that Bill Hooker is doing more to provide rigor and challenge bad data than anyone else, as a recurring theme in Open Reading Frame. This essay appeared on June 18, 2009. It’s a detailed post. Excerpts:

I’ve posted a couple of times about the misconception that all OA journals charge author-side fees, and each time I’ve mentioned the Kaufman-Wills study which found that 75% of the toll-access journals they examined charged author-side fees in addition to subscription charges. I thought it would be useful to compare author-side fees charged by OA and TA journals.

It’s easy to work out what OA and hybrid journals charge; BMC maintains a detailed list of publisher article processing charges. Here are some examples:

PLoS journals charge in three tiers: [$1,300, $2,200 and $2,850].

BMC charges between $1,105 and $2,095 for most journals, and their standard charge is $1,470

Hindawi charges between $275 and $850 for most of their journals, with a few titles up to $1,400

Springer Open Choice, Wiley Funded Access and Elsevier’s Sponsored Articles all cost $3,000. (*cough*)
What is much more difficult to determine is how much the average author is paying in author-side fees at toll-access journals, because the charge for a given article depends on number of pages and/or color figures, and in some cases also on whether supplementary information is included.

Below are a few examples; in each case for which I calculated a figure, I extracted the page and figure counts manually from a single issue. This is far too small a sample to be representative, but I’m just trying to get some kind of feel for the numbers. Further, the published figures I managed to find…are consistent with my “calculated guesses”.

[Amended figures for NIH yield estimated average author-side fees of $1,136 to $1,515 per article.]

[Summarizing detailed analyses for these small samples, average author-side fees for various journals:]

- PNAS $1,446
- Science $1,019
- Nature $1,669
- Cell $2,031
- Cell Cycle $756
- EMBO J $2,974
- Journal of Nutrition $456
- J Natural Res & Life Sci Education $400

[and some official figures from journal publishers:]

- Mol Biol Cell $1,829
- American Physiological Society (14 journals) $1,000
- J Neuroscience $850 + color charges
- Molecular Biology and Evolution $922
- Molecular Plant-Microbe Interactions $1,275

The selection of journals is fairly random, just the first few that came to mind then whatever turned up when I was searching for things like “average page color charges.” They range from prestige to niche, and even the cheapest charge fees that amount to a significant fraction of Gold OA author-side fees. (Emphasis added.)

It would be very interesting to extend this half-baked pilot study, but I think it would also be unavoidably labor intensive. Except for rare cases where publishers provide the numbers, there's really no way to calculate average author-side fees based on page and figure counts except by doing those counts for a representative sample of issues in each
journal. (Perhaps a passing statistician could help me figure out what would constitute a representative sample…) Then you have to select which journals to investigate…

Details for each calculation are in the original post. A key point: These are *additional* charges—revenue to the publisher on top of subscription fees.

**Cost to libraries: OA vs TA**

I’ll use that heading for three directly related Hooker articles—the one with this title, which appeared on June 18, 2009; an update and correction that relates to both this article and the one just discussed (June 19, 2009); and “OA vs TA costs: I think I have finally got this straight” (June 21, 2009). I’ve blended excerpts from all three as appropriate.

In 2004, Philip Davis carried out a study of library costs in which he estimated the average subscription cost/article for a subset of ARL libraries and compared this with a range of estimated author-side fees for Gold OA, in order to determine whether libraries might pay more or less if all journals switched to OA. Here I’ve tried to update that study using information that wasn’t available back then.

Davis set the spreadsheet up to make it easy to update his assumptions and recalculate (kudos!), and Peter Suber (among others) pointed out that at least the following assumptions should be updated:

1. all OA journals charge author-side fees
2. the full cost of OA fees will be borne by libraries
3. TA journals charge no author-side fees

We now have five different studies (one recently confirmed, improved and updated) showing that in fact the majority of OA journals [70%] do not charge author-side fees…

We also know that research funders are increasingly willing to foot the bill for OA… A recent RCUK report showed that 45% of authors publishing in fee-based OA journals had their costs covered by their research funders…

I’ve updated two further aspects of Davis’ spreadsheet. First, we now have better information about the actual range of author-side fees charged by those OA journals that do charge them. Rather than Davis’ $2,500–$5,000 range, I’ve used $1,300 (PLoS ONE) to $3,000 (most of the high-profile hybrid programs). If the adjusted TA cost/article falls within this range, the prediction is that the OA and TA models cost about the same from a library point of view.
Second, Davis assumed that the scholarly literature made up 50% of library serials expenditures. I don't know where this figure came from (the spreadsheet refers to a report which does not give any further information), but I think the real value is closer to 90%... [Detailed reasoning omitted here.]

[Summarizing, after all corrections included in the update have been applied: If libraries pay 40% of Gold OA fees, no ARL library will pay more for universal Gold OA than for current subscriptions—and at 20%, all ARL libraries would pay less. As Hooker notes, one set of reasonable calculations suggest that the actual cost could be around 13.5%]

[Under worst-case scenarios, which institutions might pay the same or a little more? Essentially, research-intensive schools that publish a lot—e.g., UC Davis, UCLA, UCSD, Cornell and a few others.]

The final article in this cluster looks at total revenue per toll-access article, combining subscriptions and author-side charges. Without repeating the details, Hooker concludes that it's in the range of $2,106 to $2,886 and notes: “Sure puts one-time, up-front Gold OA fees in a different perspective, doesn’t it?” To say nothing of the 70% of Gold OA journals that don’t charge such fees...

Scandal!

The ever-vigilant Phil Davis, who of recent years seems to be looking for every opportunity to discredit OA, contrived a scandal and publicized it in “Open Access publisher accepts nonsense manuscript for dollars,” posted June 10, 2009 in the scholarly kitchen. The short version:

- As with others, Davis had received numerous invitations to publish in Bentham journals—Bentham Open, that is, a huge launch of “more than 200 peer-reviewed open access journals” from Bentham Science (which also publishes several dozen toll-access biomedical and medical journals). (The count’s now up to “over 250.”)
- Davis used a program that generates grammatically correct but (presumably) meaningless articles in computer science. (The site for SCIgen, pdos.csail.mit.edu/scigen/, suggests using it to prepare submissions for “conferences you suspect might have very low submission standards”—and a SCIgen-generated paper was accepted for a conference. I’ll submit that using the program to generate an article for a journal you suspect might have very low refereeing standards is in the spirit of the program.) The program even includes figures, tables and references in the nonsense output.
He submitted the manuscript to *The Open Information Science Journal* (a Bentham Open journal), using two generic names as coauthors and an affiliation that should have been a giveaway: The Center for Research in Applied Phrenology. (Apart from the acronym, you wouldn’t expect lots of quality computer science from an institute that studies reading personality traits from lumps on people’s heads.)

Bentham confirmed receipt of the manuscript almost immediately and, some four months later, accepted the manuscript after asserted peer review, asking for the $800 publication fee. At which point the co-authors retracted the article, citing “several errors in the manuscript.”

Davis sees no evidence that peer review actually took place and says that anyone proficient in English (even if ignorant of computer science) would spot it as nonsense. “Had it gone through peer review, I should have received reviewer comments.”

The final two paragraphs of Davis’ post—and note that he’s tried this stunt with Bentham before, with different results:

> From this one case, we cannot conclude that Bentham Science journals practice no peer review, only that it is inconsistently applied. Earlier this year, I reported on a case in which a nonsensical article submitted to another Bentham Science journal was rejected after going through peer review.

> While one should be careful not to generalize these results to other Open Access journals using similar business models, it does raise the question of whether, at least in some cases, the producer-pays-to-publish model may unduly influence editorial decision-making. One may also question whether publishers like Bentham see a lucrative opportunity from the OA movement, considering that academic libraries are establishing author publication funds to pay Open Access charges. [Emphasis added.]

The payoff here is the first sentence in the second paragraph—and, given that 70% of OA journals *don’t* require author-side fees while 75% of toll-access journals *do* require author-side fees, my immediate rejoinder would be “Since most toll-access journals require author-side fees *and* since toll-access publishers justify increased subscription prices by pointing to increased publication volume, one must also raise the question of whether such fees may unduly influence editorial decision-
making in traditional journals.” (David Prosser offers a more elegant version of that wording.)

Are there toll-access journals that will publish pretty much anything they can get their hands on, with or without author-side fees? Almost certainly. (In one comment, Davis notes the “long tail” of subscription journals “that exist because they fulfill the need for second-tier faculty to publish their articles and to sit on editorial boards”—even though the papers will rarely be either cited or even read.)

Has this stunt ever worked with traditional journals? It has, although admittedly within scholarly fields where grammatically correct nonsense may sometimes be hard to separate from scholarship. (Apparently, it’s also worked in computer science—in an Elsevier journal, no less, with a paper created by SCiGen.)

The long set of comments on Davis’ post includes those who had bad feelings about Bentham as one publishing company—and others who saw this as reason that “the pay to publish model has to end.” (Does that also go for author-side fees in subscription journals? If so, wave goodbye to most journals.)

When David Prosser raises a rejoinder similar to the one I raised, Davis responds that librarians prevent crappy subscription journals from succeeding. That may be true if the crappy subscription journals are high-priced, but I’m certainly aware of publishers who’ve made a business out of salami-slicing mediocre journals that only cost a few hundred dollars each, and tend to fly under the radar at larger institutions.

Gunther Eysenbach notes that he’s warned people about Bentham before, that there’s now an Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association (which Bentham has not joined) to maintain quality standards in OA publishing, and that it would be interesting to have a control test—that is, to send fake papers “to small subscription-based journals which are desperate for submissions.” Davis mentions existing methods publishers use to cope with a lack of good papers—but repeats that librarians will spot this and cancel the journals. I dunno; I don’t see that happening in moderately-priced journals. (Librarians in the group can probably name a few “quarterly” journals that rarely produce four issues a year and still seem to have plenty of subscriptions.)

A rather lovely comment from Elizabeth Davies notes that “some peer reviewers might not be capable of recognizing gibberish, because that is what they themselves produce.”
As you might expect, Peter Suber cited the post and offered informed comments. There’s been suspicion about Bentham for more than a year. The hoax certainly demonstrates incompetence at Bentham—but the question is whether something larger is at work. While Davis cautions against generalizing, he does so in a way that suggests generalizing, sort of the “don’t look over here, there’s nothing to see” approach.

The thing is, Suber and others interested in Gold OA are the biggest enemies of scam artists within the field. Dishonest and incompetent OA publishers weaken OA, possibly more than dishonest and incompetent toll publishers weaken traditional publishing.

The followup, across many different blogs and other platforms, was interesting. Bentham itself claimed that it knew the article was a hoax and was only pretending to accept it in order to learn the authors’ true identities. That, frankly, doesn’t fly; Davis notes that nobody attempted to contact him directly.

The editor of the journal in question, who had never seen the article, resigned. So has at least one editorial board member of another Bentham Open journal, noting that in his time on the board he had never received a paper for review. Another Bentham journal editor resigned when a paper (asserting that the Twin Towers attack was a conspiracy) was published without her knowledge or approval. (The editor also said that the Davis/Anderson hoaxers were guilty of somewhat unethical behavior, since the review process is based on trust.)

Summing up:

- There’s at least one questionable OA publisher (and probably others). For that matter, any time a publisher announces scores of new journals all at once, whether toll or free, I’d be suspicious.
- So far, there are at least two known examples of nonsense papers being accepted by subscription journals and two known examples of nonsense papers being submitted to a known-to-be-questionable OA publisher—and in one of those two cases, the paper was rejected. How’s this for a conclusion: “Based on a small-scale sample, Gold OA publishers are only half as likely as subscription publishers to accept hoax papers.” But, you know, the plural of anecdote is still not data—in fact, these four instances say nothing whatsoever about relative standards of peer reviewing across the journal literature.

Ah, but there may be other lessons to learn.
Opportunity in opprobrium

That’s Dorothea Salo’s suggestion in a June 13, 2009 Caveat Lector post. Excerpts:

[O]ne way to look at this unpleasant situation is as an information problem. If that suggests to you that I think librarians have a role in solving it, you know me entirely too well. In fact, I think we have to get a handle on it, because we are and will continue to be some of the organizations funding gold OA. Imagine the mess, if a well-regarded academic library funneled money to a Bentham!

…But taking a stand gets sticky, too, because…the last thing any academic service center wants to get involved in is telling faculty where they can and can’t publish. As gold OA takes on increasing importance, anyone with funds to disburse toward author fees may well land—or be perceived as having landed—in precisely that position. How do we even begin to think about that?

Well, one way is to think of ourselves as research funders, not unlike the NIH or the Wellcome Trust. If we’re paying the money, we deserve a say in where it goes, and we’re well within our rights to say that [sketchy publishers are] right out. As librarians, we make collection-development and purchasing decisions based on assessment of information quality, right? (Yes, yes, “when not prevented from doing so by Big Deals and similar less-than-savory practices,” granted.) This is the same thing, just at a different point in the process. It shouldn’t be a problem.

Of course, I’ve just begged a huge question. How do we know [who’s sketchy]?

I think OASPA’s response to the Bentham situation points to part of the way forward. If OASPA membership becomes a seal of approval for all-OA publishing operations, then it’s dead simple for any library that funds author fees to hold to a policy of “if it ain’t OASPA, we ain’t paying.” This puts a significant burden on OASPA, I grant you—if nothing else, they have to have the guts to kick out a bad apple—but my sense from that post is that they’re at least willing to consider picking up this gauntlet. If so, good for them.

I’m not sure that OASPA membership solves the entire problem, unfortunately… and I don’t know anything about OASPA’s membership structure or finances, so I apologize in advance if this line of thought is completely misguided… [See the post itself for an expansion of this discussion.]

Even with…caveats, I think an OASPA certification program represents a tremendous opportunity for the OA community. Gold OA is still small. It’s much easier to put meaningful quality regulation in place.
over a small, emerging, prestige-hungry industry. If gold OA manages to do that, then it suddenly has another competitive advantage over toll-access, which hasn’t done so and (given its extent and decentralization) very likely can’t…

Go read the whole post; there’s more there worth thinking about. You might also read “How to avoid questionable OA publications?” in Be openly accessible or be obscure (tillje.wordpress.com/), but Jim Till’s suggestion really only works for the health sciences.

**Framing and Mysteries**

“Framing” is an interesting word. Some might say Phil Davis has been trying to frame the OA movement (in the “I been framed!” sense) for some time—publishing cost analyses using a wildly biased set of assumptions, engaging in hoaxes aimed at exposing shoddy OA peer review (and “non-suggesting” that there might be a general problem), and so on. And he suggests mysteries where there may or may not be any—which we’ll get to in a moment.

He also discusses another kind of framing, which I’ll call rhetorical framing, in “Framing the Open Access debate,” posted March 3, 2009 at the scholarly kitchen. Right there in the title is an important piece of framing: asserting that there is a legitimate debate.

**Is there?** Is there a legitimate argument that OA in general is a bad thing and to be avoided? Remember that to argue against OA you must argue against both colors—which also means you need to argue that most of the biggest for-profit publishers are wrong in accepting green OA. An editorial in Communications of the ACM questions the need for Gold OA—but ACM is a Green OA publisher (and one with generally reasonable prices). Too bad that the editorial notes the use of surplus revenues from publications to cover other activities—because some librarians (Peter Murray, in this case) are questioning this response:

I am a librarian. I view this distribution of funds as a problem. A library’s primary mission is to gather, organize, and disseminate scholarly information from a variety of fields. To the extent that library subscription dollars exceed the actual cost of producing journal content to “support the rest of ACM activities” goes beyond the mission of the library.

There’s a reply that begs the question of hidden subsidies, which these are.

Daniel Lemire asks “Is Open Access publishing the solution? Really?” in a June 17, 2009 post on his blog (www.daniel-lemire.com/blog/). The post trivializes OAs virtue (“Open Access research papers might
have marginally more impact”) and stresses the “costs”—which he summarizes thus:

There are far fewer Open Access journals to choose from.

On average, Open Access journals have lower standing.

There are more than 5,000 OA journals, including 155 (according to DOAJ) in Lemire’s field, so one has to wonder about the first point. The second is certainly open to debate—but in that case, Lemire’s only arguing against Gold OA. And, in fact, he’s arguing for “disruption”—he doesn’t regard OA journals as sufficiently disruptive.

What’s disruptive? Well, he publishes his preprints to arXiv. Before that, he put them up on his website. This would be Green OA, if he was also submitting the articles to peer review, but Lemire’s really disruptive:

Self-publishing is both simpler and more convenient than traditional publishing. It is disruptive. As is often the case with disruptive solutions, it lacks some important features. For example, reputation, peer-review, quality control, review, validation, authentication are difficult with self-publishing. But that is to be expected. The solution is not to try to emulate these features one by one. Indeed, we may find that many of these important missing features are not relevant.

From Lemire’s perspective, maybe there is an OA debate—but hardly the one Davis wishes to frame. Davis is constructing his own frame: Asserting that, in crafting a straightforward argument for OA, adherents have “alienated one community that should be on their side: the non-profit scientific societies” by creating a caricature of publisher behavior. Here’s a paragraph that will get me in trouble:

By doing so, open access advocates ignore the fact that many society publishers are non-profit and use the surpluses from their journal to provide grants and opportunities for young scientists, fund public awareness of science programs, among other social benefits. Open access advocates ignore the fact that scientists share a common ethos of openness and a culture of sharing, and that these values are at the heart of most scientific societies.

To which I can only respond as I have in the past (perhaps too often, and this might just be the last time): It is unreasonable to expect libraries to fund those other activities. If societies wish to make the case that universities should subsidize association activities, that case should be made to the departments in question.

It is certainly true that many (not all) societies charge reasonable prices for their publications and offer reasonable author arrangements.
It is also true that many societies have given over their journals to megapublishers and turned the journals into very expensive items. If the scientific societies are open and committed to sharing, they should openly demonstrate just what their actual journal costs are—and should be leaders in making sure articles can be shared.

In fact, however, Davis is attempting to frame a “debate” by creating his own, overstated, black-and-white generalization and opposition:

Open access advocates will continue to accuse publishers (as a group) of being uncaring and working against the public good. In turn, publishers will continue to accuse open access advocates of being irrational ideologues.

One thing is clear—this debate was never about science.

I’m trying to remember the number of times I’ve heard Peter Suber or Charles W. Bailey, Jr. or Dorothea Salo or Stevan Harnad accuse all publishers of being uncaring and working against the public good. (Yes, there are doubtless OA advocates who make such wild charges—but, you know, I’ve never encountered them.) So far, I come up with a goose egg—a big Zero. On the other hand, it’s certainly true that a few publishing spokespeople—not many—speak of OA advocates in a way that could suggest “irrational ideology.”

A more formal and sophisticated journal-article equivalent to this post appears in the February 2009 Journal of Electronic Publishing (12:1), an issue devoted to open access. I’m not going to comment on that article or, in general, the issue, although I suggest checking the contents list and seeing whether you find some of the articles worth reading.

One commenter notes that some (not many) societies have become “major quasi-commercial publishers that happen to have memberships attached” while retaining the “fig leaf of non-profit status.” Those surpluses may yield scholarships; they may also yield very high salaries. (A certain chemical group comes to mind.) Others wave the DC Principles flag (I’ve commented on that before)—and one raises the point I’ve been raising.

Dark secrets?

The title on Phil Davis’ May 13, 2009 scholarly kitchen post is “Dark secrets: Open Access and author processing charges.” To read the lead, it’s a Very Big Deal—one that gets a lot smaller in the rest of the telling:

You would have thought I was requesting a field manual for interrogating prisoners of war or a list of members on Dick Cheney’s Energy Taskforce.
At least in those instances, I would have received a response that answering my questions violated national security or “executive privilege.”

All I did was ask five librarians at institutions administrating Open Access publication charges two simple questions:

“Can you provide a list of Open Access articles that you have supported through your author support program,” and “Have you rejected any requests to date?”

The librarians serve in public institutions. Davis makes a point about “publication” implying “public” (so if a publication’s hidden behind toll walls, it’s not really a publication?) and then the “results” of his inquiry. To wit, two weeks after the queries, two of five responded, but without lists and actual numbers (I don’t see a request for numbers in his question)—and neither said any bona fide requests had been rejected.

And Davis produces a post with a conspiratorial headline and first paragraph, then goes on about the need for transparency and “stonewalling.” His close:

Those who campaign for Open Access need to be held accountable just like everyone else, and budget transparency is the first step.

Before I even look at the comments:

- **Two weeks?** Failure to respond fully within two weeks isn’t conspiracy. In an institution as complex as any of those libraries, it’s a miracle that two of the five were able to compose a response and get it approved within two weeks.

- I don’t believe the libraries are the sole granting authorities in all of these cases, and I don’t believe librarians could rapidly release such lists without consulting other parts of the universities, probably including counsel.

- Davis isn’t calling for OA to be accountable “just like everyone else,” he’s calling for a much higher standard of accountability. Show me “budget transparency” at for-profit publishers. For that matter, show me scholarly societies who will (or can) break out revenues from journal publishing, direct costs for journal publishing, and exactly where the surplus goes. (Do I believe there are thousands of scholarly society honchos earning millions of dollars? Not really. Do I believe there are some society people with fairly lavish lifestyles subsidized by subscription fees? Well, in the absence of budget transparency, yes, I do.)
Mostly, I don’t think there’s a scandal here. What of the commenters? Several, appropriately, say this is an important conversation. “Amanda R” finds it easy to imagine that such a request would be “bumped around internally for a few weeks” and isn’t quite ready to start calling this “dark secrets.” Davis doesn’t think it’s constructive to speculate on why three libraries didn’t respond rapidly—but apparently feels provocative headlines are constructive. Robert Kiley notes that the list of papers supported by Wellcome is readily available.

JQ Johnson points out reasons it might not be appropriate to provide such lists—and notes that, when he queried the same institutions, he got lots of cooperation. He wonders whether Davis asked the right people. Davis says this all “skirts around” the main issue and suddenly brings in another issue: “Transparency does not mean selective dissemination based on who you consider to be your friends or enemies.” Since Davis does not tell us exactly who received his requests or how he determined that they were the right people to ask, this is a red herring: We have no basis for assuming Davis was denied information because he may be increasingly viewed as a dedicated enemy of OA.

Overall? There’s not much of a story here, other than that big, bureaucratic institutions don’t respond to requests for information instantly. The big story, if any, is the sinister tone of Davis’ title and lead paragraph.

Peter Suber quotes much of the post and adds his own comments: Phil’s title and opening sentence are a little melodramatic in light of the results, but he asked two good questions and I’d like to know the answers myself. Or at least I’d like to know how many requests the funds received (for OA journal publication fees rather than something else) and how many they rejected. I don’t need to know which authors or articles were subsidized. I’d also like to know the range of fees requested, and how often the fees would pay for libre OA rather than gratis OA. I’d like to know how often the fees would go to hybrid journals with a double-charge business model (i.e. not promising to reduce subscription prices in proportion to author uptake). I’d like to know the fields or departments of the requesting faculty. If the funds have a good reason not to share anonymized data about their use, I’d like to know what it is. (This is not a hostile question; there may be very good reasons which haven’t occurred to me.) I should add that I also have lots of questions about the business information at OA and TA journals.
One more question: When a survey has a low response rate, why assume that the surveyed people or institutions are suppressing information?

I don’t have much to say about Suber’s response. “A little melodramatic” is nicely understated; the final question is, I think, an excellent one. And, after Suber points it out, I’d agree that a list is probably not an appropriate response—and, as a question, almost seems designed to make responses slow and difficult.

Bill Hooker (in a May 26, 2009 Open Reading Frame post) also notes that Davis “plays the conspiracy theory card way too hard for my taste” and that, when he left a comment asking pointed questions about Davis’ methodology (e.g., who did he contact, did he follow up, how does he know the email wasn’t trapped as spam)—well, after almost two weeks, the comment not only hasn’t been answered, it didn’t even appear on the blog (then or now, four months later):

What dark secrets is Philip Davis hiding? What dim, Crotty-esque ambitions of being the famous naysayer, the Nicholas Carr of Open Access, are forming even now in the troubled subconscious of this —-

Or, you know, I just got stuck in the spam queue. It happens. :-)

He also notes that the “everyone else” Davis claims need to be held accountable should include “bloggers who wish to hold librarian feet to the accountability fire.” Davis certainly didn’t make his research methodology transparent, and that’s important. Appropriately, Hooker mentions Hanlon’s Razor: “Never attribute to malice that which can be adequately explained by stupidity.” Substitute “bureaucracy” for “stupidity” and this seems to fit perfectly. (I’ve always preferred “incompetence” as the final word in Hanlon’s Razor, as lots of incompetent people aren’t stupid at all.)

A FriendFeed discussion includes some useful notes. Christina Pikas says “the worst part of this is figuring out who you would send a request like that to” and “Almost seems that he’s taking confusion for malicious intent.” Indeed.

The Problem(s) with Green OA

Maybe the heading for this section should be “IRs”—and maybe I should be sensible and drop this section entirely. What do you do when one path toward better access relies heavily on a specific instrumentality—and the loudest mouth advocating that path consis-
tently, um, fails to appropriately represent (the kind wording) the reality of that instrumentality? Maybe, if you’re an outsider like me, you read the stuff Dorothea Salo’s written in the past, add a few other things from John Mark Ockerbloom, Alma Swan, Richard Akerman and others and choose not to comment on it.

Or maybe you let some particularly juicy or interesting pieces accumulate—mostly from Caveat Lector, a few from elsewhere—until you have (good grief!) eighteen of them, exactly two-thirds from Caveat Lector, and attempt to summarize them coherently. Which is what this particular section is on about, although coherence may be lacking. I’m not including any posts from Green OA’s chief advocate. For one thing, all of them seem to be the same message with slightly different wordings; for another, he does enough harm to his own movement all by himself, without my assistance. Indeed, the very first piece I’m discussing here kicks off with an entirely appropriate statement:

With allies like Dr. Stevan Harnad, do institutional repositories really need enemies?

That’s the start of “Allies,” posted July 9, 2008. There’s a link to a Harnad piece, beating up on Nature Publishing Group (NPG) for offering to take care of depositing postprints into PubMed Central. As is typical with Harnad, he equates self-archiving to “a few keystrokes” and harangues any OA solution that is not, precisely, 100% what he advocates.

It turns out that NPG is willing to deposit postprints in institutional repositories (henceforth IRs) as well, which negates of some of Harnad’s criticisms—but Harnad still insists that “If Nature really wants to help OA, then dropping its access embargo would be a lot more helpful than saving authors from having to do a few keystrokes.”

Some of what Salo says about that and about NPG’s offer:

Wait a second. I thought keystrokes were the big limiting factor in reaching green-OAs holy grail. A lot of keystrokes were just eliminated, and very likely more will be as other publishers (who watch NPG like hawks, because NPG is amazing) follow suit. Surely this is a good thing? Guess not.

Truthfully, though, it’s not the count-your-blessings aspect of this silly little kerfuffle that gets under my skin. It’s the pattern, the pattern of OA advocates thoughtlessly backstabbing their allies, with IRs being a favorite whipping-boy, and it’s of long standing. And yes, before you ask, I’m as guilty as anyone when my annoyance with DSpace boils over.
Dr. Harnad pillorying NPG for helping IRs stabs me and my fellow repo-rats in the back, because we need cooperative publishers and impetus toward interoperability. Noisy proclamations about how everybody wants open access likewise backstab repo-rats, because if library administrators believe this bushwa, they inevitably blame their local repository for still-pathetic adoption and content-capture rates. Tarring all librarians, repo-rats included, with broadstroke brushes about nitpickiness and get-with-the-program-already—well, I need say no more. Ignoring librarian contributions to OA, particularly green OA, is worse. All of this harms IRs. If IRs are still important to OA (which is, I grant, arguable), it harms OA.

So could we all stop it, please? Myself included. We’re allies; let’s act like it. At the least, we could start considering the impact of our careless words on our allies.

Can’t we all just get along? A great idea—but one that’s unlikely to reach fruition, I’m afraid.

A few weeks later, after Salo gave a keynote at a conference on repositories, she posted “Repository tidbits” (August 5, 2008). A few pertinent excerpts:

The Edinburgh experience left me with a complex observation that I tried unsuccessfully to get across to one person who was pressing me really hard to identify “successful” repositories in the United States. (No, it wasn’t “define success,” though that was a tempting question. The reality is that success for institutional repositories is defined—by the people who matter, anyway—in terms of items deposited.) It’s an important enough point, and I made it inartically enough at the time, that I think it deserves a piece of a blog post.

…There’s an understandable tendency to look to “successful” repositories for examples the rest of us should follow. Nothing wrong with that in and of itself. Problems arise, however, when one assumes first, that unsuccessful repositories have nothing to teach; second, that the successful repository experience is the norm; and third, that the locus of success lies within the repository and its staff.

Because it doesn’t…

Successful repositories have sufficient backing from their libraries and their university administrations to make something work. I can’t make it any simpler than that. Without that support, the best repository-rat in the world will not succeed. With it, you don’t need an Einstein.

Exactly what successful repositories make work varies quite a bit, according to the talents and creativity of the staff involved and the nature
of the support provided. This is why it’s impossible to write the “win-
ning recipe” for a successful IR…

The other thing that successful repositories have is leave and resources to experi-
ment. They have to. The standard repository software package, as I have argued ad nauseam, is wholly inadequate to fuel a successful re-
pository program. This means that the well-dressed repository manager has some combination of elbow room in her job description, developer
time, student help, librarian alliances, and administrative weight to work with. Again, the exact combination will differ from institution to institution—but a manager without any of this might want to rewrite her résumé before her current job tarnishes it.

So much for the successful repository. Let’s talk for a moment about the typical repository. If either of my two(-plus, if you count my contribu-
tion to a consortial IR) repo-rat positions is any example, the typical repository is running on a wing and a prayer and the dedicated efforts of one FTE or less. I say “dedicated” for a reason, because it’s next-door to impossible to garner impressive results from the voluntary efforts of scattered librarians who don’t have any kind of imprimatur from above for their repository efforts.

This is no way to run a program, folks—and yet as best I can tell…it’s the typical way it’s done. These repositories cannot be successful…yet they are the majority case! What does that say for the repository movement?

The thing is, just telling repository managers “You need developer time, student help, willing librarians, and administrative support” is a useless way to behave. This message doesn’t need to go out to repository man-
agers; we know already, and there’s nothing we can do about it. Again, we don’t have the administrative support to garner all that other stuff.
The message needs to go to research-library administrators, many of whom have yet to hear it. We have sufficient reasonably successful ex-
amples now that we can say this with authority. So let’s.

What may not help this effort: A high-profile person who repeatedly insists that IRs don’t really cost much of anything—certainly not the sala-
ry of one FTE!

A month later, Salo posted two successive posts, “Feeding Mr. Blue” on September 9, 2008 and “What do we want from IRs, and what are we doing to repository rats?” on September 10, 2008. I’m picking out small excerpts from both. (Mr. Blue? An invisible heron who figures into several of Salo’s IR discussions.)

The key statement in the September 9 post: Voluntary unme-
diated self-archiving is not a viable model for institutional-
repository population. Which is not, as Salo goes on to explain, the same as saying “IRs are not viable.” So what’s the difference?

- **Voluntary**: You need a mandate—but probably only the faculty can establish an effective mandate (and you probably need a library mandate first!). If a mandate’s not possible, bribery might work.

- **Unmediated self-archiving**: Yes, faculty save their papers—but they save stuff all over the place. They’re not likely to put it in the IR on their own, but mediated deposit might work. (Salo has a fair amount of detail here, much more than I’ll quote.)

That summary certainly doesn’t do justice to the useful post. The second post is longer and even more difficult to summarize easily, but it boils down to suggesting questions an institution needs to answer before beginning an IR.

There are still, apparently, institutions who believe in the “build it and they will deposit” model. To Salo, the key question is this:

What content do I want from this initiative, and what am I willing to do to get it?

And if the answer to the second part is “I’m willing to run and market an IR,” Salo says you shouldn’t start one—it’s not enough and you’ll waste people’s time and money. Instead, she suggests, the focus should be not on IRs as such but on the content types desired and how you’re going to get them.

Once we focus on the stuff we want instead of the place we’re going to put it, we open up the questions we should have been asking all along. How does this stuff get produced, and how could we help produce it in a way that keeps it available to us? What happens to it when it’s done? What incentives can we offer to have it given to us, and are those sufficient to counter any opposing incentives combined with natural inertia and the actual difficulty of the task? Failing that, how do we find out about the existence of the stuff we want, and how can we then get our hands on it in the form in which we need it?

Given all the effort needed to do what an institution wants, is it still worthwhile? Salo says “No” may be the right answer in some cases. When failure is predictable, maybe it’s not worth the attempt. There’s more, specifically about the damage done to professionals by saddling them with unworkable IR duties, but this relates back to this section’s overall topic at the end of the post:

Until the open-access movement turns honest about the labor required to accomplish its real goals—notably, we’re fairly honest about gold OA
and mealymouthed still about green—and acknowledges the damage it
has done to the labor it's already mustered, it can't make a better start.

Let's move away from Caveat Lector for a bit. John Mark Ockerbloom
posted “Repositories: Benefits, costs, contingencies (with an example)”
on September 11, 2008 at Everybody’s Libraries. He begins from the
same perspective as Salo—”Without a clear sense of benefits and costs,
you won't have a sensible repository strategy… You have to go in
knowing what you want, and being realistic about what you’re willing
to invest to produce it.” More:

Even when your initial plan is sound, you have to be prepared for
change, and the unexpected. Technology changes quickly. Online tools,
communities, and scholarly societies also change. Methods of scholar-
ship also change, often more slowly, but sometimes in significant ways.
Even if you’ve done your homework, you may eventually find that the
repository that seemed just fine a few years ago doesn’t really meet your
needs like it used to. Maybe the software hasn’t been updated as you’d
like it, and there’s a better system available now. Maybe you’re storing
different kinds of things, or you’ve found a new application that your
scholars really want to use that’s not compatible with your existing se-
tup. Maybe the formats you’re managing have gone out of date. Maybe
it becomes more cost effective to move to a big externally managed re-
pository that your scholars are flocking to already– or away from one
that they’re not finding useful. Maybe you even decide it no longer
makes sense for you to maintain a particular repository.

You need to start thinking about strategies for change (and for exit) the
moment you start planning a repository. Remember, repositories ulti-
mately don’t exist for themselves, but for their content (and for the
people using that content). And the kind of content that libraries often
care about is likely to remain relevant much longer than any particular
repository configuration. You want to ensure that the content remains
useable for as long as your patrons care about it, even as it moves and
migrates between systems (and possibly, between caretakers).

Ockerbloom’s example, at Penn, is planning for data repository servic-
es. He details some of the questions and costs they need to consider.

Contingencies, by their nature, tend not to be fully foreseeable. But there
are a few obvious things we can ask about and plan for. Will our data still
be readable for decades to come? Can we migrate it to new formats, and if
so, what would be involved? Can we make sure we have good enough me-
tadata and annotation to know how to read, use, and migrate the data in
the future? Do we have clear identifiers for our content that will survive a
move to a new platform (and leave a workable forwarding address, if ne-
cessary)? What happens to our content if our repository loses funding, our machine room is sucked into a mini-black-hole, or we simply decide it’s not worth the trouble of keeping the repository going? What do we do if we’re told to withdraw or change the data we’re maintaining, by the person who deposited it, by someone else using or mentioned in the data, or by the government? We won’t necessarily come up with definitive answers to all these questions, but brainstorming and thinking through possible and likely scenarios should help us know what to expect and reduce the chance of our getting caught unawares by a costly problem.

As he points out, if you just put up an IR without thinking about those issues, faculty are less likely to think that the IR’s benefits are worth their time.

Running a large, successful, long-lasting repository takes a lot of work over its lifespan. Better to do some planning work up front than get stuck with a lot of costly and unnecessary work later on.

Next we move to Confessions of a science librarian in its old home, jdupuis.blogspot.com, for an October 5, 2008 post—but we get no further away from Dorothea Salo, since Dupuis’ post is an interview with her. A few choice excerpts from a 3,200-word interview:

I think the institutional repository was a noble and worthwhile experiment, but as a tool for redressing the imbalances in the scholarly-communication system, it is a failure…

I think we libraries have a lot of market power that we are not using properly. I’ve heard publishers talk about their industry, and what they invariably say is “we will follow the money.” That means libraries; as individual subscriptions dwindle, WE are the ones with the money. They’ll follow us—but we aren’t leading them toward open access.

We’re squealing like stuck pigs about the stalemate, yes, but we’re not reallocating any of our serials funds to support gold open access. I think this is a serious mistake…

…I want to see us cancelling overpriced journals, regardless of their impact factors or usage statistics, and standing up to faculty when they ask why. We need to say “no” loudly and clearly more often, and we need to divert some of the serials money we save thereby to gold open access. (Some should go back to monographs, of course.)

In response to the question “If you could get one message across to faculty at your institution about Institutional Repositories, what would it be?”

Faculty specifically? “Let me help you.”

Frankly, though, a more productive message would be directed at my fellow librarians, and would read “I can’t do this without you. Help me.”
On the future of IRs over the next five years, looking for best and worst case scenarios:

Worst case is easy: they are defunded and die… If the software remains obtuse and difficult, if the goals remain socio-culturally impractical, if the services remain under-resourced and poorly understood, IRs are doomed. At a good many institutions, I believe this is inevitable…

Best case: IRs shift from “warehouse at the end of the digital train tracks” to a set of services and systems that manage, safeguard, and shepherd the digital products of the research process all the way through, soup to nuts…

On the future of journals, publishers’ business models, open access and all…

…The publishing lobby will continue its stunning mendacity, largely though not entirely unopposed by rank-and-file publishers. There will be more open-access journals. It is likely to become harder to assert that open-access journals are unsustainable, but that won’t stop the publishing lobby from trying—and it won’t stop a few gold journals from folding, either. We will continue to argue about citation advantages, and just what a citation is worth. Faculty will continue to feel whip-sawed by all this.

Which will bring us back to Do…or, rather, to Caveat lector. “Ya think?” on October 24, 2008 notes a RAND Corporation report on UK repositories that says things Salo’s been saying, for example:

[D]igital repositories are currently underutilised, and…there are significant barriers to a strategic commitment…

Even if most of the barriers identified in this report—e.g., the lack of awareness, a technology that is in its infancy, risks of reputation damage, or the administrative burden of depositing—can be overcome, one major challenge remains for digital repositories, namely the lack of incentives for the wider institutional community to provide content for these repositories…

…There appears a misalignment between the objectives of the repository and the needs of different groups of stakeholders.

After these quotes and a few comments, Salo gives more specific advice to most academic institutions than I’d seen before:

If you aren’t a doctoral institution, don’t bother with an IR. No, I don’t care what Harvard did; you aren’t Harvard, and you have many less-futile things to do with your precious library budget and staff.
Speaking of smaller institutions and IRs, Salo asked about IRs at small institutions—and got some responses, all requiring anonymity. Some conclusions (from a November 3, 2008 post):

Some of these institutions are using IR software as a quick-and-dirty digital preservation mechanism, mostly for institutional records. These institutions don't have any particular commitment to open access, nor are they under any illusions about their faculty's commitment thereto. They'll let faculty deposit if they've a mind, but that's not what the IR is there for. A variant on this scenario is IR software considered alongside other content- or knowledge-management systems.

So far, so good; this seems decently sensible to me, though in all honesty I can't imagine most IR software standing up well against a real CMS. I'm relieved, though; I appreciate knowing that my profession mostly has its head on straight.

Unfortunately, that's not the whole story. At least some of these small institutions have The Shiny in their sights. Everybody has an IR these days, so why don't we? If we build it, they will come!

In at least one such place, I am told, cooler heads higher on the totem pole are prevailing, which is all to the good. In at least one such place, the hotheads are the top of the totem pole, sadly.

To be fair, small institutions have one major advantage large ones don't: scale. Yes, scale. Small is beautiful; at many small schools, it's perfectly feasible for the library to have one-on-one relationships with nearly every researcher on campus, especially given that teaching-focused schools aren't necessarily publishing all that much research! One-on-one outreach works; it's nearly the only technique that does.

That said, I see a Sisyphean climb even for small schools. Most importantly, small schools don't have many librarians, and those librarians don't have much time to spare. Forget about digitization or mediated-deposit programs; they're wasteful luxuries at a small school. Many such libraries, even many small institutions, don't have nearly the technical savvy it takes to run even EPrints, which is the most straightforward of the Big Three open-source IR packages…

There tend to be cultural differences between small teaching-focused and large research-focused institutions as well, ones that do not bode well for open access. One is obvious: these places tend not to have physicists, medical researchers, computer scientists—precisely the disciplines that are early adopters of open access. What they have in plenty are humanists and social scientists, who see OA (when they see it at all, which most frankly don't) as a commie plot aimed directly at the heart of their beloved scholarly societies.
Another is less obvious, at least to me.... Faculty at small schools are unbelievably suspicious of their institutions’ administrations. Anything that so much as hints at institutional oversight of research gets the major fisheye. This makes IRs and institutional bibliographies a viciously hard sell.

A third: faculty everywhere are unreasonably paranoid about plagiarism, misquotation, and idea-appropriation, and unreasonably optimistic about copyright as a guard against those ills—but in my experience, faculty at small schools are worse, much worse. Open access isn’t just a commie plot, it’s a dagger in the heart of my precious ideas!...

I can imagine a small, tight-knit institution that really truly trusts its librarians making a go of an IR, especially if the technical pieces were handled outside the institution, by a vendor or consortium. It’d be a nice thing to see. I’m not especially sanguine, however; the barriers are significant, and by no means solely technical.

How can I comment knowledgeably? I’ve never even worked in a small academic institution (UC Berkeley hardly qualifies), and while my wife directed the library at such an institution, that was before IRs were a topic of discussion.

A December 1, 2008 post is entitled “IRs in 2009: the failure legacy.” It covers a lot of ground, but I’m going to excerpt that portion most directly related to Green OA—and particularly the odd, damaging concept that Green OA doesn’t really cost anything.

What is clear to me at this juncture is that the repository world is split in two as regards the appropriate response to faculty apathy about deposit. One chunk of the world is gamely gearing up to take on mediated deposit of the peer-reviewed literature. The other chunk of the world is using the repository for lower-hanging fruit (ETDs, undergraduate research, collapsing it with the local digital library, whatever) and doing a fan-dance around its lack of commitment to green open access. All right, there’s a third chunk, too: those that are doing both.

However, it’s the second chunk that are the problem, from the point of view of the open-access movement. Bluntly, these institutions love green open access—until it costs them resources beyond the mere provisioning of a repository. Since they are now uncomfortably aware that green open access costs more than that, they are sidling away from it in as delicate and face-maintaining a way as possible. The question for open access is how to keep its agenda alive in libraries that are no longer able or willing to dedicate specific resources to the green road.

There are options. One is to push harder on the gold road: ask libraries to dedicate funds to gold OA memberships and author fees. This is a
tall order, because the subtext here is asking libraries to cancel even more journals to pay for a brighter future, but I do think gains are achievable, if perhaps mostly symbolic ones at this point.

Another is to bypass outreach to libraries and work harder on faculty, in hopes of additional Harvards and Stanfords… It’s probably too soon to push this angle too hard in the States, unless targets are chosen very carefully indeed…

A third is to ‘fess up about the real costs of green OA and provide libraries and struggling repositories with a realistic roadmap to achieving it. We have these data now; the problem is that libraries are backing away from the cost of the inevitable conclusions. If the open-access movement wants green OA through institutional repositories, it will have to stiffen the collective library backbone from the top down. I don’t see this happening, but if green OA through IRs is to survive, it will have to…

**Moving into 2009**

In a couple of posts on March 2, 2009, Salo discusses Clifford Lynch’s prediction that moves by funding agencies will mean “faculty will want help from their institutions in satisfying the requirements”—which, presumably, would be wonderful for IRs.

Salo’s not biting quite that rapidly.

To which I say, great! *When it happens, let me know.* Libraries have already been sold one pig in a poke—that was the “faculty want someplace to put their papers” pig. I, as a repository-rat, have zero credibility left. Seriously, *none.* I can’t go to my administration and say “Faculty are gonna want this. Really. Cliff Lynch said so!” That’s a lead balloon, folks.

Wait until the NSF and NIH and Mellon get serious. *Then* go to libraries. Or better yet, tell *faculty* to go to their libraries; faculty asking for help have more credibility with library administrators than I will build up in my entire library career.

It gets worse. Lynch doesn’t much care for OA as a basis for IRs. Quoting from a *Library Journal* article:

I may be a bit of an outlier on this, but it seems to me that IRs have become terrifically entangled with open access… I recently had cause to go back and reread my 2003 IR piece, and I hardly talk at all about OA, other than to observe that one of the many benefits of IRs is that they can facilitate OA mandates—but I consider them independent of one another…

Here’s where things get strange—when Lynch questions conflating IRs with OA:
I think it is shortsighted. I know many of these institutions are feeling great pain from pressure on their acquisition budgets and would like to mitigate that… But that’s a short-term economic thing, and I’m sorry to see it getting mixed up with IRs.

Whew. I was working full-time at UC Berkeley from 1968 through 1979. I can attest that, in the early 1970s, we had a large-scale serials cancellation project because of pressure on the acquisitions budget. I suppose “short-term” could mean multiple decades, as opposed to centuries or millennia, but calling the serials affordability crisis “short-term” strikes me as odd. As it does Salo, commenting on that last quotation:

Oh, Dr. Lynch. Oh, Dr. Lynch. Mistake. Big one. The serials crisis is not a short-term economic thing; it’s been here for thirty years and shows no sign of slowing. It’s not a small thing, either; it’s causing libraries significant pain… Pooh-poohing a major library crisis is not the way to win friends and influence people in librarianship, Dr. Lynch.

Anyway, if IRs aren’t going to help solve the serials crisis, Dr. Lynch, why should a library invest in one? Riddle me that. “Altruism” is not a good answer here; we tried that one already. “Faculty demand” is an even worse answer, because there isn’t any.

Moving elsewhere briefly, Richard Akerman provides another example of the challenges faced both by IRs and by OA in general, in his March 14, 2009 post, “revisiting potential research-support roles for the library.” Key excerpts:

While institutional repositories are valuable, they currently benefit primarily organisations, not researchers. They provide a unified view of an organisation’s published output. For individual researchers, their priority may be just on getting published, or if they do want to disseminate their work, they may just post it to their own website (and sad to say, may get more Google rank having it there than in their repository)…

It’s clear that IRs have become about coercion, which should be making us seriously question their value…

If providing an institutional repository is your primary or core value to the organisation, you are putting yourself at tremendous risk, because a savvy administrator may notice that you can purchase hosted repository services from BePress and BMC Open Repository. Any time a primary function (however valuable) has become commodity, you are at risk.

What I do not see anywhere in the post (which, admittedly, is about other concerns): Any recognition that open access might itself be part
of support for research. (Searching this blog for open access doesn’t yield any real discussion more recent than mid-2007.)

The last stop on this hectic journey is an April 17, 2009 Caveat lector post, “Where the snark stops.” Given the hard truths Salo has been stating about the past and present state of IRs—and the hard questions that need to be answered before IRs make sense—it’s an important post. She speaks of a retired librarian’s email referring to “the IR craze”:


If I give the impression that I think IRs are a “craze” and should go away en masse, I hereby humbly apologize, because that has never been my belief or the intent of my communication. Do I think some individual IRs should go away? Sure. Do I think some of the assumptions underlying IRs need rethinking? Oh, of course. Do I hate IR software with a fiery passion? Yup, though I am gradually becoming friends with Fedora. Do I think some IRs are badly run? Absolutely, and I don’t except any of the ones I’ve been involved with, having no grounds whatever to let myself off any hooks.

But, see, I’ve been involved with them. For four years. I’ve staked my career on the damn things. I have invested time, money, sweat, political capital, professional capital, and a great many tears in them. I have, shall we say, a certain position from which to level criticisms.

Random librarians who email me just to sneer? Have no such position. If you don’t like your local IR, step up and do something to make it better. I’m guessing your local repo-rat would absolutely adore the help. If you can’t or won’t do that, don’t expect me to have much patience for your attitude; from where I’m sitting, you are part of my years-long headache.

It’s hard to comment on that. I read it and wonder again whether I’m adding value through these pieces or possibly otherwise. Does it damage OA for me to note (once again) that Harnad’s oversimplifications turn reasonable people away from OA? Maybe. Is it harmful to point out real-world issues, as Salo delights in doing? I don’t believe so (and, I would note, neither does Peter Suber). Is it always wrong to criticize something if you’re not ready to help make it better? Certainly not—particularly if you’re not in a position to improve things.

When I was, briefly, chair of the LITA Publications Committee, one of my four desires was to move LITA’s scholarly journal, Information Technology and Libraries, toward full and immediate Gold OA status for its refereed articles. (It’s already Gold OA with a six-month embargo for non-members, and it’s been Green OA for quite some
time.) My success in that regard was similar to my success on the other three fronts: Zero. But I did try. Sniping without any effort to improve, when such efforts are available to you, is generally not such a great thing.

Can you have successful institutional repositories without green OA? Certainly. Can you have successful green OA without IRs? Probably not, particularly in the humanities, where disciplinary repositories seem thin on the ground. Can you run useful IRs (or disciplinary repositories) on a shoestring? I don’t believe so; Salo doesn’t believe so; and I believe it seriously harms OA to assert that this is possible, or that Green OA is nothing but a matter of “a few keystrokes.”

**Quality, Value and Progress**

Peter Suber leads off this section with “Thinking about prestige, quality, and open access,” the lead essay in the September 2, 2008 SPARC Open Access Newsletter. (Note 2008: it’s been around for a while.) It’s a rich, important essay. I’m providing very brief excerpts from a nearly 8,000-word essay. Specifically, I’m mostly just giving Suber’s theses with very little of the argumentation, and you should assume that all emphasis (italics, bold) is added, not in the original:

I’ve been thinking a lot lately about how journal quality and prestige overlap, how they diverge, and how their complex interaction affects the prospects for OA. Here are a dozen thoughts or theses about prestige and OA. Some are commonplace, but I include them because they help me build up to others which are not. I start with the rough notion that if journal quality is real excellence, then journal prestige is reputed excellence.

(1) Universities reward faculty who publish in high-prestige journals, and faculty are strongly motivated to do so. If universities wanted to create this incentive, they have succeeded.

(2) Most high-prestige journals today are toll access (TA).

If a journal can be excellent from birth, but not prestigious from birth, or if new journals typically achieve quality before they achieve a reputation for quality, then we have a non-cynical reason to think that quality and prestige can diverge. Quality and prestige clearly overlap, perhaps most of the time. But a significant number of high-quality journals, most notably the new ones, will not be correspondingly high in prestige…
(3) Most authors will choose prestige over OA if they have to choose. Fortunately, they rarely have to choose. Unfortunately, few of them know that they rarely have to choose.

[To summarize: There are more and more high-prestige OA journals and most high-prestige toll-access (TA) journals allow Green OA.]

(4) Apart from the fact that most OA journals are new, there is no intrinsic reason why OA journals can’t be as high in quality and prestige as the best TA journals.

(5) Quality feeds prestige and prestige feeds quality.

(6) Prestige is a zero-sum game, but quality is not.

(7) Because prestige is a zero-sum game, and quality is not, prestige can actually interfere with quality.

When the journals in a field are few, it might be possible for all the good ones to have recognizable brands and prestige in proportion to their quality. But when they are many, as today, then it’s difficult or impossible for all the good ones to have recognizable brands and prestige in proportion to their quality…

(8) Universities tend to use journal prestige and impact as surrogates for quality. The excuses for doing so are getting thin.

(9) Quality is made by authors, often in conjunction with editors and referees. Prestige is made by communities.

(10) Despite its value, prestige may only give TA journals limited protection against the rise of green OA.

(11) When OA journals approach TA journals in prestige, TA journals will lose their only remaining advantage. But this is not just a matter of time.

[A complicated and important argument that I’m unready to summarize.]

And the last few paragraphs. I’m not adding commentary because I don’t have any—except to note that this is a cogent refutation of one-note, Green OA Only, advocacy.

University promotion and tenure committees should focus less on journal prestige and journal impact than on article quality and candidate quality. I know that’s easier said than done. We’ll never have quality metrics that are as easy to apply as our current prestige and impact metrics. But we can stop putting easy judgments of prestige or impact ahead of difficult judgments of quality, and we can find help in metrics which oversimplify less than the one we tend to use now.

When prestige and quality diverge, journals, universities, and authors all tend to favor prestige. It’s not hard to see why. When prestige and quality diverge, prestige continues to offer undiminished rewards and create un-
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diminished incentives. Quality is a weaker incentive when it is not accompanied by prestige. Journals have their own reasons for favoring prestige over quality: because of the zero-sum problem, prestige boosts quality more than quality boosts prestige. But authors favor prestige mostly because their universities lead them to, and universities tend to favor prestige because it's easier than favoring quality. If universities could take on the difficult job of assessing quality, they'd change incentives for authors, which would have at least some effect on journals.

Prestige is a real incentive, for journals, universities, and authors. We shouldn't expect that any of these players will nobly rise above prestige. But neither should we underestimate the attraction of prestige or its superior attraction when prestige and quality diverge. Nor should we underestimate either its non-accidental relationship with quality or the non-cynical reasons for thinking it can diverge from quality. Nor, finally, should we underestimate either side in a delicate balance of opposites: our own role in creating prestige and the difficulty of creating prestige where it doesn't already exist.

Prestige is no obstacle to green OA. But green OA suffers when authors make the mistaken assumption that publication in a prestigious TA journal is incompatible with OA. Prestige is a greater obstacle to gold OA, but only because of gold OA journals are new, not because they are OA.

Two developments would change everything: (1) roughly equal prestige for OA and TA journals of roughly equal quality, regardless of age, and (2) high-volume green OA across the disciplines. (Funder and university OA mandates are terribly important, but they are merely means to the second of these.) The two developments are compatible, and we can work for both at once. We can make rapid progress on the second as soon as we have the will. But we can't make rapid progress on the first, even with the will, and my main purpose in this article has been to show why. We can describe the impediment from many angles: the benign circle entrenching the high-prestige TA journals, the vicious circle excluding newer OA journals, the zero-sum game of prestige, the slow-changing community attitudes that create prestige, the slow-changing allocation of funds paying for peer-reviewed research articles, and the stubborn fact of age. This impediment doesn't prevent OA journals from becoming first-rate, or even from growing in prestige, but it slows progress, like the slope of a hill, and can deprive OA journals of the feedback effects which boost submissions, quality, and prestige.

The second development is attainable, as advertised. But the first is equivalent to the state in which quality and prestige never diverge, which shows that it's an asymptote. We can increase the prestige of some OA journals, and sometimes even bring their prestige into alignment with
their quality, and the same is true of publisher efforts on behalf of new TA journals. But we’ll never prevent quality and prestige from diverging.

In my mind, these are reasons to work for gold OA and green OA simultaneously: gold OA, so that we don’t further delay the benefits of hard-won, slow-growing incremental progress, and green OA so that we don’t miss precious, present opportunities for accelerating progress.

Crossover points toward universal open access

That’s my title, but I think it’s a fair one—for the second portion of Peter Suber’s “Predictions for 2009” in the December 2, 2008 SPARC Open Access Newsletter. (I’m not including the first because it’s a little late in 2009 to be noting predictions—and too early to compare predictions to reality.)

Suber lists a dozen crossover points in the order in which he predicts they will occur. I’m providing the crossover points themselves and relatively small portions of Suber’s explanations—and it’s probably important to repeat that the order is not importance, but predicted reality, from soonest (in the first two cases, it’s already happened) to last. It’s probably also important to note that Suber defines crossover as passing the 50% mark. He says a true crossover point may be a much lower percentage in some cases; I’ll suggest that it might also be much higher in some cases. Again, added emphasis is my own, not Suber’s.

One finish line is total success: immediate OA to 100% of new research literature. But I don’t include that kind of goal here, partly because it’s not a crossover point (we’ll probably approach 100% OA for new articles asymptotically) and partly because I want to focus here on strategy, which could always be clearer, rather than the ultimate goal, which is already clear. For strategy, we have to change a set of defaults. If today most new research articles are never self-archived, then flipping that over so that most new articles are self-archived will be a critical, game-changing milestone. That’s what I call a crossover point.

Herewith, the dozen predictions, with brief excerpts [or my quick summary in square brackets] of Suber’s commentary. (In this case, the portion of the article is less than 3,000 words—and it’s a quick read.) My comments, if any, appear in unindented type.

(1) Green OA permission. Today about 63% of surveyed TA publishers, and virtually all OA publishers, allow authors to deposit their peer-reviewed manuscripts in OA repositories. We reached the cross-over point years ago when a majority of new articles carried permission for green OA.
Even though we’ve crossed this threshold, and today many more surveyed publishers allow self-archiving than not, the percentage has stopped growing and started declining. It may be that some journals are retracting their permission. Or the decline may just be just a side-effect of the order in which SHERPA is surveying journals, and it’s turning out that there are fewer green journals among newly-surveyed titles than among those surveyed earlier. I’m not worried, however, that we’ll ever cross back over the cross-over point…

(2) **OA books.** Even the youngest scholars today grew up in a world in which there were more print books in the average university library than gratis OA books online. But that ratio flipped over about two years ago. Today there are many more gratis OA books online than print books in the average academic library, and we’re steaming toward the next cross-over point when there will be many more gratis OA books online than print books in the world’s largest libraries, academic or not. The two analogous cross-over points for libre OA books are much further off…

I’d question the significance of this milestone, given that the “gratis OA books” are almost entirely public domain, thus either government publications or (generally) pre-1923. I might even question the numbers (are there really as many public domain books available for scanning projects as there are books in the Library of Congress or Harvard or even Berkeley?), but don’t know enough to make that an intelligent challenge.

Everything below this is somewhere in the future.

(3) **Funder policies.** Today most publicly-funded research is not subject to OA mandates. At the cross-over point, most of it will be. Because public funding agencies differ enormously in size, even within the same country, we’ll reach the cross-over point long before most public funding agencies adopt OA policies. A critical set of the big ones will get us there, and we already have many of the biggest, including the NIH, six of the seven Research Councils UK, and a pilot OA mandate from the EU’s FP7…

(4) **Green OA deposits.** Today only a minority of new peer-reviewed manuscripts are self-archived soon—say, within a week—after they are accepted for publication. The cross-over point will come when most are self-archived soon after publication. In certain fields, like particle physics, the cross-over point is behind us. But for the total corpus of new journal literature it’s still well ahead of us…

(5) **Author understanding.** Today only a minority of publishing researchers has an accurate understanding of OA. The cross-over point will come when that minority becomes a majority. Author understanding is undoubtedly improving, but the slope of the curve is shallow ra-
ther than steep. Why is it shallow, and why didn’t we reach this cross-over point years ago? We’re up against myths and misinformation from publishers. We’re also up against misunderstandings from excited newcomers. We’re up against a culture of university research in which researchers who are unfamiliar with OA are preoccupied with their research, overworked, uncritically focused on the publishing incentives created by their promotion and tenure committees, and grateful to sign just about any contract a journal puts in front of them.

(6) **University repositories.** Today most colleges and universities lack institutional repositories. The cross-over point will come when most have them, either individually or as members of a consortium. Why will this point come after the funder-policy and green-deposit cross-over points (#3 and #4)? First, some funders use their own repositories, the way the NIH uses PubMed Central. Second, some faculty will prefer to deposit in disciplinary repositories, like arXiv, even when they have an institutional repository. Third, universities move more slowly than funding agencies (see #10), even if they have the same interests as funding agencies in advancing OA.

Fourth, IRs have been decidedly problematic, as Dorothea Salo’s been telling us—and those problems probably aren’t helped by repeated claims that IRs are essentially free. Fifth, trying to restrict IRs to the published scholarly literature makes it even more difficult to sell them to faculty.

(7) **Libre gold OA.** It’s hard to be sure, but it seems that most OA journals are merely gratis OA today. While they remove price barriers, the large group I’m talking about removes no permission barriers and leaves users with nothing more than fair use or the local equivalent. The cross-over point will come when most OA journals will be libre OA, and remove at least some permission barriers.

Frankly, if the definition of libre only requires removing some permission barriers, I’d expect this point to be reached fairly rapidly. Maybe there need to be goalposts: e.g., a majority of gold OA publishers having the equivalent of Creative Commons’ BY-NC license would be one (and should be reachable fairly easily, I’d think), where getting a majority to the BY equivalent would be considerably more difficult—and getting them to remove all permission barriers (the equivalent to CC 0, as far as I can tell), may be nearly impossible…

(8) **Journal backfiles.** Today most TA journals don’t have OA backfiles. At the cross-over point, most will. The cost can be large, and we won’t
see significant progress until some of the wealthy book-scanning projects move more aggressively into journal-scanning…

(9) **Author addenda.** Today only a small number of universities have adopted author addenda, and only a smaller number require their use. That makes it easy for publishers to reject the addenda or to refuse to publish work by faculty for whom addenda are not optional…

(10) **University policies.** Today most university research is not subject to university-level OA mandates. At the cross-over point most of it will be. Although 24 universities and four departments already have OA mandates, a total which is very close to the number of funding agencies with OA mandates (30), I’m predicting that the cross-over point for universities will come much later than the cross-over point for funders.

A mild prediction: The whole scheme of universal mandates will prove so unsavory that it will never reach anywhere close to 100% success, at least in the United States and among liberal arts institutions. If mandates are the only way we’re going to get OA, then OA is in serious, serious trouble.

(11) **OA journals.** Today most peer-reviewed journals are TA. At the cross-over point most will be OA. Two kinds of events move us toward this point: the launch of new OA journals and the conversion of TA journals to OA. And two kinds of event move us the other way: the launch of new TA journals and the conversion of OA journals to TA. All four events occur, although the first three occur much more often than the fourth. On the whole we’re moving toward the cross-over point, rather than away from it, but the movement is slow…

Suber correctly (in my opinion) notes that the crossover may be slow because “some TA journals can survive in an OA world”—either because they’re highly prestigious, because many or most of their subscriptions are not from academic libraries, or because they charge so little that there’s no solid economic reason for conversion.

Of course, we *could* reach this crossover point by having dozens of new OA factories, each churning out hundreds of new OA journals. But the track record for solid peer review and high quality standards of recent OA factories—that is, those that announce scores of new titles at once—is so mixed (that’s not the word I want to use) that this may be a recipe for disaster, not success.

For that matter, counting journals becomes silly at some point. If 50% of all supposedly peer reviewed journals are Gold OA, but those journals publish only 10% of all refereed papers and only 5% of the quality papers, no useful crossover point would have been reached,
other than perhaps the point of madness for anyone attempting to keep up with the literature.

(12) **Libre green OA.** Today most green OA is gratis OA. But at least some is libre OA, for example, a subset of PubMed Central. There may be similar subsets in many other repositories. As long as most green OA depends on the permission of TA publishers, the majority of it will remain gratis…

Lots more discussion in the original article.

**Is OA anti-publishing**

By now you’ve doubtless figured out that scholarly kitchen is a hotbed of anti-OA blogging (among other things). Kent Anderson’s December 2, 2008 post, “Are publishers anti-publishing?” further demonstrates that. The post itself is interesting and makes some valid points, but here’s the money paragraph (emphases added):

> Investment and change are tough. For STM publishers, it’s just as difficult to avoid the anti-publishing trends (devaluing content, missing the message from users/subscribers). **The Open Access movement is implicitly anti-publishing**—essentially, the value proposition is that content is so worthless that you have to pay to have it published, and you can’t charge for it even then. That’s anti-publishing, treating content as less than a commodity. Institutional site licenses drop the paid model to cents on the dollar, undervaluing published works by deprecating them to a cost basis rather than recognizing their value to academic pursuits. **Institutional repositories are anti-publishing, not trying to reach a broader audience but trying to showcase their institution’s “intellectual property” for a purpose that is implicitly anti-publishing.**

Let’s see: 75% of toll-access journals charge author-side fees. More than 70% of OA journals do not. So, by Anderson’s “reasoning,” it’s toll-access publishers that are anti-publishing. The second bolded item is interesting in that it **explicitly** denies that IRs create broader audiences for scholarly articles. I don’t know about “implicitly anti-publishing,” but this is explicitly nonsense.

Kevin Smith has another and maybe more appropriate response, as cited by Peter Suber, in a December 5, 2008 item at Scholarly Communications @ Duke, “What is ‘value’ in publishing?“:

> Which brings me to where Anderson really goes wrong—his comments about how open access and institutional repositories are “anti-publishing.” To get to this claim one must define publishing very narrowly, based on a traditional, “the way we have done it in the past,” standard; Anderson sounds a lot like Gleik at this point. On-line, open access distribution IS
publishing, of course, as the many peer-reviewed open access journals clearly prove. What is most astonishing about Anderson’s discussion of these “anti-publishing” trends, however, is his claim that open access “de-values” scholarly content by “treating it as less than a commodity.” How can one make such a claim about scholarly content when authors have been expected to give their writings away for free to publishers for many years? Scholarly authors are used to thinking about the value of their work in terms other than economic, and those terms have been dictated, in part, by the business model of traditional scholarly publishing.

The value of scholarly work, for scholars, has never been based on the money it could earn, since they never saw a penny of that money and were, in fact, expected to pay for access to their own writings. Often they were even expected to pay “page charges,” which makes the author-side fees now charged by many publishers for open access seem very familiar. The point is that access and use, not economic gain, define the value of scholarly writing because they serve the scholarly authors’ need for recognition and impact; the cost of the wrapper in which the work was contained (the commodity) has never been a marker for value in the academic world, and it has lately become an impediment.

I fervently hope that scholarly publishers can find ways to add value to academic content, as Anderson challenges them to do. But that task will be much more difficult if it is based on a narrow view of the value of academic work that begins and ends with the traditional way publishers have done business. The search for new models of scholarly publishing will have to take into account the things that actually matter to academic authors and scholarly institutions.

Other than specious attacks against OA, what Anderson’s stuff may boil down to is similar to what I’ve seen in plaints that “books are dying” because the big New York publishing houses may be losing ground to the fleet-footed small publishers and self-publishers: That is, Anderson implicitly means “Publishing with a capital P”—the kind of Traditional Publishing that requires big chunks of capital and expects to earn big returns on that investment.

Abridgment as added value

There are quite a few ways that Gold OA publishers can legitimately charge for added value, and with luck those ways could work well enough to avoid the need for author-side fees and still yield sustainable publishing. (I won’t say profitable because there’s no reason university OA publishing, library OA publishing or society OA publishing needs to do
more than recover costs—if that. There’s nothing inherently evil about profit, but there’s nothing inherently sacred about it either.)

So, for example, a journal that combines peer-reviewed papers with other material—book and website reviews, editorials, news briefs, etc—can charge for an electronic or print version that includes the other material. A journal that’s e-only can be available, for a price, in an annual print volume without any capital investment (if the articles are already in formatted form), using print-on-demand techniques.

Peter Suber discusses another added value in the lead essay in the September 2, 2009 SPARC Open Access Newsletter. Excerpts:

Imagine that an open access (OA) journal could generate revenue by selling abridgments of its full-text OA articles. Imagine that the revenue even made it unnecessary to charge author-side publication fees. That would be a supremely elegant business model, if only it could be made to work. BMJ has made it work for more than 10 years, and next year will take the idea even further.

All BMJ research articles are full-text OA in the digital edition of the journal. The print edition, which is toll access (TA), contains 3-5 page abridgments of each research article. BMJ calls this system ELPS (for “electronic long, paper short”). The OA edition of the journal charges no publication fees, and the full-text research articles have no word limit.

Nine months ago, BMJ introduced even shorter, one-page abridgments called picos, and published selected articles in the pico format rather than the longer 3-5 page format. The experiment has been so successful that BMJ announced last month that it will phase out ELPS and go all-pico. Starting in January 2010, all BMJ research articles will have pico abridgments in the TA print edition, and the full texts will still be no-fee OA in the digital edition…

[Because authors will be doing the pico versions and BMJ editors were writing the longer summaries, this directly saves money for BMJ. A survey also suggests that authors and readers both prefer picos.]

Picos will occupy about 8 of the 60 pages, or 13%, of each print issue of BMJ. The rest will be devoted—in Groves’ words—to “education, clinical reviews, analysis, news, other medical journalism, letters, and views and reviews.”

That’s the model. Here are a few thoughts.

- The BMJ survey results don’t surprise me at all. I’d love to see structured one-page summaries of new articles in my field…
- This model works better for some kinds of summaries than others. As BMJ found, pico-length summaries have more marketing power
than shorter abstracts and longer ELPS summaries. The sweet spot will probably differ from field to field.

- Moreover, if abridgments are done badly, they’ll provide no added value at all, or the subtracted value will exceed the added value…
- If a journal’s summaries hit my sweet spot for length and quality, would I be willing to pay a reasonable price for them? Absolutely…
- I’d find it even easier to pay for TA summaries if the full texts were OA…
- Boiling down a long article to a one-page summary could give us value we didn’t have in the original. Authors know this if they’ve ever written an abstract and found that the exercise gave them new clarity about what they were saying…
- While few OA journals have TA editions, many TA journals have partial OA editions. Those TA journals might consider picos as part of a larger business model allowing them to provide OA to their full-text research articles…
- OA journals without TA editions could consider partial TA editions. This wouldn’t detract from OA if all their research articles were still full-text OA…
- Bottom line: Summaries appeal to a much larger audience than full-text articles. The market is larger. The demand is greater. That’s a fact worth knowing for any journal wishing to generate revenue by selling some content and providing OA to the rest.
- Picos don’t merely appeal to a larger market than full-text articles. They better fit the economy of attention. When we need to read full-text articles, we need to find the time to do so, and we often fail. But whether we need to read full texts or merely skim, summaries are friendlier to our crowded, demanding lives. We’re ready to pay for services that save us time…
- [Several more worthy points omitted]
- I’m not taking a position on whether summaries ought to be OA or TA. I’m saying that selling access to summaries in order to support full-text OA is elegant and promising, even if counter-intuitive, and should be considered in every niche where it might work. If intelligent summaries really benefit readers, authors, journals, and OA, even when the summaries are TA, then they are an experiment worth testing and replicating elsewhere.

**Open Access in 2008**

Way too long to include or even make a serious stab at excerpting (the JEP version is just under 13,000 words—half of this interminable
roundup!), but way too important to ignore, this is Peter Suber’s roundup of last year’s trends. You’ll find one version in the January 2, 2009 SPARC Open Access Newsletter and another in the (ahem) Gold OA ejournal, The Journal of Electronic Publishing (JEP), vol. 12, no. 1 (February 2009), the special OA issue.

Here, just for fun, are Suber’s “Highlights of the highlights”—“top 10” lists of the worst and best OA events of 2008 (if acronyms and initialisms seem mysterious, read the article):

**The worst of 2008:**

10. The Elsevier rules for electronic interlibrary loan: make a printout, scan the printout, and loan the scan. Not unique to Elsevier, but still a kludge to avoid taking advantage of 20th century technology.


8. The American Psychological Association’s $2,500 fee for depositing author manuscripts in PubMed Central. An attempt to charge for green open access as if it were gold open access. Withdrawn when publicized.

7. The UK Ordnance Survey use of public funds to pay a lobbying firm to push back against public pressure to provide open access to its publicly funded mapping data. It was bad enough to charge taxpayers a second fee for access to publicly funded data. Now it charges them for the lobbyists who work against their interests.

6. The 35-year embargo adopted by the American Anthropological Association for the OA backfiles of its two leading journals. The longest embargo or moving wall I’ve ever seen a publisher boast about. More than 10 times longer than the runner-up.

5. The Google settlement’s effects on fair use. The settlement has many compensatory gains, but Google dropped a winning case and its willingness to pay for fair-use copying may force others to pay as well.

4. The 12-month embargo allowed by the NIH policy. Twice as long as the embargo used by any OA-mandating medical research funder in the world. A needless sop to the publishing lobby, and one that slows down medical research.

3. The American Association of University Presses support for the Conyers bill (a.k.a. Fair Copyright in Research Works Act). The presses said they were not opposing the NIH policy but so far have not refined their support for the bill to target the practices they dislike and spare the NIH policy.
2. The continuing slow pace of spontaneous self-archiving. Still due to inertia more than opposition, but still a problem. Habits die hard, especially when the proposed alternative is unfamiliar, widely misunderstood, and orthogonal to entrenched incentives.

1. The Fair Copyright in Research Works Act. Amending copyright law to block an OA policy consistent with current law, while pretending to be motivated by the policy’s copyright violations. Harmful bill + misleading title + deceptive rhetoric, brought to you by lobbyists paid with your subscription dollars.

It’s not hard to list obstacles and setbacks to open access. We encounter them every day. But a Top 10 list may leave the false impression that some of the obstacles are insuperable. Even the #1 item on this list, however, doesn’t merit that description. The bill didn’t come up for a vote in the last Congress, and the September hearing on it before the House Judiciary Committee educated many committee members who previously knew nothing about the NIH policy or scholarly publishing but what the publishing lobby had told them. Some didn’t know that 25+ public funding agencies in other countries had already adopted OA mandates or that all the mandates covering medical research used embargoes half as long as the NIH embargo. Some didn’t know that scholarly journals don’t pay authors or peer reviewers. Some didn’t know that the NIH spends about $100 million/year to support the publishing costs of private-sector journals, or about 30 times more than it spends implementing its public-access policy. The bill may come back in the next Congress, but it’s a transparent giveaway to special interests at the expense of the public interest and we can defeat it.

The best of 2008:

10. The launch of Europeana. Already large and valuable, on track to be more so, unifying many smaller projects, and committed to open access for its public-domain contents.

9. The launch of OAPEN and Bloomsbury Academic. Two notable examples, among many others, of book publishers committing themselves to the synergies of open access and print on demand for academic monographs.

8. The launch of the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association and the SPARC Europe seal program. Two bottom-up ways to set standards for the fast-growing world of OA journals.

7. The libre OA mandates from the UKPMC Funders. A first for funding agencies: demanding the removal of permission barriers, not just price barriers, when funders pay part of an article’s publication costs.
6. The profitability of BioMed Central. Significant new proof that gold OA is sustainable. Disarming one more objection and removing one more excuse.

5. The European Research Council OA mandate. The first and strongest EU-wide OA mandate, covering 15% of the FP7 research budget.

4. The EU OA mandate and pilot project. A strong policy for another 20% of the FP7 research budget, and a sign of what’s to come for the rest of the research budget.

3. The promise of the Obama administration. Open access supporters in key agencies and in the new President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology. A sea change from the Bush administration, which forthrightly subordinated science policy to corporate interests.

2. The Harvard OA mandate and the Harvard effect. A first-rate policy from a first-rate university, backed by a unanimous faculty vote, inspiring change and proposals for change at other universities.

1. The NIH OA mandate. As I put it at the time: “Measured by the ferocity of opposition overcome and the volume of literature liberated, it’s the largest victory in the history of the OA movement.” If the policy isn’t repealed, this could remain the case for years and years.

**Miscellany**

Herewith, a few more items that don’t neatly fit together, except that they’re all concerned with OA. I’ll take them in chronological order—except for the last one, which is actually the oldest of the lot.

**Flat World Knowledge and U.S. Gov’t on Open Access Course Materials**

Peter Murray, June 5, 2009, *Disruptive library technology jester* (dljt.org/). Briefly, it’s about two things that *could* lead to some system of open-access textbooks and related academic material.

The first is Flat World Knowledge, a startup with $8 million in VC funding. Excerpts from that portion of the post:

Flat World Knowledge launched earlier this year, and it brings an entrepreneurial feel to the staid subject of textbooks. Billed as “the world’s first publisher of open-source college textbooks,” their website has a scrappy, web2.0 start-up feel to it... To faculty and staff in higher education, Flat World Knowledge describes themselves this way:

We preserve the best of the old – textbooks by leading experts.

Then we flip it on its head.
Our books cost $0 online. We provide paperbacks, audio books, and self-print versions for under $30. Our books are open for you to edit for your class. Our new editions are on your terms. We publish them — you decide if and when to use them.

They offer free versions of their textbooks online then charge for various derivatives and additions. Instructors can modify the textbook — rearranging chapters, add or delete chunks of text, and (coming soon according to the site) be able to add materials based on a database of what is available at Flat World Knowledge. (One has to register on the site to do this, but you can watch a video tutorial to get an idea about how it works.).

[Murray lists the textbooks currently available and those in the pipeline.]

According to both commenters, the trouble with this concept is that at least some of the initial offerings aren’t very good. One commenter calls some of them “well-known ‘road-kill’: i.e., they died an ignominious death in the traditional textbook market, and then the rights to them reverted to the author” and notes that none of them seems to be well-edited. The other commenter tags one book as a retread of a failed textbook and questions the quality of all the content. It would be inauspicious at best if the first serious attempt at open access textbooks consisted of dreck.

The second part discusses HR1464, a bill that—like all good bills these days—was apparently named by that secret agency in charge of cute acronyms: the Learning Opportunities With Creation of Open Source Textbooks (LOW COST) Act. (Yes, “open source” should be “open access,” as Murray notes, but LOW COAT isn’t nearly as cute.) The bill would require federal agencies spending more than $10 million on science education to spend 2% of those budgets on the development of college-level educational resources. It’s a start—maybe. (As Murray notes, there were no cosponsors for the bill at introduction, never a good sign. As of September 26, 2009, there are still no cosponsors.

Adventures in web publishing

This one’s too interesting to pass by—but it’s also one where I think you’re better off reading the original, by Douglas J. Amy in the June 18, 2009 Inside Higher Ed (www.insidehighered.com/views/2009/06/18/amy). It’s brief (1,380 words) and well written.

Amy—a tenured full professor with three published scholarly books to his credit—wrote a manuscript intended for a general audience, Government is Good: An Unapologetic Defense of a Vital Institu-
tion. After approaching publishers, he didn't believe that the book could get the kind of exposure he wanted. So he put it on the web—on a properly-designed site, not just as a PDF. (He got a grant for $2,000 to have someone design and implement the website.)

Results? More than 75,000 people have visited the site, half of them apparently staying long enough to read parts of the book. He's satisfied that he's reached a broader readership than for all of his other books, and there have been other good consequences. It's not an experiment that would suit everyone, but it's an interesting approach.

“Don't ask, don’t tell” rights retention for scholarly articles

Stuart Shieber posted this on June 18, 2009 at The Occasional Pamphlet. Excerpts:

A strange social contract has arisen in the scholarly publishing field, a kind of “don’t ask, don’t tell” approach to online distribution of articles by authors. Publishers officially forbid online distribution, authors do it anyway without telling the publishers, and publishers don’t ask them to stop even though it violates contractual obligations. What happens when you refuse to play that game?...

Shieber notes the reasons to publish research, the traditional means, why scholars are motivated to publish and the need both to publish through a peer-reviewed journal and to make research widely available, which the web itself does very well.

An author has a simple solution to the quandary of whether to distribute through a publisher's access-limited mechanism or freely online: Do both. Unfortunately, publishers typically restrict authors from this approach through contractual limitations stipulated in copyright assignment forms.

This brings us to the strange social contract. What has arisen, perhaps surprisingly, is a kind of “don’t ask, don’t tell” approach to online distribution by authors. Publishers officially forbid online distribution, authors do it anyway without telling the publishers, and publishers don’t ask them to stop even though it violates contractual obligations.

The standard system for scholarly communication is thus based on widespread contractual violation and fraud.

After noting that publishers could police violations much as the RIAA does—and that a few take-down letters would probably have a chilling effect on scholars who post their papers.
We can only speculate that the fear of upsetting their content providers trumps their need to maintain control over the content itself, given that there is no evidence that the online availability is hurting their revenues...

One can just imagine what kind of backlash an RIAA-style approach would have with academics, in addition to the desired chilling effect.

Shieber is not willing to routinely violate contracts. Instead, he amends the conditions of copyright assignments and will not sign an assignment form that doesn't allow for online noncommercial distribution. In general, publishers haven't complained—but there's one exception.

The remainder of the post details that exception. It's an odd story, one that I can't excerpt very well. It boils down to one Blackwell philosophy journal absolutely insisting on a 12-month embargo before Shieber could post his own article online—and pulling the article when he would not agree. (Shieber details three arguments Blackwell's editor gave for this insistence, all of which he regards as specious.)

Shieber pushed the matter to the journal's editorial board—and, eventually, Blackwell changed the policy, abandoning the required embargo for this particular journal. The article was published, a mere three years late.

What is the moral of this story? First, all participants—including the editorial board and editor-in-chief of the journal, the managing editor, the publisher's staff—were people of good will. They all acted in ways they thought in the best interest of the institutions they represented and the larger missions of those institutions. However, to a great extent, they may not have fully thought out the connections between the policies they acted under and the missions. The editorial board may not have realized that the journal's policy embargoed author distribution; certainly the journal's contributors didn't, or chose to ignore it. The publisher may not have realized the inconsistencies between the journal policies and the facts-on-the-ground.

But it is also apparent that authors are far too acquiescent in the process of rights retention with publishers. We are overly willing to accept the rulings of publishers as a fait accompli. Despite the fact that publishers assert that their policies are supported by their editorial boards, editorial boards are in fact responsive to reasoned arguments. And although a negotiation for rights retention between an author and a large commercial publishing company asymmetrically disfavors the author, one in which the author is supported by the editorial board is a different matter entirely. This example calls for taking advantage of rights retention negotiations to enlist editors and editorial boards in the process of ex-
panding access to scholarly articles in a way consonant with law, mov-
ing past the “don’t ask, don’t tell” social contract.

Well said.

A field guide to misunderstandings about open access

This first appeared in the April 2009 SPARC Open Access Newsletter, but it also appears as a separate item at SPARC: www.arl.org/sparc/publications/articles/openaccess_fieldguide.shtml. A considerably shorter version—but still more than 5,000 words—appears on the Library Leadership Network as “Open access misunderstandings.”

The 10,000-word field guide cites and discusses 25 common mi-

sunderstandings, how they arise and more. Go read it—even if all the “misunderstandings” may not be entirely false.

Conclusion

That’s the gamut—a tiny fraction of what’s been said about OA in the past year, but much more space (if with a much different excerpt-to-commentary ratio) than I’d normally devote to OA in an issue or a year.

Is this a coherent overview of OA, or OA between mid-2008 and now? Absolutely not. For that, you’d be better off with Peter Suber’s over-

views or with the Open Access cluster in the Library Leadership Net-

work (which I highly recommend, having written or edited most of it).

The question now is whether LIBRARY ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP should or will remain as an occasional feature in Cites & Insights. Here’s what I had to say about it on Walt at Random (with modifications):

Why I’m considering dropping the section

- Value added: I’ve never felt I could add much value to Peter Suber’s commentaries or, for that matter, Dorothea Salo’s (when she was fo-

cusing on these issues). I’ve given up engaging Stevan Harnad or di-

rectly discussing his monotone writing. Lately, I’m not sure my synthesis and commentary are adding much value to any of this.

- Effectiveness: Most Cites & Insights readers are within the library field, I believe—and that’s only reasonable, since that’s my back-

ground and the focus of most topical areas. So I’m probably not reaching many scientists—or, if I am, I’m probably not doing much to convince them to do more about OA and access-related issues. As for librarians, I’d guess that my readers are mostly already con-

vinced—that I’m neither educating nor convincing much of any-
body who doesn’t already get it. (I’d guess 1% to 3% of librarians read C&I, spiking to 25% or more for one particular issue. Those who need educating are mostly in the other 97%, I suspect.)

- **Futility**: Given what I’m reading from scientists as to how they relate to libraries and librarians, and given what I’m reading as to how they make decisions on where to publish and where to exert pressure, I’m feeling pretty futile about the whole effort. Not necessarily about OA as such—but definitely about my ability to make a difference.

Library Access to Scholarship essays appear to be read and downloaded a lot less often than essays on blogs and blogging, Google Books, wikis and the like and somewhat less than essays on copyright and Making It Work.

More reasons for abandoning this section, reasons that admittedly overlap with the three above:

- The addition of Bill Hooker’s *Open Reading Frame* and Stuart Sheiber’s *The Occasional Pamphlet* may make my contributions even more superfluous.
- It’s difficult to escape the conclusion that the “OA community”—the bloggers who focus on open access, notably apart from Peter Suber and Charles W. Bailey, Jr.—would be just as happy if I disappeared or, perhaps more correctly, have never been aware (or cared) that C&I even existed.
- I grow increasingly convinced that most scientists just don’t care—either about libraries or about OA—and maybe that’s appropriate. I also grow increasingly convinced that librarians can’t do it on their own, although it’s encouraging to see things like the Compact that recently emerged. Still, it’s an uphill battle, and one that I really can’t play much part in.
- Every time I see calls for “universal mandates,” I want to back as far away as possible.
- **One new one**: Sometimes it seems as though it’s all been said, that we’re now engaged in endless rehashing.

*On the other hand…*

I came up with these reasons in that second post:

- Maybe, just maybe, I’m occasionally putting points together in a different manner.
Maybe, just maybe, I’m persuading one or two people a year to think about aspects of library access to scholarship they might not have thought about otherwise.

As I noted in the blog, the reasons to keep going don’t look like much of a hand; I’m inclined to fold.

For now…

I’ve done this roundup. I intend to be very cautious about tagging any new items. After a year or so, I’ll either find that, in the few cases where I can’t avoid them, OA items fit elsewhere (e.g., TRENDS & QUICK TAKES) or that I feel the need to restart this section.

If you want to keep track of OA but don’t want to spend much time on it, a couple of suggestions:

- Subscribe to the SPARC Open Access Newsletter. It’s free, it arrives once a month and, while it’s long, you don’t have to read the whole thing. Read the title and first paragraph of Suber’s lead essay to see whether it’s a topic you want to pursue; then skim through some of the other material, if you’re so inclined.

- Subscribe to Open Access News through an aggregator—and skim through the titles quickly. Yes, there’s a lot here; no, you don’t have to read all of it. I mention OAN first among the blogs because it’s by far the most balanced and most comprehensive.

- Try one or two other OA blogs. Some are cheerleaderish; some are too simplistic; some deal with fairly sophisticated issues; several have much to offer.

Will we ever reach full OA? Would that be a good thing? For now, I choose not to speculate.