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Current Trends in Open Access Policy

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Abstract

This paper examines current (2009) trends in Open Access policy. The importance of Open Access is discussed; current trends are reviewed; and future possibilities are identified.

Note: for a detailed history of the Open Access Movement prior to 2009, see Peter Suber's timeline at: <http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/timeline.htm>.

The Importance of Open Access

Robin Peek, Associate Professor at Simmons Graduate School of Library and Information Science, created the following scenario to illustrate the importance of the Open Access Movement:

“Perhaps what we need is a visual image of what OA means to the advancement of science: imagine the starship *Enterprise* on a mission in space. Suddenly, an alien object (a giant worm) appears on the port side. Capt. Kirk asks the computer, ‘What is that thing pursuing us?’ The computer works on the problem and offers an explanation. However, the data about the object is on a subscription-only database that will cost \$30 for a single-use license. Kirk asks his bridge crew if anyone has a credit card (of course, they don’t because the uniforms don’t include pockets). Then, Kirk runs to his ready room and finds a credit card (a relic of the 20th century). As the creature seems to be on the verge of swallowing the *Enterprise*, Kirk gives the credit card to Mr. Spock who retrieves the article and sends a message of friendship to the alien creature. With not a moment to spare, the gesture of friendship stops the creature from snacking on our heroes.

‘Fascinating’, notes Spock as he tries to call up an image on the monitor to share with the bridge crew. But the digital rights management kicks in and issues the command: ‘You must purchase a multi-use license to view this image by more than one person’. So much for collaboration.”

Improving access to research is the goal of the Open Access Movement. Journal cancellations are increasing and “chronic serialitis” (Fisher, B., 2009) is a pandemic. The importance of Open Access cannot be overstated. According to the World Health Organization:

“Abstract access to health research publications is an essential requirement in securing the chain of communication from the researcher to the front-line health worker. As has been well documented, rising costs of subscriptions and permission barriers imposed by publishers have barred access to the extent that local health research and health care have been damaged through lack of information. A key to resolving the deep knowledge gap lies in creating a global knowledge base that includes essential research emanating from both research communities in developing countries as well as from ‘international’ research”.

We are all “citizens of the world”, as Socrates reminded, and without global access to accurate and current information, there is little hope that we will continue to evolve as a species.

Current Trends

Widespread faculty dissatisfaction with journal cancellations has spawned a number of Open Access adoptions. (Hackman, T., 2009). “Open-access mandates [from institutions and funding bodies] have almost doubled globally in the year that has elapsed since Harvard’s mandate in May 2008’, says Steven Harnard, an advocate of open access at the University of Southampton, U.K.” (Nature, 2009). While not all-inclusive, the following is a synthesis of recent trends within the United States and abroad in support of the Open Access Movement.

One particularly hopeful new trend is the first International Open Access Week, held October 19-23, 2009. “Open Access Week is an opportunity to broaden awareness and understanding of Open Access to research, including access policies from all types of research funders, within the international higher education community and the general public. The now-

annual event has been expanded from a single day to accommodate widespread global interest in the movement toward open, public access to scholarly research results.” (OpenAccessWeek.org, 2009). Open Access Week is an educational tool that not only broadens awareness but also provides information to dispel misconceptions.

In the United Kingdom the Wellcome Trust dedicated \$3.3 million USD (during Open Access Week) “to fund open access publication fees for its researchers over the next 12 months” (openaccessweek.org, 2009). This kind of support is important as sustainability is one of the challenges facing the Open Access Movement. In the United States the University of Tennessee recently created an “Open Publishing Support Fund” to assist faculty publish in open access journals. (Howard, J., 2009).

Another sustainability effort, the compact, is gaining popularity. “Universities would commit on behalf of their authors to underwrite reasonable processing fees for articles in open-access journals for which funds are not otherwise available (in particular, for research not funded by grants).” (Shieber, S.M., 2009). Compact fees are applicable only to open-access publishing fees. Dartmouth, Harvard and UC Berkeley are among those who have already signed the compact. This model changes the way universities support journal publishing from having them pay fees to publishers for access to the journals, to paying fees when faculty members have their work accepted. (Jaschik, 2009).

Government support for the Open Access Movement is critical. Suber “points to Ireland as one of the best regimes in terms of pushing OA. The Government funded new OA archives at Irish universities while simultaneously requiring Government-funded research to end up in them”. (Quinn, N., 2009). In the United States, the Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2009 made

the National Institutes of Health (NIH) 's public access policy a legislative mandate. This Act requires the deposit of grant-funded research findings into the National Institute of Medicine's PubMed Central. Presently, "A bill designed to make scientific research funded by the US government's 11 largest funding bodies accessible for free by the general public is hibernating in the US legislature..." (Grant, 2009). This bill is S.1373, the Federal Research Public Access Act (FRPAA). This pending legislation is supported by the "stated objectives in the report of the Intergovernmental Working Group on Public Health, Innovation and Intellectual Property...to 'promote public access to the results of government funded research'..." (Chan, et al, 2009).

Universities in the United States are adopting Open Access policies in increasing numbers. "In June [2009], the University of Kansas, Lawrence, was the first public university in the United States to adopt an open access policy regarding scholarly research. Now, SPARC (Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition) is offering resources to encourage other universities to take the plunge" (Library Journal, 2009).

Several universities in Hong Kong have adopted Open Access policies and more are expected to follow suit in 2010 "in response to the knowledge exchange and research assessment incentives." (Chan, D., 2009). University College London (UCL) recently adopted an open access publishing policy, "adding to the rapid increase in such mandates over the past year." (Nature, 2009).

The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research in India recently urged the establishment of institutional repositories in each of its more than 35 laboratories as well as conversion of all their journals to open access." (Chan, et al, 2009). The University of Pretoria in South Africa also recently adopted an open access mandate. (Chan, et al, 2009).

The National Library of Sweden's project, called OpenAccess.se, aims to "promote

maximum accessibility and visibility of works produced by researchers, teachers and students”. (Chantavaridou, 2009). NORA is Norway’s initiative to facilitate standardization and cooperation between Norwegian open access repositories and currently harvest approximately 40 repositories. (Chantavaridou, 2009).

A step towards global open access was taken recently by “global pharmaceutical behemoth Pfizer.” (Pharma, 2009). Pfizer recently reached an agreement with BioMed Central to launch an open-access waiver fund, which will support automatic waivers of publication fees for authors from low-income countries. “As a result, researchers in low-income countries can publish research articles in BioMed Central’s open access journals without the need to pay a publication fee. Pfizer’s support for open-access publishing is driven by a recognition of the wide benefits of global access to the latest research results, and the crucial role that open access journals can play in the communication of those results.” (Pharma, 2009).

The above demonstrates a current worldwide interest in and willingness to embrace Open Access. What does the future hold?

Future Possibilities

The future of the Open Access Movement is uncertain. Though there is much support, as detailed above, there are still many obstacles to overcome.

Misconceptions are still challenging the Open Access Movement. One such misconception is that Open Access means bypassing peer review. In reality, the Open Access Movement’s goal is to “remove access barriers, not quality filters”. (Suber, P., 2009). Another misconception confuses quality for prestige. Open Access journals can be of high quality at birth, however, prestige develops over time. The misconception that authors must choose between

Open Access journals and prestige journals is particularly insidious. Since Open Access is compatible with prestige, no such decision is necessary. The differences in publication fees and subscription fees are often misunderstood. Publication fees buy access for everyone with an Internet connection; subscription fees buy access for private use only. (Suber, P., 2009).

Sustainability concerns continue to arise. Journals that charge fees have revenue from the fees. Journals that charge no fees use various business models, sometimes relying on subsidies rather than revenue. There are many business models that future journals may employ. Among them are Advertising, Endowments, Fund-Raising, Institutional Subsidies, Membership Dues, Priced Editions, Publication Fees, Submission Fees, and Volunteer Effort. Hybrid Journals, where authors determine whether or not the article gets immediate OA, have already demonstrated their potential.(OAD)

The implementation of Open Access faces other obstacles, especially with regards to the “global digital divide”. Some of these are: “political instability, pervasive corruption, and inefficiency....,systemic economic inequality, environmental degradation, and racial, religious, and gender discrimination...”. (Baker, M., 2009). “As libraries continue to work on opening access to scientific and scholarly research, and as they assume more and more the roles, responsibilities, and capacities of publication, they are strategically placed to help significantly reduce the global digital information divide.” (Baker, M., 2009).

Although some journals may be willing to waive the author’s fee, some scholars may choose not to public in an open access journal, rather than subject themselves to embarrassment. (Christian, 2008). “The mere fact that open access journals are available on the Internet may not be sufficient to achieve the object of the open access initiative in the developing world.” Due to inadequate information communication technology infrastructure in the developing world, Open

Access in principle does not always translate to Open Access in action. (Christian, 2008). There is a misconception in some conservative developing countries where open access has become associated with ‘vanity publishing’. Free and poor or low quality are associated, while expensive and high quality are associated. (Christian, 2008).

Misconceptions are not limited to developing countries. There are those that fear “that open access would mean the death of peer-reviewed journal literature”. (Hackman, T., 2009). Others were told that ‘public access equals government censorship’ (Drake, M.A., 2007). Education is the solution to the misconception problem and it behooves each of us to take on the role of educator.

On a more positive note, the World Health Organization will continue to support the Open Access movement in line with their position: “It is our view that the United Nations and other international organizations should give strong support to the open access movement, which holds such promise for both research and public health.” (Chan, et al, 2009).

The future also brings more research. Additional research will be conducted to develop a “better understanding of the common characteristics of OA scholarly publishing and citation network. Exploring the characteristics of formal scholarly communication on the web is becoming more important because increasing numbers of authors, journals, and institutions publish and self-archive their research results online.” (Kousha, 2009).

Another obstacle to the Open Access movement is H.R. 6845, the Fair Copyright in Research Works Act Bill. This Bill is currently in committee. If passed, it would overturn NIH’s public-access policy. The future of Open Access is dependent upon our support. It is our responsibility to educate others about Open Access. It is our responsibility to make our opposition to H.R. 6845, and others that mimic it, known to our legislators.

The Chicago Collaborative is an attempt at bringing all the stakeholders to the table to work together in a collaborative fashion, rather than in “confrontational mode”. (Plutchak, T.S., 2009). “Making the results of scientific research more readily available throughout the world is clearly a noble and important goal. Building a sustainable system of scholarly communication that can meet that goal will require reasoned engagement; rather than slogans and banner waving.” (Plutchak, T.S., 2009). Collaboration indeed.

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