

Scholarly Communication – Roles and Responsibilities

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1. Where we are today

The “serials crisis,” now going on a decade, refers to the unsustainable state of scholarly communication. For the past ten years, prices of scholarly journals have outpaced inflation, the Consumer Price Index, and most other comparison indexes. Consolidation of large commercial publishers has meant even more concentrated control over the multi-billion dollar business. Meanwhile, particularly in the last few years, University library budgets have been cut by institutions that are trying to cope with lower endowments or decreased government support. At UC and other institutions, libraries have tried negotiating with publishers for smaller increases in pricing, have cancelled journals where possible, and have had to divert funding from monographs and other materials in order to maintain subscriptions for online (and print) journals. This means that access to scholarly resources is declining even at a time when the volume of information is increasing; more articles are being written, journals established, and books published each year. Universities cannot continue to maintain the level of breadth and depth of the scholarly materials currently available.

The situation is complex and involves numerous stakeholders and possible ways to address the issues. In the current system of scholarly communication, particularly in the sciences, scholars submit an article for publication in a journal, the article is peer-reviewed by other scholars in that field (generally for free), the publisher performs copyediting and layout, and distributes the journal under its imprint. Universities then spend millions of dollars to purchase the journal, often packaged together with the publisher’s other journals (known as the “big deal”) – whether desired by the university or not.

Currently, libraries and universities are employing tactics to reduce their costs for scholarly journals that include: promoting open access publishing (in various forms), negotiating with publishers for alternative pricing structures, and joining together to collaboratively wield greater influence. Libraries are also taking publishing matters into their own hands by offering publishing services, repositories, data management, and digitizing printed material to provide increased access to a clientele accustomed to finding everything online. But stakeholders in the system can only do so much individually; it’s going to take actions by all parties to make real change.

This white paper attempts to address the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders in efforts to change the unsustainable current system of scholarly communication. Those stakeholders include scholars, libraries, publishers and research funders.

2. What actions are needed & who can do them.

➤ **Authors/faculty**

As researchers, authors, reviewers, and editorial board members, there is much that faculty can do to influence the scholarly communication system. If faculty want their scholarly works to be widely disseminated, and for libraries to not pay exorbitant prices for journal licenses, they could:

- Retain their copyrights. Retaining copyright is one way to ensure the widest dissemination of scholarly works. If authors assign copyright of their works to publishers, the publisher then controls all aspects of that work. That means that authors may be required to request

permission to post their articles on their websites, include the article in a course-pack, share their articles with others, or to deposit it in an open access repository to make it more available to other researchers and peers.

- Deposit copies of articles, books, working papers, or conference proceedings in UC's eScholarship repository (www.escholarship.org).
- Implement an Open Access Policy for UC or for their campus.
- Deposit copies of works in online discipline-based publishing and dissemination services such as ArXiv (for physics), PubMed Central (for biomedical and life sciences), CogPrints (for the cognitive sciences) and the Social Science Research Network.
- Choose UC's eScholarship (www.escholarship.org) for journal publishing services.
- Seek open access publications that enable wide distribution of their work.
- Explore UC's Reshaping Scholarly Communication website (<http://osc.universityofcalifornia.edu>) for information on alternative publishing options, including how to negotiate and change publication contracts.
- Educate colleagues about the issues surrounding scholarly publishing.
- Select journals that have reasonable pricing practices for submitting articles, serving on editorial boards, or performing peer review.

➤ **Promotion and tenure committees**

Evaluations for promotion and tenure are in large part based on publication. Whether papers, articles, or monographs, these publications are generally judged on the prestige of the journal or publisher, which acts as an indicator of the quality of the work. Faculty may be deterred from pursuing alternative publishing options by the uncertainty of how promotion and tenure committees might perceive them.

- Faculty can work together, with appropriate Academic Senate committees as necessary, to recognize the growing number of open-access journals and other alternative online publications that are viable options to traditional journals used in the review process.
- Academic leaders can work to change the culture of the merit and promotion process so that equal weight is given to publication in high quality, peer reviewed open access journals as to traditional print/digital journals.
- The Committee on Academic Personnel (CAP) could engage in discussion about the impact of changes in scholarly publishing and communication in relation to personnel reviews.
- Within the humanities, tenure and promotion committees could reexamine the published monograph as a precondition for tenure, recognizing that publishers are increasingly wary of bringing out more scholarly monographs in a shrinking market – as libraries have fewer funds with which to purchase books.

➤ **Libraries**

Traditionally, libraries have been responsible for purchasing and maintaining monographs, journals and other materials that satisfy local needs. The transition to digital formats has meant that libraries now license online access to content through publishers or other aggregators, and have to negotiate for “perpetual access” through license agreements or purchase print copies at additional expense. Libraries have also taken on other roles such as creating and maintaining institutional repositories, open access publishing platforms, and data management services. Out of budgetary necessity, libraries have already done a great deal to influence the system of scholarly communication, including:

- Negotiate more favorable licensing contracts and terms.

- Cancel subscriptions when cost gets too high (can be difficult because of the “big deal” structure that the larger publishers offer).
- Develop infrastructure within the academic institution to support the full lifecycle of scholarly research and communication, culminating in robust platforms for the dissemination and publication of this work.
- Create educational materials to inform students and faculty about issues surrounding copyright, intellectual property and scholarly communication (see UC’s Reshaping Scholarly Communication website: <http://osc.universityofcalifornia.edu>).
- Support open access initiatives by participating in OA memberships, collaborations, and pilots.
- Work with university administrations to develop shared support models for publication costs.
- For more information on what the UC libraries are doing, see the [Scholarly Communication Update](#).

➤ **Publishers**

Traditionally, publishers screen submissions for quality, facilitate the peer-review process (although actual peer-review is done by other scholars in the field), provide editing and layout, and disseminate the work via printed journal or online article. Large commercial publishers appear to have thrived in an era when their customers have less to spend, with profits between 35-41%. Therefore, it seems that commercial publishers have little motivation to change as long as someone is paying, whether it’s libraries renewing journal licenses, authors or funders paying “article processing charges,” or universities joining open access “partner” programs. However, publishers must realize that they receive their content and much of the editing work for free from the very people (via the intermediary of the library) that purchase and read their publications. Some actions that publishers can do to improve relations with customers include:

- Standardize contracts so that authors keep copyright and publisher gets certain specific rights to enable publication, distribution, etc.
- Enable authors to deposit final versions of articles in open access repositories.
- Unbundle “big deal” packages to allow universities to cancel individual titles.
- Allow out-of-print titles in their collections to be digitized and offered online for noncommercial use, with print copies available on demand.
- Provide free access to all public domain (out of copyright) material in their collections.

➤ **Scholarly Societies**

Scholarly societies serve the interests of their members and often publish scholarly journals. They are well situated to influence scholarly publishing decisions. Societies can:

- Self-publish their journals with the assistance of university services (such as UC’s eScholarship) instead of handing over publication to commercial publishers.
- Provide ratings on the quality of open access journals in their discipline to help promotion and tenure boards in their decision-making process.
- Provide examples of alternate language for publication contracts to assist authors in managing their copyrights and retaining rights to their work.
- Offer model agreements with language that allows authors to deposit the final, edited version of their work in an open access repository.
- Encourage members to refrain from publishing in, or sitting on editorial boards of, journals with exorbitant pricing policies.

➤ **Research funders**

Funding agencies spend billions of dollars per year on research. They can influence the system of scholarly communication by:

- Implement open access publishing requirements for all research funded, like those of the NIH and Wellcome Trust.
- Allow researchers to pay author processing charges for open access publication out of grant funding.
- Offer open access repositories like PubMed.

Selected Sources:

Library Journal Periodicals Price Survey 2011:

http://www.libraryjournal.com/lj/ljinprintcurrentissue/890009-403/periodicals_price_survey_2011_.html.csp

A model of scientific communication as a global distributed information system, by Bo-Christer Björk, Department of Management and Organisation, Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration, Helsinki, Finland <http://informationr.net/ir/12-2/paper307.html>

“The Case of Scholars’ Management of Their Copyright,” from the Academic Council’s Special Committee on Scholarly Communication. Endorsed by the Academic Council on April 19, 2006. <http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/senate/committees/scsc/copyrigh.scsc.0506.pdf>

Systemwide Library License Reductions in a Time of Fiscal Challenge (Public Letter), May 16, 2011 <http://www.cdlib.org/services/collections/current/publicbudgetletter2011.html>

David Rosenthal’s blog post: “What’s Wrong with Scholarly Communication” <http://blog.dshr.org/2011/09/whats-wrong-with-research-communication.html>