

BY SIGRID KELSEY

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# OPEN ACCESS DRIVES CHANGE IN LIBRARIES AND SCHOLARLY ASSOCIATIONS

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*Libraries exist to remove barriers, to make information as accessible as possible to the largest potential audience achievable. They do it by removing financial, educational, and physical obstacles in order to facilitate knowledge and learning and improve research. With open access removing many barriers associated with copyrights, author rights, use restrictions, and costs, it is only natural that the library profession is an active supporter of open access publishing.*

Historically, a key way for libraries to remove barriers to information was by covering the costs of journals and books. However, the rising costs of journals — especially science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) titles — has outpaced stagnant library budgets and made the traditional model unsustainable. In 2014, the average cost of a chemistry journal was \$4,602.33; physics journals averaged \$4,133.98. Despite technological advances that allow easier and faster access to information, research often fails to reach the largest audience possible because it is published in journals too costly for many libraries. Therefore, while there is more to open access than the cost of serials, reactions to serials costs have invigorated the OA movement. The library profession is responding to the serials crisis in part by changing its approaches to fulfilling their long-established mission.

Universities and funding agencies share the same goals as libraries — to create, disseminate, and preserve knowledge. Many universities and agencies have implemented mandates for researchers to publish research in OA journals to achieve greater access to research and repositories, further energizing the OA movement. The Wellcome Trust, one such funding source, requires articles, scholarly monographs, and book chapters it has funded to comply with its open access policy, stating that “The Wellcome Trust believes that

maximising the distribution of these publications — by providing free, online access — is the most effective way of ensuring that the research we fund can be accessed, read and built upon. In turn, this will foster a richer research culture.” The National Institutes of Health also requires all investigators funded by the NIH to make their publications freely available in PubMed Central. Similarly, universities have issued open access statements and policies, such as Harvard University’s, which states that “faculty authors in participating schools grant the university a nonexclusive, irrevocable right to distribute their scholarly articles for any non-commercial purpose.” With each new university or legislative mandate, the open access movement gains strength and continues to change the landscape of scholarly publishing.

Even with OA gaining wider acceptance, it is not the inevitable model for scholarly communication. Many researchers continue to submit articles to costly closed journals, often because those journals are well-established with excellent scholarly reputations. Those journals, in turn, are making changes in response to the OA movement. Elsevier launched a new sharing policy in April 2015, stating, “Our goal at Elsevier and with our colleagues in the scholarly publishing industry is to maximize the value of the publishing process to researchers by supporting collaboration and sharing.” The Confederation of Open

Access Repositories quickly denounced the policy, responding that “despite the claim by Elsevier that the policy advances sharing, it actually does the opposite.” Policies continue to evolve and models continue to change, with a common acknowledgement that sharing is fundamental to the progress of scholarly work. It is difficult to predict exactly where the OA movement will settle, but it is certain the movement continues to develop and encourage changes in attitudes, policies, and practices.

All of these changes in research and accessibility have benefits for libraries, researchers, and readers, but create valid concerns about the future of the inexpensive but influential scholarly association and society journals with small operating budgets. Like libraries and universities, scholarly and professional associations have a mission to advance knowledge and to share and promote their work. As nonprofits, they must also be mindful of their budgets, and a 2012 meeting of representatives from thirty-five such societies found that about half of their income came from their publishing activities. Steven C. Wheatley of the American Council of Learned Societies noted at the 2013 Charleston Library Conference that most societies rely on membership dues, conference revenues, and publications as the staples of their income. Because many of these associations rely on the revenue from journal subscriptions to support their operating budgets, the open access movement presents a unique dilemma: associations want to support wider access to knowledge, but they rely on





subscription costs to operate. And with open access mandates and increased acceptance of open access, society and association journals will lose out on submissions without offering some form of support for open access publication.

What changes are associations making to support open access? Approaches range from jumping into open access publishing and abandoning print altogether to more cautious efforts to ease into open access without losing revenue streams.

Adopting author-friendly agreements is the first change that all academic association journals should make to step toward open access with little risk to the association's income from its journal. Allowing authors to retain their copyrights and publication rights allows them to comply with grant mandates for open access, because authors will be allowed to publish their articles in institutional repositories, on websites, and in open access repositories like arXiv. An added benefit to the journal is wider access and readership without losing subscriptions.

Besides ensuring their journals adhere to open access mandates, associations need to look closely at their member benefits. When a journal ranks highly as a member benefit, association boards may hesitate to make it open access, fearful of losing both subscription revenues and memberships. With open access on the rise and conference attendance declining, scholarly associations must seek out new ways to generate income to keep financially viable. Membership incentives including networking, learning, and opportunities to engage in professional service and receive recognition are a few of the reasons professionals join learned societies; enhancing the benefits in these areas for members will help keep these societies vital to the scholarly world.

Publication fees are a controversial model for open access, but are another way nonprofit associations generate income. Sometimes called author fees, this model of OA publishing pays for its journal costs by charging the author rather than the reader. These models must be handled carefully to prevent a journal from becoming a predatory or vanity publication. Author fees must never influence the peer review and editorial process. Charging a submission fee is one way to prevent fees from influencing article acceptance. Editors will be free to accept or reject

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articles without impacting the amount of fee income. Adopting submission fees may reduce the number of submissions, but the quality of submissions is likely to increase. Submission fees are also an opportunity to add another member benefit in the form of fee waivers, and this member benefit can be applied to individual or institutional members. BioMed Central, PLOS (Public Libraries of Science), and Proceedings of the National Academy of Science are a few open access publishers that waive or discount author fees for institutional members.

**CONCLUSION**

As libraries continue to shift their collecting focus from print to electronic, they are realigning their services, staffing, and budgets to support the new methods in scholarly communication, and much of it is open: hosting e-journals and institutional repositories, opening digital labs, digitizing their unique holdings, providing advice for author agreements and copyright, and

offering support for electronic author processing fees. Open access is vital for carrying out the missions of university libraries and the institutions they support. Libraries will continue to make scholarship accessible, as always, but in new ways. At the same time, scholarly associations and societies must realize their mission to advance scholarship through making the research of their members available. Like libraries, they must realign their services and budgets so they can continue to support their members and carry out their mission to contribute to the scholarly record.

The library profession will continue its mission of removing barriers to information and research in new ways. Funding institutional memberships to scholarly associations, hosting open access journals, and defraying author fees will help keep both open access and association journals sustainable. With increased collaboration between universities, libraries, and associations, changes will continue to advance scholarly communication and the open access movement.

*For works cited, go to [www.phikappaphi.org/forum/spring2016](http://www.phikappaphi.org/forum/spring2016)*

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