

Responding to the Challenges Facing Scholarly Communication

The Case of Journal Publishing

(Approved for Systemwide Academic Senate Review by the Academic Council on December 14, 2005.)

Discussion Statement

Journal publishers are essential partners in the dissemination of knowledge. Both publishers and researchers want academic papers to have the widest possible circulation. The current system of journal publication, however, limits the dissemination of knowledge. Better systems can be developed to meet both the goals of academic research and the economic interests of journal publishers.

The Academic Senate calls upon – and seeks partnerships with – those who publish scholarly journals to:

1. Seek only the copyrights necessary for first publication;
2. Concentrate on adding value to, rather than ownership of, scholarship;
3. Pursue innovation to improve scholarly communication systems;
4. Avoid monopoly pricing;
5. Provide transparent financial information;
6. Enable ongoing access to the persistent scholarly record; and
7. Provide full information about peer review and copyright policies and processes.¹

Background

Faculty of the University of California, and their academic colleagues worldwide, are growing increasingly concerned about the rising costs and declining circulation of journals. For decades the cost of scholarly materials has escalated at rates exceeding the consumer price index (CPI). From 1986 to 2003 the unit cost for scholarly journals rose 245% while the CPI rose 68%. Among the many factors behind this unsustainable trend, three are particularly problematic. First, the full transfer of copyright ownership to publishers gives them monopoly rights on this knowledge. Second, profit-maximizing publishers value revenue generation far above the spread of knowledge. Third, the bundled pricing of journals gives publishers undue power in their negotiation with universities. Rapidly rising subscription prices reduces academic access to research and severely handicaps universities' ability to maintain collections that support research, teaching, and the public interest. Escalating journal subscription prices are also limiting library acquisition of scholarly monographs, to the detriment of authors whose scholarship is best presented in longer publications than journal articles. As a result, the University, its faculty, and its libraries must continuously assess cost efficiency and effectiveness of scholarly materials as a factor in their selection.

It is essential for scholars, libraries and publishers to partner for the larger public good. By so doing, they can establish and reaffirm values and practices that lead to equitable, sustainable, and flexible scholarly journal publishing.

Ideal Journal Publishing Practices

The Academic Senate calls upon those who publish scholarly journals to:

1. **Seek only first publication copyright.** To add value and make an economic return, publishers do not need full transfer of copyright ownership, as is current practice. Most business needs can be met by securing an exclusive right of first commercial publication, with requests for other rights such as foreign distribution and reprinting, made when and as necessary. Authors and their institutions then retain and take advantage of other copyrights as needed for research, teaching, content management and continued influence.

¹ As suggested, for example, in the companion to this whitepaper titled *Responding to the Challenges Facing Scholarly Communication: Evaluation of Publications in Academic Personnel Processes* <http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/senate/committees/scsc/cap.eval.scsc.12.05.pdf> .

2. **Concentrate on added value rather than ownership.** Publishers can and should maintain and extend peer review, editing, access, and other services that add great value to scholarly materials. These services can be priced and valued independently. Their addition does not require that the publisher own the content of an academic paper.
3. **Pursue technological and organizational innovation to improve scholarly communication systems.** Journal publishers have been, and continue to be, an important source of technical and organizational innovation.² We wish to encourage continued experimentation and innovation providing it meets contemporary scholarly needs, rather than simply providing the opportunity to raise prices. There are pressing needs for innovation in areas such as support for data sets, automated search, retrieval, and manipulation, online commentary, and other services that add to scholarship.
4. **Avoid monopoly pricing.** Universities, states and others will use all available means to sustain access, including anti-trust and other legal remedies.
5. **Provide transparent financial information.** Transparent finances will build trust among stakeholders in scholarly communication. Publishers, authors, and research institutions rely on one another for inputs, processes, and outputs of scholarly communication. Their actions influence each other's motivations and rewards. Therefore scholarly communication stakeholders must work together to reduce total costs and make improvements to scholarly communication systems. Financial insight and transparency is necessary in this pursuit, and should include identification of production costs and agreement on measures of value.

A worthy challenge for all stakeholders in the scholarly publishing community is to derive business models that simultaneously a) maximize the audience for scholarly publications; b) sustain consumer costs within a predictable and affordable range for the academic and public marketplaces; c) provide reasonable economic returns to owners and shareholders; and d) encourage reinvestment in creating greater efficiencies and effectiveness of publishing processes and infrastructure.
6. **Enable the persistence of, and permanent access to the scholarly record.** Rapid technological change, notably frequent change in digital storage regimes, generates a risk that academic papers will not be readable in the future. Publishers and other stakeholders need to work together to establish trusted repositories ensuring persistence of and ongoing access to the scholarly record.

Accountability

Aligning current practice with the shared goals of creating healthy, sustainable systems for scholarly communication is a difficult task that must a) acknowledge and draw from the successes of the scholarly publishing industry; and b) define, as suggested above, new standards and best practices against which to assess the pursuit. Fortunately, publishers, libraries, and scholars have an existing set of metrics and partnerships upon which to draw.⁴

² We count among these innovations the use of technology to increase production efficiencies and access and decrease time to publication, new business models including open access and "producer pays," and creative partnerships to leverage and best apply the contributions of all stakeholders in scholarly publishing.

³ See, for example, the antitrust analyses of mergers and pricing practices in the scholarly publishing industry from the Information Access Alliance. <http://www.informationaccess.org/>.

⁴ Recent examples include the COUNTER standards for usage statistics, the citation-driven "impact factor" metric for assessing the impact of scholarly journals, and the OpenURL and DOI schemes for persistent and flexible identification of journal articles.

The Academic Senate envisions building upon past practice to encourage the emergence of a sustainable scholarly communication system through specific actions such as: establishing a set of best-practice criteria for scholarly journals across all formats⁵; periodically evaluating and reporting the ways in which the journals to which the UC system subscribes meet the best practice criteria; recommending cancellations, subscriptions to competitors, or the launching of competing journals in those cases where journals consistently fail to meet best practices; publicly recognizing those journals that consistently do meet or exceed expectations and encouraging UC faculty to publish in them; and creating venues through which to discuss and harmonize these strategies and actions with those of other prominent universities and university consortia.

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⁵ These criteria may include indices of price, use, quality of content and service, and the publisher's orientation toward copyright.