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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, in the September, 2009 edition of *Information Today*, 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 singleuse 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 multiuse licence to view this image by more than one person’. So much for collaboration.”

The World Health Organization offers another supportive perspective:

“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”.

“Chronic serialitis” (Fister, B., 2009) is a disease of epic proportions and one that needs our sincere attention and actions now.

Current Trends

While not all-inclusive, the following are highlights of trends within the United States and abroad in support of the Open Access movement.

“‘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). One hopeful new trend is the first International Open Access Week, held October 19-23, 2009.

United Kingdom: “Among the announcements made to coincide with the kick-off of Open Access Week was a call from British research funding organization Wellcome Trust for ‘greater transparency from journals on open access publishing costs. At the same time, the organization announced the dedication of ‘...\$3.3 million USD to fund open access publication fees for its researchers over the next 12 months’. The Trust hopes to persuade publishers to rethink their subscription models to take into account revenue from open access publication fees.” (openaccessweek.org, 2009). “University College London (UCL) became the latest institution to adopt an open access publishing policy this week, adding to the rapid increase in such mandates over the past year. The system will take effect from the beginning of the 2009-10 academic year.” (Nature, 2009).

Hong Kong: “While it is too early to report on the success of OA in Hong Kong at the funding agency level, several universities have already adopted OA policies, and it looks like more will adopt OA policies in the coming year in response to the knowledge exchange and research assessment incentives.” (Chan, D., 2009).

India: A “...recent announcement by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research in India, urging 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).

South Africa: “The recent adoption of an open access mandate by the University of Pretoria in South Africa again demonstrates recognition of the importance of open access for developing regions.” (Chan, et al, 2009)

Scandinavia: “The Scandinavian countries...have collaborated in an effort called DiVA that supports electronic publishing and printing for 15 universities in Sweden and Norway. Furthermore, the National Library of Sweden is leading a project called Open Access.se, which aims to ‘promote maximum accessibility and visibility of works produced by researchers, teachers and students’. Right next to Sweden, Norway has its own initiative created to facilitate standardization and co-operation between Norwegian open access repositories. It is called NORA and it harvests around 40 repositories...” (Chantavaridou, 2009).

Ireland: 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).

United States of America: “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). “A number of institutions also are spreading the word about in-house repositories and services. This week, both the University of Pennsylvania and the University of California Digital Library launched revamped web sites dedicated to open scholarly communications.” (openaccessweek.org, 2009).

Also in the United States: “The National Institutes of Health (NIH), after a long struggle, was able to turn a voluntary program of deposit of grant-funded research findings into a

requirement that became law in 2009.” (Fister, B., 2009). 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).

Globally: “Global pharmaceutical behemoth Pfizer has 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

International Open Access Week: The continuation of Open Access Week activities will promote additional resources devoted to the Open Access movement. “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)

Barbara Fister believes “change is in the wind” as evidenced, in part, by: “100 institutions have passed open access mandates, and Yale students are urging their university to get on the stick.” (Fister, 2009).

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 Global Forum for Health Research reported: “Strengthening research capacity in developing countries is one of the most effective and sustainable ways of advancing health and development...and of helping correct the 10/90 gap in health research”. (Chan, et al, 2009).

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).

Additional research will be conducted to “empower authors with content creation using tools that are not constrained by the paper metaphor so that, no matter what happens on the publisher's side of the transaction, authors can use and re-use their work as flexibly as possible. Although “the technology now exists for authors to transcend the limitations of paper formatting...”(Sefton, 2009), barriers still exist and much more research is needed.

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