Introducing the Scholarly Communication Section of the Academic Division: What Will the Section Do?

Joseph Kraus

The first part of this article presents a chronology of the creation of the new Section. I would like people to know more about the historical origins of the Section. For part two, I address some fallacies that librarians and information professionals face when discussing scholarly communication issues. This provides some of the reasons I had gotten involved in the debate. I would like the Section to address these fallacies and others in the future.

Part 1—A short history of the Scholarly Communication Section

The seed for the idea to create the Scholarly Communication Section of the Academic Division started to grow about two years ago. I was in a conversation with several other Academic Division members concerning how SLA HQ could respond to an issue concerning copyright. It occurred to me that if SLA had a scholarly communications group, then it would be easier for that group to provide advice to SLA HQ on such matters. After discussing the ideas with some others in the Academic Division, we determined that a Scholarly Communication Section of the Academic Division would make the most sense. We also explored the idea of creating a Caucus, but we thought that the Academic Division would make a better home for the unit.

On January 9, 2013, I asked the leaders of the Academic Division and the Division Cabinet Chair and Chair-Elect (Catherine Lavallée-Welch, Ann Koopman and Tara Murray) to clarify the process for creating a section of the Division. They recommended that we survey the membership to see if there was interest.

During the middle of March, 2013, some interested members wrote up a description of the proposed section using Google Docs. The final product was:

> The Scholarly Communications Section of the Academic Division of SLA provides a forum for members who are interested in, or responsible for, projects related to any area of the scholarly communication system. Some of the topics to be discussed include open access publishing in general, institutional repositories, institutional open access policies, funder mandates, peer review, tenure and promotion policies, campus publishing initiatives, and more. The Section will monitor and report on developments in scholarly communications.

A survey that asked members about the proposed section went out on April 9, 2013. We wanted to get a minimum of 15 people interested in joining the new section, and we also wanted to see if there were others who would be interested in helping the new section get off the ground. As of April 21st, 49 Academic Division members indicated that they would join the new section, and 10 people noted that they were interested in a leadership role within the Section.

On May 30, 2013, it was reported that "The Academic Division successfully conducted a survey of its members about the formation of this section.... It is anticipated the formation of the section will pass." (https://www.sla.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/0513-OM-A02-SLA-Board-Mins-050813.pdf)

On June 10, 2013 at the SLA Conference in San Diego, the request to create the new section was brought to the Division Cabinet, and it passed.

On April 16th, 2014, I created a LibGuide (http://slaacademic.libguides.com/scholcommsection) and the Twitter account. (https://twitter.com/SLAAcadSCS) The Twitter account is co-managed by Geraldine Clement-Stoneham and Joe Kraus.   As of September 26, 2014, the two account managers had sent out 1,164 tweets (and retweets) concerning scholarly communication issues. That has led to some good conversations and interactions with others.

On June 9, 2014, the Section held its first session. Heather Piwowar from ImpactStory presented "Show All the Metrics: Uncovering and Rewarding the Broad Impact of Research." The session was cosponsored by the Information Technology Division of SLA.

Part 2—Scholarly Communication Fallacies

There are many information professionals who are frustrated with the current information production and dissemination industry, particularly concerning scholarly information. It could be much more efficient. It has been noted that scholarly information is different from content that is sold as popular literature, business information sources, or in trade magazines, etc. In those cases, the authors expect to receive compensation for creating content, while academic and scholarly authors do not expect to receive direct compensation. They receive compensation through academic positions with prestige and high reputations when they publish in high quality publishers and sources. (Suber, 2012, pp. 15-17)

Librarians know that information is not free, but we know that it could be produced more efficiently, and that more people should be able to access scholarly research and information. As librarians and information professionals, we want as many people (our clients, customers, or patrons) to have access to as much high-quality information as possible. We want to reduce the barriers to content. Since this is the case, librarians often support Open Access projects and publishers. However, there are also many detractors to the OA system. There are many people who are skeptical that Open Access will thrive in the future.

Peter Suber has a good set of responses to myths and misunderstandings about Open Access. For example, Open Access is not an economic model, it is an access model. (Suber, 2009) Because there are several larger commercial Open Access journal publishers who utilize an Author-side Payment Charge (APC), many people think that most Open Access publishing is provided because of the APC. In actuality, only about 26% of journals listed in DOAJ charge an APC for publication of their content. (Solomon and Björk, 2012)

The following fallacies address arguments concerning Open Access and other scholarly communication issues. It should be noted that fallacies can work both ways. For example, an Ad hominem attack can be done against both Open Access opponents as well as Open Access advocates, and both arguments would be just as fallacious. When one argues in the scholarly communications arena, the discussion should be about the concepts, not about the person making the arguments.

Sweeping Generalization. (This is also called *dicto simpliciter*) This assumes that what is true of the whole will also be true of the part, or that what is true in most instances will also be true in all instances.

This is the fallacy used when people claim that an article in a high impact journal will also have high impact. Just because a journal has high impact, that does not mean that all of the articles that are contained within it will also have high impact. Seglen (1992) noted that "Fifteen percent of a journal's articles collect 50% of the citations, and the most cited half of the articles account for nearly 90% of the citations. Awarding the same value to all articles would therefore tend to conceal rather than to bring out differences between the contributing authors."

In the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (http://www.ascb.org/dora/), researchers also state that "it is critical to understand that the Journal Impact Factor has a number of well-documented deficiencies as a tool for research assessment." This statement provides many reasons why the Impact Factor of a journal should not be used to evaluate the quality of specific articles that are contained within a journal.

Hasty Generalization.   In this case, someone bases an inference on a small sample or on an unrepresentative sample.

There are some publishers of OA journals that could be considered to have predatory practices, and they publish content that is of low quality. Therefore, some might argue that the whole concept of open access publishing has been ruined. The same could be said about traditional publishers. It would be just as fallacious to say that since there are some traditional subscription-based publishers that are predatory and are low quality, therefore all of traditional publishing has been ruined.

Bohannon (2013) wrote a "sting" of many Open Access journals and publishers that was published as a news piece in the journal *Science*. This article concerning peer review was not peer reviewed. While this article criticized many Open Access publishers, there were flaws in the study that were not revealed until after the article came out. (Some are listed at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Who%27s_Afraid_of_Peer_Review%3F#Responses_from_the_scientific_community)

About five years ago, Elsevier published at least six journals that were deemed to be fake journals. (Grant, 2009) Should this tarnish the reputation of all of the other journals that

Elsevier publishes? No matter what the case, one should not make a hasty generalization based on a small sample.

Slippery Slope. (This is also called a snowball argument or domino theory) This suggests that if one step or action is taken it will invariably lead to similar steps or actions, and the end results are negative or undesirable. Thus, the first step should not be taken.

It is posited that it will be difficult for society presses to survive in an Open Access landscape. Joe Esposito (2013) stated that "Gold OA, in other words, represents something of an existential threat to many professional societies. With reduced membership benefits, membership may drop, further weakening the society." People interested in the scholarly communication system don't want scholarly societies to go away. Since that is an undesirable result, many people do not want societies to adopt OA practices.

Should the money from library subscriptions (from public and private universities) be used to support the activities of scholarly societies? Velterop (2003) asked "Should they primarily be fund-raising organizations for other activities in their disciplines, using their publications to bring in the necessary money?"

There are many responses to some of these economic concerns. Many have noted why Open Access is better for scholarly societies in the long run. (Neylon, 2012; Shieber, 2013; Velterop, 2005; Swan and Chan, 2012; Crow, 2006)

Red Herring. This type of argument attempts to hide a weakness in the logic by drawing attention away from the real issue. One may employ a diversionary tactic to attempt to confuse the issue under debate.

One red herring that some people will present is that Open Access is not the main problem, scientific literacy (or some other forms of literacy) is lacking. Since some "laypeople are not able to understand, interpret or easily appreciate the value of a scientific research project; thus a mediator or interpreter is needed to explain the work in lay terms." (Zuccala, 2010) Some people may conclude that since the general public can't understand the OA research literature, OA does not need to be addressed at this time. They may say that we need to increase the education of the general public before we address the open access issue. This draws attention away from the fact that there are many highly educated people who are not affiliated with institutions that subscribe to all content, so this discounts the fact that there are many appropriate people who desire greater access to the research. The goal of Open Access is to increase access for all people, not just the general public.

Straw Man. One may state an opponent's argument in an extreme or exaggerated form. That person might also address a weak or irrelevant portion of an opponent's argument.

Jeffrey Beall (2013) claims that most Open Access advocates are really just involved in an anti-corporatist movement. He said that "The OA movement is an anti-corporatist movement that

wants to deny the freedom of the press to companies it disagrees with." Open Access advocates are trying to take down the commercial publishing industry.

This is an exaggerated claim. Most open access advocates know that the publishing industry needs a viable economic system to operate. There are many librarians and information professionals who run green and gold Open Access publishing operations, and they know that publishing cannot be done for free. Librarians also know that the current system is not operating optimally, and many would like to see changes to the system so that more information will be available to more people at less cost. While it may be true that some OA advocates do not like commercial and for-profit publishing enterprises, it is an exaggeration to claim that most or all OA advocates are involved in an anti-corporatist movement.

As Peter Suber wrote in *Open Access*, "Jan Velterop, the former publisher of BioMed Central, once said that OA publishing can be profitable but will 'bring profit margins more in line with the added value.'" (Suber, 2012, p. 145) There may be many OA advocates who desire this situation to occur, but that does not mean that they wish to take down commercial publishers.

This provides responses to a small number of the fallacies that people interested in scholarly communication might see. What are some other fallacies that you have seen concerning scholarly communication? How would you respond to some of these (and other) fallacious claims?

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