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Abstract:

Given the rising costs of journal subscriptions and the difficulty that authors have in retaining rights to their own works, reform in the scholarly publishing industry is needed. This article, the first in a two-part series, presents an overview of the crisis in scholarly communication and discusses the groundwork that must be laid in order to develop successful programs to address the crisis on college and university campuses. As the de facto centers of scholarship and research on campus, libraries must educate faculty and advocate for more sustainable publishing models. Programs developed by the Boston Library Consortium and its member institutions are discussed.

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Author's footnote:

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The Crisis in Scholarly Communication, Part I: Understanding the Issues and Engaging Your Faculty

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This article is the first in a two-part series on scholarly communication, commonly referred to as “the crisis in scholarly communication.” This topic has been at the fore of library literature for over a decade, but little has been written on the subject for those who work in technical services. Understandably, most who study the crisis in scholarly communication tend to focus on what library professionals who work directly with researchers and faculty members need to know in order to stay informed and educate their patrons and colleagues on campus. But those library professionals who work in technical services also need to understand the issues surrounding changes in scholarly publishing, not only in terms of how, for example, price increases affect acquisitions budgets, but how changes in the industry can affect their own work as librarians. This two-part series will present first a review and discussion of scholarly communication topics as they are being experienced in the public sphere on college and university campuses, and next a more focused study of how “the crisis” translates into issues and challenges to be managed specifically by technical services departments.

The crisis in scholarly communication affects faculty and librarians in different ways. Because of this, misunderstandings and miscommunications often arise. Faculty may sometimes assume that librarians are primarily concerned with the rising costs of journals, while librarians may characterize faculty as caring only about their own publishing endeavors. Certainly there are people in each of these groups who typify these stereotypes. But when efforts are made to

improve the quality of communication about scholarly communication on campuses, both librarians and faculty usually find quite a range of opinions and concerns regarding the issues.

Overview

A 2006 survey of faculty members at the University of California found that faculty were “strongly interested in issues related to scholarly communication,” but that they “tend to see scholarly communication problems as affecting others...not themselves.” A traditional system of tenure and promotion was seen as hindering changes in faculty behavior regarding scholarly communication; i.e., deciding to publish in open-access journals or posting their publications in institutional repositories. Tellingly, one finding stated that “outreach on scholarly communication issues and services has not yet reached the majority of faculty.”¹ This is in a statewide university system with a dedicated Office of Scholarly Communication (the body that performed the survey). At smaller institutions with fewer resources dedicated to scholarly communication, the problem of outreach, education, and advocacy with faculty only becomes more challenging.

Until recently, the library literature about the crisis in scholarly communication focused predominantly on issues of budget. Librarians expressed concern about the ramifications of the “big deals” offered by publishers, in which less-desirable journals were bundled with essential titles in order to boost revenues; aside from the obvious budgetary implications, the “big deal” also leads to increased needs for processing materials, shelving, and staff time as print journal holdings increase.² Now, although the “big deal” is no less of a concern, librarians also focus on issues beyond their immediate purview, including the need to educate and advocate for changes in the scholarly publishing system. Outreach to faculty, which traditionally took the form of

subject specialists liaising with academic departments to discuss collection priorities, has now taken on a tone of urgency as librarians work to inform their faculty constituents about how the traditional publishing industry negatively impacts them as authors and as scholars.

The sciences, technology, and medicine (STM) have long been identified as the area in which the crisis in scholarly communication has the biggest impact. Prices for STM journals are significantly higher than prices for journals in the humanities and social sciences, and many STM journals are controlled by large commercial publishing conglomerates. The journals published by these companies are regarded as essential in several ways: for scholars seeking to publish their work, for researchers seeking to understand significant new developments in their fields of study, and for librarians seeking to provide their users with access to indispensable scholarly literature. In other words, we are all captive audiences.

Although it would perhaps be painting with too broad a brush to say that all publishers of these journals take advantage of scholars and librarians, it is not going too far to say that we often find ourselves over a barrel when it comes to considering our scientific journal subscriptions. Increased specialization and interdisciplinarity in the sciences has also led to more new titles being published that appeal to narrower audiences, but those specialized areas are often ones that universities hope to cultivate in order to attract scholars and funding; therefore, libraries are often pressured to purchase new, expensive titles that may be read by only a few faculty members or graduate students. As librarians, we thus find ourselves faced with difficult decisions to be made in terms of which titles to renew or purchase and which titles to cancel. Too often it is the less-expensive social-science or humanities titles that are cancelled, at least in print format, in favor of the costly scientific titles. The social-science and humanities titles are continued in electronic database form, if at all.³

Another way in which libraries are directly affected by the crisis in scholarly publishing is through the restrictive copyright transfer required by traditional publishing contracts. When authors sign such contracts, they generally sign away many of their rights to their own work, such as the right to place it on reserve at the library, deposit it in an institutional repository, and the right to include it on their personal or faculty Web sites. Authors must negotiate with publishers to retain these rights, and in many cases they are either unwilling to do this or unsuccessful in their attempts. Ownership of these rights benefits the publishers by increasing revenues through royalty charges or through legal settlements due to copyright infringement, and the mega-publishers are known to be inflexible in their unwillingness to allow author amendments to copyright agreements.⁴

When faculty authors transfer the copyright of their works to publishers, libraries are affected. Faculty are unwilling or unable to deposit their works in libraries' institutional repositories, and this makes it difficult for libraries to gain momentum with repository projects. University legal counsels hesitate to allow electronic reserve programs because they fear litigation from the publishers. And libraries are forced to continue their expenditures on costly journal subscriptions because publishers make it extremely difficult for authors to provide alternative access points to their scholarship.

John Willinsky of Canada's Public Knowledge Project (<http://www.pkp.sfu.ca/>) asks about the economic model of traditional publishing, "What sort of market drives subscription prices and cancellations up to the point of forcing libraries to cancel journals? What sort of market ensures that the labor invested by faculty authors and reviewers results in journals that their own libraries can no longer afford?" He goes on to answer his own questions by asserting that it is the kind of market that foments revolution; that is, it fosters the creation of an open-

access movement “that takes advantage of new publishing technologies to restore the primacy of the right to know.”⁵ However, Willinsky has the good fortune to live in a country where government support of alternative publishing models is already well-established. The Public Knowledge Project is a federally funded research initiative, based at two universities (one private, one public), whose mandate is “to improve the scholarly and public quality of academic research through the development of innovative online environments.”⁶ It develops open-source software for managing scholarly publishing initiatives and offers an extensive catalog of freely available research articles.

The revolution of open-access in the United States has been slow to get off the ground in part because of lack of government support. At the time of this writing, the NIH Public Access Policy has finally been passed into law, but it is too soon to know what successes and challenges will result. Between 2005, when the original policy was produced, and its passage into law on January 11, 2008, the American federal government appeared to promote alternative publishing models without actually supporting them (i.e., financially). Many stakeholders in scholarly publishing—authors, publishers, librarians, open-access advocates—are waiting to see how the NIH mandate will change the landscape of publishing in the sciences and beyond.⁷ Most recently, Harvard University has mandated that the members of its Faculty of Arts and Sciences deposit preprints of their publications in its as-yet-developed institutional repository; this will certainly have additional impacts on the future of scholarly publishing.⁸

Although open-access journals have begun publishing in the US, they have had difficulty competing for authors with traditionally published journals. This is particularly true in the sciences, where there is an enormous gap between what a single subscription to an open-access journal costs (in theory, nothing) and what a traditional journal costs (thousands of dollars per

year in some cases). With revenue pouring in each year, the traditional publishers are able to leverage a much greater market share than open-access publishers. They also have the well-earned respect of scholars, garnered through many years of publishing high-quality, peer-reviewed journals.

Fear of losing the peer-review aspect of publishing is often cited by faculty authors as a reason they are opposed to the open-access model. This perception about scholarly publishing seems to be based on the misapprehension that open access means “free for all,” in both senses of the phrase – that journals made freely available do not prioritize quality of research and instead allow anyone to publish anything. In July 2007, a working paper published by the National Bureau of Economic Research titled “Is Peer Review in Decline?” seemed to confirm the fears of researchers who see the ability to publish freely on the Web as a bad thing. The paper’s author, Glenn Ellison, notes that the authors he studied appeared to be publishing at the same rate (based on the number of their citations), but that the number of articles they published in peer-reviewed journals had declined by 15 percent between 1990-1993 and 2000-2003.⁹ He concludes that these researchers are choosing to publish their works in other venues, but does not indicate that he was able to determine whether or not these venues were peer-reviewed. Thus he equates the decline in publishing in traditional peer-reviewed journals with a decline in the quality control of scholarly publishing, at least in his field, economics.

Any librarian can provide Ellison and others who believe as he does with some insight on this matter; namely, that there are many high-quality sources of information on the Internet but that each must be evaluated. Lack of peer review, or lack of the traditional structure of publishing, in other words, does not necessarily equal lack of quality or importance of the information published. Publishers of open-access titles are also struggling to correct this

misconception by employing basic information-evaluation talking points, such as reminding their audiences that peer review still has a place in open-access journals.

Universities themselves also perpetuate the traditional model of scholarly publishing through their systems of tenure and promotion. In the University of California survey, faculty expressed concern that these systems were hindering change in scholarly communication.¹⁰ Especially in the sciences, publication in peer-reviewed journals is essential for gaining tenure in the university environment. In some disciplines, tenure may even depend on publishing in specific journals or with specific publishers. Younger faculty who are seeking tenure are thus constrained in their ability to challenge the traditional publishing model. Tenured faculty, although they may in theory be more able to choose where they publish, generally tend to stay with journals where they have already established publishing histories. They, however, are the audience to which librarians need to direct their outreach efforts, since they are the most at liberty to step outside the traditional publishing model. Often, misunderstandings lead faculty to dismiss the notion that they should consider these alternatives, and on many campuses it has fallen to the library to educate faculty and thus foment change in the publishing system. Unlike the University of California, most colleges and universities have not established a dedicated office for scholarly communication. The library, as the traditional “heart” of scholarship on campus, thus becomes the de facto center for scholarly communication.

Developing a Successful Scholarly Communication Program

Although library administrators, pressed for staff time and resources, might wish for it, there is no out-of-the-box program that can be implemented by libraries seeking to address the crisis in scholarly communication. Rather, depending on the research climate and administrative

priorities on individual campuses, scholarly communication programs can have quite different “personalities.” Libraries developing responses to the crisis in scholarly communication must first answer some questions about their goals. Will their approach be to educate, advocate for change, or both? Who are some potential allies on campus (both individuals and groups or offices)? Are library staff sufficiently educated about the issues? How can libraries learn from scholars on campus?

Before rolling out a new product, any good company will do some market research. A good library should do this, too. Librarians may think they know their faculty well, through their connections with them as subject liaisons, through campus committee work, and face-to-face interactions at the reference desk.¹¹ However, as previously mentioned, misunderstandings and misapprehensions on the part of both librarians and faculty have contributed to inertia in developing effective partnerships on scholarly communication. Librarians should speak with faculty on campus specifically about their views on the crisis in scholarly publishing, rather than assuming that faculty know very little and/or are unwilling to make changes in their publishing practices. Librarians should also keep in mind that they have a lot to learn from their faculty, and that education on scholarly communication must be a two-way street. After all, who knows more about the practical details of publishing than the faculty researchers and authors on campus? Faculty may resent a scholarly communication program that seems to be “educating” them about a process with which they are intimately familiar. If librarians instead develop a program that emphasizes a collaborative model of education and advocacy, drawing on the unique strengths of both groups, they will probably find that faculty are more receptive. But librarians must first assess these strengths in order to develop the most effective scholarly communication program for their campus. The University of California, as we have seen,

surveyed faculty in their multi-campus institution, a massive undertaking that was made possible in part by the presence of an established scholarly communication office. On campuses without such an office, those who are charged with developing a scholarly communication program may instead choose to survey faculty more informally or draw upon their departmental connections to gauge interest and knowledge at a representative level.

Librarians should also assess the knowledge of their peers in the library, both among other professional staff and support staff. Although most professional staff in my library would say that they are aware of the crisis in scholarly communication, this awareness is likely drawn from what they have skimmed in the library literature, and they may not be as conversant in the issues as they should be if a scholarly communication program on campus is to really succeed. The involvement of support staff in this program should not be overlooked, either. On university campuses, some library staff members may be working towards advanced degrees and thus will be interested in the topic from an author's perspective. But at a most basic level, librarians should avoid giving support staff the impression that scholarly communication is solely a "professional concern;" rather, they should encourage support staff to learn more about the issues and emphasize that scholarly communication is important for everyone on a university campus. Above all, the library must strive to present a strong and united effort in its scholarly communication program, and one important way this can be achieved is through the education and inclusion of all levels of library staff.

Gauging the interest level and institutional climate on campus will help determine what direction the scholarly communication program will take. Although it may not be possible to work directly with university administrators, it is important to take into account what their priorities are. Librarians are generally well-aware of how the library is perceived by

administrators and how the library fits into the institution's academic priorities. In an institutional climate that is positive for the library, a scholarly communication program might be able to take on more of an advocacy role than in a climate where the library is not highly prioritized by the administration. Faculty, after all, will take their cues from the administration, and if they sense that the library is overstepping its boundaries and perceive it as being too strident, they may reject the program. Librarians must sometimes read between the lines to assess institutional support of scholarly publishing reform. For example, if the faculty senate or other governing body has passed a resolution addressing the crisis in scholarly publishing, as has happened on many campuses (including Northeastern's), but there has been no further action on the part of the administration to support the faculty's position, librarians may read this as the administration placing the matter at a low priority. Conversely, an administrative mandate to seek out alternatives to traditional publishing arrangements indicates that addressing the crisis in scholarly communication is a high priority.¹²

As all librarians know, encouraging faculty to involve themselves with the library is a constant struggle. There are always a handful of faculty on campus who are very active in helping to select materials, engaging with the library instruction program, and serving on library-related committees. But librarians have infrequent interactions with most faculty, so developing an education and outreach program for faculty is a challenge. How best to reach faculty in an effective and rewarding manner? Having done the "market research" discussed above, librarians will have a better understanding of their faculty's interest level and the institutional priorities on campus. Directly involving those faculty who are already engaged with the library's mission will help with outreach. Keeping in mind that the faculty's top priorities are teaching and publishing, and not necessarily the library's budget problems, it is best to emphasize a personal

approach to scholarly communication when addressing faculty. Highlighting how faculty as teachers and authors are affected by the crisis in scholarly communication will make the issues personal for them, and approaching one's customers on a personal level is an effective marketing method.¹³

Scholarly Communication Programs in the Boston Library Consortium

The Boston Library Consortium (BLC) is a group of nineteen New England academic and research libraries.¹⁴ In 2005, the BLC formed a task force to address the “crisis in scholarly communication” for its member institutions. The group was charged with creating resources that would educate academic authors about issues of copyright amendment and open access and “promote healthy scholarly communication practices among their faculty and at their universities.” Emphasis was placed on creating materials that would be “branded” with the BLC logo but could be modified as needed by member institutions. At the time, several member institution libraries had already created Web and print materials as part of their individual scholarly communication programs, but the BLC sought to both augment these materials and provide starting points for libraries that had not yet developed their own programs.

The group decided to emphasize a “What’s in it for me?” approach, with the idea that focusing on benefits to individual faculty members, rather than to the consortium’s libraries, would encourage their use of the BLC’s Amendment to Extend Authors’ Rights, a document to be used by authors when negotiating publishing agreements that was unanimously approved for adoption by all member libraries. To accompany the amendment document, the task force produced an informational leaflet about authors’ rights, which can be modified for distribution on BLC member campuses. It also developed a Web site, hosted by the BLC, that provides

information and further resources on the topic of authors' rights in scholarly communication (<http://www.blc.org/authorsrights.html>). By centralizing the development process at the consortial level, the BLC emphasized the importance of educating faculty and advocating for change on member campuses and attempted to lay the foundations for a library-faculty relationship that would extend throughout the consortium. However, the project has had mixed results. Decentralization of the program did not allow for the important consideration of institutional climate and priorities on individual campuses, and the print materials developed were too generic as a result. However, the Web site, which has been used primarily by librarians at member institutions, rather than faculty, has served as an educational tool for librarians seeking to develop scholarly communication programs on their campuses. The publicity for this project at well-attended BLC events for librarians also helped emphasize the high priority that the BLC has placed on addressing the crisis in scholarly communication, and the topic became more central at member libraries partly as a result of this focus.

More successful have been the campus-specific scholarly communication programs developed at BLC member libraries. Varying institutional commitments to scholarly communication have resulted in programs of varying intensity, of course. Two of the most well-developed scholarly communication programs at member libraries are those at Boston College (BC) and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). MIT especially has made significant advances in the field of open access, with their development of the DSpace and OpenCourseWare platforms, so it comes as no surprise that their scholarly communication program is robust and advanced, and places a heavy emphasis on open access as a positive alternative to traditional scholarly publishing.¹⁵ BC's program is also impressive in its breadth, and it includes a well-developed blog on scholarly communication.¹⁶ It should be noted that both

BC and MIT have dedicated at least a half-time professional position to the development and advancement of their scholarly communication programs. At other member institutions, this work is done by committee, or by a librarian for whom scholarly communication is one of many competing priorities.

At my institution, the library has just convened a Scholarly Communication Committee, of which I am currently the chair. As a technical services librarian, I have little direct contact with faculty outside of chance encounters during the three hours per week I work at the Reference Desk. I will initially need to rely on the committee members from our Research and Instruction department; they have more established relationships with faculty members and can educate me on current opinions and attitudes among faculty about scholarly communication. Although I work in Technical Services, I have become the de facto “expert” on scholarly communication in my library through my work with the BLC, which in turn gave me the opportunity to present on the topic at two conferences. Most librarians know that such things happen in libraries, where human and capital resources are limited – through our involvement in seemingly one-time activities, we become permanently associated with the topic. And yet I realize that my initial involvement with a subject I knew very little about at first has resulted in the opportunity to become active in the profession in an area that, as a technical services librarian, I might not have considered. In other words, today’s catalogers may become tomorrow’s scholarly communication gurus, so it is important for us all to keep informed about the issues. Stay tuned for the second article of this series, which will focus on how the crisis in scholarly communication affects various departments in academic libraries.

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11. In this section, I use the term "librarians" as shorthand to refer to those in libraries who have been charged with developing a scholarly communication program, with the

understanding that on some campuses, library support staff and faculty/staff outside the library may also be involved in such development.

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