A Compact for Open-Access Publication

On September 14, five of the nation’s premier institutions of higher learning—Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the University of California, Berkeley—announced their joint commitment to a compact for open-access publication.

Open-access scholarly journals have arisen as an alternative to traditional publications that are founded on subscription and/or licensing fees. Open-access journals make their articles available freely to anyone, while providing the same services common to all scholarly journals, such as management of the peer-review process, filtering, production, and distribution.

According to Thomas C. Leonard, university librarian at UC Berkeley, “Publishers and researchers know that it has never been easier to share the best work they produce with the world. But they also know that their traditional business model is creating new walls around discoveries. Universities can really help take down these walls, and the open-access compact is a highly significant tool for the job.”

The economic downturn underscores the significance of open-access publications. With library resources strained by budget cuts, subscription and licensing fees for journals have come under increasing scrutiny, and alternative means for providing access to vital intellectual content are identified. Open-access journals provide a natural alternative.

As Dartmouth Provost Barry P. Scherr sees it, “Supporting open-access publishing is an important step in increasing readership of Dartmouth research and, ultimately, the impact of our research on the world.”

Since open-access journals do not charge subscription or other access fees, they must cover their operating expenses through other sources, including subventions, in-kind support, or, in a sizable minority of cases, processing fees paid by or on behalf of authors for submission to or publication in the journal. While academic research institutions support traditional journals by paying their subscription fees, no analogous means of support has existed to underwrite the growing roster of fee-based open-access journals.

With library resources strained by budget cuts, subscription and licensing fees for journals have come under increasing scrutiny, and alternative means for providing access to vital intellectual content are identified.

Stuart Shieber, Harvard’s James O. Welch, Jr. and Virginia B. Welch Professor of Computer Science and Director of the University’s Office for Scholarly Communication, is the author of the five-member compact. According to Shieber, “Universities and funding agencies ought to provide equitable support for open-access publishing by subsidizing the processing fees that faculty incur when contributing to open-access publications. Right now, these fees are relatively rare. But if the research community supports open-access publishing and it gains in importance as we believe that it will, those fees could aggregate substantially over time. The compact ensures that support is available to eliminate these processing fees as a disincentive to open-access publishing.”

continued on page 3
Extended Professional Development Opportunity Program

The Extended Professional Development Opportunity Program (EPDOP) provides professional-development leaves of one to three months’ duration—with full pay and benefits—to professional librarians for independent projects that increase professional competencies while providing direct benefit to Harvard’s libraries. Recipients are required to complete a written report and be encouraged to schedule a talk or brief workshop on their subject. Applicants must have completed a minimum of three consecutive years of service to the University and must demonstrate the approval of appropriate supervisors, librarians, department chairs, and/or other designees. Arrangements must be possible to cover necessary assignments in the applicant’s absence.

Eligible projects may include scholarly research in areas served by the applicant’s position at Harvard; initiatives to improve technical or library-oriented activities, such as internships and exchanges; internships at other institutions; writing in areas served by the applicant’s position; or intensive reading and study in areas new to one’s profession of a scope that extends significantly beyond normal professional expectations. Proposals must include descriptions of any “deliverables” to be presented afterwards and the amount of time needed. EPDOP may be used in conjunction with awards from other fellowships or research grants if permitted by the supervising librarian of the faculty. To ensure department continuity, applicants should allow at least six months’ notice before taking leave.

Deadline Alert: Bryant Fellowships in 2010

The Harvard University Library (HUL) is seeking applications for the Douglas W. Bryant Fellowships. Applications will be reviewed by the Bryant Fellowships Committee of the Librarians’ Assembly Professional Development Committee, on behalf of the Harvard University Library. The application deadline is Friday, February 15, 2010.

The fellowships, which are made possible by a gift from Charles and Mary Tanenbaum, support research by Harvard’s professional library staff in bibliography, in historical aspects of librarianship, in production of reference and bibliographic works, and in other scholarly investigations, which may be outside the field of librarianship.

Guidelines are available on the Harvard University Library web site at http://hul.harvard.edu/resources/bryant.html, or by contacting HUL Human Resources Director Bette Viano, bette_viano@harvard.edu or 5-3650.

Further details will be announced later in the fall.

Library Notes Schedule Update

Harvard University Library Notes, in print and online, is published by the Office of the Director of the Harvard University Library.

During FY 2010, Library Notes will be published quarterly, with nominal publication dates falling on the third Thursdays of July, September, January, and May. Inquiries and submissions are welcome at least four weeks in advance. This is a slight alteration from our prior announcement. Further adjustments may be made as HUL adjusts its new schedule to the information needs of the library community.

In Memoriam

SHEILA HART
Sheila Kirwan Hart, retired head of public services in the Harvard College Library, died peacefully at her Cambridge home on July 3. In addition to her long affiliation with the Harvard Libraries, she was an active local thespian, appearing in numerous productions at the Loeb Drama Center (prior to the arrival of the American Repertory Theatre), as well as Agassiz Theatre and Dunster House.

EDWIN WILLIAMS
Rubén Blades Visits Loeb Music Library

On Thursday, July 16, the burgeoning scholars studying Latin American music completed, the archive will be a valuable resource for students and scholars while at the same time ensuring that the valuable services that publishers provide are supported. Additional universities are encouraged to visit the compact’s web site (http://www.oacompact.org) and sign on.

A full account of the motivation for the compact can be found in the article “Supporting OA journals is an investment in a superior system of scholarly communication,” states Peter Suber, fellow of the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) in Washington, DC, and a fellow of Harvard Law School’s Berkman Center and Harvard University’s Office for Scholarly Communication.

“Before this compact,” Suber says, “a number of funding agencies and universities were willing to pay OA journal processing fees on behalf of their grantees and faculty. It’s significant that five major universities recognize the need to join the effort, extend fee subsidies to a wider range of publishing scholars, enlist other institutions, and start to catch up with their long practice of supporting traditional—or non-OA—journals.”

Summing up the compact, MIT Provost L. Rafael Reif observes, “The dissemination of research findings to the public is not merely the right of research universities: it is their obligation. Open-access publishing promises to put more research in more hands and in more places around the world. This is a good enough reason for universities to embrace the guiding principles of this compact.”

The Comfort of the Periodicals Room, the Ease of E-Access

With the migration of journals to electronic-only format, HCL’s Widener Library has begun a service that will allow users to continue to be able to read those titles in the comfort of the Periodicals Reading Room. Last month the library began circulating 20 netbooks, miniaturized laptop computers designed mainly for Internet use.

Modeled on a similar laptop loaner program at Cabot and Lamont libraries, the intent is that the machines will be used by patrons to read online-only resources and do research, freeing up the stationary library terminals for catalog searches and other quick transactions.

“We know a lot of people come into the Periodicals Reading Room to sit and read the journals, and we thought it would be nice if we had a way for them to continue doing that, and at the same time leave the desktop terminals available to patrons who want to use them for quick searches,” said Cheryl McGrath, head of Widener Library Access Services. “There has been some concern from patrons about the migration of paper journals to electronic form, and given the popularity of the laptop loaner program at Cabot and Lamont, we felt offering netbooks would be a useful service.”

The netbooks won’t be limited to the Periodicals Reading Room, though. Patrons can check one out from the Widener Circulation Desk and use it anywhere in the building wireless Internet access is available (but won’t be able to remove the machines from the building).

“The netbooks can be checked out for three hours at a time,” said Johnny Weyand, head of Collections Management, the unit overseeing the service. “Along with the small laptop, patrons will receive a charging cable and a lock, allowing them to secure the computers in their study space if they need to leave for a short time.”

“The great thing about the netbooks is that they’re portable,” McGrath said. “If a student or researcher is working on a stationary terminal and they can’t find what they’re looking for, they have to leave that terminal and go upstairs to the Reference Desk to get help. If they’re using a netbook, they can simply take the computer to a reference librarian, show them the problem, and get their question answered. These computers will give patrons a lot more flexibility in getting the help they need.”

For more information about the netbooks, visit the Widener Library Circulation Desk, or call 617-495-2414.
**WAX—Web Archive Collection Service—Goes Public**

Harvard University Library is pleased to announce the public launch of Harvard's new Web Archive Collection Service (WAX), at http://wax.lib.harvard.edu.

WAX began as a pilot project in July 2006, funded by the University’s Library Digital Initiative (LDI) to address the management of web sites by collection managers for long-term archiving. It was the first LDI project specifically oriented toward preserving “born-digital” material.

The pilot was designed to address the capture, management, storage, and display of web sites for long-term archiving. It was a collaboration of the University Library’s Office for Information Systems with three University partners, each fielding a single project: the Harvard University Archives (Harvard University Library); the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America (Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study); and the Edwin O. Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies (Faculty of Arts and Sciences, with sponsorship from Harvard College Library).

During the pilot, we explored the legal terrain and implemented several methods of mitigating risks. We investigated various technologies and developed workflow efficiencies for the collection managers and the technologists. We analyzed and implemented the metadata and deposit requirements for long-term preservation in our repository. We continue to look at ways to ease the labor-intensive nature of the QA process, to improve display as the software matures, and to assess additional requirements for long-term preservation.

To date, we are storing 5,159 ARC files for 1,405 WAX harvests representing 141 “seeds” (starting URLs) in our Digital Repository Service (DRS). These include 133 MIME types and 12,133,528 resources (individual HTML pages, images, graphics, audio or video clips, style sheets, scripts, etc.), for a total of 392 gigabytes.

WAX was built using several open-source tools developed by the Internet Archive and other International Internet Preservation Consortium (IIPC) members. These IIPC tools include the Heritrix web crawler, the Wayback index and rendering tool, and the NutchWAX index and search tool. WAX also uses Quartz open-source job-scheduling software from OpenSymphony.

In February 2009, the pilot public interface was launched and announced to the University community. WAX has now transitioned to a production system supported by the University Library’s central infrastructure.

In the words of OIS Head Tracey Robinson, “WAX provides the Harvard libraries with the first of a set of important new tools that will enable us to make significant progress on one of the major challenges of our time—that is, how to effectively collect, manage, and preserve born-digital scholarly resources.”

To view the collections, visit: http://wax.lib.harvard.edu.

For more information—
- visit: http://hul.harvard.edu/ois/systems/wax
- consult the May 2009 PowerPoint presentation: http://hul.harvard.edu/ois/support/docs/wax.html
- contact Wendy Gogel: wendy_gogel@harvard.edu

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Abby Clobridge
Associate Director for Research and Knowledge Services (April)
Harvard Kennedy School Library

Abby Clobridge has over ten years of experience working in library information science. From 2003 to March 2009 she was the head of the digital library program at Bucknell University, where she oversaw the university’s digital asset management program, digitization projects, the institutional repository, and metadata production. Clobridge and her colleague, David Del Testa (assistant professor, Department of History, Bucknell University) won the 2009 ACRL Instruction Section Innovation Award for their development of the World War II Poster Project. Prior to joining Bucknell, she worked at CNN as an investigative researcher and news librarian.

Suzanne Denison
Processing Assistant, Foundations of Public Health Policy (April)
Center for the History of Medicine Countway Library
Harvard Medical School

Suzanne Denison joined the Center for the History of Medicine while working toward her MLS and MA in the dual-degree program at Simmons. Before becoming a project processing assistant, she served as a student worker for the Center. She previously worked for the Clark County Historical Society and Museum, where she was charged with creating and installing exhibits, archival processing, collection development, and community education programs. Originally from the Pacific Northwest, she has a BA in history from Washington State University, where she also worked as a research assistant.

Cheryl Ostrowski
Assistant Processing Archivist (April)
C.L.I.R. Project
Center for the History of Medicine
Countway Library
Harvard Medical School

Before attaining her new position, Cheryl Ostrowski worked as a temporary processing assistant at the Countway. She is a recent graduate of the Simmons GSLIS program, where she worked as a technology reference assistant for the GSLIS technology lab. As assistant archivist at the Congregational Library in Boston, she helped with the digitization of their image archives. She has also managed circulation services for a public library. She holds a BA in philosophy from Wellesley College.

Dawn Walus
Project Book Conservator (June)
Weissman Preservation Center
Harvard University Library

Dawn Walus interned at the Weissman Center for several months before joining as a full-time staff member. She has held conservation internships and positions at several institutions, including the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the New York Academy of Medicine, and the Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Garden in California. She holds an MA in art conservation from the Buffalo State College Art Conservation Graduate Program, as well as a BA in fine arts from Rutgers.

Digital Repository Service 2.1.1
Enhancements Set for Harvard’s DRS

H UL’s Office for Information Systems (OIS) is in the midst of major enhancements to its digital preservation infrastructure. These enhancements, planned for rollout over the next several years, are collectively labeled “DRS 2.” A major component of this work is aimed at robustly supporting a wider variety of digital formats in the Digital Repository Service (DRS) using standard library metadata schemas for their description. DRS 2.1.1, announced by OIS on August 4, includes support for two new formats as a first step in the DRS 2 series.

This release of DRS software includes some major new capabilities that have been requested by libraries across the University.

New Format: PDF
DRS now supports the deposit and delivery of PDF files. This support was made possible through enhancements to Batch Builder, the DRS Loader, and the DRS Web Admin, as well as the development of a new delivery service, the File Delivery Service (FDS). These enhancements support the basic deposit, management, and delivery of PDF files.

New Format: Opaque Containers
The DRS has a mandate to support an increasing variety of file formats. However, full preservation support for a new format involves a substantial amount of research into preservation and delivery requirements as well as best practices for creation. In the meantime, librarians are in possession of digital files that they would like to store safely until full preservation support in the DRS is available. The solution to this as enabled by DRS 2.1.1 is to store the files in a ZIP file and deposit the “opaque container” in the DRS. The file is “opaque” in the sense that the DRS does not fully characterize the individual files within the container. But at the same time, DRS storage and monitoring services are applied, which protects the content of the files from damage. The digital files can be safely stored and retrieved via the File Delivery Service or the DRS Web Admin. At a future time the container may be expanded and migrated to directly supported objects.

DRS now supports the deposit of opaque containers. Additional DRS 2 enhancements scheduled for release in 2010 will provide additional deposit time and management options for both PDF and opaque container formats.

File Delivery Service (FDS)
The FDS is a new delivery service for PDF files and opaque containers (ZIP files), as well as XML files, SGML files, and ICC color profiles that are deposited to the DRS and enabled for public delivery. DFS allows the newly supported types to be delivered from the DRS to a user’s browser.

Image Captions
DRS 2.1.1 also includes an update to the Image Delivery Service (IDS) that has long been requested by special collections libraries—the ability to include a textual caption with displayed images. These image captions, which appear as text at the bottom of a displayed image, are intended to provide enough information for a librarian to identify the source of the image when presented with a printout or screen capture of an image—which is often what patrons provide when asking for additional information. Image captions are an option that can be enabled or disabled by collection managers. If enabled for a collection, the captions will be applied to all full-size instances of the images delivered by the Image Delivery Service—which includes display in VIA, PDS, Virtual Collections, and other web sites and systems that display images from the DRS.

To read about additional enhancements and to see the current schedule, visit http://hul.harvard.edu/ois/systems/drs/enhancements.html. For other information, contact Andrea Goethals, digital preservation and repository services manager, at andrea_goethals@harvard.edu or 5-3725.
Harvard’s DASH for Open Access

Harvard’s leadership in open access to scholarship took a significant step forward this month with the public launch of DASH—or Digital Access to Scholarship at Harvard—a University-wide, open-access repository. More than 330 members of the Harvard research community, including over a third of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, have jointly deposited hundreds of scholarly works in DASH.

“DASH is meant to promote openness in general,” stated Robert Darnton, Carl H. Fehrheimer University Professor and Director of the University Library. “It will make the current scholarship of Harvard’s faculty freely available everywhere in the world, just as the digitization of the books in Harvard’s library will make learning accessible worldwide. Taken together, these and other projects represent a commitment by Harvard’s DASH for Open Access


From Abu Ghaib to zoarchaeology, from American literature to the Zeeman effect, more than 1,500 items can be located in DASH today, with the number increasing every week.

As vital as the repository is to current work, DASH also houses a growing number of retrospective articles and papers. Contributors include Harvard President Drew Faust and University professors Robert Darnton, Peter Galison, Stanley Hoffman, Barry Mazur, Stephen Owen, Amartya Sen, Irwin Shapiro, Helen Vendler, and George Whitesides.

DASH has its roots in the February 2008 open-access vote in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. In a unanimous decision, FAS adopted a policy stating that Each Faculty member grants to the President and Fellows of Harvard College permission to make available his or her scholarly articles and to exercise the copyright in those articles. In legal terms, the permission granted by each Faculty member is a nonexclusive, irrevocable, paid-up, worldwide license to exercise any and all rights under copyright relating to each of his or her scholarly articles, in any medium, and to authorize others to do the same, provided that the articles are not sold for a profit.

In addition, faculty members committed to providing copies of their manuscripts for distribution, which the DASH repository now enables. Authored by Stuart M. Shieber, James O. Welch, Jr. and Virginia B. Welch Professor of Computer Science and Director of the Office for Scholarly Communication, the policy marked a groundbreaking shift from simply encouraging scholars to consider open access to creating a pro-open-access policy with an “opt out” clause.

“It’s the best university policy anywhere,” said Peter Suber of the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition in Washington, DC, and a fellow of Harvard Law School’s Berkman Center and the University’s Office for Scholarly Communication (OSC), “It shifts the default so Harvard faculty must make their work openly available unless they opt out. The default at most universities is the other way around: you have to choose open access and arrange for all the provisions.”

To date, Harvard Law School, the John F. Kennedy School of Government, and the Harvard Graduate School of Education have joined FAS in supporting a comprehensive policy of open access. DASH fulfills the promise made in these four open-access votes.

Still a beta, DASH is a joint project of the OSC and the Office for Information Systems (OIS), both of which are strategic programs of the Harvard University Library. DASH is based on the open-source DSpace repository platform. Software customizations will continue throughout the coming academic year.

DASH is also intended to serve as a local digital home for a wide and growing array of other scholarly content produced at the University. Non-faculty researchers and students are already afforded deposit privileges, and DASH will eventually have collection spaces for each of the 10 schools at Harvard.

In discussing the DASH deposits made by Harvard Law School faculty, John Palfrey, Vice Dean of Library and Information Resources and Henry N. Ess III Professor of Law, commented, “I am pleased to see so many of our HLS faculty represented in DASH. Our library staff have been working hard to coordinate these efforts, and we expect participation and contributions to grow significantly during the fall 2009 semester.”

Added Shieber, “We’ve made strong progress over the private beta period of the last few months in simplifying and integrating procedures for faculty depositing their work in DASH and in engaging the faculty in that process. Although we still have a long way to go in terms of faculty education, coverage of Harvard scholarship, and DASH enhancements, we decided to make the DASH beta public to provide open access to its holdings, where possible, and to invite those outside the Harvard community in as beta testers of our repository. We welcome any feedback.”

Among the many features the DASH development team has added to its DSpace implementation is the ability to link directly from a faculty author’s name in DASH search results to his or her entry in Profiles, a research social networking site developed by Harvard Catalyst. Profiles, which provides a comprehensive view of a researcher’s publications and connections within the University research community, currently indexes faculty from the medical and public health schools; its developers hope to expand it to include the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and School of Engineering and Applied Sciences in the near future.

DASH currently supports automated embargo lift dates, so that a work can be deposited “dark” and then automatically switch to open access once a publisher’s self-archiving embargo has expired. Another noteworthy feature is DASH’s PDF header page: when a user downloads a full-text item, DASH generates a header page for the document, giving its provenance and relevant terms of use.

“The terms of use were drafted after a series of conversations with publishers about Harvard’s open-access initiatives,” said Shieber. “We wanted to give publishers the opportunity to articulate their concerns about Harvard’s intended use of content in the repository, and we designed our repository and our practices as responsively as possible. We continue to welcome publisher input and engagement along these lines.

“Our long-term growth strategy for DASH is to integrate it so fully into other faculty tools that self-archiving just becomes second nature. When a Harvard author is updating their profile or the CV on their personal web site, upload-to-DASH will be there, and vice versa. All these loci for sharing information about publications will eventually synchronize with one another. This includes tools that store bibliographic information only, as well as those that provide open access to full text, such as the established subject repositories already used by many of our faculty to disseminate their work. Ultimately, DASH aims to provide as comprehensive and open a view of Harvard research as possible.”

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The new organization of the Harvard Law School Library is based on four major service units.

In an August 10 e-mail message to Harvard’s library community, John G. Palfrey, Vice Dean of Library and Information Resources and Henry N. Ess III Professor of Law, announced a reorganization of the Harvard Law School Library. That message and an accompanying graphic are reproduced here for the record.

On behalf of all of us here at Harvard Law School Library, I am thrilled to announce that today marks the debut of our new library organization.

For the past year, we have been working together to design a fresh model for the library that incorporates our three strategic initiatives: providing outstanding service to all our users, especially our faculty; streamlining and modernizing our processes to take advantage of the best of the digital world while mitigating its risks; and participating in the Law School’s broad curriculum reform efforts.

A steering committee of library staff members, supported by consultant Maureen Sullivan, built the new model. The diagram [above] illustrates the four main service units within the library. They are:

- Collection Development and Digitization
- Discovery and Access
- Management of Circulating Collections
- Research, Curriculum, and Publication Support

The Collection Development and Digitization unit differs most markedly from any unit in the previous organization. In addition to traditional collection development, it consolidates all aspects of support for the library’s digital initiatives in one place, with the ultimate goal of creating an in-house digital lab so we can initiate innovative digital projects right here at Langdell Hall.

Discovery and Access is the new home for our historical collections, as well as acquisitions, serials processing, and cataloging and metadata creation.

Management of Circulating Collections encompasses circulation, document delivery, and preservation of the modern collection.

The Research, Curriculum, and Publication Support unit is home to reference, teaching, and academic technology, as well as two exciting new endeavors already under way: implementation of Harvard Law School’s open-access policy and, after a successful (and much oversubscribed) pilot program during the previous academic year, establishing full-time support for empirical research and teaching.

All four units are supported by an underlying administrative level that will not only provide traditional administrative support, but also take on project management and in-house training responsibilities to keep us nimble.

Unit functions are being streamlined for greater efficiency that will enable us to expand our services to continue to meet new demands: for empirical research support, for more interdisciplinary and international materials, and for support for Harvard Law School’s Programs of Study and future curricular changes.

Other notable attributes of the new organization include a commitment to a concierge level of service, engaging with users through social media, cross-unit training and communication within the library, greater flexibility in work design, and the use of teams to tackle the new challenges that we face. The new organization is less hierarchical than our previous one, which will give us greater flexibility as we continue evolving to meet the needs of current and future library users.

On the individual level, one of the most exciting aspects of our new organization is the implementation of the Google 80/20 model of diversification of work activities. Approximately 80% of each person’s time will be spent on core work responsibilities. The remaining 20% offers opportunities for job enrichment through pursuit of interests outside of one’s main unit. This organizational feature was adopted in response to overwhelming staff interest in cross-divisional training and communication.

We are energized as we look ahead. We are eager to face the challenges, and to seize the opportunities, that confront all libraries in today’s fast-changing world of information. We no doubt will continue to reinvent ourselves as we move forward. We look forward to working with our library partners and the broader community of people interested in the future of information to chart a bright future together.

Nonetheless, it is vitally important to establish a precedent that says, “We will commit to underwriting open-access publishing fees and remove a disincentive to open-access publishing.” As more universities sign on to this kind of commitment, and establish open-access funds in economically sustainable ways, we hope that the open-access business model can become a viable alternative to the subscription-fee model that is currently so problematic. Perhaps over time, the fees will grow as journals move from charging subscriptions to processing fees, and access limitations are dropped.

LN
You talked about funds being economically sustainable. What guarantees that this approach to journal funding will be sustainable?

SS
We don’t want to replicate the same problems in the processing-fee market that we’ve seen in the subscription-fee market. In the design of the Harvard open-access fund, we’ve put in place mechanisms to regulate expenditures on processing fees, as described at the HOPE web site (http://osc.bul.harvard.edu/HOPE). As the academic community gains experience with this new model for funding journals, we will continue to adjust these mechanisms to provide reasonable support to journals while maintaining sustainability through market mechanisms.

LN
Assuming that the compact will add participants, is it reasonable to expect open-access publishing to increase?

SS
It’s always hard to predict the future. If publishers see major reductions in journal subscriptions, moving to open-access publishing may look increasingly attractive to them, especially if universities are willing to support the move, as we should be. What we do know is that the status quo is not sustainable. Creative thinking and positive action are required to move towards a better status post.
Interview: Stuart Shieber

Lone

With the DASH beta in full service, scholarly communication at Harvard is really moving forward. What's the next step?

Shieber

Scholarly publishing is going through a transformation as a result of systemic problems in the underlying business models, which have led to a spiral of hyperinflating costs, journal cancellations, and reducing access to the scholarly literature. With the economic downturn, this access problem will only be exacerbated. DASH is an attempt to solve the symptom of reduced access, at least to our own articles. But we need to turn our attention to the underlying problem, to find sustainable alternatives to the dysfunctional subscription-based business model that has supported journal publishing in the past.

We need to start establishing the infrastructure to support alternative models, and to get the mechanisms of scholarly communication on a sound, sustainable footing.

LN

DASH—Digital Access to Scholarship at Harvard—is online and available to the general public. What are the most important attributes of DASH and whom will it serve?

SS

At the OSC, we are very excited that DASH is finally open to the public. The role of the DASH repository is twofold: to serve as infrastructure for Harvard to preserve and disseminate as broadly as possible the record of our scholarship, and to provide the mechanism by which the Harvard open-access policies are realized. So it serves both the Harvard community and the wider public.

DASH is about access to Harvard scholarly articles, and access is one of the most important aspects to the scholarly communication milieu, but not the only one, of course; there’s much more to be done.

LN

Over the decades, academia has established a substantial infrastructure to support scholarly publication based on that business model—publishers to manage logistics and production, subscription agents to handle order processing, library budgets to pay for the subscriptions, overhead from grants to fund those library budgets, and so forth. We need to start establishing the infrastructure to support alternative models, and to get the mechanisms of scholarly communication on a sound, sustainable footing.

Lone

This hyperinflation has been termed “a crisis in scholarly communication.” Is that accurate?

SS

Yes, it is. The problem has been dramatically exacerbated by the current economic downturn. Research libraries, including Harvard’s, are beginning to entertain wholesale elimination of subscription access to entire groups of serials, as their budgets take large cuts. Such elimination of access is bad for the scholarly enterprise, and the threat of unsustainability of journals is especially worrisome given the invaluable services that they provide to scholars: logistical management of the peer-review process, production services such as copyediting and typesetting, distribution and preservation, and filtering and imprimatur based on a journal’s “brand.”

LN

What’s the solution that you propose?

SS

Open-access scholarly journals have arisen as an alternative to traditional subscription scholarly journals. Open-access journals make their articles available freely to anyone, while providing the same services common to all scholarly journals. Since open-access journals don’t charge subscription or other access fees, they have to cover their operating expenses through other sources, including subventions, in-kind support, or, in a sizable minority of cases, processing fees paid by or on behalf of authors for submission to or publication in the journal.

We need to put our money where our mouth is and commit to a financial foundation for open-access journal publishing to put it on a level playing field with subscription-based journal publishing.

LN

How can we do that?

SS

Universities and funding agencies can provide equitable support for the processing-fee business model for open-access journals by subsidizing processing fees as well. We’ve worked with a set of other universities to develop an “open-access compact” that commits universities to establishing just such mechanisms. This month, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, MIT, and the University of California, Berkeley signed on as initial signatories of the compact, and we hope that other universities will join in this important commitment to sustainable, open journal publishing.

LN

Can you give examples of processing fees today?

SS

The majority of open-access journals charge no processing fees at all. For those that do charge fees, the average fee is under a hundred dollars, though some are considerably higher. At the high end, the flagship journal of the open-access publisher Public Library of Science charges a processing fee of $2,850. Still, this is quite small compared to the average revenue per article of major journal publishers, and many closed-access journals also charge processing fees in the thousands of dollars per article on top of the subscription revenue they receive.

Right now, the number of open-access journals that Harvard researchers are publishing in is very small, and article fees can often be covered by grant funds, so we expect that the HOPE fund will require minimal outlays in the short term.

The Office for Scholarly Communication is managing Harvard’s participation in the compact through a new fund, the Harvard Open-Access Publication Equity (HOPE) Fund, which will reimburse eligible authors for open-access processing fees.

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