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Rick Anderson
University of Utah

Alison Scott
University of California, Riverside

Michael Levine-Clark
University of Denver

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Hyde Park Debate Resolved: APC-Funded Open Access Is Antithetical to the Values of Librarianship

Rick Anderson, Associate Dean for Collections and Scholarly Communication, University of Utah

Alison Scott, Associate University Librarian for Collections & Scholarly Communication, University of California, Riverside

Michael Levine-Clark, Dean and Director, University of Denver Libraries

The following is a transcription of a live presentation at the 2016 Charleston Conference.

Hello, and welcome everybody to what I think is the sixth Hyde Park Debate of the Charleston Conference. My name is Rick Anderson. I'm from the University of Utah, and I will be moderating. Let me first review the structure of the debate, and then I will introduce our debaters.

Before the debate begins, the audience is going to be polled. The proposition that is under debate is that APC-funded open access is antithetical to the values of librarianship. We can do this right now. The poll is open. Each audience member is asked to cast a vote by text either in favor of the proposition or against it. Again, this is by text only. So, while I'm reviewing the structure of the debate, we'll allow you to begin voting.

Each debater is going to open with a 10-minute statement, which has been prewritten. One will argue in favor of the proposition; the other will argue against it. The 10-minute time limit is going to be strictly enforced. After both opening statements have been made, each debater will offer a 3-minute response, and again, the time limit will be strictly enforced. Following the response, there will be a period in which the debaters will respond to questions and comments from the audience. Following the audience comments, the audience will be polled again, and a new vote will be taken in response to the proposition. It's important to understand that the winner of the debate will not necessarily be the one who ends up with the most votes in agreement with him or her; the winner of the debate is the one who moves the largest number of votes over to his or her side.

So, there are our debaters. First, we'll hear from Alison Scott, who is Associate University Librarian for Collections & Scholarly Communication at the University of California, Riverside. Alison has strategic responsibility for the ways and means by

which the University of California, Riverside Library's collections grow and change. Alison joined the UCR Library in 2014, following services as Head of Collection Development for the George Washington University Libraries, Charles Warren Bibliographer for American History at Harvard University, and Head of the Popular Culture Library at Bowling Green State University. She holds a BA in English literature from Whitman College, an MLS and MA in religion from the University of Chicago, and a PhD in American studies from Boston University.

Our second debater is Michael Levine-Clark, who is Dean and Director of the University of Denver Libraries. Michael is the recipient of the 2015 HARRASOWITZ Leadership in Library Acquisitions Award. He writes and speaks regularly on strategies for improving academic library collection development practices, including the use of e-books in academic libraries, the development of demand-driven acquisition models, and implications of discovery tool implementation.

So, we will now close the initial voting for the proposition, and I'll invite Alison Scott to the podium to make her opening statement.

Written statement from Alison Scott:

I am delighted to be here today. Whatever else I may have accomplished over the course of my career, it does appear that I have had some success as a speaker, and that I have definitely earned a reputation for having opinions.

I would appreciate it, however, if you would all take note:

I will be expressing my opinion about the resolution that we are discussing as forcefully and articulately as I possibly can, but please remember that it is my opinion. My remarks here today do not represent the policy of the University of California, at the campus or the system-wide level.

Figure 1. Opening poll results.

So, let me begin by clarifying, to my satisfaction at least, a few of the terms that I will be using during this morning's conversation. "Where we begin our search determines, in no small measure, what we discover."¹

By "open access," I mean online access to published research, the materials that contribute to and constitute the scholarly record, free of charge to readers, without financial, legal, or technical barriers to access, beyond those that are "inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself."²

By "APC-funded," I mean the "article processing charges" that make it possible for a work—article or book—to be made available as an open access work. APCs are a means for publishers to generate the

income needed to support the costs of open-access publication, enabling free access to works by imposing pre-publication fees, rather than post-publication fees, such as subscriptions or paywalls. APCs are the "author pays" tint of gold OA.

The laudable aims of open access include broadening the audience for research, maximizing the impact of research, promoting the growth of new knowledge, fostering open scholarly communication, and providing access to publicly funded research.

For scholars, [an] open access model offers the promise of increasing both the transparency and impact of their research. For the average citizen, it means unrestricted access to the published results of research financed by public funds.³

¹ Philip E. Tetlock, Richard Ned Lebow, & Geoffrey Parker, (Ed.). (2006). *Unmaking the West: "What if" scenarios that rewrite world history*, p. 23. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

² Budapest Open Access Initiative statement, February 2002. Accessed October 27, 2016, from <http://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/read>

³ Barclay, D. (2016). Could subscriptions for academic journals go the way of pay phones? *The Conversation*. Retrieved October 23, 2016, from <https://theconversation.com/could-subscriptions-for-academic-journals-go-the-way-of-pay-phones-63575>

For librarians, open access offers practical opportunities: “Open access promises to remove both the *price barriers* and the *permission barriers* that undermine library efforts to provide access to the scholarly record,”⁴ and entices us with hope for an end to the long-standing “serials crisis.”

When I say that “APC-funded open access is antithetical to the values of librarianship,” I certainly do not mean to dispute or belittle the aims of open access publication, as ideals or as aspirations. The utopian goals of open access, in intention and, if attained, in ultimate effect, align with the many of the “core academic values and principles associated with teaching, learning and research in higher education” and the means by which academic librarians support the missions of colleges and universities.⁵ Open access is a good thing.

This is because, in part, open access, *as an ideal*, aligns with two of the central values of academic libraries and academic librarianship:

I believe that academic libraries are a shared resource and a community good

and

I believe that it is one of the absolutely foundational responsibilities of academic libraries, as shared resources and as a community good, to support the *creation* of knowledge—through services, infrastructure for discovery and access, collections, and all our other enterprises, by which we support teaching, learning and research.

Nonetheless, I do mean to say that APC-funded open access as a mode of publication, as it has been proposed or implemented as practice, represents an existential threat to those two ideals of academic librarianship.

⁴ Wikipedia. (n.d.), Open access. Accessed October 14, 2016, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_access

⁵ Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians/L’Association Canadienne des Bibliothécaires Académiques Professionnels. (n.d.). Foundational documents. Accessed October 14, 2016, from <http://capalibrarians.org/membership/>

In one of his entries in the blog, *The Scholarly Kitchen*, David Crotty wrote that

One of the core principles of Gold OA is that the costs shift from being spread broadly among consumers of the literature to being concentrated directly on producers of the literature.⁶

This statement can be read as a bland, objective, even anodyne summary of the business principle behind author-funded models of open access.

A more critical reading, or perhaps just a more suspicious reading, suggests that this is a clear and precise statement of exactly why APC-funded open access is antithetical to the two values of academic librarianship that I have just emphasized.

First: APC-funded open access is concentrated directly on the producers of the literature.

APC or author pays mechanisms for attaining the greater good of open access mean that, practically speaking, our attention, as librarians and libraries, must be turned from support of our larger academic communities’ needs as learners, teachers, and researchers to the functional support of a much smaller group of article producers.

I will not go into the voluminous and contentious discussions about the financial sustainability of APC-funded open access—whether there’s enough money sloshing around the system, whether authors are rational economic actors, whether the subscription system can be “flipped,” etc., etc., etc.

In any case, I do *not* believe that the solution to the problem of financing open access is, as Jeffrey Mackie-Mason has phrased it, “‘merely’ one of getting money from subscription budgets into APC budgets.”⁷ It’s not that I don’t care about about

⁶ Crotty, D. (2016, August 9). The pay it forward project: Confirming what we already knew about open access. *The Scholarly Kitchen*. Retrieved October 14, 2016, from <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2016/08/09/the-pay-it-forward-project-confirming-what-we-already-knew-about-open-access/>

⁷ Mackie-Mason, J. (2016, April 23). Economic thoughts about “gold” open access. *Madlibbing*. Retrieved October 14, 2016, from

money; it's not that money doesn't have a terrifyingly powerful impact on our work and how we enact our intentions for our work; it's that I don't think that money is the really important measure of the values that we, as academic librarians, need to care about.

I believe that article processing charges, under the important, laudable, altruistic guise of promoting the greater global good of the free flow of scholarly information, have the paradoxical, counter-intuitive, ironic (choose your favorite qualifier) effect of privatizing community resources.⁸

Second: APC-funded open access is concentrated directly on the producers of the literature.

That is, APC-funded open access revolves around the promulgation of the work products of research, and the means by which the *results* of research, finished works, enter the cycle of scholarly communication.

Yes, academic libraries and research libraries have an ancient and honorable responsibility to the community of scholars for the documentation of the record of scholarship, and individual academic libraries do have a responsibility to document the work produced by their own institution's scholars.

But, in simplistic terms, I believe that academic libraries collect and make discoverable and accessible the records of scholarship—we wrangle the past—with the primary intention of promoting the use of that scholarly record for the creation of knowledge, for the sake of the future.

<http://madlibbing.berkeley.edu/economic-thoughts-about-gold-open-access/>

⁸ Taylor, S. (2016, February 16). *If the institution is being forced to pay APC fees they have little incentive to be altruistic. Nor need they value the purchased openness that highly.* [Peer commentary on] "What should we make of secret open access deals?" Retrieved October 14, 2016, from <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2016/02/16/what-should-we-make-of-secret-open-access-deals/>; the primary focus of his comment is on the complications arising from local offsets for subscription expenditures vis-à-vis APCs.

The OA 2020 Roadmap argues that

Open access cannot become a reality on a larger scale without utilizing and re-purposing the massive resources that are spent on journal subscriptions, year after year.⁹

In the 2015 Max Planck Digital Library Open Access Policy White Paper, "Disrupting the subscription journals' business model for the necessary large-scale transformation to open access," the authors stated that

[T]he final breakthrough to a comprehensive open access publishing system cannot be achieved unless library acquisition budgets are re-purposed so as to consolidate the system's two current streams into a single undertaking to provide the best possible publishing services for the patron researchers.¹⁰

If it is true that the only way that APC-funded open access can become a comprehensive system for scholarly publication is to "re-purpose" libraries and library budgets, turning libraries away from being intentional supporters of knowledge creation and of the future, into being agents acting for a small community of knowledge producers and documenting past accomplishment, I think that libraries are in clear and present jeopardy of losing one of our fundamental reasons of existing at all.

I do not hold any brief for the wonderfulness of the subscription model of funding publication as a facet of scholarly communication, but it does have the conceptual advantage of grounding our intentionalities—and our financial conversations—on questions of the value and utility of purchased content for ongoing research, teaching, and learning.

I know I am teetering on the cusp of a slippery slope argument, but focusing on work product, and directing our efforts to managing the products of research rather than continued discovery and the future of research, even if we *do* have as our ultimate aim the support of the altruistic goal of open access,

⁹ OA2020 Roadmap. (2016, March 21). Retrieved October 14, 2016, from <http://oa2020.org/roadmap/>

¹⁰ Schimmer, R., Geschuhn, K. K., & Vogler, A. (2015). Disrupting the subscription journals' business model for the necessary large-scale transformation to open access. <https://doi.org/10.17617/1.3>

represents the abandonment of what I regard as two of the fundamental values of academic librarianship.

Now, as I turn you over to my opponent, the honorable gentleman from the university of the mile-high city, remember the words of Stephen Fry: “Merely because I’m expressing myself well doesn’t mean what I’m saying is untrue.”¹¹

Written statement from Michael Levine-Clark:

I am here today to argue in favor of APC-funded open access and against the resolution that “APC-funded open access is antithetical to the values of librarianship.” As I make this case, I think it is important to define some of those key values for our profession. In this context, I will start with three of Ranganathan’s five laws of library science:

1. Books are for use.
2. Every reader her/his book.
3. Save the time of the reader.

So, let’s talk about what those mean.

1. Books are for use. In Ranganathan’s conception, we can’t have books hidden away in closed stacks or chained to the shelves. If we expand that definition to modern forms of scholarly communication—to include especially online journals—publications can’t be hidden behind a firewall or accessible only at institutions that can afford the high costs of subscription. There should never be barriers to information access.
2. Every reader her/his book. We as librarians should always be able to provide our users with the materials they need, whether those are books on our shelves or scholarly articles online. We should think about information access as broadly as possible.
3. Save the time of the reader. It should be easy to access the information you need. In fact, in our online environment, it should be far easier than it ever was in the past, but to the extent that we control access via proxies and manage discovery through library-centric tools, we actually make it harder and slower to access information.

Our current system erects barriers to access and stands in the way of those three core values.

There are barriers based on affiliation. Scholars at poorer institutions (or who are unaffiliated with any institution at all) can’t access large swaths of the published scholarly literature. Even those at wealthier institutions that can afford big deals are blocked from some content, and even when their institution can get articles via interlibrary loan or document delivery, the research process slows down while they wait for access. Every reader cannot access her book (or more likely her article), and we are not saving the time of the reader.

We are forced by our license agreements with publishers to put barriers in place so that even our licensed users will have to take extra steps to access licensed content. We provide access through systems that often require multiple steps (from discovery system through a link resolver to a publisher’s website) before the user can gain access, and we force our users to log in to a proxy server or authenticate in some other way in order to validate their right to access. Articles are for use, but we make that use difficult. And again, we are definitely not saving the time of the reader.

We do need to acknowledge that article processing charges (APCs) are not perfect. In the long run, they may be just as unsustainable as the traditional subscription model. It is clear, for instance, that some research-intensive institutions would pay more for APCs than they do now for subscriptions, and a transition to APC-based open access might mean that for a period libraries will need to pay APC fees on top of their subscription expenses. APC costs are also less predictable than subscriptions and the funding sources will vary, so budgeting will be difficult.

Importantly, even though APC-funded open access will remove barriers to accessing information, moving all costs to the point of publication may well put up new barriers for some to publish. Scholars at poorer institutions, those with no institutional affiliation, or those in disciplines without significant grant funding may struggle to pay the fees required to publish. Perhaps APCs could be subsidized in some parts of the world or for some types of authors, just as there are differential subscription costs now.

¹¹ Fry, S. (2014, October 1). *BBC Newsnight*.

But, even with those negative aspects of APC-funded open access, the net positive result is greater access to information, and that is a core library value.

As we all know, APC-funded gold open access is just one model. Another model is green open access, in which the article is published in a traditional journal, and then a version is made available, often after an embargo and often as an author manuscript, in an institutional or subject repository. Green open access does not change the current model fundamentally, nor does it remove all of the barriers to access. During the embargo period, those at poorer institutions and those with no institutional affiliation do not have access to that article at all (or at least not to the version of record). Therefore, one could argue that some forms of green open access are antithetical to the values of librarianship.

APC-funded open access, on the other hand, serves the values of librarianship

- By removing barriers to access
- By allowing all libraries, regardless of institutional wealth, to serve users, and
- By allowing users who don't have ready access to a library to meet their information needs.

Let's explore each of those in more depth.

1. APC-funded open access removes barriers to access. As librarians, we believe that everyone should have access to information. APC-funded open access, because it makes the article freely available to the world at the point of publication, removes all barriers to access. There are no firewalls for open access. Because open access publications are easily discoverable on the open web, users don't have to rely on the discovery tools and access points provided by libraries.
2. APC-funded open access allows all libraries to serve users. Many of us work at institutions that can afford to subscribe to huge packages of journals, so we have direct access to large portions of the published scholarly record, and even when we can't afford a subscription, we can generally get a copy of an article through

interlibrary loan or our institution can pay for access to a PDF. We come close to fully serving our users because we can afford to.

But there are lots of libraries that do not have access to big deals. Many libraries have small enough subscription budgets that they can't provide their users with most of the resources they need. Because scholars and students at these institutions are not able to get access to publications, their research and teaching and learning suffer. Without access to large portions of the scholarly record, faculty at these institutions are at a disadvantage in terms of being able to do cutting-edge research, secure grants, and get published, and because they can't get access to the latest research, their teaching may suffer too. Students at these schools are at a disadvantage in terms of learning outcomes.

But with access to articles funded by APCs, all faculty and all students can get the resources they need to grow as scholars and teachers and learners, allowing them to be competitive with students and faculty at information-rich institutions.

3. APC-funded open access allows users who don't have ready access to a library to meet their information needs. Just about everyone in this room has access to an academic library that subscribes to at least the basic resources they need, and even when those resources aren't enough, our libraries will secure us additional resources through interlibrary loan, document delivery, or even a new subscription. Even the poorest libraries can do at least some of that.

But there are unaffiliated researchers all over the world. Some of them are even our alumni. Who here hasn't had to tell an alum that she would no longer have access to the resources she became used to while studying at their institution? Our current system means that people who want to conduct research professionally or learn about something new for personal needs are cut off from most publications if they are not affiliated with an institution that

can cover subscription costs, whether that institution is a university or a think tank or a corporate research environment.

Open access solves this problem. Green open access breaks down those barriers by giving post-embargo or author manuscript access to people who are not affiliated with an institution. APC-based gold open access gives them immediate and direct access to the version of record. With a complete transition to APC-based gold open access, we all would have equal access to published scholarly research.

In summary, while there are clearly some flaws to APC-based open access, most notably that APCs erect a barrier to publication, there are clear benefits. APC-based open access provides greater access to information, something that we all should believe in. APC-based open access supports three key library values:

1. That publications are for use, that there should be no barriers to access;
2. That every reader should have access to his/her publications, that all publications should be accessible to all readers; and
3. That we should save the time of the reader, with no extra steps between discovery and access.

Article processing charges allow us to serve our users better and are definitely not antithetical to the values of librarianship.

Response From Alison Scott

I've always wanted to bang my shoe on a lectern and shout, "Of all the damn nonsense!" But I actually agree with Michael for some of his key points. Open access offers us great promise that barriers to information access will fall, that information access will no longer depend on location or affiliation, and that, when the Jubilee comes, access to information will be easier and faster. Further, my learned opponent warms my heart with his foundational appeals to three of S. R. Ranganathan's five laws, although I think he also could have included the fourth law, "Every book its reader." This law seems just as pertinent to his argument as the other three so far as all four of them keep our attention

centered on readers and not on producers. However, I have to take issue with one of Michael's examples of historical barriers to access. Chained books should not be simply dismissed as the barbarous invention of a barbarous age. In times of desperate bibliographic scarcity, chaining books to library shelves meant that thieves, or just the selfish, could not privatize the common good of texts that were meant to be shared by a community of readers. By pushing back against this specific example, I don't mean to equate APC-funded open access with book theft, and heaven knows we do not live in an age of information scarcity. But I do repeat my charge that article processing charges privatize the resources and the intentions meant to support the library as a shared community resource, even if the ultimate altruistic intention is barrier-free access to information for a global community. Essentially, Michael's argument is that the end of open access justifies the means by which we attain it. I am reminded, as no doubt you all are, of Mary Wollstonecraft's comments on the origin and progress of the French Revolution. "Malevolence has been gratified by the errors they have committed, attributing that imperfection to the theory they adopted, which was applicable only to the folly of their practice." Open access obeys four of Ranganathan's laws, but I hope I am not being malevolent when I say that the author pays costs model of funding is, in Wollstonecraft's terms, error, imperfection, and folly.

Response From Michael Levine-Clark

So, my remarks aren't going to be as funny. Sorry. Open access as an ideal is fundamentally a good thing, and clearly, we both agree on that. It does align with the values of librarianship as we've both described them. But I'd like to dig into the values that Alison articulates, values that I also agree with, by the way, and talk a bit more about why I do not see APC-based open access as a challenge to them. She states that, "Academic libraries are a shared resource and a community good." But our current model of subscription funding and license access is fundamentally at odds with that value. A typical research library, again, spends millions of dollars annually on subscriptions that can't be shared beyond the licensed campus user base. The current subscription model makes us less and less a shared resource every year as larger and larger portions of our collections end up behind firewalls. She also states that academic libraries, "... support the

creation of knowledge.” And honestly, I believe that if we’re not doing that, then our universities probably need to shut our doors, but I don’t see how we can support knowledge creation without providing access to the published literature that supports future research, discovery, and learning. With subscription-based access to that material, we reinforce a system of information haves and information have-nots, and those have-nots are at a disadvantage of creating knowledge, but APC-funded open access decreases that disadvantage. More students, more faculty, more people generally have access to these publications that serve as building blocks to support knowledge creation. APC-funded open access means that libraries can invest in discovery, services, and spaces rather than collections, and it means that all academic libraries can support knowledge creation.

Alison presents us with a choice between, “. . . focusing on work product and directing our efforts to

managing the products of research,” and on helping with, “. . . continued discovery and the future of research.” I believe we as institutions of higher learning can and should be doing both of those things. To some extent, though, I believe that the day-to-day management of compliance in APC funding is not so much a library function as a function of the office of research. If that’s true, then it frees up the library to focus more on curation, access, discovery, and service. While I am deeply concerned that a switch to APC-funded open access could impose barriers to publication for some authors and that will hit certain disciplines and certain institutions harder than others, I also believe that APCs will generally allow greater access to information for all. APC-based open access should make published research more accessible to more people through more libraries, allowing us to focus on that fundamental task of facilitating knowledge creation.

Figure 2. Closing poll results.

Following audience questions and comments, the audience was asked to participate in a closing poll.

Rick Anderson: Leah, if we could bring up the poll again. And again, I would invite everybody; this works by text only. Please register your vote either in support of the proposition or against the proposition. In the past, we've said we'll give you 5 minutes, and then after 2 minutes the voting has kind stopped, so, . . . And just for your reference, the opening poll results were 54 in favor of the proposition and 124 against the proposition. This is a little confusing, when I say in favor of the

proposition that APCs are bad. So, against APC's, therefore in favor of the proposition. Looks like we still have some votes coming in. While the votes continue, Michael will sing.

Michael Levine-Clark: You really don't want that to happen.

Rick Anderson: It might sway the voting inappropriately, ha-ha. (Lengthy pause while votes are cast.)

Rick Anderson: It is looking like a clear victory for Alison Scott. Congratulations, Alison!