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A View Toward the Public Side of Scholarly Communication

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Academic libraries often serve the same "public" as public libraries, and one might expect the public good benefits of public access to research results to make the two groups closer allies than they seem to be on scholarly communication issues. Additional key motivations to take action may be missing for public libraries, but there is untapped potential to share and collaborate on scholarly communication issues, starting with public access to publicly-funded research results.

Scholarly Communication System

The scholarly communication system is in flux and under stress in ways that affect both academic and public libraries. Responses to the related challenges and opportunities, however, have not arisen nor been much examined from a cross-sector perspective. Is there potential to do that, to share and compare strategies, or possibly even to explicitly collaborate to create change that is in the mutual interest of both public and academic libraries?

In brief but often used terms, scholarly communication is the system of people, procedures, and tools through which the results of research and scholarship are registered, evaluated, disseminated, and preserved. Traditionally the end products of this system have been peer-reviewed journals and books. The very existence of the books and journals registers intellectual precedence, and also enables dissemination and preservation, and these functions have historically been bundled together in the production and distribution of physical printed works. More recently this well-bounded set of scholarly publications (and embedded functions) has been expanded, and its component functions unbundled, by digital and network technologies that lead to more informal, and more varied ways to "communicate" scholarship. Think online books and journals, blogs and wikis, institutional repositories and disciplinary portals, online technical reports and conferences, open notebook science and collaboratories, open peer review and impact measured in downloads and Web links, not just formal citations.

Stakeholders in the Issues

The complexity of this scholarly communication system arises not only from recent technologically-driven innovation, but also from the varied interests and conventions of stakeholders who (mostly) cooperatively own, manage, and benefit from it. With very limited precision, the list of primary stakeholders includes:

- Researchers and scholars, generally employed as university faculty or enrolled as students, but also from government agencies, and the private sector;
- Libraries and librarians, who are agents for dissemination and preservation, and

who purchase (or rent) and organize access to the results of scholarship;

- Publishers, both commercial and nonprofit, who organize evaluation/peer review, and initiate dissemination, usually by offering subscriptions to journals and sales of scholarly books;
- Readers, including researchers and scholars, students, and members of the public.

For various reasons the role of the readers, or to use an appropriate but ironic commercial term, the "consumers" of the products of scholarship, are not always examined carefully in the current hubbub around scholarly communication. But it is exactly the readers, and especially the "public," that provides the bridge between the interests of academic and public libraries.

"The Public"

The "public" clientele for public libraries is readily identified and not limited in membership except, usually, by needing to reside in the tax district that most directly supports the library. Although little is or can be assumed about a common purpose or the information needs of the public library clientele, a member of the public — as distinguished from a member of the academic community — is not generally considered a primary consumer of the scholarly or scientific literature. However, there are at least three common roles in which they may, in fact, be:

1. As formal students, matriculated in high schools, adult education programs, professional development, and a host of other organized learning centers that normally would not have access (because they could not afford journal subscriptions, book purchases, or permissions-cleared course readers) to the materials needed for the foundational or contemporary knowledge in their fields of study.

2. As informal students and scholars who actively, but independently, pursue knowledge for pleasure, avocation, or in preparation for a new life activity. This group would include the independent art history scholar, the home inventor, the amateur botanist, and the garage winemaker who is considering selling her successes, and a host of similar others.

3. The patients or patient advocates who want to deeply understand a disease and become partners in decisions about its treatment.

The situation starts out differently for aca-

demic libraries, however, whose "primary" clientele is presumed to be, if not explicitly declared to be, the faculty, students and staff of the college or university. That clientele has a set of common overarching purposes (research, teaching and learning), and a presumably well-understood and bounded set of information needs to support them. However, there are at least three ways in which academic libraries serve the public directly.

1. Because faculty, staff, and students may belong to one or more of the groups above in addition to their primary affiliation with a university or college. The professional botanist may develop a vocational interest in art history. In this regard, even private academic institutions with no mission to serve the public (if such exist), might in fact need or want to serve their members just as if, and because, they are always members of "the public" in some sense.

2. As part of the "public service" mission of their parent organization. The

> *"... scholarly communication is the system of people, procedures, and tools through which the results of research and scholarship are registered, evaluated, disseminated, and preserved."*

University of California is probably not unlike many other public and even private institutions when it declares:

> *We provide public service, which dates back to UC's origins as a land grant institution in the 1860s. Today, through its public service programs and industry partnerships, UC disseminates research results and translates scientific discoveries into practical knowledge and technological innovations that benefit California and the nation…Open to all Californians, UC's libraries, museums, performing arts spaces, gardens and science centers are valuable public resources and community gathering places.[1]*

3. When explicitly designated as a primary source of material for the public, as is the case with those who act as depository libraries for government information or as one of the **Regional Medical Libraries** in the **National Network of Libraries of Medicine (NN/LM)**. Since 1965 the

NN/LM has "worked to advance the progress of medicine and improve the public health by providing health professionals and the general public with equal access to biomedical information."[2]

In recognizing the potential scholarly interests of any member of the public, or in declaring or accepting explicit public services, academic libraries recognize that "the public" has the interest and intellectual capacity to go beyond intellectual entry points, beyond the tertiary literature of textbooks and encyclopedia articles, and delve into the scholarship and results reported in journal articles or books, or even into the primary evidence of research data and original artifacts.

And, of course, any member of the public may have relatively easy access to scholarly material, either because they can directly afford it (as unlikely as this may be, especially in scientific and medical disciplines where single subscriptions above $1,000 are common and above $10,000 are well-known), or are in close proximity to a library that can afford some, or much of it. But many potential public readers will have no access. And the potential public audience will be reached, and the full public good realized, only if they all can afford access, or if they all move close to a library that lets them use materials that it has acquired, or, importantly, if the material escapes the barriers of pay-to-access or other limits on availability in the first place.

The intersection of interest then, is straightforward. Both academic and public libraries desire to provide high-quality, relevant scholarly information to their clientele. That clientele, as we've shown, has a larger overlap than is first assumed. Libraries of both stripes ought to want to reduce barriers to the provision of scholarly information, or to their clients' direct access to it.

Public Access to [Public] Research — the Silence of Public Libraries

In this regard, the move to create a scholarly communication system that provides public access to research results, especially to publicly-funded research, should resonate with both groups. Academic libraries and their membership groups, such as the **Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)** and the **Association of Research Libraries (ARL)**, and their international counterparts are indisputable leaders in lobbying for changes that increase the public's access, particularly, in recent years, to advocacy for a public access policy for **NIH**-funded research and for the *2006 Federal Research Public Access Act (FRPAA)*. Their motivation surely comes from the roles outlined above and from the many publicly-funded among them, where the value of maximizing the public benefit of the public investment upon which they were founded runs deep. Their motivation to create public access is also closely tied to their motivation to create "open" access generally, which itself

arises from a suite of motivations that begin, but do not end, with lowering barriers to access, as described below.

It is curious that public libraries seem to be less engaged and less motivated to advocate for public access to the results of scholarship. To be sure the public library community has not been silent, having at various times joined advocacy groups,[3] passed resolutions in support of legislative requirements to provide public access to publicly-funded research,[4] and assisting, through **ALA's Washington Office** with breaking news and "action alerts."[5]

But, as **Charles Bailey** noted in July 2006, "a user starting at the **ALA** home page would be hard pressed to find any information that suggests that **ALA** is an advocate of open access," and "**ALA's** mission statements and plans reveal no explicit support for open access."[6]

It is difficult to find evidence that contradicts **Bailey's** conclusion, even when looking beyond the **ALA**. Support for public access that is registered or reported on the **Alliance for Taxpayer Access** site (*www.taxpayeraccess. org*) originates with a large number of college, university and academic library sources, but, with the exception of a joint resolution from the **ALA** and **PLA** for **FRPAA**, not from the public library sector. Results from a **Google** search for the hosts of Webpages whose title includes "public access" and "research" or "**NIH** policy" are similarly unbalanced, as are the organizational and individual signatories to the **2006 Petition for Public Access to Publicly Funded Research in the U.S.** (*http://www.publicaccesstoresearch.com/cgi-bin/petition.pl*).

What is the explanation for this relative paucity of public library engagement? Three general possibilities come to mind:

1. Public library leaders and staff have no compelling reason to make efforts to enhance public access to research results, perhaps believing (or with evidence in hand) that few of their patrons need such information, or, for those patrons who do have a need, that they are well-served elsewhere (e.g., they have access via a college or university library);

2. The cost of engagement on these issues is too high in relation to the benefit, compared to other pressing matters;

3. Additional motivation to engage, which enters the picture for academic libraries, is not present for public libraries (see below). These additional motivations are necessary to push the issue of access to research results into strategic planning and action for any library.

Beyond Public Access — Additional Motivations and Strategies

1. Cost. Academic libraries have long wanted to influence scholarly communication in order to address the ongoing and painful "serials crisis" — the conundrum of promising to acquire all of the high-quality, relevant materials their faculty and students need while commercially-owned (or operated) journals

rise in price and expand in numbers too fast to hope to keep up. That crisis, and the collateral damage it causes to book budgets repurposed to mitigate it, is the original challenge that has motivated a suite of strategic actions to influence the marketplace for scholarly information. Consortial (volume) purchasing is a direct strategy in response. Advocating for low-price or non-profit new publishing models, as, for example, through the original initiatives of the **Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC)** is a secondary strategy. An indirect strategy is to support open access "gold" publishing, which moves payments from the consumers (libraries/readers) to the producers (funders/authors). But the jury is out about whether the resulting costs to libraries — which may be called upon to subsidize author/producers just as they now subsidize all readers — will decrease or be any more controllable.

Public libraries suffer materials cost increases as well,[7] but because their collections do not, for the most part, include scholarly journals and books, their motivation to address that serials crisis is indirect, at best.

2. Adopting "impact" as the key goal. Academic libraries have come to realize that scholars are primarily interested in the impact of their scholarship on the advancement of knowledge, rather than on access to it, per se. Library attention to maximizing impact, rather than lowering access costs, has led them to contribute to research on new measures of value and impact and to services that support authors' management of their copyrights in ways that maximize use and reuse of their scholarship.

Public libraries might endeavor to help their communities highlight the presence and accomplishments of local colleges and universities. But they are unlikely to be motivated to work to increase the academic impact of individual faculty members' research.

3. Publishing. Academic libraries have adopted a new role, and/or new partnerships, to assist in the dissemination of their institution's intellectual output. Library leadership in the deployment of institutional repositories and as partners with their university presses are motivated not only by the extra control it gives them in the performance of traditional institutional archiving functions, but also because such actions assert a new strategic role as aggregator and disseminator of their parent college or university's intellectual assets, and thus a core part of the research enterprise.

Public libraries may have a larger motivational overlap in this publishing domain than the previous two. In the academic library community the publishing function is often equally fueled from three directions — disseminating and highlighting institutional research, sharing curricular materials, and highlighting special collections and digitization efforts. The public library setting often has analogs of at least two of these, curricular materials (from a host of community and civic activities) and, especially, special collections. It is not a far stretch to think that both could be served by institu-

tional repository platforms, policy regimes, and discovery services to form "community repositories."

Potential for Collaboration

With an overlap in the "public" that they both serve, academic and public libraries share an interest in influencing scholarly communication systems so that they yield low barrier, or barrier free access to research and scholarship. To a lesser degree they might share other motivations to create change, especially in the creation of a publishing role to disseminate the unique materials that originate in their communities.

These overlaps suggest the potential to explore common interests and to collaborate to create change. What forms could that exploration and collaboration take?

Drawing from my familiarity with the emerging structure of scholarly communication "programs" in the academic library setting, the following possibilities come to mind.

1. Education and outreach. Academic libraries should make public libraries and librarians targets of their campaigns to inform stakeholders of the challenges and opportunities in the scholarly communication landscape. In partnership, academic and public libraries could tune the messages for public library patrons and boards, to point out the individual and public benefits of public access to publicly-funded research, at the least.

Academic libraries should offer core information and lessons learned from their own outreach efforts, including meta information about how to build advocacy programs and educate line librarians as messengers and advo-

cates (e.g., through the **ARL-ACRL Institute on Scholarly Communication**).

To buttress their appeals to faculty members, funders, and legislators to make research openly available where possible, academic libraries should solicit testimonials from their public library colleagues about the impact of open access to research results on members of the public. This extends the strategy which already has made patient advocate groups an important partner in advocacy efforts.

2. Legislative and policy advocacy. Public libraries and their umbrella groups should join letterhead groups that advocate for increased access to research results, such as the **Alliance for Taxpayer Access**. When opportunities arise to lobby for a legislative policy intervention, such as the **NIH** public access policy, both sectors should consider combining their efforts through joint resolutions and letter campaigns. It would be heartening to see a letter supporting the next version of **FRPAA** be jointly signed by a region's research university provost, regional college consortium, and regional public library consortium.

3. Service development, including library-as-publisher. Public libraries should seek, and academic libraries offer, lessons and partnerships to make innovations in publishing technologies and systems available to create public library online publishing niches, some of which would be valuable as input into research and learning at the college and university.

4. Walk the walk. Libraries and library organizations must avoid the hypocrisy of asking others to lower barriers to access but not thoroughly pursuing opportunities to do so themselves. In this regard, and in direct service to the collaboration above, both sectors need to encourage themselves and each other to make their local, regional, and national publications openly accessible. 🌱

John Ober is co-chair of the ACRL scholarly communications committee, a member of the SPARC steering committee, and until recently, was Director of the University of California's Office of Scholarly Communication.

Endnotes

1. As quoted from the **University of California's Mission** at *http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/aboutuc/mission.html*; accessed 12/02/2007.

2. As reported at *http://www.nlm.nih.gov/news/rmlcontracts06.html*; accessed 12/02/2007.

3. The **American Library Association** is listed as a member of both the **Alliance for Taxpayer Access** (*http://www.taxpayeraccess.org*) and the **SPARC Open Access Working Group** (*http://www.arl.org/sparc/advocacy/oawg.html*).

4. **Resolution On The Federal Research Public Access Act of 2006 (RPAA)**. See *http://www.ala.org/ala/washoff/woissues/copyrightb/openaccesstoresearch/ALAResolutionFRPAA.pdf*.

5. *http://www.ala.org/ala/washoff/woissues/copyrightb/openaccesstoresearch/accessresearch.cfm*

6. **Charles W. Bailey, Jr.**, *The American Library Association and Open Access*, DigitalKoans, July 23, 2006. *http://www.escholarlypub.com/digitalkoans/2006/07/23/the-american-library-association-and-open-access/*

7. See, for example, "Library Research Service. Fast Facts: Recent Statistics from The Library Research Service." *Pricing Trends for Public Library Materials.* November 17, 2004. *http://www.lrs.org/documents/fastfacts/212_Pricing_trends_public_library_print.pdf*

Some people/companies have a lot of money! **$140 million** has been spent since 2005 asking people to choose **ask.com** as a search engine. And still **Google** is the winner! By contrast, **Google** has spent $34 million on advertising between January 2006 and September 2007. See "Ask Searches for Answer to Luring New Users," by **Jessica E. Vascellaro**. *money.aol.com/news/articles/_a/ask-searches-for-answer-to-luring-...*

Have you visited the **ATG News Channel** yet? You can post a **job ad** FREE! We have linked to the *Informed Librarian*, a great resource! and we would love your suggestions about other links! AND — we are trying to start an **electronic book** of sorts that we are calling **e-stories**. I wrote the first few lines and here they are — "Once upon a time there were no books in the world. A little boy looked at his dog and said, 'I want something

to do besides playing video games.' His dog, a very understanding Labrador, barked loudly and led him to a very smart girl dog. What happened next is history..." Now we need YOU to add to the **e-story**. It's like a Wiki! Come on!

Members of the **National Information Standards Organization (NISO)** have voted to approve the creation of a working group to explore issues surrounding **institutional identification**. The NISO working group will build on the work of the **Journal Supply Chain Efficiency Improvement Pilot (JSCEIP),** an industry-wide pilot project that aimed to discover whether the creation of a standard, commonly used identifier for institutions would be beneficial to all parties involved in the journal supply chain. The project sees participants working closely together to integrate interoperability around a standard identifier codified with standard descriptive metadata. The energetic, energizer bunny **Helen Henderson** is an active participant in **JSCEIP** and one of the new project's leading advocates

among NISO's voting membership. **NISO** is currently soliciting parties in the community interested in engaging with this working group. People interested in participating in or monitoring the development process should contact the NISO office. The **NISO Business Information Topic Committee**, chaired by **Patricia Brennan**, Product Manager at **Thomson Scientific**, will appoint members of the working group and oversee the work of the committee. *www.niso.org*

Had an interesting conversation with **Pam Kelley** <pkelley@charlotteobserver.com> at the **Charlotte Observer**. The **Observer** is doing an article on **Mark Herring**'s recent book **Fool's Gold: Why the Internet is No Substitute for a Library** (McFarland, 2007). The article is supposed to come out later this month. Anyway, it is refreshing to see a newspaper continuing to focus on books. **Pam** says that they are just taking one page these days instead of two, but, still, that's good. And she is interested in coming to the **Conference** in November. We'll see!