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Op Ed -- IMHBCO (In My Humble but Correct Opinion)

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Free Access and Free Riders: The Emerging Problem

Column Editor: **Rick Anderson** (Associate Dean for Scholarly Resources & Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah; Phone: 801-721-1687) <rick.anderson@utah.edu>

A growing number of new publishing initiatives are designed to make scholarship — and especially scholarly monographs — freely available to readers. Some of these are based on an explicitly open access model (meaning that access to the content is free both for reading and for reuse under a **Creative Commons** “Attribution” license or its functional equivalent), while others are based on a public access model (which makes the content publicly available for reading and reuse within Fair Use boundaries, but allows the author to restrict some kinds of reuse).

Several of these emerging initiatives rely on contributions from third-party organizations, especially libraries. In some cases these contributions take the form of a membership fee, and in others they take the form of project-specific contributions (kind of like the **Kickstarter** model¹).

For example, consider the **Open Library of Humanities (OLH)**,² a recently-established open access publishing platform for the humanities. **OLH** solicits membership fees from libraries ranging between \$500 and \$1,000 (depending on FTE) in support of overall program costs and smaller project-based contributions toward the publication costs of scholarly articles and books.

Knowledge Unlatched³ is a somewhat different example, one that focuses on the support of scholarly monographs. Libraries can join up for \$500, and then pledge contributions to the up-front cost of producing individual scholarly books (which are then “unlatched” and made freely available online). The more libraries sign on to support a given book, the lower the per-library contribution.

The **University of California Press** has recently announced a new monograph publishing program called **Luminos**,⁴ which libraries can join for a membership fee of \$1,000.

Most ambitious of all is the **Open Access Network**,⁵ which proposes to make large swaths of currently toll-access journal scholarship in the humanities and social sciences available on an OA basis. This would be funded by voluntary contributions from colleges and universities — many of them in the tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars (the amount being pegged to enrollment).

In all of these cases, the funding model is something like the one that all listeners to **National Public Radio** will recognize: those who benefit from the free service are encouraged to contribute voluntarily to its support, in return for which they generally get little or no *direct and concrete* benefit. On the plus side, this model spreads costs widely, and therefore thinly; it also makes freely available to the public content that would otherwise be available only to paying customers. The problem, of course, is that for any individual institution (as for any individual **NPR** listener), the temptation to be a free rider is very strong, and there’s very little likelihood that any individual institution’s failure to pay will result in a collapse of the program.

The free-rider problem compounds as the number of programs built on this model continues to grow, and all indications are that it will do so. A library may be relatively likely to pony up \$1,000 for a crowd-funded OA publishing program if it’s the only such program in the marketplace — but when it’s one of ten or twenty, the library starts having to make difficult decisions about how to allocate its resources. And when a program like the **Open Access Network** emerges — one that relies on institutions of higher education voluntarily contributing tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars on an annual basis — those decisions become more difficult still. As the number of programs grows, the determining question quickly shifts from “Is this a worthy program in which to invest \$1,000?” to “What criteria will we use to decide which of these worthy programs to support?”

Here’s another question that becomes more and more urgent as these programs proliferate: what is the proper balance between investing institutional funds in products and services that directly benefit the institution’s clientele and investing those funds in programs that seek to make the larger world of scholarship a better place, without providing much in the way of significant, direct, and targeted local benefits?

One response might be to point out that although supporting such programs

may provide only indirect benefits to any particular library, those benefits are nevertheless real — that making the world of scholarly communication better helps everyone, certainly including the stakeholders of every academic library.

Another response might be to appeal to the librarian’s sense of moral obligation: “How can you continue to support a scholarly communication system that is characterized by [insert your least-favorite properties of the current system here]?”

Another might be to argue that the proper role of libraries needs to expand in the radically different information environment in which we all now find ourselves.

It’s not just about buying stuff for our patrons anymore (this argument might go) but about helping to make sure that when they’re no longer our patrons, they’ll still have access to high-quality information.

And yet another might take a more explicitly political tone: libraries exist not only to help their local constituencies accomplish scholarly tasks, but also to advance the cause of social justice by promoting the broadest-possible access to information.

About two-and-a-half years ago, in the *Scholarly Kitchen*,⁶ I discussed a couple of early projects along these lines (the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and the arXiv, both of which had adopted **NPR**-style funding models) and predicted that this kind of crowdsourced approach was unlikely to “becom(e) a major player in the landscape anytime soon.” Like so many of my prognostications, this one is starting to look like it may have been wrong. But I think the jury is still out — setting up a program and getting it going on seed grants and temporary institutional subvention is one thing; keeping it going in the long run is another. The number of these programs is certainly growing, but with the exception of the arXiv and the *SEP*, all of the programs mentioned above (and others not included in that list) are still in various stages of incubation. As more and more of them emerge and approach libraries for voluntary support, it will become less and less possible for any individual program to get a slice of any

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OH: The hosting solution affords a number of benefits. It is a very flexible solution, allowing a library to upload a single film without having to commit to a large minimum fee, and also means that libraries can have all of their hosted films stored in the one destination alongside their **Kanopy** licensed films, taking advantage of our technology as well supporting the cross-discoverability of the films. It is a fairly simple process — a library simply uploads films as and when they want to. Rights management is something the libraries manage with the content owner. **Kanopy** can facilitate this conversation as we have such great relationships with the rights owners, but ultimately this is something the libraries and rights owners negotiate.

The benefit of our video licensing service is that the rights are very clear and are the same for every film. **Kanopy** manages the licenses and the associated rights, so many libraries prefer to rely on that.

ATG: *We also notice that you already have a new subsidiary called KanopyPlay. What is that all about?*

OH: **KanopyPlay** is a streaming solution for the K-12 market. It operates very differently to our higher education solution in terms of the content and technical features, and we have been surprised by the great response from teachers, parents, and, of course, the students.

ATG: *Leading and growing a company takes a great deal of energy. How do you recharge your batteries? What do you do to relax? Are there any non-work activities that you particularly enjoy?*

OH: Every day I come home to my two-year-old son, who sprints down our corridor and hurls himself into my arms. It's simply impossible not to switch off with this welcome at the end of the day! I've never been great at relaxing except when watching movies, so it helps to be running a media company with a privileged access to films! My favorite non-work activity has to be travelling. My husband and I feel very blessed to be living in the USA, and while my son is young, we're taking every opportunity to do road trips or weekend getaways.

ATG: *Kanopy has experienced remarkable growth since starting in 2008. Can you tell us what the secret is to this success? Do you anticipate being able to maintain this growth? How?*

OH: The growth we have seen with video streaming in the broader market is being mimicked in the educational space, but is also compounded by the growth in online education. In terms of the keys to success, having the right films is certainly important, but that's not enough. We cannot simply serve up the films; we need to achieve *real outcomes* — we only succeed if we can change the way that the students learn and professors teach. That means we need to capture the magic of film and offer an experience that excites and enriches, one that gets users watching and engaging with the films. For librarians, what has also been key is being *honest* and practicing what we preach. This guides everything we do from providing a rich analytics dashboard with absolute transparency on usage to offering a Patron-Driven Acquisition model where we are only rewarded if the films are actually used.

We are very excited by the future. Not only has streaming still got a long way to go in

higher education, but we are also seeing rapid growth in new territories (particularly Europe, Middle East, and Asia) and markets (such as corporate and K-12 education).

ATG: *Speaking of growth, what marketing tips do you have for those libraries that want to expand the reach of the video streaming services they offer?*

OH: On this topic, I would urge libraries to take a look over the presentation by **Simmons** and **UMass-Amherst** colleges at the **2014 Charleston Conference**.^{*} Those two libraries ran a research study into this where they explored seven different marketing initiatives for reaching their patrons, from social media campaigns to faculty emails, lib-guides, and posters. From that research, I would suggest that there is no silver bullet as no two libraries are the same. Different initiatives achieve different purposes (for example, social media reached fewer patrons but generated traffic from those who had never been aware of the resource before, whilst faculty emails drove more traffic but to a more aware audience). We see libraries experimenting with multiple marketing channels, ensuring they have the ability to track the performance of those experiments, to see what works for them best.

ATG: *Olivia, thank you so much for taking time from your schedule to talk to us. We've enjoyed it, and we've learned a lot.* 🐼

^{*}The title of the **Simmons** and **UMass-Amherst** presentation is *Putting your Patrons in the Driver's Seat: Online Video Use, PDA, and ROI*. More information can be found on the **Charleston Conference** Website at <http://www.katina.info/conference/conference-info/program/>.

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particular library's budget pie — and librarians will feel more and more urgently the need to figure out not just whether they will participate, but (if so) the criteria by which they'll choose between them. 🐼

Endnotes

1. <http://www.kickstarter.com>
2. <http://www.openlibhums.org>
3. <http://www.knowledgeunlatched.org>
4. <http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2015/01/21/university-of-california-introduces-new-open-access-publishing-programs/>
5. <http://knconsultants.org/help-us-launch-the-open-access-network/>
6. <http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2012/08/09/the-npr-model-and-the-financing-of-scholarly-communication/>

Interview — Takashi Yamakawa from page 47

weeks after the opera played we enjoy digital live movies in Tokyo. I also like painting, both oil and watercolor. Whenever I travel I keep my small sketch book to draw sceneries to make my memory vivid. Visiting the U.S. and Europe and meeting our good friends make us happy and younger. So this interview is making me refreshed, gives me more energy, and makes me feel that I should come to the **Charleston Conference** in 2015, because I can speak to librarians, vendors, and publishers around the same tables, not like Japan.

ATG: *That would be wonderful! It would be great to see you at next year's Charleston Conference. We will look forward to getting together.* 🐼

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We are pleased to announce the completion of a seminal report by **Ann Okerson** and **Alex Holzman** entitled "**The Once and Future Publishing Library**." This study grew out of a series of discussions among **Alex**, **Ann**, **Steve Goodall**, of the **Goodall Family Charitable Foundation**, and **Katina Strauch**. We wanted to encourage useful dialog about the changes in academic publishing. The idea of **Library Publishing** emerged. The **Council on Library and Information Resources** agreed to be the home for the study and will publish the results online shortly. Stay tuned.

<http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub163>

Yet another change in our world. **Kent Anderson** is retiring from **Scholarly Kitchen**, the blog that he began in 2008. I remember when **Kent** spoke at the **Charleston Conference** back in 2010 on the panel **Who Do We Trust? The Meaning of Brand in Scholarly Publishing and Academic Librarianship**.

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