

Against the Grain

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Op Ed-Random Ramblings – Confessions of an Open Access Heretic

Bob Holley

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Random Ramblings — Confessions of an Open Access Heretic

Column Editor: **Bob Holley** (Professor Emeritus, Wayne State University, 13303 Borgman Avenue, Huntington Woods, MI 48070-1005; Phone: 248-547-0306) <aa3805@wayne.edu>

I'm an open access heretic. I attended one of the many meetings on open access at the **Charleston Conference** in early November 2018. The academic library speaker predicted that 80% of all articles would be open access within the next few years. A publisher said that all articles in his journals would be available on the company Website. I raised my hand as soon as the question session began and revealed my heretical stance. I reported that I had written an article on developments in open access from 2015 to early 2018, soon to be published in *Library Trends*, where I concluded that academic libraries had not benefitted from open access and that they should worry about the unintended consequences of its success.

I reported that the main reason why I use my academic library is to get “free” access to paywalled publications and occasionally to find articles in library science databases. I commented that the need for faculty to use the library would be greatly diminished if 80% of all articles were available for “free” and if alternate search strategies such as **Google Scholar** and open access search engines met their needs. Online access has already reduced the requirement to visit the physical library, and the success of open access and efficient discovery beyond the library catalog and paid databases would do that same for digital access.

As I expected, other members of the audience contested my conclusion. The first person asked whether I used my institution's digital repository. I responded yes but qualified my answer by saying that the process was more complicated and took longer than I would have preferred and that the main reason for doing so, increasing my citation count, didn't make much difference now that I was retired. The second rebuttal brought up the issue of author processing charges (APCs). I responded that, as a library science writer with a Humanities background, I never considered paying what I considered to be these outrageous fees since they would have come out of my pocket, a step that I considered ridiculous when I was employed and totally out of the question in retirement. A third piece of evidence from the conference was talking to two librarians after another session who affirmed that their faculty was moving away from using the expensive library databases. In one of the institutions, a member of the psychology department went so far as to suggest

canceling **PsychINFO** since he and his faculty colleagues didn't use it enough to justify the cost.

Before I comment on these and other points in greater detail, I want to make it clear that I strongly support academic libraries and don't want a future where they disappear or lose their importance within the academic community. Past history indicates that libraries, just like other organizations, have often embraced changes that led to unexpected consequences. In the corporate world, many physical stores didn't anticipate the threat from online retailers like **Amazon**. Grocery supermarkets initially pooh-pooed the competitive challenges from discount grocers like **Aldi** and **Sav-A-Lot**. Similarly, when I helped **Yale** implement **OCLC** in the 1970s, I had no inkling how doing

so would radically affect cataloging in subsequent decades with significant reductions in the number and level of staff. In preparation for this column, I read several articles from the 2000s about how libraries would be able to compete with **Google** for ready reference questions because of the superiority of the library answers. Finally, I've already commented on the fact that the digital library has reduced the importance of physical holdings for faculty. In the end, even if my predictions turn out to be accurate, I believe that academic libraries will most likely survive; but I also contend that thinking about and planning for the future is more effective if done early rather than late. Being prepared is better than being blindsided.

I also wish to caution readers that my comments are based upon articles, news releases, discussion lists, and talking with a few friends. Not having read everything, I may have missed important pieces of information that I should have incorporated in my arguments. As a retired faculty member who was a higher-level administrator for many years, I also recognize that I don't have access to the informal communications networks where tomorrow's developments are being argued and hashed out, long before the official announcements appear.

I'm going to divide the research process into three steps and examine where

the academic library has a part to play for the average faculty member. In order, they are discovery and access; publication; and dissemination of research. In the past, the library had an important role in discovery and access. The library provided its catalog and subscribed to databases so that faculty could find relevant research. This help worked best when a database covered the subject comprehensively as is the case for *Online Library Literature*. Starting long before many of the current changes, I regularly invited a **Wayne State University** professor with a non-traditional research agenda to talk to my academic library classes. He used **Google Scholar** to find needed resources and didn't rely on the broad range of databases that the library purchased because his interdisciplinary subject crossed too many



fields. His main connection with the library was accessing paywalled publications and relying on interlibrary loan to retrieve the rest. Today, one development

that has made it easier for faculty is that, in many cases, discovery and access have merged. The library resources often provide full text, links to full texts, or access to interlibrary loan to find the items. Several search engines specialize in finding open access publications where the faculty member can then get the text from the faculty's website, an institutional depository, or one of the support services like *Academia.edu* that provides access to “over 20 million uploaded texts” according to **Wikipedia**. The library's greatest worth in this process may be providing access to paywalled publications, but faculty dependence will decrease if over 80% of articles become open access. Even now, the black open access site, **Sci-Hub**, is providing illegal access to a significant number of these publications.

Libraries in the past didn't normally help all that much with the second step — getting the research published — beyond providing suggestions about the most appropriate journals for its subject matter. The new role that some libraries have taken on is paying APCs. Some experts don't consider doing so to be an appropriate use of library funds because it does not conform to the mission of the

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library to make resources accessible to its wider community and uses these resources instead to favor the research of select individuals. One speaker at the **Charleston Conference** commented on how many more resources could have been made available to everyone if these fees for the select few were eliminated. A more serious issue is the fact that the top research-intensive institutions produce so much research that paying the APCs would approach or surpass the cost of purchasing current serials subscriptions. These subsidies also raise issues of equity between disciplines where grants pay the APCs and those that don't. The biggest beneficiaries of this increase in open access materials are smaller institutions and those in the Third World who don't have the resources to purchase large collections of paywalled articles.

For the third area, the library-sponsored institutional repository has a role in disseminating faculty research. Repositories are often able to include "unofficial" versions of paywalled papers as well as any papers whose access isn't restricted by copyright agreements. The stated advantages of making these open access publications available is an increase in readership and citations. The research cited in my *Library Trends* article was inconclusive about whether open access increased citations with various studies coming to differing conclusions. Perhaps the research habits of the subject discipline make a difference. On a more fundamental level, I encountered those who questioned the value of citation counts for achieving tenure, promotion, and salary

increases. As with paying APCs for select faculty, some librarians have questioned the amount of resources required to create an effective repository. One obstacle is the variations in publisher agreements on the rules for making any version of a paywalled paper open access. If the library requires the faculty member to discover the rules, the worry is that they won't consider it worth their time to add the paper to the repository. If the library takes on the task, faculty are more likely to submit their papers but the library faces increased staffing requirements to discover the rules. In fact, if the deposit process doesn't function well and has significant delays in adding faculty materials, faculty members may feel less kindly toward the academic library than if it had done nothing at all. In any case, as with funding APCs, the institutional repository will not benefit all faculty.

To conclude this section, most if not all faculty are involved in research for their teaching and research. Only some will find it beneficial for the library to fund APCs and to make their papers available in an institutional repository. Even for those faculty, their contact with the library will also be sporadic, based upon a specific need, rather than the consistent library use formerly required to complete most research.

I will now turn to the practicalities and economics of open access as it affects my hypothesis. All the research for my article including asking for comments by postings to the main university and college libraries discussion lists did not uncover any firm evidence that libraries were saving money from open access. Perhaps part of the answer to this question depends upon what 80% of articles being open access means. First, if a high percentage of journals include an embargo period for eventual open

access, libraries might still be forced to continue buying journals as they are published because of the importance of immediate access to key content. Second, if a journal is 90% immediate open access, the remaining 10% paywalled content might nonetheless require a subscription. In other words, 80% of articles does not necessarily mean 80% of journals. Another explanation is how many of the 100% open access journals are additional titles that did not make it possible to cancel paywalled subscriptions. Even with the vast increase in open access articles, very little seems to have occurred to modify the current model except that publishers have the additional revenue stream of APCs. I confess that this result saddens me if all the efforts and high hopes for a revolution in scholarly communication have only reaffirmed the status quo with only slight differences around the edges.

I've decided not to speculate at length on other possible changes from 80% availability of articles from open access. Subject databases could still provide the links to articles though the faculty comments about their lessened use of **PsychINFO** contradict this assertion. Perhaps the library catalog or a special serials finding tool could provide the links to the open access content.

With this heretical position, perhaps I'll be called before an Open Access Inquisition at the **2019 Charleston Conference**. I'd welcome any questioning, as long as it doesn't include torture, about how open access has benefitted academic libraries. I'd also be quite willing to convert if the judges can convince me that my worries are unfounded that open access will lessen faculty loyalty to and support of academic libraries. 🍌

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accelerating new publishing approaches. The partners will also create and host a new annual symposium for early-career German researchers focused on surfacing cutting-edge ideas on the future of research communications. In order to enable the signing of the **Projekt DEAL** contract with **Wiley**, the **Max Planck Society** is involved, as a member of the **Alliance of Science Organisations** behind the **Projekt DEAL Consortium**, founded **MPDL Services GmbH**.

www.projekt-deal.de
<https://www.projekt-deal.de/wiley-contract/>

This agreement was announced during the **APE (Academic Publishing in Europe) Conference** in Berlin in February 2019. The focused and learned **Arnoud de Kemp** has been the **APE Initiator & Organizer** since 2006.

www.ape2019.eu

Watch for **Anthony Watkinson's report from APE** in our next issue v.31#2, April 2019!

The **University of Oklahoma Libraries** invites higher education institutions to share their artificial intelligence (AI) projects in a new online registry. **Projects in Artificial Intelligence Registry (PAIR)**, is an online database to support collaboration and grant funding across higher education institutions exploring AI research. "PAIR is designed to be an international registry of AI projects being developed in higher education that will help foster collaboration, cooperation and partnerships, as well as helping to find grant funding," **interim dean of OU Libraries Carl Grant** said. "Registering a project is easy, requiring only a project name, keywords, and area of specialization. Additional options can indicate if they are seeking collaborators and if they're seeking grant funding. All those fields can also be searched to find information and then provide the capability to contact the project owner." **OU Libraries** announced the registry during the December 2018 meeting of the **Coalition for Networked Information (CNI)**. According to its website, **CNI** is an organization comprising nearly 250 institutions supporting "the transformative promise of digital infor-

mation technology for the advancement of scholarly communication and the enrichment of intellectual productivity." Following the presentation, three universities have joined the **OU Libraries** registry to share their AI research. Some examples of AI research include: At the **University of Utah's J. Willard Marriott Library**, researchers are applying machine learning techniques to extract information from digital images to assist in metadata creation. Researchers at both the **OU Libraries** and the library at the **University of California, Irvine** are creating chatbots, computer applications that imitate human personality to interface with online library patrons. Supported in part by a grant from the **Andrew W. Mellon Foundation**, the **Indiana University Libraries** are working to build and test an open-source Audiovisual Metadata Platform (AMP). According to **IU Libraries'** press release, AMP will "generate searchable, time-stamped descriptions for audiovisual content," with the end goal of making available hundred of millions of hours of audiovisual content. The AI registry can be viewed at pair.libraries.ou.edu.

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