Commonplace

The Business of Knowing: Bringing about [infra]structural change to knowledge communication

Catherine Ahearn, Sarah Kearns

Published on: Jun 04, 2021

DOI: 10.21428/6ffd8432.ec94434e

License: [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC-BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

This is a call for contributions to a series about ideas for how to fundamentally alter the paradigms and practices of knowledge exchange (broadly defined). We ask that abstracts of 300 words or fewer be submitted by **Wednesday, June 23, 2021** (please see key dates and details below). Most of us have heard someone say (or have been the person to note) that if the scholarly publishing industry were created today it would look *completely different*. Well, if you agree—or even disagree—with this, we’re curious to know, and ask you to answer: **If you—yes, *you!*—were to rebuild the scholarly publishing ecosystem today, what would it look like? Why? What are the things that would have to change to get there? What are your ideas for how to do just that?**

An article published in *Commonplace* in May 2021 titled “Clarivate, ProQuest, and our Resistance to Commercializing Knowledge”¹ opens with the following:

The dominant commercial model in scholarly publishing isn’t serving the academy or humanity well, and instead extracts enormous profits from a mostly publicly-funded endeavor,^{2, 3} replicating society’s inherent biases in its assessments of quality.⁴ It must be met, if not with a replacement, then with viable alternatives that center the public good over profit, diverse perspectives over ivory tower monocultures, and effective communication over monetizable assets.

There’s quite a bit to unpack there about all the ways the for-profit model is undermining knowledge exchange *and* how we are to address them. There’s quite a bit more to discuss if we’re to move away from incremental changes that improve the system we have, and instead move toward real structural changes that work to build something anew. What role do you—and all of us—play in this?

We welcome your voices in response to these questions as an early step to ensuring they become the foundations of how we constructively and creatively share and shape knowledge more inclusively and effectively. Accepted submissions will be published in a special series in the *Commonplace* and will serve as a place and space to continue conversations about what knowledge exchange could and should look like and who gets to participate in it.

Topics within scope, include:

- Building replacements to the for-profit model vs building alternatives

- The role of tenure and promotion policies in exacerbating and potentially helping to address issues in the scholarly communications ecosystem
- “Fan fiction” on new, future realities we envision for knowledge sharing (*think outside of the system we have! show us what that world looks like!*)
- The growing role of preprints in scholarly publishing and its implications, challenges, and opportunities
- Measuring impact to capture different definitions of value, purpose, and knowing
- The knowledge ecosystem’s existing biases and its effects on our collective understanding
- Open review and its implications, permutations, and potential
- The meaning of “public” in “public infrastructure”
- The role(s) of libraries and other knowledge-oriented institutions in bringing about a new system
- The role(s) of philanthropic foundations in perpetuating problems in this space, and their potential for bringing about real change
- Critique or identify flaws in open community publishing that have thus far been unaddressed
- Provide actionable items that could make such modes/models grow and perpetuate

Key Details:

- Send in an abstract as your submission by emailing commonplace@knowledgefutures.org
- The submission deadline is **Wednesday, June 23, 2020 11:59pm EDT**
- Abstracts should be no more than 300 words
- Submission **do not** need to be text-based or “scholarly.”⁵ We welcome reactions in many forms, including art, fiction, poetry, audio, video, +
 - While your submission itself need not be text-based, we do ask that your abstract still describe the form and key points of your intended final product
- If accepted, we’ll ask for you to submit an essay draft for publication in the *Commonplace* by Monday, July 26, 2021
 - Essays should be relatively brief and focused (no longer than 1,500 words or about 6 double-spaced pages)
 - Essays should be written in English, though we will enthusiastically publish versions in other languages if you send us a translation
 - Submissions can (and are encouraged to) include multimedia elements like images, videos, podcasts/audio, and interactives if these assets help to communicate your point(s)

- As mentioned above, submissions themselves do not need to be text-based

Key Dates

- Abstracts deadline is **Wednesday, June 23**
- Responses communicated by **Monday, June 28**
- Full drafts due **Monday, July 26**
- Final pieces published in **August 2021**

You can learn more about the [Commonplace's mission here](#).

You can learn more about [serving as a contributor to the Commonplace here](#).

Please send any questions to commonplace@knowledgefutures.org.

Thank you

Footnotes

1. Stein, G., Rich, T., Verdin, Z., & Ahearn, C. (2021). Clarivate, ProQuest, and our Resistance to Commercializing Knowledge. *Commonplace*. <https://doi.org/10.21428/6ffd8432.fb0245ff> [↵](#)
2. Monbiot, G. (2018, September 13). Scientific publishing is a Rip-off. we fund the research – it should be Free. *The Guardian*, [link](#). [↵](#)
3. Buranyi, S., 2021. Is the staggeringly profitable business of scientific publishing bad for science? *The Guardian*, [link](#). [↵](#)
4. Lee, C.J., Sugimoto, C.R., Zhang, G. and Cronin, B. (2013), *Bias in peer review*. J Am Soc Inf Sci Tec, 64: 2-17. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.22784> [↵](#)
5. Here we use the term “scholarly” to mean a more erudite tone and the implementation of discipline-specific language. All pieces in the *Commonplace* aim to reach a more general, casual reader and should be written in accessible language. As always, stated facts and claims should include citations. [↵](#)