Commonplace • Series 1.3: Global Transition to Open

Equitable, Sustainable, Shared: A Values-based Vision for the Future of Scholarly Communications

Brigitte Weinsteiger¹, Holly Zerbe²

¹Gerschwind & Bennett Family Associate Vice Provost for Collections & Scholarly Communications, University of Pennsylvania Libraries,

²Assistant University Librarian for Collection Strategy, University of Pennsylvania Libraries

Published on: Nov 16, 2021

DOI: 10.21428/6ffd8432.0a4b7ba8

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

Background

The Penn Libraries have been seeking ways to advance a healthier, more open scholarly communications ecosystem, while experimenting with multiple approaches to shifting publishing practice and funding. The University of Pennsylvania is a Research I institution with four undergraduate and twelve graduate schools, as well as a multi-hospital health system. We maintain a robust budget for collections, though it is stretched to also encompass nascent Open Access funding models and an increasingly diverse set of resources and tools to support the entirety of the research workflow. The continuity of the Libraries' budget is due, at least in part, to the general awareness on campus of the important role that the Penn Libraries play in supporting scholarly publishing for authors at Penn and beyond. We are recognized more and more as not just providing access to paywalled resources, but also subventing the whole scholarly communications enterprise.

Despite our consistent funding, and campus awareness of our value, we remain judicious in choosing new publishing models to support due to both cost and equity considerations. Open Access funding models that are based on pay-to-publish article processing charges understandably have the potential for a dramatic and unsustainable shift of publishing costs toward research-intensive institutions like Penn. Widespread adoption of these models also runs the risk of disenfranchising authors without their own funding or affiliation with an institution, often in high-income countries, that participates in the model. We strive to predict any unintended consequences of Open Access models we choose to support, and avoid perpetuating existing, or creating new, issues in the ecosystem for scholarly communications.

Our Framework

As Open Access funding models have proliferated over the last decade, we realized we needed a framework by which we could evaluate and select models for support. We, as librarians, make large and small decisions about how resources are allocated on a daily basis. These decisions, over time, have a significant impact on the market for scholarly publishing. Our librarians also routinely provide input to publishers and other information resource vendors, informally through product and offer feedback, and formally through service on various advisory boards. Over many years, we have built effective relationships with the publishing community by offering

candid opinions and suggestions: not just about products, but also concerning new funding models for Open Access publishing, the demand from our local user community for such publishing opportunities, and how various approaches do or do not align with our values. To guide our collective role in shaping the future of the scholarly communications marketplace, we needed a shared vision and set of principles by which we considered, and even envisioned, new models for scholarly publishing. As a cornerstone of the Penn Libraries' [2020-2025 strategic plan](#) implementation, we recently articulated a set of thirty principles that aim to achieve a scholarly communications ecosystem reflective of our espoused values of sustainability; diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility; collaboration; preservation; access; and evidence-based decision-making. Of the thirty principles, five are particularly relevant to our goals to achieve a healthy, open ecosystem for scholarly communications. The Penn Libraries:

1. support broad, open access to scholarly research;
2. preference publishing models that allow equitable participation in the dissemination of scholarly research;
3. prioritize non-profit, society- or academy-led scholarly publishers over for-profit or commercial publishers;
4. believe that a strong competitive marketplace ensures a healthy and robust scholarly communication ecosystem that is financially sustainable for all stakeholders (i.e., authors, libraries, institutions, publishers);
5. encourage experimentation with different acquisitions models during times of upheaval in scholarly publishing and will continue support for those which are sustainable for the long term.

We see these priorities and values as ever-evolving, and we welcome discussion and debate across libraries and the publishing community. In truth, it is rare to find a model for Open Access publishing that meets all of our priorities in full. If there were a clear solution to the issues in scholarly communication, there would be no ambiguity around its future. Therefore, any new model we entertain is considered in the nuanced balance of all of these priorities. Occasionally, we are willing to forego some of the priorities if others are met, or if it appears that patience and support for a transition period might allow it to be met in the future. For example, recently we have been negotiating our first Read-and-Publish agreement. While the terms of the agreement meet many of our stated principles, particularly related to expanding open access to scholarly research and prioritizing non-profit or academy-led publishers, Gold or APC-based models for Open Access funding inherently have one shortcoming. They risk

inadvertently excluding authors without the means or institutions to cover their publishing fees. However, in some cases, a publisher's ability to secure a large enough proportion of their funding to transition most or all of their portfolio to Open Access means more authors should be able to participate even without their own individual funds. While not ideal, we recognize that this transition in funding models can take some time, however, and have been willing to be patient in the spirit of partnership and experimentation, and because our other priorities have been met. In the application of all of our principles, we keep an eye toward advancing an ecosystem for scholarly publishing that is equitable and sustainable for all parties in the long term.

Engaging Authors

However, open, equitable, or sustainable, the Penn Libraries' support, financial and otherwise, for any publishing model cannot be effective without the buy-in of its most important stakeholders: our authors. Some of the most innovative shifts that can be made on the scholarly communications landscape depend intrinsically on the participation of the authors whose research is being published. Therefore, consulting, informing, and bringing along all faculty and researchers at the University of Pennsylvania has been an integral part of our approach.

For the last three years, we have actively engaged with our University Faculty Senate on a campaign to increase our mutual awareness of issues in scholarly communication, including our authors' particular needs and perspectives, while sowing the seeds for a shift in publishing practice. We partnered with the the Chair of our Faculty Senate to charge a new Select Committee on Scholarly Communications, comprised of two of our librarians, our press director, and multiple faculty members representing the University's twelve schools. In addition, we have paired this high-level engagement with a grassroots approach that reaches individual authors at Penn. We established a robust advisory service to offer publishing support to our authors, including identifying where to publish, impact metrics for various journals, how to avoid predatory publications, and even details about a journal's price, with an explanation of how excessive price can influence the breadth of availability of a journal to its audience. Though the ultimate decision of where to submit their work for publication is left to the author, it is an opportunity for our librarians to answer questions or dispel myths about Open Access publishing, and to suggest publication in venues that adhere to both our values and the motivations of the author.

In particular, our priority to begin transitioning our support toward non-profit, society- and academy-led publishers requires, in equal measure, the participation of our authors in shifting their publishing away from commercial and for-profit venues. The service also affords our authors the opportunity to share their needs and concerns with the same librarians who build and maintain the collections that they use in their research. No one entity controls the entire sector, but scholarly communications is necessarily a delicate balance of authors', libraries', institutions', and publishers' priorities. Without the essential buy-in of our faculty, and their informed and aligned choices as essential participants in the scholarly publishing ecosystem, all efforts around transformation, both incremental and paradigmatic, are destined to fail. Our program focuses on the motivations of our authors in their own publishing, and advises on publishing options that best meet their needs. Our librarians hear of a range of wants and needs related to their publishing, including desires to ensure promotion and tenure, to reach as wide or as targeted an audience as possible, to publish with minimal delay, to avoid predatory publications, or to minimize publication fees. We do our best to point our authors in the right direction to meet their needs. With the informed engagement of our institution, from library staff to faculty, we are making strategic decisions about our investment of resources and energy into various publishing models, but particularly those that are Open Access.

The Collective Action of Consortia

In all these endeavors we aim to simultaneously support the mission of our University and the goals of our faculty as we empower a future ecosystem for scholarly communications that aligns with the values our library espouses. However, we are acutely aware that scholarly publishing is a global enterprise and Penn cannot act alone. In order to achieve both change and sustainability for the long term, it is imperative that we work in concert with a broad swath of publishers and authors, but particularly many libraries so that we can lattice our shared values across institutions.

One path forward where we have already seen success is through the collective action of consortia. Open Access publishing, like paywalled publishing, necessarily requires the broad support of many institutions in order to be financially sustainable.

Coordination through consortia achieves a greater distribution of funding across institutions, ensuring multiple libraries share the responsibility for funding. However, sustainability is dependent on not only cost but also staff time and expertise. Staying abreast of proliferating Open Access initiatives and models requires considerable time,

focus, and communication with vendors to fully understand each offer. At Penn, we rely on consortial and organizational partners such as the [NorthEast Research Libraries Consortium](#) (NERL), the [Partnership for Academic Library Collaboration and Innovation](#) (PALCI), and [Lyrisis](#) to curate and synthesize information about Open Access models and share the burden of licensing and negotiation.

Perhaps most importantly, though, consortia amplify our collective voice with our partners, putting libraries in the driver's seat to bring innovative proposals for new approaches to funding Open Access publishing. Collaboration through consortia, across libraries and universities, and among authors extends Penn's local engagement to a national and even global scale, and is key to creating a healthy environment for scholarly communications, where the core values of equity and sustainability, shared by all stakeholders, are realized.