Faculty Research   Concordia University Libraries

2010

Collective Voice for Collective Good: Library Consortia, Open Access, and the Future of Scholarly Communication

Kim Read
Concordia University - Portland, kread@cu-portland.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://commons.cu-portland.edu/libfacultyresearch

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

OLAQ

July 2014

Collective Voice for Collective Good: Library Consotia, Open Access, and the Future of Scholarly Communication

Kim Marsh Read

Oregon College of Oriental Medicine

Collective Voice for Collective Good:
Library Consortia, Open Access,
and the Future of Scholarly Communication

by Kim Marsh Read
Library Assistant, Oregon College of Oriental Medicine

For more than 120 years, library consortia have facilitated the processes by which individual libraries meet their patrons' needs. Library consortia can be traced to conferences starting in 1853, which called for the formation of a professional library organization. Motivated by the desire to collaborate and save money, a formal organization materialized in 1876 when a group of librarians formed the American Library Association (ALA). In relaying the events of that 1876 conference in Philadelphia and its accompanying resolution, the ALA's Web site states, "The aim of the Association, in that resolution, was 'to enable librarians to do their present work more easily and at less expense'" (American Library Association, 2010).

Those founding principles hold true for library consortia today. Consortia have allowed librarians to stretch their dollars at a time when costs are increasing and library budgets are stagnant or even decreasing (Maskell, 2008). Consortia have become particularly indispensable for their collective voice in negotiating pricing and licensing agreements with publishers. The oft-mentioned "crisis in scholarly communication," due to steadily increasing journal costs and the onset of e-publishing, has cemented a modern dependence upon consortia.

Rising journal costs, especially in scientific, technical, and medical fields, have been staggering. According to English and Raphael (2006), the 1980s and 1990s saw subscriptions of scientific journals rising at double-digit rates. In the new millennium, prices continue to rise at a rate at least double that of inflation. Journal pricing structures and large mergers in the publishing industry are two factors affecting costs (Bergman, 2006). Even with the successful efforts of consortia to make somewhat reasonable deals with publishers, libraries are regularly forced to cancel journal subscriptions and reduce monograph budgets. Further, the "Big Deals" they make with large conglomerate publishers are often so pricey as to restrict purchasing of journals and resources produced by smaller publishers (Rolnik, 2009).

In addition to limiting library budgets, the crisis in scholarly communication has also contributed to widening disparity in access to information. This inequality can be found among individual colleges and universities as well as among scholars of different nations. Many prestigious research universities can continue to pay increasing journal costs while smaller institutions cannot (Belle, 2002). The disparity is even greater when the developing world is considered, where purchasing access to scholarly journals is often "next to impossible" (Walker, 2009).

Open Access Models

In an age when technology should be increasing access to scholarly information, it now has the opposite effect. Patrons, scholars, educators, students, and the community suffer when libraries are unable to provide access to scholarly information. This starkly contrasts with the ubiquitous feel of available information on the Internet. Open access (OA) models hold great potential for reducing disparity in access to information and easing strain on library budgets. Some additional benefits of OA include authors' ability to disseminate research more autonomously with personal Web sites and blogs and student access to scholarly communication post-graduation. By providing free and unrestricted access, OA models, in the form of journals, institutional repositories, and author-produced Web sites and blogs, let loose the potential for broader and more equitable access to information.

Most librarians would contest the idea that access to information should be determined by ability to pay. Maskell has called providing equitable access to information regardless of a patron's ability to pay "a cornerstone of library service since its inception" (2008). This

concept, and the accompanying ability of the Internet to facilitate equitable access, are articulated in the Budapest Open Access Initiative, which states:

> An old tradition and a new technology have converged to make possible an unprecedented public good. The old tradition is the willingness of scientists and scholars to publish the fruits of their research in scholarly journals without payment, for the sake of inquiry and knowledge. The new technology is the Internet. The public good they make possible is the worldwide electronic distribution of the peer-reviewed journal literature and completely free and unrestricted access to it by all scientists, scholars, teachers, students, and other curious minds. Removing access barriers to this literature will accelerate research, enrich education, share the learning of the rich with the poor and the poor with the rich, make this literature as useful as it can be, and lay the foundation for uniting humanity in a common intellectual conversation and quest for knowledge. (Chan et al., 2002)

Scientific information, which potentially benefits all of us, provides a strong case for OA. Citizens pay for research funded by the government and have to pay again for access to that information when authors sign all rights to commercial publishers. OA models redress inequities existing in access to results of government-funded research. The National Institutes of Health, which account for about a third of all government-funded research, now requires all researchers to deposit results in PubMed Central, the OA repository for the National Library of Medicine.

The Role of Librarians

OA is not without challenges. For starters, publishing in OA journals and institutional repositories carries its own, although significantly lower, costs. More prohibitive is the resistance to OA by faculty, whose livelihoods currently depend on being published in commercial journals. Additionally, many faculty are simply unaware of the skyrocketing costs of journals and their libraries' inability to afford them. But even with that knowledge, faculty are faced with the need to publish in the most prestigious journals they can. They do not get paid to publish in prestigious journals, but rewards come in the form of promotion, tenure, and career advancement.

The question then becomes, what can librarians do to encourage faculty to take part in OA models? The most basic action a librarian can take is education:

- Discussing with faculty the pricing structure and increased cost of journals as well as the stagnation of library budgets;

- Educating faculty about copyright law and to what they are agreeing when they sign copyright over to publishers;

- Urging faculty to negotiate with publishers for the right to deposit their works in an institutional repository;

- Encouraging faculty to serve on peer review boards of OA journals; and

- Discussing peer review as it pertains to OA models.

Some critics of OA claim peer review will suffer in an open access journal. OA journals differ from traditional journals primarily in access, delivery, and cost. The way peer review is conducted in traditional journals can be duplicated in OA journals; neither the price of the journal nor its form of publication needs to determine the efficacy of peer review (Suber, 2007). The Public Library of Science (PLoS) is one prominent example. With a prestigious editorial board composed of top editors recruited from traditional scientific and medical journals, the PLoS created selective OA journals that accept fewer than ten percent of submissions (Public Library of Science, 2009). Reclaiming peer review from the realm of commercial publishers and reasserting it within academic societies and OA initiatives is an idea that could not only bolster OA models, but academia's independence and prestige as well.

Considering faculty's needs in relation to publishing, promotion, and tenure is crucial. Librarians need to play a part in the transition to a new system for acknowledging and rewarding faculty who publish. OA models need to be recognized as scholarly communication worthy of promotion and tenure. Advocacy in the form of discussion and collaboration with faculty and administrators is necessary to effect this change.

The Evolving Role of Consortia

What role can consortia play in the OA movement? Library consortia have proven that a collective voice succeeds where a solitary one fails. Through advocacy, education, and institutional repositories, consortia are utilizing collaborative relationships to effect change.

Talking with faculty about OA requires knowledge of its principles and technology, as well as preparation and strategy (Malenfant, 2010). Many librarians agree with an advocacy role, but carrying the torch alone or even as a team can seem as daunting as confronting the steep increases in journal costs. Some consortia have created informational packets, policy statements, written negotiation tools, and brochures for both librarians and faculty. The Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC), a division of the Association of Research Libraries, is a pioneering effort in this direction. In existence since 1997 and now supported by over 800 alliance members, SPARC furthers the OA movement by educating, advocating, and assisting with the creation and proliferation of OA publishing.

The Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL), a 29-member consortium, is another vocal advocate for OA. With its "Transform Scholarly Communication" project, CARL advocates for both institutional repositories and authors' rights. CARL has worked with SPARC to create a Canadian Author Addendum to aid faculty and researchers in retaining the rights to their writings. Most recently, CARL has initiated an Institutional Repository Pilot Project Harvester. The harvester makes searchable the contents of CARL member libraries' repositories to increase accessibility of OA content.

The Boston Library Consortium, with 17 members, supports the OA movement via advocacy and education. Following the lead of its member library, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the consortium adopted an "Agreement to Extend Author's Rights." By advocating for authors' rights and institutional repositories, the Boston Library Consortium hopes to inspire its members to prioritize OA efforts (Corbett, 2009).

Some library consortia have taken a role in creating and maintaining institutional repositories in addition to advocacy and education efforts. By sharing the cost of infrastructure, such as staffing, hardware, and networked storage space, consortia can put institutional repositories within reach of even very small institutions. OhioLINK, consortium

for 89 member libraries, has done just this. Though its larger member libraries could build institutional repositories on their own, OhioLINK saw the need to aid its smaller members, for whom creating an institutional repository would be cost-prohibitive (Smith, 2009). Through its Digital Resource Commons, seventeen OnioLINK libraries have their own institutional repository.

The Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries has an institutional repository system similar to that of OhioLINK. Their Alliance Digital Repository Service (ADR) uses open source software, centralized hardware, and shared staff to power individualized repositories for its member libraries. Seven of the ten Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries institutions have repositories through ADR.

Contributing financially to broader OA efforts is another way for consortia to participate in the OA movement. OhioLINK and the Pacific Northwest's Orbis Cascade Alliance are among fifteen library consortia that purchase a membership with the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). The DOAJ facilitates identifying and using peer-reviewed scholarly and scientific OA journals.

By sharing resources, ideas, expertise, and funding, consortia with OA initiatives can lead the transition to more sustainable and equitable forms of scholarly communication. Library consortia are uniquely poised to further the ideal of equitable access to information. Maskell (2008) states that this view of library consortia "supports the belief that consortia have a responsibility to address social issues such as the widening gap between the information rich and the information poor."

OA initiatives sponsored by consortia can also mitigate the strain on library budgets. Consortia have successfully procured savings for libraries by negotiating with publishers. Those that actively support OA models have the potential to greatly reduce libraries' costs because OA models are much cheaper for libraries than traditional journals. Suber (2007) states, "We can be confident that OA journals are economically sustainable because the true costs of peer review, manuscript preparation, and OA dissemination are considerably lower than the prices we currently pay for subscription-based journals. … Moreover, as OA spreads, libraries will realize large savings from the conversion, cancellation, or demise of subscription-based journals."

Conclusion

Library consortia that support OA models serve library budgets, researchers, faculty, students, and the public good. The future of scholarly communication has limited room for the continued dominance of traditional journals, a dominance fueled by profits. Publishers want to make money, thus meeting the needs of shareholders. Researchers and faculty want to communicate their findings and writings in a way that is acknowledged by their colleagues. Librarians want to ensure access to this communication. Making a profit is not in the direct interest of either researchers or librarians.

That librarian/researcher/scholars' interests are at odds with publishers' is not new. As Melvil Dewey encouraged over 120 years ago in his 1889 address at the Second International Library Conference, "The librarian must be the librarian militant before he can be the librarian triumphant. At the end of another century … our descendants will look back with wonder to find that we have so long been satisfied to leave the control of the all-pervading, all-influencing newspaper in the hands of people who have behind them no motive better than 'the almighty

dollar'" (qtd. in Belle, 2002). Equitable access to information remains a core principle of social justice that cannot be ignored by librarians. Just as library consortia have united in a collective voice to negotiate pricing and licensing agreements with publishers, they similarly hold the potential to successfully advocate on behalf of open access models.

Where to look for more information:

- Boston Library Consortium-Scholarly Communication:
  http://www.blc.org/userservices/scholarlycommunication/

- Canadian Association of Research Libraries-Transform Scholarly Communication:
  http://www.carl-abrc.ca/projects/projects-e.html

- Colorado Association of Research Libraries-Alliance Digital Repository:
  http://adrresources.coalliance.org/

- Directory of Open Access Journals:
  http://www.doaj.org/

- Directory of Open Access Repositories:
  http://www.opendoar.org

- OhioLINK Digital Resource Commons:
  http://drc.ohiolink.edu/

- SPARC:
  http://www.arl.org/sparc/

References

American Library Association. (2010). *History*. Retrieved from http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/missionhistory/history/index.cfm

Belle, J. (2002). Revenge of the librarians: Journal prices under siege. *EContent,* 25(5), 28–34. http://www.econtentmag.com

Bergman, S. S. (2006). The scholarly communication movement: Highlights and recent developments. *Collection Building,* 24(4), 108–128.

Chan, L., Cuplinskas, D., Eisen, M., Friend, F., Genova, Y., Guedon, J-C., … Velterop, J. (2002). *Budapest Open Access Initiative.* Retrieved from http://www.soros.org/openaccess/read.shtml

Corbett, H. (2009). The crisis in scholarly communication, part I: Understanding the issues and engaging your faculty. *Technical Services Quarterly,* 26(2), 125–134.

English, R. & Raphael, M. (2006). The next big library legislative issue. *American Libraries,* 37(8), 30–32. Retrieved from http://www.arl.org/sparc/bm~doc/AL09-2006.pdf

Malenfant, K.J. (2010). Leading change in the system of scholarly communication: A case study of engaging liaison librarians for outreach to faculty. *College and Research Libraries,* 71(1), 63–76.

Maskell, C.A. (2008). Consortia: Anti-competitive or in the public good? *Library Hi Tech,* 26(2), 164–183.

Public Library of Science. (2009). *PLoS Progress Report.* Retrieved from http://www.plos.org/downloads/progress_report.pdf

Rolnik, Z. (2009). Big deal = good deal? *The Serials Librarian,* 57(3), 194–198.

Smith, K.L. (2009). Open access and authors' rights management: A possibility for theology? *Theological Librarianship,* 2(1), 45–56. Retrieved from http://journal.atla.com/ojs/index.php/theolib

Suber, P. (2007). *Open Access Overview.* Retrieved from http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/overview.htm

Walker, S.R. (2009). Bioline international: A case study in open access and its usage for enhancement of research distribution for scientific research from developing countries. *OCLC Systems & Services,* 25(2), 125–134.