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Open Access To Scholarly Publications

WCU has an opportunity to join a revolution in scholarly communications taking place around the world. This revolution, the Open Access Initiative, focuses on providing free access to scholarly publications. In recent years journal subscriptions have become prohibitively expensive, thereby compromising the very purpose of journals: the dissemination of knowledge. The fact is scholarly publications have been hijacked by rapacious publishers, who are reaping considerable profit at the expense of scholarship. The proposed changes will allow academia to reclaim scholarly output for the academic community.

In the early 1990s scholars working on the Human Genome Project were struck by the paradox of making human genetics data freely available while still paying considerable amounts for access to the articles being published using this free data. The incongruity of this situation gave birth to the Open Access Initiative. The Open Access movement's rationale is that most scholars publish articles with the intent of sharing new discoveries or insights with colleagues in the field, not for the purpose of making a profit. To the scholar, it is an article's impact on the discipline that matters and not its potential to generate revenue. In fact, requiring that the reader pay for access lowers the work's potential impact since it limits the information to those who can afford to pay subscription fees. Librarians are also concerned about the negative effects of the traditional publishing model. From 1986 to 2001, the cost of serials generally increased by 215%. As a consequence, since 2001, Hunter Library has cancelled approximately 500 academic journals to keep up with inflation. It is obvious that the resulting long-term impact on library collections is unsustainable.

The basic tenets of the Open Access Initiative are: toll-free online access, free copying, free linking, and retention of copyright by the author. To further these aims, the Open Access Movement advocates a two-pronged strategy to be pursued concurrently. The most visible effort relates to the proliferation of Open Access journals either as new titles or by switching subscription-based journals to the new model. There are now nearly 700 peer-reviewed Open Access journals freely accessible to any interested reader (see: <http://www.doaj.org>). Established publishers such as Oxford University Press are experimenting with the new model and others, such as Elsevier, find themselves on the defensive due to warnings of lower profits from competition with Open Access journals.

The second part of the Open Access strategy encourages the creation of Open Access repositories. Open Access repositories are digital collections/archives of an individual's or group's scholarly output which could include articles, syllabi, conference presentations, data sets, etc. These can exist at a personal level, with each scholar making his or her own output freely

available on the Internet, at an institutional level, and at a national level. Personal open repositories are already widespread. In the U.S., institutional repositories are gaining popularity, the most famous of these being MIT's D-SPACE. In Europe it appears that national repositories are gaining popularity, as England, France and Germany move to require all scholars who receive national subsidies to make their output freely available.

It is important to note that the movement recognizes that the traditional publishing roles of editing, formatting, and peer-reviewing articles are still critical in scholarly communication. Fulfilling these roles in the Open Access environment continues to require a costly operating infrastructure. Thus, publishing in the Open Access model still costs money. Numerous Open Access funding models exist. The most common model in Open Access journals requires authors to pay for the published article. While this represents new ground for the social sciences and the humanities, in the sciences such charges (called "page charges") are well established. Funding models for repositories are based on costs being underwritten by the institution or government that maintains that particular repository. In both cases, the funding model represents important changes requiring both researchers and institutions to rethink their strategies and priorities.

While it is not yet guaranteed that the Open Access movement will attain all its objectives, the rate with which it is growing and the level of international support it already enjoys are remarkable. The consequences of its success are wide-ranging: (1) The movement provides free access to scholarly materials that currently cost the institution an increasingly unsustainable amount of money; (2) Although it is unlikely that commercial journal publishers will disappear in the near future, they are bound to feel the pressure of free access and perhaps the journal inflation rate will decrease; (3) The impact factor of our publications has the potential to increase considerably; (4) We will be able to retain intellectual copyright of our work; (5) A WCU repository would be a novel way to showcase the university's faculty research output.

But for these consequences to become reality the WCU community will have to (1) Publish in Open Access titles; (2) Create a WCU repository; (3) Promote Open Access; (4) Recognize Open Access publications for what they are in the TPR process, namely, legitimate venues for scholarly communication; and (5) Seek university financial support for funding Open Access Initiatives.

The WCU community has options concerning this revolutionary movement. We can wait on the sidelines until this movement is full blown, or we can take the initiative and help shape the movement ourselves. Since taking the initiative is not a matter of financial resources as much as institutional will, there ought not be a lack of resolve. There are no reasons to wait. This semester the library will be making a campus-wide push to publicize the movement. We hope that the WCU community will join the international Open Access movement to regain control of its own scholarly output. Sharing your comments in notes & quotes is your next opportunity for involvement.

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