

Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large/Online Edition

Libraries • Policy • Technology • Media

Volume 16, Number 2: February-March 2016

ISSN 1534-0937

The Front

Watch This Space!

Or, actually, watch this blog ([Walt at Random](#)), since “this space” in a published issue isn’t likely to change.

I hope to have a major announcement in the near future, certainly before the next *Cites & Insights* appears (do note that this is a double issue—and more than long enough for two issues).

The announcement will appear in *Cites & Insights*, but with any luck it will appear much earlier on *Walt at Random* (and, of course, be publicized as widely as possible).

And that’s all I can say about that. For now.

Intersections

Economics and Access

We visited this complicated topic in April 2015, in a full-issue essay [THE ECONOMICS OF OPEN ACCESS](#). In the eight or nine months since then, quite a bit has happened. This roundup defines economics fairly broadly and portions may go beyond open access—and some of it goes back before 2015, for topics that didn’t make it into the earlier roundup.

Writing about Writing about Open Access Economics can Make You a Little Crazy

I’m adding this section after completing the rough draft of the rest of the roundup—and the headline above may say all that needs to be said.

I keep reading the same absolute falsehoods about open access, the same improbabilities about costs, the same handwaves in lieu of difficult discussions. But I also keep reading serious writing that’s the result of serious thinking.

Once upon a time, in late 2009, I gave up on writing about open access and published all of the *Cites & Insights* OA pieces as a *Cites & Insights*

Reader: *Open Access and Libraries*, probably the longest book I'll ever publish (cross fingers) at 513 pages. That book is still available [as a \\$17.50 paperback](#) or a somewhat redundant [free PDF ebook](#).

I stopped for a variety of reasons, spelled out in November 2009—but times have changed. Peter Suber no longer produces the *SPARC Open Access Newsletter*, OA itself seems to be doing better, *some* librarians and scholars are paying attention, and once in a while I think I make a small difference. Also, of course, I've started adding value by adding original research, even if it may not always reach the people it should reach.

I stayed away for three years. I'm not threatening to go away again, either as a sometimes researcher or frequent commentator. But, you know, it can make you a little crazy at times. Maybe that's because this roundup covers a *lot* of territory: it began with more than a hundred items, and it looks as though I've actually discussed at least 90 (including a few added since I started putting this together). That's a lot of opinions and writing—this grew from an issue-length essay to a double-issue essay. I plan to stay away from the economics of access for a while, at least in this mode—but, as I look at my Diigo library, “oa-issues” is tied for first place with the most items, easily enough for a full-issue essay—and there are several other oa subtags.

Will we ever see the end of OA myths? Probably not. Will we ever see the total success of OA? Almost certainly not. Do essays like this help to flesh out the range of issues? I hope so.

Dissertations

This cluster is about PhD dissertation embargoes in the humanities and social sciences. We're not talking one-year embargoes here: six years seems to be the target. Universities are trying to improve access to current scholarship by making dissertations openly available in electronic form—and the American Historical Association thinks that's a *terrible* idea. (AHA's own journal is not OA: this should come as no surprise.)

Here's the thing: Not only do I have no horse in this race, I'm not sure what The Right Answer is, or whether there is one.

American Historical Association Statement on Policies Regarding the Embargoing of Completed History PhD Dissertations

This statement appeared [on July 22, 2013](#) on *AHA Today* and the first paragraph couldn't be clearer:

The American Historical Association strongly encourages graduate programs and university libraries to adopt a policy that allows the embargoing of completed history PhD dissertations in digital form for as many as six years. Because many universities no longer keep hard copies of dissertations deposited in their libraries, more and more institutions are requiring that all successfully defended dissertations be posted online, so

that they are free and accessible to anyone who wants to read them. At the same time, however, an increasing number of university presses are reluctant to offer a publishing contract to newly minted PhDs whose dissertations have been freely available *via* online sources. Presumably, online readers will become familiar with an author's particular argument, methodology, and archival sources, and will feel no need to buy the book once it is available. As a result, students who must post their dissertations online immediately after they receive their degree can find themselves at a serious disadvantage in their effort to get their first book published; it is not unusual for an early-career historian to spend five or six years revising a dissertation and preparing the manuscript for submission to a press for consideration. During that period, the scholar typically builds on the raw material presented in the dissertation, refines the argument, and improves the presentation itself. Thus, although there is so close a relationship between the dissertation and the book that presses often consider them competitors, the book is the measure of scholarly competence used by tenure committees.

Right off hand, I find it interesting that “five or six years” of additional work does not yield enough added value to make the resulting monograph publishable, but of course I'm no historian or PhD.

The statement continues, essentially saying that getting access to the *printed* dissertation via ILL was so slow and cumbersome that it didn't interfere with publishability. AHA says the printed copy should be all that's available—and if it isn't kept in the library, the digital copy should only be available on the PhD's own campus. In other words, it's an *explicit* call to make the dissertation effectively unavailable. But here's the last paragraph:

By endorsing a policy that allows embargos, the AHA seeks to balance two central though at times competing ideals in our profession—on the one hand, the full and timely dissemination of new historical knowledge; and, on the other, the unfettered ability of young historians to revise their dissertations and obtain a publishing contract from a press. We believe that the policy recommended here honors both of these ideals by withholding the dissertation from online public access, but only for a clearly stated, limited amount of time, and by encouraging other, more traditional forms of availability that would insure a hard copy of the dissertation remains accessible to scholars and all other interested parties.

Well, no. You're explicitly calling for limits on “full and timely dissemination” of the knowledge, and calling six years a “limited amount of time” is at best disingenuous.

There are 159 responses. Here's the first:

Stupid and stunting.

The AHA should be recommending that departments change how they grant tenure – citation should matter not publication.

A number of other comments question some of AHA's claims and ask for evidence. (Some "evidence" is offered, but you'd need to read it to determine whether it's evidence that university presses won't consider *substantially improved* manuscripts.)

I didn't quote the entire statement and one sentence in it comes up for examination in a number of comments: "History is and remains a book-based discipline." Much as I love books, that seems like a difficult proposition these days.

One oddity that arises in quite a few of the pro-AHA statements: the apparent belief that *getting* a publishing contract for a scholarly monograph means Big Bucks, or at least enough money to significantly impact student loans. That strikes me as highly unlikely, at least based on my own experience, unless university presses (looking to sell 300 copies of most monographs) are a *lot* more generous than library publishers (I have never seen an advance in excess of \$3,000, and \$1,500 is becoming the norm). If PhD students believe post-advance *royalties* will significantly reduce their student loan totals, they should have taken an economics class. The "you can't get tenure unless you have a Book" argument may be true, albeit unfortunate; the "I need that Big Book Money to pay off student loans" argument is just silly.

Maybe the AHA is right in this area. Maybe not. The comment stream raises all sorts of interesting issues—among them the assertion that some dissertations are pretty awful, but if they're available the marvelous books that will arise later won't be publishable. Explicit recognition that PhDs are awarded for "substandard work" is certainly novel!

That wasn't the end of it. Far from it...

The AHA Asks "What About the Children?"

That's Barbara Fister [on July 24, 2013](#) in "Library Babel Fish" at *Inside Higher Ed*. She links to [a January 7, 2013 post](#) by Doug Armato at the University of Minnesota Press that considers the "lifecycle of the scholarly book" and how ways of communicating scholarly information may be changing.

The smart publisher today doesn't want to introduce books to the world so new, so pristine, so original that they have never been seen or discussed in any form. Rather,

the current place of the individual book in this emerging ecosystem is as an area of highly concentrated, unitary scholarship amid a flow of less concentrated expression, with a membrane (let's dub that membrane "peer review," though it is more than that) regulating the passage between those environments as a form of osmosis.

He has no reservations about publishing a book that has been public, here and there serially in various forms, before. In fact, he sees that prior public activity as an opportunity to anticipate what book projects are likely to be worth taking on because he is able to see how readers are responding. The material itself is shaped usefully by that flow and will go on to join back into it. (As a matter of fact, as I read the blog post I opened a new tab to order a copy of the book he cites. That's how it works.)

Then there's the underlying assumption behind AHA's argument: publishers don't want to publish books based on open access dissertations because libraries won't buy them (and for many scholarly monographs, libraries are nearly the whole market).

Well, there are a lot of problems with this solution. Libraries have been buying fewer books no matter whether they are based on dissertations or not; they won't buy more books because dissertations go offline. Academic publishers no longer earn enough from libraries to base their decisions on what libraries might do. Quality publishers never did (so far as I can tell) assume dissertations were all-but ready to be revised, put between boards and sold. Following the rules in the traditional way no longer leads to tenure. It seems odd that historians should seek obscurity by safely locking dissertations up for an almost biblical period of time...

There's more here, and as always it's worth reading, as are the comments.

ETDs, publishing & policy based on fear

Another library person heard from, this time Kevin Smith [on July 24, 2013](#) at *Scholarly Communications @ Duke*. He starts by pointing to [a College & Research Libraries article](#) directly addressing the issue of whether access to electronic dissertations will diminish publishing possibilities in the humanities and social sciences—a survey-based article that concludes that most publishers do *not* reject manuscripts on that basis.

Indeed, even the very low numbers about publisher reluctance may need to be set in further context, since I think they still over-estimate the degree to which open access is the root cause of whatever difficulties there may be in getting a revised dissertation published.

Before elaborating on that, he takes on what he calls the “farcical statement from the American Historical Association” and the lack of offered evidence for the claims in that statement.

But they offer no evidence for this claim, and the evidence that is out there, including this most recent survey, directly contradicts the assertion. This is not the way a society of professional scholars should work; policy should be based on data, not merely fear and rumor. And factual claims should be sourced. Every scholar knows this, of course, but the AHA asserts an “increasing number” without citing any source, possibly because the available

sources simply do not support the claim. It is ironic that the AHA, in a statement purporting to defend the interests of graduate students, models such bad scholarly practice for those very students.

His elaboration on the earlier point is worth reading. Specifically, he takes issue with one university press director who says most libraries won't buy books based substantially on accessible theses.

Based on my experience, I do not believe that library selectors look at availability of an ETD when deciding whether or not to buy a monograph that is a revised dissertation; in fact, I doubt they usually know whether or not there even is such an ETD. One librarian told me that she looked for "quality, coverage, currency and authority" when buying monographs and the claim that she might not buy a book because an earlier version was available as an ETD was "poppycock."

That segment beginning "in fact" strikes me as most plausible—I just doubt that many academic library selectors take the time to do this level of research.

Then Smith gets to some of the *real* reasons sales of dissertation-based monographs may be declining: there's no money (especially after Big Deals have been accounted for), and what money there is goes to books with broad appeal.

With Smith, as with Fister, there's almost always more and it's always worth reading.

Embargo or Perish

This article by Ry Rivard [on July 26, 2013](#) at *Inside Higher Ed* has a longer web title, but this one's fine. Rivard says the "actual danger of such career hampering" (that is, what AHA worries about) "remains hard to quantify." Rivard cites the *C&RL* article and findings that 7% of university presses and 3% of journals would not publish works based on OA theses and dissertations.

Joan Dalton, one of the authors of the study and an associate dean of the University of Windsor Library, said the findings are mixed but that [AHA's policy](#) could harm scholarship.

"My perspective is that if we're intending to advance knowledge, that requires open communication and it seems to me that the policy may be more effective at protecting a business model than at promoting the building of knowledge," she said.

Rivard links to [a Q&A](#) with AHA trying to clarify the statement—e.g., saying AHA is *not* recommending that students embargo their dissertations, just that they should be *allowed* to do so. Except that the rest of the Q&A makes it pretty clear that AHA thinks scholars *should* embargo their dissertations—e.g., "All historians should have the opportunity to revise their work before it is published." In other words, as noted in some comments,

AHA thinks of *accepted dissertations based on which PhDs were granted as “unrevised work.”* Damn.

Since AHA continues to cite anecdotal evidence as all the evidence it needs, Rivard adds some anecdotal evidence of his own:

Peter Berkery, executive director of the university press association, said the historical association’s concerns “came at us out of left field.”

Berkery said he called the directors at 15 university presses after AHA’s statement became widely publicized. They were not aware of their presses or other presses being reluctant to publish books based on dissertations that had been freely available online, he said.

“The AHA has identified a problem that frankly is news to us,” he said. “I’m sure the anecdotal evidence that they have amassed is real, but we’re struggling to understand if this is an isolated problem.”

Later, Berkery distinguishes between dissertations “written for three people” and the presumably substantially revised books “written for thousands.”

The comments are worth reading—carefully and with appropriate amounts of skepticism.

Can’t Find It, Can’t Sign It: On Dissertation Embargoes

This post, appearing July 26, 2013 on the *Harvard University Press Blog*, offers an interesting bit of additional...well, it’s anecdotal, as the post admits, but it’s especially interesting anecdotal given the brouhaha to date. (Worth noting up front: most of the university presses that *were* unwilling to look at books based on accessible dissertations were smaller presses.)

After some comment on the AHA statement, the back-and-forth (with a note that much of the conversation has been based on “inaccurate or merely ungenerous interpretations of the statement”), a post that initially seems strongly supportive of AHA’s stance veers off into the heart of it:

Most people involved in this discussion likely understand that a publication-ready dissertation is a rare thing. Generally speaking, when we at HUP take on a young scholar’s first book, whether in history or other disciplines, we expect that the final product will be so broadened, deepened, reconsidered, and restructured that the availability of the dissertation is irrelevant. It’s only fair to note, though, that from a business perspective this position is at least in part a function of our size. As one of the country’s larger university presses, we have the capacity to ensure that we can help usher the project to that expanded state. We also have grown our sales and distribution channels to the extent that the possibility of X number of academic libraries rejecting the book based on access to the dissertation doesn’t have to be as great a factor for us as it may be for smaller UPs.

From our perspective, a missing element in the AHA's statement—and within the field, to the extent that the statement is reflective of its members' concerns—is the possibility of a dissertation's availability actually working in favor of a young scholar seeking a contract. HUP Assistant Editor Brian Distelberg, for instance, notes how a project's discoverability can be the means by which his interest is sparked:

I'm always looking out for exciting new scholarship that might make for a good book, whether in formally published journal articles and conference programs, or in the conversation on Twitter and in the history blogosphere, or in conversations with scholars I meet. And so, to whatever extent open access to a dissertation increases the odds of its ideas being read and discussed more widely, I tend to think it increases the odds of my hearing about them.

In this whole discussion, academic publishers tend to be characterized as a strangely passive lot, sitting back, keeping the gate, waiting for scholars to come to us and meet our terms for entry. If that was ever the case, it certainly is no longer. An enormous part of a university press acquisitions editor's job is to be out scouting for new voices, new ideas, and new inquiries. And as Distelberg notes, much of that scouting takes place online, where these conversations are happening. If you can't find it, you can't sign it.

There's more, and it's as well-written as you'd expect from this source.

Why Put at Risk the Publishing Options of Our Most Vulnerable Colleagues?

This lengthy post, by William Cronon (a past president of AHA) [on July 26, 2013](#) at *AHA Today*, is the longest and most eloquent statement in support of AHA's stance that I've seen. I recommend reading it to get a sense of that case, but won't be going through it in great detail.

Here's a key paragraph:

But are enthusiasts for open access really so passionate about their cause that they would force on their most junior and vulnerable colleagues the premature release of work that has taken the better part of a decade to produce even 1) if those colleagues do not yet feel their work is ready for publication; or 2) if they object to giving away for free years of scholarly labor; or 3) if they fear running the risk of other more established scholars possibly scooping their findings before they themselves can get them fully into print; or 4) if there's even a modest chance that an online dissertation might undermine their ability to attract the best possible publisher for a revised version of that work in book form?

I find #3 especially interesting: apparently, historians are scoundrels and plagiarists who would not be deterred by openly-available, copyright, material that is only not “fully in print” if you accept the view that an online

dissertation isn't "in print." I don't believe that, and find it sad that Cronon views his colleagues so dimly.

He manages to twist the *C&RL* survey results in such a manner that he can assert "9 out of 10" as the chances that online availability of the dissertation might reduce the chances of book publication.

There's a lot of straw-man argument against OA enthusiasts and a seeming suggestion that these enthusiasts are out to "pass a law" requiring PhD recipients at all institutions to give away their work. I must have missed that proposed legislation.

There's a *lot* more here, and I could comment further, but I'll leave it for your reading—along with the 48 responses.

To Embargo or Not to Embargo: ...What Was The Question? (An #AHAGate Link Round-Up)

I'm including [this July 27, 2013 post](#) by Cara Burnidge at *Religion in American History* because it's a good, succinct roundup of the situation with appropriate links—and where I might be considered biased in one direction (although I'm really not sure what's "right" here), Burnidge might be considered biased in the other, since she *did* choose to embargo her own dissertation. From what I read, I don't believe she is biased; I think this is a fair summary.

She includes links to some of the items I've already discussed and some others, including [an AHA Storify](#) of tweets on the situation and [another one](#) done by Michael D. Hattem. (At what point will historians use Storify as a source of primary historical material? Or would that be sociologists?)

Mostly: go read this: it's well done.

More on the AHA, ETDs and Libraries

I originally closed this section, on what appears to have been a one-week wonder, with this Kevin Smith post [on July 29, 2013](#) at *Scholarly Communications @ Duke*.

Smith notes some of the arguments, reiterates some of what he's said before, and note this about the claim—which I haven't covered—that "they won't buy the books" is a serious claim because YBP apparently offers a filter in some approval plans so that books that are revised dissertations don't show up.

Occasionally in this discussion we have seen publishers assert the same fiction about library acquisitions, sometimes dressed in more sophisticated form. They say that it is true that individual librarians do not make decisions based on OA ETDs, but that vendors like Yankee Book Peddler allow approval plan profiles to be designed so that revised dissertations are never considered. This is true, but it does not prove what it is asserted to prove. Many academic libraries, especially at smaller institutions that do not have

a mandate to build a research collection, will exclude books based on revised dissertations from their approval plan because such books are likely to be very expensive and very narrowly focused. Many libraries simply cannot put their limited funds toward highly-specialized monographs that will not broadly support a teaching-focused mission. To try to use this situation to frighten people about open access is disingenuous and distracts us from the real economic tensions that are undermining the scholarly communications systems.

Finally, we should remember that dissertations have been available in pre-publication formats for a very long time. The AHA statement talks about bound volumes and inter-library loan, but that is either extreme nostalgia or willful ignorance. UMI/ProQuest has offered dissertations for sale since the 1970s, and has sold those works in online form for years before ETDs began to pick up momentum. And ETDs are not so new; early adopters began making electronic dissertations available a decade ago. Duke's own ETD program began in 2006, and we worked from the example of several predecessors. So why did the AHA wait until 2013 to issue its warning? Perhaps they took their own bad advice and nurtured their opinion until it suffered the same fate they are now urging on graduate students—irrelevance.

Which looked like a good place to end this particular discussion. Until...

The Dissertation Mess: Balancing Rights and Responsibilities

Until, that is, a thoughtful consideration of the issues involved comes along more than two years later, as in this Rick Anderson piece [on December 8, 2015](#) (after I'd drafted this section) at *the scholarly kitchen*.

What? It's at Skitch, so naturally I'm going to blast it full of holes, right?

Wrong. For one thing, Anderson isn't proposing The Answer:

Over and throughout this public conversation (or shouting match) lurked a larger issue, one that was never really addressed in a direct way: to what degree is it appropriate for graduate schools to require students to give up control over the dissemination of their theses and dissertations?

I would like to suggest that this is a difficult and complex question, and that the right answer to it is not obvious.

Indeed, he doesn't have The Answer, but he thinks it's important to attempt to reach a consensus:

One possible way to resolve the tension is by compromise, in this case between individual and group interests. In order to do so, we would first have to figure out what fundamental principles should guide such a compromise, and then what the compromise would look like.

There's another way to respond to this situation, of course, and that is to deny that the rights and obligations in question are really in conflict or tension at all. From this perspective, the author's interests and the institution's interests are actually in perfect harmony, and if they appear not to be—if, for example, a student author believes she would benefit from embargoing her dissertation for five years and the institution wants her to limit the embargo to one year—the appearance of conflict is an illusion, one that can be dispelled by education.

One challenge with this approach is that education goes both ways. Authors don't have a perfect understanding of all the downstream impacts that will result from decisions they make about the disposition of their work, and institutions have a similarly imperfect understanding of all the downstream impacts produced by requirements that they impose on their authors.

Another challenge is the difficulty of finding “educators” who aren't advocates for one side or the other of the question. There's nothing wrong with advocacy, of course, but you can't expect advocates to be impartial providers of education—[that's not their job](#). Their job is proselytizing, which is not the same thing.

Another problem is that education can only go so far when the problem is genuine disagreement rather than ignorance or illusion. An author may simply disagree that her rights as a content creator ought to take a back seat to the institution's interest in disseminating her work under the institution's preferred terms. Not all disagreements are a function of a lack of mutual understanding, or of one party's misperception of reality; sometimes disagreements arise because the two parties genuinely want mutually exclusive things.

I think the time has come for a more open and candid conversation on our campuses about the questions listed above and about the underlying issues that inform them—conversations that include all stakeholders and explicitly recognize their legitimate interests, their rights, and their responsibilities. Achieving a consensus agreement as to what those rights and responsibilities are may not be easy, but it seems to me like an absolutely essential first step towards establishing answers to these questions and outlining a feasible and equitable way forward.

Is he right? Is he wrong? Is there a clear answer? If you're involved in these issues more than I am, I suggest reading his discussion—and the 73 thoughts that follow. A few of them are shallow and predictable but most are thoughtful and get into related areas as well.

Embargoes

Let's look at embargoes a little more broadly, mostly in conjunction with green OA.

Open access, publisher embargoes, and the voluntary nature of scholarship

[This analysis](#) by Shan C. Sutton appeared in the October 2013 *College & Research Libraries News*. Sutton calls 2013 a banner year for OA but says:

Within the context of green open access, there are some troubling trends in the current dynamic among institutional repositories, institutional open access policies, and reactive publisher practices that seek to blunt their impact. Many of the open access policies passed by faculty members at colleges and universities follow the Harvard model that grants the school a nonexclusive license to faculty articles upon their creation...

Recognizing the prevalence of open access policies at colleges, universities, and grant funding agencies, most journal publishers have adopted guidelines to articulate the conditions under which they permit versions of the articles they publish to be placed in repositories. These policies often involve embargo periods during which the repository version is not publicly accessible. Standard embargo periods range between six and 24 months after initial publication. Some publishers have very restrictive embargoes while others are more liberal.

Events in recent months indicate a shift toward embargoes that are longer and more constraining. This change appears to be in reaction to more widespread institutional repository implementation and open access policy adoption. It illustrates how academic institutions and some publishers are increasingly at cross-purposes when it comes to green open access.

Two changes in publisher policies this year demonstrate different but related strategies employed to limit the impact of green open access. One strategy is based on a bias against deposit in institutional repositories versus authors' personal Web sites. The other is based on an attempt to distinguish between voluntary manuscript deposit by authors and those that are "mandated" by institutional or funder policies.

Sutton uses as an example of the first strategy a change in deposit policy by Springer, which formerly required a 12-month embargo for repositories such as PMC but none for institutional repositories—and changed that to require 12-month embargoes for all repositories but not for personal web-sites. At least Springer's honest about it:

We modified our policy because, with open access (both green and gold) becoming a more and more substantial part of scientific publishing, it was vital to ensure that our policies in this area were consistent and fully sustainable. For a publisher, sustainability certainly includes maintaining the revenue stream which supports the many activities that add value during the publication process.

Or, in brief, OA's fine as long as it never threatens our revenues and profits.

Then there's Emerald. It previously allowed deposit of accepted manuscripts without embargoes, either in repositories or on personal websites—but now requires 24-month embargoes if articles are deposited as a result of a mandate, with no such embargo for voluntary deposits. This policy (Elsevier does something similar) seems to me to only make sense as a direct attack on OA mandates. Oh, and Emerald's also added hybrid options, at a mere \$1,595 per article. Emerald publishes 17 journals in LIS fields; there are lots of high-quality OA journals in LIS, including the sister journal to *C&RL News*.

There's more to this nicely-written analysis, and I have to say I love the wording in the first sentence of this paragraph:

Although it's disappointing to see embargoes designed to dampen the effectiveness of institutional repositories, the related schemes to base embargo policies on a farcical juxtaposition of voluntary versus "mandated" depositing of manuscripts demands additional scrutiny. The vast majority of institutional open access policies have a voluntary essence, even if they are referred to as mandates. First, faculty members themselves voluntarily establish these policies, usually through a faculty senate or an equivalent body. Second, the policies are not coercive, and typically include waivers that are automatically granted upon request. Third, even with a policy in place, it is the authors who voluntarily deposit their manuscripts in repositories and allow them to be made freely accessible.

Half-lives, policies and embargoes

Kevin Smith [on January 25, 2014](#) at *Scholarly Communications @ Duke*. He's discussing [a Phil Davis study](#) on the "half-life" of journal articles in various disciplines, a study apparently being used to convince legislators that public access policies should include *long* embargoes to protect journal subscriptions, not just the measly 12 months NIH allows.

It is worth noting that Davis does not actually make that claim, but his study is being used to support that argument in the on-going debate over implementing the White House public access directive. That makes it more important, in my opinion, to be clear about what this study really does tell us and to recognize a bad argument when we see it.

Here is my original reply to the LJ writer, which is based on the fact that this metric, "article half-life," is entirely new to me and its relevance is completely unproved. It certainly does not, in my opinion, support the much different claim that short embargoes on public access will lead to journal subscription cancellations.

I won't quote the reply itself; you can read it in the original. He notes that there's simply no demonstrated correlation between journal download half-life and lost subscriptions. I will quote a portion:

My overall impression is that the publishing industry is unable to show evidence of lost subscriptions based on the NIH public access policy (which Crotty acknowledges), so they are trying to introduce this new concept to cloud the discussion and make it look like there is a threat to their businesses that still cannot be documented. I think it is just not the right data point on which to base the discussion about public access embargoes.

A second point, of course, is that even if it were proved that there would be some economic loss to publishers with 6 or 12 month embargoes, that does not complete the policy discussion. The government does not support scientific research in order to prop up private business models. And the public is entitled to make a decision about return on its investment that considers the impact on these private corporate stakeholders but is not dictated by their interests. It may still be good policy to insist on 6 month embargoes even if we had evidence that this would have a negative economic impact on [some] publishers. Government agencies that fund research simply are not obligated to protect the existing monopoly on the dissemination of scholarship at the expense of the public interest.

Smith also points out that the Davis study was commissioned by the publishing industry and released without apparent peer review—and that he's never heard of a librarian using “article half-life” to make collecting or cancellation decisions.

Indeed, I had never even heard of the idea until the Davis study was released, and neither had the colleagues I asked. We would not have known how to determine this number even if we had wanted to. It is not among the metrics, as far as I can determine, that publishers offer to us when we buy their packages and platforms. So it appears to be a data point cooked up because of what the publishing industry hoped it would show, which is now being presented to policy-makers, quite erroneously, as if it was relevant to the discuss of public access and embargoes. Crotty says in his post that rational policy should be evidence-based, and that is true. But we should not accept anything that is presented as evidence just because it looks like data; some connection to the topic at hand must be proved or our decision-making has not been improved one bit.

There's more, and as always worth reading.

The evidence fails to justify publishers' demand for longer embargo periods on publicly-funded research

Peter Suber also comments on the Davis study in this [January 14, 2014 post](#) at LSE's Impact of Social Sciences blog. Since this is a well-written piece deserving direct reading, I'll just quote four key paragraphs:

There are two problems in arguing that the Davis study somehow entails that OA policies should permit longer embargoes—longer embargoes in general or longer embargoes in fields with longer article half-lives.

1. The first problem is that the Davis data doesn't show that short embargoes cause cancellations. This is a larger problem than it may appear to be. Publishers have been claiming for years that short embargoes cause cancellations, but there is no evidence to support the claim...

2. But the second problem is larger and more important than the first. Suppose we had good data showing that short embargoes caused cancellations, or that a uniform embargo across fields caused more cancellations in the fields with longer article half-lives. It still would not follow that policies should permit longer embargoes. To get to that conclusion we'd have to add premises. These premises are often assumed, but they are remarkably weak once made explicit for examination.

We'd have to add the premise that public policies should maximize publisher revenue before maximizing public access to publicly-funded research. Or we'd have to add the premise that policies should put publisher interests ahead of researcher interests. I reject these premises. Research funding agencies, especially public funding agencies, ought to reject them as well.

Allowing unembargoed green OA is good for business.

So says Peter Suber in [this January 26, 2014 post](#) at Google+, and it's a brief piece well worth reading.

Basically, he's noting that Routledge seems to be finding that, at least in LIS, allowing unembargoed green OA is, well, good for business.

Is it my imagination, or is Routledge also saying that *meeting this demand is good for business*? Its press release is not explicit, which is why I have to ask. But it's explicit on four related points: (1) Routledge is extending its pilot no-embargo green OA program in order to meet this demand; (2) the pilot program significantly increased the number of authors willing to publish in Routledge journals; (3) the pilot program also increased the number willing to recommend Routledge journals to other authors; and (4) the pilot program triggered some kind of "shift in response...toward Routledge's publishing program."

Read the rest in the original—including Suber's note that this may not be the first such evidence.

Cancellations

Just a handful of items on cancellations, including a big deal or two.

Canceling Wiley?

Kevin Smith posted this [on December 16, 2014](#) at *Scholarly Communications @ Duke*.

Because they were spaced almost a full year apart, I really did not connect the dots when two Canadian universities announced that they were cancelling their “Big Deals” with John Wiley & Sons publisher. The Times Higher Education [reported on the decision at the University of Montreal](#) back in January 2014, while the [announcement made by Brock University](#) came only a few weeks ago. I would not have considered this a trend worth commenting on had it not been for conversations I had last week at the Fall CNI Membership meeting. During that meeting, two different deans of large university libraries told me, unbidden and in separate conversations, they they were also considering ending their deal with Wiley. I was struck by the coincidence, which caused me to remember these two announcements from Canada and to begin to ponder the situation.

He considers two questions: why Wiley—and what’s next? For the first, it’s the usual problem with Big Deals: you get loads of journals you don’t much want along with the few you do, while paying annual increases that far exceed inflation—and the cost per use with Wiley, for these universities, was much higher than for Elsevier.

In my conversations with the two library deans, much the same thing was said about Wiley—demanding a large price increase, being inflexible in negotiation, and selling “a lot of junk that I don’t need” in the package. Libraries are beginning to discover that they do not need to put up with those tactics. Publishers often tell us that they are publishing so many more articles, which justifies their price increases, and they tell us how selective their flagship journals are. But when we look at these big deals, it is clear that selectivity is not an across-the-board approach; many articles that are not very useful just slide down the hierarchy to get published in journals whose main purpose is to pad out a “big” deal.

That last clause is a fairly damning statement about a number of big-publisher journals: if Smith’s right, their “main purpose is to pad out a ‘big’ deal.”

What comes after cancellations? Smith suspects libraries spend the saved money subscribing to a smaller focused list of journals from the same publisher—and if that doesn’t save money, he thinks libraries should refocus their approach:

When you have cancelled a dross-laden package, think twice before re-investing all of that money in as many individual subscriptions from the same publisher as possible; make a careful decision about where the division between useful titles and unnecessary ones really lies. Because here is the thing—money that can be saved and reinvested in open access

projects will give us a higher return on our investment, because those projects will provide greater access.

It seems clear that, over time, libraries will need to move more and more of their spending away from the consumption side of scholarly production and do much more to support the creation and dissemination of knowledge directly. Commercial publishers hope to capture those dollars as well, but one of the real benefits of supporting open access can and should be more freedom from businesses addicted to 30% profits. I would like to challenge libraries to consider, when they have to cancel, using the money to support non-profit or lower profit open access projects. Work with a society to provide subvention for a scholarly journal to become OA. Work with your university press to support OA monographs. Finally, even if not compelled by immediate budget realities, think about making some strategic cancellations in order to take these kinds of steps. We know that open access is our future, and it is vital that we take control of that future before others take it from us.

There's more, including the unclear question of whether Wiley's worse than Elsevier, the need to wean libraries away from "large legacy corporations," and [a Cameron Neylon post](#) on cancellations.

Factors in Science Journal Cancellation Projects: The Roles of Faculty Consultations and Data

This one's a peer-reviewed scholarly article in a no-fee gold OA librarianship journal: by Jeanine Williamson, Peter Fernandez and Lana Dixon [in the Fall 2014 Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship](#).

The economic downturn of 2007-08 forced many academic libraries in the United States to cancel journals. We surveyed life sciences librarians from ARL libraries to find out about their experiences with journal cancellations during 2008-12. Overall, we discovered that two factors were essential in decision-making: faculty consultations and data. While faculty consultations and data have always been influential in journal cancellations, our survey allowed us to explore what roles these two factors played in the recent period of necessary reductions.

That's the abstract. It's not a huge survey (41 institutions responded), but it's a carefully presented set of findings that may be worth reading.

No Big Splash after dropping the Big Deal

That's the headline Matthew Thomas gives to an [August 21, 2015 post](#) at *Matthew 2.0*, in which he points to [an article](#) about the experiences of two academic libraries five years after canceling Big Deals with Springer, Wiley and Elsevier. (The link here is to the repository copy of the article; the

journal itself is paywalled.) I'll quote his commentary on three conclusions—and I'm going to disagree partly with his commentary in at least one case.

1. **Demand for the content is not high enough to return to the Big Deal, since ILL requests for content which would have been covered by the Big Deal is about 10% of the downloads previously recorded.** I think the first part of the conclusion may very well be correct, but I don't think that ILL figures after cancellation of an ejournal collection doesn't map directly to real demand. In fact, in extreme, the difference between the two could be interpreted in the opposite direction: access has dropped to 10% of what demand was previously. Neither extremes are correct and the truth probably lies somewhere in the middle since neither number is a good measure of actual demand in my opinion.
2. **Savings were significant, particularly considering the size of the overall budgets, annual increases and inflation, and comparing it to the monographs budget.** This is not really an analysis but a statement, but I'm not sure that comparing the money saved with the purchasing power for books is useful. Journals and books are two separate parts of a library's collection and it's not immediately valuable to say that with all the money we saved buying journals in a specific way, we were able to buy books in a different way. The article uses this comparison as an illustration only but I'm not sure it's a very useful one.
3. **Dropping the Big Deals gives us more flexibility.** Amen. I think this is one of the best arguments for doing this. The most dangerous part of the Big Deal is the lack of flexibility and control a library has when participating in it. I just wish that flexibility and control could be given a dollar value so we could compare.

As I read the article, it struck me that “book budget” was being used as shorthand for “acquisitions budget” and that one institution, at least, was saying pretty directly that *it purchased more books* because the cancellations freed up money. Saying that books and journals are separate parts of a library's collection is slightly disingenuous: fact is, both forms of acquisition come out of acquisitions budgets, and I'm very nearly certain, based on large-scale data analysis, that many academic libraries are buying fewer monographs (at the expense of the humanities and social sciences) at least partly because of the sheer budgetary demands of Big Deals (primarily serving STEM).

I might also quibble with #1: “demand” is a tricky term, but “I need that article enough to request it via ILL” is, I suspect, a lot closer to “I need that article” than is “I can look at this article by clicking on one link.” The truth may lie in the middle, but I'd be surprised if it wasn't closer to the ILL figure.

Think of this as a suggestion to go read the free version of the paywalled article as well.

On BATNAs, selfishness, and placation

This piece by the Library Loon [appeared December 12, 2015](#) at *Gavia Libraria*—and apart from anything else, it provided the perfect name for the death-folk-rock band I will never actually create: The Selfish Ignorant Blame-spewing Prima Donnas.

Yes, it is about cancellations—specifically, Newfoundland’s Memorial University [cancelling](#) its big deals (2,500 journals affected) in order to stay within its \$7.5 million (Canadian) journal budget (the growing strength of the U.S. dollar isn’t helping matters: I was gobsmacked at the exchange rate, the worst I can remember ever seeing). Faculty reaction? At least in the news article, you could summarize it as “*how dare they!*” mixed with “oh well, then the library’s totally useless.” As opposed to, say, “we must work with our librarians to make the best of a bad situation.”

From the Loon, with my new band name:

Once again, the Loon finds herself pondering library communication strategy in the face of this reality combined with the other inescapable reality libraries are up against: their faculty, who are by and large selfish, ignorant, blame-spewing prima donnas. The immediate spur for this pondering was [Ryerson University’s library’s response to the MUN situation](#), which has in it both good and... let us say, less-good.

That link leads to a commentary at Ryerson University Library & Archives that includes this question-and-answer:

How can we maintain our reputation if we don’t have access to the latest research?

Librarians are working hard to ensure that we are not sacrificing core journals. We also provide access to top-notch document delivery services, sometimes providing access to PDF articles held by other university libraries in your email in under 48 hours. In some cases, we are maintaining access to a journal via an [aggregator database](#) with embargoed access. These embargo periods are set by the publishers and are not within our control. We encourage faculty who may be on editorial boards address this issue and advocate for an end to embargoes and turn toward more progressive Open Access policies.

That first sentence is what the Loon finds less good:

Less good is the “we will defend core journals!” promise. It is a common promise, not least because it is a common strategy employed toward the end of the can-kicking régime. The Loon mentions this because she sees nothing in particular wrong with the strategy itself; it only makes sense. The problem arises from actually *communicating* that strategy.

Then we get to BATNA: the Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement. In other words, what happens after the Big Deal goes away?

Any library's BATNA for a Big Deal is dreadful; no one, faculty least of all, likes losing accustomed access. Any Big Deal vendor's BATNA is... equivocal, even in the [squatter's market](#); losing a deal altogether is not great, but can likely be compensated for by squeezing some other library or consortium harder.

The problem with the "core journals!" promise is that it worsens a library's already-poor BATNA. Should the negotiation fail, the library has not only lost access, but broken a promise, a promise that selfish blame-spewing ignorant prima donna faculty *will* call them to account for. What starts out as attempted placation becomes a bullet aimed at the library's own foot.

There's more—for example, an element of the Ryerson discussion basically saying "give us more money" is, according to the Loon (and she's right based on all the facts I'm aware of) a highly temporary solution.

The Loon's suggestions for better ways to communicate with faculty—and how faculty should respond—are so good that I'm going to quote them:

The Loon believes that these commonly-employed messages arise from librarians' entirely reasonable and justified fear of selfish blame-spewing ignorant prima donna faculty. Here's the thing, though: *their anger is inevitable*. It cannot be prevented. It cannot be placated. Trying to prevent or placate it is pointless.

That anger might, however, be *directed elsewhere*. That should be the central aim of library communication strategy as the can-kicking event horizon nears: direct the anger at the vendors. With relatively small and rational groups of faculty, a clear numerical accounting may succeed at this; [SUNY-Potsdam's Jenica Rogers managed it](#). With the selfish blame-spewing ignorant prima donna masses, however, the story needs to be a clear, unrationalized, unapologetic "[no, we can't](#)"; ask the vendors why they charge so much. No, core journals are not safe; the vendors charge the most for those. No, more money will not help; the vendors will just vacuum it up as they do everywhere else. No, joining additional consortia will not help; the vendors simply charge consortia more and then our share goes up too. No, all the deals we are presented are bad; ask the vendors directly about that, because they won't let us tell you. No, you won't get a better deal if you fire us, and the savings from doing so won't pay for anything; ask the vendors. No (Canadian libraries should say), vendor prices do not compensate for currency slide; ask the vendors why not." Ask the vendors, ask the vendors, ask the vendors; repeat it until it turns to ashes in one's beak. Ask the vendors.

There is magic in this, the magic of an improved BATNA. Faculty who are angry at vendors will not be angry at a library for walking away from a bad deal, which gives the library negotiating leverage. Ask

SUNY-Potsdam. Ask California about Nature Publishing Group or Elsevier. Canadians, ask Simon Fraser, which [publishes its entire materials budget](#) and is refreshingly (and strategically, in the Loon's view) unapologetic about what is and isn't possible with it.

Now, then. Faculty, the Loon has been harsh with you in this post; sadly, it is the only way a mere librarian-loon can get your attention. No matter what you think of librarians in general and the librarians at your institution specifically, understand this: *when you blame journal cancellations on librarians, you only make your access problems worse*. If publishers and aggregators know they'll escape scot-free from a failed negotiation while you abuse your institution's librarians, they know they have the library over a barrel, and they'll use that knowledge to *charge more*. "It's only business," as publishers and aggregators say.

No matter what you think of the situation, support your librarians. The key support librarians need, because it gives them a viable BATNA, is your willingness to continue supporting them if they walk away from the table. Give them that BATNA and they'll get you better deals.

The only long-term solution to the problem might be a complete redo of scholarly publishing (or at least the article part of it), but if that ever happens, it will be a long time coming—and meanwhile university libraries need to survive.

The Big Deal: Not Price But Cost

When I tagged [this fairly lengthy](#) Richard Poynder article in *Information Today*, I thought it was fairly recent—but, going back, I see that it's from the September 2011 issue.

I'm including it here because, even at four years old, it's a reasonably good description of how Big Deals started (so Jan Velterop is partly responsible?) and why they no longer make much sense—except, of course, to traditional publishers anxious to retain...well, the last few words of the article: "a scholarly publishing system that is now past its sell-by date."

I won't go through the article in detail, but I will quote this in connection with the item just above:

Soon the Big Deals were not only devouring most of the serials budget but money that had been allocated to buy monographs as well, which had an impact on scientists and other researchers alike, a situation exacerbated by the fact that the proportion of research university funding allocated to libraries has been falling over time.

"Big Deals consume a disproportionately large percentage of the total library materials budget, and often the purchase of books suffers because monies have to be prioritised for journals," says [Paul Ayris](#), director of library services at [University College London](#). "This affects

scholarship in the Arts, Humanities and some Social Sciences since the unit of publication in these areas is still the book.”

In other words: *of course* savings in serials spending can allow a library to buy more books, when total materials/acquisitions spending is limited.

Flipping

No, I'm not euphemistically swearing about the state of open access economics. This section's about flipping—either flipping an individual journal from subscription to gold OA status, or maybe flipping the whole flipping journal industry to an OA basis (which might or might not leave a “journal industry” at all).

How Anthropology & Aging became Open-Access: some thoughts on transitions and trajectories

A case study by Jason Danely [on September 2, 2014](#) at *AAGE Blog*. He took over as editor of *Anthropology & Aging Quarterly* in Fall 2011; at the time, it was a digital journal (distributed as full-issue PDFs) only available to AAGE members, combining the AAGE newsletter with peer-reviewed articles.

In my view, AAQ was the only scholarly forum that dealt with the kind of problems and topics that I was most passionate about, like using ethnographic methods in aging research, applying theories of subjectivity and the body to issues of caregiving, or examining the spiritual and religious lives of older people using qualitative, empirical, and cross-cultural perspectives. Rather than picking out articles here and there from a dozen journals, I knew that every article I read in AAQ would directly support the things I taught and the research I wanted to do, and I knew that our authors deserved a bigger megaphone and a wider stage.

So he worked to redesign the journal and broaden its reach, substantially increasing the scholarly content.

Encouraged by this momentum, AAQ made its first push to into the current of digital publishing at the AAGE business meeting in 2012. In my report, I argued that the [Open Journal Systems \(OJS\) platform](#) or something very similar would make us more accessible through directories and searches, and as a result help us attract authors and AAGE members. While there was still concern within AAGE that full open-access for AAQ would result in member desertion, the idea of updating our online presence gained some ground, and through discussions in the first half of 2013, AAGE launched its new website.

Note here that we aren't dealing with loss of *subscription* revenue (there wasn't any), but with possible loss of members.

In order to prepare for the move to open-access and get a better sense of its impact on the use of the journal and the membership of AAGE, we distributed a simple online survey via our listserv in early 2014. The results were overwhelmingly approving, with the majority of respondents claiming that open-access would make them more interested in submitting content to AAQ and more likely to use our publications with students. They also indicated that their decision to become an AAGE member or renew their current membership would not be affected by moving the journal to open-access, and for some, this move would make them more likely to become a member.

There's a lot more detail here about the journal, which is gold OA with a tiny indirect charge: you must be an AAGE member to contribute, and membership costs \$28 a year. There's no direct charge. Unfortunately, it is not (yet?) in DOAJ.

De Gruyter Open converts eight subscription journals to Open Access megajournals

This article by Sue Polanka appeared September 29, 2014 on *No Shelf Required*.

Starting with volume 2015, De Gruyter Open (www.degruyteropen.com) will publish a group of eight Central European Journals now distributed in subscription model by Springer and turn them to Open Access. This is a move unprecedented for a group of STM journals, being supplemented by three new launches in the humanities.

“The key motivation for this change was to build strong megajournals in all STM fields” says Dr. Sven Fund, CEO of De Gruyter. “Our major advantage is that we build them on the basis of a group of journals that have been published for over a decade. They have rigorous peer review, high rejection rates and have earned good impact factors”. Sven Fund adds: “The overwhelming support from the editorial boards, the increasing demand to publish research in Open Access and above all, the mandates of the funding institutions all make a strong case in favor of Open Access”.

I question the term “megajournals” as applied to these journals, but I suspect “megajournals” is one of those terms that will remain fuzzy until it disappears. Here's the list of current and former titles:

Open Mathematics (formerly *Central European Journal of Mathematics*)

Open Physics (formerly *Central European Journal of Physics*)

Open Chemistry (formerly *Central European Journal of Chemistry*)

Open Life Sciences (formerly *Central European Journal of Biology*)

Open Medicine (formerly *Central European Journal of Medicine*)

Open Geosciences (formerly *Central European Journal of Geosciences*)

Open Engineering (formerly *Central European Journal of Engineering*)

Open Computer Science (formerly *Central European Journal of Computer Science*)

And three “megajournals” in the humanities: *Open Linguistics*, *Open Theology* and *Open Archaeology*.

The article—essentially a De Gruyter press release—says the “central European” group published more than a thousand articles in 2013.

A quick check shows that at least some of these titles are in *DOAJ*, commendably without APCs (they’re all too recent to *DOAJ* to appear in my 2011-2014 spreadsheet). None of them are megajournals as I would define the term—publishing at least one thousand articles a year—nor do they need to be.

There’s one unfortunate aspect, I believe: the naming convention “Open + Field” has almost entirely been used by Bentham Open, giving that form of title a somewhat tricky reputation. It might have made sense for De Gruyter to steer clear—but they presumably know better.

Flipping, not Flopping: Converting Subscription Journals to Open Access

Alice Meadows posted this [on March 4, 2015](#) at the *scholarly kitchen*—and it may be worth noting that Meadows is currently Director of Communications for ORCID and was previously in marketing roles for Wiley and Blackwell. Internal evidence in this post suggests that Meadows was with Wiley at the time.

The question of whether – and, if so, when and how – to ‘flip’ a traditional, subscription-based journal to open access (OA) is one that comes up time and again in meetings with our society partners. It’s also something that funders sometimes like to suggest as a quick route to a more open world – “Why not just convert all your journals to OA?” they ask.

Needless to say, it’s not quite that simple...

She looks at SCOAP³, an initiative with the goal of making all journals in high energy physics openly available. Notably, Ann Okerson (the U.S. National Contact Point for SCOAP³) talks about flipping in terms of going “from subscription to OA/APC,” which is interesting but perhaps not surprising.

Wiley, like other publishers, has been experimenting with flipping some journals, both proprietary and society-owned, to OA. For the right titles, it’s proving successful – and there are some real benefits. Moving to OA can help a good but slow-growing journal succeed more quickly. It can be an opportunity to experiment with gold OA without the risk and cost

of starting from scratch. No longer being confined by page budgets means you can publish more.

Drawbacks? “Gold OA journals are still viewed with distrust by some people”—hardly surprising given the yeoman efforts of various folks to engender such distrust—and that could “put off potential authors and readers, and ultimately lead to a drop in usage and Impact Factor...” (Meadows offers a link to a study of that distrust—but the link leads to an interview with Ann Okerson about SCOAP³.)

So how do you pick the right title, capitalize on the benefits, and minimize the risks? In our experience, a good candidate would ideally meet most, if not all, of the following criteria:

- Modest subscription revenue
- High quality and growing submissions
- High rejection rate (60%+)
- Well-funded field with money available for APCs
- Author community already actively publishing in an OA manner

A typical journal for consideration, therefore, would be relatively young; in a fast-moving, competitive, and well-funded field; and with an author pool that is already publishing OA. Ideally it should also be well-regarded, with a good Impact Factor, and a strong, active editorial board.

There’s more to the piece, and it’s clear that it’s really devoted to what I’d call the Publisher’s Ideal of OA Flipping: making sure there’s no lost revenue in the process. Doesn’t make it wrong; does make it a no-win game for libraries. I am bemused by the idea that usage would *drop* by making a journal’s contents openly available, unless scholars are such snobs that they don’t want to read articles that The Great Unwashed can also read. Which is, unfortunately, not outside the realm of possibility.

I was able to locate [the linked report](#) of the study showing some distrust of OA; I’ll admit I did not read the 76-page PDF in great detail.

Can monies spent globally on journal subscriptions be completely transitioned to an OA business model to free the journals?

Nicholas Cop asks that question in [a May 26, 2015 post](#) at *SciELO in Perspective*—and, respectfully, while I think the answer is “obviously” I also think it’s the wrong question. But that’s commentary before appropriate citation, so never mind.

Let me refine that: obviously, there’s enough money spent on journal subscriptions to pay for all journals—how could there not be? But apart from the logistics of a Universal Flip, there’s the bigger question: *should* all that money be spent in that way? (There’s also the wild improbability of it

being possible or legal to do so on a worldwide basis through any form of concerted action.)

Oddly enough, Cop not only wants to pursue the wrong question, he seems *excited* that the answer is “Yes” even though that’s the only possible answer:

A recent and very interesting study¹ by the Max Plank Digital Library, published as a White Paper on Open Access Policy, looks at precisely this scenario. It quantifies, for what appears to be the first time ever, if such a dream is possible and concludes that it is indeed!

And this:

The study’s analysis supports the proposal for a change in the underlying business model of scholarly publishing, shifting the payments for journal subscriptions to payments for open access publishing services, such as APCs² in what is called the Gold Road Open Access. In this scenario, academic library acquisition budgets for journals could be consolidated and thus transformed into a budget for publication services in open access.

Hey, that’s easy: let’s just take away most of the materials budget from every *academic library in every nation* so that we can spend it all on APCs!

I kept looking for some form of balance here, but found none: basically, Cop keeps adding detail to the *necessarily true* claim that all the money being spent on journal publishing would support journal publishing. With huge profit margins, to boot.

I find this whole thing sad (and in the comments, it becomes clear that Cop! gets! excitable!). *Of course* the answer to the title question is “yes”: it has to be. If it follows that it’s reasonable to pay publishers \$5,000 and more per paper, soaking up that \$10 billion or \$14 billion or whatever, well, hey, at least we’d all be able to read the papers.

Meh.

What happens to publishers that don’t maximize their profit?

Björn Brembs asks that question in [a June 19, 2015 post](#) on his blog that’s effectively a follow-up to the Cop piece and related work.

Lately, there has been some [public dreaming](#) going on about how one could just switch to open access publishing by converting subscription funds to author processing charges (APCs) and we’d have universal open access and the whole world would rejoice. Given that current average APCs have been [found](#) to be somewhat lower than [current](#) subscription costs (approx. US\$3k vs. US\$5k) per article, such a switch, at first, would have not one but two benefits: reduced overall publishing costs to the taxpayer/institution and full access to all scholarly literature for everyone. Who could possibly complain about that? Clearly, such a switch would be a win-win situation at least in the short term.

I, for one, could certainly “complain about that”: \$3,000 strikes me as an absurdly high figure for the necessary publishing tasks, more than 30 times as high as SciELO’s costs, just for example. Brembs is asking that question rhetorically, as he makes clear in considering medium-term and long-term results, based on looking at past developments: specifically, “what happens when you allow publishers to negotiate prices with our librarians—hyperinflation.”

While I’m not quite as ready to fault librarians for the results of these negotiations, I agree that the likely results of paying whatever APCs the publishers think they deserve will be ruinous...or *just short* of ruinous.

There’s a lovely paragraph here about profit margins, paywalls and actual costs; I leave you to read that in the original. I will quote two later paragraphs of Bremb’s nightmare scenario:

So let’s take the quoted US\$3k as a ballpark average for future APCs on a world-wide scale. That would mean institutional costs would drop from the current US\$10bn to US\$6bn annually world wide. Let’s also assume a generous US\$300 of actual publishing costs per article, which is considerably more than current costs with arXiv (US\$9) or SciELO (US\$70-200) or current median APCs (US\$0). If this switch would happen unopposed, the publishers would have increased their profit margin from ~40% to around 90% and saved the tax payer a pretty penny. So publishers, scientists and the public should be happy, shouldn’t they?

Taking the perspective of a publisher, this scenario also entails that the publishers have wasted around US\$4bn in potential profits. After all, today’s figures show that the market is worth US\$10bn even when nobody but a few libraries have access to the scholarly literature. In the future scenario, everyone has access. Undoubtedly, this will be hailed as great progress by everyone. After all, this is being used as the major reason for performing this switch right now. Obviously, increased profit margins from 40% to 90% is seen as a small price to pay for open access, isn’t it? Wouldn’t it be the fiduciary duty of corporate publishers to regain the lost US\$4bn? After all, why should they receive less money for a better service? Obviously, neither their customers (we scientists and our librarians), nor the public minded an increase in profit from 40% to 90%. Why should they oppose an increase from 90% to 95% or to 99.9%? After all, if a lesser service (subscription) was able to extract US\$10bn, shouldn’t a better service (open access) be able to extract 12 or 15bn from the public purse?

Still more, using the auto industry as an example, and I think Brembs makes a fairly good case for, well, here’s his final paragraph:

tl:dr: The incentives for price hikes in a universal gold open access economy will be even stronger than they are today.

When I say “fairly good case” I’m not saying “overwhelming case”; the comments include useful rejoinders from Mike Taylor and others.

Disrupting the subscription journals' business model for the necessary large-scale transformation to open access

While that title of [this article](#) by Ralf Schimmer, Kai Karin Geschuhn and Andreas Voler (all from the Max Planck Digital Library of the Max Planck Society), released April 27, 2015, sounds promising, the abstract takes that promise away:

This paper makes the strong, fact-based case for a large-scale transformation of the current corpus of scientific subscription journals to an open access business model. The existing journals, with their well-tested functionalities, should be retained and developed to meet the demands of 21st century research, while the underlying payment streams undergo a major restructuring. There is sufficient momentum for this decisive push towards open access publishing. The diverse existing initiatives must be coordinated so as to converge on this clear goal. The international nature of research implies that this transformation will be achieved on a truly global scale only through a consensus of the world's most eminent research organizations. All the indications are that the money already invested in the research publishing system is sufficient to enable a transformation that will be sustainable for the future. There needs to be a shared understanding that the money currently locked in the journal subscription system must be withdrawn and re-purposed for open access publishing services. The current library acquisition budgets are the ultimate reservoir for enabling the transformation without financial or other risks. The goal is to preserve the established service levels provided by publishers that are still requested by researchers, while redefining and reorganizing the necessary payment streams. By disrupting the underlying business model, the viability of journal publishing can be preserved and put on a solid footing for the scholarly developments of the future.

In other words, this isn't about "disrupting" at all: it's about *handing publishers huge assured revenue streams by ~~robbing~~ grabbing the acquisitions budgets of libraries*. It's the other paper referenced in Brembs' essay just above, and other than making the case that what's being paid for journals will pay for journals, it hardly seems worth reading further.

Having read enough of it to be sure it really was saying "if we **take** all the money libraries spend on journals and just hand it to the journal publishers, it will be enough...for now," I gave up. For this we need white papers?

Of course, the trick here—other than Brembs' likely outcome—is that, at least in the U.S., *it's not possible* for any agency to say "we'll just take the acquisitions budgets from all the academic libraries, public and private, and divert it directly to publishers." That's a good thing.

Apparently—I'll get back to that next—these authors are not only demonstrating that water is wet, they're arguing for the *necessity* of grabbing all the acquisitions budgets (OK, only the vast majority that goes for

journals) and handing it directly to publishers. That does not make me like the paper better; it does make me appreciate decentralized higher education systems more.

A study justifying waste of tax-funds?

That's Björn Brembs' opinion of the Max Planck Society paper, as he discusses in [this April 29, 2015 piece](#) at *The Winnower* (which, like most *Winnower* articles I've encountered, has had zero post-publication reviews—but then it's not intended to be a scholarly article).

He notes that the study does find that you could flip the whole operation with no more money “and keep the publishing industry alive,” but he isn't happy with the proposed solution. I'm going to quote the rest of his post, including comments from one of the authors, in full (yes, it's CC BY):

Over 15 years ago, the US government (via the NIH) helped Brazil develop an incredibly successful publishing model, [SciELO](#). It has since spread, with many other countries all over the globe joining. In their now roughly 900 journals, SciELO publishes peer-reviewed papers, fully open-access at an [average cost](#) of US\$90 per article. [Recently](#), these figures have been confirmed with numbers from the NIH's open access repository [PubMedCentral](#), where such costs come to lie around US\$50 per article. Thus, publishing fully open access with all the features known from commercial publishers clocks in at below US\$100 per article. This we already knew before this study. Why was there a study needed, that shows that we can also get such universal open access for up to 100 times the price of PMC/SciELO? Is the survival of the publishing industry really worth up to US\$9.9b in subsidies every year? What value do publishers add, that could possibly be worth the annual bill of 9.9 billion in virtually any currency?

The authors emphasize that “Whether calculated as mean or median, however, the average APC index will never be dictated by the high-end values.” This may of course be financially relevant for the tax-payer in the short-term, but in the long-term the tax-payer will also be interested in whether the science they fund is reliable: is publicly funded science a good bang for the buck? If we only were to convert to this ‘gold’ OA model and left everything else virtually unchanged, the situation for the reliability and hence credibility of publicly funded science would be even worse than it is [today](#). As outlined in [detail elsewhere](#), high-ranking journals argue that their APCs will come to lie around US\$50,000 per article. While this may indeed not change the average cost to the taxpayer with currently in excess of 30,000 journals, it will mean that in addition to knowing the professional editor and, if needed, fake your data, you then also would have to be rich (or work at a rich institution) in order to publish in a venue that helps secure a job in

science. Given that these journals [publish the least reliable science](#), this would be the one single scenario I could imagine, that would be even worse for science than the *status quo*.

The authors also do not mention that the large majority of open access journals (including Max Planck Society's very own eLife) do not charge any APCs at all (an issue already raised by [Peter Suber](#)). It is not clear from the study if articles published in these journals have been counted at all. If not, their costs are overestimating the actual costs by a significant factor.

Thus, as I see it, this is a study that at best serves no real purpose, at worst constitutes a disservice to science by suggesting such a transition would even be desirable, when it clearly is not. I have asked one of the co-authors of the study, [Kai Geschuhn](#) to comment on my criticisms. You can find her reply below, I'll leave it uncommented:

Like it or not, offsetting subscription costs against publication fees still isn't the common understanding of how to finance open access. With this study, we didn't want to raise the question whether scientific publishing should cost US\$50, US\$100 or US\$5,000 per article. The aim rather was to show that the transition to open access is feasible already. The figures presented in the paper relate current subscription costs to scientific article outputs on different levels (global, national, and institutional) in order to show that there is enough money in the system to finance all of these articles. While this is obvious to you, it is often not to libraries which usually expect the open access transition to become even more expensive. This misconception is mostly due to the assumption, that the total number of publications from an institution or a country would have to be financed. We suggest calculating with articles from corresponding authors only, which usually leads to a reduction of up to 50% of the total amount.

After ten years of debate, we finally need to agree upon a realizable first step. We believe that offsetting budgets actually is key to this so we have to start the calculation.

I don't feel the need to comment further.

Sharing costs, not flipping them, best bet for Open Access

So says Elizabeth Yates in [this May 11, 2015 post](#) at *LibraryWriteHer*. The lede:

A new white paper from the Max Planck Digital Library makes the interesting – but misguided – suggestion that the costs of subscription scholarly journals should be flipped to cover Open Access article processing charges.

After summarizing the paper, she suggests that it involves a “pretty simplistic projection given the sheer variability of scholarly journals,” notes

that most OA journals don't charge fees, and points to Brembs' notes about SciELO's low costs as a model.

She also points to the Open Library of the Humanities as a better model:

While SciELO focuses on sciences, the humanities are also creating an innovative Open Access platform via the [Open Library of Humanities](#) (OLH). Instead of levying publishing fees on authors, this model distributes costs across a consortium of library members who pay a membership fee. Fees are charges according to institutional size – a common practice for libraries who purchase consortial licences for subscription resources. Brock, for example, would pay \$1,000 annually to join – vastly cheaper than the thousands we currently spend on paywall humanities journals. Since its financial launch in January 2015, 40 libraries in the U.K., Canada and the U.S. have signed up to support the platform, which expects to launch the OLH Megajournal in September.

There is much to like about this model, especially the absence of APCs and the banding approach to cost sharing across institutions. This kind of innovative, big-picture approach—coupled with the expertise of libraries—presents a far more promising future for Open Access.

I'm not so thrilled about One Great Humanities Megajournal to Publish Them All, but OLH as a funding and production platform for humanities journals does appear promising.

The Global Gold Open Access “Flip”: A Realistic Plan or Magical Thinking?

It's not hard to guess which answer David Crotty believes to be correct, in [this September 24, 2015 post](#) at *the scholarly kitchen*—and I find it a little maddening because, while I frequently find Crotty disagreeable, I agree with him on this occasion.

Crotty works for a scholarly publisher, and it shows, but in this case I think he has it right. To the extent that the study just cited is actually *advocating* for such a global change and suggesting that it's not only financially feasible but realistically possible, I think “magical thinking” may be an appropriate term. Crotty offers a number of reasons why that's so, and you don't have to agree with all of the reasons to see the problem with “let's just change *everything*” as a realistic solution to, well, *anything*.

Much of what Crotty says here is simply good sense, especially given the reality of higher education. For example:

Much of the drive toward a flip is based in the EU and the UK, where public higher education is highly centralized at the national level. This creates the notion that there exists a global pool of funds that could be diverted away from subscriptions and toward OA fees. But the difficulties in coordinating action between self-interested parties becomes even

more evident when one thinks about how libraries are funded and subscriptions are paid for in the US, still the major producer of scholarly articles worldwide.

I frequently ask US librarians where their subscription budget comes from and the responses vary widely, but the most common answers are tuition, student fees and some portion of grant overheads. Because tuition and student fees are collected by individual institutions, there's no big pool of funds that can be diverted centrally from one purpose to another. Such a flip would massively increase the financial burden on productive institutions, while freeing non-productive institution from any responsibility in funding research access.

If I'm running a small teaching school and can save money by cancelling subscriptions, my Dean is going to be much more interested in spending our students' tuition fees on our students, rather than sending that money off to Harvard to help their poor professors publish papers.

Here are the final two paragraphs. I agree with the first; I find the first part of the second to be typical publisher pablum, but then I would, wouldn't I, since *my* access (as a member of The Great Unwashed) sure isn't improving at any great rate.

Magical thinking in the guise of objective analysis does no one any good. For those looking for real-world, practical ways to improve access to knowledge, it sets up unrealistic expectations; OA efforts based on such unrealistic assumptions will inevitably fail. That hurts everyone—advocates, publishers and readers alike—all of whom will have to deal with the unintended consequences of any policies based on flawed research.

Access to the research literature continues to improve. Every day, more people can access more information than the day before. The problems haven't all been solved yet, by any means, but the progress currently in evidence is a good thing. There are all kinds of interesting experiments going on throughout the scholarly communications world, new business models, new ways of publishing research. Let's continue to experiment and find new ways of improving what we do, driving real world progress rather than hoping for magical overnight solutions.

Sometimes posts on this blog catch fire in the comments; this was one of those times, with 53 comments that involve much more text than the original article. Are the comments enlightening? Yes, in terms of various people's attitudes, including those of the Planck study's authors. Otherwise, not so much.

STM Association Response to the Max Planck Digital Library White Paper on the Open Access Transition

This unsigned piece [appeared December 15, 2015](#) at *STM Publishing News*—and it's surprisingly clear in its “ever higher APCs for everybody!”

assertions. Since I'm clearly biased, I suggest you read the piece yourself and draw your own conclusions. However...

Amusing but not important: the lead sentence, starting "The STM association has read with interest the Max Planck DL...paper..." Who knew an association was capable of reading? But never mind...

Adoption of Gold OA models also varies significantly by discipline. Gold OA has been most enthusiastically adopted in the biomedical sciences where there is both widespread researcher support and an infrastructure of funders willing to support APCs. This is a good area on which to focus since this is a sizeable field of academic publishing. The picture is very different in other areas, especially those not commonly funded as generously as the sciences. For researchers without such resources to fall back on, the discretionary funds of their institution may be the only source. This has made the prospect of Gold open access more challenging for many researchers in social sciences, humanities and the arts.

In 2014, just under 100,000 articles in the humanities and social sciences appeared in gold OA journals—but, of course, it's true that most of those journals (and most of those articles) did not involve APCs, unlike biomed. Is this really about OA adoption (that is, is 99,771 really a substantially lower percentage of all HSS articles than 176,898 is of all biomed articles) or is it about APCs?

The speed of transition has been overestimated. Data from the STM Report 2015 [http://www.stmassoc.org/2015_02_20_STM_Report_2015.pdf] shows that in the last 10 years Gold OA articles have increased from about 3% to 13% of the total produced each year.

I'll assert that the STM report is incomplete or wrong; if gold OA was only 13% of the total in 2014, then there had to have been roughly 3.7 million total articles in 2014, and I find that very hard to believe. (On the other hand, you could read a growth from 3% to 13% over ten years as suggesting that 56% of scholarly articles could be gold OA in 2024, which would be wonderful but perhaps unlikely.)

The MPDL median APC figure of €2000 does not reflect the current mixed market of mainly subscription based resources and is too low for a 100% Gold universe. The MPDL estimate of €2000 as a median APC is much lower than the €2495 estimated by the Wellcome Trust. MPDL advocates retaining existing journals with the current level of service, but the model needs to account for the associated costs. Many hybrid journals, whose APCs are accounted for in the Wellcome Trust estimate, have higher costs because they are more selective than the sound science journals that dominate the fully-OA market. In an 100% Gold universe, APCs would also need to cover the significant infrastructure costs currently sustained by subscriptions.

There it is: the claim that APCs don't actually cover the costs. Those poor struggling STM publishers are actually subsidizing OA, apparently.

What this says to me is that the STM association will (continue to) be an enormous stumbling block on the road to any workable and financially feasible OA future. That comes as no surprise.

(There may be more items related to this Grand Flipping Scheme later in this roundup, e.g., in the "Costs" section.)

The End of Journals

[This editorial](#) by Harlan M. Krumholz appears in the November 2015 *Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes*, and while the journal itself is paywalled, the editorial is freely available.

For hundreds of years, medical journals have served as arbiters of the quality of medical research. But the traditional peer-reviewed publication model is fraying. The hierarchical gateway to publication, historically in the hands of experts, is at odds with the ubiquitous democratization of data and information in the 21st century. The impending revolution in the approach to evaluate and disseminate scientific findings is not an indictment of the talent, intentions, or products of editors and reviewers, but rather a response to a model that simply may have run its course given societal and technological change.

That's the first paragraph of a three-page PDF; I won't quote more of it directly, but it's clear that Krumholz is not lamenting a situation but considering what's wrong with the current journal model. He sees *at least* nine deficiencies: the current publication process is too slow, too expensive, too limited, too unreliable, too focused on the wrong metrics, too powerful, too parochial, too static, and too dependent on a flawed business model.

Those are the subheads; each one is followed by one or more paragraphs, all clearly written and saying a *lot* about journals as they now stand. Krumholz concludes:

We have arrived at the juncture where medicine and science need new vehicles for the dissemination of knowledge. These new approaches will enable us to separate the wheat from the chaff in order to better serve the public. The question for all of us in medical publishing—and for those who consume medical knowledge—is how that would best be accomplished in a new world that is flat, digital, and transparent.

OK, so this isn't about flipping so much as abandoning, which is also Brembs' stated goal: an entirely new system of communicating scholarly research that frees it from the bounds of journals.

Well worth reading in any case.

DE GRUYTER—Traditional Scholarly Publisher’s Shift Towards Open Access. *The Facts Behind the Numbers*

This piece—with two bar graphs and a relatively small amount of text—is by Witold Kieńć and appeared [October 23, 2015](#) at OpenScience.com. I suppose it’s misplaced, because it’s not so much about flipping as about shifting.

The first bar graph shows article publication totals for De Gruyter (“hybrid” journals) and De Gruyter Open (gold OA journals, many without APCs) since 2011. In 2011, there were almost twice as many articles in “hybrid” journals as in OA journals; in 2014, with both groups growing rapidly, the OA side was essentially equal to the subscription side—and in 2015 De Gruyter estimated that the Open side would outnumber the “hybrid” side.

De Gruyter’s pretty clear that “hybrid” journals have very few OA articles—typically no more than 2% to 3% at most. In fact, De Gruyter’s established a “no double dipping” policy that’s really a “*not much* double dipping” policy: if “hybrid” journals reach 5% OA articles, subscription prices will be lowered proportionally.

In terms of journal count, the Open side has already taken over: 544 gold OA journals to 290 “hybrid” journals. In a quick check as of December 8, 2015, DOAJ shows 221 De Gruyter Open journals, of which only 25 charge APCs. It’s fair to assume that a lot more journals are in the DOAJ queue, sometimes involving changes of publisher.

Four subscription journals to flip to fee-free OA with the OLH in January 2016

This [November 27, 2015 item](#) appears on the *OLH Blog* (OLH being the Open Library of Humanities in this case). I’m noting it as a recent example of journal flipping—noting that one journal involved (not a flip so much as a new journal) will be discussed at considerably greater length in the next section of this article.

I’ve had trouble wrapping my head around OLH and its model, but its dedication to fee-free gold OA (funded by an international consortium of libraries) is at least promising (and, of course, **fee-free** is the standard model in the humanities and, to a lesser degree, the social sciences).

There’s not a lot more to say here: it’s an announcement—and in this case, three of the four journals will have *external* funding, which should be true for any number of potential OLH journals.

Lingua Glossa

From the general to the specific: a new case of something that’s happened a few times in the past, when the editors of a subscription journal rebel and, in the process, wind up creating a new journal. This time, the new journal will be a no-fee gold OA journal—and this time, the old journal

was from Elsevier. Well, “is,” I guess: it’s not shutting down, any more than the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* disappeared after *portal* began. It’s a fast-building story: all the items in this group date from a three-week period.

Language of Protest

Start with Scott Jaschik’s story [on November 2, 2015](#) at *Inside Higher Ed* (as usual for *IHE*, the web title is different than this story headline).

All six editors and all 31 editorial board members of *Lingua*, one of the top journals in linguistics, last week resigned to protest Elsevier’s policies on pricing and its refusal to convert the journal to an open-access publication that would be free online. As soon as January, when the departing editors’ noncompete contracts expire, they plan to start a new open-access journal to be called *Glossa*.

The editors and editorial board members quit, they say, after telling Elsevier of the frustrations of libraries reporting that they could not afford to subscribe to the journal and in some cases couldn’t even figure out what it would cost to subscribe. Prices quoted on the Elsevier website suggest that an academic library in the United States with a total student and faculty full-time equivalent number of around 10,000 would pay \$2,211 for shared online access, and \$1,966 for a print copy.

That’s the opening (I love the clause beginning “and in some cases”). There’s quite a bit more, including comments from the editor (who will give up compensation of €5,000 or around \$5,500 and notes that he could make more money per hour flipping burgers).

The editorial board members are apparently suggesting similar moves by others—and suggesting that linguists *not* take the positions they’ll be offered by Elsevier. One scholar, Stefan Müller, may have gone a little overboard:

“You may be flattered by the offer of Elsevier but think twice: the good reputation of the journal was built by researchers like us. This reputation is now transferred to the new journal,” he wrote. “If you work for Elsevier you are basically doing harm to your community and you will not profit from the reputation of the journal since it is gone now and Elsevier as such has a rather bad reputation because of the ways in which they act commercially and in terms of copyrights I would not hire anybody who did something like that and I would object in any search committee I am involved in.”

Also comments from the executive director of the Linguistic Society of America, not directly involved in this discussion. Notably, library access to that society’s flagship journal, *Language*, costs about \$300.

Quite a few comments, at least one of them calling Müller’s last sentence “chilling.” Muller responds by pointing to the [full list message](#).

Public Universities Back Protest of Elsevier Pricing

Also *Inside Higher Ed*, but a day later ([November 3, 2015](#)) and without a byline. It's mostly portions of a [statement](#) from Peter McPherson, president of the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, supporting the mass resignation. Quoting directly from that statement:

“APLU appreciates the decision of the editors and editorial board members of Elsevier’s journal, *Lingua*, to resign and form a new publication intended to disseminate scholarly work at a lower cost. It is time to further test less expensive modes for scholarly communication...

“As publishers have merged and become more powerful, universities are often paying more for publishers’ mark-ups. The federal government makes massive investments in researchers, staff, and facilities to advance knowledge; publishers do not. Universities similarly make big investments in research. University faculty generally are the authors, editors, and reviewers of the articles coming out of that research. To get their articles published, faculty usually must transfer significant copyrights to the publishers. Then the publishers sell back to the universities the very content they as a group produced, and at steadily higher subscription prices. The system is fundamentally broken...

“While we do not know all the details of *Lingua*’s particular case, it’s abundantly clear that the frustrations of its editors and editorial board are widespread. Scholars, librarians, and university administrators are committed to the free exchange of ideas and information and a growing number find that dissemination of knowledge is being significantly hampered. In a day and age when the public can get information from seemingly unlimited sources, the world of academic publishing has been more consolidated into a limited number of tightly controlled channels.”

The comments are worth reading.

*Addressing the resignation of the *Lingua* editorial board*

Elsevier responded in [this November 4, 2015](#) “corporate commentary” by Tom Reller at *Elsevier Connect*.

Elsevier’s “few facts to clarify some misconceptions”:

- The editors of *Lingua* wanted for Elsevier to transfer ownership of the journal to the collective of editors at no cost. Elsevier cannot agree to this as we have invested considerable amount of time, money and other resources into making it a respected journal in its field. We founded *Lingua* 66 years ago.
- *Lingua* is a hybrid open access journal which means that every author who wants to publish open access (i.e., free-of-charge for the reader), can do so. However, we have observed little uptake of the open access

option in *Lingua* or elsewhere in linguistics at price points that would be economically viable.

- The article publishing charge at *Lingua* for open access articles is 1800 USD. The editors had requested a price of 400 euros, an APC that is not sustainable. Had we made the journal open access only and at the suggested price point, it would have rendered the journal no longer viable – something that would serve nobody, least of which the linguistics community.

You *could* reword part of that last sentence as “no longer viable given Elsevier’s profit margin and cost structures,” but that would be mean. Reller also points out that Elsevier expects to receive 1.2 million article submissions in 2015 and publish 400,000 of them—which, as one of the 27 comments point out, has *nothing* to do with the situation at hand. Other comments point out that Elsevier acquired *Lingua* in the 1990s: the company did *not* create the journal. The comments in general are interesting.

Clarifying a few facts for Elsevier and their response to Lingua

Martin Paul Eve posted this [on November 5, 2015](#) on his blog; it’s a direct response to the Elsevier statement. I’ll set aside the first “fact” (Reller fixed his post after complaints) and the second one (which boils down to a Reller claim that, when one company buys another one, it gets to claim the other company’s history as its own, an unusual approach to history). Looking at the key “fact”:

[W]hen Elsevier claims that price points below their current level are not “sustainable” I feel the urge to point out that Elsevier would say that and they are using the argument that “what the market will bear” is the acceptable price point. They did, of course, make \$1.1 billion profit in 2012 on a 36% profit rate. They have just established (correction: leased) new offices in the UK that include [basketball courts for their staff](#), even as our university budgets here face a forecasted cut of 40%. So they may have a different idea, in the mind of shareholders, as to what “sustainable” actually means. I define it as: covering labour, technological and business costs necessary to publishing on a not-for-profit/charitable basis. Not paying for Elsevier to play basketball on our time.

On the other hand, though, a number of Elsevier journals *do* have APCs [at around \\$1,100.00](#) (~£713.47). As above, Elsevier had [a 37% profit margin in 2014](#). If you take that profit margin off the Hybrid APC that they are charging on journals like “Habitat International”, “Cities”, and others you end up at ~£449.49 per article, which is not so far off the *Lingua* figure...

There’s more, and it’s all well-stated, ending with this: “what is ‘sustainable’ for Elsevier is unsustainable for universities.”

Elsevier Battle Escalates

Scott Jaschik's back at *Inside Higher Ed* with [this November 6, 2015 followup](#) looking at Elsevier's statement. Much of it recounts (briefly and well) what's already here, but there's also more "clarification" from Elsevier and this comment from the academic who first complained about Elsevier's claim to have founded *Lingua*:

Rooryck said in an interview that the fight over who founded the journal reinforces his views on the importance of scholars insisting on new publishing models. He said "legally," Elsevier did buy North Holland, but "intellectually" it was wrong to claim that Elsevier created the journal, just as it's wrong for the company to have so much control over how knowledge is distributed.

"They cannot claim that they have founded the journal at all," he said. "The idea was entirely that of the two linguists The larger issue here of course is that they seem to claim intellectual ownership of achievements that they facilitated at best."

An odd brief set of comments, although I rather like this one from Stan Dubinsky:

This must mean that Delta Airlines founded Northwest Airlines. I'll bet they (Delta) had never considered that.

Parsing Elsevier: Lingua and Open Access

"BeerBrarian" Jacob Berg posted this [on November 5, 2015](#) at *BeerBrarian*, also looking at Elsevier's statement and Eve's response. Without repeating stuff that's already been covered, Berg includes a table of 2012 profit margins for various corporations (with Elsevier and Wiley having even higher margins than Apple, and Springer just slightly lower), pokes at some other statements, and ends with this:

Elsevier is more than entitled to make a profit, which includes happy and productive employees that can [exercise on the job](#), but sustainability is a two-way street. There are ways to make money in strictly open access environments that academic librarians should invite them to explore, such as "generating better metadata for... open access items; designing stronger, more relevant search functionalities; and creating attractive and user-friendly platforms." ([Source](#))

Per usual, when discussing issues of open access, faculty are barely present. So long as faculty cannot or do not or refuse to recognize the political economy of scholarly communication, the longer it will remain a moral hazard in which they are immune to its costs. If it is professionally and personally possible, academic librarians should initiate these conversations with faculty and academic administration. That means you, tenured librarians. To colleges and universities that employ

scholarly communications librarians and help them succeed: thank you.

Worth reading.

What a Mass Exodus at a Linguistics Journal Means for Scholarly Publishing

Since much of what's in [this November 5, 2015 report](#) by Ellen Wexler at *The Chronicle of Higher Education* has already been covered (and since I never know when *CHE* articles might disappear behind a paywall), I might have omitted it—except that Wexler quotes one of my heroes in the library field:

Academics are concerned about the high costs of subscriptions to journals. Sometimes it is a challenge for them to decipher how much the subscriptions cost because publishers have bundled them for sale as package deals or imposed complicated pricing schemes.

“That kind of intentional obfuscation on the part of the publishers has to stop,” said Jenica P. Rogers, director of libraries at the State University of New York at Potsdam.

Ms. Rogers is an open-access advocate, and two years ago she [spoke out against](#) the American Chemical Society's journal pricing. She wasn't surprised by the conflict at *Lingua*, and she said that companies like Elsevier need to lower their expectations when it comes to profit margins if they expect university libraries to keep buying their products.

“More and more libraries are hitting a crisis point,” she said.

Even at institutions that have traditionally been able to afford expensive subscriptions, she added, libraries are being forced to make hard decisions because the ownership of journals is being concentrated in fewer hands. Early this year, for instance, Macmillan Science and Education, publisher of the journal *Nature*, merged with Springer Science+Business Media.

“As we consolidate the market like this,” Ms. Rogers said, “I no longer have a choice.”

Nearly a hundred comments, some of them interesting, some from various pseudonyms that tend to have a similar tone (and almost sound as though they could originate in Colorado), with gems of wisdom such as “OA is an attack on academia masquerading as ‘help’.”

Elsevier Mutiny: Cracks Are Widening in the Fortress of Academic Publishing

What may be most noteworthy about [this November 2, 2015 story](#) by Mathew Ingram is where it appeared: at *Fortune*. I'm not *entirely* sure what

a photo clearly taken at UC Berkeley has to do with the story, but never mind.

Not really much to say about the relatively brief story, except maybe that I don't see the two-paragraph plug for Academia.edu (a for-profit site that shouldn't be allowed to use that top level domain) as being particularly relevant, especially since there's not much said about *real* open access initiatives.

Open Access and the Power of Editorial Boards: Why Elsevier Plays Hardball with Deviant Linguists

A very different country heard from: [a November 7, 2015 post](#) at *governance across borders*. It's an unusual take (somewhat dismissive of OA in general), but perhaps worth reading. The first two and final paragraphs:

The [recent infight](#) between the world's largest academic publishing company, Elsevier, and (soon: former) editors of one of their journals over attempts to make the journal [open access](#) – that is, freely available online – demonstrates the potential power of editorial boards in shaping the digital future of academic publishing.

The academic publishing system runs on reputation. Researchers gain reputation by publishing in reputable journals, which are more read and cited than other journals. The better the reputation of a journal, the more prestigious is it to review and serve as a member of the editorial board. Of course, the related reputation dynamic is self-stabilizing and highly path dependent because prestigious journals get more submissions, have higher rejection rates, more prestigious authors and reviewers, all of which contributes to being cited more often, which in turn is the key reputation metric in most disciplines (see a [paper by Jakob Kapeller and myself](#) on this issue for the field of economics)...

All in all, the whole episode shows that editors and editorial boards may be the best lever for moving academic publishing towards open access. It is them and not the publishing houses that possess the prestige that makes academic journals important and precious. For the overwhelming majority of journals, publisher's reputation does not matter – and in the case of Elsevier, it would be an increasingly bad reputation anyway.

“Deviant linguists” is an interesting way to put it (and possibly another good name for a rock band)—and whether Elsevier is the largest academic publisher probably depends on your definitions; Pearson is much larger, but not primarily a *journal* publisher.

[Lingua](#) is dead. Long live [Glossa](#)!

So say Eric Baković and Kai von Fintel in [this November 8, 2015 post](#) at *Language Log*. The post includes a bunch of links to various items on this event (some discussed here, some not) and is followed by an odd group of

comments. It includes some calls for community actions (support *Glossa* and don't support what they're calling *Zombie Lingua*) and other possible actions. There's also this about Elsevier's insistence (legally correct, of course) that it owns the name *Lingua* and will just go find new editors:

This is why the new journal will be called *Glossa*, but in the eyes of the community it is the rightful continuation of *Lingua*. Elsevier will try to start their own new journal, which they will name *Lingua*, usurping a name that has a lot of associated goodwill because of the hard work of the editors over many decades. We view this move as disingenuous and deceitful, and as a disservice to the field. The alternative name *Zombie Lingua* for the Elsevier project has been proposed, and we hope it will stick.

More Support for 'Lingua' Editors

A relatively brief [November 13, 2015 report](#) by Carl Straumsheim at *Inside Higher Ed*, noting statements in support of the editors from ARL and others, and a sort of non-statement from AAU. There's also stuff from Elsevier's Brad Fenwick:

"Publishers, whether for profit or not for profit, aren't the enemy here," Fenwick said. The challenge, he added, is shrinking funding for higher education and libraries, which he said is creating "misplaced aggression" toward companies such as Elsevier.

Despite more organizations coming out in support of the *Lingua* editors, Fenwick said he has yet to hear of any organization or library canceling Elsevier subscriptions.

There's the answer: provide *lots more money* for libraries to fork over to Elsevier, and get over that "misplaced aggression." A handful of comments, including one in which Sandy Thatcher seems more clearly anti-OA than usual and one from Jeffrey Beall, who rather than addressing the topic does an *ad hominem* on ARL, calling it a "toll-access periodical publisher," which as far as I can tell is simply not true. ARL does charge for some monographs but not, I believe, for its periodicals.

Whose Journal is This, Anyway?

Speaking of library heroes...here's Barbara Fister [on November 13, 2015](#) in "Library Babel Fish" at *Inside Higher Ed*. It's a typical Fister column in that my temptation is just to say "Here. [Go read this](#). Pay attention to it."

But I suppose that's a copout. Fister focuses on a question indirectly raised in the conversations about the event: "wait, who really owns this thing?"

From an intellectual property standpoint, Elsevier owns the journal—not just the brand, but also the copyright of most of the content that has

been published under its name. [A commentary](#) from the company suggests that it's pretty cheeky to ask it to transfer ownership of a journal they founded to the journal's editors and board. Critics quickly pointed out that Elsevier didn't found *Lingua*, it acquired the journal when it bought out North Holland in the 1990s. They weren't persuaded by Elsevier's claim that "when we acquire a publishing company, we embrace and adopt its history."

Timothy Gower, who [kicked off](#) the [Elsevier boycott](#), calls the Elsevier statement "[facepalmish](#)," but regardless of who founded the journal, it's pretty indisputable that the publisher requires authors to transfer copyright to Elsevier unless the author pays \$1,800 to make their work open access. In that case, the author retains the copyright, paired with a Creative Commons license.

So okay, Elsevier owns both the brand and copyright to most of the articles. So it owns the journal, right?

Well . . . a linguist who cheers the insurrection [describes the situation differently](#). He says that as the scholars whose editorial work guided the journal depart, Elsevier will start a new *Lingua*, recruiting an entirely new team to run it. He calls this a Zombie *Lingua* and argues that the real journal will carry on the tradition. In his view, if you are looking for *Lingua*, don't turn to Elsevier, as their version will be a hollow husk of a brand name. He's not alone. A number of scholars writing about this controversy say Elsevier will start a new journal that happens to be named *Lingua*. In this view, it's the people involved in the editorial work of the journal who own it regardless of any picayune legal claims.

Fister reminds us of the Research Works Act and its seeming assertion that publication itself *was* the research—and of the furor when SAGE changed the focus of a journal over the objections of its editors.

There's more (including an interesting link between Uber and Elsevier). It's good. Go read it.

Read the comments as well.

PolEcon of OA Publishing: What are the assets of a journal?

Cameron Neylon weighed in [on November 19, 2015](#) at *Science in the Open*. He was doing a series on the political economics of publishing (most of which won't be covered in this roundup), and found it appropriate to discuss this issue.

It's a thoughtful discussion, one I could certainly quote in full (it's CCO, as you'd expect from Neylon), but I think you should go to the original. I'll quote the first paragraph, but that just begins the discussion:

The resignation of the editorial board of *Lingua* from the (Elsevier owned) journal to form a new journal, that is intended to really be "the

same journal” raises interesting issues of ownership and messaging. Perhaps even more deeply it raises questions of what the real assets of a journal are. The mutual incomprehension on both sides really arises from very different views of what a journal is and therefore of what the assets are, who controls them, and who owns them. The views of the publisher and the editorial board are so incommensurate as to be almost comical. The views, and more importantly the actions, of the group that really matters, the community that underlies the journal, remains to be seen. I will argue that it is that community that is the most important asset of the strange composite object that is “the journal” and that it is control of that asset that determines how these kinds of process (for as many have noted this is hardly the first time this has happened) play out.

Go read the rest—and this is probably a good place to end the section.

Various Issues

Does that sound more organized than “Miscellany”?

The squatter strategy

The Library Loon wrote this [on December 4, 2013](#) at *Gavia Libraria*. It’s a case where I almost have to quote the whole damn thing or basically just point you to it—or maybe quote the first two paragraphs and refer you to the original for the rest:

The Loon has been predicting for quite a while that as library budgets crack under their current strains, big toll-access journal publishers would start decommissioning low-prestige, duplicative, fringe journals to save on overhead.

... but it keeps on stolidly *not happening*. The Loon is ready to call it a failed hypothesis. Why did it fail, though, and what is actually happening? The Loon doesn’t know; let us by all means be clear about that. She is beginning to formulate an alternate hypothesis, however, and wouldn’t mind sharper minds than hers considering it.

The Loon offers the evidence—*new* subscription journals even from major publishers, no evidence that the new journals arise from scholarly demand, continued buyouts of independent and small publishers by big ones, mergers, more “we’ll go gold for the right money” from big publishers, etc.

The Loon makes a compelling case as to what’s going on and how libraries could deal with it.

Journal Articles: Who’s Going to Pay for Them?

I find this discussion, [on April 1, 2013](#) (a coincidental date) at *AMSTAT-News*, interesting enough to include here, although without a lot of discussion.

Basically, the American Statistical Association publishes a number of journals, with subscriptions handled by Taylor & Francis; members (\$175/year in most cases) receive them as part of membership (most of them only online).

The society says subscriptions are “relatively inexpensive,” but doesn’t list prices. I looked up the first six of 15 or so, and came up with a *personal* total of \$1,429 per year just for those six; as is far too often the case, institutional prices require contact and a quote, and it’s fair to assume that they’re a whole bunch less “relatively inexpensive.”

The journals have a fairly typical green OA policy; if I read it correctly, only preprint versions can be deposited and there’s a year embargo. Naturally, the journals are also “hybrid,” with a peculiar and perhaps misleading statement about the charges:

Finally, ASA authors may choose to make their own articles open access by paying a fee to the publisher. This fee is similar to that charged by other open access journals, such as the [PloS series](#).

Of course, PLoS does not *have* hybrid journals, and only one of the journals has a moderate (certainly not cheap!) APC, so I’m going to assume that we’re talking \$3,000 or so.

The society is following NIH rules, of course, and calls the one-year embargo “a compromise, attempting to balance the needs of science with the needs of publishers, including professional societies.” The statement earlier makes clear that subscription revenues are “an important source of revenue for the association”—later saying it would have to raise dues *at least* \$110 per year if it went full OA without APCs. Which makes this sentence a little tricky:

Revenue from subscriptions has historically been expected to cover the cost of the publications and a little more, providing resources for the association to fulfill other aspects of its mission.

Not stated: how much of that cost has to do with print distribution, subscription handling and other things that go away with online-only OA.

Here’s the thing: the statement does *not* falsely assert that all OA has to be based on APC; it *does* suggest some alternatives; and it’s looking for feedback rather than damning OA advocates. That makes it an interesting (and useful) statement.

Particle-physics papers set free

Richard Van Noorden wrote this piece on [January 7, 2014](#) in *Nature News*, and I’m including it even though I haven’t really been following SCOAP³ (although it pops up from time to time).

January sees the start of what has been billed as the largest-scale open-access initiative ever built: an international effort to switch the entire field of particle physics to open-access publishing.

But the initiative, organized by CERN, Europe's high-energy physics laboratory near Geneva in Switzerland, has not yet fulfilled its dream—it currently covers only a little more than half of published particle-physics papers.

The scheme's scope was slashed in the summer when the field's largest journal, *Physical Review D*, pulled out, although its publisher, the American Physical Society (APS), did agree to publish papers on experiments at CERN's Large Hadron Collider on an open-access basis without charging author fees.

And as the starting gun sounded, a number of US libraries, including those of Stanford University in California and Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, declined to pay into the system.

That's the start of what strikes me as a well-written discussion of what's going on here. Basically, it's an organized flip: librarians stop paying for certain journals (or pay reduced prices in some cases)—but the publishers get the money anyway because an assured APC is roughly what they were getting in subscriptions. It moves funding from individual research grants to libraries.

Freeloading is obviously an issue, as is long-term viability, especially when the biggest journal opts out. Pardon me if I'm a *wee bit* cautious about this sentence:

But in three years' time, contracts may be renegotiated, so open-access fees might go down.

They *could*. Health care costs could go down too. So far, that doesn't seem like the way to bet.

What Times Square can teach us about open access

Oddly enough, [this April 20, 2015 piece](#) at *Elsevier Connect* is not a vaguely bizarre apology by an Elsevier official: it's by Roy S. Kaufman, who works for the Copyright Clearance Center.

My office is located at Broadway and 43rd Street in Manhattan. For my morning coffee, the Starbucks across Broadway offers 78 combinations of coffee, cow's milk and sugar. A large cappuccino costs \$4.45, which is the same price as the Starbucks on the corner where I live. Seven miles away, in Jackson Heights, Queens, the large cappuccino costs \$4.25.

If I do not want to cross Broadway, which usually involves being accosted by six adults dressed as Elmo, I can cut across 43rd Street to a fancy sandwich shop, for (slightly) fewer combinations of coffee, cow's

milk and sugar, at slightly lower costs. Alternatively, if I don't want to cross the street, I can choose among fewer options at still lower prices from a food cart on my corner, also known as "man in a can" coffee.

So what does my daily coffee run have to do with open access?

Well, you see, journal publishing was "business-to-business" because publishers were selling to libraries, which in Kaufman's view are businesses. But with OA—and, *of course*, as far as Kaufman (and I'd guess CCC) is concerned, if it's OA, authors must be paying APCs—the model becomes "business to consumer" where *the author is the consumer*.

Kaufman starts from there—redefining libraries as businesses and all OA as being APC-based—to offer "five lessons": there's no single answer, brands matter (and don't), and so on.

I won't list all five. It's an amusing article, and certainly implies that cost-effective OA publishing is "generic" and probably very little—and that publishers will come up with all sorts of ways to get authors to pay *even more* by making them feel special.

No additional comment. And, interestingly, no additional comments either.

Advice for journal-publishing academic societies

This one comes from Ross Mounce [on August 2, 2015](#) at *A blog by Ross Mounce*. He begins by noting an announcement: the Ecological Society of America moving its journals to John Wiley & Sons.

Whilst I think the decision to move away from their old, unloved publishing platform is a good one. The move to publish their journals with Wiley is a strategically poor one. In this post I shall explain my reasoning and some of the widespread dissatisfaction with the direction of this change.

He notes the stated goals of ESA (improving communication among ecologists, raising public awareness, increasing resources and ensuring appropriate use) and says:

Reading those four bullet points, it strikes me that a society with this stated mission should be a vanguard of the open access movement. An [efficient](#), well-implemented open access publishing system, supported (and thus empowered) by the ESA would positively address all four of those goals.

He notes how the move to Wiley fails those goals in moderate detail, then noted moves by other society publishers: a zoological society moving from Wiley to an OA publisher, a paleontology society moving to a university press—and one society moving its journals to Wiley, with unfortunate results for articles that were *supposed* to be freely available.

One comment cites history that ESA is, in fact, actively opposed to OA, or at least [was in 2012](#).

The economics of scholarly journal publishing

This one's [an oldie but a goodie](#), worth noting here since (if you're like me) you might not be aware of it. It's by Carl T. Bergstrom and Theodore Bergstrom and dates to 2001—with a link to an update in 2006.

There is a startling difference between the prices that university libraries must pay for academic journals owned by commercial publishers and the prices for journals owned by professional societies and university presses.

For example, in the fields of economics and ecology, the average institutional subscription *price per page* charged by commercial journals is about 5 times that charged by non-profit journals. These price differences do not reflect differences in quality as measured by number of recorded citations to a journal. For commercial journals the average *price per citation* is about 15 times that for non-profit journals. Similar price differentials are found across a wide variety of scientific disciplines.

These price differences have grown rapidly over the past 15 years. In 2001, the average real (adjusted for inflation) price per page of journals owned by commercial publishers has approximately tripled, while that of non-profit economics journals has increased by “only” 50 percent.

Over the same time interval, the number of journals published has increased dramatically. In 1980 there were about 120 economics journals, half of which were commercial and half non-profit. In 2000 there are almost 300 economics journals, two-thirds of which are owned by commercial publishers.

In 2014, there were some 493 serious *open access* journals in economics that actually published papers that year, three-quarters of them without APCs, and another 229 in ecology (65% without APCs).

The paragraphs quoted here start the paper, which notes the rapid increase in cost of journals for libraries and explores the workings of the scholarly journals, attempting to answer some economic questions. (The 2001 paper is HTML; the 2006 update is a PDF. Both are worth reading as background.)

Checking Our Library Privilege

Barbara Fister [on October 20, 2015](#) in the “Library Babel Fish” column at *Inside Higher Ed*, and the privilege she's talking about is working in an academic institution with subscriptions to All Those Journals.

So, let's say I'm doing research on issues related to privilege and inequality. Google Scholar tells me there's an article on stratification in higher education that's looks interesting. Here' another one on how postcolonial theory can inform resistance to neoliberalism in universities. And ooh, this looks really interesting: digital inequality and participation in the political process. How great that academics turn their methods and theories to solving

the problem of inequality. Too bad most people won't be able to read these articles.

The first one, from a Taylor and Francis journal, would cost me \$40 if I weren't affiliated at an institution that will spend a lot of money, much of it from student tuition, to get it for me. Shame those students will graduate in so much debt. Hey, somebody could write a good article about that. The second, from a journal published by Oxford University Press: \$39.00. The third, from a Sage journal: \$30. But hey, the abstracts are free and these publishers offer information about the journals' impact factors, a variety of alternative metrics for each article, and a handy link so I can tell Twitter all about research that most people can't read.

Like most forms of privilege, those who have it often don't recognize it. It's sneaky that way. As Jason Baird Jackson pointed out back in 2012, scholars with access to the record of research are the [academic one percent](#). The first challenge is to recognize our privilege. The second is to examine what we do in our everyday lives that makes things unequal and work on fixing it.

The rest of the column notes some of the good news on that front—articles with green OA copies, the Open Library of the Humanities and other OA initiatives, and a growing openness among scholars towards OA.

The comments...well, enough of them have been deleted that it's hard to follow the apparently-contentious stream. Except that any number of privileged academics seem certain that none of us Great Unwashed either want to see or have any excuse for seeing their noble efforts in the scholarly field. Oh, and don't want us talking about privilege.

Once More, Into the Breach

This piece by Daniel Kleppner and Richard A. Meserve appears as “The Back Page” in the [December 2015 APS News](#)

It's historical—and an example of an unusual issue in costs and access, namely a publisher trying to *prevent* someone from making public price comparisons. It dates back to 1986-88:

In 1986 and 1988 Henry (Heinz) Barschall, a respected nuclear physicist at the University of Wisconsin, editor of *Physical Review C* and what was then the APS Publications Oversight Committee, wrote articles in *Physics Today* that presented the results of a study of the cost of library subscriptions to physics journals. The consequences of Barschall's studies provide a cautionary tale on what can go wrong when scientific and commercial interests collide.

Barschall found the cost of physics journals published by the American Institute of Physics (AIP) and APS was low, while the highest cost was for the publisher Gordon & Breach (G&B). The difference in cost among various publishers spanned a factor of about 40. Barschall's articles evidently

infuriated Martin Gordon, head of the firm, because in 1989 he launched a series of lawsuits against APS, Barschall, and AIP (the publisher of *Physics Today*). The litigation went on for ten years. In 1991 one of the authors (DK), wrote an article for *Physics Today* calling attention to the bizarre situation. AIP, however, declined publication arguing, quite reasonably, that the essay would certainly precipitate yet another lawsuit by G&B.

That's the beginning, and it's a cautionary tale well worth reading—one that involved four jurisdictions and three languages, as Gordon sued in Zurich, Frankfurt and Paris as well as the U.S. Much of this piece is the 1991 article; Gordon died in 2015, so the authors and publisher now feel that it's fairly safe to tell the tale.

Apparently G&B sent ominous letters to others as well when they complained about prices—and supposedly threatened one person for *observing* that G&B was threatening to sue people.

Worth reading, including the segment of the New York judge's opinion. G&B lost all its cases. Still: the very notion that a publisher can (or thought it could) sue to prevent price comparisons is pretty chilling.

Born Digital: building the ultimate open-access publisher

This commentary by Frontiers (that is, unsigned) appeared [December 22, 2015](#) on the *Frontiers Blog*. I find it odd in a number of respects, beginning with that remarkably boastful title.

The first paragraph:

The digital disruption for analog film started in 1975 with the [invention](#) of the digital camera by Steven Sasson and ended with the [bankruptcy](#) of Kodak in 2012 (40 years later). The digital disruption in publishing started in the late 1990s with the first online archiving of articles, but it is still far from complete (~30 years into the transition). However, as over 30% of peer-reviewed papers are now published in some form of open-access¹, the industry has technically crossed the [tipping point](#) for disruption. This is the point where more than just the innovators and early adopters begin using a product or service.

Really: “over 30% of peer-reviewed papers”? Where does that come from? Another set of sample-based estimates from Björk and, in this case, Laakso—[this time from 2012](#), with OA articles projected to 2014 by Frontiers (not the article), and in a graph projected—based on a *continuing annual OA growth rate of 18%-20%*—to exceed subscription-journal articles around 2018-2020 and wholly dominate the field by 2021 (with three times as many OA articles as subscription-based). That graph also shows 600,000 OA articles in 2014 (or 2015?), and that 600,000 figure shows up later in the text. The same sources show the average APC for OA articles as \$2,700. But but but...those things *aren't in the journal article*. Not even close.

See, here's the thing: I *know* that third figure is wrong unless there are one hell of a lot of “hybrid” OA articles with very high fees. The average

APC for OA articles in fee-charging journals, *ignoring all the ones in no-APC journals*, was \$1,107 per article for 275,773 2014 articles in APC-charging OA journals. If you include the 200,000-odd no-fee articles, the average is \$633.

Can you get from \$1,107 to \$2,700? Not easily. The paper used for this stuff seems to show at least a 12:1 ratio of articles in full OA journals to “hybrid” articles. That might yield 40,000 such articles in 2014; at \$5,000 an article—a very high figure—that’s \$200 million, which brings the average APC to \$1,600 if you ignore all the no-fee articles. Even if you assume 100,000 articles in “hybrid” journals at \$5,000 each, both extremely high assumptions, the average would *still* only be \$2,142.

In other words, the so-called average APC is a crock (and does not come from the cited paper, which quotes a 2011 average of \$900, too high for all OA articles and a little low for APC-based articles).

Turns out the big numbers for OA articles in the cited paper are not *at all* gold OA: roughly a third of the estimated numbers are for “delayed OA,” which I’d call “not OA” but presumably refers to green OA with a one-year embargo. That number is a SWAG, based on a few hundred journals.

How do we get to 600,000 articles a year? Not directly from the article (which uses *DOAJ* journals as its basis, a decision I believe is the only plausible one to make): it shows 340,130 articles in 2011—not enormously different from my own 321,312 count.

The problem is partly the projection used in the *Frontier* piece—a straight-line 20% annual increase from 2011 onward. *Emerging markets normally don’t work that way*—and OA is no different. My own analysis shows 23% growth from 2011 to 2012—but 12% from 2012 to 2013 and 9% from 2013 to 2014. I’ll be very surprised if growth from 2014 to 2015 is 10% or higher. Yes, if you project 20% annual growth from the 2011 figures, you get around 600,000—but that projection is nonsensical (and does not appear in the cited paper). The direct statement of 600,000 articles is hyperlinked to a graph in the Björn/Laakso article—a graph that shows *nothing of the sort*, since it ends in 2011 with figures noted here.

Once you deal with the glaring improbability of the numbers, the rest of the post is mostly bemusing. *Frontier* has 60,000 editors—and, as far as I can tell, published fewer than 11,000 articles in 2014. That’s one heck of a ratio of editors to articles! There’s this statement:

And with over 2/3rds of the approximately 200 staff *Frontiers* employs, as IT engineers, *Frontiers*’ focus is constantly on providing better and more efficient services for scientists at more competitive costs.

Frontiers’ APCs are around \$2,000: I suppose that’s “competitive” with traditional journals, but certainly not with the bulk of OA journals.

All in all, an odd piece—mostly hype for *Frontiers*, but in a manner that makes me dubious about the publisher’s claims in general.

Costs

One of the biggest sections, and of course other items could be lumped here. For that matter, the next section is “Spending,” and the distinction between costs and spending is a tricky one. Meanwhile, here we go. Most of this is recent; much has to do with APCs and OA and sometimes that magic word “sustainability,” which seems remarkably useful in attempting to shut down change and experiments.

I believe there’s a lot of worthwhile material here, even if I don’t agree with all of it (I don’t, as should become obvious right away). But if you’re skimming this massive essay for some reason, and don’t much care about all the conflicting assertions regarding costs, *go to the last item in the section*—it was added after the essay was complete, and is a dynamite article specifically worth reading and thinking about.

Why is science publishing so damn expensive?

What better way to start than with this question, asked by Tim Vines on February 2, 2015 at *The Molecular Ecologist*? Or at least it would be a good way to start if this wasn’t what it turns out to be.

Vines begins by linking to a *Vox* article about taxpayer-funded research that isn’t available to the public that paid for it and suggests OA as an answer. Vines links to a few pro-OA sources and then goes right off the deep end:

This is [a common line of argument](#), but it glosses over the fact that OA journals charge a similar amount per manuscript to make their papers public—except it’s authors that are paying and not libraries.

Bullshit. Some OA journals, mostly run by the same publishers who charge outrageous amounts to libraries, charge “a similar amount per manuscript”—but most don’t. In ecology, the average APC *for articles in journals that charge APCs* was \$709.07 in 2014; it was \$428.41 per article including all OA journals.

We then hear that “quality peer review costs money,” pointing to a *Nature* article—and this:

As has been regularly pointed out, the reviewers and editors are largely free. However, the managing editors, editorial office staff, and the building they sit in are not. Editorial offices would barely be needed if authors always followed the author guidelines, if editors were able to spread the reviewer workload fairly and always to the right people, if reviewers quickly agreed and then returned high quality reviews, and everyone was fair, honest and objective all the time. In this peer review Utopia, the system would more or less run itself.

Calling all of these costs “quality peer review” is, well, I’ve already used the word, and it’s a direct slap at the thousands of OA journals that manage to get by without such massive expenditures.

Who's Tim Vines? Why, he's the managing editor of *Molecular Ecology* and *Molecular Ecology Resources*—Wiley “hybrid” journals that charge, respectively, \$4,000 and \$3,000 for OA options.

In the comments, he tries to handwave away profits (by saying that even non-profits charge more than \$1,300 per paper, which is *manifestly false* for most journals) and, when SciELO is brought up, assuming high acceptance rates and low wages—and snidely speaking of “higher profile journals.” (It's interesting to see his responses to comments in general: “I think” is apparently good research.)

Which subjects are most likely to charge article processing charges?

Heather Morrison asks that question in [this May 5, 2015 post](#) at *Sustaining the Knowledge Commons*—and has an answer, based on a May 2014 sample of journals in DOAJ that were flagged as having APCs.

It's an interesting analysis because it compares percentages of journals—that is, is the percentage of APC-charging journals that are in Subject X higher or lower than the percentage of all journals that are in Subject X? But the result is shown as a positive or negative *percentage*, which strikes me as unusual.

So, for example, at the top, while 23% of the journals overall were in medicine, 47% of journals with APCs were in medicine—giving medicine a “subject tendency” of 24%. Second was biology and life sciences, with 7% of the journals but 14% of journals with APCs, or a “subject tendency” of 7%. None of the other numbers are very high: the other two positive “subject tendencies” are 3% and 2%, with seven negative “subject tendencies” down to social sciences and humanities, both with -13% tendencies.

This table says something—but I'm not sure what. Quite apart from the question of what subject buckets should be used, I'd look at those raw figures and say “biology journals are twice as likely to charge APCs as the overall average, and medicine is a bit worse than twice as likely, while at the other end social science journals are less than half as likely to charge APCs as the overall average—and humanities journals are only one-fourteenth as likely.” The table shows social sciences and humanities with the same negative “subject tendency,” but there's a huge difference.

Interesting data...and an unusual way of looking at it.

#FSSC: Are publisher profits justifiable?

Mike Taylor [on May 6, 2015](#)—but on *The Royal Society Publishing Blog* rather than *SVPoW*. If you're aware of Mike Taylor at all, you can guess his answer—there's just a hint of it in the first paragraph:

It's widely recognised that the established scholarly publishers skim an awful lot of money off the top of research budgets. The Big Four (Elsevier, Springer, Wiley, Informa) all have [profit margins in the range 32–42%](#). For Elsevier alone, a 38.9% profit on revenue of £2126M (page

17 of [their own 2013 annual report](#)) represents £826M diverted away from research – a figure more than sixteen times the £50M that the Finch Report estimated as the annual cost of transition to an all-open-access ecosystem.

But he's also looking at a defense he believes Elsevier will make: Hindawi has claimed an even higher profit percentage—and PLOS had an operating surplus of 27% in 2013. Can *those* be justified? He has three thoughts (excerpted):

First, the emphasis on profit *margins*—that is, profit as a percentage of revenue—is misleading. Hindawi's median APC is \$600 (calculated from [their listing](#)). So a 52.4% profit on a typical paper represents \$314 leaving academia and going into shareholders' pockets; whereas 38.9% of a typical Elsevier paper, with an APC of \$3000, is \$1167...

Second, much depends on the destination of the profits. When Elsevier or Hindawi profit from publishing, that money is lost to academia. By contrast, PLOS's operating surplus – \$367 of the \$1350 APC on a PLOS ONE paper – is ploughed back into their mission...

Finally, and most important, what really matters is not how much profit a publisher makes, but simply how much they charge to publish. To funding agencies, the price of an APC is money that can't be spent elsewhere, whether it goes to publisher profits or merely covers publisher costs...

In the end, Taylor argues, the prices for legacy publishers are simply too high, and he believes Wellcome Trust shouldn't be spending so much on APCs.

Interesting comments, including an attempt by Tim Vine to justify higher prices based on selectivity; Vine claims that “the *majority* of the expense in science publishing” is editorial office time spent on papers that are rejected. Of course, to accept that, you have to accept Tim Vines' assertion that \$350 in “editorial office staff” overhead for handling each article's peer review (remember: the actual peer review is done for free) is either real or reasonable—and for that matter that expense in this case has much to do with APC or pricing.

\$1,300 per article or \$25K / year in subsidy can generously support quality scholar-led OA journal publishing

More from Heather Morrison at *Sustaining the Knowledge Commons*, this time [on May 14, 2015](#). She offers a modestly detailed model to demonstrate that, at Canadian prices and wages, a 20-article-per-year scholar-led OA journal could be produced or \$25,000 a year or \$1,300 per article.

It's an interesting breakdown—but, of course, \$1,300 per article is a pretty high figure, especially in the humanities. (Of the relatively few humanities & social science gold OA journals that charge APCs at all, three-quarters charge less than \$353 per article.)

Much of the post is Morrison's attempt to comment on a fairly typical Stevan Harnad assault on gold open access; I admit that I couldn't be bothered with that portion.

What Goes Into Making a Scientific Manuscript Public?

In [this June 11, 2015 post](#) at his eponymous blog, Björn Brembs tries to answer that question with the assistance of Abel Packer, one of the founders of SciELO. Of course, he's posing another question: why can SciELO do it for less than \$100 per article?

SciELO receives most of its articles from the participating journals in JATS XML and PDF. It takes that version and publishes it online, makes sure it is indexed in the relevant places (PubMed, Web of Science, etc.) and archives it for long-term accessibility. These services cost about US\$67 (which are covered by the participating governments, not the authors). For other digital services such as a DOI, plagiarism checkers, altmetrics, etc. another US\$4 are incurred. So bare-necessities-publishing costs are just over US\$70 per article at SciELO.

There's one major point here: SciELO is a platform for more than a thousand journals, and each journal handles its own peer review and layout. The \$71 here takes care of everything *after* editorial and layout.

Of course, a growing number of OA journals provide templates (Word or LaTeX) so that authors do most of the layout. Here's more on SciELO optional costs:

At SciELO (and their participating journals), these services [formatting and, apparently, expediting peer review?], if chosen by the authors, average around another US\$130. Taken together, the complete package from, say, MS Word submission to published article can thus be had for a grand total of just over US\$200. However, if/once authors use modern authoring systems, where they write collaboratively on a manuscript that is formatted in, e.g., native XML, then publication costs drop to below US\$80. On the other hand, if SciELO authors opt for English language services, submission services, an enhanced PDF version, a social media campaign, and/or data management services—all offered by SciELO for a fee—a cozy all-inclusive package will cost them almost US\$600, but still a far cry from the 5k commercial publishers charge for their subscription articles.

There's more here, and I think you could argue with some of what's in Brembs' post. Still, worth reading and thinking about.

When Pragmatism Collides With Fundamentalism —PLOS Hikes Publication Fees

The title sets the tone for [this September 29, 2015](#) Phil Davis piece at *the scholarly kitchen*, discussing reactions when *PLOS One* raised its APC from \$1,350 to \$1,495 after six years of a steady-state fee. As Davis says, that increase doesn't exceed inflation for those six years (the U.S. CPI increased 12.3% from January 2009 to December 2014). "So, why did such a small price increase arouse such a negative reaction from open access advocates?"

My own take: \$1,350 was too high to begin with—and PLOS should have become more efficient over the years.

I do find it hard to argue with Davis' comment that "it appears that PLOS operates more like a commercial publisher than a charity," but I'll sure as hell argue with what comes a bit later:

In 2014, the not-for-profit publisher made \$4.9 million surplus on \$48.5 million in revenue. The vast majority of this revenue came from article processing fees for papers published in *PLOS ONE*, which numbered more than 33,000. PLOS' profit margins are some of the highest in the industry, making one wonder why such a profitable non-for-profit needed to raise rates.

\$4.9 million on \$48.5 million is 10.1%. Yes, that's a healthy profit—but the big names in scholarly journals have *much* higher profit margins, and Davis knows that. (The statement might be factually accurate, as there are probably lots of smaller publishers with lower profit margins—sort of like saying Mazda has some of the highest sales figures in the auto industry.)

Of course, I also take some issue with Michael Eisen's claims that making PLOS sustainable "directly led to recent open access explosion." Well...no. I don't buy that. But I could certainly be wrong.

The finish:

The turbulence we hear may be PLOS' second wave of pragmatism colliding with fundamentalist open access ideology—that publishing needs to be done cheaply while including all of the [services](#) demanded by authors. These arguments are still being made by disgruntled academics, librarians, and scrappy startups—groups that dream of becoming a disruptive force in science publishing but have little to lose. Fifteen years later and \$50 million annual revenue, PLOS is in a real position to effect change, but may find itself like most other incumbent publishers, growing conservative and protective of its assets.

Here's the odd thing: Davis' hook for the story is "such a negative reaction from open access advocates"—but, in fact, he cites precisely *one* OA advocate questioning the change. That's taking anecdota to an extreme.

Publishers respond to growing need for collaboration by offering an open access home for interdisciplinary research

Sounds great, doesn't it? As Sam Burrige and Michele Acuto describe it in [this May 20, 2014 post](#) at LSE's *Impact of social sciences* blog, Palgrave Macmillan/Nature Publishing Group was doing the scholarly community a huge favor by establishing *Palgrave Communications*, a "high-quality outlet for research in the humanities."

Particularly since if Burrige is to be believed, there was such a need:

Options for open access publication have been increasingly abundant fairly widely for scientists over recent years. But there are fewer options if you are a sociologist, fewer still if you are a historian. And the options don't increase if you are conducting interdisciplinary research, with many journals still reflecting traditional discipline boundaries.

Sociology: 404 DOAJ-listed gold OA journals as of mid-2014, and at least 384 of them date back to 2013 or earlier. Of those, 90% don't charge APCs, and those journals publish two-thirds of the articles. Among those that do, the weighted average APC per article is \$296.22 for 2014.

History: 275 journals, with 253 publishing articles in 2014, 98% without APCs, those publishing 96% of the articles, and an average cost of \$385.45 per article in APC-charging journals—but there are so few of those that this figure is irrelevant.

Which makes the *second* paragraph of Burrige's piece so revealing:

We see this as a particular need given the rise of funding streams for interdisciplinary work: What if your funder mandates that you must publish open access – but you can't find a journal which is the right fit for your findings? And then there is the rather more idealistic premise that interdisciplinary thinking can benefit the outcomes and breadth of use of research and therefore society as a whole.

I read this as "there are funding streams out there that *we're not capturing part of*. Let's fix that." With an APC of £750—around \$1,215 as I write this, but quite possibly higher when the article was written.

There's more to the two discussions, but I can't help but be a little skeptical of the whole thing, especially given Michele Acuto's discussion of trying to have global outreach combined with calling that APC—much higher than almost any in the humanities and social sciences—"relatively (by Western standards for the moment) affordable rates." By the standards of the humanities and social sciences, the price is very high: in 2014, only 23 (out of more than 4,000) had APCs higher than \$1,179. But then, this is the UK, where funding seems unlimited and APCs flourish with abandon.

I checked the journal's site. You have to open a link to a separate page to get the APC (currently \$1,200, but the same £750). The journal appears

to be a rousing...well, it apparently didn't publish any articles in 2014 and 42 in 2015 through December 14, 2015. It's in *DOAJ*.

There are, of course, other multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary journals—quite a few of them. It's ungracious, but I can't help but feel that this journal is meeting a need felt by the publishing company more than by the scholarly community.

Is Access to Research Ever Really Free?

I mostly include this relatively brief item by Andrew Ghillyer [on October 31, 2015](#) at the *enago blog* as a reminder that accidental or deliberate mis-statements about the nature of gold OA continue to thrive.

The question itself is absurd: *access* to research results published via either gold or green OA is, of course, free: otherwise, it's not OA.

But that's not what's being discussed here: the issue is whether publishing can be done without any costs (and the answer to that is “no”).

Critics of the traditional model continue to complain about the extent to which the deck is stacked in favor of academic journals. Content is submitted for free, peer reviewed for free, and then sold at top dollar with some overhead expenses for marketing and administrative and editorial services, leaving a very healthy profit margin.

In that context, one would imagine that a true publishing revolution would begin with payment for both the submitted content and the peer review services. In fact, the OA model took a different path and chose to [charge authors an article processing fee](#) in order to get their papers published, and for them to still require peer review which was still done for free. Not exactly transformational, but still within the bounds of greater access by virtue of no subscription costs to readers.

Maybe starting a sentence with “In fact” makes it easier to say something that is *mostly wrong*—since most OA journals do not charge APCs. (Of course, the writer doesn't even say “mostly charge authors”; the clear implication is that they *all* charge APCs.)

Ah, but there's a supporting link...to an earlier post in the same blog, by the same author, that repeats the same falsehood. (The earlier article also says that Creative Commons licenses began in 2005, which makes me feel prescient since *Cites & Insights* has used a Creative Commons license since 2003. It also strongly suggests that OA has been around for “less than a decade,” which is pure nonsense.)

Sad—and interesting coming from a company that sells “journal-publishing support” and should know that there *are* other costs besides writing and peer review.

What Open-Access Publishing Actually Costs

This news article by Ellen Wexler [on November 9, 2015](#) at the *Chronicle of Higher Education* relates to the *Lingua/Glossa* situation (discussed earlier) but focuses on OA costs in general and OLH in particular.

Among the detailed costs of OLH, the one that's interesting is marketing—in the case of OLH, to raise more donations/subscriptions.

A couple of the quotations are interesting:

“People point to journals that they think are run for free, but they're not run for free,” Mr. Eisen said. “They're either run by volunteers or there's a subsidy. There's no such thing as a free journal. It costs money.”

See, to me, voluntary labor is *free* labor, so this doesn't make a lot of sense. But then there's this:

Tom Reller, Elsevier's head of global corporate relations, said in an emailed statement, “Sustainability to us means nurturing, servicing, disseminating and preserving research for the entire scholarly ecosystem, including authors, readers, librarians, professionals, funders and others including shareholders who invest in this important work.”

The editors at *Lingua*, who resigned last month to start a new open-access journal, may have found a model that works for them, he added. “But we need to take a broader and longer-term approach.”

A broader and longer-term approach that apparently requires profit margins even higher than those of Apple and several times as high as those of most publishers and most businesses. I'm sure librarians are delighted by Elsevier's nurturing, especially as it simplifies budgetary decisions.

No comment on the comments.

“PeerJ can't possibly last because the numbers don't add up.”

Mike Taylor posted this [on March 27, 2015](#) at SVPoW—and those scare quotes are there for good reason. To wit, this email he received:

Do you have any insight into the PeerJ business model? When I try to persuade people to publish in PeerJ, a very common response is that the journal can't possibly last because the numbers don't add up.

I must admit I'm impressed that scholars have studied journal business models so extensively that they can actually make such a claim—that they're not just repeating FUD from somewhere.

Taylor has published in *PeerJ* but doesn't know its financials. He does know some things:

1. PeerJ is run by Pete Binfield, who has **more experience of running open-access megajournals than anyone alive**, and he's confident enough in the financial model to have staked his own livelihood on it.
2. The principal outside investor in PeerJ is Tim O'Reilly, who has **more experience of making money from free-to-read content than anyone**

alive, and he's confident enough in the financial model to have staked a seven-figure sum on it.

3. Most importantly, **the content in PeerJ is safe forever**, because it's fully, properly, BOAI-compliant open access, licenced using CC By, and [archived at PubMed Central](#). So even if the worst happened, [if PeerJ went bankrupt, everything published in it would live on](#).

4. Since [CC-By documents cannot be re-enclosed if their publisher is acquired](#), even if PeerJ were acquired by [a predatory barrier-based publisher such as Elsevier](#), the articles would remain safe.

5. **We have got into the habit of paying far too much for publishing**. [On average paywalled papers cost the world more than \\$5000 each](#). Legacy publishers typically charge APCs of \$3000 or so. Yet born-digital publishers such as Ubiquity Press need charge only \$500, and [show the breakdown of that cost](#). (And note that \$80 of that is set aside to cover waived articles for which no fee is paid.) Against that analysis, PeerJ's fees don't look crazy. The truth is that, as well as [their 35% profit-margins](#), legacy publishers' costs are sky-high because they are [dragging around the carcass of print-based publishing](#).

6. [Numerous universities](#) are confident enough of the PeerJ model that they have signed up for institutional plans. You know, little universities like Cambridge, UCL and Bristol (UK), and Harvard, MIT and Cornell (USA).

Basically:

In short, there is no rational reason not to publish in PeerJ (unless you're [statistically illiterate](#) enough to think that its lack of an impact factor is of any scientific significance).

That last link is particularly interesting—it's to a careful takedown of impact factors, one that garnered more than 200 responses. The much smaller number of comments to this post bears reading, even if it includes Tim Vines' repetitive "here's why it costs so much" explanation of why *his journals* need \$300 in people time to handle editorial review for one article.

Stop funding open access—just a thought

This item, posted by Wilma van Wezenbreek [on September 4, 2015](#) on the TUDelft libraries blog, is odd—but maybe the finances are very different in the Netherlands.

Why is it odd? For one thing there's this:

There is a lot to read about the total cost of publishing, and how open access will cost us much more than we pay for "closed" access right now.

No link for that, so I can't help but wonder how it can be true for the Netherlands—or perhaps just for Delft University of Technology—while it isn't (or shouldn't) be true for scholarship as a whole.

This also seems mysterious, although that may be a language barrier:

We are creating complexity in the world of publishing, we are finding ways to fund open access, where it perhaps could be as simple as it used to be. Apart from member or personal subscriptions, the major proportion of costs for the reading access came from the institutional (library) budgets. There was no budget for this from funding agencies; if you wanted extra content, not covered by the “big deals”, you needed to arrange this with your librarian, and publishers marketed their content via their libraries and via the researchers (“ask your library to ...”). So why are we changing this? If a library or consortium wants to have an open access arrangement for or alongside the subscribed content, you cannot “use” this extra money in the system.

In general, I think “we” want to change this because the existing system is clearly not affordable—and because it doesn't provide for open access.

And, finally, this, which seems to be the essential conclusion to the piece:

Let there just be one budget for publishing (and for the sake of simplicity I leave out the surcharges that might be paid by the authors out of their own research budget, also in the old days), and have no, I say no, extra funding for open access. Too bad. Not because I am not in favour of Open Access. But because I am.

There are some bullets, but I don't find that they change what appears to be an anti-OA (or, more specifically, anti-gold OA) stance.

How a flat APC with no price increase for 3 years can be a 6% – 77% price increase

This post, by Jihane Salhab and Heather Morrison [on May 13, 2015](#) at *Sustaining the Knowledge Commons*, is short and clear—but also a little odd.

The facts are clear enough: until this year, *PLOS One* hadn't changed its \$1,350 APC for years—but the U.S. dollar has been strengthening against most other currencies, especially weak currencies such as those of South Africa and Brazil.

Any scholarly publishing system that involves cross-border payments, whether demand side (subscriptions / payments) or supply side (APC, journal hosting or other production services) has this disadvantage of pricing variability almost everywhere. In this case, US payers benefit from the flat fee, but anytime an APC is paid for a US scholar publishing in an international venue the same pricing variations based on currency will apply. In contrast, any scholarly publishing system that involves local payments (e.g. hosting of local journals, paying local copyeditors and proofreaders)

has the advantage of relative pricing stability that comes with paying in the local currency.

That's true—but unless it's a call to have all journals be local journals, I'm not sure how useful it is. Given the push toward international journals (as evidenced by the absurd number of *International Journal of...* titles, many from weak publishers), that doesn't strike me as likely.

How much does “typesetting” cost?

Mike Taylor asks that question [on June 11, 2015](#) at *Sauropod Vertebra Picture of the Week* (SVPoW) and offers some answers to the question as defined here:

The tendency of many discussions I've been involved with has been that the main technical contribution of publishers is the process that is still, for historical reasons, known as “typesetting”—that is, the [transformation of the manuscript](#) from an opaque form like an MS-Word file (or indeed a stack of hand-written sheets) into a semantically rich representation such as [JATS XML](#). From there, actual typesetting into HTML or a pretty PDF can be largely automated.

I know *precisely* what it takes to get from a Word file done with a template to an HTML or PDF form: one click (and choosing a filename), since Word offers Save as PDF and also the option of HTML (or, better, Filtered HTML) in the Save as... choices. (Hmm. Those choices also include Word XML and “Strict Open XML.”) But I guess JATS XML provides a lot of metadata that the tags provided by a good Word template won't. I guess.

That quibble aside (Word is only “opaque” if you don't use styles!), Taylor finds sources that include around \$10 per page, around \$35 per article, or around \$0.50 per page,

Lots of stuff in the comments, and I'm resisting the urge to comment on them.

Frontiers' financial commitment to open access publishing

This [October 13, 2015 piece](#) on the *frontiers blog* attempts to show where the money goes for Frontiers' OA journals—and I'm bemused right off the bat, given these opening paragraphs:

In 2014, the annual cost of traditional, subscription-based scholarly journal publishing was \$14 Billion [\[1\]](#). This money comes mostly from your university libraries, which are supported by the overheads from your grants. Your libraries pay subscription fees, so you can read the journal articles you need to do your research.

Open Access does away with subscriptions to allow any reader in the world unrestricted access to scholarly articles. To provide this option, Open Access publishers directly charge the authors an Article Publishing Charge (APC), which authors typically pay from their grants or receive

institutional support to cover the cost. The APC generally ranges from \$500 to \$6,000 with an industry average of around \$3,000. Often people wonder “Where does this money go?”

In a sentence, your payment covers the cost of producing high-quality publications and keeping this literature freely accessible, discoverable and permanent.

Really? \$14 billion? The footnote says that comes from combining two industry reports—\$10 billion from STM (one report) and, I guess, \$4 billion from the humanities and social sciences (another report that I can view for \$2,500, so I haven’t read that one).

That’s *by far* the highest estimate I’ve ever seen for journal revenues. More typically, I’ve seen around \$10 billion for *all* peer-reviewed journals, and \$4 billion seems awfully high for the humanities and social sciences in terms of *journal* revenues. But figures are typically fuzzy: over the past couple of months, I’ve seen Absolutely Reliable Figures for the total *volume* of published peer-reviewed scholarly articles ranging from 1.5 million to 2.5 million. (Similarly, the number of active scholarly peer-reviewed journals is anywhere from 25,000 to 34,550 to 50,000, depending on who you ask.)

University libraries are supported “by the overheads from your grants”? Partially true for some universities, but wildly misleading. Even more so for academic institutions that aren’t research-oriented!

The second paragraph is worse: We’re told that (all?) OA publishers pay APCs—and that the “industry average” is around \$3,000. The first is simply false. The second is true if and only if you define the “industry” as “those OA publishers that charge an average of \$3,000 per article.” Among APC-charging journals in general, the average was \$1,108 in 2014 *assuming no discounts or waivers* (or \$633 if you include no-fee journals), and only 28 gold OA journals (with a total of 3,405 articles in 2014) charged \$3,000 or more. In other words, *considerably less than 1%* of gold OA publishing—measured either in journals or in articles—is at or above this so-called “average.”

The rest of the article isn’t much better—because it doesn’t really say how much publishing costs. Instead, it says that 34% of Frontiers’ revenues went toward publishing operations—which are not broken out from that figure. That means, of course, that 66% of Frontiers’ revenue does *not* go into publishing (that’s not quite true: somehow, 10% of *revenue* goes toward “discounts & waivers,” which I don’t even understand).

Considering Non-Open Access Publication Charges in the “Total Cost of Publication”

A peer-reviewed paper by Andrew Gray, [published November 18, 2015](#) in *publications* (a journal from a publisher that used to be labeled ppppreda-

tory, MDPI, but no longer is, although the Chief Judge, Jury and Executioner has decided it's still a Bad Company). The link here is to the full-text HTML version; PDF and XML versions are also available.

I'm not sure *what* to say about this. The situation in the UK—where this is from—seems peculiar, with some of the world's lowest percentages of no-fee OA journals, apparently some of the world's highest APCs, government mandates that seem to allow huge sums to be paid for APCs and scholars with a marked preference for the *most* expensive form of gold OA, namely “hybrid” journals.

I believe the article's saying that most subscription journals have dropped page charges but that half of them still have color plate charges, and a fair number actually have submission charges. It also appears to be saying that *administering* APCs (at universities with government block grants for them) costs half as much as the APCs themselves, which seems pretty shocking if true. It also views APC charges, administrative overhead, and the “non-open access publication charges” (color plates and the like) as *add-ons* to subscription costs, with no apparent suggestion that APCs should at some point reduce subscription costs. (I don't see much in the article to suggest that, at least outside of the UK, most OA journals simply don't charge APCs, but I read the article quickly.)

Perhaps worth reading, but cautiously.

Why I Can't Afford (to Publish In) Open Access Journals

This section starts to wind down with [this December 13, 2015](#) piece by Timothy Aungst at *The Digital Apothecary*, and I'm afraid it's indicative of just how far OA has to go to deal with half-truths. That's not necessarily Aungst's fault; it's an example of the way far too many scholars see the field.

Aungst begins with a section “Why I Love Open-Access Journals,” and I suppose you could call the rest of the article the “But...” appendage.

Traditional journal models aren't going to go away anytime soon (I believe at least), but many are starting to adopt to an open access model or make such options available. Nowadays, a lot of journals I see offer such an option when submitting a manuscript on the prospect of open access publishing “with a payment of \$xxx.xx.” Now, I haven't been able to check any of those boxes yet, because I don't have the money. I am still looking for grants, and while I have had some very minor success, I really haven't considered budgeting money to pay for publication in the future, but maybe that will one day change.

Nonetheless, I am starting to meet a barrier for some of my publishing endeavors. A number of journals are moving to the open access model, and ditching traditional publishing models. That's great. What really stops me in the process is when I find that there is no other option to submit a manuscript for eventual publishing without paying. This just happened with a

project I have been working with a few students in the past year and a colleague of mine, where a journal we have been eyeing went open access. I remember when my colleague showed me the email and was happy to see that we may be able to get something online for many to read. Unfortunately, as we looked up the authors instructions as we were finalizing our work, we saw that we would ultimately now have to pay. We have no money for this, and I do not expect departmental funds to go to such work.

A few other colleagues of mine have mentioned similar situations. Some have managed to find funding from their universities and departments. Some used grants. One friend mentioned considering paying out of pocket. When I hear this and try to imagine paying the hundreds to thousands of dollars to do so, I really wonder where things are going, especially for younger faculty members.

Recognition that most OA journals...oh, never mind. Say it as often as you want, it's not being heard. Recognition that most reputable APC-charging journals will waive fees when there are no funds to cover them? Nope.

And then we get..."Predatory Publishing?" With mention of Bohannon's "sting." With a wholly uncritical link (later) to Beall's list. That's in the "So Where Do I Publish?" section, where he says:

My fear is that open access will be synonymous with predatory at some point. I also fear a point where many academics will avoid open access because of said costs, especially younger faculty who may not have the funds to pay-up.

I think there needs to be some changes (and now is a good time to learn since this is all relatively new after all) to the field of open access. We need easier payment schemes to factor in newer faculty resources. We need to help newer faculty identify and understand open access journals to publish in, and reduce any stigma of publishing in such areas.

I'd love to say that this is an atypical case of a scholar (a) wholly ignoring the costs of subscriptions, (b) with a once-over-lightly "understanding" of OA and (c) with a readiness to believe the worst. Unfortunately, I'd guess it's more typical than not. I can only sympathize with those librarians (and others) who have been trying to educate scholars on these issues for years now, with apparently little success.

How Much Does \$1.7 Billion Buy You? A Comparison of Published Scientific Journal Articles to Their Pre-print Version

Sharon Farb, Todd Grappone, Peter Broadwell and Martin Klein (all UCLA) offered this [on November 19, 2015](#) at the Coalition for Networked Information (CNI). The abstract:

Academic publishers claim that they add value to scholarly communications primarily by coordinating reviews and contributing text during

publication. These contributions come at a considerable cost: U.S. academic libraries paid \$1.7 billion for serial subscriptions in 2008 alone and this number continues to rise.

Library budgets, in contrast, are flat at best and not increasing at anywhere near the same rate. Several institutions have therefore discontinued or significantly scaled back their subscription agreements with commercial publishers such as Elsevier and Wiley-Blackwell. At the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), we have investigated the publishers' value proposition by conducting a comparative study of pre-print papers and their post-print counterparts. We have two working assumptions: 1) if the publishers' argument is valid, the text of a pre-print paper should vary significantly from its corresponding post-print version, and, 2) by applying standard similarity measures, we should be able to detect and quantify such differences. In this talk we present our preliminary results based on pre-print publications from arXiv.org and their post-print counterparts obtained through subscriptions held by the UCLA Library. After matching papers via their digital object identifiers (DOIs), we applied comparative analytics and evaluated the textual similarities of components such as the title, abstract, and body. The results of our assessment suggest that the vast majority of post-print papers are largely indistinguishable from their pre-print versions. These findings contribute empirical indicators to discussions of the value that academic publishers add to scholarly communication and therefore can influence libraries' economic decisions regarding access to scholarly publications.

I'll admit to a little surprise at that \$1.7 billion figure for 2008, since that's about what I found for 2012—but my figures are for the subset of academic institutions that reported to NCES from 2002 through 2012, and it's quite possible that the others account for the extra few hundred million dollars. In any case, that's not the issue: the issue is whether all that value-added work adds that much value.

The link here is to a page that provides links to an NCES table and, more interesting, a set of graphs based on various statistical measures of the similarities of pairs of texts.

I'd love to see more discussion of this, and it's easy enough to see how it could be denigrated (good editing might not affect the statistical measures much while still improving the text). In any case, it's an interesting item.

On the marginal cost of scholarly communication

This article by Tiffany L. Bogich, Sebastien Ballesteros, Robin Berjon, Leon Chen and Chris Callahan appeared [near the end of 2015](#) at *science.ai research*.

Science.ai is a startup scholarly publishing platform, and this article could be thought of as, to some extent, a manifesto for the new company.

I'm sure the figures in it will be discussed or dismissed, but they sure do provide some interesting arguing points.

Here's the abstract:

We assessed the marginal cost of scholarly communication from the perspective of an agent looking to start an independent, peer-reviewed scholarly journal. We found that various vendors can accommodate all of the services required for scholarly communication for a price ranging between \$69 and \$318 per article. In contrast, if an agent had access to software solutions replacing the services provided by vendors, the marginal cost of scholarly communication would be reduced to the cloud infrastructure cost alone and drop to between \$1.36 and \$1.61 per article. Incidentally, DOI registration alone accounts for between 82% and 98% of this cost. While vendor cost typically decreases with higher volume, new offerings in cloud computing exhibit the opposite trend, challenging the notion that large volume publishers benefit from economies of scales as compared to smaller publishers. Given the current lack of software solutions fulfilling the functions of scholarly communication, we conclude that the development of high quality “plug-and-play” open source software solutions would have a significant impact in reducing the marginal cost of scholarly communication, making it more open to experimentation and innovation.

The perspective is that of “an agent looking to start an independent, peer-reviewed, web-based scholarly journal.” A key caveat, *clearly stated*: this analysis measures *marginal* costs of each additional article, not the overhead of normal business operations (but that overhead is or can be absorbed in many smaller university-based and society-based journals).

The article looks at two extremes: one where the journal outsources everything, using various vendors to handle each task, and one with an end-to-end technological solution. It appears to be a fairly careful analysis, based on actual numbers either found on the web or provided by vendors, including five key requirements: submission, management of editorial workflow and peer review, “typesetting,” DOI registration and long-term preservation. The analysis assumes 50% acceptance—thus, two peer-review rounds for each published paper.

After discussing how each *range* of figures for vendor-based services was determined, they show a table of per-article costs for various article volumes (from 50 to two million, although 50 is still much higher than most small OA journals). Summarizing, the combination of submission handling and management of editorial workflow appeared to range from \$60 to \$130 per accepted paper; “typesetting” (which includes format conversion and metadata creation) from \$7.40 to \$186.37 (assuming 7.4 to 12.4 pages per article), \$1.33 for DOI, and from \$0 to \$0.25 per article for CLOCKSS, depending on article volume. The combined range is \$68 to \$317 for small publishers and \$69 to \$318 for large and very large publishers.

There's a lot more discussion and data—and moving to an integrated software cloud-based solution appears to bring the costs down to \$1.36 to \$1.61 per article, with \$1.33 of that being DOI handling.

Are those numbers (especially the second set) at all realistic? I can't say, but the authors make an interesting case. If they're right, then assuming absorbed infrastructure costs, a 40-article-per-year small OA journal with absorbed overhead costs could get by nicely on a grant of \$2,800 to \$13,000 per year with outsourcing—or a departmental subsidy of \$60 per year with the cloud solution.

Seems too good to be true? Perhaps, but certainly worth a look. If \$300 per year is a high marginal cost per published article, just how much should a nonprofit or small publisher charge for overhead?

Last-minute addition: Cameron Neylon critiques this paper [in a blog post](#) I haven't had time to fully digest. Worth a critical read as well.

Spending

How is spending different than costs? I thought the differentiation made sense when I was retagging the articles originally considered here—but at this point it almost feels as though it's a way to keep the longest section of the piece from being even longer. Actually, maybe this section should be “the spend,” since that term seems to get used a lot. For example...

The Reckoning: An Analysis of Wellcome Trust Open Access Spend 2013-14

This one appeared [on March 3, 2015](#) on the Wellcome Trust blog, signed by Wellcome Trust but written by Robert Kiley. It's part of Wellcome's effort “to help make the costs around open access more transparent.”

With the caveat that Wellcome Trust's figures are likely to be on the high side, both because Wellcome pays APCs (and requires OA) and because it primarily funds biomed research, these numbers are interesting. Among the items:

- Wellcome Trust paid for about 20% more articles in 2014 than in 2013—and spent about 20% more on APCs, because the average APC went up less than 1% (from £1,821 to £1,837—the *median* actually went down slightly).
- The authors funded by Wellcome Trust *love* “hybrid” journals (by about three to one over true OA journals)—even though the “hybrid” journals average £2,030 to the true OA journals' £1,241, 64% more.
- Other funding organizations no longer allow OA grants to be used for “hybrid” journals. Wellcome Trust says “we have (to date) decided not to go down this path” but does say the “hybrid” marketplace “is not

working effectively.” (Well, it’s working effectively for the publishers…)

- Anyone care to guess which publisher not only gets the most Wellcome Trust APC money but also the highest average APC? Yes, you got it: the big E. And, oddly enough, that publisher—and the second-place Wiley—both actually managed to average *higher* APCs for the tiny number of articles in true OA journals than for the large number of articles in “hybrid” journals. (The top two represent 40% of Wellcome Trust’s total APC spend.)
- Publishers aren’t doing nearly as well at complying with Wellcome Trust’s requirements as they should be, given that they’re certainly getting paid. After some analysis, the discussion has a three-word paragraph: “This is unacceptable.”

Those are the highlights. There’s more.

The Life and Death of an Open Access Journal: Q&A with Librarian Marcus Banks

This piece by Richard Poynder was posted [March 31, 2015](#) on *Open and Shut?* Poynder begins by noting (correctly) that librarians have been pioneers in OA and related activities, with SPARC playing a significant role—but then tosses in this:

Ironically, despite their high profile advocacy for open access many librarians have proved strangely reluctant to practice what they preach, and as late as last year [calls](#) were still being made for the profession to start “walking the talk”.

What an odd sentence. It’s as though scholars were rushing to OA with open arms while those tired old librarians were holding back—which sure isn’t the history I remember! *Of course* some librarians haven’t become OA advocates, either because it’s not their job, because they’ve been burned so often by attempts to work with scholars, or because they’re simply conservative.

Poynder then moves to the issue at hand: *Biomedical Digital Libraries*, launched in 2003 under the BioMed Central umbrella, shut down in 2008—after BMC raised APCs, submissions dried up, and moving the journal to a different platform didn’t help. Meanwhile, the *Journal of the Medical Library Association* (JMLA), which went OA in 2001, continues to publish.

What do we learn from *BDL*’s short life? In advocating for pay-to-publish gold OA did open access advocates underestimate how much it costs to publish a journal? Or have publishers simply been able to capture open access and use it to further ramp up what [many believe](#) to be their excessive profits? Why has *JMLA* continued to prosper under open access while *BDL* has withered and died? Was *BDL* unable to compete with *JMLA* on a level playing field? Could the demise of *BDL* have

been avoided? What, if anything, does the journal's fate tell us about the future of open access?

I discuss these and other questions with Banks [Marcus Banks, editor of *BDL* when it died] below. The issue of affordability, it seems to me, is particularly apposite, as librarians are having to confront the harsh truth that, far from reducing the costs of scholarly communication, open access appears more likely to [increase](#) them.

It turns out that Banks has an interesting perspective on this issue. As he puts it, "At the risk of frustrating many librarian colleagues, I must say that the framing of open access as a means of saving money has been and remains a serious strategic error."

He adds, "A fully open access world may not save any money and could cost more than we pay now—this world would include publication charges as well as payments for tools that mined and sorted the now completely open literature. That's fine with me, because in this world we'd be getting better value for money."

That's the introduction. The rest of the article is an interview. It's worth reading, perhaps a little skeptically.

One interchange undermines the whole "OA advocates don't understand the costs" idea and suggests that the answer to the last question in Poynder's set of questions above is "not much of anything":

RP: After it ceased operating as a BioMed Central journal you tried to transfer BDL to an Open Journal Systems platform, and then to the University of California's eScholarship platform. Why did neither of these attempts succeed either?

MB: These attempts occurred in 2008. Their main advantage was no author fees for publication. But by this time I had maintained my own blog for three years, almost as long as my time with *BDL*. I was finding blogging to be a more effective means of sharing insights and research about librarianship, which at the time sported a vibrant "biblioblogosphere." So I argued that [library journals should evolve into blogs](#), something that is still possible today although the credentialing power of formal publication cannot be discounted.

Given my circa-2008 feelings about the potential of blogs I became disinterested in propping up the journal model. Meanwhile, our editorial board members had moved on to other projects.

I read that as "the journal failed because we lost interest," which isn't quite what Poynder seems to be pushing for.

There are some leading questions in this interview, and while Poynder asks one legitimate question (how many *articles* involve APCs, not just how many journals), I don't remember him contacting the source of a pretty definitive answer to that question.

It's an interesting interview. I would disagree with Banks on some items and agree on others. Read the handful of comments as well.

Incidentally, to provide some context, 131 journals in library science that are in *DOAJ* are covered in *The Gold OA Landscape 2011-2014*. Of those publishing articles in 2014, only 3% (four journals) charged APCs, and only 3% of the 2,542 articles appeared in fee-charging journals. The four journals are all small; the weighted average APC for 2014 was \$286.72, but that comes down to \$7.22 per article across the field.

The Danger of Universal Gold Access

This post by Björn Brembs on his eponymous blog dates all the way back to November 7, 2012; it was reposted [on August 30, 2013](#). It's a cautionary tale—and, given continued attempts (and success) by the big commercial publisher to capture OA at extremely high fees, it's a tale worth recounting. Brembs' blog is CC BY, and I'm quoting the whole, relatively short, post.

As a strong supporter of any open access initiative over the last almost ten years, there is now a looming threat that the situation may deteriorate beyond the abysmal state scholarly publishing is in right now.

Yes, you read that right: it can get worse than it is today.

What would be worse? Universal gold open access – that is, every publisher charges the authors what they want for making the articles publicly accessible. I've been privately warning of this danger for some time, and now an email and a [blog post by Ross Mounce](#) reminded me that it is about time to make my lingering fear a little more public. He wrote:

Outrageous press release from Nature Publishing Group today.

They're explicitly charging more to authors who want CC BY Gold OA, relative to more restrictive licenses such as CC BY-NC-SA. Here's my quick take on it: <http://rossmounce.co.uk/2012/11/07/gold-oa-price-watch>

More money, for absolutely no extra work.

How is that different from what these publishers have been doing all these years and still are doing today?

What is so surprising about charging for nothing? That's been the *modus operandi* of publishers since the advent of the internet.

Why should NPG not charge, say, 20k USD for an OA article in *Nature*, if they chose to do so?

If people are willing to pay more than 230k ([\\$58,600 a year](#)) for a Yale degree or over 250k ([\\$62,772 a year](#)) just to have "Harvard" on their diplomas, why wouldn't they be willing to shell out a meager 20k for a

paper that might give them tenure? That's just a drop in the bucket, pocket cash.

I'd even be willing to bet that the hard limit for gold OA luxury segment publishing will be closer to 50k or even higher as multiple authors can share the cost. Without regulation, publishers can charge whatever the market is willing and able to pay. If a Nature paper is required, people will pay what it takes.

If libraries let themselves be extorted by publishers out of fear they'll get yelled at by their faculty, surely scientists will let themselves get extorted by publishers out of fear they won't be able to put food on the table nor pay the rent without the next grant/position.

Who seriously believes that only because they now make some articles OA, publishers would all of a sudden become non-profit organisations?

I don't see anything extraordinary in this press release at all, completely normal and very much expected. In fact, the price difference is actually quite small.

I really have no idea what's supposed to be so outrageous about this?

Obviously, the alternative to gold OA cannot be a subscription model. I've written repeatedly that I believe a rational solution would be to have [libraries archive](#) and [make accessible](#) the fruits of our labor: publications, data and software. There can be a thriving marketplace of services around these academic crown jewels, but the booty stays in-house.

At the very least, if there ever should be universal gold OA, the market needs to be heavily regulated with drastic price caps below current author processing charges, or the situation will be worse than today: today, you have to cozy up with professional editors to get published in 'luxury segment' journals. In a universal OA world, you would also have to be rich. This may be better for the public in the short term, a they then would at least be able to access all the research. In the long term, however, if science suffers, so will eventually the public.

Every market I know has a luxury segment. I'll gladly rest my fears if someone shows me a market without such a segment and how it is similar to a universal OA academic publishing market. Until then, I'll be working towards getting rid of publishers and journal rank.

As to the handful of comments, they're basically a conversation with the person who seems to be even more anti-gold OA than Jeffrey Beall: Stevan Harnad. Once a prescription begins with "X has to be universally mandated," as far as I'm concerned the discussion is pretty much finished

Your University Is Definitely Paying Too Much for Journals

Brembs again, same blog, [June 17, 2014](#), this time commenting on an article in PNAS: “[Evaluating big deal journal bundles](#).”

Without going into details on the article itself (yes, it’s available), the message here is pretty straightforward: no matter how “good” a big deal is, it’s still far more than universities *should* be paying.

Brembs includes one figure from the paper that he found fascinating, and I agree: it shows premiums or discounts from “expected prices” based on modeling—and it shows discounts reaching “-130%.” I still can’t figure out (nor can Brembs) how you can discount anything more than 100%, unless the publishers are actually paying the university to take the journals. I am apparently not numerate enough for these times.

Gold Open Access: Counting the Costs

I can summarize [this article](#) by Theo Andrew in *Ariadne* issue 70 as follows: If you insist on gold OA *and* provide all the money any publisher asks for *and* base your spending estimates on medical publishing, *then* gold OA will be enormously expensive.

The actual article is about the University of Edinburgh, but I think the summary above is a realistic one. Unfortunately, the message that’s being promulgated—based largely on UK figures and open-handed funding—is that gold OA is Just Too Expensive for libraries or universities to embrace. Which, under this set of conditions, as Brembs says earlier, is *absolutely true*.

Gold open access in practice: How will universities respond to the rising total cost of publication?

Here’s another piece on the same theme, by Stephen Pinfield [on March 25, 2015](#) at the LSE Impact of Social Sciences blog—and while it’s clear, supported by evidence from 23 UK universities, and convincing as it stands *for UK universities and given UK’s apparent open-handed “charge what you will” policies*, what it and the previous piece say to me is this:

If supporting OA results in higher overall costs, *you’re doing it wrong*. Specifically, failing to apply some controls to out-of-whack APCs, “hybrid” double-dipping and, of course, the outrageous and rising costs of traditional journals. If you can’t address those things, yes, you’re going to pay more. Because, you know, put that pot of gold out there and hands will reach for it.

The Gold of Gold

Another fuzzy distinction: this section deals with gold OA journals and, to a great extent, with APCs.

Bottlenecks in the Open-Access System: Voices from Around the Globe

This commentary by 26 authors [appeared March 31, 2014](#) in the (gold OA) *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication*. Here's the abstract:

A level playing field is key for global participation in science and scholarship, particularly with regard to how scientific publications are financed and subsequently accessed. However, there are potential pitfalls of the so-called “Gold” open-access (OA) route, in which author-paid publication charges cover the costs of production and publication. Gold OA plans in which author charges are required may not solve the access problem, but rather may shift the access barrier from reader to writer. Under such plans, everyone may be free to read papers, but it may still be prohibitively expensive to publish them. In a scholarly community that is increasingly global, spread over more and more regions and countries of the world, these publication access barriers may be quite significant.

In the present paper, a global suite of colleagues in academe joins this debate. The group of colleagues, a network of researchers active in scholarly publishing, spans four continents and multiple disciplines in the natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences, as well as diverse political and economic situations. We believe that this global sampling of researchers can provide the nuance and perspective necessary to grasp this complex problem. The group was assembled without an attempt to achieve global coverage through random sampling.

This contribution differs from other approaches to the open-access problem in several fundamental ways. (A) It is scholar-driven, and thus can represent the ‘other side of the coin’ of scholarly communication. (B) It focuses on narrative report, where scholars were free to orient their responses as they saw fit, rather than being confined to binary or scalar choices. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, (C) it distinguishes among institutions and countries and situations, highlighting inequalities of access among wealthy and economically-challenged nations, and also within countries depending on the size and location of particular institutions.

The commentary itself is a PDF—and I should note, sadly, that the abstract above is likely to be read by a *lot* more people in *Cites & Insights* than it was at *JLSC*: the footer on the article shows 90 views and 28 downloads. Presumably 29, after I (probably for the second time) download it to comment on it.

There's this paragraph:

We aim to challenge the limitations of one important facet of the OA publishing model, the author-pays model. The Gold standard only works for all if there are no author fees or if the author has the “gold” that it requires.

However, this condition excludes the majority of the world's scholars from publishing in OA journals.

Only four journals, out of more than 100 gold OA journals in librarianship/library science, charge APCs. Thus, the majority of the world's *library* scholars are entirely able to publish in OA journals. Elsewhere, it is still the case that *most OA journals do not charge author fees* (73% in 2014) and, although those journals publish a minority of gold OA articles, it's a very large minority: 42.8% in 2014. (75.6% in the humanities and social sciences.)

The article seems to view Beall's list uncritically and says flatly that "The *best* new work continues to be published in closed-access journals," an astonishing claim that's impossible to prove but poses a huge attitudinal problem in making OA work. The article repeatedly equates gold OA with "author-pays."

The article may be worth reading, but I'm troubled by the set of assumptions and the apparent general feeling that expensive = good. (It's a relatively brief article—about eight pages of actual text.)

Is it True that Most Open Access Journals Do Not Charge an APC? Sort of. It Depends.

Here, let me fix the title of this David Crotty piece on [August 26, 2015](#) at *the scholarly kitchen*: "Is it true that most open access journals do not charge an APC? Absolutely." Here's the opening:

One of the truisms that often comes up when discussing Open Access (OA) business models is that the majority of OA journals do not charge authors an article processing charge (APC). This has been a standard talking point supported by multiple studies (most now a few years out of date), and by the continuing work of [Walt Crawford](#). It's a statement one hears over and over (a quick Google search provides mentions [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)—if Wikipedia [says it's true](#), it must be, right?). It's a factoid I myself have used in arguments. But is it really an accurate representation of the OA publishing market? A closer look suggests that by strictly limiting the definition of what qualifies as an "OA journal", we may be missing out on what's actually happening.

That "strict limitation" is that I, like any sane observer of OA journals, do not accept the absurd notion that "hybrid" journals are actually OA journals, even if they've never actually published OA articles.

Crotty calls my approach "cherry-picking." Given that there are no plausible numbers to suggest that "hybrid" articles account for more than a very small percentage of all gold OA articles, and that most big publishers will be happy to take \$3,000 to \$5,000 to possibly eventually make certain articles available, it is *of course* the case that there are probably more "hybrid" journals than there are OA journals. It's also meaningless.

Crotty correctly says that my own work does not agree with the notion that “most OA is published without author charges”—a notion that I haven’t seen all that often. I certainly won’t make such a claim (except in the humanities and social sciences, where it’s true).

Oxford University Press apparently shows 4% to 6% takeup for “hybrid” options; other publishers that have released numbers (there aren’t many!) mention even lower percentages. One source (see *much* later under “Double dipping in hybrid open access”) says it’s less than 2% for major publishers—so let’s say there *might* be 30,000 “hybrid” OA articles in 2014. That would add about 6% to the total for OA articles; I feel no qualms about ignoring those numbers, especially since there’s no plausible way to gather them.

Since I’m so deeply invested in this particular discussion (and in the comments here), I should probably stop editorializing here. The comment stream is somewhat more cordial.

Fee Waivers for Open Access Journals

This communication from Stuart Lawson appeared in *publications* [on August 5, 2015](#). The abstract:

Open access journals which charge article processing charges (APCs) sometimes offer fee waivers to authors who cannot afford to pay them. This article measures the extent of this practice among the largest toll access and open access publishers by gathering stated fee waiver policies from publishers’ websites. A majority (68.8%) were found to offer fee waivers and sometimes they are only available to authors from low- and middle-income countries. This has implications for the ability of authors without funding to publish in journals from these publishers.

It isn’t a comprehensive study, but the parameters are clearly stated and it seems to have been carefully done. I’m mostly pointing to it as a useful set of data.

Open Access Could Mean Authors Pay to Publish

On the other hand, this piece by Michael Lubell and Mark Elsesser [in October 2015](#) at *APS News* is a flat-out attack on OA, not that well disguised as a statement of concern about expenses.

During a recent discussion, APS President Sam Aronson noted that “Many commercial scientific publishers consider open access an existential threat to their business. But as a nonprofit publisher,” he emphasized, “APS considers its impact on the research enterprise to be of far greater importance.”

Mac Beasley, the society’s past president and interim treasurer, agreed, adding, “Who will bear the financial burden of open access, what rules

will govern it, and how will its implementation affect resources otherwise available for research? These are questions all APS members should be asking.”

We’re told that APS “has long been a supporter of open access,” but you can’t tell that from here. Instead, you get assertions that those calling for open access don’t recognize the cost and value of publishing activities, the flat-out statement that “almost all scientific publishers of high-quality journals rely on subscriptions” (the implication: if it’s OA, *it’s low-quality*), the usual equation of OA and author-pays, an attack on the quality control of free or inexpensive journals, using Bohannon’s “sting” as evidence, a slap at SCOAP³...

Gaia save OA from some of its asserted long-time supporters!

Who has a problem with APCs? – Current state of research

Witold Kieńc posted this [on June 30, 2015](#) at *Open Science*—and it’s an interesting piece, even if the biggest source of data is five years old.

In the humanities there are usually no author-side fees for publication in open access, but when they do occur they are more frequently paid by researchers themselves. Fees in the humanities also seem to be relatively low. In biomedical sciences the situation is the opposite. Fees are common, and relatively high, but they are most often covered by grant money. What are reasons for this phenomenon? Is it going to change?

The details that follow this opening—again, mostly based on a large 2010 survey (one that showed 52% of surveyed authors having published at least one OA article in the previous five years)—are not only plausible, they’re not wildly inconsistent with my own findings in 2014.

That is: back then, 32% of biomed authors avoided APCs, as compared to 59% of STEM authors and 79% of humanities and social sciences authors. My figures for 2011 articles: free articles accounted for 50% of biomed OA (down to 37% in 2014), 47% of STEM OA (also down to 37% in 2014), and 83% of HSS OA (down to 76% in 2014). Those really aren’t huge differences, especially since [the 2010 survey](#) dealt with authors rather than articles and, given the participants, may have underrepresented less well-developed countries.

This piece is worth reading—and notably ends with a useful caveat:

All the studies I have mentioned in this post were based on samples that were not representative of the entire research community, but they obtained quite a similar result, which makes them quite credible. However, there is still a need to conduct a large, representative survey about researchers’ experiences with APCs.

The mythical OA article processing charge

Heather Morrison posted this [on December 3, 2015](#) at *Sustaining the Knowledge Commons*—and it’s a preface of sorts to the next item.

The purpose of this post is to provide some important context for understanding OA publication charges. A key point that I would like to highlight is that **the OA APC, in the sense of a single number charged for each article published, is a myth.** It is important to understand this because OA journals are obviously conducting some real-world experiments that have the potential for beneficial results for high-quality, sustainable open access publishing, and providing discounts that may be needed by some authors and OA APC payers.

The remainder of the relatively short post expands on that paragraph. There are several confounding issues, described in the post. Which leads into...

OA APC preliminary data 2015: range, central tendencies and preliminary longitudinal analysis

By Heather Morrison and Jihane Salhab [on December 3, 2015](#) at *Sustaining the Knowledge Commons*—and it's useful stuff, done using a different methodology than *The Gold OA Landscape 2011-2014*. To wit: Morrison's group looks at APC on a per-journal basis rather than a per-article basis, and uses sampling rather than a full survey.

That said, the overall average APC was \$998 *per journal*, lower than my \$1,108 *per article ignoring \$0-APC journals* and much higher than my \$633 *per article overall*.

There's more here, including longitudinal aspects of APC levels (I have no comparable data, since I didn't look at journals before 2014). It's interesting: on a year-to-year basis, roughly one-third of (APC-charging?) journals increased prices from 2014 to 2015, decreased them or stayed about the same.

No additional comments...except the note that claims of \$3,000 average APC are simply nonsensical, no matter *how* you measure OA journals and articles.

Business Models

We'll close this extended discussion with another large and somewhat amorphous set of items that seemed (to me) to be about business models, including the range of possibilities and some interesting experiments—and some notes, useful and otherwise, on OA as a business proposition.

Open Access: How to get into the business?

Bridge i2i is at least upfront in [this March 11, 2015 post](#) on its blog: it's all about the ~~Benjamins~~ business. Oddly, although one paragraph *seems* to imply that APCs are the only way to run an OA journal, the next section discusses “many business models of open access,” focusing on five of them: institutional funding, consortium/community publishing, external

sponsorship “or advertising,” crowdfunding or e-commerce, and subscriptions for print copies.

Really? Print *subscriptions* as a survival mechanism for new OA journals, as opposed to the case study for one single Indian journal that converted to OA? Sure, could happen, maybe.

That’s followed by an assurance that “OA can be successful business model” and a brief note about “fake journals,” with, *of course*, a wholly uncritical link to “a list of which.” The final two paragraphs:

The publishing industry must be cautious, as there are now several revenue sources for open access journal. The problem is not unique to open access and it does not imply that open access publishing is always bad or of inferior quality. The penetration of technology and wider reach of articles would definitely improve the quality of research. But the choice of journals and the agency that operates journals in the open access domain should undergo rigorous scrutiny to avoid researchers being misguided.

Similarly, the community of researchers or the publishing houses that venture into open access publishing have to distinguish themselves from the numerous journals that operate in the space. They have to stay away from the publishers that have promoted fraudulent journals. With increasing transparency around the journal policy and increased reach within the academic community, newer entrepreneurship in open access publishing can maintain the required standards.

Reading through this, I look back for some meat—and see none. Apparently, “BRIDGEi2i provides Business Analytics Solutions to enterprise globally, enabling them to achieve accelerated business impact harnessing the power of data.” It’s basically an Indian consulting, er, Business Analytics firm, and I can only hope that the quality of this piece is not indicative of the firm as a whole. Let’s just say that, if you believe OA is a “business” that you want to “get into,” I’m guessing this is not where to begin.

Need cash? Publish your paper in the MalariaWorld Journal

That provocative headline appears above [an April 3, 2015 article](#) by Dalmeet Singh Chawla at *Science Insider*—and he begins with a sentence that may tell me all I really want to know about the article:

Most open-access (OA) journals make money by making authors pay an article processing charge to publish a paper. A small online malaria journal based in the Netherlands wants to turn that situation on its head. It is promising to pay authors €150 for every article it publishes from now on. The idea behind the move—possible thanks to a Dutch funding agency—is not only to lure authors to the journal, but also to drive home the message that academic publishing is way too expensive, says the journal’s editor, Bart Knols.

Quite apart from the fact that it's not usually the authors who pay APCs, it is *simply not true* that most OA journals make their money this way—and, frankly, it's outrageous for a *Science* organ to say so.

OK, so the writer's apparently Indian. Is the situation different there? As it happens, it is: of the 438 DOAJ-listed journals I considered serious enough to include in *The Gold OA Landscape 2011-2014*, 53.7% charge APCs—and India accounts for 100 out of the 312 DOAJ-listed journals I considered too questionable to include in the analysis. Almost all of those 100 sketchy journals, including the ones calling themselves “British” and the ones hiding APCs, charge APCs. But the statement is flatly untrue in the U.S., where it's being published—62.3% of OA journals not charging APCs—and certainly worldwide. Two paragraphs later, he repeats the same falsehood.

That nonsense aside, it's an odd and interesting story. The journal in question—with very few published articles and not yet in PubMed—is mostly underwritten by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research, and they're OK with the idea of a reverse APC. The journal's editor takes a poke at *Malaria Journal*, a BMC journal with €1,720 APC, saying:

“Authors should understand that the high publication costs with open-access publishers like BioMed Central can be put to better use—research—now that there are good alternatives to publish their work for free and get rewarded,” Knols tells *ScienceInsider*. “The cost of publishing an article in the *Malaria Journal* can cover more than 400 children with bed nets.”

Unfortunately for what might otherwise be an interesting trial, *Malaria-World Journal* is *not* open access: each article's abstract ends with “To view or download this Open Access MalariaWorld Journal article please log-in [here](#).” (One commenter points that out along with noting that the “most OA journals charge APCs” statement is false.) It's in DOAJ; I don't think it should be, but that's an area where I disagree with DOAJ.

Might Freemium Open Access Be Better than Green or Gold? – A Guest Post by Toby Green

This piece by Toby Green appeared [on May 19, 2015](#) in *Digital Science Perspectives*. Green, head of publishing at OECD, suggests a third model for OA, “freemium”—free basic services with payment for premium items.

Apart from the ghastly word, it's an interesting discussion and worth reading—but with two major problems as I see it:

- It's not clear that this model works anywhere but (maybe) in games and (maybe) in low-end air travel. (As one who's given away the heart of my 2014 study and charged for the full study, I can tell you this “freemium” model ain't working all that well: Nowhere close to

1% of those reading the free portion have paid for the full study, let alone the 10% I think you need for this sort of model to function.)

- What he calls free basic open access is what others would call *not* OA: you can read the articles online, but you can neither download nor forward them.

Still, an interesting discussion.

Double Dipping in Hybrid Open Access—Chimera or Reality?

This [June 3, 2015 paper](#) by Bernhard Mittermaier is absolute dynamite if you believe “hybrid” OA has any serious potential to improve the economic situation (of anybody but “hybrid” OA publishers).

Mittermaier conducted a careful, detailed survey of 24 journal publishers and did follow-up work as possible. To answer the question in the title up front: “reality.” He concluded that *no* publisher fully avoids double-dipping, even if you accept their responses at face value—and some don’t even pretend to

I think the paper might be worth reading for pages 2-4 even if Mittermaier hadn’t conducted the research. He offers a set of bullet points as to why (thinking) authors are reluctant to use “hybrid” OA (and, in the process, gets an average non-hybrid APC that’s pretty close to my own calculations—that is, around \$1,000, as compared to \$3,000 and up for “hybrid” APCs), followed by some textual commentary on both sides.

I don’t have a lot to say here except: you should read this paper. And then avoid “hybrid” OA.

Have we reached Peak Megajournal?

Mike Taylor [on May 29, 2015](#) at *SVPoW*—and he’s using a definition of “megajournal” I find frustrating but apparently common: that is, any journal that does peer review for correctness but not impact. (For my own research, I use actual publishing level—the journal must have published at least 1,000 articles in one year. Most so-called megajournals are nowhere near that level.) He’s actually commenting on an article, which I’ll leave for you to read if you choose.

Taylor includes a graph that shows (a) that yes, the total number of articles in “megajournals” may be declining but (b) that this is basically because *PLOS One* dominates “megajournals” and was supposed to decline rapidly in 2015.

But the post appeared in May 2015. How could it reasonably include projections for all of 2015? The other paper just takes the first quarter and multiplies by four, which makes interesting assumptions about publishing patterns. Looking at the table in the other article, there are only three very large journals, and two of the three show continuing year-to-year increases; for the remaining ones, some of which are so “mega” that they published 16 articles in one year, six are estimated as growing in 2015,

four as shrinking, one as unchanged—but all the 2015 numbers are, to my mind, largely useless estimates. (The same article estimates total DOAJ-registered articles as 200,000 in 2015; since the actual number is at least 480,000, you can see why I'm reluctant to cite the original article directly.)

The graph shows a *huge* decline in *PLOS One* article count from 2014 to 2015—down from around 30,000 to around 22,000. So I went to *PLOS One* and did an Advanced Search for each year—noting that I'm doing this on December 27, 2015, so I'm still missing four days of 2015 articles.

The results? Yes, the article count declined from 2013 to 2014—but by roughly 1,000 out of 33,000. As for 2015, there's a decline (noting that two weeks remain)—but to just under 29,400 (down about 2,400), not to 22,000. I'd be hard-pressed to call that a substantial decline.

Taylor, who uses the High Number for total scholarly publishing (2.5 million for 2014, where other sources range from 1.5 to 2 million), finds it hard to believe that the market for, well, let's call them “impact-independent journals,” is saturated at less than 2% of the journal market and says:

I suspect that what this study really shows us—and I'm sure the PLOS people would be the first to agree with this—is that we need a lot more megajournals out there than just *PLOS ONE*. Specifically:

- It's well established that [pure-OA journals offer better value for their APCs than hybrid ones](#).
- It's at least strongly suspected (has there been a study?) that OA megajournals offer better value than selective OA journals.
- We want to get the APCs of OA megajournals down.
- *PLOS ONE* needs competition on price, to force down its increasingly unjustifiable APC of \$1350.
- It's a real shame that the *eLIFE* people have fallen into the impact-chasing trap and show no interest in running an *eLIFE* megajournals.
- I think the usually reliable Zen Faulks is dead wrong when he writes off what he calls “[Zune journals](#)”.

So the establishment of new megajournals is very much a good thing, and their growth is to be encouraged. Many of the newer megajournals may well find (and I hate to admit this) that their submission rates increase when they're handed their first impact factor, as happened with *PLOS ONE*.

This all seems reasonable. We do need a better term than “megajournals,” ‘cuz that's not what most of these are. (And aren't there *hundreds* of OA journals that validate for correctness but not impact? Isn't that true of most/all MDPI and Hindawi journals, just for starters?)

Donations as a Source of Income for Open Access Journals: An Option To Consider?

Thomas Reinsfelder published [this refereed article](#) in the Summer 2015 *Journal of Electronic Publishing* (a no-fee gold OA journal that's been around for 20 years). The abstract:

Online open access journals allow readers to view scholarly articles without a subscription or other payment barrier. However, publishing costs must still be covered. Therefore, many of these publications rely on support from a variety of sources. One source of funds not commonly discussed is donations from readers. This study investigated the prevalence of this practice and sought to learn about the motivation of journal editors to solicit donations, and also to gather input

on the effectiveness of this strategy. Results show that very few open access journals solicit donations from readers, and for those that do, donations represent only a very small portion of all support received.

Reinsfelder cofounded and coedits an OA journal in librarianship, volunteer-run, and notes that there are always *some* bills. The journal has started asking for donations—and he thought it would be useful to see whether this business model is working elsewhere.

This is a carefully-done study; I think it's worth reading. Looking at more than 1,100 English-language journals in *DOAJ* that are published in the U.S. (data taken in June 2014), only 5% asked for donations. Editors of those 54 journals were asked for feedback; 26 responded at least partially.

The breakdown of the 26 journals (all, as you might expect, published in association with universities, societies or other nonprofits) is interesting: half in social sciences, one in biomed/life sciences, the rest evenly split between the humanities and physical sciences. In other words, all but seven of the 26 journals are in HSS.

How effective is the strategy of soliciting donations? Not very: only eight called it somewhat or very effective. Fifteen editors were able to report donation totals for the previous 12 months—and while one journal raised an astonishing \$40,000 and another \$10,000, the median was \$2,000...and one-third of the 15 didn't raise a dime.

There's lots more here, and even though the author unfortunately mentions Beall's lists as apparently credible, it's a solid contribution.

Speaking of which, contributions pretty clearly don't represent a viable business model for most journals. And now there's evidence.

Proof of Concept, Proof of Program, and Proof of Scale in Scholarly Communication

This piece by Rick Anderson [appeared September 22, 2015](#) at the *scholarly kitchen*, and while it doesn't describe any specific business model, it does pose some useful thoughts about how business models might be judged.

I won't comment on the piece itself. The comments are interesting, including some nastiness thrown in from one privateer and a discussion in which I was involved, which gets to some tricky definitional issues. To wit: If you say "volunteer-run journals don't scale" you're probably both right and wrong.

You're right in that's difficult to run a very large journal entirely with volunteer labor—although the definition of "very large" may be fuzzy. You're wrong, however, if you believe this means that such journals can't handle a large number of articles—there are many very small journals, and no-fee OA (not all of it volunteer, to be sure) accounted for more than 200,000 articles in 2014.

In any case, worth reading—the article and the comments—and thinking about.

Opening the Open Library of Humanities

This editorial by Martin Eve and Caroline Edwards, appearing [on September 28, 2015](#) in *Open Library of Humanities* 1:1, helped clarify some of my own confusion regarding OLH—but still leaves a little confusion.

When I was reading about Martin Eve's plans for and advocacy of OLH, it seemed to me that he was pushing for One Humanities Journal to Rule Them All—and I thought a humanities megajournal was a bad idea, especially if it involved APCs or sucking grant money away from other projects.

It's somewhat clearer now. APCs aren't involved; instead (other than grant funding), there's a business model that I find particularly interesting and maybe promising: a consortium of libraries and other institutions to build a "scalable model" for journal transition to open access—not for One Big Journal but for a range of smaller journals. Except that I can't really tell whether One Big Journal is still the intent.

At the time of this editorial, six journals had moved to the OLH platform and (I guess) 100 institutions had signed on. That's a good start.

As of December 17, 2015, there were ten articles in *OLH* 1:1 (which is doing OA the right way—publishing articles as they're approved, with an issue growing until the next issue begins).

Aha: [this announcement](#) has firmer numbers: 99 institutions, seven journals (including *OLH* itself), still a goal of 150 articles in "year one," which I assume will run through September 2016.

Interesting times in academic publishing

Timothy Gowers posted this [on November 10, 2015](#) at *Gowers's Weblog*; he discusses “four current goings on in the world of academic publishing.”

First, there's the new overlay journal he's involved in, *Discrete Analysis*—an OA journal that's purely an overlay on arXiv (there's an extended discussion of this interesting model in [a September 10, 2015 post](#)). Initially, at least, this journal (consisting of links to *refereed* articles, with DOIs and other infrastructure added) is covered by a small grant to handle refereeing management (at \$10 per submission). I think the September 10, 2015 post is very much worth reading: it *does* define an alternative business model for some OA journals in fields covered by arXiv.

The second is a comment on Open Library of Humanities:

The rough idea is that they provide a platform for humanities journals that are free to read online and free for authors (or, as some people like to say, are Diamond OA journals). Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this initiative is that it is funded by a consortium of libraries. Librarians are the people who feel the pain of ridiculous subscription prices, so they have great goodwill towards people who are trying to build new and cheaper publication models. I think there is no reason that the sciences couldn't do something similar—in fact, it should be even easier to find money.

As you know, I'm not one of “some people”; I think proliferating colors just confuses the issue, but that's me. I wonder whether the last clause in this paragraph is likely to be true, but I'm not suggesting that it isn't. (On the other hand, the humanities have a strong bias *against* APCs—then again, mathematics has a high percentage of non-APC OA journals, although a slight majority of articles involve APCs.)

The third is the *Lingua/Glossa* situation, already covered (as always, Gowers has interesting things to say). The fourth is slightly astonishing, involving the decision of the London Mathematical Society to shut down one of its journals that wasn't quite covering costs. The astonishing part is this paragraph (from a letter to an author from the journal's editors) about a proposal to make the journal OA:

However, the LMS Council did not accept the proposal, and decided instead that the journal should be closed, one reason being that it felt **the move to a gold open access model would likely lead to a slow decline that could be more damaging to its reputation**. Council felt that the general area of computation and mathematics was one that the Society should, in the long run, continue to be present in, but thought that there were probably better ways to use its resources in this direction. Of course the Society will continue to make the papers already published available in perpetuity. [Emphasis added.]

Wowser. So the officers of a society assume that making a journal open access automatically results in a “slow decline that could be more damaging to its reputation” than, you know, shutting it down.

And some people wonder why OA-advocating librarians and others seem frustrated about not only ignorance of OA but ignorant opposition.

Comments also worth reading.

Guest Post: CCC’s Roy Kaufman on Growing Your Open Access Business in an Environment of Peak APC Pricing

I recommend [this November 12, 2015 post](#) at the *scholarly kitchen* by Roy Kaufman of the Copyright Clearance Center as a useful preventive measure if you are at all tempted by any of CCC’s many webinars and other initiatives related to open access. The piece should make it absolutely clear that CCC is in favor of one thing: helping publishers to squeeze every possible cent out of libraries and others.

I’m bemused by Kaufman’s simple assertions that it actually *costs* journals \$10,000 or more to handle one article, and that “hybrid” APCs actually represent a *loss* for publishers. Who knew that Elsevier was so public-spirited as to threaten its very profits through offering pricey APC options for almost all of its journals? Better yet, who can believe that?

Kaufman even has solutions, including cutting costs and launching even more journals—but he favors the third approach: get more money out of authors. Oh, he doesn’t word it that way. Here’s his paragraph:

Increase product offerings to authors. If publishers cannot raise APC and subscription prices, nor further cut their costs or publish more articles, they *can* offer authors various extras as part of the publishing package. Additional fee-generating options might include reprints, language-polishing services, continuing education and certifications, article-level analytics, submission charges, or color- and page-charges, to name just a few. By selling more products, revenues can increase, costs can be amortized across a bigger business, and profits can go up.

Oh, look at that: Let’s have more submission charges, more color charges, more page charges: publishers can get even richer by soaking authors (or funding agencies) through additional channels.

There’s more, and it’s of one piece. Double-dipping? No such thing: the journals are losing money by accepting APCs and not reducing subscription prices, apparently. But hey, offer all sorts of new “services” and you can, what, triple-dip?

This seems like a depressing way to conclude a roundup—but it’s always useful to note that strong forces want nothing more than to make even more money from scholarly articles, one way or another, and by all means to keep those 30%-40% profit margins high and preferably higher.

Conclusions

I learned quite a few things while working on this essay, not all of them having anything to do with open access. For example:

- A number of academics view PhD theses as drafts or unrevised work: that is, theses based on which PhDs were actually granted.
- To a lot of people, anecdotal (even if it's a Sample of One) trumps surveys or actual data any time—but I already knew that.
- Flipping journals from subscription to OA, especially if it's no-fee OA, can be a good thing. Flipping the whole field in a way that provides publishers with the same revenue they currently have would probably be a very bad thing for all concerned except the publishers—and if it's being worked on behind closed doors and in invitation-only conferences, so much the worse. Open-via-closed doesn't make sense.
- As always, there's a wide range of figures or how much is spent on scholarly journals, how many there are, and how many articles are published. For the first, I've seen ranged from \$10 billion to \$14 billion. For the second, anywhere from 28,000 to 50,000 (and up!). For the third, anywhere from 1.5 million to 2.5 million. In all three cases, the answer—if there even is “the” answer—may be “it depends.”
- There's also a huge range of figures for supposed costs per article of OA publishing—with the new minimum being asserted as a possible \$1.61 per article, and \$300 appearing to be a pressure point.
- One assertion I had never heard before: for-profit STM publishers are *subsidizing* the OA articles in “hybrid” journals—or at least that's the way I read one STM association press release.
- If we assume that every scholarly article gets published *somewhere*, it's possible to calculate that Elsevier editors see half of all scholarly articles, assuming that overall volume is 2.4 million articles.
- If you want to start a pricey new gold OA journal in the humanities and social sciences (“you,” of course, being one of the Biggies), it helps to pretend that hundreds of existing journals with no fees or very small fees simply don't exist.

If I was properly listicle-oriented, that list would be numbered and I'd find two more to add. But I'm not, so it's not.

Pay What You Wish

[Cites & Insights](#) carries no advertising and has no sponsorship. It does have costs, both direct and indirect. If you find it valuable or interesting, you are invited to contribute toward its ongoing operation. The Paypal donation button (for which you can use Paypal or a credit card) is on the [Cites & Insights home page](#). Thanks.

Masthead

Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large, Volume 16, Number 2, Whole # 192, ISSN 1534-0937, a periodical of libraries, policy, technology and media, is written and produced, usually monthly, by Walt Crawford.

Comments should be sent to waltcrawford@gmail.com. *Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large* is copyright ©2016 by Walt Crawford: Some rights reserved.

All original material in this work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/1.0> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Stanford, California 94305, USA.

URL: citesandinsights.info/civ16i2on.pdf