Compelling and Necessary Momentum: A Recent Timeline in Open Access

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February 22, 2013: The White House ordered agencies to "make research and digital scientific data funded by the federal government more accessible to the public." Jennifer Martinez, blogging for *The Hill*, reported that Peter Suber, director of the Public Knowledge Open Access Project, called this move a "big win for researchers, taxpayers, and everyone who depends on research for new medicines, useful technologies, or effective public policies." See: http://thehill.com/blogs/hillicon-valley/technology/284483-white-house-issues-directive-aimed-expanding-free-access-to-federally-funded-research-)

Later that day, the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC), a library-based organization, issued a press release applauding the White House for this "landmark directive," calling it a "watershed moment" and a "major step forward toward open access to scientific research." (See: http://www.arl.org/sparc/media/sparc-applauds-white-house-for-landmark-directive-.shtml)

February 28, 2013: *The New England Journal of Medicine* published four articles debating the pros and cons of open access publishing. Ann J. Wolpert's essay, "For the Sake of Inquiry and Knowledge—The Inevitability of Open Access" (DIO: 10.1056/NEJMp1211410), identifies the five key stakeholders in scholarly communication as funding agencies that support research, organizations that host the intellectuals who conduct the research and support its growth, authors who publish on the research, publishers who obtain copyright transfer and edit and produce published works, and libraries who collect and make available published works. Open access disrupts this ecosystem especially for the fourth identified stakeholder by addressing the barriers created by cost/profit based publication of knowledge and information. Not only are authors discontent with the traditional profit based model of scholarly publishing, says Wolpert, but so are government agencies expending funds for research, as well as charitable foundations seeking wide access and impact for the research they support. She concludes, "There is no doubt that the public interests vested in funding agencies, universities, libraries, and authors, together with the power and reach of the Internet, have created a compelling and necessary momentum for open access. It won't be easy, and it won't be inexpensive, but it is only a matter of time."

Martin Frank, in "Open but Not Free—Publishing in the 21st Century" (DOI: 10.1056/NEJMp1211259), outlines various cost models associated with open access publishing and the effect this has on available funding for research. Two models that have emerged are now called, the "Gold" and the "Green", the former being fully free and immediate reader access to scholarship and the latter being author/institutional paid publication and made free to readers only after an embargo period. The crux of the problem, he argues, concerns the model where an author or an institution pays a publisher for publishing an article in an open access journal that results in the loss of significant funds for the research itself given limited budgets.

As a countermeasure to certain drawbacks in open access publishing, Charlotte Haung issues an appeal for "transparency" in her article, "The Downside of Open-Access Publishing" (DIO: 10.1056/NEJMp1214750). In particular, being up front with authors and readers, she says, open access publishers would help dispel negative perceptions by clearly and truthfully presenting their editorial practices, content standards, and financial arrangements that support the commitment of OA publishers to high quality scholarship.

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Michael W. Carroll explores some legal aspects of copyright and open access in "Creative Commons and the Openness of Open Access" (DOI: 10.1056/NEJMp1300040). Creative Commons is an organization that promotes open access by offering six different types of licenses with varying restrictions that may also include additional restrictions depending on the need of authors. According to each of the three well-known open access declarations (the Budapest, Bethesda and Berlin), Carroll asserts that it is the "Creative Commons Attribution" license that actually meets their definition of "open access" and, he says, this type of license remains the "gold standard."

These four articles appear in the context of scientific and quantitative research, and for the humanities and social sciences some of the issues and concerns are shared with the hard sciences. The issues of pay-to-publish and data-based research being driven by big money are those more common among the sciences. The upshot of this, I believe, is a more welcoming and supportive environment for open access within the humanities and social sciences—at least for now.

At any rate, the winds of scholarly communication increasingly tilt toward strengthening currents in open access publishing. Such a shift not only affects access to research and information, it also affects the nature of librarianship and the role of librarians in this intellectual ecosystem.

March 26, 2013: The Association of College & Research Libraries published the white paper, "Intersections of Scholarly Communication and Information Literacy: Creating Strategic Collaborations for a Changing Academic Environment" (See: http://acrl.ala.org/intersections). The focus of the study and recommendations clearly are on the instructional side of library services, but there are important directives for scholarly communication librarians—and both are deeply rooted in the change to digital formats and open access. The paper suggests, "Notable initiatives for scholarly communication librarians are open access policies, digital repositories, copyright education and support, and library publishing programs." (p. 12)

April 2, 2013: SPARC issued the third in a series of reports on the sustainability of open access services. In "The Collective Provision of Open Access Resources" (See: http://www.arl.org/sparc/bm~doc/collective-provision-of-oa-services.pdf), author Raym Crow provides some general guidance to open access providers as they seek to develop more sustainable models for this mode of publication. One model he presents, the "Assurance Contract," may in fact be a good way forward through institutional commitment to funding and oversight of quality control. This may even address some of the concerns raised by Haug. The encouraging element in SPARC's report is the concern for sustainability of open access—concerns that, in my opinion, are less than those facing traditional print publishing.

This brief six week timeline covered here by no means represents a comprehensive picture of recent developments in the open access movement. It does, however, offer some key indicators of how quickly and how deeply the momentum is building. Now entering its fifth year of publication, *Collaborative Librarianship* proudly takes its place in the field of scholarly communication. In supporting and advancing open access, we again invite other librarians, archivists, and information professionals to join us as contributors to the journal: as authors, peer reviewers, and perhaps in other capacities—and more certainly as readers.