

# Principles and Strategies for the Reform of Scholarly Communication 1

## Scholarly Communication Defined

Scholarly communication is the system through which research and other scholarly writings are created, evaluated for quality, disseminated to the scholarly community, and preserved for future use. The system includes both formal means of communication, such as publication in peer-reviewed journals, and informal channels, such as electronic mailing lists. This document addresses issues related primarily to the formal system of scholarly communication.

One of the fundamental characteristics of scholarly research is that it is created as a public good to facilitate inquiry and knowledge. A substantial portion of such research is publicly supported, either directly through federally-funded research projects or indirectly through state support of researchers at state higher-education institutions. In addition, the vast majority of scholars develop and disseminate their research with no expectation of direct financial reward.

## Scholarly Communication in Crisis

The formal system of scholarly communication is showing numerous signs of stress and crisis. Throughout the second half of the 20th century commercial firms have assumed increasing control over the scholarly journals market, particularly in scientific, technical, and medical fields. The journal publishing industry has also become increasingly consolidated and is now dominated by a few international conglomerates. Prices for scholarly journals have risen at rates well above general inflation in the economy and also above the rate of increase of library budgets. Libraries have coped with price increases through a variety of strategies, including subscription cuts and reductions in monographic purchases. In addition, escalating prices have occurred at the same time that the quantity of scholarly information, including the number of scholarly journals, has increased substantially. The net effect of these changes has been a significant reduction in access to scholarship.

The economic challenges facing scholarly monograph publishers, particularly university presses, are another aspect of the growing crisis, one that illustrates its systemic nature. Faced with declining library markets and other economic pressures, university presses have substantially decreased the extent to which they produce specialized scholarly monographs. Such publications have been an important component of scholarly output, particularly in humanistic disciplines.

The recent transition to electronic publishing, though promising in many respects, presents numerous new challenges and threats to access. As journals move from print to electronic form, the legal framework for their use changes from copyright law to contract law. The latter framework governs publisher licensing agreements, which often include undesirable limits on use, eliminating

forms of access that would have been permitted in the print environment under principles of fair use. Individual libraries tend to have limited bargaining power in negotiating publisher licensing agreements that provide desired levels of access for users as well as rights for such services as interlibrary loan. Libraries also face loss of content in licensed aggregated journal databases when agreements between publishers and aggregators change.

The electronic environment also poses significant challenges for long-term preservation of, and access to, information. Since most libraries do not actually own and store the content of the journals they license in electronic form, new models for preservation must be developed. Changes in technology platforms pose other serious preservation challenges.

Access to scholarship is further threatened by various issues at the national policy level. Powerful commercial interests have successfully supported - and are continuing to advocate - changes in copyright law that limit the public domain and significantly reduce principles of fair use, particularly for information in digital form. Public policy establishes the legal environment in which publishers and aggregators negotiate licenses with libraries; it can seriously compromise the ability of libraries and library consortia to negotiate licensing terms on an equal footing. National policy has also failed to address consolidation in the journal publishing industry and the price rises that result from publisher mergers.

These issues and trends have reduced access to scholarship. While the severity of problems experienced has varied by both the type of institution involved and its particular circumstances, these issues touch all types of universities and colleges and their libraries. They will continue to adversely affect the system of scholarly communication, unless they are successfully addressed by the higher education community.

## **The ACRL Scholarly Communications Initiative**

The purpose of the Association of College and Research Libraries' scholarly communications initiative is to work in partnership with other library and higher education organizations to encourage reform in the system of scholarly communication and to broaden the engagement of academic libraries in scholarly communications issues. Goals of the initiative are to create a system of scholarly communication that is more responsive to the needs of the academy, reflecting the nature of scholarship and research as a public good.

## **Principles Supported**

ACRL supports the following principles for reform in the system of scholarly communication:

- the broadest possible access to published research and other scholarly writings
- increased control by scholars and the academy over the system of scholarly publishing
- fair and reasonable prices for scholarly information

- competitive markets for scholarly information
- a diversified publishing industry
- open access to scholarship
- innovations in publishing that reduce distribution costs, speed delivery, and extend access to scholarly research
- quality assurance in publishing through peer review
- fair use of copyrighted information for educational and research purposes
- extension of public domain information
- preservation of scholarly information for long-term future use
- the right to privacy in the use of scholarly information.

## Strategies Supported

ACRL supports the following strategies for reform in the system of scholarly communication:

- the development of competitive journals, including the creation of low cost and open access journals that provide direct alternatives to high priced commercial titles
- increased control by editorial boards over the business practices of their journals, which may include negotiating reductions in subscription prices, converting to open access business models, or moving journals to nonprofit publishers, such as university presses, in instances where continued commercial publication does not serve the needs of their scholarly communities
- challenges to journal publisher mergers to prevent increased industry consolidation, especially among publishers of journals in scientific, technical and medical fields, where mergers have resulted in documented opportunistic price increases
- the development of peer-reviewed open access journals, which follow business models that obviate the need for subscriptions or other economic restrictions on access
- federal and private funding of authors' fees for publishing in open access journals, incorporated as an integral part of the process through which research is funded
- federal legislation that will require that federally funded research published in subscription-based journals be made openly accessible within a specific period (e.g. six months) after publication
- the development of institutional repositories (defined as open access sites which capture the research output of a given institution) that are created either by single institutions or by groups of institutions working under a cooperative framework

- the development of disciplinary repositories (open access sites that archive research in a discipline according to principles of open access)
- self-archiving by scholars of their research and writings in open access repositories
- publishing and copyright agreements that allow authors to retain the right to self-archive their peer-reviewed publications in open access repositories
- maintenance of interoperability standards that facilitate efficient access to content in open repositories
- the development of new models and practices that will preserve scholarly information in electronic form for future use
- implementation of public policies that ensure fair use of scholarly information in electronic form
- implementation of public policies that protect the rights and capacities of libraries to provide acceptable terms of user access and reach reasonable economic terms in licensing electronic information
- licensing agreements by library consortia and other groups of libraries that maximize their collective buying and negotiating power
- use of innovative and cost-effective electronic information technologies in publishing, including publication of journals in electronic form and the creation of scholarly electronic communities that serve the needs of scholars in a discipline in flexible ways
- campus advocacy by librarians, faculty, and administrators to create greater awareness for the need for change in the system of scholarly communication
- vigorous national advocacy, in cooperation with other groups, in support of the public policy principles enumerated in this document.

**Note:**

<sup>1</sup> This document, which was developed by the ACRL Scholarly Communications Committee, is intended to be a foundation statement that provides overall guidance the ACRL scholarly communications initiative. It was approved by the ACRL Board of Directors on June 24, 2003, at the ALA Annual Conference in Toronto.