

First Monday, Volume 10, Number 8 - 1 August 2005

A proposal for an open content licence for research paper (Pr)ePrints

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Abstract

Many academic papers that are to be submitted to refereed conferences and journals have been previously exposed to the author's colleagues. The term 'preprints' has long been used to describe such documents. 'Departmental Working Paper' series were for many years a conventional vehicle for their publication. In the modern world, preprints are frequently transmitted electronically, variously as e-mail attachments and as files available for download via FTP or HTTP.

When a preprint is made available electronically, it is likely that the author provides the recipient not only with a copy, but also with a copyright licence. In most cases, however, the licence is only implicit, and the terms of the licence are unclear. This creates the potential for considerable uncertainties, and those uncertainties are of serious concern in the context of tension between for-profit publishers of refereed articles and the research communities that referee and edit them gratis, and depend on them for early access to information.

This paper briefly reviews the open content and ePrints movements, considers the interests of the various stakeholders, proposes a set of licence terms intended to satisfy the needs of all parties, and concludes that a particular Creative Commons licence type should be applied to all electronic preprints.