CAUT Librarians' Committee Discussion Paper
on
Reframing Scholarly Communications

This paper is to promote discussion within CAUT and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Canadian Association of University Teachers

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In January of 1995 the Council of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) approved the Association's Policy on Scholarly Journal Cutbacks. This document recognizes the reality of journal cancellations in university libraries as an everyday fact of academic life. It speaks to the need for wide consultation and care in the cancellation process, and it raises concerns about the impact of cancellations of less mainstream journals on the research and teaching process. The policy urges better cooperation, both between universities and with other research bodies, such as the Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information (CISTI) in sharing journal resources. It also advocates the lobbying of governments for direct funding to support the purchase of scholarly publications. Finally, the CAUT policy calls on universities to "sensitize themselves to the problems caused by the economics of the present system of academic journal publishing and seek alternative ways of dealing with the high costs associated with these materials" (CAUT, 1995).

In the six years since the appearance of this CAUT policy, the situation with respect to scholarly journal cutbacks in university libraries has grown considerably worse. At a recent conference on the topic held at the University of Calgary, Dr. David Schulenburger (Provost of the Univ. of Kansas), described the matter as the "scholarly communications problem" (Shulenburger, 1999). His approach contrasts with that of many faculty, who tend to view the situation as either "a library problem" (the result of poor budget management within the library), or "the Provost's problem" (the result of insufficient allocations for library journal budgets from university administrators).

U.S. statistics indicate that in 1986 there were about 103,700 journals published world wide. By 1999 this figure had risen to 161,000 journals published. During this period the Consumer Price Index rose by 49% and the average cost of monographs rose by 66%. The cost of scholarly journals however, increased by 175% (Shulenburger, 1999). Thus a library with a journals budget of $10 million in 1986 would have to spend $17.5 million to buy the same number of journals in 1999. However, factoring in the huge increase in the number of journals published during this period, means that in order to purchase the same proportion of the journal literature that it bought for $10 million in 1986, a library in 1999 would have to spend $27.2 million dollars. The situation is exacerbated in Canadian research libraries (which generally buy 80% of their material in U.S. dollars), by the currency exchange factor. The University of Alberta Library for example, estimates that over the course of a year every one-cent drop in the loonie vs. the greenback, reduces its buying power by about $65,000.

Scholarly journal publishing, particularly in the areas of Science, Technology and Medicine (STM) has become a global big business, dominated by a handful of huge commercial publishing conglomerates whose profit margins are estimated by the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC), to run at between 20% and 40% per year (SPARC, 2000, Overview …). As far back as 1992, a study commissioned by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation concluded

that a few foreign commercial publishers had an "oligopolistic control of the market" (Zack, 1997). Numerous publishing mergers and acquisitions throughout the 1990s have concentrated control of the journal literature in even fewer corporate hands than was the case at the time of this Mellon Foundation pronouncement. North American members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) are among the most reliable customers of commercial journal publishers and in 2000, these 121 ARL members spent about 720 million Canadian dollars on journal subscriptions (SPARC, 2000, Overview …). Spiraling serials costs have forced research libraries to cut back seriously on the number of journals they stock. By 1999, ARL libraries were spending 170% more to buy 6% fewer journals than in 1986 (SPARC, 2000, Create …). This situation limits access to the published research particularly for graduate students, who do not have the resources to maintain numerous personal subscriptions.

As (particularly STM) journal costs consume an ever increasing share of library budgets, research libraries are also forced to reduce their monograph acquisitions. In this regard the ARL indicates that while world production of scholarly communication is estimated to have doubled since the mid 1980s, the average research library's monographic acquisitions have declined by 26% (SPARC, 2000, Coping …). This trend is especially damaging for scholarship in the humanities and some of the social sciences, where academic publishers (primarily scholarly societies and university presses), find that the library markets for their new monographs are increasingly limited. Many scholarly books sell only 200 – 400 copies compared with sales of 1500 copies a decade ago. In fact, the Chronicle of Higher Education recently referred to this situation as the "death of the scholarly monograph in the humanities" indicating that young scholars have reported increased difficulties in getting their first books published (Magner, 2000). As well, SPARC states that university presses are rejecting quality monograph manuscripts with limited market potential, because publishing costs cannot be recovered (SPARC, 2000, Create …).

The current state of affairs indicates that universities have done a poor job of responding to CAUT's 1995 call to sensitize themselves to the problems caused by the economics of the present system of academic journal publishing. Worldwide STM journal publishing is dominated by even fewer (yet larger) commercial players than it was in 1995. As mergers reduce competition, commercial journal prices spiral ever higher. Faculty want to have the results of their research published in the major journals in their fields. This confers credibility and carries weight at Faculty Evaluation Committees. But almost all of the major STM journals are controlled by a small group of large corporations. As E.L. Blythe, Virginia Tech's vice president for Information Systems put it: "What we've seen is cartel-like behavior … Essentially what's happening is the research and teaching is produced on campus, (faculty) want it published so they give it to the publishers, who sell it at exorbitant rates" (Zack, 1997).

Thus a handful of commercial publishing conglomerates have so successfully insinuated themselves into the academic reward system, that they now have a more or less captive supply of authors. It's important especially for new academics to get published in the major journals. As well, these publishers have a captive market – since virtually all big academic libraries have to buy their journals, which the faculty have deemed to be indispensable.

One of the other insidious aspects of this cycle is that as the dominant STM journals consume ever-increasing shares of library budgets, non-mainstream journals (which often allow for alternative voices/approaches), journals in newly-emerging areas, and monographs, tend to get "dollared out" of the academic discourse simply by virtue of not being available in library collections. While librarians can help to articulate the problem and demonstrate its effects at a practical level, it is only

the faculty who can change this cycle. The ARL has recognized this fact in the for-faculty section of its Create Change website, which speaks directly to faculty about the "scholarly communications crisis" stating that "Fewer scholarly publications are available to scholars worldwide. Year after year, libraries are reducing their journal and monograph collections, even though the production of scholarly information grows exponentially. As a consequence, you, your colleagues, and your graduate students have access to less and less of the world's scholarly output each year" (SPARC, 2000, Overview …). ARL further contends that "scholars are losing control of a system that should be theirs and theirs alone ... And yet, chiefly through their pricing and copyright policies, publishers are now in control. The system is fragile" (SPARC, 2000, Overview …).

One commonly-held hope among scholars is that electronic publishing will transform the communication process, making it cheaper and faster. In fact, electronic publications often represent an additional expense for publishers, which gets passed along to libraries, as electronic versions of journals end up being bundled in with print subscriptions. There are also serious long-term concerns with electronic journals. Archiving and stability of digital content, and preservation of the integrity of digital backfiles, are the two issues most often raised. As well, in most universities articles in electronic journals do not carry the weight in tenure and promotion committees, that articles in print journals carry. Digital publishing still needs to establish aggressive quality indicators.

Many academic librarians still encounter a distressing level of naiveté and lack of concern among faculty about the state of the scholarly communication system. The experience at Penn State is fairly typical. Says Nancy Eaton (Director of Libraries): "The Libraries continue to find that many faculty fail to understand some of the basics of scholarly communication – for example that the Libraries pay far more for their subscriptions than do individuals" (Soete, 1999, p.18). In order to increase levels of awareness among faculty there is a growing trend in ARL libraries toward the appointment of scholarly communications librarians, or the designation of this function as a significant responsibility for a library manager. Such appointments or designations have been made at Brown, Cornell and North Carolina State, and at the Universities of Connecticut, Tennessee, Virginia and Washington (Soete, 1999, p. 12). Ann Wolpert, Director of Libraries at MIT, observes that scholarly communication is a large, complex and mature system, and the degree of sophistication in management of the process, varies considerably from discipline to discipline (Soete, 1999, p. 28). Faculty who are journal editors may be quite knowledgeable about the economics of scholarly publishing. However they often have close relationships with publishers, sometimes based on perks such as free trips to Europe, but often forged into long-term professional friendships. These working relationships may make it difficult for editors to be very vocal about journal pricing policies (Soete, 1999, p.16).

There is however, much activity dedicated toward raising awareness and increasing discussion among faculty about the scholarly communication process. At a recent meeting in Tempe, Arizona several scholarly association leaders, faculty members, campus administrators, and librarians came to an unprecedented agreement which calls for changes in the relationships among publishers, universities, disciplinary societies, and faculty members. This agreement, coordinated by the Association of American Universities (AAU) and the ARL, articulates 9 guiding principles relating to such matters as cost containment, utilization of electronic capabilities, archiving, peer review, copyright, and the issue of quantity vs. quality of publications in the academic credentializing system. The document is entitled Principles for Emerging Systems of Scholarly Publishing and it states flatly that the "current system of scholarly publishing has become too costly for the academic community to sustain" (Case, 2000). The ARL and the AAU are promoting this agreement among

their member institutions with the goal of reaching a broader consensus across academe about how to proceed. Dr. Schulenburger and the document's other 35 signatories say that they are "trying to wake up faculty members who haven't paid much attention to the crisis in publishing" (Magner, 2000).

In commenting on the Tempe document the Executive Director of ARL, Duane Webster, puts it rather bluntly: "The real call is for faculty to understand what is going on in the marketplace, what is going on in technology, and to be part of the debate. And right now, they're not" (Magner, 2000). Dr. Webster's summation is particularly distressing given its similarity to CAUT's 1995 call on universities to sensitize themselves to the problems caused by the economics of the present system of academic journal publishing, and to seek alternative ways of dealing with the high costs associated with scholarly materials.

Still, the Tempe meeting and its results provide clear evidence that systemic problems with the processes of scholarly communication, are the subject of increasing attention among academics. New publishing models, initiatives, and experiments are proliferating rapidly. The ARL-sponsored SPARC and Create Change initiatives are gaining momentum and visibility. Their websites are huge repositories of information which document publishing issues/developments, and articulate a comprehensive set of strategies which scholars can pursue in order to begin the process of regaining control of their own literature. As Michael Rosenzweig, editor of the journal Ecology and Evolutionary Biology puts it: "several commercial publishers have so emphasized the maximization of profit that they have restricted the flow of knowledge … We are here to take back the hijacked cargo and protect it from future raids" (Rosenzweig, 1999).

Recent examples demonstrate that concerted action does bring about change. In November 1999, the complete editorial board of the Journal of Logic Programming (JLP), 50 editors in total, collectively resigned after 16 months of unsuccessful negotiations with the publisher Elsevier Science, about the price of library subscriptions. They founded a new journal with Cambridge University Press, to start in 2001. The price per page of the new journal is to be 55% lower than that of JLP, and the new journal has supplanted JLP as the sole official journal of the Association for Logic Programming (SPARC, 2000, E-News). In another case, the American Association of Physical Anthropologists (AAPA), concerned because price increases imposed on its journal (the American Journal of Physical Anthropology) by the publisher Wiley-Liss had forced many cancellations of subscriptions, informed the publisher that it was considering launching a competitor journal that would better serve the community. After lengthy negotiations the publisher agreed to reduce the price of the AAPA journal by almost half (SPARC, 2000, E-News). Also in 1999, the American Chemical Society's Organic Letters, a SPARC partner journal, was introduced as a not-for-profit competitor to Tetrahedron Letters (TL) published by the Pergamon Press branch of Elsevier Science. Almost immediately the publisher dropped the price increase for TL from an annual average of 13.8% between 1995 and 1999, to 3% in 2000 (SPARC, 2000, Coping …). These three examples support the belief held by many librarians and faculty, that the price of a journal subscription bears little relation to the cost of its production.

On the production and distribution side of the scholarly communication process, projects such as the Open Archives Initiative (OAI) continue to move forward with dispatch. Using the online pre-print model of high-energy physics papers housed on a server at Los Alamos National Laboratory, the eprints software associated with OAI provides the means for scholars to archive and search/retrieve papers electronically from anywhere in the world, without the intervention of publishers (SPARC, 2001, E-News). The National Institutes of Health has created PubMed Central,

which allows publishers and other independent organizations to deposit articles and reports in the life sciences into a central online system, that is freely available to the public (SPARC, 2001, p. 8). Here in Canada, the National Research Council (NRC) has formed a partnership with le Centre Érudit de l'Université de Montréal and the University of New Brunswick Electronic Text Centre, to build an infrastructure for providing access through a single web gateway, to peer-reviewed electronic scholarly journals published in Canada (NRC, 2000). This "Canadian Portal to Scholarly Publishing" which is also endorsed by the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL), holds promise for improving the dissemination of the results of this country's scholarly research (CARL, 2001).

Recently the Triangle Research Libraries Network (North Carolina) along with SPARC, launched the website (and printed guide) <u>Declaring Independence: A Guide to Creating Community Controlled Science Journals</u>, in order to help the editorial boards of high-priced journals evaluate their journal's service to the community. Section 2 of this guide describes several successful alternative publishing models such as: MIT CogNet, Project Muse (Johns Hopkins Univ.), eScholarship (U. of California), Project Euclid (Cornell and Duke Universities), Columbia Earthscape (Columbia University), and the NRC/CISTI program in Canada (SPARC, 2001, pp.6-9).

All of these projects are providing viable avenues to engage individual faculty in becoming more effective participants in the process of reframing the system of scholarly communication. While it is easy to construe the handful of commercial publishers who control the world's scholarly journals market as the villains in this crisis, they are simply doing what successful corporations do - making money and lots of it. The real enemy of positive change in this story, is indifference and inaction on the part of faculty and academic librarians.

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