

Scholarly communication: important issue at the 8th EAHIL conference in Cologne.
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Have traditional scientific journals become an obstacle for scholarly communication and if so, what are the problems? These issues were discussed by the first two speakers at the 8th European Conference of Medical and Health Libraries, Cologne, Germany, September 16th-21st, 2002.

The first speaker Prof. Dr. Hans Reinauers presented a paper on “Libraries, Scientific Journals, and Scientists: a Critical Interdependence” and the second speaker Charles Oppenheims on “Information Ownership: Copyright & Licenses”.

Oppenheim pointed out in his presentation that there is a tension between copyright owners and users. Initially the copyright belongs to the author but the author agrees to transfer the copyright of the paper (including electronic rights) to the publisher of the scientific journal. Why does the academic transfer the copyright? According to Oppenheim:

- It is required by the publisher
- Academics gain two things from scholarly journals and believe they can only achieve them by assigning copyright to the publisher
 - First is gaining priority
 - Second is to be added to the archive of knowledge

Why is it so important for academics to publish? Reinauers argued that:

- The quality of research activities of scientists is evaluated
 - Therefore scientists have to increase their publishing activities
 - The general strategy of scientists is to publish in journals with high Journal Impact factor
- The slogan “publish or perish” has never been more apposite actual than today

Reinauer stated that:

- Scientist should not sign away their ownership when they submit their manuscript to a journal. This baseless donation to publishers should be concluded
- The influence of the Journal Impact Factor must be reduced. The evaluation of papers and publications must be performed by the appropriate competent scientific societies (not by Journal Impact Factors)

Scholarly communication

There is a growing understanding that the present system of scholarly communication must change. The traditional system of scholarly communication has many constraints. Only in an Open Access System can scientific information escape the constraints of copyright and charge for use. Unfortunately innovations are complicated. Commercial publishers are mainly concerned with making a profit and many academics want to keep to the traditional quality measures. As Reinauer pointed out the use and misuse of Journal Impact Factors is an obstacle to innovation.

Today there is a worldwide movement towards Open Access of Information. The Open Archives Initiative (OAI) (www.openarchives.org), the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) (www.soros.org/openaccess/) and SPARC (www.arl.org/sparc/) are leading the way in this transformation process by implementing alternatives to commercially-published scholarly and scientific information.

The content of research journals is the product of the international academic community. It can therefore be claimed that scholarly information is an institutional asset. Today academic information is given away free of charge to commercial publishers. It could instead be shared free of charge between organizations. New publishing models are necessary if open access is to be achieved. The Budapest Open Access Initiative has agreed on the main strategies: self-archiving and alternative journals.

Strategy 1: author self-archiving

- Scholars need the tools and assistance to deposit their refereed journal articles in open electronic archives, a practice commonly called, “self-archiving”. When these archives conform to standards created by the Open Archives Initiative, then search engines and other tools can treat the separate archives as one. Users then need not know which archives exist or where they are located in order to find and make use of their contents.

Strategy 2: alternative journals using new business model

- Scholars need the means to launch a new generation of journals committed to open access, and to help existing journals that elect to make the transition to open access. Because journal articles should be disseminated as widely as possible, these new journals will no longer invoke copyright to restrict access to and use of the material they publish. Instead they will use copyright and other tools to ensure permanent open access to all the articles they publish. Since price is a barrier to access, these new journals will not charge subscription or access fees, and will turn to other methods for covering their expenses.

Promoting direct communication between researchers

Libraries can promote direct communication between researchers by setting up open electronic archives or online repositories. By setting up, promoting and managing an institutional repository the library can create a stable location where scientific information produced by the institute can be preserved and disseminated. An institutional repository can include Theses, Journal Articles (pre and post-print, self-archiving), Technical Reports, Conference Proceedings, Books, Non-Research Collections and so on. The institutional repository should be OAI-compliant. OAI-PMH (Open Archives Initiative - Protocol for Metadata Harvesting) defines a mechanism for data providers to expose their metadata. By registering a repository via the OAI data provider registration page, the fact that the OAI-PMH has been adopted is made absolutely clear.

Data providers should co-operate to build networks of service providers. Service Providers use metadata harvested via the OAI-PMH as a basis for building value-added services.

Act now!

By setting up an OAI-compliant institutional repository the library contribute to the worldwide emerging new scholarly communication system.