

Society Publishers with Open Access Journals

From “Society publishers with open access journals,” SPARC Open Access Newsletter, November 2, 2007, co-authored with Caroline Sutton.

<http://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/4387568>

PS note: This is the first time I’ve co-authored an article in SOAN. I’m drawing special attention to it in order to make sure that no one overlooks the contribution of my co-author, Caroline Sutton of Co-Action Publishing.

We are pleased to announce the first results of an ongoing research project.

The overall project has two phases. Phase One is to make a comprehensive list of scholarly societies worldwide that support gold OA for their own journals. The journals might be full OA or hybrid OA, and the society’s relationship to its journals might be that of owner, publisher, or partner with the publisher. (For convenience, when we say below that a society “publishes” an OA journal, we’ll mean that it has at least one of these relationships to it.) The list includes the journals themselves, and associated data, as well as the societies.

If we can find funding, Phase Two will survey the societies turned up in Phase One in order to learn details about their turn to OA, their business models, and the financial and academic consequences of their OA policies.

The idea was to test the widespread impression that learned societies as such feel threatened by OA. The impression isn’t just a side-effect of hearing some society publishers publicly oppose OA; it’s often deliberately cultivated by associations representing society publishers such as the ALPSP and the DC Principles Coalition. A related goal was to learn business-level details from the OA-friendly societies in order to help other societies make the transition.

Today we’re releasing the provisional results of Phase One. We’ve found 425 societies publishing 450 full OA journals, and 21 societies publishing 73 hybrid OA journals. (Three societies publish both types of journal and are counted in each total; the list covers 468 societies altogether.)

The full list is OA in an Excel spreadsheet under a Creative Commons Attribution license.

<http://www.co-action.net/projects/OAsocieties>

If you have additions or corrections, please send them to Caroline Sutton at <projects@co-action.net>.

The full OA journals are associated with societies in 57 countries and regions. The top three countries are the US (with 93), Japan (84), and India (62). One sign that there's a long tail is that the number drops off quickly between number three, India, and number four, Canada (with 18). By contrast, the hybrid OA society journals are largely concentrated in the US (49) and the UK (19).

The society with the most OA journals is the World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology (formerly the World Enformatika Society), with 22. One society publishes seven, one society publishes six, two publish three each, and 11 publish two each. Most societies publishing OA journals publish just one.

The society with the most hybrid OA journals is the American Chemical Society, with 33. The Royal Society has 11, the American Physical Society has seven, the Linnean Society of London has three, and three societies have two each. Only five societies publish just one hybrid journal.

Just as some societies publish more than one journal, some journals are published by more than one society. Seven journals on our list are joint projects of more than one society. One journal, *Informatika*, involves seven cooperating societies. Another, *Contemporary Issues in Technology & Teacher Education*, involves five. Three journals involve two societies, and two journals involve three societies.

When societies want to outsource the publication of their full OA journals, or partner with others in their publication, most pick for-profit publishers. Medknow publishes 44 society journals. In fact, all but one of Medknow's journals are society journals. Most of the societies choosing Medknow are Indian, but a few are Saudi Arabian. MedKnow, by the way, is not only for-profit but also profitable. Hindawi, also for-profit and profitable, co-operates with nine societies to publish 11 journals. BioMed Central publishes three, and Springer and Lippincott each cooperate on one. Of the non-profit publishers, Highwire Press co-operates on 7, the Royal Society of Chemistry publishes 1, and seven university presses publish one each. Co-Action Publishing itself will publish one starting in 2008.

Of hybrid journals, 12 are published by for-profit publishers, and the rest by societies.

Most full OA society journals (234) ask authors to transfer copyright. 148 don't describe their copyright policies on their web sites. Only 51 allow authors to retain copyright in some form. Only 15 say they use Creative Commons licenses, although some may do so without mentioning it and some mention using equivalent licenses.

Two journals ask authors to agree to joint ownership of the copyright with the society. One lets authors choose whether to transfer or retain copyright, and one allows the author to retain copyright but imposes a one-year embargo on the author's own posting of the article elsewhere.

Of hybrid OA society journals, 33 allow authors to retain copyright and 39 require them to transfer copyright. 13 use CC licenses. Only one copyright policy was too unclear for us to summarize. Clearly hybrid OA journals pay more attention to copyright issues than full OA journals do.

Most society OA journals (356) are in the STM fields. 51 are in the social sciences, 32 in the humanities, five in the arts, and the rest multidisciplinary.

Of hybrid OA journals, two are in the social sciences and all the rest in the STM fields. Hybrid journals are clearly most common in the fields in which most authors have research grants from which they might be able to pay the journal's publication fee.

Compared to full OA society journals, hybrid OA society journals are (1) rarer; (2) published in fewer countries; (3) more likely to be part of a suite of similar journals from the same society, as opposed to the society's only journal; (4) more likely to be published by for-profit publishers; (5) more likely to have a clear and publicly-available copyright policy; (6) more likely to let authors retain copyright; (7) more likely to use CC licenses; and (8) more likely to be in the STM fields.

Of the full OA journals, 75 charge author-side publication fees. In some cases, however, a journal may provide society members (or even others) with anywhere from 2 to 8 pages free of charge. 12 journals charge submission, as opposed to publication, fees; and of these 12, eight also charge publication fees. Two journals invite authors to make voluntary contributions to cover the cost of publication.

In an October 2005 study sponsored by the ALPSP, Cara Kaufman and Alma Wills found that a majority of OA journals (52.8%) charged no publication fees. Our list shows that a much larger majority (83.3%) of society OA journals charge no publication fees.

Why bother?

As we mentioned, two goals of the project are to test the widespread impression that learned societies as such feel threatened by OA and to learn business details from the societies with gold OA experience that might help those without it. A third goal was to help societies find similarly situated, OA-friendly societies in the hopes that conversations with fellow society publishers might be more productive than conversations with OA advocates who are neither society officers nor publishers.

This summer Peter was talking to a society publisher who voiced the common argument that society publishers can't move to gold OA because they need subscription

revenue to support their journal's quality as well as other society operations. Peter mentioned that the Optical Society of America publishes an OA journal (*Optics Express*) which makes a surplus and has the highest impact factor in its field.

The publisher's response was essentially, "Yes, but our society is not like the OSA."

It's a fair answer, and it would have been just as fair if Peter had cited a different society publisher of a different OA journal. There's a very wide variation among learned societies. No matter which OA-friendly society you cite as a model, and no matter which OA-averse society you might be talking to, the odds are that your dialog partner could truthfully respond, "Yes, but our society is not like that one. Ours is larger or smaller. It's in a different field. Our journal has a higher or lower circulation. It has a higher or lower price. It has a higher or lower impact factor. It has a higher or lower rejection rate. It competes with a, b, and c, rather than x, y, and z. It comes out more often or less often. It does more or less copy editing. It depends more or less on advertising and reprints. It provides a higher or lower percentage of society revenue. It has a higher or lower percentage of individual subscribers. It publishes a higher or lower percentage of articles based on publicly-funded research."

One purpose of our list is to move conversation and debate past the "yes, but" response, which is justified as a statement of fact but not as a conversation-stopper. In one-on-one comparisons between societies, the odds are that we will find more relevant differences than similarities. But the list reduces or reverses the probabilities. The societies on our list are very diverse, nearly as diverse as the larger population of society publishers overall. The odds are that there is at least one society on our list with which any given society will have more relevant similarities than differences.

These similarities may be as unexpected to the societies themselves as they are to OA advocates. Societies that just don't see how to make gold OA work in their own case may be surprised to find similarly situated societies who are making it work or giving it a serious try.

We're not saying that all the OA society publishers are doing as well as the Optical Society of America. We won't know until we do Phase Two. But we hope that society officers who haven't seen a promising way to convert their own journals to OA will find encouragement in this list, look for similarly situated societies, and explore new OA possibilities in constructive conversations with their counterparts from other societies. We hope that rank and file society members will do the same.

We realize that the motivations to publish full OA journals differ significantly from the motivations to publish hybrid OA journals, and therefore we treat them separately in our list.

There may still be good reasons for a given society publisher to conclude that it cannot convert its journal to OA. In that case, we hope the society can at least support green OA and not lobby against government OA policies. On the question of gold OA, the length of our list changes the question from what makes the OA society publishers

rare and special to what makes the OA holdouts hold out. How many of the objections or fears will turn out to be myths that can be answered by the publishers with actual OA experience?

When the DC Principles Coalition issued a press release in February 2007, opposing government OA mandates, it claimed that 75 society publishers supported its position, though it didn't list them.

<http://www.dcpinciples.org/press/2.htm>

<http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/2007/02/dc-principles-coalition-still-opposes.html>

Our list of 425 societies is six times larger than that set of 75 societies.

When the Association of American Publishers sent a letter to members of Congress in June 2007, opposing efforts to strengthen the NIH policy, it solicited signatures from as many like-minded publishers as it could find. It found 46, of which 34 were society publishers.

http://www.pspcentral.org/publications/LHHS_appropriations_bills.pdf

<http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/2007/07/publishers-oppose-strengthening-nih.html>

Our list of 425 societies is 12.5 times larger than that list of 34 societies.

These comparisons are admittedly rough, if only because lobbying against OA mandates is not the opposite of publishing OA journals. Some societies do both, and some societies do neither. But even as a very rough comparison, it seems that the society publishers supporting gold OA far outnumber those opposed to government OA policies—and the disparity would only widen if we threw in the society publishers supporting green OA.

We know that our list raises more questions than it answers, and hope to be able to provide some of those answers in Phase Two. When societies convert their journals to OA, or hybrid OA, do they lose money? Do their impact factors reflect the OA impact advantage? Do submissions go up or down? If they charge a publication fee, how do they set its level? If they don't charge publication fees, how do they cover their publication expenses? How did they make their decision to convert to OA?

In short, are there lessons here for other societies considering a turn to gold OA?

Method

Our list has two sources. First, Peter had been maintaining an informal database of the OA and hybrid OA society journals he encountered in his daily research. Second, Caroline systematically completed Peter's list from the DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals) and research on individual society and journal web sites.

(PS note: My contribution was to do small amounts of work over a long period of time, while Caroline's was to do a very large amount of work over a short period of time.)

In DOAJ, we conducted searches based on the following key words: "society," "association," "federation," and "organization/organisation." The database searches were conducted first in the general DOAJ and then in the "for Authors" section in order to capture information on the hybrid OA journals. We used these words in English for our preliminary results and hope to supplement those results as we go forward.

We're likely to have overlooked societies if they never crossed Peter's radar and do not use any of the keywords above in their journal title. That's one reason we regard the list as unfinished and ask for your additions and corrections.

There were several kinds of borderline case that we omitted from our list. For example, we excluded journals associated with university departments or research institutes rather than learned societies. If a journal used one of our keywords in its title but was not associated with a scholarly society, we excluded it. We also excluded journals no longer accepting submissions, and journals only offering OA for an introductory trial period.

We didn't require that the societies on our list own the journals associated with them. They might own and publish them; or they might own them and outsource the publishing to a separate company or organization; or they might regard the journal as the official journal of the society even if owned and published by a separate organization. What we required was an official endorsement and a significant form of cooperation with the journal.

Most regrettably, the list is limited to journals with enough editorial matter in English to enable us to identify them as OA or OA hybrid journals significantly associated with a learned society. We're sure we've omitted many eligible journals and welcome word of them from people in a position to know their status.

A number of new OA journals will start publishing in January 2008, and a number of older journals will convert to OA in January 2008. We included these on the list.

All the journals on the list are peer reviewed or conduct some other form of professional quality control. The vast majority of the journals listed are research journals containing original research articles and reviews. Some of the titles listed are newsletters and contain administrative information in addition to scholarly contributions.

If we can secure funding for Phase Two, we hope to work with a considerably larger and more comprehensive list of societies and journals.

Note from May 2015: Caroline and I published a second edition of the catalog in December 2011, for which I wrote an accompanying article.

<http://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/8592165>

With a new third co-author, Amanda Page, we published a third edition of the catalog in September 2014. The project now has a name, Societies and Open Access Research (SOAR), and a home page.

http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/hoap/Societies_and_Open_Access_Research

The second and third editions of the catalog are in a Google spreadsheet under a Creative Commons Attribution license, and no longer include hybrid journals. We update the spreadsheet regularly.

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0AgBYTDKmesh7dDZ6UnBfcnpOdVpnd3ptSnVpQ0xrenc#gid=15>

As of May 2015, the catalog lists 967 societies publishing 923 full (non-hybrid) OA journals.

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By: Peter Suber

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