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Balancing influence in a shifting scholarly communication landscape

Creating library-owned, community-aligned infrastructure through individual, local, and community action

With the acquisition and creation of scholarly communication platforms/infrastructure by major commercial entities, the balance of influence continues to shift. The ACRL/SPARC Forum at the 2018 ALA Midwinter Meeting brought together library stakeholders for a conversation about how the library community can reassert its influence to shape the open access publishing landscape. Panelists focused on 1) Individual action: "What can one person do?" 2) Local coordinated action: "How can one group or institution effect change?" and 3) Collective action: "How can libraries work together to provide sustainable alternatives?"[1]

Sarah Wipperman: Beprexit and the move toward a library-owned scholarly communication infrastructure

What should libraries own in scholarly communication? The August 2017 Elsevier acquisition of bepress[2] added fuel to the fire surrounding the question of commercial scholarly communication products. Companies that were once traditional publishers have been strategically moving into other areas of the research lifecycle, creating and/or acquiring products that assist in the creation, dissemination, and reuse of scholarly works. This shift has led to libraries being asked to "rent" more and more of these products, meaning that ownership of the scholarly communication infrastructure is increasingly in the hands of commercial companies.[3] This poses several issues for libraries.

First, being asked to "rent" more commercial, nonlibrary-owned products means that we have less money to invest in our people, our teams, and the solutions we and our constituents want and need. It means less support is going back into our library communities and that we have less agency in the future development of scholarly communication infrastructure.

Second, commercial interests are often at odds with library values, which creates different priorities in service structures. Libraries are not trying to profit from research or researchers. We're not trying to sell them a product or certain membership level. We're not selling their data or making money off their work. We believe that research has the greatest impact when it is made openly and widely available, and we build services to support researchers in doing that. If the products we use to support those services do not align with our needs and values, we are

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limited in our ability to provide useful and effective services.

Third, libraries have a responsibility to the community to steward their materials. People come to us as collaborators. They bring us their work and ask us to take care of their scholarship because they trust the libraries to do so in a responsible way. In taking stewardship over materials, we make a promise to our partners that we will provide them with some amount of preservation and persistence. We are telling them that we have some amount of control over the future of their works. Can we truly promise that if we don't have a stake in the platforms we use?

We, therefore, need to make a decision about what we as libraries should own and what we can support. If we need to use commercial solutions, we need to ensure that those companies align with our values as libraries and the communities we serve. If they don't, we need to look at other options.

Beprexit

When Elsevier announced its acquisition of bepress, Penn Libraries, a bepress customer for 13 years, made a practical, values-based decision to start exploring alternative options in a project we are calling *beprexit* ("bepress exit").[4] Through this work, we are rethinking our own scholarly communication infrastructure, the services we provide, and the products that can best support our community's needs.

The road to beprexit, however, did not start last August. Penn Libraries has been investing in scholarly communication infrastructure for years and, most importantly, in people who provide scholarly communication services.[5] We have been building relationships across campus and developing workflows to streamline our processes and expand our services. We built a case for our services, built teams to support those services, and built communities to sustain and improve our efforts. Now, we are ready to build a broader infrastructure to tie these together.

Beprexit has given us a unique opportunity to rethink our repository and all of our related services, to engage our campus community in cocreating and codesigning the service structures they need, and to build library-owned solutions that can support those services. Before we plan and, hopefully, migrate, we are taking some time to learn because we want to ensure that this is not just library-owned but community-owned infrastructure. Throughout this period, we are being as open as possible about our process and findings. It is my hope that others can learn from our successes and failures and that we might inspire others to look at their own structures and make decisions about what their libraries should own in scholarly communication.

Shawn Martin: Why do we communicate scholarship?

Often, when librarians discuss scholarly communication, we focus on the struggle between commercial publishers and individual libraries. However, scholarly communication is a very complicated ecosystem comprising many different players, including publishers, librarians, faculty members, funding agencies, and many others. Therefore, any discussion about changing the scholarly communication system must ask fundamental questions about why the academic publishing system functions the way that it does.

In 2017, SPARC announced that the theme for the 10th International Open Access Week would be "Open in order to. . .,"[6] indicating that open access is not an end goal, but a functionality that helps to accomplish end goals such as sharing work with others or increasing the impact of scholarship with a wider audience. Similarly, scholarly communication could be viewed as a mechanism for many different communities to facilitate an end goal of some kind. What are those end goals, and what is the role librarians play in facilitating a more efficient scholarly communication system? Publishers might say that they need to make a profit, to sustain

their current operations, or to invest in new platforms and technologies. Scholars publish in order to meet tenure qualifications or to update their colleagues. A funder such as the National Science Foundation or the American Cancer Society might want to make scholarship available to assess the return on investment of their funding or to advocate for particular issues within their communities, such as curing cancer. Librarians serve all of these constituencies and fundamentally serve three different functions: production, dissemination, and management of scholarly outputs.

Production of scholarly communication could mean that librarians help our users take advantage of tools that help create digital scholarship or help to build communities around such tools through workshops. *Disseminating scholarship* means to ensure that books, articles, data, and all other outputs reach their intended audience and possibly beyond. *Management* refers to preserving scholarship and making it findable and accessible with metadata and search mechanisms. Most libraries are already engaged in these activities, whether they host digital scholarship centers, copyright services, data management, institutional repositories, or open educational resources. Providing such services are the reasons librarians help to administer the scholarly communication system.

In some ways, the latest argument between Elsevier and libraries echoes a long-standing disagreement over the increasing price of serials subscriptions.[7] Though it may be easy to see Elsevier's current move as yet one more battle in an ongoing war to control the publication of scholarly articles, one could also see this struggle as an opportunity to develop a more sustainable scholarly communication system. Libraries have long helped to produce, disseminate, and manage scholarship. Asking more fundamental questions about how best to perform these functions in the digital age and how to create services that put libraries at the forefront of scholarly communication is essential.

Whether one is an administrator at a major research institution, a repository librarian at a small college, a publisher, or a scholar, the future of the scholarly record is at stake and it is incumbent upon all stakeholders to create a system that works. Re-framing why we communicate scholarship in the first place may be the first step in that process.

Chealsye Bowley: Community-aligned service providers

Last year I moved from my position as a scholarly communication librarian to join Ubiquity Press, a for-profit open access publisher. As a librarian, I want open, library-owned infrastructure, but it isn't a reality for all institutions. We will have to have commercial providers for many services. Ownership of the infrastructure of repositories and publishing is a critical topic. But if we cannot have library owned infrastructure, it should be at the very least community aligned. What we can do both individually and collectively to help shape the landscape of open access publishing with providers is to determine values, partner with value aligned providers, and push back on contracts.

After Elsevier's acquisition of bepress, there were many conversations online and on listservs. An important exchange between Amy Buckland, head of research and scholarship at the University of Guelph, and William Gunn, director of scholarly communications for Elsevier, took place on Twitter[8] with Gunn stating, "All I'm saying is if this prompts librarians to come together on a set of principles they want in a service provider, it would be good." Buckland responded, "And if this prompts service providers to come together on a set of principles they uphold for libraries, there might be more trust." Libraries should have a set of principles and values they want in a service provider. One needs to be prepared to evaluate potential partners and negotiate contracts. But it should not be on libraries to do the work of shaping service providers to be more trustworthy and community

aligned. Service providers work for libraries and should do the bulk of the work to align themselves with the communities they serve by listening to librarians and proactively planning to align to their values by establishing new policies, revising contracts, and increasing their transparency. Trusting a service provider should not rest in trusting one nice person who works for them, but trust needs to come in the form of codified values and contracts that provide protections for the library.

When I joined Ubiquity Press as their first community manager, I began focusing on the questions: How can we be a better partner? How can we reflect community values? Our first step was to assemble our Library Advisory Board in May 2017.[9] The Library Advisory Board has been vital in helping guide our new decisions, and ensure we are moving in a direction that aligns with community needs and values. How Ubiquity Press is seeking to establish this trust is through a new governance model that is presently going through the approval process with our Board. The intended new governance model will establish a new Steering Board of customers, and policies that center on the stipulation that any acquisition must maintain the platform as open access and open source, and that services must not be made exclusively available through bundles. This is just the beginning of an ongoing process to build greater community-aligned infrastructure. My hope is that other service providers will join us in proactively aligning with library values.

If we do not have library-owned infrastructure, we need to ensure that our partners, whether they are nonprofit or for-profit, are community-aligned. Be critical of every vendor. And when they're not aligned with your values, push back. Get contracts that reflect those values and protect the community. You can help individually and collectively shape the landscape of open access repositories and publishing by pressuring service providers to adhere to library values.

Notes

1. All panel presentations are available at http://bit.ly/mw18forum.

2. "Elsevier Acquires Bepress, a Leading Service Provider Used by Academic Institutions to Showcase Their Research," Elsevier, August 2, 2017, https://www.elsevier.com /about/press-releases/corporate/elsevier -acquires-bepress,-a-leading-service-provider -used-by-academic-institutions-to-showcase -their-research.

3. See preliminary findings of rent seeking by Elsevier: Alejandro Posada and George Chen, "Publishers Are Increasingly in Control of Scholarly Infrastructure and Why We Should Care," The Knowledge Gap: Geopolitics of Academic Production, September 20, 2017, http://knowledgegap.org/index.php /sub-projects/rent-seeking-and-financialization -of-the-academic-publishing-industry /preliminary-findings/.

4. "Penn Libraries to End Partnership with Bepress," Penn Libraries, October 13, 2017, https://pennlibnews.wordpress. com/2017/10/13/penn-libraries-to-end -partnership-with-bepress .

5. See Penn Libraries' workflows for mediated deposit permissions as an example: http://bit.ly/pennpermissionworkflows.

6. "Theme of 2017 International Open Access Week to Be "Open in Order to…," SPARC, https://sparcopen.org/news/2017 /theme-2017-international-open-access-week -open-order.

7. Judith Panitch and Sarah Michalak, "The Serials Crisis: A White Paper for the UNC-Chapel Hill Scholarly Communications Convocation," January 2005, www.unc.edu /scholcomdig/whitepapers/panitch -michalak.html.

8. Amy Buckland, Twitter Post, August 9, 2017, 12:01 a.m., https://twitter.com/jambina /status/895148063177801729.

9. Ubiquity Press, "About Ubiquity Press," North America Library Advisory Board, accessed March 5, 2018, https://www.ubiquity press.com/site/about/#north-america- library-advisory-board. ⌁