

# Rethinking scholarly communication

By Chestalene Pintozzi

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*Librarians can provide leadership and expertise to publishing issues*

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**T**he crisis in scholarly communication created by the convergence of several trends over the past two decades has presented academic libraries with many serious problems for which solutions are still being sought. A key trend is the increasing cost of scholarly journals driven by increasing page counts, numbers of volumes or issues, currency fluctuations, and what many believe to be exorbitant price increases by several large commercial publishers. A significant second trend in the United States has been the erosion of federal and state support for institutions of higher education. A third important factor is the expectation and demand that faculty and researchers publish increasingly higher numbers of articles to obtain tenure or promotions or grants to support their work.

A contributing factor is related to issues of copyright and fair use. Most major publishers require that scholars sign over copyright before publication of their works. Their home institutions, as well as others, must then pay for access to their work either through subscription fees or copyright fees included in the cost of document-delivery services. Copyright law, policies, and applications relating to electronic publishing are being actively debated.

A silver lining in this dark cloud is the exceptional opportunity it presents for librarians to assume leadership roles in the development of solutions. At the University of Arizona, librarians have seized the opportunity to educate and raise awareness of the issues among faculty and administrators.

## Background

Scholarly communication, the process through which scholars convey their learnings and knowledge to each other and to future generations, has evolved over time and continues to change. Oral, face-to-face communication used by the earliest scholars was complemented by development of the written document. Production of these documents was limited by the need to write each document by hand and distribution was limited by available means of transportation. Libraries collecting and providing access to these scholarly works began to develop but were relatively few and small.

The invention of the printing press in the first half of the 15th century and its rapidly expanding use dramatically changed the process by permitting broader and faster dissemination of information. It was no longer necessary to travel to scholars' places of work, to meetings of scholarly societies, or to have scribes copy documents in order to have ready access to their work. Scholarly societies and other institutions began to compile and publish the results of their own study and research. Libraries became key components in the scholarly communication process by collecting, maintaining, and providing access to these printed works.

New transportation technologies developed over succeeding generations significantly enhanced the speed of distribution of scholarly works. As the production and dissemination of scholarly information increased, so did the interest of commercial publishers who saw and responded to the growing marketplace for their products.

The 20th century brought an explosion of academic research and study and an explosive increase in publishing fueled by increasing numbers of faculty and students and increased

federal and state funding for higher education, with both peaking in the late 1960s. Libraries also expanded at a rapid rate, investing increasingly large amounts of monetary and staff resources in acquiring and providing access to collections. During this same time commercial publishers increased their output in terms of both the number and size of publications, and invested heavily in printing, marketing, and distribution technologies and expertise. Many scholarly societies found it financially advantageous to move publication of their journals to commercial publishers. Since the 1960s the growth of library budgets has declined and, in many cases, this has resulted in significant decreases in buying power. Purchases of monographs declined and many academic libraries were also forced to undertake major serial cancellations.

The past decade has brought astounding growth and development in electronic communication, publication, and dissemination of information. This phenomenon is seen by many as the beginning of a new age of scholarly communication with implications reaching far beyond simply changing the format of publications. Some see the emerging technologies of the Internet, the World Wide Web, and unknown others yet to come as fundamentally changing the way in which scholars work and communicate with each other. Libraries, universities, scholars, and publishers are just beginning to explore and exploit these resources.

### **The role of librarians**

As noted above, librarians have long been key players in the scholarly communication process. They identify, collect, and provide access to information needed to support research, teaching, and learning by current and future generations of faculty, students, and researchers. They are connected to both the world of academia and the world of publishing through their longstanding role in the information chain.

As faculty members, librarians understand the requirements of promotion, tenure, and grants, as well as the need to have scholarly works readily accessible. They have developed longstanding relationships with publishers and understand the economic realities of the publishing world. They also work with and are knowledgeable about technological developments that are providing new avenues of access to the results of scholarly endeavors. Librarians need to use their connections and

knowledge to influence the future of scholarly communication and to define their role in that future.

### **The University of Arizona response**

At the University of Arizona Library an action plan regarding scholarly communication was conceived and implemented in conjunction with our most recent serials cancellation project, which was completed in 1994.

As a first, local step to address the identified issue of exorbitant price increases, a decision was made to target for cancellation titles whose prices had increased more than 25% over the prior two years. Background information on the crisis in scholarly communication including publishing, pricing, and library budget trends, and copyright issues was compiled and presented by the dean of libraries to campus leadership and governance.

Individual librarians presented this information and plans for delivery of information through alternative access options to their assigned departments and colleges. Librarians and faculty worked together to determine which subscriptions to cancel, which could be obtained through cooperative agreements with other Arizona libraries, and which could be obtained from a document-delivery service. These activities developed a basic understanding of some of the issues surrounding scholarly communication among the general faculty and the university's leadership groups.

### **Statewide actions in Arizona**

To address the broader issues and opportunities of the crisis in scholarly communication, the Arizona University Libraries Council (AULC) identified common concerns and developed the following method to raise faculty awareness and stimulate action. A seminar planning committee composed of librarians from the three AULC libraries designed an interactive seminar format and selected speakers.

They chose Ann Okerson (then of the Association of Research Libraries), George Brett (Clearinghouse for Networked Information Discovery and Retrieval), and Jim O'Donnell (University of Pennsylvania). Kenneth Crews (then of San Jose State University) and a panel of local experts rounded out the program. Other components were designed to involve participants in the generation of their own lists of issues and the development of means by which they could be addressed in Arizona.

Directors of the three libraries obtained funding for the seminar from the chief academic officers of the three universities. A central location in Tempe was selected for the event and the agenda was finalized. Participation was limited to 30 faculty and administrators, selected by librarians, from each of the universities. Their selection was based on criteria including leadership position, ability to communicate out-comes to colleagues, ability to influence colleagues to action, and knowledge of scholarly communication and library issues. They were provided with a packet of carefully selected background readings before the event.

### **Discussing the issues**

The seminar took place in January 1994. Ann Okerson set the stage for the two-day event with a presentation on the economics of scholarly communication and publishing. Jim O'Donnell followed with a provocative paper

two hours to outline action plans and identify potential owners for the eight issues identified earlier. During this process, faculty and administrators recognized their ownership of the issues and their accompanying responsibility for finding solutions. Next, they presented their plans to each other for discussion and development of steps to be undertaken.

### **Further action**

Enthusiasm was high among attendees throughout the seminar and many returned to their home campuses eager to continue discussion and work with their colleagues. A scholarly communication listserv was set up to promote continuing discussion and sharing of information. Other follow-up actions varied among the four campuses. On one campus a governance group developed wording supporting quality of publications rather than quantity as part of criteria for promotion and tenure. On another campus a steering committee was organized to bring critical issues and plans for the seminar to the attention of appropriate university- and college-level committees. On a third campus instruction sessions in the use of Internet resources were organized and presented to faculty groups.

The overall goal of raising awareness and knowledge of

the scope of scholarly communication issues among influential faculty and administrators was met. Knowledge that they gained is being shared with their colleagues. Awareness of their roles and responsibilities has increased among faculty. Some professors are thinking twice and consulting with librarians when asked to serve as editors of journals by publishers with a history of high price increases. Another result is that librarians are now looked to on campus for leadership and information in matters relating to scholarly communication. At the University of Arizona, for example, the dean of libraries has been invited to speak to the Faculty Senate several times on publishing and copyright issues.

### **Copyright follow-up**

Copyright continued to attract much interest among faculty at all three universities. This was generated, in part, by the seminar on scholarly communication, but also by emerging concerns

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on the nature of scholarly inquiry. A discussion of copyright issues and scholarly publishing by Kenneth Crews, and an online demonstration of technology in support of scholarly communication by George Brett rounded out the day. Lively discussion among speakers and participants followed each session.

During an afternoon reception, librarians demonstrated electronic indexing and abstracting and document-delivery services available to scholars in their homes or offices. Everyone then participated in evening brainstorming sessions which resulted in identification of the following eight broad categories of issues: copyright, technology, discipline-specific concerns, culture change, financial concerns, publishing, promotion and tenure policies and procedures, and libraries and education.

The following morning began with a panel discussion of the Arizona perspective on the role of universities in scholarly publishing. Participants then divided into facilitated groups for

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raised by the "Green Paper on Intellectual Property and National Information Infrastructure" issued by the Information Infrastructure Task Force in July 1994.

Another statewide seminar focusing on copy-right in the electronic environment was designed and held in October 1995. Speakers included Laura N. Gasaway (University of North Carolina) and Paul Evan Peters (Coalition for Networked Information).

It was intended and designed more to educate than to result in action plans; however, this effort has also enhanced the image of librarians as providers of expertise and leadership in issues relating to scholarly communication among faculty at the three Arizona universities.

### Investments and benefits

Activities such as those described above can be readily replicated by other academic libraries. In developing the two seminars, librarians from the Arizona University Libraries Council demonstrated leadership by targeting concerns crucial to scholars at their institutions. They then identified key stakeholders among faculty and administrators and brought them together in

environments designed to raise their awareness, increase their knowledge, and promote interaction.

Librarians have continued to work with faculty on each campus to design and implement needed changes. At the University of Arizona Library, for example, librarians are assisting anthropology faculty in the creation of an online refereed journal and are exploring the possibility of supporting an online linguistics abstract service.

The costs in terms of both staff time and money are not insignificant. But when the problem and an approach designed to develop solutions was clearly defined and presented to the Arizona universities' chief academic officers, they were persuaded to contribute monetary support. Seminar planning committees composed of librarians from the three Arizona universities collaborated to accomplish the organizational and implementation work.

Rewards for the time and money invested were great in terms of building awareness and understanding of scholarly communication and library issues on the part of faculty and administrators, and of enhancing the role of librarians as campus leaders. ■

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