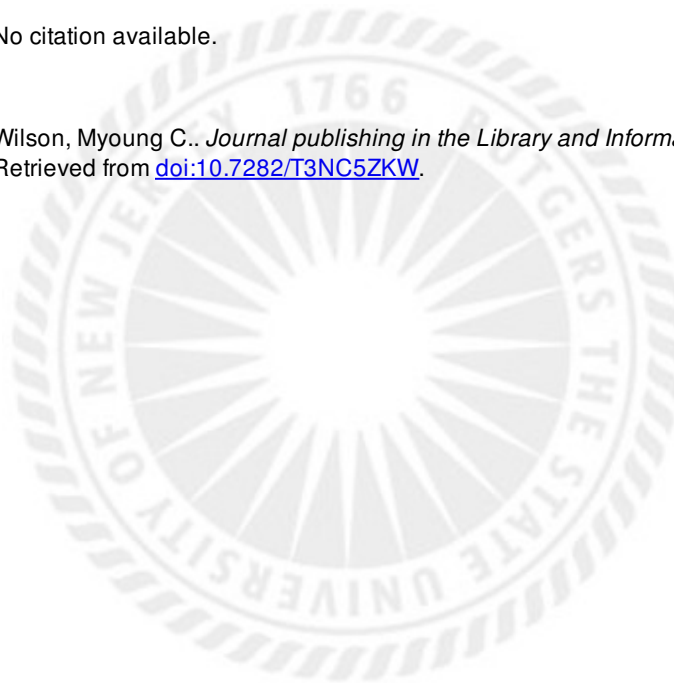


Journal publishing in the Library and Information Science (LIS) field

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Article begins on next page

Journal Publishing in the Library and Information Science (LIS) Field: Librarians' "Moral and Professional"(1) Dilemma in Leading Reforms in Scholarly Communication

I. Reform Movements of Scholarly Communication and Introduction

Librarians have traditionally occupied key positions in the cycle of knowledge production, organization and dissemination. This unique position enabled them to observe the early warning signs and to participate in the subsequent debate on the ways that scholars communicate their research results through journal publishing.

From the mid 1970s librarians' concerns regarding a "serials crisis" were largely communicated to commercial publishers and vendors. When academic librarians realized that the upward trend of journal price increases was not easily reversible, they then shifted the venue of their dialogue to their own campuses in order to get academic administrators and faculty authors to engage in the debate. The impetus for this shift was the realization, by academic librarians and administrators alike, that the "serials crisis" was not solely the "library's problem" and that the "challenge of maintaining access to significant research and scholarship is the responsibility of the entire research community." (2) Faculty authors were made aware of the critical position they occupy as knowledge producers as well as consumers in the knowledge market. (3) After years of cancellations of overpriced journals, many academic librarians in the United States have now become campus leaders in exploring and encouraging alternate ways to publish the research output of their faculty authors. Two models have been advanced:

One alternative to the traditional, print based system of journal publishing is to build a self-archiving publishing outlet for faculty authors through the construction of an institutional repository. The leading platforms of these institutional repositories are the University of Southampton based EPrints, MIT's Dspace, and the University of Virginia and Cornell based FEDORA (Flexible Extensible Digital Objects Architecture), among others. In these repositories faculty authors can post their own teaching materials as well as pre and post prints of their research. While copyright restraints have prevented many faculty from posting their own journal articles, commercial publishers, notably Elsevier, have lately relaxed their position and allowed journal authors to post their own "version of the final paper" on their personal and institutional web site so long as the publisher (in this case Elsevier) retains the copyright of the published article. (4)

The second model is to publish peer-reviewed electronic journals that bypass commercial publishers and meet publishing costs in part by charging authors and also by moderate subscription costs, thereby making journal content more affordable and accessible. In this model, researchers themselves have now taken off their gauntlets, so to speak, and have waded into the business of publishing their own work. For example, scholars at UC Berkeley started a successful publishing venture, the Berkeley Electronic Press, known as “BE Press.”(5) Prominent scientists, such as Nobel Laureate Harold Varmus and his colleagues, started a new, high quality, and highly competitive and visible online journal, *Public Library of Science (PLoS)*. The first issue of *PLoS Biology* was released in October 2003. In its inaugural editorial “Why PLoS became a publisher,” the founding publishers, Patrick O. Brown, Michael Eisen and Harold Varmus, emphasized the availability of scientific publications via a digital medium (i.e. the Internet) and the importance of a “treasury of scientific information available to a much wider audience, including millions of students, teachers, physicians, scientists, and other potential readers, who do not have access to a research library that can afford to pay for journal subscriptions.”(6) The Washington Post reporter, Rick Weiss touted the PLoS as a “remarkable social experiment” that might fulfill scientists’ long standing goal of democratizing the scientific publication enterprise (7)

These new models of academic publishing are being actively explored in the strong belief that publicly funded research output must remain as public knowledge in the public domain. Scientific results should not be held as private property in the hands of a few giant corporations. A recent meeting held at the University of Pennsylvania captures the essence and spirit of this argument in the conference title “Knowledge Held Hostage: Scholarly versus Corporate Rights.”(8) Peter Suber noted that 2003 was the year that research funders began to realize that if research is important enough to fund, then it is important enough to share. Suber also characterizes 2003 as the time when the “dam finally broke.” He noted numerous momentous activities including launching a *Directory of Open Access Journals*, the treatment by elite science media such as *Science* and *Nature* of the topic of open access to scientific literature as one of the five top science stories, and, most importantly, the freeing of the traditional captive market of academic research libraries, such as the ones at Cornell and North Carolina State, from giant corporate contracts. (9) The first issue of *PLoS Biology* was also published in 2003.

Libraries and librarians have been important players and have become a driving force in leading the current movement of the research community toward a restructuring of the current inefficient and unaffordable practice of academic journal publishing. The Association of Research Libraries' Change Initiatives, and Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) are leading examples of librarians' concerted efforts to reform the system of scholarly communication. (10)

Despite the active role that librarians, particularly academic research librarians, are playing in bringing about change in the ways that knowledge is disseminated, little attention has been paid to the cost increase of journal publishing in the librarians' own profession. This essay examines our own disciplinary literature in the Library and Information Science (LIS) field. It addresses how librarians are handling their own affairs in this great "social experiment" of democratizing the knowledge market. I will attempt to examine the reaction of librarians and the LIS research community to cost rises and mergers in LIS journal publishing. I will also attempt to identify LIS journal titles that have been "born digital." Some of these electronic journals were undertaken in direct competition against the corporate takeover of LIS titles in an effort to reduce cost increases and to demonstrate a new model of publishing. Other "born digital" journals are part of a social and scholarly experiment funded by public institutions to test their intellectual, economic and technical sustainability. The essay will also contain a narrative of a personal journey in that I have served as a library science collection librarian for the last fifteen years to one of the leading library schools in North America.

II. The Cost of LIS Journal Titles

The late 1980s and early 1990s were not good years for academic research librarians who were overseeing LIS journal collections at their institutions. Librarians became increasingly uncomfortable with runaway journal prices, especially in STM areas, and began to address the serious nature of a "serials crisis". The April 1991 issue of *Publisher's Weekly* reported that Robert Maxwell sold Pergamon Press to Elsevier for the equivalent of \$764.9 million. Pergamon Press was known as the British sci-tech house that also published LIS journals, including such key journal titles as *Information Processing and Management*. In late 1987 another British publisher, the MCB University Press (now Emerald Press), started acquiring journals in information science as part of the company's growth strategy. While discussing the controversial growth of the MCB University Press Richard Poynder noted that "for librarians the most

controversial moment came in 1990, when MCB acquired *New Library World* and immediately doubled the subscription cost, leading the editor to resign in protest.”(11) This undue price hike did not go unnoticed by librarians in North America. At the 1992 annual American Library Association conference held in San Francisco there was a meeting of the Discussion Group of Library Science Collection Librarians of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). The major topic of this meeting was the price increase of LIS journals. The MCB University Press was especially cited as a particular problem because of its “outrageous” price increases. Patsy Stann, on behalf of the librarians who attended the meeting, agreed to write a letter to MCB expressing concern over the excessively high cost of their publications (*New Library World* and *Library Review*) and the lack of communication concerning radical price increases. At this meeting librarians also noted that almost 80 % of American libraries have already cancelled these two titles. (12)

Upon my return from the conference, I consulted with the Rutgers LIS faculty (one faculty member jokingly suggested to me that the library fund his trip to England instead of subscribing to these journals referring to the British origin of some of these high priced titles) and cancelled the *New Library World* and the *Library Review* from the Rutgers collection. In their recent study Schimdle and Via noted that the impact of commercial publisher buyouts of this nature has been very costly to libraries since some journal titles have seen as much as a 483 percent price increase. (13)

The *Bottom Line* is one such LIS journal that saw a 483 per cent price increase (1995-2002) as a result of a commercial publisher’s take over (noted in the Schimdle et al study). LIS journals such as *Bottom Line* had a noble beginning and at its birth a very modest annual subscription. Professor Betty Turock, Professor Emirtus at Rutgers and the former president of the ALA, founded the journal in 1986. Her initial aim was to enrich her library management course and to aid librarians, primarily in public libraries, to better manage library budget issues. (14) The journal’s annual subscription rate in its founding year was USD 45 and had increased to only USD 49 in 1995 when the journal was acquired by the MCB University Press (UK). Subsequently the subscription price doubled in 1996 to USD 99. The usual publisher’s rationale for price increases is “added value,” largely through increased marketing and circulation. Beginning with the 1996 issues, *Bottom Line* changed its subtitle from *A Financial Magazine for Libraries* to *Managing Library Finances* and the journal began to be indexed in *Library Literature*. In

the following year, in 1997, the price almost doubled again to USD 150. While one might agree that the visibility of the journal was enhanced, common sense dictates that no amount of marketing can justify the kind of staggering increase that was seen for a journal that aimed solely to serve libraries and which was not in the business of making a profit. Ironically, Professor Turock was seriously concerned about the rising cost of academic journals and invited this author to submit an article to *Bottom Line* on the serious nature of serials price increases from the perspective of a practicing librarian. In that article I insisted that the price of serials is everybody's business (not just the library's business) and urged both librarians and scholars to act to develop new publishing policies (15)

While librarians have been documenting the increase in serials prices in all disciplines, especially the dramatic increases in STM titles, very few studies singled out the cost increase of LIS journals. Schmidle and Via's "Physician heal thyself: the library and information science serials crisis" is therefore a welcome study that examines the cost of our own research output. This study first noted that the average LIS journal cost as determined in the *American Libraries* annual survey of serials prices (of all disciplines) is lower than their own survey of 132 LIS journal titles that they tracked over the period 1997 to 2002. In addition, the authors found, not surprisingly, an extreme variation between the subscription costs of professional association publications and academic presses, and those of commercially published titles. (16) The authors also noted the proliferation of narrowly focused LIS journals largely written by practicing librarians rather than by those faculty who teach library and information science. They also suggested that the separation of those journals that are more geared toward information sharing by professional librarians rather than toward pure research may also help contain the costs of LIS journals. (17)

III. Example of "born digital" LIS journals

Peter Suber's chronology of the open access movement (18) includes landmark publications of online journals in the social science disciplines. *Electronic Journal of Communication* (1990), *Psycology* (1989), and *Public-Access Computer Systems Review* (1989) are good examples of early free online journals initiated by committed scholars.

Interestingly two significant LIS journals on both sides of the Atlantic were "born digital" in 1995 and 1996 respectively. The launching of these two journals was funded by government agencies. *D-Lib Magazine* was first published in the United States in July of 1995 by the Corporation for National Research

Initiatives (CNRI, a non-profit organization) with initial funding from the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) and currently by the National Science Foundation. The primary focus of *D-Lib* is on “digital library research and development encompassing the technical, economical and social impact of digital libraries.” *D-Lib*’s copyright policy is progressive with the kind of protection that librarians encourage faculty authors to insist upon with commercial publishers. *D-Lib* essentially makes its author the sole holder of rights to the article as follows: “ All rights reside with the author(s). We will identify the author(s) as the copyright holder(s) unless specifically directed otherwise. *D-Lib Magazine* requires non-exclusive permission to disseminate and make the material available.” (19)

Ariadne in the United Kingdom published its first issue in January 1996. It is published by UKOLN based at the University of Bath and is funded by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) of Higher Education Funding in the UK. Its principal goal is to “ report on information services developments and information networking issues worldwide. *Ariadne* claims copyright and other proprietary rights to their articles but offers generic permission for research and private use so long as the article is properly cited and its integrity maintained as it first appeared in *Ariadne*. (20)

Both of these journals have emerged in recent years as the most visible, high quality and influential digital journals that are freely available to anyone with Internet access. They serve as future models of open access digital journals in the LIS field.

Unlike the above two titles, *Information Research: an international electronic journal*, launched in 1995, became digital from an earlier print version of the *Information Research Newsletter*. A committed scholar, in this case Professor T.D. Wilson, who launched *Information Research* as a peer reviewed open access journal, publishes it. *Information Research* is partly supported by the Department of Information Studies at the University of Sheffield in the UK. Another well-received and freely available open access current awareness tool that became digital from an earlier paper version is *Current Cite* published by UC Berkeley librarians.

One of the more famous LIS journals that was “born digital” in direct competition with a commercial publisher is *Portal: Libraries and the Academy*. The launching of this journal was a well-known event in the annals of scholarly communication in the library community. The *Journal of Academic*

Librarianship (JAL) that began in 1975 has also been a top tier peer reviewed journal. When Reed Elsevier purchased the journal in 2001 with a 22% price increase, the largest in *JAL*'s 25 year history, fourteen of its twenty-six editorial board members, including its editor-in-chief, Gloriana St. Claire resigned. St Clair cited the "moral and professional conundrum" for librarians in continuing to serve as editors, authors and reviewers when their own journals are following the same path that faculty authors are encouraged to leave. (21) Some of the editors, who resigned, including St. Clair, then began to work with Project Muse, a pioneering collaboration between the university press and the university library at Johns Hopkins University. Project Muse offers the full text of John Hopkins University Press scholarly journals on the Web and advocates "library friendly licensing" and "reasonable pricing." (22) The collaboration between the *JAL* editors who resigned and Project Muse saw the beginning of a new print but primarily an online journal entitled *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* as one of the Project Muse titles. *Portal* has since emerged as a high quality peer reviewed journal for academic librarians. *Portal's* main focus is to "present research findings and provides regular coverage of issues in technology, publishing, and periodicals. *Portal* is written by librarians for librarians."(23)

There are currently thirty-two LIS journals listed under the social science disciplines in the *Directory of Open Access Journals*. (24) Any change in this list will be a good indication of the health of librarians' commitment to make their own research results readily available and accessible to a wider community.

VI. Conclusion

This paper reviewed the highlights of recent movements to reform the scholarly communication system in order to remove the barrier of high cost and to develop new modes of publishing using a digital medium that will ensure continued access to research and scholarship. The radical price increases initiated by some commercial publishers of selected LIS journals were discussed as well as LIS journal pricing patterns. Selected "born digital" LIS journal titles were identified. Also examined were their funding sources, the target audience, as well as their content and scope, and copyright policies.

The actions and reactions of librarians when faced with the corporate takeover of their journals were not dissimilar from colleagues in other disciplines. Most dramatic was the resignation of editorial

boards and the start of collaboration with new models of journal publishing, exemplified by the launching of *Portal*, in the United States.

Librarians must continue to engage in the monitoring of their own disciplinary literature not only in terms of intellectual content but also affordability. While much support has been expressed for the new models of publishing that employ new technology, there are also serious barriers and costs involved in these ventures. One area that clearly requires further research is an exploration of the sustainability of open access journals. A longitudinal study of the birth and demise of these journals in the LIS field can reveal the elements that are required to sustain high quality publications.

Better coordination among price watchdogs has also been organized in recent years by leading library organizations in the United States. Like human rights watchdogs the recently formed Information Access Alliance aims to fundamentally challenge the current antitrust laws regarding STM publishing. (25)

The wide dissemination of academic research has been the historic mission of libraries. Libraries and librarians form a critical chain in influencing public discussion, public knowledge and public opinion. Therefore the creation of an accessible and affordable public knowledge market place is fast becoming one of the most critical missions of libraries and librarians in a knowledge society. .

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