



04 February 2012

Peers, review your actions

Like 55

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29 September 2011

Help usher in universal open access - stop giving free labour to publishers that lock research away, says Michael Taylor

Twenty years ago, academic publishers provided a valuable service to researchers. By printing articles, binding them into issues and sending them out into the world, they provided the only means then available for work to be disseminated. But the internet changed that: now it's easy for anyone to make their work universally available.

Despite this, commercial publishers continue to post record profits. Why? While we weren't paying attention, they established a stranglehold on our product - research papers - and authors feel they have no choice but to go along with the system that's in place.

It's a well-rehearsed truth that the government funds research; academics do the work, write the papers and give them to a publisher (often paying the publisher for the privilege); other researchers edit the papers, usually for no fee; other researchers provide peer review gratis; yet somehow the publisher ends up owning the result of the whole process - only to sell copies back to the researchers who did the work and the citizens who funded it.

Everyone knows this system is a historical hangover, but the cycle is hard to break. University libraries have to buy the journals so that their scholars can read them. And because only peer-reviewed articles are respected, scholars feel they have to place their work in the journals in order to advance their careers.

So it is understandable, if lamentable, that we give commercial publishers our research.

But what's truly mind-boggling is that we also review and edit for these corporations. For free. It's the editorial and review process that gives the crucial stamp of approval to research. But publishers don't provide this: it's one more thing that *we* give *them*. We feel obliged to contribute our time, effort and expertise because reviewing is seen as a service to the community. But it's become a service to corporations.

Why aren't we more furious about this? Is there any other field of endeavour where such a grotesque arrangement would be tolerated?

The solution, of course, is open-access journals, such as *PLoS ONE*, which charge authors a handling fee to cover their operating costs and make the resulting articles free for everyone, everywhere.

The problem is how to make the switch to open access: it can't be done overnight. When the transition is complete, the subscription fees saved by university libraries will be far greater than the handling fees spent by research groups. But in the short term, it's hard for researchers to find those fees from shrinking grants, knowing that the benefit will not be direct and immediate, but only over the long term as the shift towards ubiquitous open access accelerates. The problem will persist because university libraries and research groups are funded separately.

So the question becomes what we, as individual researchers, can do to accelerate the change. Simple: we can stop propping up the for-profit publishers that lock our research away. Like many colleagues, I publish my work in open-access venues whenever possible. But I recently took a further step: I will no longer offer free peer-review to non-open journals. If they want me to add value to a product that they did not create and will not release to the world, that's fine; but they can pay me for my time and expertise at a decent professional rate - £100 per hour, say.

Researchers, I urge you to join me in taking this simple stand.

It is good news that the Research Information Network has established a working group on improving access to research findings. But Dame Janet Finch, chair of this group, seeks "a solution that (publishers) can live with as well as everyone else". Why? Does the UK government have a moral duty to keep feeding inflated profits to Dutch and German corporations? Corporations with a business model based on restricting access to research?

The status quo is not merely unfortunate, it's exploitative and immoral. By giving those corporations our time and effort, we are helping to perpetuate it.

Postscript :

Michael P. Taylor is a research associate in the department of earth sciences, University of Bristol.

Readers' comments

- **David Bartram** 29 September, 2011

"Simple" is always a red flag. Will you also refrain from submitting your work to non-open journals?
"Whenever possible" implies the answer is no.

The barrier to the transition isn't our willingness to provide peer review for free -- it's the fact that most people can't afford to stop submitting to the non-open journals; and if you're going to submit, then you can hardly refuse to review.

- **Mike Taylor** 29 September, 2011

I am the author of this article. I would like to gauge what kind of support there is for a reviewing boycott. If you are a researcher and you agree that withholding free reviewing services from non-open journals is the appropriate response, please let me know by leaving a comment below and ideally also by emailing me on dino@miketaylor.org.uk

- **Mike Taylor** 29 September, 2011

David, I said "simple", I didn't say "easy"!

I don't dispute that changing a long-established system will involve some difficulty along the way, and no doubt some compromises, too. "Whenever possible" is not perfect, but it's much better than what most of us do now.

"If you're going to submit [to non-open journals], then you can hardly refuse to review." Whyever not? When you submit, you are giving the publishers free product that they profit from. It certainly doesn't follow from that that you owe them *another* favour in return!

- **TheWatcher** 29 September, 2011

Are you going to be at Open Science Summit this year?

- **Mike Taylor** 29 September, 2011

"Are you going to be at Open Science Summit this year?"

In California? I wish!

Maybe if they have it in London one year.

- **A.R.** 29 September, 2011

PLoS has margins of over 20%. It is also heavily incentivised to publish as much as possible (more papers = more revenue).

Is this better than the traditional model? Also high margins, but incentivised to reject lower quality papers and keep quality high. (more user subscriptions = more revenue).

I'm not claiming one is better than the other - I don't really know. But it's certainly not as clear cut as this article makes it out to be.

- **Mike Taylor** 29 September, 2011

A.R., the PLoS ONE model different from that of many journals in that does not filter papers on the basis of some subjective notion of "importance". But it absolutely does filter for quality: bad papers are rejected, and a brief scan of random articles will show that standards are consequently high -- an observation corroborated by PLoS ONE's rather high impact factor (4.4) for such a young journal.

But other PLoS journals follow a more traditional model and do filter for perceived importance. They are also doing very nicely using the open-access model with this approach, and not just financially. For example, the top-ranked journal in the Biology category in the 2009 Journal Citation Reports was PLoS Biology, with 12.916.

It seems to me that the joint lesson of all the PLoS journals taken together is that the open-access model is both financially viable and scientifically successful, whether or not the individual journal filters on "importance". The important thing is to filter on quality.

- **Mike Chopra-Gant** 29 September, 2011

Much as I dislike the existing system, I'm not convinced that the "pay to publish" open access system is the answer since it introduces too many equally undesirable factors: it favours the rich and (however much one insists on the contrary) raises an expectation of publication in return for payment (try telling students that paying fees doesn't make them customers). Nor does the neoliberal anarchism of everybody publishing everything for free via their personal website and relying on an intellectual "market" to sort good from bad seem hopeful either: we'll all drown under the uncontrolled torrent of garbage and be left yearning for the days when publishers made fat profits from our free labour. The real solution would be for universities to be publicly funded at levels at which they could undertake the full range of scholarly activities, including dissemination through non-profit university presses. Yeah, like that's going to happen!

- **Steven** 29 September, 2011

The problem with the pay-for-publishing model is, that it favors institutions or research with money backing. Independent researches, or academics wanting to publish outside of their core area get substantially disadvantaged.

- **BarsMonster** 29 September, 2011

Handling fee? You must be kidding.

Online publishing could be free, and servers/bandwidth are dirt cheap.

I don't see why authors must be paying for this.

There are indeed minimal costs for storage & serving, but it's fraction of a cent per article. It's not XX's century, it might be just payed by government or pro-IT sponsors.

- **Asmi Shah** 29 September, 2011

Thanks for the excellent article.. I totally agree to your ideas and we are trying to contribute to this idea by creating tools which would allow sharing data in academia..

But on the other hand, the question is how to get people out of their rigid mindset where publishing in nature / science is the best thing that could happen to a researcher!! how would you really change the existing system ???!

- **Nathan D. Ryan** 29 September, 2011

While I'm happy to participate in such a boycott, I don't think peer review should be a requirement for academic publishing at all. The one-time, pre-published stamp of approval from a fixed number of reviewers lends a false credibility to an article. Add to this that pre-published reviews are often shallow anyway, and you've established a system whereby passing a peer review is a matter of luck or politics (usually in the form of carefully selected citations). The math doesn't even work: If a tenure-track professor published 10 papers in a year, he/she would need to review 30 papers just to achieve a parity of labor with the review process (assuming three reviewers per paper). Also, pawning reviewing duties onto inexperienced students means discarding the 'peer' of peer review. It's no wonder so many reviews are crap.

If you're going to propose the Internet as a publishing medium, then there's no reason that published research needs to be restricted to a static snapshot. Let researchers publish and iteratively update their research in one place (with a sponsoring university, say), and instead incentivize post-published review. Make reviews count toward the service requirement of the tenure process, for example. Then you could review projects more directly related to your research, and the credibility of a published research could be an aggregate of reviews over time. Relegate the current publishing houses to the mechanisms of networking and content discovery.

- **Austin Tate** 29 September, 2011

All authors and their institutions should make sure that they retain the right to use the materials (including on-line) in any way they wish. That still allows the publishers the proper rights to publish.

Most publishers have under the counter arrangements where they can adapt to the restrictions placed in authors due to their employment, funding or contractual agreements. But often choose not to make this well known, relying on the ignorance of their authors and their isolated and individual position in this regard.

A proper publications policy that does just enough to protect the right to reuse can assist an author to not be bullied by the publishers. But this cannot be well enforced as an individual. Hence a policy should be adopted by the organisation which employs or funds them.

See <http://www.inf.ed.ac.uk/publications/submission/copyright.html>

- **Gjalt-Jorn** 29 September, 2011

Pay-to-publish is indeed far from ideal. However, the argument that it favours the rich doesn't seem to hold; as Mike indicated, our costs for publishing will be much lower than our `_current_` costs for all our subscriptions. Besides, hopefully journals will want us to publish in their journals; offering cheaper rates than the competition etc. After all, indeed, besides their layout they don't have much costs. As long as peer review remains a demand, we don't have to worry about lower quality papers.

Here I disagree with Nathan - peer review can work, if you adopt a system similar to BMC - they have an open review procedure. No longer anonymous. Everybody sees your first submissions; reviewers' comments; second submission; etc etc, on to the final accepted manuscript. Of course, people will have to get used to the fact that getting a critical review from a friend is a professional act, nothing personal.

This might entail problems for people with big ego's, who may not be able to acknowledge that their work, too, has flaws. However, the idea is that we all help each other become better scientists - and nobody's perfect. By taking out the possibility for reviewers to reject or accept based on use/falsification of pet theories, inclusion of own publications, or use of 'sexy methods' or non-sexy but sophisticated (and difficult) but appropriate methods/statistics, science will ultimately become more objective, and hopefully less political.

Nathan's proposal re: making reviews count professionally seems a great idea, by the way. This can definitely motivate post-publishing reviews (already possible for some journals, but I've never seen one submitted). If we publish all research, we can also start minimizing publication bias; and minimize the problems we currently have with some people unable to replicate findings in some big paper, and being unable to publish these failures anywhere. The focus would shift more towards methodological quality, which can be a learning experience to most of us.

Sorry this became so long. It's an important issue :-)

- **Mike Taylor** 29 September, 2011

Many thanks to everyone who's commented -- lots of interesting stuff here. I will try to be brief in response.

Mich Chopra-Gant: "'pay to publish' raises an expectation of publication in return for payment". It's probably in order to avoid this that journals charge on publication, not on receipt of a manuscript. Rejected authors pay nothing. (I should probably have used the phrase "publishing fee" rather than "handling fee" to make this clearer.) BYW., I did not recommend publication without filtering ("uncontrolled stream of garbage") and don't understand how that vision is relevant to what the article discussed.

Steven: many OA journal (including PLoS) offer fee waivers to authors without institutional funds. In practice, OS doesn't seem to favour richer authors/institutions.

BarsMonster: the costs of servers and bandwidth are indeed cheap (though not free). The costs of an open-access publisher lie elsewhere, mostly in human costs such as senior-editor salaries, administration, accounting, etc. A publisher is still a business even if it's OA, and it still has the usual overheads. Handling fees vary enormously -- for some journals (e.g. Acta Palaeontologica Polonica, which I have published in twice) there is no fee.

Asmi Shah: you have put your finger on the underlying problem, resistance to change. Many career academics seem to have developed a sort of Publication Stockholm Syndrome where they have fallen in love with their captors. I don't know how to help such people.

Nathan D. Ryan: no doubt the peer-review system is flawed, but that is a separate issue. (For what it's worth, my position is that, while it's not perfect, it's better than any of the alternatives that exist SO FAR, but that may change in the future.) Right now, I would rather focus on getting publicly funded research out of publishers' paywalled gardens and into the hands of the people who paid for it.

OMR: what?

- **Matthew Cobb** 29 September, 2011

While I have a lot of sympathy with Mike Taylor's article, you have to remember that a lot of specialist pay-per-view journals are run by learned societies, which make money through the big publishers. In turn, these societies then fund conferences, and subsidise young researchers to attend those conferences. Will PLoS be organising conferences? I suspect not. How can we preserve the nurturing influence of learned societies while maximising access to science?

- **You have to be kidding** 29 September, 2011

Ok, seriously. No. The journals, etc. have to make money. You may want unrestricted access to all

scientific data and analysis submitted, but what you are asking for is to do away with capitalism. I'm a Stallman fan, too, but keep your GNU out of my peanut butter studies.

- **lucas** 29 September, 2011

It always bugged me how papers aren't free to read to anyone with Internet. SO much for Science being superior to others.

- **Button** 29 September, 2011

Under the current system only the rich can read science, under open access only the rich can publish. Neither system is without its flaws. (And as a point of note, PLoS One was launched as a money-making system to support the other high-quality PLoS journals, and only this year has their system broken even - they need the high volume (=low selection) articles to pay the way. Other publishers are following suit ... Open Biology, Nature Current, BMC... etc.)

- **Dr.S.Lakshminarasimhan** 29 September, 2011

All is said and done paid publication will lower standard.How this is going to be viewed by the universities is more important for the grant of credits towards a degree or as a research publication.

- **Heinrich Mallison** 29 September, 2011

I'm all in favor of open-access publication, and consequently in favor of working for such journals for free. Some here say or insinuate that for-profit journals are necessarily better - that's simple wrong! I have seen horribly edited and catastrophically printed papers and books sold at prices that make my eyes water. On the other hand, there are people and societies willing to fund open-access journals for free, and editors willing to volunteer their time and effort for them, who demand high quality work of themselves and the authors. I know, I volunteer for Palaeontologia Electronica as a style editor. I see what gets submitted, and what of those submissions makes it to publication. The level is certainly not below average, both in terms of rejection rates and quality of published papers.

As Mike pointed out, there are open-access journals with (for palaeo) very high impact factors. There are also for-pay journals that utterly suck. I guess we can lay the "open-access sucks" myth at rest here and now.

That said, I personally try to send my stuff to open access journals only. It sometimes didn't work out in the past, and I am sure that some of my future papers will end up behind paywalls, but if I can help it my work will be OA, always.

- **Magnus Johnson** 29 September, 2011

One thing all publishers should do is to publish reviewers comments with the paper. More transparency will provide less opportunity for narrow cliques to promote their own work. I don't think the high impact factor of plos1 means too much. Would you say every paper in Nature was brilliant or are they just populist? I see more rubbish in Nature than I do in the Journal of Crustacean Biology. Why's that?

- **Mike Taylor** 29 September, 2011

Lots more good points made here -- I hope it's OK that I keep coming back and responding! Briefly, then:

Matthew Cobb: you're right that journals run by scholarly societies but published and paywalled by for-profit publishers are an edge case, and they are one that I agonised over for a while. In the end I came down on the side of simple formulation: if it's not going to be open access, then I won't review it. But I would certainly have no quarrel with someone who adopted that policy with an exception for scholarly society journals (such as, in my own field, the Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology, published and paywalled by Blackwell on behalf of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology.)

"You have to be kidding": Did you even read the article? Nothing you're saying bears the slightest resemblance to anything I said.

lucas: I agree that all scientific research (or at least all publicly funded research) should be freely available. The question is how we get there from here. I think that a reviewing boycott for non-open journals is a small but real step in that direction.

Button: as noted elsewhere, many open-access journals offer fee waivers for authors without institutional funding. There is certainly no lack of outlets for unfunded scholars wanting to publish their work as open access. I don't dispute your account of the origin of PLoS ONE, but ... so what? It's become one of the most cited of all journals from a standing start in five years. That has to be a major success story however you slice it.

Heinrich: I have nothing to add except "I agree" :-)

Magnus: I also agree that more transparency in the peer-review system would be a good thing. Some fields practice double-blind review (i.e. reviewers don't know who the author is and vice versa), which I think is OK; but more often the reviewers know and the authors don't, which makes it too easy to be a hostile reviewer. I would support a BMC-like open review system as described by Gjalt-Jorn above: original manuscript, reviews and final manuscript all published online.

Thanks to you all for your contributions to this discussion!

- **Gavin Moodie** 29 September, 2011

I don't doubt that electronic journals will return to the early days of print journals: organised by scholars and charging minimal fees if any to cover their costs. The live issues are how long this will take and the mechanism for achieving it.

If a boycott or other measure were successful and all commercial publishers stopped publishing journals tomorrow there would be a period when authors would have to identify alternative appropriate publishing venues and readers would have to find where the papers they want to read are now to be found.

I expect it would take a year for those currently writing and reading papers to sort out likely publishing venues in their field and another 3 years for scholars to prioritise the new venues. And it would take another 2 years for this tacit knowledge to be codified into guides accessible to doctoral candidates and others new to a field.

The central issue for many scholars is surely whether the indirect savings for their institution and society would be worth the disruption which would affect them directly: the familiar revolution vs reform issue. Unsurprisingly, most scholars are reformists rather than revolutionaries. (Perhaps a few may be reactionaries!)

If that is the case the most successful action would be that which supports an orderly transition from the current to the new arrangement. Concurrent publishing in the commercial journals and preprints in the various on line repositories freely available is one such modest step. In my own field the social science research network is now well established and growing in stature.

- **Kaveh Bazargan** 29 September, 2011

"...but more often the reviewers know and the authors don't, which makes it too easy to be a hostile reviewer."

Much like commenters who are afraid to put their real names down. ;-)

- **Mike Chopra-Gant** 30 September, 2011

@Mike Taylor

It's probably in order to avoid this that journals charge on publication, not on receipt of a manuscript. Rejected authors pay nothing. (I should probably have used the phrase "publishing fee" rather than

"handling fee" to make this clearer.) I can't see how that model could possibly be economically sustainable. Given that a large number of journals have acceptance rates of 15% or below and that the work that is involved in assessing rejected submissions is not greatly less than that for accepted work, it would mean that no payments would be received for most of the work involved in producing the journal. That would then necessitate even higher rates of payment for accepted work.

BYW., I did not recommend publication without filtering ("uncontrolled stream of garbage") and don't understand how that vision is relevant to what the article discussed.

Well, I was just considering another possibility that admittedly wasn't raised by your article. I thought considering possibilities that article authors hadn't mentioned was a large part of the point of these comment boxes. Plenty of academics seem willing to blog just about every thought that enters their minds without any kind of filtration apparent. I was just expressing the hope that this isn't the future.

- **F Lengyel** 30 September, 2011

I know of at least one eminent chemist who refuses to review papers for publication in for-profit journals. Editors have been getting the idea. Now I see editors of for-profit publications offering papers to review without bothering to mention the journal.

I do not believe that it is "hypocritical" to publish in a for-profit journal, but refuse to referee for them for free. I prefer instead to do what for-profit publishers who engage in rent-seeking behavior and who change extortionate subscription fees do: let the market decide.

- **Very Ropyey?** 30 September, 2011

Knowing what the next innovation in the market shall be is sharpe business practice under certain circumstances... If someone hollers at you across a library (breaking the sound barrier) `WHAT are you working on????!!!!!!' they're maybe gonna pum p gas out of your special mix of data... then they'll only claim you torched the library so they can't do it as well as the research leaders.... it's a den of war in there sometimes! (Did anyone men tion the war?) Ta, Fawltly

- **Charles Oppenheim** 30 September, 2011

I am surprised that there have been so few comments about the alternative to author-pays journals, namely go ahead and submit to a subscription journal, but do not assign copyright to them, instead give them a non-exclusive licence to reproduce, and in the meantime submit the accepted manuscript to an Open Access repository.

I like the proposal, and I will from now on refuse to referee for any journal that asks its authors for copyright assignment. For decades now I have refused to assign copyright to publishers, and even those who require that give way when i tell them that it's either that or I withdraw my article.

- **Peter Murray-Rust** 30 September, 2011

Thanks @Mike for raising this issue. I have blogged at length about what is wrong with scholarly publishing. (<http://blogs.ch.cam.ac.uk/pmr/2011/07/09/what-is-wrong-with-scientific-publishing-and-can-we-put-it-right-before-it-is-too-late/>). The solution is in the hands of academia but they are not interested in changing a broken system that honours personal glorification over access to information. The scholarly literature should be a fundamental human right (not necessarily cost free but universally available). Put simply, people die through lack of access to scientific literature.

Your proposal is a valuable part of the change. It's simple. I do not review for closed access journals. I do not serve on their editorial processes. Reviewing is not measured in RAE / REF so it is no pain to give it up. (Unfortunately people will still want the glory of being editors on closed access journals)

- **Librarian** 30 September, 2011

As a librarian I applaud your stand. Am tired of cutting other valuable services in order to prop up budgets to pay for overinflated journal costs.

- **Elizabeth Baldwin** 30 September, 2011

Pay-to-typeset

So what, other than the bits we provide for free, actually needs to be done by the journals? Aside from a tiny share of overheads, I reckon a lot of it is typesetting. ... But many of us scientists write in a professional typesetting language in the first place!

Hands up who's had an article in latex re-jigged completely unnecessarily by a publisher? They simply create work for themselves. Give me the right class file in the first place and I will submit in the right format. After review and proofreading there is no need to create further work.

So pay-to-publish, perhaps, but provide a hefty discount for submissions in latex, already formatted. The young impoverished geeks will know what to do.

- **Scottish Academic** 30 September, 2011

I've been boycotting reviewing journals for the last few years actually. The publishing model is completely wrong, why under any circumstances should I spend my spare time reviewing articles for free....? A Lawyer wouldn't do this, a Doctor wouldn't do this, a Consultant wouldn't do this. Why should I as an academic?

- **Amrendra Kumar** 30 September, 2011

Hello Mike!

I was wondering why people have not tried advertising revenue based publishing model. It works well for newspapers, blogs etc. I see that readership of the journals may not be too large, but it is definitely a high value niche for which advertisers would pay well.

The other idea i was considering is the voluntary contribution model. The journal would be open to all, but it would monitor and keep record of usage from institutional users. At the end of month/year the usage stats would be sent to the institution urging them to voluntary pay money in proportion to usage. Also showing them how much other institutions have contributed.

Other idea i can think of is some form of professional annual fees payed by university departments from all over the world. The membership fees could be indexed according to the size of the department, PPP of the nation, etc.

I would like to know what you think about these proposals.

Amrendra
PhD (dropout) & Entrepreneur
IIM Bangalore

- **Laura O'Grady** 30 September, 2011

I have also blogged about this issue, "Access to peer reviewed journals" at <http://ogrdy.ca/kh24A9>.

The next time I'm asked to review an article I plan to send a link to Mike's post in response to my reason why I won't do it. The more times we do this the more likely the publishers will start to "get" it. I'm not terribly enthralled with the process as it sits right now.

Regarding the comment from Button above, "many open-access journals offer fee waivers for authors

without institutional funding" I think "many" is a bit of an exaggeration. If you are in developing nation you may get a waiver. If you are a graduate student in the social sciences you might as well forget it. And forget asking your supervisor for funds to publish your papers. I've paid for every single one of mine, sometimes using my own personal money just to aid with career advancement.

I also disagree with Button's comment, "There is certainly no lack of outlets for unfunded scholars wanting to publish their work as open access". Also not true. What if your area of specialty only has 6 or 8 journals? What if only one or two of those are open access? What if neither of them provide waivers? Such generalizations are dangerous and inaccurate. As a peer reviewer I would not accept an article containing these types of statements ;)

What about patients who want to read articles about their illness? Some journals charge from \$35 to \$45 (USD) for one article. That's more expensive than many books! Totally absurd, unjustified and unwarranted.

I look forward to more enlightened discussion and resulting change regarding these issues.

- **Mike Taylor** 30 September, 2011

Charles Oppenheim, Peter Murray-Rust and Laura O'Grady (and others): many thanks for your support. I think it's very important that academics publicly state their no-free-reviews-for-non-open-journals policies. A visible demonstration is much more likely to catalyse change than a silent one, so I applaud your public statements.

Elizabeth Baldwin, some disciplines (particularly it seems maths and physics) expect authors to format papers; other disciplines (including my own, palaeontology) do not -- so that is work that the journal does for you, rightly or wrongly. An OA fee discount for pre-formatted manuscripts makes sense to me.

Amrendra Kumar, I'm not sure I'm qualified to comment about your specific proposals for funding publishing, but I like it that there are new ideas on the table.

Finally, Laura, a couple of the statements you disagree with, which you attributed to Button, were actually mine -- I was probably unclear in when I was quoting him, sorry. You're right that I was overgeneralising from my own field, where there is indeed "no lack of outlets for unfunded scholars wanting to publish their work as open access". I accept that that's not necessarily true in other fields. (Though note that PLoS ONE publishes on all sciences, and offers no-questions-asked waivers.)

- **Peter Murray-Rust** 30 September, 2011

I have blogged on some of this in <http://blogs.ch.cam.ac.uk/pmr/2011/09/30/access-to-scientific-publications-should-be-a-fundamental-right/> . I refuse to review for closed access journals.

I have written many times this year on <http://blogs.ch.cam.ac.uk/pmr/2011/07/09/what-is-wrong-with-scientific-publishing-and-can-we-put-it-right-before-it-is-too-late/> and about 20 more posts.

@TheWatcher I shall be at OSS in Mountan View

BTW I posted earlier today but it hasn't appeared so apologies if there is duplication

- **Laura O'Grady** 30 September, 2011

Please also see petermr's post, "Access to scientific publications should be a fundamental right"

<http://blogs.ch.cam.ac.uk/pmr/2011/09/30/access-to-scientific-publications-should-be-a-fundamental-right/>

- **Vera K** 30 September, 2011

If the taxpayer, for the most part, funds research then why not go one step further and use a tiny fraction of that money for peer-reviewed dissemination? I am not sure what a viable model for this could be - perhaps mandatory contributions of universities and funding agencies to the running of open access journals?

- **Simon** 1 October, 2011

Institutions could do it. Tell their libraries to stop paying fees to publishers and instead put them (or rather, the tiny fraction of them necessary) towards to cost of establishing open-access journals in the relevant fields. The academics at the institution in question could do the editing and reviewing.

It would work much better, of course, if multiple institutions would join together. But as a first step, why not? The money is there, the libraries are already paying it in massive amounts. The expertise is obviously there.

Institutions need to take more of a stand on this issue, as without institutional protection no academic can go against the status quo.

- **Dennis Weyland** 2 October, 2011

@Nathan D. Ryan: I totally agree, the peer review system itself does not work. from a game theoretical point of view it cannot work and the personal experiences of myself and my colleagues (and many other researchers) confirm that.

in my opinion it is important to get rid of the research inhibiting publishing system and the peer review system at the same time.

@Mike Taylor: You say about peer review "(For what it's worth, my position is that, while it's not perfect, it's better than any of the alternatives that exist SO FAR, but that may change in the future.)"

I think there are already better alternatives. Think of an open access publication platform without any reviews prior to publication and with a system that allows researchers to rate publications and comment on publications unanonymously...

- **David Trotter** 2 October, 2011

There are several major continental journals in my area (Romance Linguistics) which do not practise what we would regard as, strictly speaking, peer review. The editors decide what to publish and roughly speaking, that is understood and (I think) accepted. The standards of these journals are fairly much the highest in the world, in the field they deal with. I think we fetishize peer review, as though there was no other way to do it.

- **Alex holcombe** 3 October, 2011

Michael, I'll add you to the list at the list of strong pledgers at openaccesspledge.com
Would you consider signing the standard pledge there and ticking to indicate you made a stronger pledge?

- **Alex Holcombe** 3 October, 2011

All: I've made a list of all previous open-access pledges that I've been able to find at http://www.openaccesspledge.com/?page_id=21 , and invite everyone to sign on at <http://www.openaccesspledge.com/>

It's important to let the community see that it's not just a few individuals pushing for open access in this way. Common objections to Michael's type of pledge are

1. If I as a scientist *submit* to closed journals and thus benefit from the peer reviews they solicit, it's not fair that I not return the favour and review for them
2. The "green road" of posting post-prints to open repositories may be better or a necessary adjunct to the "gold road" of paying for publication.

The reviewing pledge we've formulated at openaccesspledge.com avoids both of these problems by

including an even exchange for reviews at closed outlets, and allows reviewing of manuscripts destined for open repositories.

- **David Marjanovic** 3 October, 2011

Advertisements already exist in for-profit journals from Nature and Science to the Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology (a society-based journal handled and sold by Taylor & Francis). Apparently, they do not generate enough revenue to make these journals free for readers.

I would like to see more journals like Acta Palaeontologica Polonica, which is free to authors (up to a certain but high number of pages) as well as to readers because it is financed by the Polish Academy of Sciences.

- **Steve Koch** 4 October, 2011

(I didn't read all the comments before posting this, apologize for any duplication.)

- **Steve Koch** 4 October, 2011

I agree with you 100%. I don't think it's necessary to pledge to both refuse to referee AND stop submitting to closed-access journals. There's nothing logically inconsistent with stopping reviewing, but continuing to submit. Personally, all of our lab's submissions will be OA, unless I'm a co-author on a paper and that PI wants to shoot for a closed journal. I haven't made an official pledge to stop reviewing for closed-access journals, but effectively I have. I only have done PLoS ONE over the past couple years and I'd be more than happy to sign an open pledge to do so. This kind of movement could take over very quickly, because I suspect we all feel abused by the system. The only real motivation to do free reviewing is for tenure & promotion. Or possibly to stay sharp in the field. But I think some of us do it out of a misplaced notion that we "owe" it for the peer review that's been donated for our own submissions. I think it's quite possible that if many of us started signing a pledge and refusing our services for free to closed-access journals, it could reach a tipping point very quickly. That would then erase the problem with tenure & promotion. Maybe dreaming, but I'm willing to jump on board. (Also I have a glimmer of a memory of a graduate student blogging about this idea 1 to 2 years ago but I can't find it.)

- **Sandy Thatcher** 23 October, 2011

Why assume that the handling fees will be cheaper than subscription rates? Commercial publishers will set fees so as to maintain the same profit levels they get from selling subscriptions. What good will charging for reviewing do? Publishers will simply add the cost of paying reviewers to other costs and set their prices (or fees) accordingly. Note that this is what they already do for monographs, where reviewers do get paid (albeit modestly).

- **Casey Bergman** 9 January, 2012

I've also found saying "no" to reviewing for non-OA journals to be a very effective step in the OA revolution. Michael Ashburner, University of Cambridge emeritus geneticist (<http://bit.ly/zSTxCB>), has provided a template for saying "no" to non-OA review requests, which hopefully can be of use as boilerplate to others: <http://bit.ly/xdPfra>

- **Carl Edlund Anderson** 16 January, 2012

I can only agree whole-heartedly with the spirit of the article, but I am not sure that the "solution, of course, is open-access journals, such as PLoS ONE, which charge authors a handling fee to cover their operating costs" -- or at least I am not sure that this is the only solution. I am, again, absolutely on-board for the open-access journals part, but instead of a pay-to-publish model (which would, despite various schemes of waivers and safeguards, tend to favour well-funded or personally wealthy researchers), I would prefer to see institutions (particularly publicly funded ones) essentially "eat" the costs, by specifically assigning editorial and peer-review responsibilities to their staff. For example, it is specified that so-and-so has such-and-such a role on the editorial team of an open access journal published by the department (and their efforts are genuinely considered when it comes to staff evaluations, etc.), or so-and-so shall peer-review an open access article for every open access article

they submit, etc. Basically, academia -- or at least publicly funded academia -- should perform a kind of "public outreach" by simply doing the "grunt work" of publishing internally. One can, in fact, find plenty of open access journals working on such a basis now -- but I think it would be nice to see more of this.

- **Oliver Smith** 17 January, 2012

Well done, it is a unique posting. I think your articles are very nice. bridging finance.

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