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## Demonstrating Leadership in Open Access

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# DEMONSTRATING LEADERSHIP IN OPEN ACCESS

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*Communications in Information Literacy* publishes invited editorial content, including reviews of books and other media, interviews with select figures in the information literacy community, and guest editorial and opinion.

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In late March of 2013, the editor and the editorial board of the *Journal of Library Administration* took a bold and laudable action. When the publisher refused to allow open access to a special issue whose theme was, in fact, open access, the board and leadership resigned en masse. (New, 2013) The editors of *Communications in Information Literacy* join with many others in congratulating them for this decisive action.

We academics are currently living in two publishing environments: One is the mostly for-profit world of commercial publishing. In this world we do much of the intellectual work of publishing - for free. We conceptualize new journal titles in our field and find editorial boards to oversee them; we research and write the scholarly articles; we review the articles and mentor the authors; we edit the journals; and we curate each issue of the journals. What the commercial publishers supply is copyediting and other production aspects, and for this work the commercial publishers are able to define the rights of authors in what are often unfavorable terms.

The other publishing world we inhabit is, in good part, a visionary one. This world that we aspire to is the open access publishing model. In the open access environment academics and universities have taken over, we might even say taken back, all aspects of publishing, thanks in good part to the benefits that electronic publishing affords. With open access, academics are not just the creators and consumers of scholarly information, but we are the disseminators of it as well. One of the proposed goals of open access is to see scholarly information more widely and democratically distributed, and so in the open access publishing world restrictive authors rights contracts are far less common.

Each of us lives to a different percentage in each of these worlds: the world of now, and the aspirational world of the future. We must acknowledge the very real forces that keep many of us confined to, and constrained by the current commercial publishing world. We need to publish, quickly and often, and to meet tenure and promotion requirements. For promotion and tenure we also need to show growing community service and involvement in the library profession, and so serving as a reviewer or editor with a commercial title is often necessary. In a Maslovian sense we realize that things like food, rent, and job security must be dealt with first before we can pursue our dreams. So the question becomes, how can we move most effectively from here to there?

First, there is the need to lead by example. As librarians in college and university settings, we are responsible for creating a new environment for scholarly endeavors. Many of us look to publish in open access titles--not necessarily a hard thing to do in the library science discipline--but do we take advantage of our own institutional repositories? Do we negotiate to amend our author agreements or grant applications to accommodate author rights over the final manuscript? Have we sufficiently petitioned our societies and professional associations to develop open access policies for their members? Librarians must consider these actions carefully, but be prepared to “walk the walk” as well as “talk the talk.”

One compelling idea that might help us lead as open access advocates is the notion of “publishing offsets,” much like the carbon offsets that are used by companies that realize, due to expediencies, that they will be creating more carbon pollution than is desirable. These companies also realize that there is no reasonable way to reduce the

pollution so they offset this negative effect by finding ways to lower carbon emissions elsewhere.

Authors could use the concept of publishing offsets to help the move toward an open access future. Each time we publish we could look in the *Directory of Open Access Journals* to see if there might be an open access venue in which to publish. If not, due to understandable exigencies, we could opt for a commercial publisher, but we would always try to negotiate the authors rights agreement to be more favorable to us. Even if the publishers do not budge, the constant need to negotiate would be sending a powerful message to the world of commercial publishing that they need to rethink their ownership of our work. The offset idea would come in once we have published with a commercial press; our next publishing effort should be directed to an open access journal.

The same would be true of reviewers, editors, and editorial board members. If you currently serve as a reviewer, editor, or editorial board member for a commercial journal publisher, then for each of those positions find an equivalent open access position and volunteer for it. In this way we would be moving a larger percentage of academic publishing activity into the open access environment. By these actions we would also be showing our peers and our promotion and tenure committees that open access journals are just as robust and worthy of consideration, and we would be creating more openings in which to have scholarly publishing and open access discussions with them.

The burden for offsetting our work will fall more highly on the fully tenured in our ranks. Our colleagues who are still undergoing their reviews for promotion and

tenure need to produce more quickly and often, and so they have less ability to bargain and wait for publication. Fully tenured librarians--ones who have created a publishing record for themselves--also have leverage and connections, and so they have wider range of offsets to use.

The reason to work on open access journal boards, as reviewers for open access journals, and to submit our scholarly works to them is not to put for-profit publishers out of business. There is enough work here for many business models to thrive. The reason for supporting, by our work, a strong suite of open access journals in library and information science is so that we, as the creators of this work, are able to maintain the rights to our labor. Creating a thriving open access market will bring pressures to bear on commercial publishers, so that they will need to offer equal or similar authors rights agreements to their authors as well.

We celebrate, today, the leadership of the librarian scholars who resigned from the *Journal of Library Administration*, and the example they have set for others in our profession to not allow for-profit publishers to dominate the open access discussion.

## REFERENCES

New, Jake. (2013) Journal's Editorial Board Resigns in Protest of Publisher's Policy Toward Authors. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. March 27, 2013. Available from: <http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/journals-editorial-board-resigns-in-protest-of-publishers-policy-toward-authors/43149>