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Universities Should Rethink the Publishing Model

Letter to the Editor

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Congratulations to the University of Missouri President (August 3, 2012, “Documents Show U. of Missouri Press Suffered Years of Mixed Signals”) for recognizing the rapidly changing landscape of scholarly publishing. Transformation of the academic publishing culture toward increased access to research results has begun in libraries and among faculty who publish in open access sources. Broadening access to university scholarship assures greater visibility, enhancing the university’s global impact, the prominence of institutions, and reputations of scholars.

Universities are prodigious publishers of scholarly and creative work, and nearly all publishing is subsidized through scholarly presses, faculty salaries, library purchases, research administration, and grants for page charges. The academic distributed publishing infrastructure involves scores of campus offices and stakeholders. Most of these units are not expected to recover direct costs.

Universities have generously supported the stockholders of commercial and certain scholarly society publishers by paying twice for some research and creative work. Research published in scholarly books and journals is first purchased through faculty/staff salaries. Faculty generally give away their intellectual property to publishers; the university repurchases research in the form of peer-reviewed literature. Faculty also serve as peer reviewers and editors, usually with no outside compensation.

To keep scholarly publishing sustainable, many university presses and university libraries are collaborating to publish peer-reviewed content online using the open access model. Open access enables universities to leverage their publishing expenditures by subsidizing costs for peer-reviewed publication once. From then on, anyone connected to the Internet can read the material without additional cost.

Universities should develop new business models to protect their intellectual capital and mobilize their publishing assets by engaging prominent faculty and scholarly societies to envision a more university-centered scholarly publishing system. Faculty are eminently qualified to organize and manage peer review; librarians possess significant knowledge of digital discovery, delivery, and archiving systems; and individuals across the academic community practice efficient publishing processes. Aligning these resources will enable universities to set strategic goals and reallocate funding to achieve the greatest impact from their scholarly publishing investments.

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