

The Access Principle: The Case for Open Access to Research and Scholarship

Preface for the Paperback Edition

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There was a time, not so long ago, when the release of a scholarly book's paperback edition constituted what might be called its greater "public" release. Certainly, the dust-jacketed hardback copy would have appeared earlier, but only in the rarified public space of a scholarly bookstore. Research libraries, too, would trot out the hardback editions, lining them up, jacket-less, on the New Book cart. But for students and the educated public the paperback is the underline-and-annotate edition of choice. May the names of those paperback imprints always burn bright across the bookshelves of this life – Vintage Books, Penguin and Pelican, Dover, Dell, Signet, and Harper Torchlight. They made this body of ideas truly public, reaching small-town bookstores – in my case at the back of Edward's Paint and Wallpaper – as well as big city franchises. The paperback was the open access educational reference point for my generation, in what Kenneth C. Davis memorably called "two-bit culture: the paperbacking of America" in his book by that name (Davis, 1984). So my tenuous education, no less than the commitment to this bookish life, was built, paperback by paperback, shelf by shelf.

The paperback edition of *The Access Principle: The Case for Open Access to Research and Scholarship*, signals something different for me. Even before this online, updateable preface to the paperback edition, my publishing activities had taken yet another digital turn with this book. Thanks to the innovative spirit of MIT Press, this book went public in a new, broader sense shortly after the release of its handsome cloth-bound edition. The Press put up an open access copy on its Website that readers could download chapter by chapter or as a whole. This was consistent not only with the case being made for the book, although that case is focused on opening access to the scholarly journal literature, but also represented the Press' leadership in this area of digital scholarly culture. And as for the success of this publishing experiment, and not the first the Press has undertaken, I was told that the 800 "viewings" of the online edition did not seem to translate into any noticeable effect in book sales on the online site.

Still, what the Press did, and what this particular book speaks to, is what it means to publish a work in these transitional print-to-digital times. The case for open access is about how, for this particular class of publications known as journal articles, what it means to publish – from the Latin *publicare* to make public property, to place at the disposal of the community – means to place the article online and, to the degree that has now been demonstrated possible through a variety of open access models, remove any financial barriers to being able to read the article.

If the paperback edition continues to increase the accessibility of monographs such as this book, it is also becoming harder to publish such works, for reasons having to do with journal publishing practices. Journal subscription prices continue to increase at a rate that leaves less and less in library budgets for monographs. While those concerned about the state of scholarly publishing have been focused on journals, we have been ignoring the plight of what some of us cared more about in terms of the intellectual project – the monograph. At this point, a few of us are turning our attention to applying

what we have learned from building alternative publishing platforms for the journal to the scale and scope of the monograph, as our small way of ensuring that the article does not become the unit and limit of thought (Willinsky, in press). In this sense, the case for open access to research and scholarship continues to grow outward from the journal article, which initially lent itself to such ready opening, to include open data, open source and open scholarship in the broadest sense (David, 2008). It suggests that we are perhaps moving toward the formulation of a guiding economic and legal principle for what I, at least, have begun to regard as the particular intellectual properties of learning (Willinsky, 2006).

To reiterate, this move to open access does not mean that the work is *free*. The reader still has to find her way through considerable machinery to the Internet. It does not mean that the author goes unpaid. This act of making a research article public is precisely what the author is paid for, in part, as a scholar employed by a university or research institute. Yet open access does pose a bit of a challenge to those who publish the work. As this book describes in some detail, the methods and models of open access publishing are already numerous. The number of open access journals is now approaching 4,000 titles. The majority of these have found that online publication has enabled them to sufficiently reduce their costs to drop subscriptions and rely on institutional subsidies and the mainstay of all journals, whatever their model, namely, volunteered content, reviewing, and editing. In some fields, page-charges have been transformed into article processing fees that now cover publishing cost.

The breakthrough development in the other approach to open access, through authors archiving a copy of their published work, is the *mandate*. With considerable credit due to Stevan Harnad's remarkably strategic and tireless campaigning through the [American Scientist Open Access Forum](#) on this theme, a number of funding agencies, including government and private foundations, are instituting [archiving policies](#) that mandate the depositing of a version of funded article in open-access repositories. In April of 2008, the U.S. National Institutes of Health established a [NIH Public Access Policy](#) that requires all researchers receiving funding to "submit final peer-reviewed journal manuscripts that arise from NIH funds to the digital archive PubMed Central upon acceptance for publication" with the papers then made "accessible to the public on PubMed Central no later than 12 months after publication," as the policy puts it. Similar policies or mandates have been instigated by Wellcome Trust and the MacArthur Foundation, as well as by a number of government funding agencies around the world. The faculty in Arts and Sciences at Harvard, along with the Law School, have voted into place archiving policies, as have the faculty in Stanford's School of Education. So while the best estimates to date place the proportion of the scholarly periodical literature made open access at 20 percent (Björk, Roos & Lauri, 2008), we have yet to see the full impact of the mandates, which are growing in number, with much more openness to this literature still to come.

At the same time, there has been a corresponding growth in public resources such as [Wikipedia](#), the [Encyclopedia of Life](#), and [Medline Plus](#), as well as the spread of open source software through Firefox and Apache, and the tremendous success of Creative Commons in encouraging people to license their work in ways that make it easy to share. It amounts to a rising up, or at least a growing expectation among the public that open and free access to knowledge is the new standard of what it means to make things public.

One might say, following William Gladstone's not unrelated nineteenth century equation for timely justice, that *access to knowledge delayed is knowledge denied*. I have continued, since this book was initially published, to research the public impact of this increased access – and this preface forms a summary of the subsequent work – with studies of, among other things, how it is affecting the educational quality of *Wikipedia* (Willinsky, 2008) and the professionalism of Registered Message Therapists consulting [PubMed](#) (Willinsky & Quint-Rapoport, 2007).

The very sense that more of this knowledge should be open has begun to have an effect across the board in terms of scholarly publishing, affecting not just the independent and new journals, but also the other two segments of this highly stratified publishing market, in short, the scholarly societies, and commercial publishers. It is indeed good news that all three segments of this market are experimenting with various paths to open access. While open access is being recognized as not an unreasonable goal for the state of scholarly publishing, there are still serious disagreements around the best methods for approaching such a goal. The scholarly society and commercial publisher organizations, for example, have begun to aggressively lobby against such initiatives as the NIH Public Access Policy (Willinsky, 2009).

By way of updating the case for open access presented in the book in terms of those three segments within scholarly journal publishing, I would report that for independent journals – essentially journals without publishers, one might say – open access has meant a renaissance in introducing new innovative titles and topics. Open access has meant that a distinguished group of scientists and physicians (“committed to making the world's scientific and medical literature a freely available public resource”) can launch the journal [PLoS Biology](#) and in less than two years have it be ranked as the highest impact journal in its field (Kennison, 2005). A singular accomplishment, to be sure, but one that serves to check the all-too-frequent tendency to dismiss open access as antithetical to quality and rigor. It is still a matter of getting what you paid for, to the degree that the research published in this journal was in all likelihood richly supported by taxpayers through the National Institutes of Health and other life science funding agencies.

Independent journals have also found that the use of open source software for managing and publishing journals can reduce barriers to launching peer-reviewed journals in relatively new areas of scholarly inquiry, such as postcolonial studies, while being able to operate on an international scale, running on little more than scholarly commitment (Willinsky & Mendis, 2007). Add Google Scholar into the mix, with these new-found journals appearing alongside the venerable giants when they have an article with precisely what someone is searching for, and you suddenly have a much broader if not entirely level playing field. Google Scholar still provides markers of quality for each indexed article, namely, the number of times and who has cited the article. By the same token, this combination of open elements has enabled other groups of scholars to exercise academic freedom and independence within the otherwise heavily indebted arena of medical journal publishing (Willinsky, Murray, Kendall, & Palepu, 2007). These independent journals have certainly been the area where the Public Knowledge Project, with which I continue to work closely, has continued to make its modest contribution, with some 2,500 journals using its open source software to contribute to that portion of the peer-reviewed literature that is freely available.

Part of what is enabling this resurgence of independent journals is how research libraries have become involved in hosting open access journals, sometimes in collaboration with university presses. Recognizing the pro-active role that libraries can play in increasing access to this knowledge, they are setting up institutional repositories for faculty to self-archive their work, wherever it is published, and they are helping existing independent journals to move online or for new ones to form. Still, I have to report that nothing has come yet of my idea of libraries coming together to form a publishing cooperative in conjunction with a scholarly society, as I outline in Appendix D of this book. Still, in a move similar in spirit to this cooperative idea, the physics community has organized libraries across 19 countries to support the wholesale purchasing of open access for all authors contributing to the high-energy physics journals (Young, 2009).

However, independent journals still make up a small part, perhaps 15 percent of the market (Crow, 2005). A far more powerful force, although not an area of growth at this point, is the scholarly society publisher, representing roughly 40 percent of the market. Scholarly societies have contracted out the publishing of close to half of their journals to commercial publishers, but among those societies that have continued to publish their own titles, a number have found an effective way to increase access to the research they publish through what is best called *delayed open access*. Here the leadership of Highwire Press, operated by Stanford University Libraries, has been critical. It provides an electronic platform for many of the biomedical societies, and is able to make close to two million articles freely available, with open access delays ranging from no time at all through to 24 months.

Among commercial publishers there has continued to be considerable corporate concentration among the major publishers, with Elsevier, Springer, Wiley-Blackwell, Taylor & Francis, and Sage dominating STM publishing. Yet here, too, the rhetoric of an openness to open access has begun to prevail, in the name of being open to “all business models – all models that ensure continuity and sustainability of the journal model that have brought such significant insight and information to the scientific community” (Mabe, 2008). The path to potentially sustainable open access among these publishers, as well as among such major non-profit payers as Oxford University Press, is with an optional “article processing fee,” which appears to be converging at the moment on \$3,000 an article, although some do charge less. For that price, the author’s article is made freely available on publication, even as neighboring articles in the journal’s table of contents may not be.

The publishers’ testing of the (open) waters may well be a prelude to a switch to open access on the part of the entire scholarly publishing industry. It wouldn’t have to be all that complicated. The universities would simply move their library budgets from paying publishers’ subscription fees to paying the equivalent of what is now the publishers’ article processing fees that pays for open access. In a sense, the University of California system has taken another step down this road, as their new 2009 contract with Springer covers the cost of the open access option for all of its faculty in Springer journals (Albanese, 2009). The very prospect of scholarly publishing going this way is an exciting development. The world could only benefit from this new state of universal access to the research literature, for the very reasons I describe in this book. It would mean the entire literature, running backward and forward in time, would be open to

readers around the globe. All that the publishers are asking, before making such a move, is that the current journal model can be sustained and continued, as indicated by Mark Mabe, executive director of the International Association of STM Publisher, whom I cited in the previous paragraph.

And there's the rub. An industry-wide move to open access could end up reducing the amount of funding available for doing research if that move is premised on a need to sustain the current journal model in which one growing segment of the market feels justified in being paid far more for its services than the rest of the market. The current journal model reflects the successful efforts of the major corporate publishers over the last four decades to aggressively acquire smaller publishers and society journal titles, while running up subscription prices well ahead of inflation, setting their journals in a price league of their own.

As a result, commercial publishers are charging libraries many times more, on a per-page basis, for their journals than do scholarly societies, while proving far more expensive in terms of journal quality, as well (Bergstrom & Bergstrom, 2004). Corporate concentration in scholarly publishing, even as its market share grows, is not offering the economies of scale that lead to lower prices in other industries. Rather, it is driving up publishing costs for the academic community, resulting in less funding for conducting research and scholarly work. Which is to say that the publishing industry's insistence on sustaining the current model should be a concern for the academic community, whether we move toward open access through funder and institutional archiving mandates or through one segment of the market charging article processing fees.

Open access needs, then, to be seen as more than a pricing option, business model, or supplementary archival activity. It is part of a larger movement toward greater cooperation within the academic community and greater openness in science and scholarship, with open source tools and instruments, open data and archives. The broader intent is to increase the quantity and quality of research through global collaborations, through reduced cost structures for communication, publication, and other forms of sharing. And while there are clearly many paths to open access, the most promising ones, in terms of advancing both scholarly production and publication, are united by a common economic principle, one that Yochai Benkler has bluntly identified as *nonproprietary* and *nonmarket*, which he has celebrated as features of a new "wealth of networks" that rivals Adam Smith's original conception (2006).

My hope is that we can gradually convince the rest of the academic community, as well as the public at large, of the need to check the growth of the corporate control of scholarly publishing, if not reverse it. It is something that we can only reasonably expect to do by continuing to work on what has proven itself to be a sustainable and viable way of advancing scholarship through open source software systems to support scholarly publishing and archiving, by working closely with research libraries as well as new organizations, like [Open Humanities Press](#), the [Public Library of Science](#) and others, with considerable room to still form partnerships with corporate entities, when there does not loom debilitating costs to scholarship.

The case which this book makes for open access is about why this new approach to the circulation of knowledge needs to be regarded as a human right and a public good, an aid to scientific and economic development, a continuing chapter in the long history of an increasingly open science and the beginning of a new public place for the reach, scope

and contribution of this body of knowledge. Open access is, in that sense, a continuation by other means of all that the paperback edition of scholarly books continues to mean, and will for some years to come, in opening this body of work to interested and curious readers.

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