Unnecessary inflammation of the Public Access debate

An increasingly vigorous public debate about Public Access (the unrestricted access to and use of scholarly publications that are derived from publicly funded research) has been reignited in publishing and academic circles by the introduction of a new bill in Congress, the Research Works Act (RWA). Just before the December holiday break, Representatives Darrell Issa (R-CA) and Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) introduced this bill to the US House of Representatives, and over the past few weeks many of the stakeholders embroiled in this issue have vocalized either ardent support or vehement opposition to the bill. Unfortunately, the debate over public access, already suffering from more heat than light, didn’t need any new sparks to fuel the flames.

Cutting through the legalese, if RWA were to become law it would essentially repeal and forbid passage of any future legislation like the NIH Public Access Mandate passed under the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008. NIH’s public access policy is deployed via the popular PubMed Central digital repository. The 2008 law requires that articles resulting from NIH-funded research be made available free to the public, online, within 12 months after their publication in a journal. At first consideration, one would assume that publishers would uniformly support a law that would nullify this policy, which forced a one-size-fits-all approach to increasing public access independent of the constraints it would put on publishers' ability to recoup the costs for a particular journal. Even so, AIP and many other publishers do not support nor see the need for this new bill. I will explain why, but first, some context:

A number of publishers, especially in the biomedical arena, are able to recoup their investments after a 12-month embargo period and are comfortable with releasing their content to the public on this timeframe. Other publishers are not in the same position with all their titles. However, the flexibility publishers need to adjust their dissemination policies based on the business requirements of their journals is eliminated once a fixed timeframe mandate becomes public law.

Scholarly publishers, and the scholars that author and review manuscripts, are dedicated to the widest possible dissemination of the resulting published work. We communicate through this process and help knowledge to grow. Yet the costs associated with the publishing process are real. There must be revenue streams—between the author, the author’s institution (often represented by their library), and the reader—to support this service. More than 25,000 scholarly journals are currently being published, and institutional subscriptions generate income for 90% of these titles. For most of the remaining 10%, authors or sponsoring agencies pay an upfront fee per article; these articles are posted on the web without subscription barriers as soon as the article is published. This latter business model is termed
"open access," and the model is gaining traction because of its unrestricted access after publication.

AIP, APS, OSA and many other publishers are publishing and promoting open access journals for some fraction of their portfolios. However, it would be imprudent to force all stakeholders to conform to this one model, just as it is counterproductive to force all journals to release their content unrestricted after a 12 month embargo.

We have made steady progress in recent years to depolarize the public access debate, working in tandem with other stakeholders to develop practicable solutions. Even though the RWA recognizes the value that publications bring to scholarship, I find the proposed legislation to be unnecessary and ill-timed at this juncture in the discourse over public access. The America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2010, which incorporated several of the Scholarly Publishing Roundtable’s 2010 recommendations, set into motion collaborations involving federal agencies, commercial and nonprofit publishers, universities, and others. These stakeholders are working together to map out sustainable approaches toward increasing public access that don't weaken incentives for investments in private-sector research works such as publications.

In early 2011, AIP, APS, AAS, and other publishers began working directly with DOE and NSF to develop agency–publisher partnerships and pilot projects for increasing access to and interoperability among agency and publisher databases. The adoption of RWA, which is highly unlikely in this Congress, would obviate the progress we have made on this issue over the last three years. The mere introduction of the RWA bill has threatened the many users and supporters of NIH’s highly popular PubMed Central website and unnecessarily inflamed public opinion against publishers.

New legislation is not needed at this time. The measured, imaginative discussions that have been spurred by the existing COMPETES law offer the surest route to success in broadening public access.

**Physics Resources Matters**

Science history's online research tools

AIP’s two history programs—Center for History of Physics and Niels Bohr Library & Archives—have had an online presence since the mid-1990s. The Center and Library pioneered use of the web as a research tool for science historians, writers, teachers, and students of many ages. The key concept of our shared site lies in those two words: research tool. Our online catalogs can be used anywhere in the world to ferret out information essential to historical research. Our International Catalog of Sources (ICOS) is a searchable catalog of manuscript collections around the world.

![International Catalog of Sources (ICOS)](image)

Writing about the cosmological debates of the 1950s? ICOS tells you George Gamow’s manuscripts are at the Library of Congress and Thomas Gold’s are at the Royal Society of London. ICOS includes information on 9,707 collections in 771 repositories in 41 countries. Most scientific disciplines have no such guide to the archival collections of their leading figures.
AIP's history programs have developed many other online research resources: our posting of archival finding aids, the catalog of our 18,000-volume library of books regarding physics, astronomy, and allied fields, and the Emilio Segrè Visual Archives. Teachers and students find our web exhibits and syllabi useful, too. Each resource requires years of development. The value of that hard work is evident in the power of these tools.

Community Matters

Mildred S. Dresselhaus recognized as Enrico Fermi Award winner

Former AIP Governing Board Chair Millie Dresselhaus received national recognition this month when President Obama named her winner of the renowned Enrico Fermi Award, one of the government’s most prestigious awards for scientific achievement. Millie will share the honor with Burton Richter, accomplished physicist and former head of SLAC. Notably, Richter is also a former president of APS.

The US Department of Energy's press release of January 11 stated, "Dresselhaus was selected for her scientific leadership, her major contributions to science and energy policy, her selfless work in science education and the advancement of diversity in the scientific workplace, and her highly original and impactful research."

Please join me in congratulating Millie for this significant and well-merited honor.

Walk to good health

The beginning of the year is a great time to work on a new you. Make 2012 your healthiest year yet, and make the commitment to eat right, get fit, and live healthy for all your years to come. You can start off with something as easy as walking. Check out Walk to good health from Aetna and be sure to get out and enjoy the fresh air!

Off the Press
Marketing staff produce a quarterly newsletter specifically geared towards the interests of librarians. Check out the latest issue, released last week.

**Coming Up**

**Tuesday–Thursday, January 24–25**
- 2012 Academic Publishing in Europe conference (Berlin, Germany)
  Fred Dylla to deliver keynote address, "One publisher’s journey through the open access debate"

**Monday, January 30**
- AIP Advisory Panel on Committees meeting (College Park, MD)
- AIP Executive Committee meeting (College Park, MD)

**Tuesday, January 31**
- STM Board meeting (Washington, DC)
- Employee appreciation ice cream social (Melville, NY)

**Wednesday–Friday, February 1–3**
- 2012 PSP Annual Conference, "Prospering with Digital: Making Investments Pay" (Washington, DC)

**Thursday, February 2**
- ACP Super Bowl kickoff lunch, 12–1 pm (College Park, MD)

**February 3–8**
- AAPT Winter Meeting (Ontario, CA)