OSTP moves to expand public access

Most people would not have predicted the strong response from the general media to the February 22 White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) memorandum on “increasing access to the results of federally funded scientific research.” For most citizens, the topic is somewhat esoteric—especially when timed with the latest manufactured budget crisis by the federal government, the infamous March 1 sequestration. But the science, academic and scientific publishing communities have long awaited the OSTP directive, which is the result of a process initiated more than two years ago when President Obama signed into law the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2010. One section of this bill directed OSTP to work with the federal agencies that fund science and their stakeholders (such as publishers) to develop and implement policies that promote access to the results of agency-funded research, including grantee reports, data, and scholarly publications.

Publishers are very careful to point out that although the government may have paid for the research, it did not pay for its publication in a scholarly journal. Providing wider access to this peer-reviewed publication lies at the heart of the public-access debate, as publishers have not yet succeeded in fully explaining their essential added value in transforming raw research articles into the finished product of a peer-reviewed, edited, archived, linkable and searchable scholarly journal article.

My colleagues in the scholarly publishing community have generally commended OSTP for its memo’s balanced language and explicit recognition of the critical services that publishers provide. The directive provides instructions for the agencies to develop—together with stakeholders—draft plans for public access to publications and data within the next six months. This will be a tall order for certain agencies that have not considered the matter in any detail. However, DOE and NSF, two very important agencies that fund basic sciences, have made steady progress over the last two years through productive partnerships and pilot projects with publishers. We hope that these projects will serve as models for other agencies.

Shortly after the OSTP memo was issued, the Association of American Publishers posted a press release supporting the directive for outlining a reasonable resolution of issues around public access and a consistent strategy for collaboration with publishers for the identification, access, and archiving of relevant content. AIP Publishing posted its response last week, expressing its willingness to work with the agencies to achieve wider public access and stressing the need to incorporate sustainable business models.

One means of increasing public access that can coexist with the dominant subscription model is
embargoing public release of an article for a certain time period after publication. Embargoes, however, must be judiciously applied (preferably under the control of the publisher, rather than by mandate) to reflect the wide differences among journals and the scholarly communities that they support. The OSTP memorandum is carefully nuanced on the use of embargoes, suggesting a 12-month period as a guideline but allowing for flexibility. AIP will continue to advocate for a mixed-economy solution to providing increased access to all potential readers. This could mean immediate-access options, supported by up-front author fees (the so-called “gold open-access” model), and article rental options that AIP (now through AIP Publishing) and APS have piloted for more than two years. AIP looks forward to working with the federal science agencies to continue to develop and implement joint projects that leverage each of the partners’ strengths: federal agencies fund research, and publishers process, promote, make discoverable and archive peer-reviewed journal content; the journal also provides a means of scholarly reputation management that is an essential part of academe.

It is instructive to note how the general and scientific media have commented on the OSTP memo in the last week. (Media analyst Steve Corneliussen posted an excellent report on the reaction in the press on Physics Today’s website.) More often than not, these articles promote a simplistic headline for a summary of this highly nuanced directive to the federal agencies, conveying the message, “the federal government will unlock the pay wall for scientific publications.” Unfortunately, the details below the headline really matter for the health of this essential form of scientific communication. Freely available does not mean free of the cost that someone—author, librarian, reader, or taxpayer—will need to cover.

For additional information about the OSTP directive, see FYI #35.

From AIP Publishing

APL Materials welcomes the editorial team

In her letter from the editor, APL Materials Editor Judith MacManus-Driscoll writes,

APL Materials is being launched at a very exciting time for materials science. Two key driving forces are causing an explosion in the field: the first, the extreme demands being placed on materials to achieve ever-higher-performance functional products, and the second, our urgent need for clean energy. High-performance, complex materials of both nonbiological and biological forms will be central to our future progress . . . My vision for APL Materials is that it will be a premier, international, rapid-publication, open-access journal in advanced materials research. It will communicate the most valuable and timely research in the field, enabling us to further our quest for these critical discoveries. The journal will span the whole breadth of functional materials research . . .

AIP Publishing is pleased to introduce to the community the complete editorial team of APL Materials, whose expertise spans from complex oxide materials and nanostructures with wide-ranging functions, electronic oxides and thin films, bionanotechnology, molecular assembly, bio-inspired synthesis, graphene, low-dimensional carbon materials, nanostructured solar cells, and beyond. They are:
From the left:

- Editor, Judith MacManus-Driscoll, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK
- Editorial Board members Meicheng Li, North China Electric Power University, China, and Stuart Parkin, IBM Almaden Research Center, USA.

Associate Editors, from the left:

- Chang-Beom Eom, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA
- Seunghun Hong, Seoul National University, Korea
- Brian LeRoy, University of Arizona, USA
- Zhongfan Liu, Peking University, China
- Lukas Schmidt-Mende, University of Konstanz, Germany

Details about the Editorial Team and brief biographies are available at the APL Materials website.

Physics Trends flyers

The Statistical Research Center produces two sets of Physics Trends flyers each academic year. These flyers depict education and employment trends that are of interest to undergraduate and graduate students. They are designed to be quickly understood and are intended to be posted in public areas frequented by students. Some department chairs have reported that the flyers are also helpful when talking either with deans or with the parents of prospective majors.

A set of three flyers was recently mailed to SPS Chapter Advisors and those department chairs who requested additional copies. If you want to receive hard copies of the Physics Trends flyers, contact Judith Mulvey of the SRC staff. You can also find and download the latest flyers as well as those produced over the last 11 years at the SRC website.
Off the Press

*Physics Today*, March 2013 issue

**Cover:** In this image of a tadpole embryo, the developing stomach is highlighted in blue and pink. Recent research has shown that the position and left-right asymmetry of the stomach and other organs are dictated by bioelectric gradients, which can be manipulated by genetic and pharmacological tools. (Image courtesy of Michael Levin, Tufts University.)

**Coming Up**

Tuesday, March 12

- WOW drawing and dessert celebration, 2:00 pm (College Park)

Wednesday, March 13

- Staff birthday breakfasts (Melville and College Park)

March 18-22

- APS March Meeting (Baltimore, MD)