



OSI POLICY PERSPECTIVES

COMMON & GROUND

**IN THE GLOBAL QUEST FOR
OPEN RESEARCH**

SUMMARY VERSION

OSI POLICY PERSPECTIVE 2 (S)
APRIL 2020 EDITION
OPEN SCHOLARSHIP INITIATIVE

ABOUT OSI POLICY PERSPECTIVES

The OSI Policy Perspectives series offers broad, common ground perspectives on key issues in scholarly communication. Each report summarizes the current state of a particular issue and what we know about it, and also attempts to articulate the perspectives and lessons of experience from all stakeholder groups in scholarly communication on this issue (particularly but not exclusively as expressed in OSI conversations) and identify what common ground might exist for building broadly acceptable policy.

OSI is not a democratic body that speaks with one voice on any particular issue. Trying to reconcile the views, intentions, and motivations of all the different actors, communities and groups in the scholarly communication space—which are very rarely entirely aligned—is challenging. We acknowledge, therefore, that these reports may be (and in fact, probably are) an imperfect reflection of the many perspectives and ideas in this group. The fact that these reports sometimes need to be published in a rush, in response to policy commenting deadlines and other pressures only makes this imperfection more likely.

We also acknowledge, however, that OSI often considers a wider range of perspectives than established policy making bodies in scholarly communication, and that our relative strength is showcasing this range of perspectives and noting how they differ, and importantly, how they share common ground. To this end, we hope it is valuable to produce these reports, however imperfect, and share them with the scholarly communication community and beyond.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: Thank you to Rob Johnson, Abel Packer, Jason Steinhauer, Mel DeSart, Joann Delenik, and Rick Anderson for their input into this report. Thanks as well to several others in OSI who contributed important ideas and feedback but are not named here.

CONFLICT STATEMENT: The author of this report is the program director and principal investigator for OSI, which receives funding from foundations, UNESCO, commercial publishers, and individual participants by way of conference fees. Funders, however, have no privileged input into OSI policy deliberations apart from being equal members of the OSI community. OSI has many voices contributing to documents such as this, and endeavors to maintain an inclusive and balanced perspective on scholarly communication issues.

DISCLAIMER: In this report, the author has attempted to accurately represent the perspective and ideas of OSI participants, alumni and observers. However, it is possible that this attempt is incomplete and/or inaccurate. Any responsibility for errors, omissions and/or misrepresentations rests solely with the author. Also, the findings and recommendations expressed herein also do not necessarily reflect the opinions of contributors, or individual OSI participants, alumni, or observers, or any institutions, trustees, officers, or staff affiliated with these individuals.

PREVIOUS VERSIONS: No previous public versions.

CITATION: Hampson, G. 2020. OSI Policy Perspective 2: Common ground in the global quest for open research (summary version). Open Scholarship Initiative. doi: forthcoming



SUMMARY VERSION

COMMON GROUND

IN THE GLOBAL QUEST FOR OPEN RESEARCH

Scholarly communication is incredibly important to modern research—a vast field, where many different organizations, interest groups and experts tackle a dizzying array of issues related to how research gets communicated. These organizations, interests and issues overlap and intersect in important ways, but they most often exert separate and distinct forces on the function and evolution of the scholarly communication ecosystem.¹

ABOUT OSI

The Open Scholarship Initiative (OSI) is a diverse, inclusive, global network of high-level experts and stakeholder representatives working together in partnership with UNESCO to develop broadly accepted, comprehensive, sustainable solutions to the future of open scholarship that work for everyone everywhere. This document reflects the input of the individuals listed here as well as contributions from other OSI participants who are not listed. The findings and recommendations expressed do not necessarily reflect the opinions of these individuals, OSI participants, OSI participant institutions, or the agencies, trustees, officers, or staff of these institutions.

OSI is managed by the Science Communication Institute (SCI), a US-based 501c3 nonprofit charity. OSI serves as the Network for Open Access to Scientific Information and Research (NOASIR) for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). For more information about OSI, please visit osiglobal.org.

As an ecosystem, therefore, several weaknesses have become apparent in scholarly communication over the years, such as:

1. **Diagnostic:** The diversity of this system makes it difficult to describe, diagnose and reform in any collaborative and coherent way. Reform measures that works for one stakeholder, issue or region may not work for another.
2. **Ripple effects:** Changing the scholarly communication ecosystem is difficult because changes that happen in one part of the system will ripple to other parts, sometimes with unintended consequences.

1. The businesses and skills involved in scholarly communication range from publishing, journalism, marketing and teaching, to policy development, grant writing, technical writing, editing, informatics, copyright oversight, institutional repository management, tech transfer and research design. Interests and concerns run the gamut from interdisciplinary discovery to outreach, advocacy, education, peer review, collaboration, open access, open data, predatory publishing, public faith in science, impact assessment, academia's publish-or-perish culture, journal indexing, citations, standards, curation, preservation, embargo policy, funder mandate compliance, research analysis, research transparency, replicability, and beyond. And all of this multitude varies widely by region, institution, clients, audience, career stage and field of study when it comes to perspectives, goals, strategies, and best practices.

3. **Hyper-advocacy:** Despite the diagnostic/reform barrier and ripple effects (or arguably because of these) a diverse array of specialized actors in this system are attempting to create system-wide change anyway. Many of these advocacy efforts, predictably, are very focused on just one part of the scholarly communication puzzle or one particular perspective. A wide variety of efforts—along with a variety of goals, agendas and definitions—have emerged which are sometimes incompatible, even conflicting.
4. **Tail wagging the dog:** Scholarly communication can't speak with one unified voice to funders about goals for the future, which means that funding in this space has lagged well behind needs, so it's often funders themselves who set agendas based on their own understanding, vision for the future, and sense of priorities.²

In OSI, we have been observing and debating the activity in this space since late 2014 with specific regard to understanding possible global approaches and solutions for improving the future of open research. While the COVID-19 pandemic has made the importance of open science abundantly clear, the struggle to achieve this goal has been mired in a lack of clarity and urgency for over 20 years now, mostly stalling on the tension between wanting more openness but lacking realistic solutions for making this happen on a large scale with so many different stakeholders, needs and perspectives involved.³

Underlying this tension is a fundamental difference in philosophy: whether the scholarly communication marketplace—driven by the needs and desires of researchers—should determine what kind of open it wants and at what levels; or whether this marketplace should be forced to adopt a specific roadmap to open on a specific timetable. There is no real difference of opinion in the scholarly communication community whether open is a good thing that should be pursued. The debate is mostly about how we should go about pursuing it.

The evolution of this philosophical gap is complex and fascinating, but unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper to explore in detail.⁴ Fast-forwarding to today and summarizing the history of the open movement over the last 20 years, these are the most salient points for our discussion here:

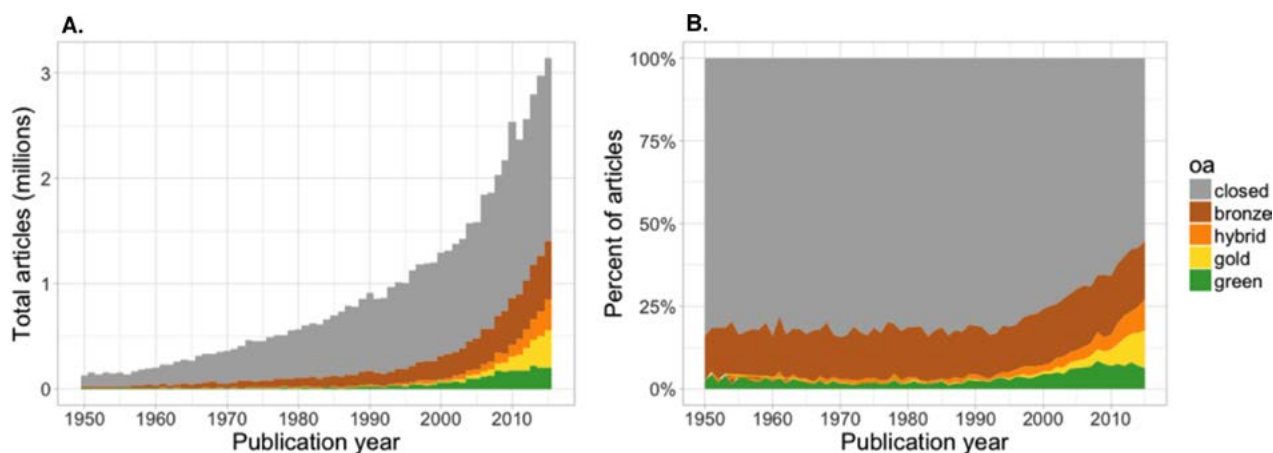
1. **Open is growing strongly.** How strongly depends on which indexes we're measuring, which time periods, which disciplines, and what we mean by "open." As you can see from Figure 1, not all open is doing equally well—especially not the kind of open we may be rooting for—and lots of information is still closed. But in aggregate, the growth of open is robust.

2. The Science Communication Institute (SCI), which is the parent body of OSI, attempted to create a Science Communication Network for several years but the response was lackluster. Everyone in science communication recognizes common elements across the field, but they are also more focused on their current strategies and constituencies than looking for commonalities. The teaching of science communication is similarly hamstrung—different course and degree programs around the world focus on widely differing offerings (some, for instance, just teach writing whereas others delve into issue like public policy, and still others focus just on helping scientists communicate more effectively). Robust funding for this type of field unification effort will go a long way, however. As with any "movement," it's important to build up a core of participants, benefits, and results before the movement really begins to build—for the community to see this alliance as real before they commit to joining it. For a deeper discussion the challenges of uniting the science communication field, see the SCI website at sci.institute.

3. The terms "open" and "open access" are often used interchangeably. There is no universal agreement on what either of these terms mean. Also, please note that the word "open" is used in this paper as an adjective, a verb and a noun. When we use this word we can be speaking of a condition of information (an adjective), the act of freeing information (a verb), and/or the name of the movement that embraces both (a noun).

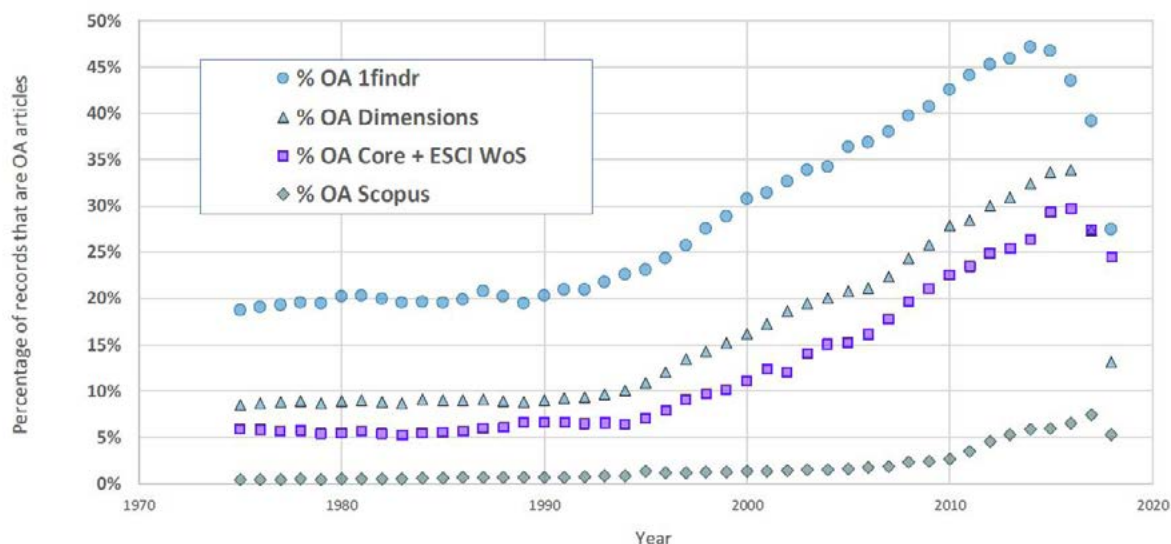
4. Richard Poynder's recent essay on this topic does a very thorough job of this—see Poynder 2019.

Figure 1: Growth of various types of open⁵



Source: Piwowar et al. 2018

Figure 2: Amount of open research in the world, by journal index



Source: Archambault 2018

5. Over the years, the scholarly communication community has used colors to represent different kinds of open. “Green” open mostly refers to preprints—the pre-published version of articles—but it can also refer to collections of articles that are free to read but otherwise not compliant with BOAI (the 2002 Budapest Open Access Initiative standard, which is considered by many open advocates as the standard by which all open research should comply). “Gold” open refers to articles that are published in a free, CC-BY format (usually but not always supported by a publishing fee paid by the author). BOAI compliant material can be green or gold. It’s unsure how much green is compliant, but it’s a minority share. Estimates of the amount of gold open in existence generally varies between 5 and 23 percent (Science-Metrix 2018), depending on the sample and time period; 20% is a reasonable rough estimate. This number hasn’t grown substantially over time. This said, the aggregate figure isn’t exactly helpful because gold open works better in some fields than others—biomedical fields, for instance, which account for the largest number of journal articles overall. In such fields, gold open might account for around a third of all the open, whereas in other fields gold accounts for just a sliver of the total open output (Piwowar 2019).

2. **Open has evolved considerably** since its earliest years, as has the Internet and the information environment, and the truths about information we once thought immutable. We can still be passionate, for instance, about our belief that information should be free, but we have a better understanding today of how this dynamic can create and has created unanticipated side-effects, such as the rise of disinformation and fraud, and putting subscription content providers like newspapers out of business.
3. **We haven't controlled the evolution of open.** Different stakeholders and institutions in the scholarly communication community have appropriated this concept— from education to software to scholarly publishing —meaning that over time the evolutionary tree of open terms and practices has branched considerably. And finally,
4. **The open movement has fractured.** Different groups are now advocating different solutions and policies, valuing different outcomes, and even disparaging each other's right to be part of the open community. The most visible fault lines separate the producers of information (publishers and researchers) from the main financers and consumers of this information (government funders and university libraries), but the actual fault lines are more nuanced, with many groups on the outside looking in, unable to influence the trajectory of this debate.

Can we reconcile the competing perceptions in this space (why we might want to try doing this is discussed in the next section)? Our strong opinions about right and wrong, our different needs and perspectives, and the general factionalism that has pervaded this conversation for most of the last 20 years, have erected roadblocks that stand in the way of global progress on this issue:

1. **Trust:** Different factions in the open space don't trust each other. The rhetoric is heated, and often dismissive and disrespectful.
2. **Frustration:** Boiling over from this lack of trust, this space is plagued by frustration, acrimony (see also, Twitter), and hyperbole, all of which prevents us from working together effectively.
3. **Lack of engagement:** Researchers aren't involved in these reform conversations in any meaningful way.⁶
4. **Ignorance:** We're missing key pieces of the puzzle (for instance, what kind of open is most effective, how necessary are embargoes, how big is predatory publishing, and so on).
5. **Lack of funding:** We need funding to develop new systems and structures, but this is a poorly funded space (or a funder-driven space, as noted previously).
6. **Inertia:** The culture of communication in academia is highly resistant to change. There's also the inertia of our own long-held positions and courses of action (of publishers, open advocates, universities, funders, governments, and other groups).
7. **Tunnel vision:** We have tended to focus on narrow, prescriptive solutions that fit just one perspective (as noted previously) instead of developing general frameworks for progress that will allow for adaptation, competition, and creativity.
8. **Unilateralism:** The scholarly communication community has grown accustomed to reacting to unilateral policy initiatives and proclamations. The result has been a lurching, divisive sort of progress—or at least attempts at progress.

6. This is due to several reasons: wildly differing opinions by field, career stage, and other factors; a lack of concern about open relative to other concerns like quality, peer review and impact; and many different definitions of "open."

FINDING COMMON GROUND

It's hard to envision a system more global and more integrated than research. Many stakeholders affect and are affected by changes in the ecosystem; the scholarly communication ecosystem differs in significant ways across the globe and between researchers, institutions and fields of study; and there are many questions that exclusive action can't address. There are also broad ecosystem-level questions that need answering. For these reasons alone, global approaches are needed.

The first step in this exploration isn't to start looking for "open solutions," but to develop a better understanding of how our research communication needs and interests overlap. By identifying the broad contours of common ground in this conversation, we can build the guardrails and mileposts for our collaborative efforts and then allow the finer-grained details of community-developed plans more flexibility and guidance to evolve over time.

What are these overlapping interests? First, the people in this community share a common motive—idealism—to make research better able to serve the public good. We also share a common desire to unleash the power of open to improve research and accelerate discovery; we are all willing to fix issues now instead of waiting for market forces or government intervention to do this for us; and we want to ensure that everyone everywhere has equitable access to knowledge.

There is also very broad agreement in this community about which specific problems in scholarly communication need to be fixed and why. The most salient problems are:⁷

1. **Culture of communication in academia:** We need to clarify messages about open and break down barriers and simplify pathways to more open adoption. We also need to engage universities and scholarly societies in a conversation to encourage new advancement pathways that include more use of open, and that can help untangle publish or perish attitudes and metrics like the impact factor from promotion and tenure considerations.
2. **Funding:** We need to stop aligning our funding primarily behind one-size-fits-all solutions, and instead fund a wider variety of approaches for a variety of actors and audiences.
3. **Studies:** There are many gaps in our understanding of scholarly communication, from predatory publishing to the global flip to embargos, citation advantages, the economic benefits of open, and more. We should work as a community to fund and conduct studies to fill in these information gaps.
4. **HSS & Science:** The fact there are no one-size-fits-all solutions is nowhere more apparent than when comparing the different needs of HSS disciplines (like history) with disciplines in the natural sciences. This said, while we can develop better tailored solutions (or disciplines can develop their own), we should also continue to promote areas of mutual interest and benefit.
5. **Impact factors:** Impact factors are loved by some stakeholders, despised by others. They are a net positive for some, and a terrible scourge for others. We need to reform the use of impact factors—this much is clear. Exactly how another matter.
6. **Open IP:** The global community should work with WIPO, NISO, and other relevant organizations to establish new global standards for open IP and create IP literacy materials for the research community.

7. This list from OSI2017 conference participants and is just a starting point for discussion—there are other lists, and other issues in common. See the OSI2017 report for more detail.

7. **Peer review:** We need to work as a community to develop new global standards for journals. We also need to study the effectiveness of different models and support the community as it experiments.
8. **Institutional repositories:** Repositories are a crucial tool in the custody chain of research preservation. We need to better understand the challenges ahead and ensure we're asking the right questions and pursuing the best solutions.
9. **Rogue solutions:** Our community must take a stand against Sci-Hub types of solutions that violate copyright laws and are off the open spectrum, while also supporting new and entrepreneurial approaches to open.
10. **Standards:** There are many issues in this space that would benefit from a standards-based approach—from what we consider to be “open” to what publishers should do, what best practices researchers should follow (beyond DORA), and much ore.
11. **Underserved:** There is much work we can do as a community to encourage more openness in universities and public sector institutions, better address the wide variety of research-related needs and concerns that emanate from the vast diversity and asymmetries of the scholarly communication environment (such as indexing, standards, and promotion and tenure practices), and narrowing the affordability gap.

In addition, there are many overlapping beliefs in this community. OSI participants have concluded that four such beliefs best define our common ground: (1) Research and society will benefit from open done right; (2) Successful solutions will require broad collaboration; (3) Connected issues need to be addressed, and (4) Open isn't a single outcome, but a spectrum. These four beliefs are a summation of the nine common beliefs that OSI2017 participants identified:⁸

1. **Open isn't binary.** Open exists along a spectrum of outcomes, with wide variation according to discoverability, accessibility, reusability, transparency, and sustainability (DARTS).⁹ There is no widespread agreement between stakeholder groups of what “open” or “open access” (OA) mean in practice. Some open advocates prefer to think of open access as being an optimal, singular state or range on the open spectrum. Others prefer to call any kind of open “open access”—gold OA, green OA, and so on. There is no broad agreement that these terms are similar, interchangeable, or mean the same thing to everyone. Therefore, keep the DARTS open spectrum concept in mind and recognize that open and open access are highly variable terms—that when two groups advocate open or open access, they may be advocating entirely different outcomes.



8. See the OSI2017 report for more detail.

9. **DISCOVERABLE:** Can this information be found online? Is it indexed by search engines and databases, and hosted on servers open to the public? Does it contain adequate identifiers (such as DOIs)? **ACCESSIBLE:** Once discovered, can this information be read by anyone free of charge? Is it available in a timely, complete, and easy-to-access manner (for instance, is it downloadable or machine-readable, with a dataset included)? **REUSABLE:** Can this information be modified? Disseminated? What conditions (both legal and technical) prevent it from being repurposed or shared at will? **TRANSPARENT:** What do we know about the provenance of this information? Is it peer reviewed? Do we know the funding source (are conflicts of interest identified)? What do we know about the study design and analysis? **SUSTAINABLE:** Is the open solution for this information artifact sustainable? This may be hard to know—the sustainability of larger, more established solutions may evoke more confidence than new, small, or one-off solutions.

2. **Open isn't free.** The focus of open cannot be only about cost-savings. Open is going to cost money—the jury is still out on exactly how much.
3. **Open isn't easy.** Achieving open outcomes can be complicated. The easy solution isn't necessarily going to be the correct solution.
4. **Publishing is critical.** Without publishing, there is no modern, reliable scientific record. This isn't to say that publishing as-is is infallible or indispensable, just that we need to make changes with care and respect for the vital role that publishing plays in research.
5. **We're more alike than unlike.** There are wide differences of opinion in this community but also significant overlap in our perspectives.
6. **Convergent needs are everywhere.** Convergent needs and aspirations are everywhere in this community. This can be difficult to recognize when we spend most our time arguing about what color of open access is best. From a 10,000 foot level, however, this convergence is obvious.
7. **We need more information.** There are significant gaps in our community's understanding of many key issues in scholarly communication. More study is needed.
8. **Accountability.** We all have a stake in the outcome.
9. **Trust.** This conversation needs trust to move forward. There is a lot of mistrust in the scholarly communication system which has been so polarized for so long.

ALL ABOARD

What's stopping all the world's researchers from jumping on board the open research train today? The biggest reason may be uncertainty. Many researchers appear to be interested and willing to get on board (enthusiasm varies widely by region, field and institution), but for others, their altruism is often tempered by self-interest— a significant dislike of the complexity and/or requirements pushed by most open plans (such as CC-BY licensing, or requirements that ban hybrid journals; see AAP 2019, AHA 2018), for instance, or a sense that they are getting what they need from the system as is, so why fix what isn't broken? ¹⁰

Let's assume for a moment, though, that we want all open trains to head in generally the same direction—an outcome that working with each other on the future of open might help produce. In such a world, we could offer more compelling “destinations” instead of our current “take it or leave it” ones. While we're at it, we could even throw in more comfortable accommodations. Our new, common ground approach to open can then be one where we all:

1. **Work together to get all research material somewhere onto the DARTS open spectrum.** Seventy percent of the world's research is currently closed and entirely off the open spectrum. Let's work together to get that down to 10% in 10 years. We can do this by valuing all open outcomes and not judging which of these are superior to others.
2. **Work together to improve all open outcomes.** Getting more information onto the spectrum is just a first step. From there, we can work together to improve open outcomes. Over time, these improvements will incentivize change and adoption, which will further incentive more improvements and more adoption.

10. To-date, scholarly societies have generally been ambivalent about one-size-fits-all changes to the scholarly communication environment (see, for instance, AAP 2019 and AHA 2018). Most of the guidance and mandates on this issue are coming from libraries and funders instead.

3. **Work together to immediately improve access where it's most needed.** What kind of outcomes are wanted by researchers and where? Where are improvements needed and why? Let's be focused and thoughtful and not grasp for easy one-size-fits-all explanations and solutions.
4. **Work together to improve open clarity and standards.** What's the simplest way to participate in the future of open research? We need solutions that are easier for researchers to understand and value, and easier to universities to implement. Creating global open standards can help.¹¹
5. **Work together to address urgent needs.** There are many such needs to choose from, but none are more urgent and global than climate change. Let's bring the international open community together to open not only climate-related research, but to actively integrate this work, make connections, and facilitate discovery.¹²
6. **Pilot open solutions.** Let's build things with open—combine, curate and standardize data, make new connections, bridge the gaps between disciplines, see new fields, make new discoveries—in short, do work that proves open is the future.
7. **Look beyond.** As a community, let's look beyond the journal article and figure out what we really need. What tools and systems should we build? To what end (specifically)?

After a few years of working together, we should be able to reach an “Open Renaissance” where open is clearly defined and supported, open solutions are robust, inclusive, broad, scalable and sustainable, almost all knowledge is discoverable, the global access gap disappears, global standards are clear, the marketplace remains competitive so open products remain cutting edge, repositories are integrated, and data standardization is widespread and robust. Flowing from this Renaissance, the social impacts of research will surpass today (including improved literacy, public engagement, and public policy impact), knowledge will become more of a global public good, and society will reap the benefits.¹³

What if we don't work together on the challenges ahead? Continuing with our go-it-alone approach may eventually result in competing and increasingly unequal haves versus have-nots regional solutions where we end up with one open future for China, another for the EU, and still other futures for South America, Africa, and other regions, each working to solve its own unique concerns and perspectives.¹⁴ This approach may also force changes across diverse disciplines that may not work well (for example, open solutions that work in physics generally don't work at all in history), causing researchers in some fields to lose interest in an open future. Or by not working together now to defeat predatory publishing, we may see a situation in the not so distant future where we can no longer tell real science from junk—an outcome which will damage both science and society.

11. There are international conventions in this space with regard to copyright law, universal digital object identifiers, and so on, but no international standards describing, for instance, how journals should conduct peer review, or what constitutes a legitimate and credible journal. Not all emerging open formats are created equal; standards can help ensure a baseline of quality and reliability. COPE and other organizations have created strong first drafts of this kind of work (see COPE 2018). The next step is for the international community to review (and modify as needed) these proposals and build the capacity of publishers worldwide.

12. There are already programs and procedures, both at the publisher level and the international level to help researchers respond to global health emergencies like Ebola, Zika and the Coronavirus. See, for example, NIH's Emergency Access Initiative, or Elsevier's information resource centers (Reller 2020). It's important to note here that we're not suggesting daylighting private health information from studies or discounting studies where this information can't be publicly evaluated. These are both bad ideas, and don't do anything to help science or science policy.

13. This section is verbatim from Hampson 2018

14. One example here is that if we replace subscription paywalls with “play-walls” where authors need to pay to have their articles published, this is arguably a worse outcome for authors from lower-resource regions and institutions since we're now dealing not just with research that's hard to access, but with research that doesn't get published in the first place.

Considering what's at stake—what we can achieve by working together, and what we risk by not working together—it is critically important that we put our differences aside in this community and summon the will to look thoughtfully and carefully at how we are approaching the common challenges we face. Exactly how we do this is the question.

OSI has proposed a plan of action for working together to rebuild the future of scholarly communication on strong, common ground foundation. This plan—which we're referring to as Plan A—calls for joint action on studies, scholarly communication infrastructure improvement, and open outreach/education.¹⁵ Plan A also calls for working together with UNESCO to develop a unified global roadmap for the future of open, and for striving to ensure the community's work in this space is researcher-focused, collaborative, connected (addressing connected issues like peer review), diverse and flexible (no one-size-fits-all solutions), and beneficial to research. UNESCO's goal is to finish its roadmap proposal by early 2022.

CONCLUSION

The scholarly communication community needs to come together on common ground to help build the future of open research. Every phase of this work needs to be done together, from the decision to unite to the search for common interests to the development of options.

This work isn't going to be easy. It is vital, however, that we pivot to the realization that this community shares a tremendous amount of common ground beliefs, interests, opinions, and goals for the future of research. Our common ground approach and solutions will support a future of open that aligns the full potential of all stakeholders in this community, and will lead to open outcomes that are far more robust, exciting, creative, and sustainable than any other outcomes could possibly be. Step one is to reach across the aisle and allow for the possibility that we are all allies, and that we will be stronger in our common cause by working together.

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15. There are some in OSI who lament that Plan A doesn't call for more aggressive action. Finding a suitable, common ground starting point for action is key, however. Assessing the wealth of recommendations from OSI2016 and OSI2017 workgroup participants (see the OSI2017 report for details), the most frequently mentioned crosscutting issues were the need for more studies and the need to reform the culture of communication in academia. The most frequently mentioned approaches for reforming scholarly communication were studies, coordination and collaboration, outreach, new tools and programs, improved standards, pilots, resource development, and policy leadership. Plan A's focus is derived from these recommendations, overlaid with what the OSI group learned and observed in 2018 and 2019 about our internal strengths and about the environment for global reform.

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