

Sustainability Challenges in Current Academic Publishing Model

The amount of research content – particularly digital content – available to university researchers in Canada and elsewhere is unprecedented, and growing. A variety of new discovery tools (e.g. Google Scholar) and research technologies (e.g. text and data mining) have flourished, giving rise to connections between disparate disciplines and creating new areas of study. The amount of research available to – and used by – Canadian researchers has never been higher, on account of digital technologies.

Although there has been a great deal of success in regards to increased access, the commercial publishing model that underlies much of the system is not sustainable and is threatening the long-term access to research.

INSTITUTIONAL MOBILIZATION TOOLKIT

What Can I Do?

- Be aware that the increasing cost of journals is outpacing the increase of library budgets, putting pressure on your library to do more with less.
- Be open to a conversation with your librarian about your scholarly content needs in terms of your research and teaching, in an environment where tough content retention decisions may have to be made.

What Are Libraries Doing?

- Working through consortia to leverage greater purchasing power.

Tools:

- Introduction
- Evolution of Journal Pricing
- Canadian Economic Environment
- Innovation in Scholarly Communication
- **Sustainability Challenges**
- Understanding Scholarly Metrics
- Glossary of Scholarly Communication Terms
- Selected Bibliography

Learn More:

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Challenge: Oligopoly of Commercial Publishers



Consortial negotiation (by CRKN and others) have benefited Canadian universities by democratizing access to research content, decreasing overall costs, and enabling smaller institutions access to resources they might not afford otherwise. These gains have often been won by the adoption of the "big deal" – an all-in price for unlimited access to everything a publisher offers.

The digital age and the advent of the so-called "big deal" has drastically changed the publishing landscape, enabling publishers of scholarly research to make titles available at the push of a button. While this has increased the amount of content available to researchers and students, the big deal has empowered large, profitable, STM publishers (and encouraged consolidation in the marketplace), effectively, crowding out spending on other resources like books. Moreover, while these deals initially offered deep discounts which help foster wide adoption, subscription fees are increasing at rates outpacing limited university budgets. Worse, the nature of these large packages makes it difficult for libraries to reduce their spending, as the per-title prices, when subscribed to outside of a "big deal", are such that a library can usually only obtain a small number of titles for a similar price as the entire package.

The problem is a unique one in the sense that both the source and the market for much of the scholarly content provided by large commercial publishers are research universities – and that while universities are facing ever-increasing subscription costs, academics remain incented to provide their research and editorial services to the publishers with little or no compensation to their granting agency or host institution.

Challenge: Promotion & Tenure Criteria



Researchers can:

Explore alternative -- or additional -- criteria for establishing P & T within their departments

Encourage more experienced faculty to take leadership in this regard



Challenge:

Promotion & Tenure Criteria



Administrators can:

Elevate document deposit into Institutional Repositories as part of P & T criteria

Consider using a more comprehensive set of measures to assess performance

The majority of promotion and tenure decisions in Canada rely in some fashion on prestige and impact factors of publications. Impact factors in particular have been designed and advanced by the commercial publishers, and by their very nature do not favour new publications. This not only solidifies the market position of the largest publishers, but stifles innovation in journal titles, research topics, methods and funding.

Challenge: Awareness of Publishing Alternatives



Researchers can:

Enter into dialogue with your library regarding alternate publishing models

Encourage and support junior faculty who are developing scholarship in new ways



Challenge:

Lack of Awareness of Publishing Alternatives



Administrators can:

Explore and understand the impact of alternate publishing models

Researchers, administrators and librarians continue to have alternatives to large commercial publishers, although they are not always well understood or easy to access. For instance, faculty may not understand copyright surrounding their work, or negotiate for better author rights when their work is published. Researchers may be reluctant to look for alternative publications if their career prospects are only enhanced by being published in a narrow band of journals. University librarians may inadvertently support commercial publishers in the training and support that they provide to their clients. Similarly, not every institution has a repository of institutional research which is open access and easily discoverable.

While strides have been taken with a number of open access initiatives, it continues to be hampered by a sense that open access content is free: while the researcher or academic accessing the content does not pay under open access, the content still needs to be financially supported. Open access remains an alternative publishing business model, and not a publishing model divorced from business.

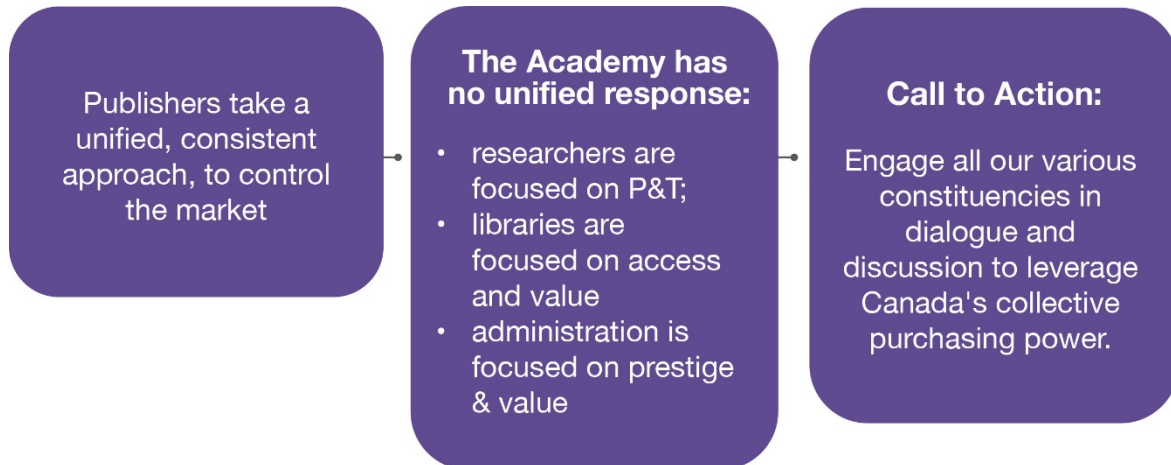
Challenge: Democratization of Knowledge



Scholarly research is a public investment, and preserving access to this research should be a public goal. The Tri-Agency Open Access Policy notes that its objective is to "improve access to the results of Agency-funded research, and to increase the dissemination and exchange of research results".

Access to the latest research is essential for innovation and the advancement of society, is central to the teaching and research roles of academic institutions, and is essential for Canada to remain competitive on the world stage.

Challenge: Focused vs. Divergent Approach to Publishing



The largest commercial publishers are extremely well-funded, and are working on many fronts to increase both the value and the visibility of their platforms and content. Publishers work to acquire additional content (and competitors), develop their hosting platform, review and modify licensing terms and promote their services, both to librarians and administrators, and directly to researchers. On the opposite side, researchers and academics are both enabled and ensnared by the work of commercial publishers – and lack the concerted effort and organized focus to push back in a meaningful way. In many cases, disparate parts of a university campus – individual researchers, university librarians, and the research office – may be dealing with commercial publishers in isolation from each other.

About the Canadian Research Knowledge Network

The Canadian Research Knowledge Network is a partnership of Canadian universities, dedicated to expanding digital content for the academic research and teaching enterprise in Canada.