University of Kentucky

From the SelectedWorks of Adrian K. Ho

March 2011

Hybrid Journals: Transition to Full Open Access or Here to Stay?

Contact Author

Start Your Own SelectedWorks

Notify Me of New Work

Available at: http://works.bepress.com/akho/16

Hybrid Journals: Transition to Full Open Access or Here to Stay?

By Adrian K. Ho, The University of Western Ontario

It is now common that subscription-based journals provide an open access (OA) publishing option in exchange for a publication fee. In other words, the article published upon payment of the publication fee will be freely available online with minimal copyright and licensing restrictions. This is known as the hybrid business model of journal publishing because the costs are covered either by subscription or by the publication fee. While this model has become common, some aspects of it are not widely discussed. For example, what factors determine the amount of the publication fee? How is this model faring? Will hybrid journals turn into full OA titles over time?

The ALCTS Scholarly Communications Interest Group organized a panel discussion on hybrid journals and the future of scholarly publishing at the 2011 ALA Midwinter Meeting in San Diego. The panelists were:

- Philip Bourne, Professor of Pharmacology, University of California San Diego
- Charles Eckman, University Librarian & Dean of Library Services, Simon Fraser University, Canada
- Patricia Hudson, Senior Marketing Manager, Oxford Journals, Oxford University Press
- Dan Morgan, Executive Publisher, Psychology & Cognitive Science, Elsevier

They discussed the development, perceptions, and future of hybrid journals from different points of view. Judy Luther was the discussion moderator.

Charles Eckman delivered the first presentation and pointed out that there was a steady growth of library-based funding support for authors who wish to enable OA to their published research. As former Director of Collections at the UC Berkeley Library, he provided an overview of the OA fund there and noted that researchers welcomed financial support for publishing in hybrid journals. Of the 60 OA articles funded in 2008, 30 were published in hybrid journals. He also discussed the OA fund at Simon Fraser University where he is currently University Librarian & Dean of Library Services. The Senate Committee there reviewed and rejected funding for publishing in hybrid journals due to fiscal accountability questions and concerns over the journals' "double-dipping issue." Eckman argued that the stance of campus stakeholders matters in determining whether an OA fund should support publishing in hybrid journals. Moreover, researchers who publish in hybrid journals tend to opt for OA when there is financial support for it. In principle, hybrid journals could transition to full OA journals. However, the "subscription culture" and a lack of will to develop new practices are among the factors that create barriers to such a transition. He suggested that more data be collected from different stakeholders of journal publishing for the study of this issue. He wrapped up the presentation with recommendations such as applying the OA fund to other types of scholarly publication. Eckman's presentation is available online at: http://bit.ly/giQw3p

Philip Bourne followed with his talk, which approached the topic from the researcher's perspective. He argued that scientists and faculty members are usually more interested in publishing their research in the most prestigious journals than in ensuring unfettered online access to their research. He noted that funding agencies' policies on access to funded research are a significant factor in determining what researchers will do in terms of supporting OA. For instance, the National Institutes of Health have not strictly enforced their public access requirement at this point. Researchers, therefore, stick to their habit when selecting journals for publication and give no thought to archiving their publications in OA repositories. They realize that journal access is in general not free and like the idea that OA will help boost readership of their works. However, most of them have not thought much about publishing in hybrid journals. Bourne stated that "hybrid journals are but a small step in the right direction" and that full access to published research and related data in a machine-usable way is crucial. He concluded by providing a brief description of a knowledge and data cycle, which epitomizes the future of scholarly communication. The knowledge and data cycle is based on an article by Bourne (Will a Biological Database Be Different from a Biological Journal?), which is freely accessible at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.0010034 Bourne's presentation is available online at: http://bit.ly/gZ3PkY

Patricia Hudson then discussed hybrid journals from the perspective of a non-profit publisher. Oxford University Press currently offers the OA option in 94 of its subscription-based journals. Editorial decisions of these journals are entirely independent of whether the author plans to select the OA option. The publication fee is US$3,000. Articles covered by the option have a Creative Commons license applied to them and are deposited to PubMed Central as needed. In 2009, the OA option uptake was highest in Life Sciences and lowest in Humanities and Social Sciences. The Press informs the author of the OA option after the acceptance of the article, and notes that this option offers a possible solution to the compliance with research funders' access policies. Hudson rounded out the presentation by alerting the audience to a number of questions that warrant attention. Among them are: How will gold OA uptake affect subscriptions to hybrid journals? How can OA articles be clearly identified within hybrid journals? Is gold OA feasible in Humanities and Social Science publishing? Hudson's presentation is available online at: http://bit.ly/eF7L8E

Dan Morgan followed by speaking on the hybrid journals published by Elsevier. As of Dec. 2010, more than 500 Elsevier subscription-based journals offered the OA option. The charge was US$3,000, but US$5,000 for Cell Press journals. Morgan pointed out that Elsevier does not charge subscribers for content covered by the OA option. In 2009, 515 articles were published with the option among the 260,000 articles published by Elsevier journals. As the uptake of the option had been very low since 2006, it did not generate an impact on journal pricing. Industry-wide, the low uptake rate (1-2%) presented risk for sustainability. However, it is likely that the uptake will increase as a result of funding support. Morgan maintained that Elsevier is open to mechanisms that have the potential to bring about sustainable universal access to published research. But the company adopts a "test-and-learn approach" to "ensure that system-wide impact of such mechanisms are [sic] fully understood before scaling them up." Meanwhile, there are questions for different

stakeholders involved in the hybrid model. They address various issues such as the sustainability of funding support for the OA option, the funding distribution among different disciplines, and the perpetual costs of hosting articles published with the OA option. Last but not least, Morgan briefly discussed five future directions for scholarly publishing:

1. Close remaining access gaps
2. Provide access to non-journal outputs
3. Enrich and enhance articles
4. Develop tools to derive insights across articles
5. Strengthen anti-plagiarism and ethics enforcement

Morgan's presentation is available online at: http://bit.ly/dI7gz3

Selected Readings about Hybrid Journals

Continued adventures in open access: 2009 perspective
http://dx.doi.org/10.1087/20100205

Equity for open-access journal publishing
http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.1000165

Humanities and social science journals: A pilot study of eight US associations
http://dx.doi.org/10.1087/20100209

Nine questions for hybrid journal programs
http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/newsletter/09-02-06.htm#hybrid

Open access publishing at Springer (with slides about hybrid journals)
http://www.berlin8.org/userfiles/file/Berlin8_OA_Conference_PH_v1.pdf