

The University of Akron

From the Selected Works of Ian McCullough

June 26, 2016

Shifting Sands - forum notes.pdf

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/ian_mccullough/14/

Shifting Sands: Ethics and Means for Sharing and Getting Published Scholarship

ACRL- STS Scholarly Communications Committee Forum, ALA Annual, Orlando, FL June 26, 2016

For this Scholarly Communications Committee Forum, I gave a short “provocation” to the roundtable discussion groups. The notes below are what I typed out to organize my thoughts, but I did not read this verbatim at the forum.

Ian McCullough

Our interest in this topic was spurred by the article in *Science* by John Bohannon “Who’s downloading pirated papers? Everybody” came out while we discussed what to present for the committee forum. I think this topic – of how scientists are going around the library to access materials – is both timely and growing in importance. I will spare you how this relates to my scholarly research. But I think this may be an existential question for librarians – what are we when collections are completely untethered from the library?

Instead of calling this a great new disruption though, I see it as a progression in past practice which those of us who have been in research lab groups may recognize. When I joined a lab group, I was given a few papers to read. They were printed out and put on my bench space. I didn’t download them or look them up. It wasn’t uncommon to get a PDF in an email for us all to read for journal club or a lab meeting. But none of these

extra-legal uses of copyrighted materials raises an eyebrow in lab - frankly no one cared.

In addition to passing papers, it is common to ask collaborators and friends at other institutions for articles. But the process is moving from personal networks and the traditional informal knowledge transfer methods into semi-formal and organized requests. #icanhazpdf is a twitter hashtag used to ask for articles, and the request is then erased so people don't waste time. I regularly see a Facebook group "Ask for PDFs from People with Institutional Access" under my suggested groups (over 8000 members). I've also seen personal pleas from friends to give them papers on FB. I sometimes get personal emails to send a paper.

So I suppose I see these practices on a continuum and I don't totally disapprove because they seem familiar to me from my time as a scientist. Really, I just wanted the information. Only being a librarian made me really interested in the economics of journals or copyright of research. One of the main reasons we have expensive journals is researchers are disinterested in copyright, which so many give away so freely. Publishers profit from this disinterest and that disinterest has never really threatened publishers until now. Sci-Hub is the next step in this decoupling of extra-legal journal use from personal connections. To me the real question is do we teach Sci-Hub as a part of the information ecosystem? Do we pretend it doesn't exist? Where do we draw the line about acceptable topics to discuss with our users?