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Unraveling current issues in scholarly publishing Démêler les enjeux actuels de l'édition savante

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Unraveling Current Issues in Scholarly Publishing

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We first envisioned a special issue dedicated to addressing problems in the scholarly publishing ecosystem as we assembled a dataset on Article Processing Charges (APCs) from six large scholarly publishers (Butler et al., 2023). The dataset supported institutional analysis on the cost of open access publishing at the University of Ottawa (uOttawa), estimating that uOttawa corresponding authors paid \$2.9 million CAD in 2022 (uOttawa, 2024). Further analysis approximated that upwards of \$8 billion was spent globally on publishing from 2019 to 2023 (Haustein et al., 2024). These estimations illustrate a stark reality in which monetary resources meant to support the scientific enterprise are instead funding the activities of commercial publishers. It also provoked questions: This is but one (albeit large) issue in scholarly publishing; what are the others? How do these problems intersect? How do existing systemic structures continue to enable and proliferate these issues?

Can we unravel the wicked problems of the academic publishing system, not to respool them and work with them unabated, but to imagine new solutions and possibilities? In this editorial, we acknowledge that the threads this special issue explores cannot simply be rewoven. The systemic structures – rooted in neoliberal capitalism, linguistic hegemony, commercialization of knowledge, and epistemic injustice (to name a few) – will continue to shape the fabric of scholarly communication unless they, too, are transformed. We do not set out to present a solution to this second, deeply rooted problem. Rather, we present its various strands to spark reflection and exploration.

Our objectives for the special issue were thus to invite the scholarly community to identify challenges, consider their effect, and ultimately, to promote information exchange, collaboration, and productive discussion. While resolving these issues is a long-term project, illuminating how we understand them will hopefully aid us in working to tackle them as a collective, and is the telos of this special issue. To

this end, we, along with Stephanie Savage, contribute the commentary “Towards Sustainable and Coordinated Methods for Estimating Open Access Costs at Canadian Higher Education Institutions” on the topic of APC estimates and overall OA costs for institutions (Hare et al., 2025). It calls for coordinated dialogue on the part of the Canadian scholarly communications community to advance this work. This instantiates, in a sense, what we hoped for this special issue to accomplish: bringing together diverse expertise, motivation, and perspective to solve common problems.

This special issue, as we hoped, is richly discursive, featuring several commentaries. These pieces are invaluable: they provide space for reflection, introduce fresh insight, provide concrete steps forward, or offer guidance on impactful future approaches to key topics. Lynne Bowker contributes a research note entitled “Investigating the Use of Plain Language Summaries in Canadian Science Journals”. This work investigates how authors publishing in Canadian Science Publishing journals take up the publisher’s option to produce a plain language summary (PLS) and provides recommendations to promote the use of PLSs. Christophe Dony’s piece “On (Conflating) Predatory Journals and Predatory Practices: Presenting the Tool ‘Compass to Publish’ and the (Im)possible Scalability Debate” critically engages with information literacy and pedagogical principles underlying the free online tool *Compass to Publish*, designed to help users identify predatory publishing practices. This commentary provides sharp insights into the evaluation of predatory practices and compromised research, along with educational strategies and tools that can be applied to other areas of scholarly communication. The final commentary in the issue, Lynne Bowker, Mikael Laakso, and Janne Pölönen’s “Making the case for multilingual scholarly communication,” describes the complexity of implementing multilingualism within a scholarly ecosystem with English as its lingua franca. They describe the many forms of multilingualism, as well as the small steps actors can take to cultivate and promote linguistic diversity through specific recommendations.

In addition to commentaries, this issue features several articles. Sonya Betz, Emma Uhl, and Mike Nason contribute their study “Low-Key Load-Bearing: Defining the National Role of Canada’s Library Publishing Programs”. This novel research highlights libraries as crucial players driving eq-

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uitable and sustainable publishing, operating with limited resources, and providing critical support for diamond open access models, bibliodiversity, and underserved journal types. Simon van Bellen and Lucia Cespedes' study "Diamond open access and open infrastructures have shaped the Canadian scholarly journal landscape since the start of the digital era" details the Canadian landscape as a flourishing space for diamond open access, made possible through developments in open infrastructures supported by digital technologies. Their study provides valuable insights for the design of tailored practices and policies to meet the requirements of different types of periodicals. This work is a fantastic contribution for those looking to understand the evolving Canadian scholarly journal landscape. Philips Ayeni, Lynne Bowker, and Emmanuel Kulczycki contribute a review article entitled "Machine Translation in Scholarly Communication: A Scoping Review," which investigates the use of machine translation tools in multilingual scholarly communication. Their analysis highlights the limitations of these tools in displacing English from its central position in scientific publishing, poignantly noting that technology alone cannot create or sustain a multilingual scholarly ecosystem. Finally, Roberto Cruz Romero, Stephen Dimity, and Stephan Stahlschmidt's study "Bibliodiversity of Small Academic Publishers: The Role of Open Access for Impact and Visibility" investigates how differences in standards of quality among large bibliographic databases influence incentive structures for academic publishers using bibliometric data. Identifying regional and linguistic specificities and thematic differences among small publishers as compared to larger ones, they describe how bibliodiversity can shape epistemic and scientific practices.

In examining the issues across the scholarly publishing landscape presented by these authors, we find several recurring themes: multilingualism and bibliodiversity are often at the forefront of such conversations. The role of technology and the opportunities it brings for solving such issues, such as open infrastructure, translation, and providing educational support to actors in the scholarly communications space, are also being explored to maximize their potential. Libraries

are imperative stakeholders and drivers of open access in Canada—lessons arise as to how to support them, understanding they are critical to advancing diamond open access and community-led publishing efforts. Finally, disparities in scholarly publishing—resulting from commercial publishing business models, variations in indexing practices, and concerns about metadata quality—influence how knowledge takes shape and is shared. Now that these threads, or issues—already weaved into the scientific skein—have been identified, how do we work with them productively and transform them into something new? That we leave to the readers of this special issue.

The Guest Editorial Board includes Madelaine Hare, PhD student in Digital Transformation & Innovation at the University of Ottawa, and Leigh-Ann Butler, Scholarly Communications Librarian at the University of Ottawa. We deeply appreciate the expertise and efforts of all contributors to this issue: authors, reviewers, copyeditors, the Editor of CJILS, Philippe Mongeon, and the help of Stefanie Haustein in launching the call for papers. We hope this issue advances needed dialogue around the challenges, recommendations, insights, calls to action, and paths forward identified in the published works. All members of the scholarly communications space—students, librarians, professionals, researchers, administration, faculty members—are encouraged to read on.

Madelaine Hare & Leigh-Ann Butler

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