

# Public Access Forum Closes

By Rick Weiss, Robynn Sturm, and Diane DiEuliis

All good things must come to an end, and so it is with OSTP's forum on enhancing public access to published results of federally funded research. The response to this endeavor has been truly outstanding—almost overwhelming—and we at OSTP are very happy that our approach to gathering input on this issue was so well received. Importantly, it's not only the volume of input that has been so gratifying. You sent us extremely substantive comments, complete with scholarly journal articles and references and an array of other documents that will facilitate our goal of initiating a policymaking process that is truly evidence-based.

We are still tallying the final rush of submissions—deadlines seem to be great motivators—but it looks like we are likely to have more than 500 comments by the time we close the blog tonight. Some of those that were submitted by e-mail (as opposed to via the blog) may not be visible for another day or two as we finish the posting process. Then, of course, our real work begins.

Many of you have asked what the process will be from here. The first step will be for us to sort through your comments and read the literature to which you've referred us. We will organize that material in a series of matrices and, from there, start developing policy recommendations, informed by the arguments and evidence you've shared with us over the past six weeks. As we move forward, we will keep you abreast of our work.

Meanwhile we thank all of you who have contributed so generously to this process. You have helped prove that the foundations of open government—transparency, collaboration, and participation—really do have the potential to enhance democracy.

*Diane DiEuliis is Assistant Director of Life Sciences at the Office of Science and Technology Policy  
Robynn Sturm is U.S. Assistant Deputy Chief Technology Officer at OSTP  
Rick Weiss is Director of Strategic Communications and a Senior Policy Analyst at OSTP*

This entry was posted on Friday, January 22nd, 2010 at 10:40 am and is filed under Public Access Policy. You can follow any responses to this entry through the RSS 2.0 feed.

---

## Responses to "Public Access Forum Closes"

Hope Leman said on January 22, 2010 at 3:20 pm:

Thank you, Office of Science and Technology Policy staff, for providing us out here in research land with such a wonderful opportunity to engage in a civil discussion of important public policy issues. We all learned a lot about a plethora of issues and we look forward with interest to the next stages of your important initiative.

This is very touching, "You have helped prove that the foundations of open government—transparency, collaboration, and participation—really do have the potential to enhance democracy." On our parts out here, it meant a lot to be asked for our input on matters we all care so very much about.

Thank you again.

Mary Ellen Curtin said on January 22, 2010 at 5:42 pm:

I hope that I my comment is making it in under the deadline; I apologize for the delay — I've had this tab open since just before Christmas. I am writing as a trained scientist, science writer, and blogger who is currently outside the academic system.

Because I "understand science", I am frequently called on by friends and family to interpret articles in the media, science stories on TV, and medical information from all sources. More often than not, I run up against a paywall keeping me from seeing the primary scientific or medical research. I have developed various ways of tracking down copies of crucial articles, but they take a lot of time. The net result is that I can look at very few articles per request, and have to scry the entrails of abstracts and news reports to figure out what the scientific literature actually says. This is bad enough. The real problem — of which most of your commenters are not apparently aware — is that lack of access to the core of the scientific literature does not mean that there is no information on a given topic, where by "information" I mean "Google hits". What I find is that there's a lot of \*bad\* information, delusional information, half-digested news stories and self-serving screeds, wild theories and barely-substantiated rumors. It is difficult for members of the general public to get to solid scientific evidence on any given question; this has left a void into which unsolid non-scientific material has flowed.

In sum, the low visibility of the scientific literature on the public's (Google's) radar has increased the visibility of non- and anti-scientific information on scientific and medical topics. The alternative to open public access is not passive public ignorance, but active public misinformation.

Mary Ellen Curtin  
<http://goodbookoftheday.com/>

Stevan Harnad said on January 26, 2010 at 11:45 am:

HARVARD'S RESPONSE TO PRESIDENT'S RFI  
Professor Steven Hyman, Provost of Harvard, the first US University to mandate Open Access

<http://www.eprints.org/openaccess/policysignup/fullinfo.php?inst=Harvard%20University%3A%20Faculty%20of%20Arts%20and%20Sciences>  
has submitted such a spot-on, point for point response to President Obama's Request for Information on Public Access Policy  
<http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/pamphlet/2010/01/22/373/>

that if his words are heeded, the beneficiaries will not only be US research progress and the US tax-paying public, by whom US research is funded and for whose benefit it is conducted, but research progress and its public benefits planet-wide, as US policy is globally reciprocated. Reproduced below are just a few of the highlights of Professor Hyman's response. Every one of the highlights has a special salience, and attests to the minute attention and keen insight into the subtle details of Open Access that went into the preparation of this invaluable set of recommendations.

[Hash-marks (#) indicate three extremely minor points on which the response could be ever so slightly clarified -- see end.]

"The public access policy should (1) be mandatory, not voluntary, (2) use the shortest practical embargo period, no longer than six months, (3) apply to the final version of the author's peer-reviewed manuscript, as opposed to the published version, unless the publisher consents to provide public access to the published version, (4) [# require deposit of the manuscript in a suitable open repository #] immediately upon acceptance for publication, where it would remain "dark" until the embargo period expired, and (5) avoid copyright problems by [## requiring federal grantees, when publishing articles based on federally funded research, to retain the right to give the relevant agency a non-exclusive license to distribute a public-access copy of his or her peer-reviewed manuscript ##]...

"If publishers believe they cannot afford to allow copies of their articles to be released under a public-access policy, they need not publish federally funded researchers. To date, however, it appears that no publishers have made that decision in response to the NIH policy. Hence, federally funded authors remain free to submit their work to the journals of their choice. Moreover, public access gives authors a much larger audience and much greater impact...

"If the United States extends a public-access mandate across the federal government, then lay citizens with no interest in reading this literature for themselves will benefit indirectly because researchers will benefit directly.... That is the primary problem for which public access is the solution...

"It doesn't matter whether many lay readers, or few, are able to read peer-reviewed research literature or have reason to do so. But even if there are many, the primary beneficiaries of a public-access policy will be professional researchers, who constitute the intended audience for this literature and who depend on access to it for their own work....

"Among the metrics for measuring success, I can propose these: the compliance rate (how many articles that the policy intends to open up have actually been opened up); the number of downloads from the public-access repositories; and the number of citations to the public-access articles. As we use different metrics, we must accept that [### we will never have an adequate control group: a set of articles on similar topics, of similar quality, for which there is no public access###]...

Three suggestions for clarifying the minor points indicated by the hash-marks (#):

[#"require deposit of the manuscript in a suitable open repository" #]

(add: "preferably the fundee's own institutional repository")

[##"requiring federal grantees, when publishing articles based on federally funded research, to retain the right to give the relevant agency a non-exclusive license to distribute a public-access copy of his or her peer-reviewed manuscript" ##]

(add: "the rights retention and license are desirable and welcome, but not necessary if the publisher already endorses making the deposit publicly accessible immediately, or after the allowable embargo period")

[### "we will never have an adequate control group [for measuring the mandate's success]: a set of articles on similar topics, of similar quality, for which there is no public access" ###]

(add: "but closed-access articles published in the same journal and year as mandatorily open-access articles do provide an approximate matched control baseline for comparison")

Stevan Harnad

<http://openaccess.eprints.org>

Stevan Harnad said on January 30, 2010 at 11:03 pm:

In the Bonus Round, Colin G. Scanes Editor-in-Chief Poultry Science (Poultry Science Association) wrote:

– "[T]here is self-interest from journals... whether... profit... or non-profit... in not supporting free open access. Equally there is strong self-interest in university libraries... supporting open access because they are likely to reduce their costs of purchasing journals."

Reply: There are also the interests of research, researchers, their institutions, their funders, and the tax-paying public that supports the research and for whose benefit it is conducted and published. That interest is in making the research accessible, immediately upon acceptance for publication, to all would-be users, not just those whose institutions can afford subscription access.

Hitchcock, S. (2010) The effect of open access and downloads ('hits') on citation impact: a bibliography of studies

<http://opcit.eprints.org/oacitation-biblio.html>

– "1. Who is to pay the very real costs of producing journals with this move to open access? Should it be the researcher, and, if so, where is the additional funding to come from? Is it realistic to consider that journals should absorb the costs?"

Reply: Open Access means free online access to published journal articles, not necessarily Open Access publishing. Authors can provide Open Access to their conventionally published articles by self-archiving their final refereed drafts free for all online.

– "2. At what point do libraries cease to purchase subscriptions for journals if their contents are available by open access?"

Reply: No one knows whether and when libraries will cancel journals. Till they do, institutional subscriptions pay the cost of peer review and authors make their final drafts free for all online. If and when journal cancellations make subscriptions unsustainable because users prefer to use the free online drafts, journals will cut costs and downsize to providing peer review alone, paid for, per article, by authors' institutions, out of their windfall subscription cancellation savings.

Harnad, S. (2007) The Green Road to Open Access: A Leveraged Transition. In: The Culture of Periodicals from the Perspective of the Electronic Age, pp. 99-105, L'Harmattan.

<http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/15753/>

– "3. If library subscriptions to journals are an essential part of the business plan of a journal or a professional society, how many journals will disappear if we go to a completely open access approach?"

Reply: No journals will disappear as a result of Open Access. Open Access is provided by author self-archiving (now being increasingly mandated by their institutions and funders) and if and when subscriptions fail, journals will downsize to peer-review service provision alone, paid for on the open access publishing service-fee model.

– “4. As a journal editor with, at present, a positive cash flow, we can and do waive page charges from papers from institutions in developing countries that cannot afford to pay these. We will not be able to continue this if there is a major reduction in revenue. Forcing journals to adopt an author-pays model would have a stifling effect on the publication of work from authors in developing countries.”

Reply: No need to change anything (except to make sure the journal endorses rather than obstructs author self-archiving). Universal self-archiving and self-archiving mandates will provide universal Open Access, and the rest depends on how long subscriptions remain sustainable, and on whether and when the downsizing and transition to the Open Access cost-recovery model occurs.

– “5. What is a reasonable embargo period between publication and the paper being available by free open access?”

Reply: What is optimal for research — and for researchers, their institutions, their funders, and the tax-paying public that supports the research and for whose benefit it is conducted and published — is no embargo at all. What is helpful from publishers is if they endorse Open Access self-archiving by authors. The rest will all come as a natural matter of course either way (i.e., with or without publisher endorsement), as a result of Open Access mandates by institutions and funders. The Green publishers will simply have the historic satisfaction of having been on the side of the angels all along. <http://bit.ly/9za1O1>

Poultry Science’s self-archiving policy is not in Romeo and does not appear to be among the 63% of journals that endorse immediate Open Access self-archiving by its authors. It would be helpful if this were remedied:

“Poultry Science Copyright Release: Copyright laws make it necessary for the Association to obtain a release from authors for all materials published. To this end we ask you to grant us all rights, including subsidiary rights, for your article. You will hereby be relinquishing to the Poultry Science Association all control over this material such as rights to make or authorize reprints, to reproduce the material in other Association publications, and to grant the material to others without charge in any book of which you are the author or editor after it has appeared in the journal.” <http://ps.fass.org/misc/pscopyright.pdf>

Stevan Harnad

American Scientist Open Access Forum