

SPARC and Chemists to Collaborate on New Reduced-Cost Journals

The American Chemical Society (ACS), the world's largest scientific society, is the first Scholarly Publishing & Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) publishing partner in an innovative collaboration aimed at distributing research results faster and at significantly less cost to library subscribers. ACS—a non-profit scientific society that currently publishes 26 peer-reviewed research journals—will collaborate with SPARC to publish at least one new scientific journal each year for the next three years. SPARC is a newly formed alliance launched with support from ARL member libraries.

On June 30, ARL signed a memorandum of understanding with ACS to set out the terms by which SPARC and ACS will proceed. The agreement frames an ongoing working relationship. At a press conference announcing the partnership, Duane E. Webster, ARL Executive Director, declared it “a major step forward in resolving the debate between libraries and publishers over academic journal costs and access, especially as the benefits and challenges of electronic publishing become more evident.” He noted that the Coalition's aim is to substantially reduce the cost of scholarly publication while shortening the time required to deliver information, especially in the form of journals.

“Today we replace debate with dialogue and action, moving forward together to make cutting-edge scientific research available to the academic community in the most efficient and cost-effective way possible,” said Robert D. Bovenschulte, ACS Director of Publications. “We're especially pleased to be the first scientific publisher to enter into a partnership with SPARC, a creative, forceful, and welcome initiative by ARL. We're also confident that this collaboration will result in publishers being able to offer higher quality products than are currently available.”

The first new journal will publish letters in organic chemistry both online and in print. Under the agreement, SPARC members advise ACS by identifying the subject area of interest, and in return the participating libraries will help provide instant market acceptance by endorsing the project and ensuring purchase of the new publication.

Richard K. Johnson serves as Enterprise Director for SPARC, which is seeking additional publishing partners. “One of the key advantages SPARC offers to a publishing partner,” said Johnson, “is the commitment of Coalition members to subscribe to SPARC products. This



Pictured at the June 30, 1998 signing of the publishing agreement are (clockwise from left): Duane Webster, ARL Executive Director; Richard Johnson, SPARC Enterprise Director; Kenneth Frazier, Director of the University of Wisconsin Libraries and Chair of the SPARC Working Group; and Robert Bovenschulte, Director of the ACS Publications Division.

reduces the time to market acceptance and cost-recovery of a new title.”

Currently comprised of 98 member libraries with a purchasing power of nearly \$500 million, SPARC was created as a result of the growing concerns among librarians and researchers over the rising cost of academic publications, particularly scientific journals. Library materials budgets, which have increased over the past decade at almost seven percent a year, have not been able to keep pace with the 12-percent annual increase in the average price of science journals. Both the high prices and steep annual increases charged by some major scientific publishers have forced libraries to cancel thousands of journal subscriptions, prompting publishers to raise prices even higher to make up for the loss.

The advent of electronic publishing has also been a concern for both publishers and librarians, despite its distinct advantages over print in terms of delivery time, additional features, and flexibility. Higher subscription costs, licensing agreements for access, and the uncertainty of archiving all have been sources of increasing tension between academic publishers and their customers.

The new organic letters title will include the enhanced features that ACS developed for all of its 26 journals that it began offering on the World Wide Web last year. The most important of these is “Articles ASAP” (As Soon As Publishable), which releases journal articles on the Web as soon as they are finished, accelerating publications by two to 11 weeks over print.

ACS announced additional services this year that will help improve the cost efficiency to the subscriber or non-subscriber, such as free access to tables of contents since January 1996; supporting information on experimental details, also at no charge; and the option to purchase single articles without subscribing. ACS also altered its licensing arrangements with academic libraries, eliminating restrictions on use of the web editions of ACS journals in interlibrary loan programs.

“We are very pleased to have the prestige and power of ACS in this first partnership,” said Kenneth Frazier, Director of the University of Wisconsin Libraries and Chair of the SPARC Working Group. He continued, “ACS publications are generally higher quality and more heavily cited by researchers, and they are considered among the more reasonably priced scientific journals. We hope that other scientific publishers – both non-profit and for-profit – will recognize the significance of this collaboration and join us in this effort to fundamentally change academic publishing.”

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