



A BIMONTHLY REPORT ON RESEARCH LIBRARY ISSUES AND ACTIONS FROM ARL, CNI, AND SPARC

THE RESEARCH UNIVERSITY AND SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING: THE VIEW FROM A PROVOST'S OFFICE

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Editor's note: Dr. Maher delivered the following remarks on October 20, 2006, at a forum in Washington, DC, cosponsored by ARL, the Association of American Universities (AAU), CNI, the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC), and SPARC.

I'm delighted to talk to you about the concerns that a provost sees when looking at the current state of scholarly publishing because this is one area in which the future of the research university is truly threatened. Let me preface my closer analysis of the university and the difficulties of scholarly publishing in today's world by giving you an overview of the university, as I see it, and then coming back to the issue of scholarly publishing with the university as the context within which my remarks are located.

The Nature of the Research University

The research university is really the public's preferred model for higher education. Not all students go to research universities, but most of the knowledgeable families who are selecting schools for their children look at higher education and expect to see their child at either a research university or an institution that has a lot of the earmarks of a research university. So, for instance, what you've seen in the last 10 or 15 years, when competition and financial pressures have pressed higher education so severely, is a strong tendency for universities that had not claimed, in the past, to be research universities to now call themselves research universities. You also see colleges renaming themselves as universities, and even the most elite of the liberal arts colleges, which do not, in any sense, claim to be research universities, are, nevertheless, now hiring faculty who are at least research-active enough to supervise senior theses.

Schools do this mainly because the families who are willing to send children to elite schools would not do so if at least that aspect of a research university was not available at the school.

On the other hand, the cost structure of a research university is daunting. Many of the schools that are talking about themselves as research universities are not really facing the costs involved, while the research universities that are, in fact, committed to the mission of a research university face very severe costs. You do hear criticisms of higher education because of the high costs: the high tuition charged to the students and the general financial strain on anyone connected with these universities. When you look at the cost structure, it's easy to see why that problem exists.

First off, you have to realize that the consumer price index is not a reasonable measure of the inflation that research universities encounter. The market basket for a typical research university is not the market basket that is listed in the consumer price index, by any means. Instead, the higher education price index that reflects the market basket universities need to deal with is three-fourths salaries, and those salaries are heavily located in the higher-paid professions for which families expect universities to prepare their children. The inflation in those salaries nationwide has been far above the consumer price index for several decades now, and universities are struggling along, trying to recruit and retain the right faculty and staff in order to provide the education that families want.

There are extra difficulties for a research university. If you are recruiting faculty who can do both research and teaching, the salary structure is much more expensive than if you are recruiting people who will only teach. In fact, it's a difference of about a factor of two. In addition, if we expect the faculty to do research

and also insist on high-quality teaching from these faculty, we cannot insist on the same *quantity* of teaching as would be the case if they were not simultaneously expected to do research. In fact, the teaching that is done by an individual faculty member who is research-active at a major research university is about half the amount done by a full-time teaching faculty member at a typical small college. So there's another factor of two in the cost.

We now have a factor of four in the cost for the faculty member at the research university, and that strain on the budget is very, very serious, leaving the administration of the university trying to be responsive both to the need to make the university as good a research university as it can be and the need to keep the cost down so that the student tuition does not get out of control. That strain on the administration of the university is a very serious one.

Scholarly Publishing & the Research University

With all of that as background now, let's look at scholarly publishing. There are several aspects of scholarly publishing that are crucial to the functioning of a research university. The first aspect is that the research mission of the university requires that all of the scholars at the research university have access to research from around the world. Ideally, every scholar would have full access to every scholarly result from anywhere in the world. All of you here know how difficult that is to fit into the budget of a library that serves a research university.

In addition, we are addressing the needs of all of the people at the university—and instead of calling them faculty or students, let's call them learners. When the youngest freshman is busy learning the work the freshman does, we call that homework. When the more advanced research faculty members are learning, we call it research. But it's really that this is a learning community, and everybody in the community needs to be learning as much of the time as possible, and these learners need help in evaluating the quality of the scholarship within those publications they are encountering. That used to be relatively easy with the paper publications of refereed journals. But now we've got very strange things floating around the World Wide Web and various electronic versions of journals and quite a range of quality in journals: the need for the scholarly community to know the reliability of a given publication is quite an important issue.

Similarly, when the university goes to hire a faculty member or promote a faculty member or give a faculty member tenure, it's clearly a responsibility of the university—given the cost of hiring a faculty member and

keeping that person for several decades—to do all that it can to make sure that it is hiring a person who is really a very, very good scholar and someone who will do a very, very good job in both research *and* in the instruction of the students of the university through a long and hopefully successful future. Those evaluations of the quality of the work of the individual faculty member are not easily separable from the evaluations of the quality of the scholarship in journals, since it is the scholarship that that particular faculty member puts into journals that will give the best understanding we have of how that particular faculty member is contributing. So it's the quality that's being evaluated when one looks at those publications, not just the quantity—and maybe not even the quantity. Really,

it's the quality and the magnitude of the impact of this person's work on the field, and that has always been taken care of by the scholarly publishing system.

In short, asking in what way a system of scholarly publishing might change raises a number of issues that are crucial to the success of a research university in meeting its mission within a reasonable cost and while dealing fairly with both the public and the faculty and staff.

How Strains in Scholarly Publishing Affect the University

Now let's take a look at the major elements of the university that are involved in the strains on scholarly publishing at the moment. In fact, I think that you will find that essentially every viewpoint on the difficulties of scholarly publishing is present within the university, even though there are some elements of some of those viewpoints that are not part of the universities themselves.

Within a university, first, you've got the library, which has to acquire material to provide access. The librarian's viewpoint on these things all of you know rather well.

Secondly, you have the university press, and the university press has a responsibility to publish scholarly work to provide access. Universities who have presses usually have them through an understanding of responsibility, since their faculty are creating much of the scholarship, to provide outlets to communicate scholarly work to other scholars around the world. University press books are usually rather heavily subsidized. That subsidy has to be increased as libraries stop buying university press products. So the more the library budgets are constrained and the libraries respond to that by reducing their purchases of university press books, the

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more pressure the provost then feels to increase the subsidy of the university press. It really is clear at the provost level that these strains are significant and complex.

Thirdly, you have the faculty. They write in order to provide access to their scholarship, the results of their work. And they read to learn what others have done so that they can, in their future scholarship, build on what others have done without having to reinvent the wheel. The faculty interest is obvious: they would like to have access to absolutely everything and they would like to be able to publish reasonably easily.

And then you get to the scholarly societies that you might think of as separate from the university, but which are, in fact, institutions grounded in a discipline or a profession that are of such importance to the faculty that the university cannot ignore their legitimate needs. In fact, to take it a step further, the faculty of the university will, within the university, represent the interests of their scholarly societies very aggressively; no university decision can be taken without regarding what issues might arise that come out of the legitimate interests of the scholarly societies.

So, where does that leave the provost? We've got all of these conflicting—or at least potentially conflicting—elements in the currently very strained world of scholarly publishing, all within the house. And the provost, in setting the budgets and setting the policies that create the environment in which all of these groups must work out their difficulties, is a person who must exhibit real balance in order to keep all of the legitimate interests of all of these groups in mind.

Where Are the Faculty?

I do see a very real possibility to enlist the faculty in helping with creating the right balance, since the faculty, number one, have influence on all the major players. The library cares about the faculty's opinion. The university press cares about the faculty's opinion. The scholarly societies care about the faculty's opinion. The faculty—if they can get themselves well informed about these issues and then go out and advocate some reasonable resolution of the difficulties faced by scholarly publishing—could have a major impact.

The faculty are also the ones whose success brings success to the research mission of the research university, and their general state of happiness with the scholarly climate will also be important for the environment in which our students are taught. We cannot succeed—and the faculty cannot succeed—unless real balance is achieved

in dealing with all of the legitimate problems faced by scholarly publishing. At the moment, I don't think we understand, and certainly our faculty don't understand, either the scope or the depth of our problem. In particular, I worry about the intimidation of faculty that has gone on by some of the journals. I know that attempts to get the faculty engaged and to use the faculty's inherent strength to deal with problems of scholarly publishing—in particular, access constraints due to the common practice of transferring copyrights to publishers—have really been thwarted by the faculty's fear that the journals would not publish their work and that, particularly, they wouldn't be able to get their work into the right journals. But many faculty have tried, albeit fitfully, to have an influence, and their positive results are most evident in the improved

cooperation exhibited in recent years by many of the scholarly societies.

Intimidation of the faculty is a real thing and must be dealt with by anyone who sincerely wants to work on this problem and who wants to try to work with the faculty to solve these problems. I have found that a number of public statements that claim "the faculty want this" or "the faculty want that" are often statements that do not take proper cognizance of the pressure that is put on the faculty to go along with things that the faculty, in fact, don't approve of at all.

Conclusion

I hope you've found this to be a helpful overview of what the provost sees at a given research university when looking out at all the issues that have arisen around scholarly publishing. I think that we could accomplish an awful lot of good if we could come to a consensus, with faculty help, on how to deal with all these problems at the same time. It's absolutely crucial that we refrain from a lot of finger pointing and accusations and instead try to get all of the different elements in the scholarly publishing spectrum working together trying to find a good solution. A meeting like this meeting is wonderful, in that sense: we've had all the viewpoints present in the room, and that gives us an opportunity to try to work through some of the difficulties in a respectful and positive environment.

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Dr. Maher's paper was presented at the forum "Improving Access to Publicly Funded Research" held October 20, 2006, in Washington, DC. Other papers and slides presented that day are available at <http://www.arl.org/forum06/>.

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