



Issue Brief:

AAP PR Campaign against Open Access and Public Access to Federally Funded Research: Update re the PRISM Coalition

September 4, 2007

Summary

A new initiative has been announced in an ongoing public relations campaign sponsored by the Association of American Publishers (AAP) against initiatives concerning access to federally funded research (public access) and open access generally. PRISM (Partnership for Research Integrity in Science & Medicine), a new coalition, is attracting substantial criticism from a broad spectrum of researchers. The PRISM message corresponds directly to plans described in internal publisher documents leaked to reporters to “develop simple messages (e.g., public access equals government censorship)” that are aimed at key decision makers.

As news of this initiative evolves, it presents an opportunity to engage in conversations with members of your campus community concerning the changes to the scholarly communication system and how this may affect scholarly journal publishing. This memo provides talking points to assist you and your staff in working with members of your campus community with regards to the recently disclosed publishers public relations campaign against open/public access initiatives and legislation concerning access to federally funded research.

Background

The PRISM Web site states that PRISM was “launched with developmental support from the Professional & Scholarly Publishing Division of the Association of American Publishers (AAP) to alert Congress to the unintended consequences of government interference in scientific and scholarly publishing.”

Those consequences are characterized in many forms and frequently distort the nature of ongoing and substantive discussions about open access and public access to federally funded research. In describing the consequences, the initiative repeatedly conflates policies regarding access to federally funded research with hypothesized dire consequences ultimately resulting in the loss of any effective system of scholarly publishing. Many commentators agree that inaccuracies abound in the initiative’s rhetoric.

News of publisher plans to conflate public access to federally funded research with government censorship and the destruction of peer review first broke in *Nature* on January 25, 2007 (<http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v445/n7126/pdf/445347a.pdf>). The AAP, on behalf of its Professional and Scholarly Publishing Division, (publishers cited in the leaked documents included Elsevier, Wiley, and the American Chemical Society) hired public relations executive, Eric Dezenhall. His Web site proclaims he is “skilled at helping companies play defense in the face congressional investigations, hostile legislation and other forms of government intervention.”

PRISM implements the recommended campaign strategy to focus on messages such as “government [is] seeking to nationalize science and be a publisher.” This effort is clearly aimed at preserving established publishing conventions and the revenues of established publishers.

The launch of PRISM offers opportunities to engage in conversation with faculty, researchers and staff about the changing nature of scholarly communication practices and the contributions various communities make to the communication process.

Below are some of the “simple messages” proposed for the publishers’ campaign against open access/public access to federally funded research and some responses to use when engaging members of your campus community. Where appropriate, quotes from PRISM statements are included as well with the caveat that PRISM is honing its messages on an ongoing basis. Even within a few days of its launch, the site’s messages have been regularly reconfigured.

Public access to federally funded research and/or open access equates to the destruction of the peer review system.

This continues to be the assertion offered most consistently, that only traditional journal publishing practices and business models can provide peer review. The peer review system is rightly seen as the central contribution journals have made to science, however neither public access policies to federally funded research or open access journals alter the traditional practice of peer review.

- Peer review is already built into open access journals and to policies concerning access to federally funded research thus showing the fallacy of the predicted demise of peer review.
- The peer review system, based almost completely on the voluntary *free labor of the research community*, is independent of a particular mode of publishing, or business model.
- Publishers’ own studies have found that open access journals are peer reviewed as frequently as comparable subscription journals.
- The existing National Institutes of Health (NIH) policy and legislation concerning access to federally funded research called for submissions from only peer-reviewed journals and “includes all modifications from the publishing peer review process.”
- Finally, journal publishers do not create the content they publish, nor do they generally pay authors for that content or compensate reviewers for the time they spend ensuring the quality of published research through their contributions to the peer review process. The academy supports and provides the peer review.
- Public access to federally funded research policies proposed to date have all incorporated embargo periods to protect publishers from any rapid shifts in subscription revenues.

Public access equals government censorship.

“Policies are being proposed that threaten to introduce undue government intervention in science and scholarly publishing, putting at risk the integrity of scientific research by: ...opening the door to scientific censorship in the form of selective additions to or omissions from the scientific record...”

Current NIH policy (<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-05-022.html>) calls for authors to deposit their versions of articles in PubMed Central. These articles will be freely accessible unless temporarily embargoed for up to one year by their authors. This policy in no way affects the published versions of articles that are held in libraries.

To maintain archive integrity for its author-submitted works, PubMed Central is mirrored internationally and is managed by the National Library of Medicine. PubMed Central includes information resources well beyond those placed on deposit resulting from this new policy. Many of those additional resources have been deposited voluntarily by publishers who believe PubMed Central availability enhances the functioning of the scientific record. Two key drivers of the NIH policy are to make these federally funded research results widely available and to hold government accountable.

The government is trying to steal publishers' intellectual property.

“Recently, there have been legislative and regulatory efforts to compel not-for-profit and commercial journals to surrender to the federal government a large number of published articles that scholarly journals have paid to peer review, publish, promote, archive and distribute.”

NIH's public access policy calls for authors to deposit the final electronic manuscript after peer review and acceptance for publication. Authors deposit works and may set an embargo period that can serve to protect publisher revenues. However, no proposal has been made either to force publishers to deposit their own published versions of articles or to deposit works that they have published in the past. No existing or proposed policy has extended beyond authors' works that are directly funded in some way with government dollars.

What is not acknowledged here is that research articles are produced with significant contributions from many different sources. Researchers themselves write and peer review the articles without receiving any payment from publishers. The federal government provides substantial public funding for scientific research. Existing and proposed policies concerning public access to federally funded research attempt to create balance between the contributions made and benefits received by publishers and allow them to continue to profit tremendously from the pool of content this funded research generates.

The NIH public access policy promotes governmental accountability to taxpayers, enhances and accelerates the research process, and provides the broadest possible access to research without substantially harming publishers. Rejection of these policies inhibits research progress reducing the benefits of publishing research.

Next steps

Important questions face researchers, their funding bodies, research institutions, libraries, and publishers. Where these questions are discussed honestly on the basis of their own merits, there is the best opportunity to develop systems and strategies that fully leverage society's investments in advancing knowledge and researchers' efforts to create and apply new knowledge. Focusing on real risks and needed changes rather than defending established interests in the wake of change opens the path to meaningful dialog.

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