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Executive Office of the President  
Office of Science and Technology Policy  
725 17th Street, Room 5228  
Washington, DC 20502  
Via e-mail: [publicaccess@ostp.gov](mailto:publicaccess@ostp.gov)  
Attn: Public Access Policy Forum

## **AAUP RESPONSE TO THE OSTP'S REQUEST FOR PUBLIC COMMENT**

### **I. Background to the AAUP Comments**

The Association of American University Presses (AAUP) has 133 largely U.S.-based members, with representation in 42 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. All are non-profit scholarly publishers who collectively publish more than 10,000 scholarly books and 800 journals each year. Most member presses are affiliated with research universities, but some are entities of scholarly societies and research institutes. AAUP members publish on subjects and in fields covering the entire spectrum of scholarly research, not just science and technology; some of those journals contain articles based upon federally funded research. These publishers utilize a variety of business models including subscription sales and subsidized open access.

The AAUP supports the Administration's goal of increasing public access to the results of research funded by federal science and technology agencies, and we appreciate having been given this opportunity to comment. We would like to make two general comments before responding to the specific questions posed in the Federal Register Notice.

First, we endorse the shared principles and many of the recommendations in the January 2010 report of the Scholarly Publishing Roundtable appointed by the House Committee on Science and Technology. That report's principal recommendation, that "Each federal research funding agency should expeditiously but carefully develop and implement an explicit public access policy that brings about free public access to the results of the research that it funds as soon as possible after those results have been published in a peer-reviewed journal," is followed by eight further recommendations and five principles to be observed. These further recommendations are designed to ensure

that the goal of free public access is met in a way that respects the interests of all stakeholders in the system of scholarly communication, and that maximizes the public good to be derived from meeting that goal.

The Roundtable report does an admirable job of explaining the importance of each of the further recommendations and so we list them here.

1. Agencies should work in full and open cooperation with all stakeholders, as well as with OSTP, to develop their public access policies.
2. Agencies should establish specific embargo periods between publication and public access.
3. Policies should be guided by the need to foster interoperability.
4. Every effort should be made to have the version of record (VoR) as the version to which free access is provided.
5. Government agencies should extend the reach of their public access policies through voluntary collaborations with nongovernmental stakeholders.
6. Policies should foster innovation in the research and educational use of scholarly publications.
7. Government public access policies should address the need to resolve the challenges of long-term digital preservation.
8. OSTP should establish a public access advisory committee.

We believe these further recommendations are part and parcel of the principal recommendation and must be considered along with it.

Second, we note that the Roundtable's principal recommendation is broader than the one posted in the OSTP Federal Register Notice. The Roundtable's recommendation applies to all federal funding agencies; the Federal Register Notice speaks only of research funded by federal science and technology agencies. As a practical matter, however, some science and technology agencies, like the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Energy, and the Department of Health and Human Services, also fund research in the social sciences and humanities that would be covered by either an all-agency or a STM-specific public access policy. We are also aware that other federal agencies of the Executive Branch have started to develop public access policies of their own, often with no stakeholder consultation or involvement. Finally, although the explicit focus in discussions of public access to publications arising from federally funded research has focused on journal literature, we note that books and other texts may also sometimes result from federally funded research.

Given these circumstances, it would seem prudent and wise for all federal funding agencies to develop policies in accordance with a coherent set of guidelines. We believe the principles and recommendations of the Roundtable report provide such guidelines. The Roundtable report notes the variations in both funding patterns and scholarly practice within different fields in the sciences. Those variations are even more extreme in the social sciences and humanities, which tend in general to be much more poorly funded than the sciences, may require substantially greater non-federal investment to publish, and may require much longer embargo periods, or alternative routes to free public access, if they are to recover their publishing costs from sales and subscriptions.

Therefore we think it vital that the Roundtable's further recommendations, with their emphasis on consultation, cooperation, interoperability, authority, preservation, and long-term sustainability be followed. AAUP members—university presses, scholarly associations, and research institutes—publish a significant number of the scholarly journals in the humanities and social sciences. Because of their stewardship responsibilities these publishers are particularly attuned to the costs to be managed in the exploration of options for expanding free public access. We believe that the AAUP community, many of whom have been experimenting with open access models, can be a valuable resource in future discussions of public access to journal articles based upon federally funded scholarly research.

## II. Comments in Response to OSTP Questions:

### **1. How do authors, primary and secondary publishers, libraries, universities, and the federal government contribute to the development and dissemination of peer-reviewed papers arising from federal funds now, and how might this change under a public access policy?**

Participants now contribute to the development and dissemination of peer-reviewed papers arising from scientific research as follows:

- a. The US government funds some research costs (researcher time, lab costs).
- b. Universities subsidize these and privately funded research efforts in kind through maintenance of infrastructure to support and oversee the researchers.
- c. Researchers write, review, and edit papers prior to publication either on their own time, on grant-funded time, or on university time.
- d. Publishers (commercial and not-for-profit) support journal editors and editorial boards to manage the editorial and peer-review processes through which the best of the papers are accepted for publication. Each journal has a specific subject area of focus, editorial approach, and reputation to uphold. The brand name of a journal, along with the names of the editors and the publisher, serve as markers or filters for consumers and researchers. These confirm that the research and scholarship are well-executed and worthy.
- e. Publishers also design, edit, and produce online and print editions of the papers in journal form. They most often recoup costs through sales of journal subscriptions worldwide. Some publishers recoup their costs through a combination of advertising sales, institutional subsidies, and author fee structures.
- e. Universities, some corporate and public libraries, and some individuals purchase subscriptions to the published journals and provide access to their affiliated researchers, faculty, students, and other patrons.

Under a free public access policy, the ability of publishers to recoup the costs of peer review, editing, design and composition of content, and publicizing the content to the audience for the work, could essentially disappear. It would be vital to find other

means of covering the costs incurred in validating the quality of the author's work and making it accessible. Some journal publishers have been experimenting with new models of funding (author fees, university fees, foundation funding, etc) but there has not yet emerged a model that is proven to be truly self-sustaining.

**2. What characteristics of a public access policy would best accommodate the needs and interests of authors, primary and secondary publishers, libraries, universities, the federal government, users of scientific literature, and the public?**

All participants would be well served by a framework of law, regulation, and collaboration that will encourage the greatest number of the high quality articles to be distributed to the widest audience at the lowest cost. The path for progressing to wider access to the science scholarship based on federally funded research will likely, and should, be evolutionary. We support the recommendations of the Scholarly Publishing Roundtable report of January 2010 for proposing to embrace the views of all stakeholders as we move toward improving access while upholding the quality, certification, and distribution aspects of the current scholarly publishing enterprise. Current copyright laws encourage creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship that stimulate investments in dissemination and we believe these should be kept in place.

**3. Who are the users of peer-reviewed publications arising from federal research? How do they access and use these papers now, and how might they if these papers were more accessible? Would others use these papers if they were more accessible, and for what purpose?**

The users of peer-reviewed papers are primarily scholars and scientists affiliated with colleges and universities. Most of them now have online access to these journals through their libraries' subscriptions. Unaffiliated scholars and other readers can access peer-reviewed papers through libraries or through the journal publishers by subscribing or purchasing individual papers. Most journal subscriptions are available for sale at lower prices for individuals, or for per-article fees.

The majority of researchers have the access that they require to further their own investigations and mentor their students. However, some independent users may not currently have access to research they may find useful, either because of cost-barriers that would be removed by free public-access policies, or because the scholarly articles are not written to be accessible to lay audiences.

It is impossible to predict the specific benefits that would accrue from expanded free public access to this literature. Many people believe there could be some benefits such as: better access to medical information, more innovation, improved public education, a better-informed electorate, etc. Each agency should research this question separately as the benefits and costs of free public access are likely to differ depending on the discipline, leading to different solutions to varying unmet needs.

**4. How best could federal agencies enhance public access to the peer-reviewed papers that arise from their research funds? What measures could agencies use to gauge whether there is increased return on federal investment gained by expanded access?**

The first question of how best the agencies might enhance public access to the peer-reviewed papers arising from their funding is likely to be answered differently in different fields. We recommend that federal agencies work with publishers, libraries, and scholars to research this question.

The second question here, of how agencies might gauge the value of their public access policies, is an important one. As a first step, we think it would be useful to learn from the PubMed Central experience. The NIH public access policy has been in place for nearly two years. Might the PubMed Central usage statistics be published? What has been the NIH federal investment in free public access, and what has been the return on this investment? The measurement tools in use at NIH may be helpful in framing the discussion within the other agencies.

**5. What features does a public access policy need to have to ensure compliance?**

All participants in the scholarly communications process are most likely to comply once there are clear rules. To help ensure compliance, any policy enacted should allow submission of the files in a format in which publishers already are creating and storing their content. Compliance will be easiest and most complete if file submission is an extension of a pre-existing process.

**6. What version of the paper should be made public under a public access policy (e.g., the author's peer-reviewed manuscript or the final published version)? What are the relative advantages and disadvantages to different versions of a scientific paper?**

The version of record—that is, the author's final published article—is considered by the overwhelming majority of users the most high-value version. However, there is certainly value in making data sets and technical and grant reports resulting from agency-funded research freely available. A public access policy in which federal funding agencies and publishers collaborated, with the agency providing free access to reports and data sets and publishers providing links to paid or, after an appropriate length of time, free access to the finished article makes a great deal of sense and would have wide support. Such a policy is already in effect, with the active and enthusiastic participation of many publishers, at the National Science Foundation.

**7. At what point in time should peer-reviewed papers be made public via a public access policy relative to the date a publisher releases the final version? Are there empirical data to support an optimal length of time? Should the delay period be the same or vary for levels of access (e.g., final peer-reviewed manuscript or final**

**published article, access under fair use versus alternative license), for federal agencies and scientific disciplines?**

There is no simple, one-size-fits-all solution to the embargo question; it varies, and varies widely, by discipline and specialty. In a few fast-moving fields in the sciences, research is outdated within six months; in some scientific fields, as in the humanities and social sciences, the citation half-life—that is, the length of time after publication in which half of an article’s citations appear in other publications—can extend for years.

**8. How should peer-reviewed papers arising from federal investment be made publicly available? In what format should the data be submitted in order to make it easy to search, find, and retrieve and to make it easy for others to link to it? Are there existing digital standards for archiving and interoperability to maximize public benefit? How are these anticipated to change?**

Peer-reviewed articles arising from federal investment have been made publicly available by publishers, traditionally in paper and increasingly in electronic form. Publishers have invested and continue to invest in discovery, retrieval, and linking tools, and in electronic archiving, both on their own and with other enterprises.

It would be fruitful to investigate questions about file formats and discoverability with researchers, publishers of various sizes, and librarians. As is made clear in the Roundtable report, U.S. agencies should also pay mind to the great deal of work already being done within the broader international scholarly communications community to develop consistent standards. Finally, in developing standards for data and file submission, agencies should consider, along with archiving and interoperability requirements, that requirements should be simple and affordable to enable and encourage compliance. Individual researchers, or small non-profit publishers, are responsible for many of the journals in niche fields.

**9. Access demands not only availability, but also meaningful usability. How can the federal government make its collections of peer-reviewed papers more useful to the American public? By what metrics (e.g., number of articles or visitors) should the Federal government measure success of its public access collections? What are the best examples of usability in the private sector (both domestic and international)? And, what makes them exceptional? Should those who access papers be given the opportunity to comment or provide feedback?**

Measuring the degree to which public access is making a difference is an important question. An evaluation plan should be completed prior to starting the kind of massive project a public access database would entail. Detailing the mission, goals, and objectives of the database would serve as the foundation for any kind of metrics to determine whether or not free public access was meeting expectations. Output measures (e.g., number of visitors or number of downloads) will reveal only part of the picture. Outcomes, while considerably more difficult to measure, would reveal how the content is

being used and whether or not it has made a difference in people's lives, whether it be that the discipline has advanced more rapidly than it would have without public access or that an individual, armed with new knowledge, was better able to contribute to the public good.

Providing a forum for feedback and comments may be expected by users of this prospective massive database (or interoperable databases). Monitoring and moderating such feedback and comments could, however, add to the costs of managing the database(s). We believe that the need for and purpose of this type of feature should be assessed by each agency, and the relevant community of researchers, publishers, and librarians, in order to ensure that any such tool is designed to meet the demonstrated need.

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