The University's Role in the Dissemination of Research and Scholarship — A Call to Action

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Association of American Universities

Association of Research Libraries

The Coalition for Networked Information

National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges

Acknowledgements

A Vision Statement

for the University's Role in Dissemination

The creation of new knowledge lies at the heart of the research university and results from tremendous investments of resources by universities, federal and state governments, industry, foundations, and others. The products of that enterprise are created to benefit society. In the process, those products also advance further research and scholarship, along with the teaching and service missions of the university. Reflecting its investments, the academy has a responsibility to ensure the broadest possible access to the fruits of its work both in the short and long term by publics both local and global.

Faculty research and scholarship represent invaluable intellectual capital, but the value of that capital lies in its effective dissemination to present and future audiences. Dissemination strategies that restrict access are fundamentally at odds with the dissemination imperative inherent in the university mission.

Background

On August 4, 2008, four leading associations serving research universities, the Association of Research Libraries, the Association of American Universities, the Coalition for Networked Information, and the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, convened a roundtable discussion engaging provosts, chief research officers, chief information officers, senior faculty, and library and university press directors to identify actions that should be taken to expand the dissemination of the full range of products of the university community's research and scholarship. Informed by that discussion, this paper is intended to provide guidance to each organization and its members.

Introduction

The production of new knowledge through the practices of research and scholarship lies at the heart of the university's mission. Yet, without effective and ongoing dissemination of knowledge, the efforts of researchers and scholars are wasted. Dissemination is thus a core responsibility of the university.

Traditionally, universities have relied largely on formal publication systems to ensure dissemination and their critical function in vetting new scholarship, but digital technologies have opened the door to an additional and broader range of dissemination possibilities and have generated entirely new forms of content that must be shared. This shift demands that universities take on a much more active role in ensuring dissemination of the knowledge produced by

their institutions — both now and in the future. The shift also positions universities to play an increasingly active role in dissemination — particularly of new kinds of content.

Key to fulfilling this dissemination responsibility is for universities to have the ability to make appropriate decisions about access to content and the uses to be made of it. They must acquire and maintain the rights necessary to make scholarly content as usable and broadly accessible as possible. Particularly for content that is not formally published, universities need appropriate limited rights. Research data, video, audio, and multimedia works, and new forms of digital works and scholarly resources, are just some of the non-traditional content whose dissemination needs management. In addition, the university's ability to disseminate knowledge will be enhanced if it can regain similar limited rights to disseminate works that pass through the formal publication system.

To assist campus leaders in engaging with this issue and developing local responses, an articulation of principles and vision for the university's role in disseminating new knowledge are offered along with an expression of the need for action now and a series of recommended actions. In addition, the sponsoring organizations have identified a set of recommendations for collective actions by the university community.

Principles and Practices for University Engagement in Disseminating the Work of its Faculty

- Dissemination of knowledge is as important to the university mission as its production.

- Recognizing the value of the intellectual capital created by the members of the university community, universities should develop strategies for ensuring maximum distribution of the full range of unique and uniquely valuable content produced by the university community.

- Past norms and practical requirements for dissemination have led to practices of transferring control of access to and use of faculty work outside the academy, limiting the university's and faculty members' ability to ensure broad dissemination and wide use. Where the academy has relinquished the ability to manage its intellectual capital to best serve its needs and priorities, it should act to regain this capability.

- Key functions of traditional publishing must persist. Particularly, valuation and rewarding of high quality faculty work must remain central features of dissemination.

- As new kinds of digital products emerge from the conduct of scholarship, universities must act to ensure that they become broadly available and that some basic dissemination rights remain within the academy.

- To ensure the academy's ability to make its products accessible, it must employ existing infrastructure and continue to invest where needed in technological, organizational, and policy strategies to build capability within the academy to disseminate its work.

This is the moment to take action

Decades of investment and development in information technologies and networked information resources have created an unprecedented opportunity for scholars to express, document, organize, and transmit knowledge with extraordinary flexibility, depth, and power; these same developments have made it possible for this knowledge to be accessible throughout our society and globally at manageable costs. Yet ,these opportunities are constrained by publishing, tenure, and promotion policies based on historic practices.

Universities and their communities need to capture the full value of the growing investments in research and scholarship by maximizing the dissemination of their products. Research investments come from many sources, including federal funding agencies and private foundations, but universities themselves also make substantial contributions. These investments are made based on an expectation that research findings will be broadly available for use in advancing research, teaching, and in advancing the public good. Dissemination of research is a key value of the academy. Indeed, academic freedom encompasses the rights of faculty members and researchers to communicate freely and broadly the conclusions of their scholarly endeavors.

Traditional dissemination practices have largely relied on outsourcing production of print artifacts paid for by transfer of copyright to publishers. The assumption has been that broad dissemination required the total concession of copyrights in return for the substantial and unique investments publishers made in producing publications. Yet, there is an inherent difficulty with relying on market forces alone to maximize dissemination. In the emerging electronic environment, there are new opportunities to increase access to new knowledge and far less need to rely on models that demand exclusive distribution rights. Traditional publishing and distribution routes can and will adapt as they are supplemented by new forms of university-based dissemination. For an appropriate transition to occur, however, universities must retain the ability to ensure broad distribution of research and scholarship.

Another key value of the academy is preservation of access to research and scholarship over time. We must retain the rights to preserve products of faculty work within the academy or decisions about what will be saved and who will be able to use it again will reside outside the academy.

To realize the benefits of this changing landscape, promotion and tenure criteria need to continue their evolution beyond their basis in historic practices that often tied faculty rewards exclusively to publication in the traditional journal and monograph vehicles. While the identification of high quality scholarship is integral to the academy's work, basing rewards on use of the historic, print-based distribution system retards the development of new models and also strengthens the ability of actors outside the academy to control future dissemination of new knowledge.

Reflecting the need to retain the ability to ensure that faculty scholarly and creative work is broadly available, universities, working with their own faculty, should supplement traditional publishing models with more effective models over time. While such models must preserve the critical qualitative components of traditional publishing, they can and should go beyond them by adopting the benefits made possible by the networked environment. Assistance in these tasks should be solicited from scholarly societies and university presses.

In a networked environment one maximizes technology investments by integrating dissemination functions directly into existing university technology environments. A variety of capabilities for disseminating content already exist on campuses, often under the management of libraries or information technology units. With appropriate rights management strategies, these can be effectively harnessed to substantially enhance dissemination of research and scholarship in the present and into the future.

Recommendations to Campus Leaders

Primary Recommendation: Campuses should initiate discussions involving administration and faculty about modifying current practices and/or its intellectual property policies such that the university retains a set of rights sufficient to ensure that broad dissemination of the research and scholarly work produced by its faculty occurs.

A number of related actions are also provided here. The scope of a university's dissemination responsibility should not be limited to traditional forms of faculty publications. The discussion of dissemination must broaden and take into consideration all of the products of university faculty including data, analyses, new forms of scholarship, working papers, conference proceedings, monographs, journals, and creative works such as performances.

Embracing responsibility for disseminating the new knowledge arising from faculty work requires individual universities to pursue both inter- and intra-institutional and collective strategies. Coordinated action can arise out of formal collaborations, but also from informal synchronization of actions at multiple institutions.

Some specific institutional strategies include:

- Initiate a process to develop an institutional dissemination plan by explicitly evaluating existing dissemination activities, policies relating to promotion and tenure, and policies regarding faculty copyrights. For instance, charge a campus blue ribbon task force to advise the provost on key issues raised by the emergence of new forms of scholarly publishing and the gains that might be had by utilizing more effective ways of sharing the high quality results of the processes of scholarly and creative endeavor.

- With this foundation, develop priorities for supporting new dissemination strategies that enhance the value of the multifaceted investments in faculty research and scholarship by promoting the broadest possible access to it.

- Engage departments on campus in developing fresh articulations of the criteria that are appropriate for judging the quality of contributions to their discipline, criteria that embrace emerging forms of scholarly work, where those possess the same attributes of quality and contribution to new knowledge, and do not rely solely on traditional publications and historic practices.

- Develop institutional policies that enable the university to disseminate the full range of its community's products now and in the future.

- Where local dissemination infrastructure exists (such as institutional repositories), promote its use and expand its capabilities as required. Where needed, build new infrastructure that supports documentation of the products of faculty work, both for grant management and compliance and for more general purposes.

- Seek opportunities to invest in shared dissemination infrastructure with other institutions – through shared facilities or by contributing funds to the development of dissemination services by another institution.

- Encourage faculty authors to modify contracts with publishers so that their contracts permit immediate open access or delayed public access to peer reviewed work in a manner that does not threaten the viability of the journals or monographs.

- Develop policies or strategies that redirect resources from high cost /low value dissemination practices to development of dissemination mechanisms residing inside the academy.

- Where universities support presses, work to realign presses more directly with the university mission. Encourage press investments in dissemination activities that correspond to areas of excellence on campus. Consider revising reporting relationships to encourage collaboration between presses and libraries. Invest in press/library collaborations.

Collective Action Through Associations Serving Research Institutions or University Consortia

Opportunities for collective action by consortia or university collaborations:

- Create shared dissemination infrastructure to capture economies of scale and broaden access to researchers and scholars at institutions unable to support local infrastructure.

- Improve access to dissemination infrastructure through partnerships with scholarly societies to offer alternatives to commercial publishers.

- For all disciplines, initiate a broad re-articulation of the hallmarks of high quality research and scholarship that emphasize its substance independent of publication or distribution form.

- Develop new norms for sharing copyrights among universities, authors, and providers of publishing services in order to facilitate low-cost use of the copyrighted work in teaching and research.

Opportunities for associations:

- Convene presidents, provosts, chief information officers, and library and press directors to re-envision the dissemination strategies employed by research universities.

- Identify and act on opportunities for the academy to regain control of the dissemination of the results of research and scholarship.

- Develop a set of principles and best practices for university policies regarding copyright assignment of faculty works.

- Facilitate shared investment in targeted areas of distribution infrastructure through existing channels and work with research libraries and campus IT to expand dissemination infrastructure within the academy.

- Encourage reallocation of resources from supporting restrictive-access models to supporting models that maximize access both in the short and long term, taking care to avoid reallocations that threaten the current system while an improved alternative is being developed.

- Develop best practices across a broad array of related areas:

  - Dissemination practices
  - Promotion and tenure policies that privilege substance over form in evaluating quality
  - Preservation and access strategies for products of research and scholarship
  - Preservation and access strategies for teaching products