

2024 URI Open Access Fund Committee Final Report

April 16, 2024

Authors:

Andrée Rathemacher, Professor, Library Technical Services,
andree@uri.edu

Evan Preisser, Professor, Biological Sciences, preisser@uri.edu

Luzi Shi, Assistant Professor, Criminology and Criminal Justice,
luzi.shi@uri.edu

Judy Van Wyk, Professor, Sociology & Anthropology, vellosa@uri.edu

2024 URI Open Access Fund Committee Final Report

April 16, 2024

Committee membership

Andrée Rathemacher, Professor, Technical Services (Chair)

Evan Preisser, Professor, Biological Sciences

Luzi Shi, Assistant Professor, Criminology and Criminal Justice

Judy Van Wyk, Professor, Sociology & Anthropology

Committee charge

The committee's charge, issued by Interim Dean of University Libraries Peter Larsen on February 26, 2024, is as follows:

The OA Fund was set up by the Provost and VP of Research about 10-15 years ago and administered by the Libraries. It was meant to be a source of last resort funding for researchers publishing in Open Access journals. The requirements are fairly strict, as researchers are expected to make plans for OA fees in grants and other research funding. It's been a qualified success, but, over the years, the OA landscape has changed, and this is probably not the right way to be doing OA funding in the modern models. More information on the fund: <https://uri.libguides.com/oafund>.

I expect this committee to be fairly low impact, mostly some reading, a few meetings, and a report to submit to the Provost to recommend options on how to move ahead. I'd like to aim for mid-April, but, if you feel you need more time, that's fine. I want to repeat that you do not need to provide definitive recommendations, only a set of suggestions for the Provost and others to make decisions from.

Background

At the request of Professor Andrée Rathemacher, Interim Dean of University Libraries Peter Larsen asked Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs Barbara Wolfe in 2023 if we could close the URI Open Access Fund. She requested a study. This committee was formed in response to that request. At issue is more than the Open Access Fund, which supports between 10-15 articles a year at a total cost of under \$15,000. While this committee discussed the OA Fund and has made a recommendation about its future, we also looked at various options for institutional support for open access publication of scholarship, highlighted the pros and cons of each, and provided some options for moving forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are the recommendations of the committee. Please read the full report for a deeper explanation of the issues.

1. The [URI Open Access Fund](#) should be retired.

The open access landscape is fundamentally different now than it was a decade ago. The Fund's limited nature creates unreasonable expectations from URI faculty authors that the university will systematically fund APCs for their articles, which neither the OA Fund nor the university can meet, and this causes frustration. Open access publishing has advanced to the point that the OA Fund is not needed to "promote" open access. The OA Fund is simply not scalable. There is not enough money in the fund to meet needs, nor can there be. Rather than covering the APC expenses of a small number of URI faculty, OA Fund resources should be redirected toward efforts that will have greater impact.

2. Hire a Scholarly Communications Librarian to educate faculty on options for making their work open access, on article-level metrics, demonstrating and enhancing the impact of their scholarship, etc.

A Scholarly Communications Librarian will assist URI faculty across all disciplines in publishing more effectively and increasing their impact and citation rates through open scholarship best practices, enhancing the prestige and reputation of the university.

3. Encourage URI faculty to make their articles open access by depositing their manuscripts in [DigitalCommons@URI](#) in compliance with the [URI Open Access Policy](#).

The University of Rhode Island was the 8th public university in the United States to pass a "permissions-based" open access policy in 2013. The policy provides a legal mechanism whereby URI faculty authors can make versions of their scholarly articles available open access immediately upon publication, at no cost to them. This is a cost-effective means to increase the global impact of URI's scholarship.

4. Continue to support [Diamond OA initiatives and Subscribe to Open options](#) that provide OA with no author-facing charges and offer alternatives to the large, for-profit academic publishers.

Such efforts support open scholarship, cost transparency, and scholar-led publishing and best align with the values of the academy in creating and sharing impactful research.

5. Consider support for the membership models of fully open access publishers, e.g. PLoS, MDPI, Frontiers.

These publishers rely on an APC-based publishing model, which is not ideal for the reasons elaborated below, however their business models are based solely on providing peer review and publication services, unlike the legacy commercial scholarly publishers that “double-dip” by charging both subscription fees and publishing fees.

6. Consider participating in Transformative Agreements through consortia such as Lyrisis.

On the negative side, transformative agreements strengthen the position of the large commercial publishers, locking institutions into expensive agreements that are difficult to cancel. They further strengthen the APC-based model of open access publishing. They insulate faculty authors from the costs of publication, which encourages price inflation. Through TAs, the university pays publishing costs for research supported by external funding, resulting in higher costs for the institution. Support for TAs will require an increase in the library materials budget. On the positive side, TAs cover publishing costs for a large number of journals, creating more open access publishing options for university authors. Because publishing costs are bundled into journal subscription agreements, administrative costs are lower.

OPEN ACCESS LANDSCAPE

In preparation for the committee’s discussions, committee chair Andrée Rathemacher created the following overview of some of the present-day issues around open access.

What is open access?

Peter Suber, open access expert, philosophy scholar, and Senior Advisor on Open Access in the Harvard Library, provides this [definition](#) of open access in his book [Open Access](#) (MIT Press, 2012):

Open access (OA) literature is digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions.

Worth noting is that open access content is not only free to *read*, but free to *reuse* (to reproduce with attribution, to text and data mine, etc.)

Scope

Many scholarly outputs can be made available open access, including journal articles, books, data sets, and primary source materials.

This committee will focus on open access to research articles published in peer-reviewed scholarly journals.

Final published version / URI Open Access Policy

Our discussions will focus on open access to the final published version of the article hosted on the publisher's platform (known as "Gold Open Access").

However, as we educate administrators and our faculty colleagues about open access options, it is important to always keep in mind that the [URI Open Access Policy](#) provides a legal mechanism for any URI faculty member to make the peer-reviewed manuscript versions of their articles available open access through [DigitalCommons@URI](#). (This is known as "Green Open Access.")

This may not be a URI faculty author's preferred option, but it is always available as an alternative to paying an open access article processing charge if funds are lacking.

Article processing charges (APCs)

Many open access journals charge APCs to publish articles. The [Directory of Open Access Journals \(DOAJ\)](#), an index of open access journals that have been vetted for adhering to best practices, currently lists a total of 16,465 English-language open access journals. Of these, only 38% charge fees. However, [fee-based OA journals publish a majority of OA articles](#).

OA journals that do *not* charge APCs tend to be supported by institutions or societies, volunteer labor, and/or collaborative funding mechanisms.

Hybrid OA journals

Hybrid open access journals are subscription-based journals that charge an APC to make single articles available open access. They tend to be published by large, commercial publishers (e.g. Elsevier, Wiley, SpringerNature, Taylor & Francis, Sage, Cambridge, Oxford, American Chemical Society, etc.).

(Unlike hybrid journals, fully open access journals make *all* of their articles available open access; they do not collect subscription fees for access to their content. Examples of fully open access publishers include PLoS, MDPI, BioMed Central, Frontiers, and Hindawi.)

Publishers argue that hybrid OA is a bridge to full open access in the future, as growing revenue from APCs will result in a lowering and eventual elimination of subscription charges.

Open access advocates are skeptical of this argument, because these publishers do not offer transparency around their finances that would demonstrate that the transition is happening. In fact, it is possible that publishers are “double-dipping” and increasing their overall revenues by collecting money for both subscriptions and publication charges. If this is the case, publishers would have a disincentive to shift to full open access.

Worth noting, too, is that APCs in hybrid journals tend to be higher than APCs in fully open access journals.

Non-APC based open access publishing (“Diamond Open Access”)

Some open access journals charge neither subscription fees nor author fees. Journals that are free to read and free to publish in are often referred to as “Diamond Open Access.”

While many of these journals run on donated labor and technology (see, for example, the [five active peer-reviewed journals](#) hosted on DigitalCommons@URI), there are also a number of collaborative funding / community investment models that support this model.

One growing approach is known as “Subscribe to Open.” In such an arrangement, libraries pledge to provide a financial contribution to a selection of journals from a publisher based on the amount of their current subscription fee. If the publisher can meet costs for a given year, they will publish all articles open access (with no charges to authors).

The URI Libraries have been a leader in supporting such initiatives, with notable examples being Annual Reviews Subscribe to Open, Berghahn Open Anthro, Liverpool University Press Open Planning, Open Library of Humanities, and SCOAP3 Journals. See a complete list on the [Open@URI LibGuide](#).

Similar initiatives are the [Lyrasis Open Access Community Investment Program](#) and [Knowledge Unlatched](#). These programs enable libraries and other stakeholders “to evaluate and collectively fund Diamond Open Access Journals” (Lyrasis). In seeking funding, the publishers of these journals typically provide some degree of transparency around their expenses.

Note that Diamond Open Access is adjacent to, and sometimes overlaps with, support for “scholar-led” infrastructure, which envisions returning control of the publication of scholarship to the academy and away from international, for-profit publishing behemoths.

With regard to APC-based OA publishing, there are a number of things to examine more closely. One is criticisms of APCs in general, and others are various models of paying for them.

Criticisms of APC-based OA publishing

Criticism of APC-based OA publishing is growing. The primary criticisms are:

- An APC publishing model is contrary to a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. APCs exclude authors without funds to pay for them, which primarily affects researchers in disciplines and at institutions with less funding. It disproportionately impacts researchers in the Global South, excluding perspectives and topics of essential importance to a world in crisis.
- Just like subscription prices, APCs are opaque. It is not clear what publisher services they actually pay for. As a result, the cost of an OA publishing system based on APCs is likely much higher than it “needs” to be, diverting resources from other priorities.
- As an APC model comes to dominate, publishers are more likely to adopt it, disincentivizing experimentation and crowding out innovative and more equitable alternatives.
- The existence of APCs makes possible the “predatory” model of OA publishing, in which fraudulent journals charge for publication without providing peer review and other essential services.

Who pays?

Publishing involves technology, which costs money, and human labor, which deserves to be fairly compensated. The question of “who pays” is important in any vision of an open access future. APCs place the burden of payment on the author. Some authors have access to grant funding or institutional support; others do not. This brings up the equity issues noted above.

While a system in which authors do not have to pay is more equitable, many open access advocates agree that in an APC-based system, it is important for authors to have “skin in the game.” Meaning, if authors are insulated from the costs of publishing, and thus have no price-sensitivity when they select journals in which to publish, this will likely lead to unsustainable cost inflation as has been the case with journal subscription costs.

In addition, expecting universities to cover APCs for all articles published by their researchers is not sustainable for research-intensive institutions, which would likely pay more under an open access system than they did for subscriptions. It is important that funders share costs by paying for the publication of articles that result from their grants. Funders need to ensure that publication costs are an allowable expense, and authors who receive grants need to budget the cost of publication into their proposals.

There is also the issue of paying APCs for articles where the authors come from multiple institutions. How can costs be shared fairly?

Finally, the administrative burden of managing open access payments on an article-by-article basis is costly to everyone involved.

Open Access funds

One of the first (if not *the* first) Open Access Funds was “invented” by Harvard in 2009. Stuart M. Shieber, a professor of computer science and then Director of the Harvard Office for Scholarly Communication, proposed the [Compact for Open-Access Publishing Equity](#) to support alternative, sustainable business models for OA journals in order to help them compete on a more level playing field with subscription-based journals. According to the COPE website,

The compact for open-access publishing equity supports equity of the business models by committing each university to “the timely establishment of durable mechanisms for underwriting reasonable publication charges for articles written by its faculty and published in fee-based open-access journals and for which other institutions would not be expected to provide funds.”

OA Funds were subsequently established at [many universities](#). They were experimental, limited, easily-manageable initiatives intended to support APCs for authors with no other funds available, at a time when OA publishing was in its infancy. They were established to demonstrate support for open access publishing and were set up as funds of last resort. OA Funds were never intended as a mechanism for systematically paying for APC-based publishing by all authors at an institution.

The [URI Open Access Fund](#) was created in December 2013, at the initiative of Professor Andrée Rathemacher, with funding provided by the Office of the Provost and the Office of the Vice President for Research and Economic Development. (Note that it was never a service of the URI Libraries per se.) Taking the lead from the Harvard fund, the URI fund adopted requirements such as requiring journals to be listed in the DOAJ and to publish with CC licenses and for authors to have ORCIDs and be in compliance with the [URI Open Access Policy](#), did not fund the publication of articles supported by grants, and required prorating in cases of co-authors at other institutions. Such rules were incorporated to incentivize best practices as well as to make the funds' limited resources stretch further.

Transformative Agreements (Read and Publish agreements)

Emerging as a juggernaut in the open access publishing landscape are “transformative agreements” (TAs), also called “read and publish” agreements. In this model, libraries pay for subscription access *and* APCs for corresponding authors from their institutions in one package. Articles published OA in these journals are freely available, while other articles are still behind a paywall.

The details of these agreements vary (e.g. whether article payments must be individually approved by the subscribing library and which journals in a publisher's portfolio are included). The total cost of a TA is invariably more than pure subscription access.

TAs are typically offered by the large commercial publishers mentioned above. [URI has entered into TAs](#), through our consortium Lyris, with ACM, Cambridge, the Royal Society of Chemistry, and SpringerNature.

The argument for transformative agreements, advanced primarily by the publishers, is that this model allows publishers to transition away from a pricing model that relies on subscription revenue and toward a model that is fully open access, with libraries paying publication charges just as they paid for subscriptions.

The arguments against transformative agreements are many and overlap with the arguments against APCs in general. These are:

- Most publishers that offer read and publish agreements are not transparent about their finances and offer no firm date when they will make the transition to fully open access publishing.
- It is possible that transformative agreements, because they enable publishers to collect both subscription fees and APCs, actually disincentivize a transition to full open access.
- With TAs, universities are paying APCs for articles resulting from grant-funded research. In order for an APC-based open access system to be sustainable, funders must shoulder some of the costs.

- TAs further entrench APCs, which, as noted above, create barriers to publishing for authors from institutions and regions with fewer resources, increasing inequities in the scholarly communication system.
- TAs, by definition, are a form of hybrid OA, in which APCs cost more than in fully OA journals.
- TAs strengthen the position of the large commercial publishers that offer them.
 - Authors are steered to their journals since the APCs are paid for through the library's agreements, depriving other, more innovative OA publications of content.
 - TAs by definition include a subscription to the entire portfolio of a publisher's journals (aka they are a form of "Big Deal"). Once researchers come to expect that APCs are paid for through the library, it is difficult for libraries to discontinue TAs. They are locked in to subscribing to the portfolio package of journals and are unable to unbundle the subscription in response to budget shortfalls, changes in usage, etc.
- By hiding publication costs from authors and therefore any price-sensitivity around publication options, TAs are likely to result in hyperinflation of publication costs that mirrors what happened with subscription fees during the "[serials crisis](#)".
- TAs are an administrative burden on supporting libraries, which must publicize them and are often required to approve articles individually.
- Funds used to support OA through TAs are unavailable to support other, non-APC-based OA initiatives.

For these reasons, it is likely that supporting TAs will slow the transition to OA, result in an OA system that costs more than it needs to, and decrease the diversity of scholarly voices.

Memberships (Pure Publish agreements)

Some fully open access publishers that rely on APCs offer institutional memberships to libraries. These provide unlimited publishing to authors at the institution (similar to TAs) or offer discounts on APCs. Examples include [PLoS](#) and [PeerJ](#), which offer flat fee agreements; [Frontiers](#), which offers various levels of institutional support for APCs; and [MDPI](#), [BioMed Central](#), and [F1000Research](#), which offer discounted APCs and/or centralized invoicing.

As with TAs, memberships favor some OA publishers over others, result in universities paying publication charges that should be covered by grants, and have the potential to result in inflation in APC costs by removing or reducing author price sensitivity.

WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

Meeting dates

The committee conducted five meetings via Zoom, on March 5, March 19, March 26, April 2, and April 16. During the March 19 meeting, we spoke with Professor Eleta Exline, Scholarly Communication Librarian, University of New Hampshire. During the March 26 meeting, we spoke with Christine Turner, Scholarly Communications Coordinator, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Faculty concerns

This committee is small and therefore is not able to represent the views of all URI faculty, but some common faculty concerns regarding fee-based open access publishing were identified.

It is worth noting that it is the growth of open access and its promotion by scholars, librarians, funders, and government agencies that has brought these issues to the fore. A decade ago, the challenge was to gain acceptance for open access. Now many faculty wish to publish open access; current challenges revolve around the best ways to fund it.

An issue in the social sciences, where journal publishing is the norm but grant-funding is not as common as in the physical sciences, is the necessity of paying out of pocket to publish in APC-based open access journals. Additional concerns are that even when grant funding is available, publication charges are not always an allowable expense, and social scientists often continue to publish articles based on grant-funded research long after the grant has closed. This is less of an issue in the sciences, where grants that support publication charges are more the norm, and in the humanities, which relies less heavily on publishing in journals.

In addition, while publishing in an open access journal, or choosing the open option in a hybrid journal is the author's choice, in a small number of cases, the primary journal in a discipline has transitioned to an APC-based open access publishing model, eliminating the option to publish without a fee for authors who wish to publish in that journal.

URI faculty have a lack of awareness of the issues surrounding open access publishing and the options available to them, including making articles available Green Open Access through the institutional repository and the legality of sites like ResearchGate. More education is needed. As one committee member stated, "How could anyone know this except a librarian?"

Experience at other universities

University of New Hampshire (Eleta Exline)

UNH has had an [open access fund](#) for three years. It is funded at \$5,000 a year, with each article capped at \$1,000, for a total of five awards. (UNH has approximately 1,000 faculty members.) The UNH library has not negotiated any transformative agreements directly with publishers, though they participate in 1-2 through consortia. Prof. Exline believes that TAs are the “big deal” repackaged, meaning that they end up entrenching high-priced commercial publishers. She’d like to see more support for non-profit scholarly publishers. UNH does not pay for APCs on behalf of faculty authors. When asked for financial support, Prof. Exline educates faculty about other options, such as making the article manuscript open access through their institutional repository, publishing in a comparable journal that does not charge a fee, and seeking alternative sources of funding. Her role as Scholarly Communications Librarian involves educating the faculty; she pairs with library liaisons and attends departmental faculty meetings. She has met with about one-third of the faculty, and she also meets with graduate students and postdocs. She believes there are no easy answers to these issues, and that when making decisions about supporting open access, institutions should consider how the different models support the university’s values.

University of Massachusetts, Amherst (Christine Turner)

UMass Amherst has an open access fund ([SOAR Fund](#)) in the amount of \$25,000 a year covering 1,300 faculty. The maximum award is \$1,900 per article (enough for 13 articles at the maximum funding level). When faculty authors ask for APC funding, Ms. Turner recommends the SOAR Fund; transformative agreements that the library supports; complying with UMass Amherst’s open access policy to make the manuscript version of the article available through the institutional repository; and seeking departmental funding. The UMass Amherst libraries have adopted a [principle-based framework](#) for engaging with information providers, favoring publishers that reinvest in the scholarly enterprise rather than extracting excessive profits. They [participate](#) in some transformative agreements, but not with the “Big 5” publishers, and they support non-APC-based open access publishing initiatives and fully open access publishers such as PLoS. Ms. Turner engages in outreach with researchers, campus-based editors, and grad students, educating them about appropriate promotion and tenure metrics (e.g. [DORA](#)) and best practices in open scholarship.

Harvard and Northeastern Universities

Outside of the formal meetings of the committee, individual committee members examined the library website of Northeastern University Library and exchanged emails with Colleen Cressman, the Librarian for Open Publishing, Open Scholarship, and Research Data Services in the Office for Scholarly Communication in Harvard Library. We found that Northeastern University Library [supports](#) numerous transformative agreements in addition to various subscribe-to-open initiatives.

Harvard confirmed that their open access fund, the HOPE Fund (on which the URI Open Access Fund was modeled), has been indefinitely suspended due to budget constraints and publishers' ballooning APCs. Harvard wants to more actively pursue no-APC OA efforts, thus they are trying to avoid participating in transformative agreements. They support individual journals that are Diamond OA/no-fee, they support journals affiliated with Harvard researchers in negotiating for strong OA principals with their academic press publishers, and they host journals via their institutional repository.

FURTHER READING

General

Hinchliffe, Lisa Janicke. "[Library Licensing Strategies](#)." The Scholarly Kitchen [blog]. December 19, 2023.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology. [Access to Science and Scholarship: Key Questions About the Future of Research Publishing](#) [report]. November 2023.

Ansele, Manuel. "[Scientists paid large publishers over \\$1 billion in four years to have their studies published with open access](#)." *El Pais* [newspaper]. November 21, 2023.

Diamond Open Access

Science Europe, cOAlition S, OPERAS, and the French National Research Agency (ANR). *Action Plan for Diamond Open Access* [report]. March 2, 2022. doi: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6282402>.

APCs and Transformative Agreements

Mudditt, Alison. "Transitional Agreements Aren't Working: What Comes Next?" *The Scholarly Kitchen* [blog]. April 4, 2024.

cOAlitionS. "[Moving away from APCs: a multi-stakeholder working group convened by cOAlition S, Jisc and PLOS](#)." Plan S [website]. June 27, 2023.

PLoS. "[Beyond article-based charges working group: an update on progress](#)." The Official PLOS Blog [website]. April 17, 2024.

Ivy Plus Libraries Confederation. "[IPLC Letter to the Office of Science & Technology Policy](#)." Ivy Plus Libraries Confederation [website]. March 3, 2023.

cOAlition S. "[cOAlition S confirms the end of its financial support for Open Access publishing under transformative arrangements after 2024](#)." Plan S [website]. January 26, 2023.

Finnie, E., Moulton, O. C., Russell, J. C. & Carlson, A. J., (2023) "Another Week, Another Transformative Open Access Agreement. But Just How Transformative are They Proving to be in Practice?", *NASIG Proceedings* 37. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3998/nasig.4312>.

Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI). [The Budapest Open Access Initiative: 20th Anniversary Recommendations](#). Budapest Open Access Initiative [website]. March 15, 2022.

- See Section 3. Article processing charges
- See Section 4. Read-and-publish agreements

Farley, Ashley et al. (2021) "Transformative Agreements: Six Myths, Busted." *College & Research Libraries News* 82(7): 298 doi: <https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.82.7.298>

Who pays?

University of California Libraries. *Pay It Forward: Investigating a Sustainable Model of Open Access Article Processing Charges for Large North American Research Institutions* [report]. July 18, 2016. <https://library.ucdavis.edu/scholarly-communications-program/archive-of-initiatives-and-projects/uc-pay-it-forward-project/>