ISSUES BRIEF

Evaluating Open Access & Avoiding "Predatory" Publishers

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Overview

Open Access is a model of publishing that provides free access to scholarly literature. One means of financing open access journals is via Article Processing Fees (APCs). Most publishers charging these fees provide academics with services such as peer review and the hosting / archiving of content. They also rely on fellow academics of good standing to serve as reviewers or editors.

So-called "predatory publishers" are "primarily fee-collection operations" (Berger and Cirasella, 2015) that rely on deceptive practices (e.g. highjacked journals, citation stacking, citing false editorial boards) to convince scholars to publish in their journals. They provide little or no services in return for the APC; and tend to publish anything submitted to them. They are problematic as they have no regard for the scholarly record; they endanger the reputation of scholars; and they drain the resources of academics, funding agencies and institutions. Their relationship to APCs has contributed to an incorrect assumption that Open Access = poor scholarship. For these reasons, it has become important to find ways to educate scholars about how to properly assess publications and avoid publishing in deceptive journals.

Additionally, there are complex social and economic factors at play. Scholars contributing to these publications tend to be [inexperienced and predominantly from developing countries](#). While educating researchers about unethical publishing practices may be one strategy for helping them to avoid these journals, it is also important for libraries to understand what other factors may be preventing them from publishing in higher quality publications. Some examples include the rising costs of publication in top-tier OA journals, increasing dominance of English as the primary language of scientific communication, intense career pressure on junior researchers to publish, and structural inequities in scholarly publishing.

What's Happening Locally

COPPUL member libraries are actively engaging in outreach and education in their own communities, particularly with early career faculty and graduate students, to help researchers identify and avoid unethical publications. Many libraries have crafted useful educational resources and services on this topic, such as workshops, resource guides, one-on-one consultations and scholarly publishing advice. A few examples include:

- https://libguides.usask.ca/predatorypublishers
- https://library.ucalgary.ca/guides/scholarlycommunication/predatory
- http://guides.library.ubc.ca/publishjournalarticle/predatory
- https://library.uwinnipeg.ca/scholarly-communication/avoiding-predatory-publishers.html

As unethical publishing practices are increasingly highlighted in [local](#) and [national](#) media, COPPUL libraries are drawing on their deep expertise in critical information literacy and scholarly communications to provide leadership and guidance not only to researchers hoping to avoid so-called "predatory publishers," but also to administrators in setting policies for OA grants, tenure and promotion assessment, and assessing research impact.

What's Happening Elsewhere

Using black and white lists, educational resources and best practices in publishing, efforts are underway to limit the ability of questionable publishers to profit from scholars and funding agencies.

Educational Tools

- [GVSU Libraries: Open Access Journal Quality Indicators](#)
- [Journal Evaluation Tool (Loyola Marymount University)](#)
- [How to Assess a Journal (Canadian Association of Research Libraries)](#)
- [Think, Check, Submit: Chose the Right Journal for your Research](#)

White Lists

- [Directory of Open Access Journals](#)
  The Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) requires publishers to adhere to a strict set of best practices, and complete an extensive application and review process for inclusion in the directory. This resource can be used to verify reputable and legitimate open access publications.

- [Journal Guide](#)
  An index of high-quality journals with information on scope, timeline of peer-review process, indexes, open access options and publishing charges. Created by [Research Square](#).

- [Open Access Publishers Association](#)
  The Open Access Publishers Association requires members to adhere to strict codes of conduct. The names of accepted publishers can be used to verify that a journal is produced by a publisher in good standing.

- [UlrichsWeb, Global Serials Directory](#)
  Serials Directories that include information about various publications can be used to assess the likelihood that a publisher is real.

Black Lists

- DOAJ: Journals Added and Removed
  Lists a number of publications that are no longer part of the DOAJ after its call for resubmission. Reasons given include ceasing publications, suspected editorial misconduct, journal not adhering to best practices, and URL no longer available.

- Highjacked Journals
  Produced by Geoffrey Beall, this list indicates which journals have names similar to established journals which they are attempting to mimic.

Best Practices in Publishing

- Open Access Publishers Association
- Principles of Transparency and Best Practices in Scholarly Publishing (COPE)

Recommendations & Considerations

- Encourage researchers to fully assess the quality of any publication to which they are considering submitting.
- Enhance awareness of positive and negative journal quality indicators through education and outreach to students and faculty. Graduate students and emerging scholars who may be new to the publishing process would especially benefit from education on measures used to find and evaluate open access journals, as well as what tools are available for assessing journal quality.
- Consider a "basket of measures" approach when assessing journal quality, using both qualitative (white lists, black lists, directories) and quantitative (e.g. journal metrics) factors.
- Collaborate with institutional partners (e.g. Research Office) to develop faculty/researcher education and awareness about publishing practices and open access publishing options.
- Invite stakeholders into discussions of change within the publishing landscape to build shared understandings around current open access developments and strategies for tackling predatory publishing issues.
- Develop initiatives that advance and promote legitimate open access publishing options.

Learn More

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