Editorial, *Prism 2*: The importance of online research dissemination.

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> **"Articles freely available online are more highly cited. For greater impact and faster scientific progress, authors and publishers should aim to make research easy to access."**
>
> *(Lawrence, 2001, para.1).*

Increasingly, there is evidence that online scholarly publication is important to both individual career outcomes and the wider impact and relevance of scholarly knowledge. The quote above comes from a study by Dr. Steve Lawrence, a graduate of Queensland University of Technology and University of Queensland who is now a senior research scientist at the search engine Google in the United States of America. Lawrence and his Google team analysed more than 100,000 online and offline conference papers. They concluded that, on average, online papers were 4.5 times more likely to be subsequently cited (excluding self-citation) than offline papers published in the same year. Based on his own research plus other studies elsewhere, Lawrence argued that easier access increased research usage and, further, that "maximizing the usage of the scientific record benefits all of society" (2001, para. 2).

The editors of the online journal *Advancing Women in Leadership,* Genevieve Brown and Beverly Irby, argue that electronic journals outdo their printed counterparts in reach, longevity, and quality. They make a case that "online publishing has the potential to reach a far greater audience than printed material, and at little or no additional cost to the author" (2002, n.p.). Further, they suggest that, unlike printed journals which tend to progress to the library stacks where they are out of sight and out of mind, online journals are always only one click from the desktop. "Once the article or journal is published on line, it remains there for millions of possible readers, as long as they have access to a computer and the Internet" (n.p.). Brown and Irby argue that online publications also have the potential to be higher quality. If authors and editors are committed to excellence, online publishing allows easier post-publication error correction and data updates. To really reap the benefits of online publishing, they recommend articles be considered living documents, with new links and extra references or resources added to reflect new developments (ibid.).

Of course, not all of these benefits happen automatically when research goes online. Edward Valauskas, in an article comparing the strengths and weaknesses of online and offline scholarly journals, comments that much online publishing has not yet fulfilled its technological potential and is at present too little different from offline publishing (2003). Even those online publications that are minimally interactive, however, still have certain basic structural advantages over their offline counterparts. Valauskas argues that:

> (T)he mere 'electronics' of digital journals -- the networking of authors, editors, and reviewers -- makes for a more interactive and instantaneous editorial analysis. … The nature of the Internet means that reviewers thousands of miles apart review an article nearly in real time with other editors, allowing for the rapid development of comments and opinions. In turn, authors enjoy rapid notification of the editorial fates of their opera. (2003, para. 6)

Valauskas applauds the internationalisation of publishing that is possible online, citing as example *First Monday*, which "includes an editorial board scattered around the United

States, Europe, India, and Australia. Articles arrive from authors in South America and Africa in addition to the well-connected continents of North America and Europe" (para. 6).

> **"The potential advantages of moving toward electronic publication for scholarly work far outweigh any possible disadvantages..."**
> *(Roberts, 1999, para.7).*

Peter Roberts, in his 1999 article 'Scholarly publishing, peer review, and the Internet', also overviewed the strengths and weaknesses of online publishing, concluding that "the potential advantages of moving toward electronic publication for scholarly work far outweigh any possible disadvantages associated with such a move" (para. 7). Roberts argued that online publishing reduces library shelf-space crises, reduces the time to publication, and, in practical terms:

> simply makes the task of getting hold of scholarly articles easier, and - if the journal is provided free of charge (or at a reduced rate) - cheaper than print and post systems allow. Downloading and printing articles in electronic journals allows academics to make clean, laser-quality copies of the papers they have an interest in. Publication through the Internet eliminates the need for photocopying and, for those who would normally borrow journals from their university libraries, also saves time that would otherwise be spent walking backwards and forwards between different locations on a campus. (1999, para. 12)

These are all advantages that *PRism* aims to offer authors and readers, and on most counts I think we have succeeded admirably. We have an extremely strong international refereeing board. Its members are munificent in turning around most refereeing within 6 to ten weeks.

We have editorial board members from five countries and, in this issue, we welcome our first authors from outside Australasia, reflecting the interest that *PRism* is starting to attract overseas. We received comments and inquiries about articles published in the first issue from academics and industry members in seven different countries, and in all cases we were able to put inquirers directly in touch with authors so that they could continue their email discussions (leading to several potential international and national research collaborations). To further enhance international ties, we have appointed three highly respected academics as regional editorial advisors in Australia, New Zealand, and North America. Their role will be to promote *PRism* and its calls for papers at institutions, on lists, and at conferences in their region and to identify key publishing indexes where *PRism* should be listed to ensure wide dissemination of its published articles.

One of the key articles in this issue responds to an article in the first issue; this is the kind of dialogue I hope other authors will emulate. We make it easy for you to cite our articles by including copy-and-paste citation details in correct APA format in the footer. Our average submission-to-publication turnaround is less than one year and often faster (many offline journals have publishing wait lists of several years).

Of course, we're not perfect. In our first year we did not, as Valauskas suggests many online journals do not, fulfil the promise of online technology in terms of interactivity. For our first year we have not been able to deliver discussion forums so that site users can quickly and publicly exchange opinions and responses to published material. We also don't yet have a fool-proof 'link-rot' detection and correction service to keep site resources constantly updated. We're working on those areas and, with the support of our new co-sponsor, Massey University's Department of Communication & Journalism, hope to do better this year. However, I still think we can award ourselves an oversized bouquet of pink dahlias in terms of benefits such as wide visibility and subsequent citation of authors' work, internationalisation of

contributors and refereeing, speedy feedback to authors, and ease of usability and access.

So what's the next step for *PRism*? Actually, it's quite an exciting one, probably because it's a bit political and as anyone who knows me can confirm, I think it's important to stand up for political convictions. Basically, in future we hope to make it legal for you to copy off as many prints of *PRism* articles as you like and use them for whatever you want, by obtaining 'open access' agreements from contributing authors. Of course many readers probably already make copies, so in practical terms going 'open access' won't change much. But as a political statement, it's also still an important step for *PRism*.

You may have noticed that I have specified 'open access' online publication rather than 'free' online publication, when describing what it is that *PRism* ultimately aims to do. The two are not synonymous; there are many fantastic research resources online, but not all of them are free to read, and very few are also 'open access', which means free to download, copy as many times as you like, and distribute without royalty payment. *PRism* was created in response to the need for quality material online, but also the need for free quality material online, whereby the low cost of online technology could be used to ensure that neither authors nor readers paid a fee. Currently it achieves this by providing materials that are free to read and free to use for 'fair use' critical, educational, or scholarly purposes. Taking the next step from 'free to read' online access to 'open' online access seems a logical step in fulfilling *PRism*'s goal to bring scholarly research to, and make it usable for, a much wider audience.

> **Open access can "increase a journal's readership as well as its contribution to the public good on a global scale".**
>
> *(Public Knowledge Project, 2004, n.p.)*

According to the Public Knowledge Project (PKP) at the University of British Columbia, open access can "increase a journal's readership as well as its contribution to the public good on a global scale" (PKP, 2004).

Specifically, open access means (using the definition from the Budapest Open Access Initiative or BOAI) that authors retain copyright in their article but agree that anyone may "read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software, or use them for any other lawful purpose" (BOAI, 2003, n.p.) without paying a royalty. Strictly speaking, even academics are not currently supposed to download a personal copy of an article from the Internet, *PRism* included, without authorial permission. Declaring the journal open access would change that. As I understand it, open access leaves copyright with the authors, which means that authors protect the integrity of their original work (it cannot be published elsewhere in an altered form) and retain the right to be properly acknowledged and cited. However it allows readers to, for example, store a personal copy on their hard drive, or print off ten copies of an article to hand out to staff members in a private organisation (such as a PR consultancy) to read before a staff meeting, without expectation that the private organisation will pay a royalty fee for that use. Of course, nothing is really free, and it is only with the support of sponsoring organisations such as Massey and Bond Universities, and the willingness of authors to be part of an open access publishing project, that the publishing costs of a journal such as *PRism* can be met, whether access is free or open.

Of course, as an author, you don't get any royalty money from your open access publications. But you do get wider dissemination of your name and ideas at no cost to you (as opposed to the increasingly common practice of publishers charging *authors* for the privilege of publication) and, if you agree with Steve Lawrence and others on the importance of free public access to quality research output, you do get the warm glow of contributing to the betterment of humanity. Realistically, if people want copies of free online materials on their

hard drive, in their laptop or palm pilot, or in their Endnote database, or if they want to email copies of things to friends, they probably do it already anyway. The costs and difficulties of tracking and prosecuting that kind of use are, at present, prohibitive. And the private organisation that thought your stuff good fodder for a staff discussion was probably going to print off ten copies of your article anyway without anyone being the wiser, so open access is possibly just a practical way of removing argument about 'fair use' and making online information dissemination a positive, rather than potentially punitive, process. Open access broadens the legitimate audience of scholarly publishing from just other academics using articles for research or educational purposes to include private individuals, entities, and industry users who like your work and want to use or accurately reproduce sections of it (for example in a corporate newsletter) with proper acknowledgement.

In recent times, with increasing concentration of ownership of scholarly publishing outlets, and rising journal subscription costs, the notion of free access to academic research has definitely become a hot political issue. In the US, the Public Library of Science (PLOS) (http://www.publiclibraryofscience.org/) is launching a series of open access online scientific journals. PLOS obtained 30,000 signatures on a petition to scientific publishers to obtain open access to archived materials but, according to the *New York Times*, "most journals declined" (Open access, 2003, para. 2). PLOS therefore took matters into its own hands, creating an alternative publishing venue. Universities including Cornell, MIT, Columbia, Toronto, Rochester, Ohio State, Washington, and Oxford are likewise all currently involved in open access digital archive experiments designed to wrest control of scholarly publishing back from corporate monopolies (Cooke, 2002). There is even an international lobby group dedicated to promoting and supporting open access publishing, the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC). SPARC describes itself as "an alliance of universities, research libraries, and organizations built as a constructive

response to market dysfunctions in the scholarly communication system … [that have] reduced dissemination of scholarship and crippled libraries" (2003, n.p.). It has a range of materials discussing open access publishing on its site, and will provide support to open access initiatives.

There are, of course, many sides to the open access debate (some of which can be viewed on the Society for Scholarly Publishing's website and listserv, at http://www.sspnet.org/) and not everyone agrees that authors voluntarily relinquishing the right to royalties is the answer. What does seem clear is that the practice of commercial publishers charging readers for scholarly research output (often from publicly funded research) is under scrutiny. The United States government's House Appropriations Committee (HAC) has asked the National Library of Medicine to "examine how the consolidation of for-profit biomedical research publishers, with their increased subscription charges, has restricted access to vital research information to not-for-profit libraries" (HAC, 2003, para. 7). The Committee has ordered a report on "potential remedies to ensure that taxpayer-funded research remains in the public domain" and "steps that can be taken to alleviate this restrictive trend in information technology" (HAC, 2003, para. 7).

The public interest argument seems strongest in the case of medical research, and most of the debate to date has referred to medical journals (see for example Smith, 2003), but I can see no reason why wider dissemination of refereed public relations and communication research should not also be considered vital to the social good. Particularly in an industry where ethical dilemmas are a daily reality, it is important to put thoughtful and well researched material about best practice and ethical conduct out into the public domain. I think it is important to increase industry use and critique of scholarly material, and if this means making industry users feel comfortable with downloading and photocopying such material without legal risk, I think that's a positive thing.

In the case of *PRism*, however, I have taken the decision to leave the option for true open-access publishing (as opposed to the current

'free' online publishing in which the only right granted is for the article to appear, not to be downloaded or copied or further distributed) to authors. The first and second issues of *PRism* were created as a 'free' online publication. Authors retain full copyright (other than licensing *PRism* to *display* the article) and any reproduction, even just a print-off to read on the train should, strictly speaking, be only with their permission. For future issues, authors will be asked to decide whether they want to continue to publish in that manner, or sign a license granting open access. Those articles which are open access will be published with a notice that specifies that, in the interests of public knowledge dissemination, the author has agreed to open access as per the BOAI definition and readers are free to copy or download, provided that they correctly reference and do not alter the content. Those articles still governed by traditional copyright will be accompanied by a copyright notice that specifies that they cannot be downloaded, copied, or in any way reproduced without the author's written permission.

I hope that all authors will join in the open spirit of information sharing that is *PRism*'s fundamental goal. But I also recognise that this debate is complex, and I respect authors' rights to make an individual decision. Regardless of whether authors decide upon 'free' or 'open' access, *PRism* will still continue to provide a fantastic level of accessibility, absolutely gratis, to a wide and diverse audience. It will still continue to promote authors' names and ideas, get their work 'out there' and, the research shows, is also likely to get them widely cited. Particularly for early career researchers, I believe that this is an unparalleled service, and I thank in particular the ongoing efforts and wisdom of the Editorial Board who make it possible.

So to the second issue of *PRism*, and looking already towards the third, here's 'cheers'. Thank you team, once again I think we have something to be very proud of. Of particular note for educators, there are four excellent articles on pedagogy in this issue: Ann Peru Knabe's exploration of the role of constructivist learning theory in online PR teaching; Donald Alexander's research into online PR courses in Australia; Kristin Demetrious' case study of successful online learning; and Lisa T. Fall's research into the benefits of civic engagement in PR curricula. For everyone else, but perhaps especially for practitioners, John Thangaraj sounds a note of caution against believing the hype surrounding customised fonts, Chris Galloway introduces a useful and practical new PR tool in the form of appreciative inquiry, and Dale Pfeifer and Matene Love present important new research on cultural differences in leadership that has implications for communication programmes in multicultural contexts. Last but definitely not least, John Harrison's clear, concise and practical exploration of an industry case study cuts through the rhetoric about ethics to show what is at stake when codes fail, and where responsibility for ethical practice should lie. It's an absolute pleasure to be able to bring you articles of this standard on such important topics, and I hope you will all enjoy the read.

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