

THE AUDACITY OF SCOAP³

by Ivy Anderson, Director of Collections,
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Introductory Note: SCOAP³ (Sponsoring Consortium for Open Access Publishing in Particle Physics) is a grand experiment. It is a new model for scholarly communication proposed by a community of scientists. Physicists interested in expanding access to their literature have designed a novel approach to garner support from individual libraries, library consortia, research institutions, and even nation states to turn a core set of journals in the high energy physics (HEP) discipline into open access publications. SCOAP³ aims to convert all HEP literature published in high-quality journals, existing and new. This operation will be facilitated by the fact that seven journals carry the large majority of the literature in the field. These journals are published by the American Physical Society (APS), SISSA-IOP, Elsevier, and Springer. Already leaders in making their science freely accessible through the e-print service arXiv, the scientists are now proposing to make a substantial portion of the published literature open access as well.

The project principals have estimated that the total amount of money currently spent by the library community on these titles worldwide is about \$15M US. They estimate that the US commitment to make the publications open access would be \$4.5M. The general plan is to provide a financial base of support by creating a consortium of institutions that would “redirect” the money they currently pay for subscription access to support open access publication.

On February 29, 2008, the University of California, Berkeley, hosted a meeting for the US community during which the SCOAP³ model was described and organizers reported on financial commitments received to date. Ivy Anderson provides the following summary of the day. Slides and videos of the presentations are available at <http://www.scoap3.org/focalmeeting.html>.

— Julia Blixrud, Assistant Executive Director, External Relations, ARL, and Assistant Director, Public Programs, SPARC

On February 29th, I had the privilege of participating in the US focal meeting on SCOAP³ at the University of California, Berkeley. (Disclosure: I was one of the organizers of this meeting, and the University of California, for which I work, was the first US institution to express tangible support for SCOAP³.) Based at CERN, SCOAP³ is an open access (OA) publishing initiative of a new and different sort—one that is largely non-disruptive to both scholars and publishers, and in whose discussions at least two society publishers (APS and IEEE) are actively participating. That these unique aspects have attracted so little attention is surprising; one can only assume that no one has been paying serious attention. Hopefully, that will not be the case for long.

There are several important elements that distinguish SCOAP³ from other OA initiatives:

SCOAP³ is a funding consortium that seeks to mediate between author and publisher, while still conceiving of payment as a supply-side activity. By pooling funds from multiple sources and asking publishers to submit to an open tender process, it is hoped that publishing fees can be reduced. The notion of a consortium of funders has significant new appeal for three reasons: first, it avoids shifting the burden of funding to individual authors; second, it provides a context in which funds from multiple sources—libraries as well as other funding agencies—can be aggregated and deployed to support the peer review and publishing process; and third, by aggregating funds on behalf of authors, the consortium can exert the leverage of the marketplace to negotiate fees and control costs at an earlier point in the publishing cycle. This is fundamentally different from models that ask authors to cough up funds for their own articles or invite libraries to finance the publishing activity of their institutions’ authors in a decentralized, disintermediated, and ultimately unsustainable manner.

SCOAP³ is non-disruptive to authors—and to a substantial degree, to publishers and societies. As noted above, SCOAP³ insulates authors from publication charges, which can act as a powerful disincentive in the “author-pays” OA model. In addition, it maintains the vetting and credentialing functions of the existing journals while transforming them to open access. This is why the societies that publish HEP journals have actively engaged in the discussions about SCOAP³—it proposes to support, not replace them. The most critical functions of the current scholarly system, functions which work well for scholars, are preserved under SCOAP³, while still undergoing significant transformation.

SCOAP³ has the potential to fundamentally alter the role of libraries in the publishing process. SCOAP³ funding agencies, including libraries, will be responsible for the governance structure that is formed to contract with publishers for peer review and publishing services, placing libraries in a role that is well aligned with the “university as publisher” paradigm gaining currency in other areas of university-based scholarship. This alignment will place new demands on libraries and assign to them new roles in administering the outputs of scholarship and research.

SCOAP³ has emerged in a discipline that is responsible for some of the largest and most ambitious experiments in all scientific endeavor. Scholar-led, its fundamental aim is the development of a global e-science infrastructure commensurate with the ambitions of its scientists. In the SCOAP³ model, final published articles will be deposited in a network of open access repositories, enabling unrestricted data mining and re-use of scholarly output.

SCOAP³ makes such deposit a key element of the model.

Everyone interested in the grand experiment of open access publishing, whether pro or con, should sit up and take notice of this audacious new OA accelerator that is SCOAP³. To be sure, the success of this endeavor is far from certain; but that is precisely what experimentation aspires to teach us. The California Digital Library on behalf of the University of California Libraries is pleased to have been the first organization in the US to sign a formal letter of intent to provide SCOAP³ with financial support. All libraries who envision a future in which academic libraries assume new roles in building and supporting the research cyberinfrastructure, or who seek to advance the convergence of libraries and academic publishing, should join the experiment and boldly accelerate its findings.

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TAKING ACTION ON SCOAP³

by Julia Blixrud, Assistant Executive Director, External Relations, ARL, and Assistant Director, Public Programs, SPARC

To move the SCOAP³ project forward, libraries and consortia can take the following steps:

1. review the Report of the SCOAP³ Working Party, available from <http://www.scoap3.org/>;
2. calculate the amount of their pledge to SCOAP³ by estimating their current expenditures on seven HEP core journals, as outlined at <http://scoap3.org/whichjournals.html>;
3. sign the expression of interest to join SCOAP³ at <http://www.scoap3.org/scoap3us.html>; and
4. promote the project within the physics community on campus.

After enough commitments are made, the SCOAP³ principals will issue a tender to the publishers of HEP journals. The publishers answer the tender and a formal agreement on details is made. SCOAP³ participants then establish the consortium, decide on governance, and commit funds. Finally, contracts are signed with publisher partners and funds are transferred. The yearly cost of the SCOAP³ operation will be determined by the number and the prices of contracts awarded following an invitation to tender, and will be reissued regularly.

While many details are yet to be clarified, the project can provide the library, scientific, and publishing communities with information on the effects of making a discipline's published literature freely accessible as well as this particular new approach transitioning journals to open access. For more information about SCOAP³, see <http://www.scoap3.org/>.

ARL CREATES WEB GUIDE TO NIH PUBLIC ACCESS POLICY

Earlier this year, ARL developed a Web-based guide to assist research institutions in implementing the new Public Access Policy adopted by the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

The new NIH Public Access Policy, which becomes effective April 7, 2008, calls for mandatory deposit in PubMed Central of peer-reviewed electronic manuscripts stemming from NIH funding. The change from a voluntary to mandatory policy creates new expectations, not just of funded investigators, but also of the grantee institutions that support those investigators.

The ARL guide, "The NIH Public Access Policy: Guide for Research Universities," focuses on the implications of the NIH policy for institutions as grantees, although some information for individual investigators is included and links to further details are provided. The guide is helpful to a range of campus constituencies that may be involved in implementing the new policy, including research administrators, legal counsel, and librarians.

In addition to compliance concerns, the guide considers the benefits of the new policy and institutions' opportunities to build on the policy requirements by seeking additional rights for using funded research to address local needs.

Reflecting the dynamic nature of campus implementation activities, the guide will be updated as more campuses release plans, resources, and tools that can serve as models for their peers.

The guide is freely available online at <http://www.arl.org/sc/implement/nih/guide/>.

NISO ISSUES BEST PRACTICES FOR SHARED E-RESOURCE UNDERSTANDING (SERU)

In February, the National Information Standards Organization (NISO) issued *SERU: A Shared Electronic Resource Understanding*, which codifies best practices for the sale of e-resources without license agreements.

SERU offers publishers and librarians the opportunity to save both the time and the costs associated with a negotiated and signed license agreement by agreeing to operate within a framework of shared understanding and good faith.

The SERU document and additional information about the process of its development can be found at <http://www.niso.org/committees/seru/>.