

# The OA Interviews: Virginia Steel, Norman and Armena Powell University Librarian at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)

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29<sup>th</sup> July 2018

Click [here](#) to go direct to the Q&A with Virginia Steel

Who would have thought in 2002 that the [sixteen “open” enthusiasts](#) who that year launched the [Budapest Open Access Initiative](#) were about to unleash on the world a chain of events that some believe will eventually upend the 350-year old scholarly publishing system, and has in the meantime thrown researchers, librarians, universities, funders, governments and scholarly publishers into what at times looks like a dance of death.

Of course, the key driver for the changes that scholarly publishing is currently going through was the emergence of the internet, since those changes would not be possible without the web. And in fact, publishers had begun to take advantage of the new digital network a decade before open access became a thing. Elsevier, for instance, [launched](#) its online database of electronic journals ScienceDirect eight years prior to BOAI. But publishers had assumed they would simply port the traditional subscription model to the online environment and carry on much as before, all be it a subscription model re-imagined as the now infamous [Big Deal](#).

In other words, as the name suggests, what was radical about the BOAI was not its recognition that journals could now be put online, but the assumption that this could be done without the imposition of paywalls. In retrospect, we can see that this simple idea has ended up calling into question practically every aspect of traditional scholarly publishing, not excluding traditional peer review and the need for legacy publishers.

Yet ...

Yet for all its revolutionary potential, and the significant mindshare that open access has acquired over the past 16 years, some of the key [aspirations articulated](#) by BOAI have yet to be realised. And they may never be. Yes, today more research is freely accessible. But leaving aside the fact that the openness of that content [is fragile](#)<sup>1</sup>, the true revolutionary potential of making it open has not yet been exploited.

So, for instance, OA has yet to solve [the affordability problem](#) that BOAI promised it would, and in pursuit of which goal most librarians joined the OA movement in the first place.

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<sup>1</sup> “[M]ore documents are freely available in unsustainable sources and/or in violation of their copyright, than through sustainable and legal ways.” <https://osf.io/uaw27/>

More importantly, OA has failed to create the more equitable knowledge infrastructure envisaged by BOAI. Let's recall: the promise was that removing access barriers would allow the world to “accelerate research, enrich education, share the learning of the rich with the poor and the poor with the rich ... and lay the foundation for uniting humanity in a common intellectual conversation and quest for knowledge.”

The reality today, however, is that paywalls are simply being replaced by publication walls, a development that threatens to disenfranchise those in the global South even more thoroughly than paywalls.

These failings are a product of the fact that the strategies adopted and promoted by OA advocates have too often had unintended consequences. Above all, they advocated for pay-to-publish gold OA. In doing so they enabled legacy publishers to co-opt open access, and so lock themselves and their high profits into the new environment, not least by introducing overpriced [hybrid OA](#).

The pay-to-publish model also gave rise to a plague of [predatory publishers](#), and the accompanying tide of fake science now threatens to [corrupt the scientific record](#).

The nub of the problem is that OA advocates too often fail to think through their ideas and strategies, with the result that their interventions often worsen rather than improve the situation. It does not help that they are susceptible to groupthink and tend to flock around any idea that has superficial appeal. The way that dissident voices are challenged and policed on Twitter is indicative of this tendency. Moreover, OA advocates will often cling to a faulty idea long after it has become clear that it is flawed.

And while there were plenty of warnings about likely unintended consequences, these were ignored or poo-pooed. In 2004, for instance, the world's largest and most experienced publisher Elsevier [cautioned](#): “By introducing an author-pays model, Open Access risks undermining public trust in the integrity and quality of scientific publications that has been established over hundreds of years.”

Elsevier added, “Because the number of articles published will drive revenues, Open Access publishers will continually be under pressure to increase output, potentially at the expense of quality.”

Elsevier is of course not a disinterested party. Nevertheless, its point was a valid one and should have been listened to since it is also an obvious one. (Ironically, as soon as it realised that gold OA would allow it to increase its profits Elsevier quickly distanced itself from its warnings, thus proving the point it had made!).

But the most knowledgeable and far-sighted commentator has been publishing consultant [Joseph Esposito](#). True, Esposito is not a disinterested party either, and he has a habit whenever a change to the *status quo* is mooted of muttering darkly “be careful what you wish for” (e.g. [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). Nevertheless, his warnings have generally been on the money.

In 2004, for instance, Esposito [predicted](#) that in an OA environment, “the overall cost of research publications will rise, though the costs will be borne by different players, primarily authors and their proxies.” This has proved accurate.

In the same vein, in 2014 Esposito predicted that open access would be additive rather than substitutive, and so further increase the costs of scholarly communication. As he put it, “revenue from OA will be additive to the revenue from traditional journals.” That is today’s reality.

And in 2105 Esposito [predicted](#) that open access would be co-opted by legacy publishers. Few would now deny that that too is today’s reality.

For open access advocates this is all hugely frustrating and the cause of a lot of hand-wringing. The uncomfortable truth is that almost every initiative, idea or proposal introduced by the OA movement is rapidly derailed, subverted, or co-opted by publishers for their own benefit, or leads to undesirable developments like predatory publishing.

### Too gloomy a view?

But is this to take too gloomy a view? While many of Esposito’s predictions may be today’s reality, it does not mean that they will be tomorrow’s. After all, we are in the middle of a revolution, and perforce seeing through a glass darkly. We may simply be witnessing the inevitable teething problems that any largescale social change can expect to experience.

To put my cards on the table: I am a sceptic by nature and so Esposito’s views resonate more with me than the perpetual Pollyannaism of many OA advocates. Nevertheless, I can see that it may just be that the research community is going to have to wade through a lot more mud before it reaches the promised land.

I assume, however, that whether the vision of BOAI is ever fully realised will to a great extent depend on whether those who support, promote and implement open access learn from experience and adapt and change their strategies as a result.

Here there are encouraging signs. Conscious that the institutional repository movement [has failed](#), for instance, the [Confederation of Open Access Repositories](#) has developed a new strategy focused on creating what it calls a “[Sustainable Knowledge Commons](#)”.

### New determination

More interestingly, in Europe we are seeing a new determination to insist that publishers start offering big deals that include a clear transition path to an all-OA environment. These deals, those pushing for them assert, must be fairly priced and they must consist of a package that includes both access to existing paywalled content *plus* the ability for researchers to publish papers OA on a constantly increasing basis. The Association of Universities in the Netherlands ([VSNU](#)), for instance, has been flexing its consortial muscle to that end, and [turning down deals](#) it does not feel meet its requirements.

Meanwhile in Germany, [Project Deal](#) is insisting on what it calls “[Publish and Read](#)” contracts that make even greater demands of publishers. This has led to a long-standing faceoff between Elsevier and the German research community. And after Sweden followed Germany’s lead earlier this year Elsevier [cut off access](#) to its electronic journals in both countries.

What has focused European minds is a fast approaching deadline. In 2016, the EC made [a rash promise](#) that by 2020 all European publicly-funded research would be freely available. Two years out, it has become apparent that Europe will need to take dramatic action if it wants to fulfil its promise – or pay legacy publishers ever larger wads of public money in order to do so.

One response has been the EC’s announcement that it plans to [build its own publishing platform](#).

More significantly, hard hitter [Robert-Jan Smits](#) (“[one of Europe’s most powerful figures in research](#)”) has been appointed Senior Advisor on Open Access within the European Political Strategy Centre at the European Commission. His task is to ensure that the 2020 goal is met.

To that end, Smits is currently working on what has been dubbed [Plan S](#). Strikingly, the signals are that Plan S could see legacy publishers excluded from the solution proposed, or assigned a significantly curtailed role.

A similar message is coming from Project Deal. In May, for instance, Gerard Meijer, director of the German Fritz-Haber Institute and member of Project Deal [indicated](#) that academic publishers may not be included in its future plans. This may be necessary, he said, because “If we keep moving at this pace, we’ll never reach our goals.”

Much of this may be little more than sabre rattling (we don’t know), but we can surely expect it to focus minds.

One problem with Europe’s more aggressive stance is that it is seeing it double down on an anti-democratic and authoritarian trend already evident in its push for OA. We have seen, for instance, ever more demanding and oppressive OA mandates imposed on European researchers – a development at its most extreme in the [OA policy](#) announced in 2014 by the (former) Higher Education Funding Council for England ([HEFCE](#)).

There are now also noises being made to the effect that European researchers may have to give up publishing with legacy publishers and begin using “[alternative platforms](#)” (presumably platforms like the one planned by the EC). And it has been suggested that researchers who do not make their work OA could be [fined](#).

As such, Plan S could end up alienating not just publishers, but the people who actually produce the research in question, even as they are told that they will be the main beneficiaries of open access.

Librarians could also find themselves being side-lined. Smits has suggested, for instance, that librarians are acting as a brake on progress. As he [put it](#), “They want to preserve the money and

power they have to finance the subscriptions to the prestigious journals. They fear that if they don't have this money anymore, their role will be less important.”

Since they pride themselves on being the premier OA advocates and leaders of the movement this will feel like a punch in the face for librarians.

True, the increasingly robust stance Europe is taking in its war with publishers *could* speed up the transition to OA. But there must be concern that it will cause collateral damage, with researchers and librarians the most likely potential victims.

## Back in the USA

What we learn from this is that the most high-profile OA activity today is taking place in Europe. But what about the country that gave us the ground-breaking 2004 [NIH Public Access Policy](#), and the 2008 [Harvard OA policy](#)? What is the state of play in the US today?

Certainly, we can see new OA policies regularly rolled out, and these are invariably Harvard-style policies.<sup>2</sup> (The Harvard policy model, we could note, is unlike the top-down compulsory ones being imposed on researchers in Europe. Rather, it involves faculty voluntarily agreeing to adopt policies that invariably include a no-questions-asked waiver element).

We can also see a [re-invigorated preprint movement](#) gathering pace in the US, in part as a result of the advocacy and technology of the Virginia-based [Center for Open Science](#), but also, of course, [bioRxiv](#) and [PeerJ Prints](#).

In addition, the long-standing attempts to have OA legislation like [FASTR](#) and [FRPAA](#) enacted continue. (With little success to date).

What we are not seeing in the US, however, is the same determination to take on publishers. This is doubtless in part because academic culture is different in the US, but also because it would be difficult to organise. As Roger Schonfeld has [pointed out](#), the US university system is not centralised in the way it tends to be in Europe. As such, he says, there is “no national-level common negotiating posture” for dealing with publishers.

Nevertheless, there is clearly the same desire to move forward with open access, if by different means. And it would seem that the University of California (UC) is keen to take [a leadership role](#) in this, judging at least by the range of OA activities and initiatives it is involved in.

For instance, UC Libraries have been taking part in [OA pilots](#) since at least 2009, and since [2012](#) the University has introduced a series of [open access policies](#).

Then in 2015 [UC Press](#) launched the OA journal [Collabra](#) (Now *Collabra: Psychology*) and an open access monograph publisher called [Luminos](#) (some background [here](#)).

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<sup>2</sup> [73 universities](#) have introduced a Harvard-style OA policy to date, mostly institutions in the US.

A year later (2016), the California Digital Library ([CDL](#)) took part in [a joint study](#) designed to estimate what the institutional costs would be if subscription journals were converted *en masse* to an entirely APC business model. This was preparatory to proposing a “global flip” strategy in which a largescale conversion of subscription journals to pay-to-publish would be engineered.

The US study came in the wake of a similar exercise undertaken by the [Max Planck Digital Library](#). Max Planck concluded that there is already enough money in the system to pay for a large-scale transformation to OA and published its findings in a [white paper](#) in April 2015. This became the [foundational document](#) for the 2016 [OA2020 Initiative](#). UC followed up by overseeing the launch of a [US version](#) of OA2020.<sup>3</sup> [Please see correction in the footnote]

2018 has seen the pace of UC’s OA advocacy activities increase further. In February it published [Pathways to Open Access](#) (some context on this [here](#)), followed in April by a [Declaration of Rights and Principles to Transform Scholarly Communication](#).

And in June the University published a [Call to Action](#) with the stated aim of addressing the “twin challenges of journal affordability and the moral imperative of achieving a truly open scholarly communication system”.

What does this vision mean in practice, and how will it be achieved? What is the endpoint being worked towards? What, in short, is the University’s current thinking on open access?

Who better to put these questions to than [Virginia Steel](#), the Norman and Armena Powell University Librarian at UCLA, and [Chair of the SPARC Steering Committee](#)?

### Nuanced and undogmatic

In contrast to many OA advocates in Europe, Steel’s views on open access are nuanced and undogmatic. For this reason, perhaps, she seems to be wary of “big idea” solutions like the global flip. As she puts it, “Succeeding with OA will require multiple models that will vary depending on disciplinary needs and the cultures and scholarly communications models of those disciplines.”

She also appears to be more independently minded than many OA advocates, and not shy to challenge and question proposals she has doubts about – as evidenced by her decision in 2016 to write [an open letter to the academic community](#) setting out her concerns about the OA2020 Initiative and the notion of a “global flip”.

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<sup>3</sup> On 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018 Virginia Steel and [Jeffrey MacKie-Mason](#) suggested the following correction: “There is not a US version of OA2020. As the web site you link to states in its first sentence, ‘This site was created by an informal group of U.S. institutions who have signed Max Planck Digital Library’s OA2020 Expression of Interest (“EoI”). These institutions offer perspectives here about why they signed and how OA2020 can help transition scholarly journals to open access.’ The US web site is just another information channel about the global OA2020 initiative, designed to focus on the participation by and perspectives of US signatories.”

Steel's approach is doubtless partly a product of the more democratic academic culture evident in the US. As a result, discussions about OA tend to major on voluntarism, persuasion and academic freedom, not compulsion, confrontation and punishment, as we see in Europe today.

Explaining the reasoning behind her more consensual approach Steel says, "Incentivising adherence to OA is better than compelling faculty to comply – the carrot will be better received than the stick – and it's likely that more faculty will adopt OA practices sooner rather than later if they have a positive reason to do this."

Nor does Steel believe we can rush the transition to OA. "[T]urning the scholarly publication system upside down will probably take several decades," she says, adding that convincing researchers to get on board "requires continued effort to explain, cajole, and convince".

The process cannot be hurried, she suggests, not just because it will require a lot of persuasion, but because there is still no consensus on many aspects of open access. As she puts it, "Making content openly available ... will take time and discussion since there isn't consensus on, say, whether or not content should be available for reuse by commercial publishers."

## Risks

This last point is an important one. It reminds us that there has never been consensus within the OA movement. It is for this reason that funders, universities and governments in Europe have adopted a top-down compulsory approach. The danger of this approach, however, is that it will diminish and erode important academic values, alienate key stakeholders, and maybe even prove counterproductive.

On the other hand, the more *laissez-faire* approach we see in the US might mean that by the time a consensus is reached, and by the time researchers have been persuaded in sufficient numbers of the merits of embracing OA, legacy publishers will have so fully embedded themselves into the OA environment, and indeed across the entire research workflow, that it will prove impossible to stand up to them, or even to contemplate doing without their services, whatever they might charge for those services. Such an outcome would mean that any hope of resolving the affordability problem would have to be abandoned, as would any hope of creating the more equitable knowledge infrastructure envisaged by BOAI.

In conclusion, the vision articulated at BOAI in 2002 has yet to be realised, and there must be doubts that it will be. For sure, we are seeing more research made open access, but it is often [a fragile openness](#), and the problem of affordability remains. Most disappointingly, the possibility of COAR's "sustainable knowledge commons" ever becoming reality looks increasingly unlikely.

It may be that I take too sceptical a view. But whatever happens, it is unclear to me that the European approach of confrontation and compulsion will prove any more successful than the US emphasis on persuasion and consensus building. And both approaches would seem to come with risks.



In short, the future is uncertain. In fact, sitting in the middle of the OA revolution as we are, we might even be tempted to think that the outcome will depend as much on luck as on schemes, strategies and plans. Like Pierre Bezukhov wandering around the chaos of the Battle of Borodino in *War and Peace*, we might have to conclude that the actions of leaders, and of plans and policies, are far less effective than we like to think!

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*Virginia Steel*

The interview begins ...

**RP:** *Can you say something briefly about yourself and your job at UCLA?*

**VS:** As the Norman and Armenta Powell University Librarian at UCLA, I oversee most of UCLA's libraries and all their associated functions (e.g., the provision of discovery systems, access to content, preservation, and research assistance across the disciplines studied at UCLA).

The UCLA Library is one of the largest research libraries in North America and is comprised of eight campus libraries that collectively hold more than 12 million print and electronic volumes. The Library serves all UCLA students, faculty, and staff across the disciplines and has played a leading role in collecting archival resources in digital format.

The Library has launched innovative digital humanities and data management services and has developed robust partnerships with UCLA faculty through which we collaborate on a variety of projects related to the acquisition and digitization of materials and the development of new tools so that different types of information can be better utilized and made broadly accessible for teaching and research.



As part of the Library's strategic planning process several years ago, we developed an [Open Scholarship and Collections Policy](#) that confirms the Library's "bold commitment to put collections, resources, and scholarship from around the world at the fingertips of students and scholars."

**RP:** *I see that you are on the [SPARC steering committee](#), so you an OA advocate. Can you say when and why you became an OA advocate?*

**VS:** For as long as I've been a librarian, libraries have struggled to handle rapidly-increasing journal prices in order to provide access for faculty and students to the latest thinking in their fields. To live within our means, we have had to cancel journal subscriptions, and many libraries have ended up decreasing the amount they spend to buy books or even to hire librarians and staff so that they can continue to subscribe to expensive journals.

This has resulted in a situation where there are definite "haves" and "have-nots" in terms of access to the most recent research. The situation is particularly acute in smaller institutions, for independent scholars, for the Global South, and for members of the public who do not have ready access to research libraries.

"Open Access" as a concept gained traction in the 1990s and 2000s once it became apparent that online publishing could open up research to the world. When I became a library director in 2001 and was appointed to the Association of Research Libraries' Scholarly Communication Committee, I became active on a broader level and began to be involved in regional, national, and international movements to promote open access.

As someone who works for a public university, open access is even more important since public funds help support universities where research happens, and it is only fair that the public be able to access resources without having to pay exorbitant amounts.

In my mind it is tremendously important for all people to be able to read as widely as they can and to have access to a full range of information resources regardless of their ability to pay. We need to work toward a world in which there is equity in access to information including both publishing and reading.

### The current situation and challenges

**RP:** *How would you characterise the current situation vis-à-vis open access a) at your institution, b) in North America and c) globally?*

**VS:** In general, the shift toward open access is very much a work in progress. The University of California Academic Senate passed a [systemwide open access policy](#) that applies to faculty in 2013, and that was followed by a [UC Presidential open access policy](#) for other UC authors including clinical faculty, staff researchers, postdoctoral scholars, graduate students, and librarians.

There are quite a few faculty at UCLA who believe in open access, although many still do not follow through to make their scholarship openly accessible in the UC institutional repository [eScholarship](#) or another open repository or journal.

And yet there are still many faculty members – and others – who don't know about the OA movement and who also don't understand how broken the scholarly communication system is. Reaching the faculty who don't know about OA and convincing them to get on board requires continued effort to explain, cajole, and convince.

Having faculty who advocate for open access with their peers helps, but every opportunity needs to be mined to spread the word. I have rarely heard a faculty member oppose the idea of open access, but a number have questioned whether OA is an achievable goal.

My guess, based on my experience at another ARL library as well as one that isn't, is that other North American institutions have a similar mix of OA supporters, advocates, and those who are either unfamiliar with OA, who don't feel that it's an important issue, or who want the process of making their published research OA to require no effort from them.

It is sometimes easier to gain support for OA at institutions that are in a weaker financial position, but making articles and other research outputs open still requires some action on the part of busy authors to make their content open, and that's a big obstacle.

My reading of the global situation is that it varies. Many countries in Europe have centralized funding for higher education, so this creates a financial and governance structure through which open access can be reinforced as an important concept.

The Global South has suffered for a long time by not being able to afford to subscribe to increasingly expensive content, so the access part of open access is being embraced. Those same financial constraints pose significant obstacles to OA models that require significant funding, such as Article Processing Charges.

Scholars in the Global South cannot afford the current pay-to-read system, and many worry that they will be unable to participate actively as authors if we move to a pay-to-publish system.

***RP: What do you think are the current challenges facing open access, and what would be the best strategy for moving things forward?***

**VS:** There are multiple current challenges including the reliance of faculty tenure and promotion systems on journal impact factors; the lack of proven business models that will support open access publishing; disagreement on which strategies toward OA should be pursued and how actively; the dominance of a few commercial publishers that are making what many consider to be excessive profits; concerns in professional and scholarly societies about their future business model since many have been dependent on revenue from subscriptions; and the general slowness of cultural change.

It's going to take concerted effort for the foreseeable future to experiment with different OA models and to convince faculty and their institutions to change the scholarly communication system. In the US this seems more likely to happen if the demand for new models arises from the faculty and their scholarly societies instead of imposed from the top down.

But in my reading on culture change, it takes at least a decade to make significant change, so turning the scholarly publication system upside down will probably take several decades.

Endpoint?

***RP: What do you see as the endpoint: a world of universal (or near universal) open access to research papers, and perhaps also to monographs and other scholarly outputs? Or something else?***

**VS:** The Confederation of Open Access Repositories ([COAR](#)) has articulated what I consider a compelling vision of a [Sustainable Knowledge Commons](#) that includes five prerequisites:

1. Strengthen local institution-based services that preserve and provide access to diverse and valuable research products,
2. Connect local services to national, regional, and global networks through the adoption of interoperable standards and practices,
3. Begin to redistribute funds towards services that add value to the networks, such as peer review,
4. Improve the processes used to evaluate research contributions to include a wider range of qualitative and quantitative metrics and indicators, and
5. Adopt the principles and governance that will ensure the commons reflects the needs of the global research community.

Achieving this vision will require that the academy take back control over its research outputs, and new business models need to be developed that will generate sufficient support for the system while keeping costs under control.

If the research community were able to create this Sustainable Knowledge Commons and to ensure that all types of content – articles, data, and other research outputs – are openly available, discoverable, preserved, and have a robust financial foundation that is based on actual costs as opposed to profits that exceed 30 percent year after year, then I believe we will have achieved what the Open Access movement has intended to do.

***RP: COAR's vision is indeed compelling. But is it a practical vision? The story of institutional repositories (which the COAR vision appears to assume as the base infrastructure) seems to be [one of disappointment](#) rather than success, and some have concluded that the IR strategy [has failed](#). You talk of the need for the research community to take back control of its research***

***outputs. But given the very mixed results we have seen with repositories, and the way OA has been co-opted by legacy publishers, how can the COAR vision ever be realised?***

**VS:** If we are talking about repositories as they exist today, I agree that many of us have been disappointed by the lack of uptake and deposit into them.

However, COAR is advocating for a next generation IR that will incorporate different technologies and be more seamlessly embedded into the research process.

The idea of a faculty member working in an online environment that eventually leads to working papers in a repository and then some sort of overlay peer-reviewed journal or edited and peer-reviewed section of the IR is much easier to envision than it was even a few years ago.

***RP: I was struck you said it will take a decade to make significant change. You also said “there are still many faculty members – and others – who don’t know about the OA movement and who also don’t understand how broken the scholarly communication system is. Reaching the faculty who don’t know about OA and convincing them to get on board requires continued effort to explain, cajole, and convince.” 12 years ago, I did [an interview](#) with Catherine Candee, then director of publishing and strategic initiatives in the Office of Scholarly Communication at the University of California. Amongst other things, Candee said a lot of effort was already at that time going into educating faculty at UC about open access.***

***From what you say I am thinking that all this explaining and cajoling does not appear to have borne much fruit. For instance, in a [recent UC report](#) it was stated “only 25% of UC faculty are depositing articles in eScholarship”. This is 5 years after the OA policy was introduced I believe.***

***Candee also told me that the University was then spending \$27 million a year on licensed content. I understand that [today](#) that figure is \$34 million, which is 26% higher. If one adds to that the estimated cost of separate campus licences, personal subscriptions and APCs etc. the figure is estimated to be \$51 million, which is nearly 90% higher. Some might conclude that OA efforts at UC are just not proving successful. Would you agree? If not, why not?***

**VS:** I don’t agree that OA in UC is not successful.

As I noted, in the past several years the Academic Senate adopted an OA policy for faculty, and the University adopted an OA policy covering everyone else. More faculty are adding their work to OA repositories either in their discipline or the UC eScholarship repository, although there’s still a long way to go.

What hasn’t happened and where we’ve been unsuccessful is in controlling the costs we’re paying for licensed content and in breaking the stranglehold the large commercial publishers have.

I didn’t go into this thinking that the situation would change overnight – it’s much more of a marathon than a sprint – so it’s going to take a lot more work.

But with the new tools being developed such as the [Open Science Framework](#), COAR's vision for next-gen repositories, and some of the development efforts such as the joint [CDL/UC Press Editoria project](#) which currently focuses on books but will eventually provide a framework for journals, I think we're getting closer to a tipping point.

## Global flip

**RP:** *As you will know, there is in Europe a strong move towards engineering what is generally termed a “global flip” in which all (or most) subscription journals would become open access. This is being spearheaded by the [OA2020 Initiative](#). There has been an effort to promote the cause in the US too. I think you have been a little sceptical about this. Last October you published an [open letter](#) to the academic community in which you concluded, “I fully support the laudable goals of all members of the open access movement and am proud to count myself among them. However, I feel quite strongly that the mechanism the [OA2020 Initiative](#) proposes to achieve those goals would not be workable across the broad international spectrum of research institutions, funding bodies, and publishers.” As I understand it, however, UCLA has subsequently signed the Expression of Interest (EoI) in OA2020. Can you provide some background to your decision to write the open letter?*

**VS:** The OA2020 initiative was announced by the [Max Planck Society](#) in March 2016 as an outcome of discussions at the invitation-only [12<sup>th</sup> Berlin Open Access Conference](#) held in December 2015. OA2020 advocates argued for a rapid flip from the current subscription-based model to a model based on Article Processing Charges (APCs).

The initiative became a frequent topic of conversation at library meetings as well as in the UCLA Academic Committee on the Library and Scholarly Communication.

In fall 2016 I wrote an [open letter](#) to UCLA faculty to share my reservations about the proposed APC model which ended up reaching not only the UCLA community, but people interested in scholarly communication in other locations.

**RP:** *Can you say what kind of response you got to your open letter, and why UCLA subsequently decided to support OA2020?*

**VS:** I had a few responses from UCLA faculty to my letter, and these either asked for more information or were generally supportive. I also heard from librarian colleagues around the country who wanted to use parts or all of the letter for discussion at their campuses.

OA2020 generated some controversy in various University of California groups. Members of the UC Council of University Librarians had differing opinions about its focus primarily on a rapid flip, with some who believed it was a good idea and others, including me, who were concerned about its potential to end up costing even more than the current subscription model and maintain control in the hands of commercial publishers rather than academic authors.

OA2020 was also raised with the University Committee on Libraries and Scholarly Communication (UCOLASC), a systemwide group with representatives from each of the 10 University of California campus library committees as well as staff from the California Digital Library.

There was a strong push to sign the OA2020 Expression of Interest from several faculty and university librarians that began in 2016 and has continued. The OA2020 champions encouraged their colleagues across the system to sign on, and some of them focused on getting UCLA on board. Key faculty were enlisted to help promote OA2020.

At the same time, [OA2020.us](https://www.oa2020.us) was launched, and the Expression of Interest was modified to be a more general, mom-and-apple-pie statement about the importance of achieving open access.<sup>4</sup> [Please see correction in the footnote]

UCLA's Committee on the Library and Scholarly Communication (COLASC) continued to discuss OA2020 and, in summer 2017, surveyed faculty to get their opinions on it.

Only 12 people responded (roughly three-quarters of one percent of the faculty), with one who unambiguously supported OA2020, five who were unambiguously opposed, and six who were ambiguous about OA2020 in particular but were critical of the strategies that would be needed to reach OA2020's goal.

UCLA's COLASC voted to recommend to the UCLA Academic Senate and campus administration that UCLA add its name to the EoI.

The Academic Senate leadership agreed and asked campus leadership to sign. Since the EoI language was described as "anodyne", which it is, the decision was made to add UCLA's name despite my concerns and despite concerns expressed by campus leadership about the potential for the APC model to exacerbate an already unsustainable scholarly communications model.

Virtue signalling?

***RP: I think you are saying that the OA2020.us EoI is a watered-down version of the Max Planck one. One might wonder why anyone would want to sign up to an anodyne statement other than as a form of virtue signalling.<sup>5</sup> Would you agree?***

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<sup>4</sup> On 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018 Virginia Steel and [Jeffrey MacKie-Mason](#) suggested the following correction: "OA2020.us is just a web site which, as it states in its title and introductory text, is a place for U.S. signatories to provide statements about their participation in OA2020. It is not a separate initiative. In particular, the OA2020 Expression of Interest was not modified: all US participants on OA2020.us signed the Max Planck Expression of Interest and no other version exists. There is a separate document, the Max Planck 'Roadmap', which is not part of the EoI commitment. It was this roadmap which changed: Initially it focused almost entirely on APCs, but in mid-2016 an additional statement about non-APC-based OA models was added that broadened its focus." [But see [this](#)]

<sup>5</sup> On 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018 Virginia Steel and [Jeffrey MacKie-Mason](#) suggested the following correction: "As has been corrected in Footnote 4 about, it was an error to suggest there is an OA2020.us EoI. There is not a separate EoI: the 10 US institutions (to date) have all signed the Max Planck EoI. What did change was the Max Planck roadmap that was expanded to include non-APC-based OA models in addition to the strategies calling for APCs." [But see [this](#)]



VS: One of the reasons why institutions may have signed on – in addition to virtue signalling – is because it’s important to keep the OA discussion on the front burner.

As we’ve already discussed, there are still faculty and others who are unaware or unconvinced, so I would hope that at least some percentage of them might be interested enough in the OA2020.us debate that they’ll do some reading and become more cognizant of the issues.

**RP: Here is what puzzles me: The ten US organisations listed on [OA2020.us](https://www.oa2020.us) are the same ten US institutions that are listed on the [OA2020 site](https://www.oa2020.org). You seem to be saying that the OA2020.us EoI/statement is a watered-down version of the OA2020 one. Have these organisations signed up to both EoIs then? If so, does that not moot the need for the US site? Also, is it not a bit deceptive if the US version was watered down to persuade more universities to sign up, to then add their names to both sites? Or are you saying that the Max Planck statement/EoI was also watered down? [See footnote 5 above].**

VS: Since I haven’t been a participant in the meetings that led to the drafting of OA2020 and that have been held since, I can’t speak authoritatively on the reasons for changes.

However, a constructive view of the changes is that the authors of the original OA2020 EoI and supporting materials have recognised that there are multiple routes to achieve OA. Not all disciplines, authors, institutions, or governments are going to agree on a single OA model, so there need to be different pathways that can be followed.

The University of California recently published a “[Pathways to OA](#)” report that describes the various models developed to date as well as the work that will need to be done on each model.

**RP: It does seem odd that so few UCLA faculty surveyed by COLASC responded to the survey (and of those who did most were opposed to or ambiguous about OA2020) and yet UCLA went ahead and endorsed the EoI. I sometimes feel that the OA movement has been primarily driven by a few individuals who, when they fail to convince colleagues about open access, proceed to lobby funders and universities to introduce policies to try and compel researchers to embrace OA. I am also struck that in responding positively to this lobbying (as they generally do), funders and institutions often introduce OA policies for reasons other than those advanced by OA advocates. In Europe, in particular, OA policies have been used to increase the levels of micro-management and bureaucratic scrutiny that researchers are subjected today, rather than to necessarily increase OA.**

**You said earlier that it is better for faculty-led initiatives to emerge rather than impose top-down policies on researchers. Compulsion does seem antithetical to the ethos of open access as articulated in the BOAI statement, and my suspicion is that it tends to turn researchers off OA rather than convince them. On the other hand, it is clear that persuading faculty is a huge task. Is there a danger that the OA project may ultimately fail?**

VS: I don’t think OA will fail – in fact, I think it has been key to changing the conversations among authors, publishers, and librarians.

Open access is already accepted by enough faculty in STEM fields to have become accepted practice, and I've heard publishers say they think OA is inevitable. In these fields the objections that arise are not to OA itself as a concept but instead to the time it takes to make one's research freely available. If research funders take on this role or work with publishers to make it easy for articles to become open, I wouldn't expect much faculty dissent.

I do agree, though, that incentivising adherence to OA is better than compelling faculty to comply – the carrot will be better received than the stick – and it's likely that more faculty will adopt OA practices sooner rather than later if they have a positive reason to do this.

That's all the more reason for institutions to think about ways to make OA an attractive, easy option for faculty, a goal that a number of organisations such as SPARC have been promoting.

Overall, though, as a colleague of mine recently said, just because we haven't reached a state of OA perfection doesn't mean there hasn't been significant steps forward in OA.

“Fundamental flaws in economic logic?”

***RP: To go back to the flip strategy: As you know, your colleague at Berkeley [Jeff MacKie-Mason](#) is not only committed to the OA2020 initiative but [convinced](#) that a global flip is the only way of achieving open access in the near time. When he [responded](#) to your open letter he argued (as he often does when rebutting those who worry about the implications and practicalities of a global flip) that people who argue against it do so as a result of “fundamental flaws in economic logic”. He adds, “Changing the funding model from post-payment to pre-payment does not increase the costs of production [of] journal publications, thus publishers will not have higher costs that they ‘need’ to recover. And changing the funding model from post-payment to pre-payment does not increase publisher market power, so they will not be able to collect more money from research institutions than they already collect.”***

***Do you accept that argument? If not, why? Is it that arguments that seek to explain the world in terms of economics alone are insufficient for predicting future behaviour?***

**VS:** I don't agree with Jeff's conclusions primarily because the commercial publishers are in business to make as large a profit as they can for their owners and shareholders, so production costs are almost irrelevant as long as they're being covered. The publishers will charge what they can get away with, and the largest three or four have been successful in generating huge returns of the order of 30 percent profit or more.

As long as the publishers control the intellectual property, they will use it to make as much money as they can, either by charging high subscription costs that inflate at rates much higher than the Consumer Price Index year after year or by ratcheting up APCs over time to substitute for lost subscription revenue.

In terms of predicting future behaviour, in my career as a librarian I have often observed people acting in ways that aren't rational and continuing to adhere to beliefs that are no longer based in reality.

By way of example, most librarians who have large legacy print collections to manage know that despite the abundance of data showing declining use of print and the increasing use of e-journals, in particular, there is always a subset of the user community that believes passionately that print must be retained. This is an argument based more on holding onto the past than on looking forward to the future.

In Joi Ito's book, [Whiplash](#), he talks about "[o]ur own habits of mind..different in content, but no less stubborn in character." He also goes on to posit an "argument we develop...that our current cognitive tool set leaves us ill-equipped to comprehend the profound implications posed by rapid advances in everything from communications to warfare."

I would include our system of scholarly communications as one area in which many people are still adhering to long-established ways of handling the entire process instead of thinking about and experimenting with new models that can not only make important content available but advance research on some of the challenges facing modern society.

#### Pathways, policies and strategy

**RP:** *As we noted, the flip strategy is really a European idea. You probably saw the recent Scholarly Kitchen [post](#) by Roger Schonfeld in which he expressed some scepticism about the likelihood of it being exported to North America in any significant way. As it happens, four days prior to Schonfeld's post, MIT announced that it had [signed](#) a deal with the Royal Society of Chemistry intended to "shift publishing models toward open access". However, in discussing this I think we need to distinguish between a number of different models.*

*There is the offsetting model developed by [Jisc in the UK](#), which was primarily a response to publisher double-dipping. There is the [Read and Publish model](#) pioneered by the RSC, which would seem to be more focused on facilitating a transition to OA. And there is the "Publish and Read" model that [Project DEAL](#) has been calling for in Germany. The latter is intended to force publishers to agree to deals in which (for a set price) eligible researchers would be able to publish all their research with the publisher on an open access basis PLUS be able to read all that publisher's e-journals for no additional fee – what we might want to call an [OA Big Deal](#). What are the respective merits of these different models in your view?*

**VS:** What's really important and needs to be carefully evaluated in all of these models is 1) who controls the copyright of the content, 2) to whom is reading access provided, and 3) is there equity in the opportunities to publish for researchers in institutions or parts of the world that are not able to provide the level of financial support available in Europe and North America.

The ultimate goal of OA is to allow open sharing of research results in a way that offers equal opportunities for researchers around the world to publish, preserves effective peer review, allows authors to retain control over their work, allows worldwide reading access, and provides a

sustainable financial model that covers the costs of publishing. The models listed above have some of those characteristics but not all. It's still very much a work in progress, and there are competing interests that make these conversations difficult.

***RP: Let's, in the interests of fairness, turn this round and view the situation from the publisher's point of view. As I understand it, the Swedish Bibsam Consortium recently rejected an offer from Elsevier (and announced it was [cancelling its agreement](#) with the publisher) because Elsevier would not agree to a DEAL-style contract. What Bibsam wanted, it said, was an agreement that would provide "immediate open access to all articles published in Elsevier journals by researchers affiliated to participating organisations, reading access for participating organisations to all articles in Elsevier's 1,900 journals and a sustainable price model that enables a transition to open access."***

***It was put to me recently that since Sweden accounts for just 1.3% of the papers published by Elsevier, it is unreasonable for Swedish institutions to ask for the right "to read 98.7% of the global output for free if taxpayers from those other countries do not wish to pay for Gold OA?" To put it another way, why should for-profit publishers like Elsevier take a financial hit for the open access cause? Do you think that putting it that way points to the fact that the OA movement is faced with an intractable problem or, as my interlocutor put it, a Gordian knot?***

VS: This is where I think there needs to be more thought and discussion about new models of scholarly communication that are equitable, affordable, and sustainable over time and that take advantage of the technologies available today.

The for-profit publishers have been able to control publishing and reading to a greater extent than is healthy for many readers or potential readers, libraries, their parent institutions, and many authors. Since production and distribution is different now and there are multiple options for open publishing (OJS, for example), we are at a point in time where we can think differently about the roles in the publishing process.

Publishers, who are good at editorial work and branding, could and should be part of the equation, but I would argue that they shouldn't control readership and use of the content. And the financial support publishers receive should be based on their actual costs.

***RP: Personally, I find it hard to see how a global flip could work unless a majority of the world's major research institutions/funders signed up to it. Yet, aside from 7 California-based universities, the only US institutions to sign up to OA2020 appear to be Wayne State, Iowa State, and North Texas. And it is now two years since the original initiative was launched.***

***Meanwhile, we are seeing European funders [start to talk about](#) a future without legacy publishers. Can the OA2020 strategy nevertheless succeed? If it doesn't succeed what are the implications for the progress of open access in your view?***

VS: A global flip is just one way to achieve OA, and it has yet to be shown to work at scale in reality. But there are plenty of other routes being explored. As I noted, the University of

California just published a “Pathways to OA” document that outlines the variety of approaches, and librarians and faculty are pursuing all of those approaches to a greater or lesser extent.

For instance, a small group of members of the Association of Research Libraries is working on “Academy-owned OA” ([AO-OA](#)) and is partnering with a handful of professional societies and disciplinary repositories to explore new models to move away from subscription-based models dominated by commercial publishers.

Succeeding with OA will require multiple models that will vary depending on disciplinary needs and the cultures and scholarly communications models of those disciplines.

*RP: Yes, I saw the Pathways document. More recently (25<sup>th</sup> April) the University Committee on Library and Scholarly Communication (which I believe is the committee you mentioned earlier) published a [Declaration of Rights to Transform Scholarly Communication](#). This includes 18 principles. After reading these, I began again to wonder if universities might not have become a little [unrealistic in their demands of publishers](#) (see also [here](#))? Either way, I find it hard to believe that publishers would agree to some of the demands made in the document. Were you involved in the drafting of that letter? Do you support it?*

VS: I wasn’t directly involved in the drafting of that document, although I did see a version before it was finalised. It strikes me as an aspirational document and one that will be used to get a dialogue started with publishers.

I think it’s important to aim high, but I also recognise how challenging it’s going to be to achieve what’s laid out in this Declaration. Life in the library world includes constant negotiations that sometimes include drawing firm lines in the sand and other times include compromises.

*RP: UC has published a fair number of documents about open access in recent years, and their production seems to be accelerating! The latest one – which is referred to as a [Call to Action](#) – was published on 21<sup>st</sup> June. It occurs to me that the series of OA documents we have seen emerge from UC tells us something about the way in which universities are having to adjust their strategy in response to events.*

*So, UC began in 2013 by introducing [OA policies](#). As noted earlier, these have had mixed success and encouraged the growth of expensive hybrid OA, which most agree has delayed rather than speeded up any transition to OA. Then, as we discussed, last year 7 UC campuses [signed up](#) to the OA 2020 Initiative, which was viewed as a way of speeding up the transition and phasing out expensive hybrid OA – by forcing all subscription journals to become pure open access journals. I think we agree that this has not been well received in the US and there must be doubts as to its eventual success. In February, the [Pathways to Open Access](#) document was published which, as you note, proposes a multiple model to achieve OA. Then in April, the [Declaration of Rights and Principles to Transform Scholarly Communication](#) was published, which you say is more of an aspirational document than a list of realisable measures. Most recently, we saw the publication of the [Call to Action](#) document.*



*As I understand it, this last document proposes that subscription renewal negotiations with publishers be used as levers to both reduce costs while increasing the quantity of research papers made open access. I guess this assumes agreeing Jisc-style offsetting models. The aim, we are told, is to address the “twin challenges of journal affordability and the moral imperative of achieving a truly open scholarly communication system”.*

*Would it be fair to say that, taken together, these documents demonstrate that to achieve its OA objectives the University has had to be reactive (to events) rather than proactive, and has sometimes had to reverse tack. If so, is this simply what one would expect when trying to implement cultural change, or could it be that the OA movement is in danger of going in circles? Also, can you say what UC means when it talks about the “moral imperative” of achieving OA (what is the moral imperative?). And what is meant by the term “a truly open scholarly communication system.”? I assume this goes to what you said earlier about creating a Sustainable Knowledge Commons where “all types of content – articles, data, and other research outputs – are openly available, discoverable, preserved, and have a robust financial foundation.” But what does “openly available” mean in practice? Many OA advocates, for instance, will tell you that research and data are only open when they have a [CC BY](#) or [CC0](#) licence attached so that they can be edited, repurposed and reused by anyone, even for commercial purposes. Is that what UC means by openly available?*

VS: What we in UC have been working on is building momentum around OA, so the increasing frequency of documents being developed indicates continuing commitment to bringing about long-term changes in scholarly communication. And, as we’ve discussed, this will require greater faculty support and awareness. We have to be proactive *and* reactive since we’re talking about a new vision for the future while we’re still working within traditional structures that we’re pushing to evolve.

In terms of precise definitions of the “moral imperative” of OA or even what is meant by “openly available”, we haven’t had a conclusive set of conversations across the UC system about what those would be. My interpretation – and it’s really only mine – is that “moral imperative” means what I’ve already said. Making content openly available, though, will take time and discussion since there isn’t consensus on, say, whether or not content should be available for reuse by commercial publishers.

## Publishers

*RP: Initially, OA advocates argued that in the age of the internet publishers should be no more than service providers (offering publishing services) not (as they have been historically) the effective owners of both scholarly content and the infrastructure over which it is distributed. More and more, however, we are seeing the argument advanced that there is in fact [no longer any useful role for academic publishers to play](#), particularly given the way they first resisted and then co-opted open access for their own benefit.*

*From your answers, I am thinking that perhaps you too feel there is no longer a useful role for publishers to play in scholarly communication. Is that right? If not, what role should they play, and how can the research community persuade or compel them to adopt that role?*



**VS:** Actually, I think publishers do have a useful role to play in terms of their editorial work (managing the review process, selecting papers, requesting revisions, and working with authors) as well as in the production work on layout and organisation.

As an example of this, the [California Digital Library](#) and the [University of California Press](#) received a [grant](#) from the [Mellon Foundation](#) to develop an open source publishing platform that is a step forward from the work that's been done as part of [OJS](#). The intention is not to make publishers irrelevant but instead to allow the publishing function to be added to institutional repositories.

Although it's early days yet, I think there's a lot of potential for publishers to work with institutional IR hosts to find promising content and to then work with faculty authors when they're ready to move from the working paper stage to formal publication that includes peer review and more traditional vetting.

Having said all this, I do hope that the days of the big commercial publishers making excessive profits and controlling a lot of the content will come to an end soon.

**RP:** *You say you hope the days of the big commercial publishers making excessive profits and controlling a lot of the content will come to an end soon. The question we keep coming back to, of course, is how to achieve that. As we have discussed, one strategy being explored today is to sign OA Big Deals and offsetting agreements in the hope that by doing so the research community will be able to claw back money from publishers that can then be used to support and fund new-style OA publishing solutions (presumably in the hope of eventually freeing itself from big commercial publishers) Another strategy, of course, would be to simply walk away from legacy publishers and use the large sums of money this would release to fund alternative solutions – in the manner [proposed](#) recently by the [Bibsam consortium](#), for instance.*

*But I am wondering how practical either of these options is. The first would require publishers to agree to lower their prices in order to release money back to the research community. This seems improbable given that the research community still appears to lack the necessary muscle to force publishers to lower their prices. The second option would likely lead to considerable pushback from researchers. After all, they really like publishing in (and reading) legacy journals.*

*Either way, the current situation is that in their bid to engineer a transition to open access universities find they are now having to pay both traditional subscriptions and a constantly rising APC bill, and there currently appears to me to be no clear path to escape from that. Given the affordability problem you pointed to, I find it hard therefore to see how the research community can hope to provide anything other than token funding for alternative publishing solutions. If right, this suggests that the Pathways idea of multiple approaches to achieving OA may not be achievable. But maybe I am missing something here?*

**VS:** You're totally right that this is a challenging situation, but we need to be persistent in moving forward on multiple levels. At the micro level, we need to keep encouraging faculty to deposit in OA repositories and publish in true OA journals, and at the macro level, we need to keep the dialogue going with publishers to reinforce our willingness to walk away from bad deals and our increasing resolve to adhere to OA policies and principles.

We also need to continue to urge professional societies and our faculty editors to collaborate on the development of models that will be more cost-effective than many of the current commercial journals. If individual libraries or library consortia could move toward the addition of overlay journals to institutional repositories, this would be a step forward and would provide information about what the costs would be.

At the same time, though, faculty and university administrators will need to ramp up the level of discussion about promotion and tenure review and how publications are assessed. Progress will probably not be linear, but we need to continue to take incremental, significant steps on all aspects of this cultural shift to keep moving the line.

An example of what I'm talking about in terms of adding overlay journals to IRs is the work that's being done by the UC Press and CDL to develop an open journal publishing platform that can be "bolted on" to an institutional repository. If affordable options for publication can be made available and we can enlist professional societies to try new approaches, over time we will be able to figure out how to sustain these new models. Again, this will need to be embraced by senior administrative leaders in the academy to help influence faculty, but given that the current subscription model for journals is unsustainable, this seems do-able over a period of time.

***RP: Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that university managers eventually decide they have no choice but to walk away from legacy publishers (whatever the wishes of researchers) and ask ourselves whether that would provide a solution to the affordability problem? As you know, these companies have over the years accumulated massive databases of research. If all future papers were made open access with a CC BY or CC0 licence attached (as OA advocates insist they should be) publishers would be able to harvest those papers and continue building up their databases.***

***By mining all this freely-given data they would be able to create powerful AI engines – as Elsevier is [already doing](#) – and develop a host of new products and services to sell back to the research community at high prices. In addition, they are moving into the workflow area with new products, further embedding themselves in the research process.***

***Is it realistic to think that big commercial publishers will disappear any time soon, or cease to make excessive profits from the research community? In short, does not the affordability problem look set only to worsen whatever happens?***

**VS:** I don't think commercial publishers are going to disappear entirely anytime soon, and it's clear that they've been looking ahead and thinking about their next suites of products and services. They are responsible to their shareholders and owners and are driven to make sizeable

profits, and, in many cases, they have already started marketing their database capabilities to research administrators instead of librarians.

That's one of the reasons why the level of OA advocacy at many institutions is increasing – those who have been involved in these discussions for a while need to help institutional decision-makers understand the financial and operational risks of giving away this information only to have to buy it back at higher and higher prices.

Fortunately, libraries and faculty OA advocates have direct ties to our local user communities, and we have been building closer relationships with our researchers. That enables us to understand what their current and future needs are and to collaborate in building open tools and platforms that we hope will be excellent alternatives to expensive commercial products.

### Funders and preprints

**RP:** *I want to go back to the point you made about funders taking a more active role with regard to making scholarly research more open. I am not sure if you were referring to the fact that funders like [The Gates Foundation](#) and [The Wellcome Trust](#) etc. have begun to launch their own publishing platforms (usually using the [F1000Research](#) platform), but I wonder if you see any dangers in this development? Might it raise conflict of interest issues for instance?*

**VS:** I think the main point of this approach is to ensure open publication so that anyone interested around the world will be able to read the results of this research. Faculty and other authors need to retain ownership of their intellectual property so that they can grant non-exclusive licenses that will allow publication and reuse of their content in repositories.

So far as I know, the funders who are establishing publishing platforms are not limiting publication of research they have supported only to their platforms. I don't foresee them taking control of the content that comes from their funded research in the same ways that commercial publishers have.

**RP:** *Finally, I would be interested in your views on the new preprint servers we are seeing emerge (most built on the Open Science Framework platform you referred to earlier). As a result of this development, many publishers now accept that papers can be made available as preprints prior to submission to a journal, and funders are encouraging their use. Indeed, following the publication of an [updated recommendation](#) on access to scientific research, the EU has released a "[Commission Staff Working Document](#)" that states, "Early sharing of publications (pre-prints) will satisfy open access requirements."*

*I wonder how you see these servers developing? For instance, you talked of IRs becoming new platforms for overlay journals and associated services. Might it rather be these centralized preprint servers (some of which belong to legacy publishers like the ACS and RSC) who take on that role rather than IRs?*

*In any case, do you think preprint servers can address the "twin challenges of journal affordability and the moral imperative of achieving a truly open scholarly communication*

*system” that UC wants to see, or create the “Sustainable Knowledge Commons” you referred to? Is there not a danger that they will simply be co-opted by publishers and become one more tool that they can use to tax the research community?*

**VS:** Actually, I’m optimistic about the potential of preprint servers becoming full-scale platforms that provide access to preprints, peer-reviewed content, and underlying datasets.

If the academy builds open tools that result in a “Sustainable Knowledge Commons” and there is widespread collaboration with professional societies, I would hope that governance models would ensure that control is retained by the academy and the content creators.

But there will have to be a deep institutional commitment to not cede control.

**RP:** *Thank you very much for taking the time to answer my questions.*

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**Richard Poynder 2018**

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