

## Guest Editorial

# Introduction to *C&RL* Topical Issue: Open and Equitable Scholarly Communications

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The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL, a division of the American Library Association) has a long history of involvement in helping to shape the evolution of scholarly communications and the role of academic libraries within it. A recent milestone was the June 2019 release of the publication *Open and Equitable Scholarly Communications: Creating a More Inclusive Future*,<sup>1</sup> with significant involvement from ACRL's Research and Scholarly Environment Committee (ReSEC) as described in the report's foreword. Broader in scope than past 2004 and 2007 ACRL scholarly communication research agendas, the 2019 report was more ambitious and action-oriented, and it put social justice at the center as part of ACRL's broader core commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

ACRL sought, through the research agenda, to challenge the profession and encouraged readers to take action—whether by implementing the practical actions in that report or investigating a recommended research question. In tandem with the release of the report, ACRL issued a call for proposals for research grants intended to spur inquiry in the three priority areas: people, content, and systems. The first section, on people, addressed embracing diversity and inclusion, improving the working lives of people engaged in scholarly communications, and increasing awareness concerning creators' rights. The section on content acknowledged the opportunity for greater inclusion and openness by rethinking how value is assigned to scholarly materials and creating more representative and open collections. The section on systems identified several avenues to explore supporting sustainable technological infrastructure, creating systems that permit more access to more people, building mission-aligned organizational and financial systems, and advancing innovation in academic libraries.

ACRL ReSEC proposed this topical issue of *College & Research Libraries* to showcase new research on how the academic and research library workforce has accelerated change in the scholarly communications environment. Once approved by the *C&RL* editorial board, we issued an open call for proposals in August 2022, particularly welcoming articles resulting from collaborative research involving librarians and other higher education stakeholders (such as institutional researchers, faculty, administration, students, or community partners). Given the focus of *Open and Equitable Scholarly Communications* on valuing different ways of knowing, the

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committee also welcomed adventurous scholarship, and encouraged work on issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion as they relate to academic libraries and scholarly communication.

Proposals underwent an open peer review process, meaning we as guest editors knew the names and institutions of prospective authors for each proposal. We also shared the proposals and author names with then-current members of ACRL ReSEC and our team of developmental reviewers to comment on, if they chose. We returned proposals with substantive comments, including the name of the individual making them.

Authors accepted for this topical issue developed full drafts and received developmental feedback from us and past members of ACRL ReSEC who contributed to the *Open and Equitable Scholarly Communications* report—Isaac Gilman, Charlotte Roh, and Yasmeen Shorish. They knew whose work they were commenting on, and authors knew who had reviewed their work. Our hope was to enhance collaboration and connectedness during the developmental stage of the writing process. We shared drafts in progress as well as this essay with *C&RL* Editor Kristen Totleben. Once manuscripts were final, we shared them with her again. ACRL staff members have key roles in this topical issue: Dawn Mueller was responsible for design, layout, and production, and David Free promoted it through ACRL communications channels. We name all the people involved, in addition to the authors themselves, to illuminate the nature of this endeavor as a scholarly conversation and to acknowledge otherwise invisible labor.

Each of the articles in this issue considers open and equitable scholarly communications in a number of ways—and, indeed, the facets reflected in the research agenda are interconnected and interdependent. However, we have aligned all of the articles with the agenda's core concepts—people, content, and systems—to more clearly illustrate how the authors approach these topics.

## People

While all the articles in this issue address people in some way, two groups of researchers focused on illuminating challenges, concerns, and inequities in individuals' work in order to support more open, equitable, and inclusive scholarly communication in the future.

In "Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Faculty Perceptions of Open Access in the Social Sciences and Humanities," Camille Thomas and Tatiana Bryant explore the risks and rewards that BIPOC faculty experience around open access publishing. Through research funded by an ACRL grant, Thomas and Bryant found that when BIPOC faculty in these disciplinary areas choose to engage in open access publishing, they face additional requirements, both implicit and explicit, to attain promotion and tenure. On top of these added expectations, research participants spoke to the hypervigilance required to ensure that their research had meaningful impact, especially when it occurred with marginalized communities or centered on marginalized topics. Not only do their white counterparts not experience such expectations, but Thomas and Bryant explain that BIPOC faculty's work may transgress departmental or disciplinary norms, which further complicates their ability to earn tenure and promotion. Given the gap in research on faculty who identify as BIPOC, Thomas and Bryant bring valuable perspectives from scholars in disciplinary fields not often considered in the context of open access publishing, and their work helps us understand where we might go in creating more equitable and open systems for tenure and promotion.

In "'I Create Open Access in My Own Way': Perspectives on Open Access and Publishing Choices from Faculty at Regional Campuses at a R1 University," Charlotte M. Johnson, Marc

E. Ross, and Lauren B. Collister examine the publishing practices and priorities for faculty of R1 institutions who work at regional campuses. Previous research on faculty publication venue choice reveals tension between the benefits of open access and institutional pressure for faculty to publish in specific journals for review purposes. However, faculty on regional campuses are asked to approach their work differently than those at parent locations, and so understanding their attitudes and experiences helps us to understand open access publishing more holistically. Through their exploration of faculty's perspectives and practices at the University of Pittsburgh's regional campuses, Johnson, Ross, and Collister provide a perspective that is underrepresented in the literature and underserved in terms of support for publishing research. In doing so, these authors give voice to their research participants' work in more inclusive ways and offer us new ideas to impact scholarly communications practices across academe.

## Content

One article explicitly addresses key questions related to content, and especially how our commitment to and engagement with more open intellectual products can impact faculty and students. In "How Diverse, Equitable, and Inclusive Are Open and Affordable Course Materials?" Ashley D.R. Sergiadis, Philip Smith, and Mohammad Moin Uddin report the results of a survey of fourteen general education courses that used open and affordable materials. They asked both instructors and students to consider the equitable use and access of the materials, the diversity of representation within the content of the materials, and the possible pedagogical impacts (especially inclusive teaching). Based on survey responses, Sergiadis, Smith, and Uddin note that instructors using open educational resources need to begin by ensuring that students can effectively access and use any such resources; from there, they should customize these learning tools as much as possible in order to reflect students' identities and learning needs. Once faculty members achieve these lower-order goals, the authors found that using open educational resources doesn't guarantee better support for equity, diversity, and inclusion in a course. However, the authors argue that instructors can use conscious pedagogical practices such as transparent design to connect open educational resources with equity, diversity, and inclusion goals in more intentional and structured ways, enabling us to think about content in more open and equitable ways.

## Systems

The majority of the articles in this issue focus on the systems that inhibit or facilitate a more open and equitable scholarly communications landscape. In "Building Community: Supporting Minoritized Scholars through Library Publishing and Open and Equitable Revenue Models," Harrison W. Inefuku, Curtis Brundy, and Sharla Lair present a critical analysis of current open access journal funding models in use by libraries in the United States; what's more, they explore whether these models benefit or harm authors who hold marginalized identities. The authors acknowledge the shortcomings in using library publishing programs to disrupt the author-facing open access publishing costs and diversify the scholarly record. As an alternative, Inefuku, Brundy, and Lair offer the Lyris Open Access Community Investment Program (OACIP) model as an alternative; they see it as a potential revenue stream for library publishing programs, whereby they may develop the resources to reach the potential of serving as a site of disruption. The authors note that many libraries and library organizations espouse diversity, equity, and inclusion as core values and issued anti-racism statements

in the wake of the murder of George Floyd in 2020, but the actions taken as yet have been minimal. However, by using library publishing programs to disseminate scholarship by and about marginalized communities and supporting these efforts through collective funding programs like OACIP, Inefuku, Brundy, and Lair argue that libraries can take steps to follow through on commitments expressed through their values and in their anti-racism statements.

Sarah Severson and Jessica Lange's article, "Organizational Structures and Relationships in Canadian, Noncommercial Journals: Supporting Scholar-Led Publishing," provides us with a perspective on how noncommercial journals operate and organize their daily activities in order to ensure their success, longevity, and sustainability. Noncommercial journals are excellent examples of "community-owned" scholarship, and understanding how their infrastructure is owned and staffed is an area of need identified in the *Open and Equitable Scholarly Communications* research agenda. Severson and Lange interviewed the editorial leadership (e.g., managing editors, editors in chief) of fifteen Canadian noncommercial journals; through their conversations, we learn more about such journals' organizational structures and relationships with external organizations (e.g., associations, libraries). From this foundation, Severson and Lange propose directions for library publishers as they seek to strategically align their services to better meet the needs of the editorial teams on their platforms. As library publishers' services mature, it is critical that we understand how to effectively and equitably coordinate the work of library publishers and those interested in academy-led scholarly publishing. Doing so will help us to construct technical and financial systems that are more equitable.

Rachel Borchardt, DeDe Dawson, and Teresa Schultz explore a different but related systems aspect in their article "Financial and Other Perceived Barriers to Transitioning to an Equitable No-Publishing Fee Open Access Model: A Survey of LIS Journal Editors." While the authors note that they began their research assuming that open access is a shared value across librarianship, they found that this principle is put into practice in different ways and at different levels. Borchardt, Dawson, and Teresa Schultz gathered information from editors of twenty library and information science journals and found that financial barriers have kept most LIS journals from discussing a transition to a no-fee open access model. While the authors note that open access is, in fact, a value that is generally shared by the editors they surveyed, they did find some disagreement about the value of open access among editors of society journals, who wield greater power in transitioning to no-fee open access models. By exploring the funding models that support open access publishing, the authors help us better understand certain systemic roadblocks to practicing open access in our own discipline.

In "Towards a New Precedent in Open Grants: An Exploration of Shared Challenges and Benefits of Making Grant Proposals Open Access in the Academic and Public Spheres," Hannah Toombs, Hao Ye, and Perry Collins present an environmental scan about the current state of open access grant proposals. While grant proposals are central to the work of scholars in nearly all areas of academic and public research communities, they are rarely included in our conversations about open access. Whereas published results from grant-funded projects may be available through online repositories, grant proposals themselves—whether successful or unsuccessful—are not commonly published. Although stolen research ideas and disciplinary competition are valid concerns, a lack of open access in terms of grant proposals can impact early career researchers, under-resourced institutions, and traditionally marginalized scholars; a lack of open access may also create barriers to funding and research accessibility along with reproducibility, process transparency, and grant recipients' representation. Toombs,

Ye, and Collins conducted a literature review, held a stakeholder discussion, and analyzed existing repositories that contain grant proposals to better understand and frame the central challenges. They conclude with ideas about how we might increase access to such resources so as to contribute to equity and transparency in funding distribution. Moreover, they use their findings to consider what standards and incentives could effectively improve grant proposal accessibility, thereby supporting equity at systemic levels.

## In Closing

As noted above, this issue presents the findings of research that responded to ACRL's 2019 *Open and Equitable* scholarly communications research agenda. However, it is not the sum of the research inspired by that publication. ACRL awarded seven research grants, and most recipients chose other venues to disseminate their work. Additional relevant research may have been inspired by the research agenda but did not respond to the call for proposals.

In the meantime, the field has continued to evolve independently of any of the work the *Open and Equitable* research agenda instigated, and sometimes in ways that none of us anticipated. For example, the 2020 global pandemic disrupted every economic sector and every aspect of society, yet it also accelerated demand for open access scientific literature. Social justice movements at the same time have heightened the importance of conversations around the importance of equity, inclusion, and justice in many facets of life, including academic discourse. And the proliferation of generative artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT adds new dimensions to conversations around scholarly communications. While the landscape continues to evolve, the overarching goal of making scholarly communications more open, equitable, and inclusive remains. In 2023–24, as ACRL refreshes its strategic plan, the association remains steadfast in its strategic goal that the academic and research library workforce accelerate the transition to more open and equitable systems of scholarship.

Our goal, then, is for this selection of articles to serve as concrete evidence of how we can think about dynamic topics in meaningful ways during changing times. Indeed, there are new and sometimes unexpected developments ahead of us as we consider how to make the scholarly communications landscape more open and equitable. But by considering these authors' understandings of the people, content, and systems at play at present, we hope that the field will continue to consider the lessons learned from the 2019 research agenda as we collectively look ahead and advance our shared discussion about these ideas.

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## Note

1. Association of College and Research Libraries, *Open and Equitable Scholarly Communications: Creating a More Inclusive Future*, prepared by Nancy Maron and Rebecca Kennison with Paul Bracke, Nathan Hall, Isaac Gilman, Kara Malenfant, Charlotte Roh, and Yasmeen Shorish, (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2019) <https://doi.org/10.5860/acrl.1>