

Editorial

An Open Question

The “Open Access” question in scientific publishing has spawned spirited debates, new journals, National Institutes of Health directives and no shortage of sure-fire plans to “fix” the way scientific findings are communicated. Each group in this debate has its well-defined reasons why its viewpoint is the correct one. Certainly there are legitimate reasons why government-funded research should be available to those who paid for it, but the reality, at least for the *Journal of Neuroscience* is that 96% of the articles published since 1981 are already freely available to anyone with Internet access. Only the 600 papers published in the last 6 months are under access control, and those are freely available to each of the >35,000 members of the Society for Neuroscience (SfN) as a benefit of membership, as well as at more than 1000 libraries across the world. A recent survey of the membership indicated strong support for the concept of open access, but an unwillingness to pay the ~\$3000 cost of each article published in the *Journal*, perhaps not a surprise in this year of uncertain grant funding. The cost of publishing a *Journal of Neuroscience* paper is approximately equally divided between the costs of peer review (online submission system, Central Office operations, editorial honoraria) and publication (copyediting, figure and text composition, proof generation, and online hosting by HighWire Press).

But perhaps Open Access is not even the central question. Rather, the issue might be better framed as how we, as (neuro) scientists, can best make our work accessible to our colleagues and to the public in the rapidly changing publishing environment. There is no dearth of questions: What should be the criteria for “publishing” a paper? Is anonymous peer review the best system? What are the roles of commercial and society-based journals? And yes, of course, who pays?

As part of an effort to address these questions, the Society leadership organized a Publishing Open Access Group that has been discussing these issues. As part of this effort, we invited input from a number of people who have been involved in various publishing experiments and enterprises. Their viewpoints are included in a series of commentaries beginning with the September 6th issue and extending for the next 5 weeks. I hope that you will find these interesting, while at the same time recognizing that these are not necessarily the viewpoints of the *Journal* or the Society leadership.

If you are interested in these issues, please consider attending

the Publishing Roundtable at the Annual Meeting moderated by incoming SfN President and former Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Neuroscience*, David Van Essen.

(R)evolution in scientific publishing: How will it affect you?, Monday Oct 16, 9:30 A.M. http://www.sfn.org/am2006/index.cfm?pagename=app_eventsWorkshops&session_id=114, or post your views to <http://forums.sfn.org/>.

Gary Westbrook, Editor-in-Chief, *The Journal of Neuroscience*

Commentary Series

Sept 6 Why Open Access to Research and Scholarship? John Willinsky

John Willinsky is Pacific Press Professor of Literacy and Technology at the University of British Columbia. He is the author of *The Access Principle. The case for Open Access to Research and Scholarship* (MIT Press, 2006).

Sept 13 Will Research Sharing Keep Pace with the Internet? Richard K. Johnson

Richard Johnson was the founding Executive Director of SPARC (Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition), which was founded in 1998 by a group of libraries to promote competition in scholarly publishing.

Sept 20 As We May Read. Paul Ginsparg

Paul Ginsparg is a professor of physics and computing and information science at Cornell University. He is the creator of <http://arXiv.org>, which provides an immediately available, online “archive” of preprints, primarily in physics, mathematics, and computer science. Submissions are not peer-reviewed, but can be submitted as well to peer-reviewed journals.

Sept 27 Reinventing the Biomedical Journal. Richard Smith

Richard Smith is Chief Executive of UnitedHealth Group Europe and former Editor of the *British Medical Journal*. He is a board member of the Public Library of Science.

Oct 4 Open Access and the Future of the Scientific Research Article. Matthew Cockerill and Vitek Tracz

Matthew Cockerill is Publisher at BioMed Central, which currently publishes 162 open access journals in biology and medicine. Vitek Tracz is Chairman of the Science Navigation Group (formerly Current Science Group) of which BioMed Central is a member company.