

# Scholarly Publishing—Major Issues and Responses in the Twenty-first Century

## An Interview with Mary Case

Marta Mestrovic Deyrup



In early winter 2002, *LA&M* met with Mary Case, director of the Association of Research Libraries' (ARL) Office of Scholarly Communication (OSC) in Washington, D.C. Case has been director of the office since 1996, and has worked on many of the policy issues at the forefront of ARL's activities. In 1997 she coordinated the Conference

on the Specialized Scholarly Monograph in Crisis and helped organize a Pew Higher Education Roundtable on Managing Intellectual Property. Since then, she has worked on creating principles for scholarly publishing and licensing electronic resources, written white papers for ARL, and acted as a spokeswoman for the research library community. Perhaps the most important activities Case has been involved in are the establishment of the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) and the Create Change educational campaign.

The ARL offices on Dupont Circle offer a panoramic view of the nation's capital. This view seems fitting for an organization involved in so many of the key issues facing academic libraries today.

*Q: Let's begin by talking a bit about OSC. What is it?*

*A:* The office itself was formed in the early 1990s and grew out of a concern about the rising cost of journals. ARL had been tracking those costs since 1986. It had commissioned studies in the late 1980s to document the serials crisis and its causes. One of the recommendations of the studies was that the association should create an office that would help build understanding within the broader academic community and explore strategies for action. The report suggested that electronic publishing, which was then in the early stages of development, might offer some potential for reducing the costs of publishing. There was a great concern that something needed to be done and that there needed to be some energy behind it. The association went to its members for a dues increase to staff the office. Ann Okerson was hired as the first program officer of what was then the Office of

Scientific and Academic Publishing. Ann served in that capacity until she left for Yale in 1995 and I was hired in 1996. During that transition the name of the office was changed to what it is currently—the Office of Scholarly Communication.

*Q: Why was the name changed?*

*A:* To capture more broadly the scholarly communication set of issues. I think a number of people thought the office was actually a publisher.

*Q: What was it that brought you to the office?*

*A:* I was introduced to the serials crisis when I was head of the serials department at Northwestern in 1986. That fall we received our serials invoice and the price increases were phenomenal. It was too late to cancel anything, but we were finding increases of 25, 35, or 40 percent, which meant, basically, that nobody could buy books that year. I did a number of internal studies and tried to sort through what was happening. I was also hearing at ALA many heated discussions of the issues. In the meantime, over the next few years, I became more interested in planning and was involved in strategic and long-range planning efforts, both within the library and in our university's program review office. I actually spent a couple of years as director of program review in the office of the vice-president for administration and planning at Northwestern. That was a fascinating opportunity to get a sense of what the broader issues at a university were and understand what departments and schools were doing, something I never would have had an opportunity to find out otherwise. The job at ARL intrigued me when it became open because it was a nice melding of my interest in policy and planning and in library issues.

*Q: Were you brought in to accomplish a set of objectives?*

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**A:** There was a sense that a lot of the early effort really focused on trying to get the message out. Ann traveled all over the country during those years trying to explain the problem. She went to campuses to talk about the issues and bring faculty and librarians together. She also had been working with societies and university presses and hosted a number of conferences looking at electronic publishing. The next stage of development was to find a way to institutionalize the educational effort needed to carry the message forward. At the same time, we continued efforts to identify a project or action the community could undertake to confront the problem. It really wasn't until SPARC that we were able to find a larger contingent of the library community willing to begin to do something.

**Q:** *Can you describe SPARC? What does it do?*

**A:** SPARC came from a comment made by Ken Frazier at the University of Wisconsin at an ARL meeting in May 1997. ARL members had spent several years trying to figure out a way forward, how to make a change in the system. People couldn't come to a consensus on what to do. Out of frustration, Ken finally stood up and said if we all just put ten thousand dollars in a pot and started to publish a few titles that would be in direct competition with the highest priced journals we might begin to make some inroads and show that we could publish quality journals for far less cost.

Initially, there wasn't much response, but out in the halls after the meeting a number of people came up to Ken and said we needed to do something—whether right or wrong, we needed to try to deal with this issue. So Duane Webster, the executive director of ARL, and I said we would help move this idea forward. A couple of weeks later we had a meeting at ALA. About forty-five directors showed up. There was great interest.

Over the next few months we chose the name SPARC and began to think about what a business plan might look like. The decision was made that SPARC itself would not become a publisher. There were many able publishers out there already. We needed to be working more closely with them—societies, the university presses, the nonprofits—to encourage them to think about creating the kind of competition that we were interested in and to let them know we would support them by subscribing to their titles. In June 1998 we hired Rick Johnson as our SPARC enterprise director and announced our first partnership with the American Chemical Society (ACS). We had close to ninety institutions within the first six months who each contributed five thousand dollars towards the creation of SPARC to get it going.

**Q:** *Do you see SPARC as a model for humanities publishing, or is that a whole other kettle of fish?*

**A:** SPARC has been considering supporting projects in humanities and social sciences publishing. The steering committee has said that SPARC should go in that direc-

tion, but the question is whether this is the right model for those disciplines. For some of them it probably is. SPARC is currently looking at projects in economics. Economics is one of the areas in which there have been large increases in prices in recent years. Even though the base price is generally lower than in the science, technology, and medical (STM) area, the price increase has been pretty dramatic.

But it will be a question as SPARC goes forward as to what kind of models will be most appropriate. High prices are not really a problem for most journals in the humanities.

**Q:** *I think the problem is the high price of journals in the sciences. Libraries are forced to discontinue their purchases of some humanities journals to compensate for this.*

**A:** Right. The other major effect has been on libraries' ability to buy monographs.

**Q:** *Tell me exactly how the SPARC model works.*

**A:** When SPARC was first developed, its main program was SPARC Alternatives. The intent of this program was to introduce titles that directly compete with existing, generally high-priced titles. SPARC encourages a society, such as ACS, or an independent editorial board, or a nonprofit group, such as the department of mathematics at the University of Warwick, to start publishing a new title. In return, SPARC will help market the title to libraries and the publisher can use the SPARC seal. SPARC members have committed to subscribe to these titles if they fit within their collection areas.

**Q:** *Are these titles only in electronic format?*

**A:** No. A few of the journals are electronic only, but many of them have print equivalents. A number of them are open access, meaning they are free in the electronic version, but it varies.

**Q:** *Who does the traditional role of editing and publishing and binding?*

**A:** That remains the role of the publisher or the society. SPARC does not take on any of those roles. It is a facilitator and marketer, if you will. In addition, SPARC offers publishers a number of services, including helping them with language for licenses and authors' agreements. Sometimes SPARC helps an editorial board interested in leaving its current publisher. SPARC has even helped editorial boards that have ended up in staying with a publisher renegotiate their contract. But its initial core program was to encourage alternate journals to provide direct competition.

As you may know, SPARC has continued to evolve over the past several years. In partnership with several organizations, SPARC was instrumental in the creation of BioOne—a digital aggregation of journals from small societies in the biosciences. Most recently, SPARC has been promoting the

development of institutional repositories. Institutional repositories have the potential to provide the infrastructure for entirely new systems of scholarly communication.

**Q:** *How successful has SPARC been?*

**A:** Very successful. In the case of introducing competition, the two most successful examples are *Organic Letters*, which is published by ACS, and *Evolutionary Ecology Research*, which has an independent editorial board. Both of these have done well financially. *Evolutionary Ecology Research* actually broke even the first year, which is unheard of in journal publishing. *Organic Letters* has taken papers away from its competitor, *Tetrahedron Letters*, and is ranked more highly in the ISI impact factors. When the partnership with ACS and the formation of SPARC were formally announced, the price of *Tetrahedron Letters*, which was rising at the rate of 14 to 15 percent a year, immediately went down 5 or 6 percent. The following year, when *Organic Letters* came out, the price increase of *Tetrahedron Letters* dropped to 3 percent, then to 2 percent the following year. It is now climbing back up again. But I think this shows that the introduction of competition really did have some impact. If *Tetrahedron Letters* had continued on the same track as it had been it would be more expensive than the two titles are together.

I think SPARC has actually been even more successful in the public relations and communication efforts, where a great deal of energy has been spent on keeping such journals as *Science*, *Nature*, and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* apprised of and constantly attentive to what is happening. That has kept the issue in focus and brought it to the attention of a much broader range of faculty and scientists.

**Q:** *It seems like 1997 was a watershed year for ARL. This marked the beginnings of SPARC, the organization of the Pew Roundtable, and the Conference on the Crisis of the Scholarly Monograph. You've talked about SPARC. How successful were the conferences you organized?*

**A:** They were quite successful. The scholarly monograph conference was exciting because it brought together ARL, the Association of American University Presses (AAUP), and the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS). It was the first time, I believe, a conference focused on the monograph, which had been hurt in part by libraries trying to deal with the budget issues related to STM journals. Among other topics, it considered whether the scholarly monograph, which tends to focus on a very narrow area and is often a junior faculty's first book, can be published electronically. The question is how to make these publications affordable and still be accepted as quality products. These discussions have continued in a number of venues.

**Q:** *What do you think of the Modern Language Association's (MLA) recent report? MLA proposed a num-*

*ber of different possibilities for addressing the problems of the scholarly monograph.*

**A:** I think it is great. It is wonderful to have the scholars themselves and the scholars' societies grappling with these issues. I thought the report of the task force was very well done. MLA's executive council invited representatives from AAUP and ARL to meet with them in late October 2002. They asked how MLA could help libraries and presses in this whole arena. It was a wonderful, fascinating meeting. It was very interesting to see them engaged in these issues, hear their concerns, and hear them grappling with fundamental issues of promotion and tenure within their disciplines, including whether the book is the appropriate venue for communicating their scholarship and whether there is a need to subvent the work of junior scholars by providing them with stipends. If you think of what universities do when they are hiring their science faculty, they often spend huge sums of money to support new labs and graduate assistants or post-doc researchers. A small stipend of five to seven thousand dollars could make a significant difference to a humanities junior faculty member in being able to get his or her work published. It was an interesting conversation. One of the proposals from the meeting was that MLA create an electronic repository for the first works of junior scholars and for works by scholars experimenting with the functionality available in electronic publishing. A library may be a logical partner for MLA in this kind of venture.

**Q:** *Can you talk about the office's plans for the upcoming year? Are there other recent successes we should know about?*

**A:** I think the Pew Roundtable was extremely successful. It resulted in one of the most eloquent, easy to read explanations of the crisis in scholarly publishing that I've seen. We partnered with the Association of American Universities (AAU) on that. I like your characterization of 1997 as a watershed year. It really did help to crystallize developments. I am also proud of the Create Change initiative that came out of this office. I invited several collection development people from around the country to Washington, D.C., and we did some brainstorming of how faculty could help transform the system of scholarly communication. This resulted in a brochure, which is still being requested. Subsequent to that, a Create Change Web site was developed in collaboration with SPARC and ACRL.

There are the principles for emerging systems of scholarly publishing and the conference from which the principles resulted, which was held in Tempe, Arizona, in March 2000. This was initiated by David Schulenburg, the provost at the University of Kansas. He felt there really needed to be a next step after the Pew Roundtable. He approached the AAU and ARL and we worked with him to bring a group together. David actually had done some initial drafting of the principles beforehand, which made the meeting very productive.

Earlier last year, ARL began to promote open access. The board announced its support of the Budapest Open Access Initiative in February 2002, and a task force looking at copyright and scholarly communication issues developed a five-year action agenda with the desired goal of open access to quality information in support of learning and scholarship.

This push toward open access grows out of the recognition that despite substantial efforts, the library community is not making a lot of progress on the Hill. While community efforts have mitigated the impact of some legislation, there is still the threat of the Uniform Computer Information Transactions Act, database protection, and several bills mandating digital rights management systems. More and more publishers and content owners are looking to digital rights management systems to control content through the use of technology.

*Q: And the closing down of PubScience . . . ?*

*A:* Exactly. So how do we change the discussion? How do we at least, in terms of the academy, move this forward? We've started talking about open access, particularly for journal literature, where the faculty member or scholarly researcher has no expectation of getting recompensed directly for his work. He doesn't get paid by the publisher, and he may even have to pay for publication. Ultimately, his purpose is to get his work peer reviewed and distributed. We've suggested that there might be a better way than paid subscription journals to do this. Open access is the end goal, with open-access journals, institutional repositories, and disciplinary repositories being various methods for getting there. We are focusing in particular on promoting institutional repositories. In October 2002, the office, in collaboration with SPARC and the Coalition for Networked Information, held a workshop on institutional repositories. When we were initially planning this event we had no idea how many people might be interested. We were thinking that if we got fifty or sixty it would be okay. We had 275 people, and we were just amazed. It was exciting that there was so much interest out there in this topic and we heard incredible buzz subsequent to this. It allows libraries to take positive action, helping faculty do something that they want to do. Faculty are creating all kinds of digital products right now. A number of institutions have started exploring repositories because faculty came to the library and asked, "Can you do something with data or help me with my files? Can you help me store my projects or maintain them or make them accessible to a broader audience?" So developing an institutional repository is meeting a need. As faculty become more and more aware of the advantages of having repositories available and having people look at and cite their work, they will think about the current for-profit model for journal publication. There will be pressure put on journals to make them open access.

*Q: Are these projects publications in the prepublication stage?*

*A:* They could be. Or it could be the faculty member putting up his post-publication paper. But initially it will probably be data, course syllabi, working papers, conference presentations, simulations, and so forth.

*Q: Would this then be handled through the library?*

*A:* It is possible that this could be handled either by the library or by information technology on campus. It just depends where within that infrastructure one would want the responsibility for storing the files. Even if the library isn't the technical host, it would have a critical role in helping determine what the long-term retention policies should be, what kind of things need to be done to insure the longevity of the digital files; for example, what kind of metadata is needed to identify what is there—what kind of file it is, when it was last touched, when it needs to be migrated, what vocabularies should be used to allow access to this material from other similar repositories at other institutions.

*Q: I know that Rutgers is one of the leaders in this.*

*A:* Yes. Also MIT, with the creation of DSpace. They were one of the key participants at the conference in October. Also the California Digital Library, Cal Tech, and Ohio State.

*Q: Scholarly communication is a critical issue for research libraries. I wonder how much of an issue it is for libraries that are not research institutions or for public libraries. Is there a place for these other constituents in this discussion?*

*A:* I think that is an issue for most academic libraries, if you think about the fact that almost the entire STM literature is overpriced. ARL is frequently criticized for painting with too broad a brush because there are publishers who have priced products reasonably through the years and will continue to do so. But we also know that while a number of publishers are not in the league with the top few who are taking significant advantage of their position, some do take advantage of the fact that the behavior of the big companies provides a lot of leeway. We know that this has happened. A large part of the literature is overpriced to a degree that if it were more reasonable, the smaller libraries could buy more in support of the teaching that goes on at their institutions. At the same time the price of books has gone up over time, in part because individuals and smaller libraries can no longer afford them. Where presses could count on selling about fifteen hundred copies of some of these monographs, they are down to two hundred. We know that most of these two hundred books are

being bought by the larger libraries. Again, were the system more in balance, all libraries would have the opportunity to buy more for their patrons. And for those public libraries that are still buying some of the more general interest university press titles for their patrons or key journals, this has an impact on them as well. Some of our members are large public research libraries—for example, the New York Public and Boston Public libraries. This issue affects all of the communities to varying degrees.

*Q: What are some of the trends library directors and administrators should be focusing on? Is there anything in the near future they should be looking at?*

**A:** The most important trend is the development of institutional repositories, which we just talked about. Another is of the support of open access journals within the library. Just imagine how many journals come out of the university from various departments—the library could think about partnering with some of these departments. Certainly, the library should inform faculty and administrators about this set of issues. This is a long-term continuing conversation. It may take many of these discussions before the issues become relevant to an individual.

*Q: We've gone through most of the issues. Is there anything else you would like to discuss?*

**A:** Let me just talk about the work we do regarding publisher mergers. A lot of our efforts are aimed at trying to transform the system, but there is a reality that we deal with, which is the current system and trying to sort our way through that. Over the years we have attempted to bring our concerns with mergers to the Department of Justice (DOJ). In 1997, when Reed-Elsevier and Wolters Kluwer proposed a merger, DOJ came to us. It had had lots of complaints from librarians, and it asked us to help it understand this market. At that point we had a very sympathetic group of people working at DOJ who were trying to figure out what the issues and problems were. At first they were very skeptical, but then they began to put the pieces together in a new way. One of the economists at DOJ, Mark McCabe, developed a new theory for assessing the market for journals. He came to discover that mergers that wouldn't create antitrust concerns under the current merger guidelines could actually be harmful in this particular market. The Reed Elsevier/Kluwer merger was called off by the companies, however, so we didn't get to see this new theory at the time.

*Q: There was the purchase of Harcourt General by Reed Elsevier . . . ?*

**A:** Right. In that case we went back to DOJ and presented this new theory, which had been further developed.

We did not have a very sympathetic hearing and as you know the merger went through. But it is something we continue to be concerned about. In partnership with several other library organizations, we have engaged a legal firm to develop a white paper on this set of issues.

*Q: What do you hope to achieve with this white paper?*

**A:** We hope through the white paper to educate a much broader audience about the issues involved in mergers of science and legal publishers. Since we haven't been able to get through to DOJ directly, we hope to make this a much broader public policy issue and bring a broader set of players to bear on the issue. We will be distributing the paper to congressional staff, anti-trust attorneys, state attorneys general, economists, and legal scholars with the intent of changing the merger guidelines for this market. At the very least, the next time a merger of concern arises we would have a broader base of support and influence in making our case. A couple of companies are currently up for sale—Kluwer Academic, Bertelsmann Springer, and, with its internal difficulties, possibly Blackwell. Wolters Kluwer has accepted an offer for Kluwer Academic from an investment firm, which currently has no other comparable holdings. So it doesn't present a problem. But indications are this same investment firm might also purchase Springer, at which point we would want to approach DOJ again.

The UK Competition Commission (CC) also reviewed the Reed Elsevier/Harcourt merger. CC allowed the merger to proceed, but recommended that the government conduct a study of the market, which it subsequently did. The study concluded that there is indeed something wrong with this market. But the publishers had somehow convinced them that independent faculty action and efforts such as SPARC are dramatically changing the environment, therefore no government intervention was needed at the time. As flattered as we are by this conclusion, we recognize that change won't happen overnight. But, I am convinced, it will happen.

Let me mention one last effort. Scholarly communication is an international activity, and the problems are ones that are felt the world over. As a result, a number of library associations from around the globe have come together to form the International Scholarly Communications Alliance. The group hopes to leverage the work each organization is doing locally to create international action on these issues. Member organizations so far come from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and Hong Kong. Reaching scholars on their member campuses is the primary goal of each of these organizations. The system of scholarly communication will change only when the scholars themselves decide it is time.