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Open (and free) for business: Letter from the Editor, September, 2006

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Editorial

This journal, Library Student Journal (LSJ), starts from two premises that may be contrary to common assumptions but which I feel are decent and defensible. First, that the field encompassing librarianship and information science is not at threat from developing technologies and the evolving ways in which information is communicated, but is well positioned to take advantage of these changes. And, second, that the traditional structures of scholarly publishing face an Open Access (OA) storm so strong that even the hybrid traditional-OA programs to which many of the established scholarly journals are now turning will do little to prevent a collapse.

Inevitably, the future of scholarly publishing will be a form of OA that avoids the inequities and conflict-of-interest issues arising from author-supported or advertising-supported models. *Sponsored OA*, a model in which sponsors absorb the

costs associated with publication, is perfectly suited to an LIS field looking for ways to develop its strengths into relevant new uses. In our case, a combination of volunteer staff, server space from the University at Buffalo, and small donations from a variety of sources allows LSJ to publish without cost to authors or readers.

Our goal with LSJ is to provide a forum for discussion of current LIS education issues and to publish the best student papers in the LIS field, broadly defined, while providing valuable publishing and editing experience to authors and editors alike. But I hope our readers, authors, and editors will also take away this lesson: libraries can be publishers, and librarians can take advantage of our diverse skills and the many resources at our disposal to be directly and actively involved in the publishing of high quality scholarly information.

The University of Wisconsin Library now publishes a peer reviewed free-to-submit OA science journal, Journal of Insect Science (<http://www.insectscience.org>), originally established by the University of Arizona Library. Its founder and editor, Henry Hagedorn, has a vision of libraries and academic institutions taking over the role of scholarly journal publisher from the traditional commercial publishers. In an open letter in 2001, he said:

I resigned [from *Archives of Insect Biochemistry and Physiology*] because I strongly feel that commercial publishers are ripping academic scholars off. By being an editor for *Archives* I was an accomplice to highway robbery. *Archives* was started by Allen Press in 1986 at a cost of \$250 to institutions....By 1996 an institutional subscription was over \$1000 and today it is \$2000.... Beyond the issue of cost, the commercial journals have also subverted the basic concept that is essential to academic communication: free access. Since Gutenberg, academic publishing has been tied to paper, and that tied us to an expensive method for the dissemination of our work. In the previous century this evolved into a lucrative commercial operation. Authors were obliged to trade the copyright to their work to ensure its publication so they could get tenure. It was a particularly insidious bargain because it allowed market forces to distort the basic drive of academia to disseminate ideas and encourage discussion. Forcing readers to pay dearly for the right to read our work is the last thing we want; free dissemination should be the long-term goal. I think the goal is attainable.

[\(http://insectscience.org/about/change/openletter/\)](http://insectscience.org/about/change/openletter/)

Hagerdorn's experience was not exceptional and his vision for the future of scholarly publishing is exactly correct.

The response to the OA challenge from traditional publishers—generally, the conversion of some or all of their journals to author-supported OA models or models that offer authors an OA option for additional cost—addresses two major problems they face: OA publications have a higher impact factor, and libraries on shrinking budgets cannot afford rising subscription prices for much longer. Yet the cure may be worse than the disease—author fees introduce some serious ethical dilemmas and will not be financially sustainable in the long run.

Most obviously, author fees are inherently unfair for those unable to pay (many OA journals do have a waiver for on-a-budget authors and authors from developing countries, but waivers introduce their own conflict-of-interest issues, will not be sustainable, and are not applicable for journals in which OA is optional for an extra fee). Less obvious is the fact that “author” fees are by and large paid from grant funds—many of the large for-profit publishing companies are now funded primarily from public grant money. Even the star of the not-for-profit OA world, Public Library of Science, has recently increased its author fees from \$1500 to \$2500 while continuing to rely heavily on financial support from sponsors.

So it is in this context that I introduce the first issue of *Library Student Journal*. We hope to be, in our own little way, an example of the future of scholarly publishing: open and free. I hope many future LIS professionals will take advantage of this opportunity to be published without fee in an Open Access peer-reviewed journal. And I hope you will take away a new vision of what scholarly publishing *will* be and what your role in it *can* be.

Author's Bio

Eli Guinee is founding editor of *Library Student Journal*. He has worked in reference and circulation at the Colorado State University Libraries, as a cataloguer at the National Library of Scotland, and is now pursuing a Masters of Library Science at the University of Buffalo.