SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING

OPEN ACCESS: Measure will establish a repository of journal articles by Harvard’s faculty

HARVARD UNIVERSITY’s arts and sciences faculty members decided on Feb. 12 to back the open-access movement in scholarly publishing. By voting unanimously to retain copyright on their published journal articles, they enable Harvard to place their articles in an open-access online repository.

Many publishers require authors to relinquish copyright. However, Harvard chemistry professor Roy G. Gordon isn’t concerned that the action will limit where Harvard professors can publish. “Journals will come around to understanding that open access is the future,” he explains. He adds that professors can opt out of the new policy for individual articles by requesting a waiver.

In an editorial in The Harvard Crimson, university Library Director Robert Darnton wrote that the policy would “be a first step toward freeing scholarship from the stranglehold of commercial publishers. ... We academics provide the content for scholarly journals. We evaluate articles as referees, serve on editorial boards, work as editors ourselves, and yet the journals force us to buy back our work in published form—at outrageous prices.”

Computer science professor Stuart M. Shieber, who proposed the measure, said in a statement that “the scholarly publishing system has become far more restrictive than it need be. Many publishers will not even allow scholars to use and distribute their own work.” Harvard’s action, he added, “should be a very powerful message to the academic community that we want and should have more control over how our work is used and disseminated.”

But many publishers, including the American Chemical Society, already help authors share their articles. Laura L. Kiessling, editor of ACS Chemical Biology and a University of Wisconsin, Madison, chemistry professor, notes that through ACS’s AuthorChoice program, authors can pay a reasonable charge to provide all readers with free access to their articles via institutional repositories, authors’ personal websites, and ACS’s website. And the society’s Articles on Request program allows authors to share free digital reprints of their articles by directing readers to an ACS website. —SOPHIE ROVNER