Hyde Park Debate

Rebuttal – Angela Cochran

I am not a copyright attorney, nor have I ever played one on TV. With that said, the argument seems to be that copyright must not be applied to scholarship and publishers should not be expected to improve and distribute content for free. This is what we currently call the Gold OA model: a model that claims no one should pay to access content, but publishers should still peer review and curate content.

With all due respect to Thomas Jefferson, information doesn't just want to be free. Information wants to be normalized, populated in multiple outlets and in an ever-growing list of formats. It wants to be put in front of the persons who need it most at the moment they need it. Making information free does not make it good, useful, or discoverable. There is plenty of free information on the internet. A lot of it is wrong and a lot of it can't be found by those who need it. In fact, as I talk to our authors and editorial boards about data sharing, their biggest concerns are about how people will find it once they put it in a repository. The answer is easy, it needs a DOI, it needs rich Meta data that is tagged for optimal SEO, it needs to be linked to other outputs like conference papers and journal articles. It needs for these links to be disseminated via citation linking facilitated by Crossref. In order to be useful to people, there needs to be an explanation of what the data is, where is came from, who collected it, where it was collected from, and how it was analyzed.

This is not an argument for not making information free. But free is actually the least of the concerns for the information.

My opponent spoke in support of the value added to journal articles by publishers and he supports a model whereby publishers are compensated. Where I have concerns is that he argues that publishers should only be paid what it costs to produce an article.

The infrastructure that supports all the things that researchers value in publisher services has been built and maintained by publishers. Publishers pay to develop standard DTDs so that XML content is portable and able to be text mined. Publishers developed and continue to financially support a strong reference linking ecosystem through CrossRef. Publishers have developed online platforms specifically designed for the content formats produced in scholarship. None of these initiatives would have been funded without significant investment by publishers.

Further, reducing the services provided by publishers to a mere vendor arrangement negates the responsibilities to scholarship as a whole. Scholarly publishers, particularly society publishers, expend a great deal of resources to ensuring that quality work is distributed through a brand to a specific community. Treating publishers as vendors reduces that role and leads to lowered community standards and loss of quality curation.

In closing, if all scholarship must be free to access and re-use (and in my opponent's statement free of copyright), a sustainable business model must be explored. I don't believe an APC model is equitable or sustainable. I do believe that libraries and publishers need to come

together to innovate a shared expense model that levels that playing field.