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## Peer Review

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**A Primer on Open Access ...**  
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six months after publication) will undercut subscriptions and reduce revenue. Similarly, the average rejection rate is higher at humanities journals than at STM journals, increasing the cost of peer review per accepted article, and making Open Access harder to subsidize through processing fees on accepted articles. Humanities journals often want to reprint poems or illustrations that require permission from a copyright holder, and this permission rarely extends to Open-Access publication.

Behind these specific reasons is a more general one. Journal articles are the primary literature in the sciences, but in the humanities they tend to report on the history and interpretation of the primary literature, which lies in books. But as we've seen, journal articles are royalty-free while books are royalty-producing. The logic of Open Access applies much better to journal-based fields than to book-based fields.

All these are reasons why we should not expect to make progress toward Open Access in all disciplines at the same rate. They are also reasons to expect that different business models will evolve in different fields to cover the costs of Open-Access journals. (By contrast, the costs of Open-Access repositories are already low and essentially constant across disciplines.)

Open Access is within reach of scientists and scholars today. They can launch an Open-Access repository whenever they like, at essentially no cost, and more and more universities and disciplines are doing so. With a bit more planning and investment, scholars can launch an Open-Access journal. Scholars

themselves decide whether to submit their work to Open-Access journals, whether to deposit it in Open-Access repositories, and whether to transfer copyright.

Conventional journals can experiment with Open Access to their back runs, to back issues after a certain embargo period, to all new articles, or to selected new articles, in order to learn the methods and economics of Open-Access publishing. But scholars needn't wait for conventional journals to make these experiments, and needn't persuade them to accept Open Access as a superior, or even desirable, alternative. The Internet has already given scholars a chance to reclaim control of scholarly communication. For the first time since the journal appeared on the scene in 1665, price needn't be an access barrier to this critical body of royalty-free literature. For the first time since the rise of the commercial publishing of scholarly journals, scholarly communication can be in the hands of scholars, who answer to one another, rather than corporations, who answer to shareholders. The only question is when scholars will fully seize this beautiful opportunity. 

*Peter Suber is Research Professor of Philosophy at Earlham College, Open Access Project Director at Public Knowledge, and the author of the SPARC Open Access Newsletter.*

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## Peer Review

by **Mark Y. Herring** (Dean of Library Services, Dacus Library, Winthrop University) <herringm@winthrop.edu>

This month's headliner, as you've doubtless guessed, is peer review. By the time you reach my scribble you may have heard enough ... already. I sure hope not. Peer-review, along with its alternatives, is an important topic, not the least of which is its potential impact on library access to information. If you haven't guessed by now that the library access landscape is changing, you may need medical attention. The wiring is loose and your future does not bode well.

For too many years peer-review, in graves of academe (a phrase I borrow shamelessly from **Richard Mitchell's** witty book), has been the touchstone of greatness, the benchmark of honor, the tenor of tenure, the ... ah, well you get the picture. With near-sneering-nose superiority, academe has held that writing in a peer-reviewed journal is tantamount to guarding the grail, gilding the lily, gargling the grandiose. No, wait, that last part doesn't work.



On the other hand, maybe it does, so read on.

In recent years peer-review writing has taken it on the chin, and the punch (some would call it a sucker-punch) has all but knocked it out.

Before getting to that very interesting story, there is another, the one of a tenure-wannabe who decided to test the waters by taking renowned papers, sending them, slightly altered, to various presses and waiting.

The rejection slips came in surfeit. It seems that publishing presses, academic and otherwise, didn't want something wonderfully well-written, only something that would sell. All our correspondent managed to do was prove how incredibly difficult it is to get published. He also proved, by way of ruse, that it is equally difficult for **Dickens, Melville, Hemmingway** and others to make it, in barely disguised form, to the light of published day.

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But the story doesn't end there. Our next serves to underscore the devilish difficulty of providing reliable access to library patrons. Enter, **Alan Sokal**.

Make no mistake about it, **Sokal** is no academic slouch out to make a name for himself. He had already made it. Professor of physics at **New York University**, **Sokal** had become troubled over the recent gibberish that had come from the academy *vis-a-vis* science, especially as it touched upon social matters. For example, much had been made about women and science, or rather the lack of the one at the expense of the other. This, it turns out, had been much overblown, owing mainly to the politics of the matter, *not* the science. As it turns out, men are much *less* represented in many of the Humanities; but that doesn't seem to bother many. So **Sokal** decided to test the waters of his theory that when it came to showdown between science, facts and politics, politics would win every time, regardless of how stupid or how unsubstantiated the "science" or the factoids. **Sokal** proved his point in spades.

**Sokal's** "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity" is now legendary in certain circles. Unfortunately, it is not well-known in academic ones; and when it is, it's generally dismissed. That's more easily said than done. The response of the academy, and typically anyone for that matter when caught red-handed is simply: deny. The essay appeared as the featured article in the *peer-reviewed* journal *Social Text*. Moreover, it was not merely published, but published in a special issue of the magazine devoted to *rebutting criticisms leveled against postmodernism and social constructivism*. Is it too harsh to say that this hoax hoisted the politics of the academy on its own petard while giving peer-review a permanent black eye? Consider its description by the author:

[The article] is chock full of absurdities and non-sequiturs....[I]t asserts an extreme form of cognitive relativism: after mocking the old-fashioned "dogma" that "there exists an external world, whose properties are independent of any individual human being and indeed of humanity as a whole," it proclaims categorically that indeed "physical reality," no less than social "reality," is at bottom a social and linguistic construct." By a series of stunning leaps of logic, it arrives at the conclusion that "the *Pi* of Euclid and the *G* of Newton, formerly thought to be constant and universal, are now perceived in their ineluctable historicity; and the putative observer becomes fatally de-centered, disconnected from any epistemic link to a space-time point that can no longer be defined by geometry alone. (*Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science* [Picador, 1998]) pp 1-2.

For those who may not quite get through all the mumbo-jumbo, gobbledygook, pseudo-scientific language with anything like meaning, **Sokal** claims that gravity and the eternal world are simply linguistic constructs and therefore not real. If you believe this for one minute, we'll go test it atop a large building by jumping head first over the side. Mind you, you first. It reminds one of the argument that **C.S. Lewis** once had with an opponent who cried, "Therefore this podium is not real, the world is not real and our life is phantasm," or words to that effect. When **Lewis** stood up to rebut, he replied, "I would counter my opponent's arguments, but it's so unfair to do so when he's not here to defend himself."

What makes this story important, even critical when discussing peer-review is the now palpable possibility that even in the world of peer-review — an academy staple — what ends at the final product may in fact be worthless gibberish, tainted not only by partisan politics (from the left and the right) but vouchsafed by those who must, should and are paid to know better. (For more, see not only **Sokal** and **Bricmont's Fashionable Nonsense** mentioned above, but also **Alan Charles Kors** and **Harvey A. Silvergate's The Shadow University: The Betrayal of Liberty on America's**



## WEBWORTHY

Column Editor: **Pamela M. Rose, M.L.S.** (Web Services & Library Promotion Coordinator, Health Sciences Library, University at Buffalo; Phone: 716-829-3900 x129; Fax: 716-829-2211) <pmrose@buffalo.edu> wings.buffalo.edu/~pmrose

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*Websites are chosen for uniqueness, depth of information, functionality and ease of access. Sites are organized by broad subject area and are visited just prior to publication. Please let the editor know of any broken links. Comments and suggestions welcome to Pamela M. Rose, Health Sciences Library, University at Buffalo, 3435 Main St., Buffalo, NY 14214-3002; 716-829-3900 x129; <pmrose@buffalo.edu>. Unless otherwise noted, Internet sites were also reviewed in Science's NetWatch column. — PR*

### Chemistry

The definition of entropy in thermodynamics was defined as "disorder" in 1895, and college chemistry textbooks since 1960 have continued to use that definition. **Frank Lambert**, Professor Emeritus of Chemistry at **Occiden-**

**Campuses** [Free Press, 1998].) It means in effect that we have no real recourse to information that may not be jaundiced in some manner, and in ways that materially alter its intrinsic and extrinsic value.

For years I thought our only recourse was to rely on articles for which authors are paid, and by and large I still think that to be true. I find it hard to believe that a magazine would pay \$250 and up for pure nonsense. But even these sources can be tainted, not so much by politics (though there is that possibility) but by finances: it's now generally well-known that what was first to go in editorial departments when budget cuts came were the once famous fact checkers. Most magazines and publishers rely on authors policing themselves; and this reliance is hardly foolproof, as evidenced by **Bell Laboratories' Jan Hendrik Schon**, a physicist touted for a **Nobel Prize**, who, as it turns out, fabricated much of his research.

So where does this leave us? It leaves us wanting in many ways. Wanting for reliable resources of information. Wanting for avenues that are trustworthy and irreproachable. But there is also a silver lining: it leaves us knowing that librarians and libraries are without substitute in the quest for accurate, authentic and honorable information. 

**tal College** in Los Angeles believes that to be misleading and not based on modern science. More properly, entropy is a change in various terms/formats of the spreading or dispersing of energy as a function of temperature, a definition textbooks are slowly revising. Meanwhile, students can visit **Professor Lambert's** collection of information links and copyrighted articles, including a student primer and materials specifically for non-chemists. — <http://www.entropysite.com/>

### Integrated Pest Management

The health and environmental consequences of the continuing glut of chemicals used in pesticide applications are well documented. Scientists have developed alternative strategies known as **Integrated Pest Management (IPM)**, which involves using natural enemies, altering harvest times, developing disease resistant crops, or interrupting the pest's life cycle in some way. For example, tiny wasps have been used to control alfalfa weevils. Now entomologists **Edward Radcliffe** and **William Hutchison** of the **University of Minnesota** offer an electronic textbook with over 60 chapters contributed by internationally known experts in **IPM**. It's a work in progress, with

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