

Publishing: It's complicated

Nearly everyone agrees that with AAA publications, the ideal situation would be for everything to be open access (OA), with no article publication charge (APC; also known as article processing charge). Achieving that is no easy task. On top of already-existing complexities, the ground keeps shifting in academic publishing at large, and every actor and entity is scrambling to figure out which way is up. I must preface this by saying I am by no means an expert on these things. On the contrary, since taking up the editorship of this journal, I have been trying to learn as much as I can about academic publishing, the AAA publishing contract, and how OA is developing, and I often feel quite in over my head.

The AAA portfolio is one major complicating factor in our publishing strategy. At present, the AAA is set to publish 23 separate titles, an extraordinarily large portfolio for an association of our size. It's an extraordinarily large portfolio even for associations many times larger than the AAA. In a commitment to supporting this breadth and depth of output, the AAA strategy requires first and foremost that any publisher take on the full suite of titles. There is no doubt that this requirement makes AAA unattractive to many publishers. Most publishers are not interested in taking on all our titles, though many would be willing to take the top few journals and cut the others loose. For this reason, it is important for individual journal editors and sections to think about the whole portfolio and its implications, not just their own publication or section priorities.

This commitment to breadth and depth is built upon a financial model that allows smaller publications to benefit from larger ones. It's an all-for-one-and-one-for-all strategy that to some degree blunts the demands of the market on association publications that are not large income producers. Currently, the AAA publishing proceeds are split 66 percent to what I call "headquarters" and 33 percent to sections. With the new contract, AAA is providing support services that are available to all publications, free of additional cost to sections. Wiley contributes funds to that work.

What does the 66 percent pay for? For one thing, five full-time AAA employees with benefits: Chelsea Horton, digital publishing manager; Natalie Konopinski, editor of *Anthropology News*; Janine Chiappa McKenna, director of publishing; Sean Mallin, managing editor of *American Anthropologist*; and Pablo Morales, managing editor of *American Ethnologist*. The 66 percent also pays for copyediting and management services that are now available to all AAA publications, provided by Ideas on Fire and KWF Editorial. While individual consultants from these providers may not be working with AAA full-time, all consultants are full-time employees with benefits. That's a great thing.

The tradeoffs are that, in the past, the internal AAA split was 50/50, with sections receiving greater income but having to pay for editing support themselves. Section income has decreased with this new 66/33 model, and that's not a pain-free development. The hope is that the value of editorial support will outweigh the loss of income to sections. (As an editor who enjoys the full-time support of a dedicated managing editor, I cannot imagine cobbling together such support on my own.)

There are likely some hard decisions down the road, and these decisions affect all AAA activities, not just publishing. Income from nearly every source is down for AAA. The writing is on the wall: sections cannot look to the publishing program to provide a lot of income to support other important activities.

WHEN WILL WE GO ALL OA?

The OA landscape is exciting. It's also confusing and complicated. One of the most pressing questions for AAA is how to afford a move to OA and how to secure the funds needed to support the publishing program (those five full-time jobs, the editing and journal support, and other costs take more than pocket change). There are numerous, emergent models out there, none of which are fashioned for our unique and unruly set of 23 publications.

Subscribe to Open (S2O)¹ is a library-based approach that relies on a base number of institutional subscribers to make content open. Back content may remain behind a paywall, so one question here is how open is open?

Plan S and cOAlition S work from the funder side, requiring that scientific publications that result from research funded by public grants be published in compliant open access journals or platforms.

In contrast, the Wiley OA model, like that of most for-profit publishers, relies on a combination of APCs and what are called "transformational agreements." These agreements are in essence one-off, individual deals with governments, funders, or institutions that provide funding for OA publication. From the point of view of editors and authors, it's a messy and confusing situation, as different agreements can have different parameters and requirements. Take a look at Wiley's author compliance tool for a peek at the range of possible situations.² The scattershot nature of transformational agreements also contributes to inequities, as few transformational agreements exist with Global South institutions or governments.

Cultural Anthropology has of course been on the cutting edge of OA experimentation at AAA, demonstrating so much of what might be possible. One important thing CA has demonstrated is that it's possible to go OA and keep those impact metrics up, a huge concern for authors, especially

those who are junior or seeking employment. Another thing to note is that income generation is still important in OA, because there are real costs to publishing a journal. The CA model involves paywalling material from before the journal went OA. Other key services, such as indexing, persistent archiving, and metrics are provided by Wiley on a fee-for-service basis. Covering publishing costs is increasingly challenging, as memberships continue to shrink, and along with that, section funds. (Note that because CA is not published by Wiley, the Society for Cultural Anthropology does not participate in the income distribution, as do other publishing sections.)

ENTER THE NELSON MEMO

Complicating an already complicated situation is the “Nelson Memo,” issued by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) in August 2022.³ In a nutshell, the memo requires that any publicly funded research and its associated data be made publicly available with no embargo. What’s an embargo? In many cases, publishers place an embargo—typically 12 months—on authors placing their research in a publicly accessible repository. A central point is that the Nelson Memo does not require that journals go OA. As David Crotty (2022) observes in a Scholarly Kitchen essay, the Nelson Memo is directed at authors, and it is they—not publishers—who must ensure they meet the directive to make their work publicly accessible. A likely outcome is that journals will have to relinquish embargos, and authors will be able to place noncopyrighted versions of their work in repositories without publisher barriers. Who creates and runs those repositories? Not yet clear, though many already exist and are in use, especially in the sciences. All of the nitty-gritty is being discussed by the scientific funders, associations, and associations of associations, AAA among them.

At present, there are not really a lot of answers regarding the specific outcomes from the memo; affected agencies must prepare plans and submit them within 6 months (if they have funding of \$100 million or more) or 12 months (if they have funding of less than \$100 million). The memo raises many, many questions, especially for anthropology, where there are particularly sticky questions about the requirement for making data available.

The main thing I have figured out at this point is that there are no easy answers about either publishing or open access. There’s little likelihood that our publishing program can go 100 percent OA while not charging APCs, continuing to publish 23 titles, and generating the income required to support the existing program, all while providing income to sections from the publishing program.

We have hard work ahead of us. The more of us who are informed and active, the better off we will be. Pay attention to the work of the Publishing Futures Committee (PFC), which recently shared a piece on publishing futures in *Anthropology News* (Horton 2022). One place to get great information on scholarly publishing, OA, and the Nelson Memo is The Scholarly Kitchen.⁴ CHORUS has pulled together a comprehensive list of readings and links related to the Nelson Memo.⁵ I also find the monthly newsletter from Clarke & Esposito informative.⁶ On Twitter, Tim Efenbein (@timelfen) is always finding and sharing good information, as is Marcel LaFlamme (@MarcelLaFlamme_), who is also a PFC member. This is hardly a comprehensive set of resources, but I hope you’ll explore them and join in coming discussions about the future of publishing at AAA.

ENDNOTES

¹ <https://subscribetoopencommunity.org/>.

² <https://authorservices.wiley.com/author-resources/Journal-Authors/open-access/author-compliance-tool>.

³ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ostp/news-updates/2022/08/25/ostp-issues-guidance-to-make-federally-funded-research-freely-available-without-delay/>.

⁴ <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/>.

⁵ <https://www.chorusaccess.org/resources/ostp-nelson-memo-2022-reading-list/>.

⁶ <https://www.ce-strategy.com/>.

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Crotty, David. 2022. “Speculation on the Most Likely OSTP Nelson Memo Implementation Scenario and the Resulting Publisher Strategies.” The Scholarly Kitchen, October 27. <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2022/10/27/speculations-on-the-most-likely-ostp-nelson-memo-implementation-scenario-and-the-resulting-publisher-strategies/>.

Horton, Chelsea. 2022. “Publishing Futures in 2021.” *Anthropology News*, January 31. <https://www.anthropology-news.org/articles/publishing-futures-in-2021/>.