NIH Public Access Policy and Scholarly Communication

NIH on Public Access

One brief but significant portion of the omnibus spending bill passed late last year by Congress is the NIH Public Access Policy. The policy mandates that all NIH-funded research be made freely accessible through NLM’s PubMed Central (PMC) database, an open archive of biomedical research. This represents a change in the publishing process for all NIH funded research.

Key dates for NIH Open Access Policy implementation

• April 7, 2008: Articles accepted for publication on or after this date must be deposited in PubMed Central.

• May 25, 2008: Beginning this date anyone submitting an application, proposal or progress report to the NIH must include the PubMed Central reference number when citing articles arising from their NIH funded research. This includes applications submitted to the NIH for the May 25, 2008 and subsequent due dates.

The Libraries will assist Penn’s Office of Research Services and the faculties, as needed, in the process of compliance with the NIH Open Access mandate, and we welcome feedback and questions.

Library Support for Scholarly Communication and the Open Access Movement

For the past decade, the Association of Research Libraries’ (ARL) Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) has been leading librarians’ efforts to transform scholarly communication. Traditional methods of publication generally require authors to cede their copyright to publishers, who, in turn, sell publications back to the libraries which serve the scholars producing the works. In the digital age, these methods have become economically unsustainable for universities and even damaging to the public interest, given restrictive licensing agreements that prohibit libraries from providing open access to published research.

Taxpayers fund the NIH’s $29 billion annual budget, which underwrites the publication of some 80,000 peer-reviewed articles. But, due in large part to publishers’ fees and restrictions, most of this research remains unavailable to the public, except through institutional subscriptions, which make up as much as fifty percent of a library’s budget. This mandate makes the NIH the first US federal agency to require open access to publicly funded research, and it adds to the momentum for a shift in scholarly communication which has been rapidly building over the last six months. The European Research Council, Canadian Institutes of Health Research, six of the seven research councils in the United Kingdom, and Harvard University have all recently weighed in with policies promoting open access to scholarly publications.

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While absent a mandate similar to those cited above, Penn Libraries have been actively promoting the principles of Open Access since 2004. ScholarlyCommons@Penn is a freely available repository for the preservation and dissemination of faculty and student research, featuring over 10,000 voluntarily deposited works from researchers at several Penn schools and centers. It includes articles, dissertations, conference papers, works of visual art, and student publications. ScholarlyCommons@Penn allows authors to retain their copyrights, and promotes free access to Penn research not only for affiliated scholars, but also for researchers world-wide, particularly those in the developing nations.

To bolster its commitment to the institutional repository, the Libraries recently appointed Scholarly Communications Librarian, Shawn Martin, who will assist faculty with copyright information and oversee expansion of the ScholarlyCommons@Penn and related services. For more information, contact Shawn Martin or Marjorie Hassen, Director for Public Services at 215-898-8118.

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