

Barriers and benefits of transitioning to an equitable open access model: interviews with LIS journal editors

Not all library and information science (LIS) journals operate under an equitable open access (OA) model, despite librarianship's emphasis on OA as a value. A previous study illuminated significant barriers for journal editors in transitioning to an equitable OA model. This follow-up study sought, through structured interviews with editors of unflipped journals, to further explore these barriers in order to identify themes and potential solutions to overcome barriers. LIS journal editors who oversaw a transition to equitable OA models were also interviewed regarding the process and impact of flipping the journal. Through qualitative analysis of these interviews, several themes emerged. Barriers to flipping include lack of individual or journal-level agency and motivation, as well as competing priorities for the editors, journal or organization. Benefits to flipping included better alignment of personal and organizational values, increases to perceived prestige and lack of membership disruption for professional societies. Analysis also demonstrated ways in which barriers to flipping differ between professional society journals and large for-profit publisher journals. Based on the analysis, several next steps were identified to better support LIS and other journal editors, as well as potentially move toward solutions to successfully transition more journals in the future.

Keywords

library science; LIS; open access; equitable open access; LIS scholarly literature; diamond open access



TERESA SCHULTZ

Scholarly
Communication
& Social Sciences
Librarian
University of Nevada,
Reno
Reno
USA



RACHEL
BORCHARDT

Scholarly
Communications
Librarian
American University
Washington D.C.
USA



DEDE DAWSON

Open Scholarship
Librarian
University of
Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, SK
Canada

Introduction

Open access (OA) was originally intended to increase equity of access to research results by removing financial barriers for readers. However, peer-reviewed journal literature is not costless to produce.¹ One way that journals cover these costs and maintain profits in the case of commercial publishers, is through levying article processing charges (APCs)

on authors (or their proxies). These are typically referred to as gold or hybrid journals. Not all journals rely on APCs, though, with an estimated 29,000 diamond OA journals that do not charge authors fees and receive funding through a diversity of models. Despite the high number of diamond journals in existence, they publish fewer articles than APC-based journals.² This may be one reason that authors associate OA publishing with APCs. It may also be because the large commercial publishers who dominate the market overwhelmingly favor the APC model, which has proven profitable for them.³ Despite the seeming prevalence of APCs, many authors do not have funding to pay these high fees; this is especially true of marginalized authors and those based in low-income countries. What once was intended to improve equity for readers has now become inequitable for authors. As such, we consider APCs to be a financially inequitable model and, through our research, seek ways to support journals to transition to a more equitable diamond model, specifically in our field of library and information science.

'What once was intended to improve equity for readers has now become inequitable for authors'

Equitable access to information is a core value of librarianship, and academic librarians have long advocated for the OA movement and for a transition to a more equitable open publishing system.⁴ This has manifested mostly through the provision of services, support and encouragement for authors at their institutions to make their works OA. But academic librarians are also often researchers in their own right. As such, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) recommends that academic librarians make all products of their research OA, too.⁵ Yet many library and information science (LIS) practitioner journals remain behind paywalls and charge inequitable APCs to publish OA.⁶ This dichotomy led us to conduct a two-part research project, with the first part surveying editors of LIS journals that have not yet 'flipped' to an 'equitable OA model' that does not charge APCs to authors. The survey explored what barriers the journals faced in transitioning to such a model. Results indicated that journal finance, or lack of knowledge of the finances, is the main barrier. Other barriers included publisher control that limits action, lack of clarity on decision-making authority, and little or no demand from authors.⁷ In this second phase of our research project, we followed up the survey with invitations to these 'unflipped' LIS editors to participate in semi-structured interviews. We also invited former editors of LIS journals that have already flipped to a more equitable OA model to be interviewed on their experiences during that transition and sought advice they may have to give to others. Ultimately, we hope the interview data collected from both of these groups will provide rich qualitative information to aid in the development of solutions and support for LIS journals in making this transition to more equitable OA publishing models.

Positionality of the authors

This research is informed by our perspectives as three scholarly communications librarians who are concerned about OA publishing models within our field of library and information science. We believe it is imperative that more LIS journals transition to equitable OA models of publication to align librarians' publishing practices with our professional society's core value of equitable access to information. Our goal with this work is to inform potential ways to flip more LIS publications to an equitable OA model, as well as support current fully open LIS journals in a way that makes sense for our field. While we recognize that other disciplines are also seeking similar solutions, our focus is to better understand barriers for LIS publications specifically. This will enable us to pursue appropriate solutions, which may differ from those in other disciplines.

'mounting evidence that APCs are financially inequitable and unsustainable'

Literature review

Inequity and unsustainability of APCs

The push to seek non-APC OA funding models is based on the mounting evidence that APCs are financially inequitable and unsustainable. The evidence indicates that authors in high-income countries usually have their APCs paid for by their employer or funder, whereas authors in low-income countries, who can least afford to pay, more typically pay out of

3 pocket.⁸ African governments, for example, typically do not pay these fees for researchers, and APCs are roughly equivalent to several months of salary for African scholars.⁹ Although some publishers attempt to address these inequities by offering APC waivers to authors from low-income countries, researchers have contended that waivers are complicated, opaque, unavailable for many journals and ask those most in need to jump through hoops that more privileged authors never encounter.¹⁰ Due to these barriers, APCs can exacerbate existing inequities in scholarly publishing, further excluding diverse and marginalized voices from participating in the scholarly conversation.¹¹ Even if libraries or institutions pay APCs on behalf of their researchers via new read and publish (R&P) collections models (also known as transformative or transitional agreements), this is still inequitable because institutions in the Global South cannot afford to join these R&P deals.¹²

It is also clear that APC prices are unsustainable, replicating the serials crisis in a new way. The average price of APCs charged by the five biggest commercial publishers between 2015 and 2018 was US\$1,989–\$2,905.¹³ Evidence shows that APC prices are rising several times faster than the rate of inflation, with publisher pricing based on the prestige of the journal, and those titles with high impact metrics have the highest and fastest-rising APCs.¹⁴ There are also some who argue that a disconnect exists between actual costs of publishing and APC price.¹⁵ R&P agreements based on APCs are also unsustainable for libraries. There is no indication that they are transforming the subscription model to a more equitable open model; instead evidence suggests they are reinforcing the control that legacy profit-driven publishers currently have of the scholarly publishing system.¹⁶ One of the Budapest Open Access Initiative's 20th anniversary recommendations is that academia move away from APCs (and models based on APCs such as R&Ps) and focus on 'inclusive publishing and distribution channels that never exclude authors on economic grounds'.¹⁷

'APC prices are unsustainable, replicating the serials crisis in a new way'

Support for equitable OA publishing and journal transitions

Publishing costs money, so it is important that the academy finds ways to financially support OA publishing services and labor that does not charge readers or authors. Options do exist; of the 27 business models or strategies that Wise and Estelle identified, only three rely on APCs.¹⁸ There are more than 80 academic libraries belonging to the Library Publishing Coalition (LPC), which advances in-kind library publishing and hosting services.¹⁹ Other models include the Lyrasis' Open Access Community Investment Program (OACIP), Jisc's Open Access Community Framework (OACF) initiative, and collaborative funding models like SCOAP³ and the Open Library of Humanities.²⁰ Established mission-driven publishers with a pre-existing subscriber base are in an ideal situation to adopt the Subscribe to Open (S2O) model, which transitions journals to an equitable OA model on a yearly basis depending on the participation of a set number of subscribers.²¹ This is a relatively straightforward model for libraries to implement (compared to R&Ps) because it requires no new or additional acquisitions workflow processes, and it is also more financially sustainable for library supporters because subscription prices need to be close to actual publication costs for it to be successful.²² The number of options also demonstrates the need for flexibility as one model will not necessarily work for all disciplines.

'barriers remain for journals seeking to transition to an equitable OA publishing model'

Despite the increasing availability of funding options, barriers remain for journals seeking to transition to an equitable OA publishing model. Editors of small scholarly journals have expressed concerns about ongoing and reliable funding for journal staff and technical support in an OA environment.²³ Compensated positions at small scholarly journals tend to be related to production, whereas editorial positions rely largely on unpaid labor. The significant extent and scope of this uncompensated editorial work leaves these journals in a precarious position.²⁴ Many societies have entered into co-publishing relationships with large commercial publishers to alleviate some of these financial uncertainties and labor issues and have become dependent on the resulting subscription revenues to fund society activities. In the process, though, they may lose control of their journal and in-depth knowledge of their finances.²⁵ Such society journals face considerable

challenges if they want to flip to an equitable OA model. When the journal *Cultural Anthropology* left Wiley to become OA in 2014, the Society for Cultural Anthropology effectively became the publisher, taking over the labor in production, infrastructure, administration and dissemination – a huge learning curve for the society.²⁶ Societies that have maintained control of their journals and finances also face barriers. Some financial sustainability concerns are so great that even if journals had flipped to an OA model some were subsequently found to ‘reverse-flip’ back to subscription – especially if they aimed to increase production or enhance services, both of which require more financial investment in labor and resources.²⁷ If a society journal moves from subscription to OA, a key member benefit, access to the journal’s contents, might be lost, and societies fear losing members and their membership dues.²⁸

In the field of library and information science, the American Library Association (ALA), which publishes about a dozen OA peer-reviewed journals, struggles to balance financial sustainability of its journals with its commitment to the professional values of librarianship that demand equitable OA models.²⁹ Our own survey of unflipped LIS journal editors confirmed the consensus that journal financial concerns, or lack of knowledge of the finances, is a barrier to LIS journals transitioning to an equitable OA model, and that the expectation of uncompensated labor inherent in OA publishing exacerbates the challenges.³⁰ While studies have looked at how other disciplines have sought to find financially equitable OA models, our research seeks to address LIS-specific solutions to help journals transition to a financially equitable OA model.

Methodology

We opted to conduct semi-structured, qualitative interviews with two groups. The first group consisted of the same population of unflipped LIS journal editors who participated in the first phase of the study. The second group consisted of people who served as editors of flipped LIS journals when the journal transitioned. To identify these people, we determined which LIS journals had transitioned at some point and searched journal records for information regarding who the editor was at the time. Although journal editors are not the only people involved in these decisions, we opted to focus on them as they are likely to be the most involved as they are the leaders of the journals.

We created two semi-structured interview protocols (see the data availability statement at the end of the article) based on information gathered from the survey in the first part of the research project.³¹ One protocol focused on the first group of unflipped LIS editors. This protocol included questions to further explore what barriers their journals faced in transitioning, questions about their journal’s finances and budget, the editors’ familiarity with various OA funding models and other factors affecting their journal’s chances of transitioning. The second protocol focused on flipped LIS editors and asked questions about the process of transitioning, including who started and approved the process, what barriers, if any, they faced, what were the benefits in transitioning, how transitioning affected the journal’s budget and their familiarity with current OA funding models. Both protocols were approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Nevada, Reno and the Research Ethics Board at the University of Saskatchewan.

We emailed participation invitations to 41 unflipped editors and to 12 flipped editors. Eight unflipped editors, representing journals published by large for-profit companies, smaller for-profit companies, and not-for-profit societies, and seven flipped editors, all of whom represent journals published by not-for-profit societies, agreed to participate. Interviews were conducted and recorded virtually in Fall 2023 using Microsoft Teams with at least two researchers taking part in each one. The protocols were used as the basis for questions, but we asked follow-up questions as needed. At the end of this round of interviews, we assessed our notes and agreed that we had reached saturation and thus did not seek out any more participants.

Microsoft Teams generated transcripts for each interview, which we then edited against recordings of the interviews for basic clarity and anonymization. Anonymized transcripts were then uploaded to Taguette, a free and open-source program used for qualitative coding. We read through each transcript and then used an inductive method to develop a list of descriptive codes and then ultimately themes. After conducting a test round on one transcript that we all coded and used to further refine the codebook, a mix of two researchers were assigned to independently code each transcript. We then discussed any disagreements and brought in the third team member whenever we could not reach a consensus.

Limitations

Some of the flipped journals transitioned a decade or more ago, meaning that the editors of those journals could have forgotten, or misremembered, details related to the journal's transition. All participants were asked questions based on their own knowledge, memory and opinions, which could affect the responses they gave. Also, although all participants were asked about their views on current OA funding models, a review of the responses showed there was a broad enough misunderstanding of these questions to render the data questionable, and we opted to not analyze it. Finally, by limiting our interviews to journal editors, we missed the views and experiences of others who were or could be involved in the process, including society board members.

Results and discussion

Because of the small pool of potential research participants – fewer than 100 – and details shared through the interviews that could lead to identification, no identifiers, not even anonymous ones, will be used for specific participants. Instead, participants will be referred to either as a flipped or unflipped editor. For the same reason, we have opted to generalize some details provided by participants to maintain their anonymity. Direct quotes have been lightly edited for clarity and to remove individuals' details.

Barriers

Three broad themes emerged when it came to barriers preventing LIS journals from transitioning. These included lack of momentum, lack of power and competing priorities. The issue of lack of momentum reflects the idea of not having enough incentive to push for a transition, whether from lack of time and energy, lack of knowledge, or not seeing a need to transition. Meanwhile, the structure of how many scholarly publishers operate makes it hard for editors to push for change, often giving them little or no power over many of a journal's policies. Finally, some unflipped editors expressed competing priorities through an attachment to traditional practices, such as print copies of journals, that are stronger than any desire to support a more equitable OA model.

Lack of momentum

One common theme that emerged under the broader idea of lack of momentum was how overworked and undercompensated journal editors in the study are. Unflipped editors often referred to issues around how little they are paid for their work. When one asked for a raise to their honorarium, the publisher told them they needed to increase how many articles they published. Another editor noted that the publisher provides no funding for any outreach for the journal, such as attending conferences to promote it, meaning the editor's institution often pays for this. Some unflipped editors do not receive an honorarium at all. When asked whether they would ever consider starting an equitable OA journal, an unflipped editor strongly objected, saying, 'No, absolutely not. Couldn't pay me to do that. Nope, it's already so much work to do the journal, and it's so much unpaid labor.' An unflipped editor said their journal has struggled to find assistant editors who could eventually take over for the main editor. Another unflipped editor was already in the process of leaving the journal because of the increasing workload.

'Unflipped editors often referred to ... how little they are paid for their work'

Flipped journal editors also expressed issues around labor and being overworked, whether for themselves or for society staff who support the journal in some way. However, they also discussed efforts to reduce this labor, often by seeking changes to what the journal publishes. For instance, one flipped editor noted their society had opted to publish some non-peer-reviewed content in another venue, which reduced the need for copy-editing and layout. Some flipped journals have sought to increase the number of editors to reduce how much any one person does, with one editor saying, 'Until last year I didn't work with anyone in terms of editorial help and that was very taxing at times. I used to work whole weekends and nights on the journal while my kids were younger. It was really difficult.' However, at least one flipped editor noted they have also struggled to recruit more editors and assistant editors.

Unflipped editors generally expressed support for OA, but they also showcased a lack of knowledge about OA beyond the generalities through statements they made about OA. A few openly stated they were not very familiar with various OA models, with one saying, 'This is certainly not my area of expertise so I wouldn't even know necessarily how to approach those conversations.' Many of them expressed how their journal already supports OA in some way, whether by offering hybrid OA through the payment of APCs or by allowing green OA, which some of them said was enough. However, evidence shows that LIS researchers often fail to openly archive their research even when journal policies allow it, and APCs for many LIS journals – especially those published by the large, for-profit publishers – have increased past US\$3,000.³² One unflipped editor did express recognition of this, noting 'That's pretty prohibitive even for those of us in the United States and North America and European countries, where it might be within reach for some. For those in the Global South, I would characterize it as prohibitive.' One unflipped editor said they would send articles to anyone who asked for them, but then readers would need to at least think of trying this. It would also likely become unsustainable if many made the attempt.

'Unflipped editors ... showcased a lack of knowledge about OA beyond the generalities'

Most of the unflipped editors also expressed that they have not heard requests from any stakeholders to transition their journal. This included not hearing from society members, potential authors or peer reviewers about issues with the journal's open access status, or lack thereof. One unflipped editor noted that although they had recently decided to part with the journal because they did want to support open access more, the journal's other editorial members had not expressed any such interest. Two unflipped editors noted that if they did have complaints from authors about things like APCs, they might be able to use this in negotiation with their publisher, but they had not heard such complaints.

Lack of power

Unflipped journal editors indicated that the publishing system also makes it difficult to push for change. A common refrain echoed by most of the unflipped editors was how little power or agency they had with their publisher. One unflipped editor said they had pushed for OA with their publisher representative but got nowhere. One had success in pushing back on a proposal by their publisher to increase the journal's APC but also noted they were not able to get it lowered. Several even said their publisher never consulted them about APC prices and just told them about any increases after they had already been instituted. One noted that this applies to policies other than just financial ones, saying, 'There were policies, in other areas, where those policies have simply been created, and I've been notified after the fact.' Another said LIS journal editors had had some success in pushing for OA but were told by the publisher to not discuss their advocacy with any other editors outside of the LIS journals.

This lack of agency was coupled with a lack of knowledge of how their publisher worked. Unflipped editors would discuss how they had one, maybe two, contacts with their publisher but little other knowledge of how the publisher operated. One unflipped editor stated, '[Our publisher contacts] really do serve as a gatekeeper, I would say, between the editor in chief and the editorial board, the editorial team, and the journal at the corporate level...' This often included knowledge of how production of an article worked, with some unsure

how copy-editing was handled. 'Once something goes into production, I don't see anything anymore, which is both a blessing [and] a curse,' an unflipped editor said. Although this was most common with the for-profit publishers, one unflipped editor of a society journal noted that they had attempted to create a proposal for transitioning the journal to an equitable OA model only to fail when their society would not turn over detailed financial information about the journal.

Unflipped editors also had little knowledge of their journal's budget outside of any honorariums that they and some assistant editors received. Some discussed how their publishers would sometimes share reports about how a journal performed compared to other journals in the publisher's portfolio in terms of research metrics, while others noted their publisher had quotas for how many articles they should publish. But they often said they did not know when asked about finances, with one unflipped editor stating, 'I don't know whether we're responsible for generating our own revenue. I don't know if we're self-supporting or if [the publisher] has a fund for LIS journals that come in through all of its LIS journals, that it reallocates and distributes. I have no idea how any of those decisions are made.'

'Unflipped editors ... had little knowledge of their journal's budget'

Competing priorities

Some unflipped editors discussed worries about what role the loss of subscription revenue would have on the journal and, in some cases, the society. One unflipped editor noted their society has no funding to support the finances of the journal, while another unflipped editor argued that revenue from the journal supports other activities by the society that do promote OA. An unflipped editor who works with a large for-profit publisher journal said they doubted their publisher would want to risk losing money. Relatedly, one unflipped editor mentioned worries about society members losing a benefit and noted that concern is the main barrier their journal faces in transitioning. However, as noted in the following 'Benefits' section, several flipped editors stated that while this had been raised as a concern before transitioning, ultimately none of their members had expressed any displeasure.

Interestingly, several of the unflipped journals continue to issue print copies of their journals, and several editors expressed nostalgia about losing them. One unflipped editor expressed concern that members would be upset if they were to lose print copies but added, 'Maybe I'm being too conservative in imagining what the members want – and maybe ten years ago it would have been too early to say such a thing. And maybe now they're more ready to being willing to go towards an all-electronic [journal].'

Finally, some unflipped editors made statements reflecting a type of vocational awe in their work that could potentially prevent them from pushing for change. For instance, one unflipped editor who had expressed frustration with their publisher also evidenced a need to continue to support the journal because they believed it played an important role for local authors, adding, 'which is why I've stuck around fighting, fighting, fighting for this time.' Another expressed similar feelings of frustration in the administrative work and in working with the publisher but said that they kept at it because of their desire to work with authors.

Benefits

When flipped editors were asked about the benefits they observed as a result of moving to an equitable OA model, three main benefits emerged. Editors articulated how the move aligned with the values of the society, journal and/or librarianship in general. They also gave examples of ways in which moving to open allowed the journal to increase its reputation or reach or increase the reputation of the organization. The final benefit discussed was the lack of effect of the move on their society's membership and associated membership revenue.

Value alignment

Flipped editors articulated a number of benefits associated with moving to an equitable OA model. The benefit that was mentioned by every single flipped editor was the ability to align their journal with professional values, either with the professional society the journal was

associated with, or with librarianship more broadly. The frequency of this benefit suggests that it may have been a motivating catalyst rather than an ancillary benefit, as demonstrated by one unflipped editor who said, '...[The organization] felt that it was important enough to get this information out, that this was a role that a professional organization should take.' Perhaps one of the biggest takeaways from the flipped editors was the degree to which organizational values played a role in decision-making and could point at potential strategies for flipping other professional society journals. As Hall et al. argue with regards to ALA journals specifically, 'Considering the core values of librarianship, there should be no question of whether or not an ALA journal should be OA.'³³

Reputation enhancement

Another benefit mentioned by most flipped editors was the impact that flipping to an equitable OA model had on the journal's reputation, which included expanding the audience reach for the journal as well as providing a benefit to the journal's authors. As one flipped editor described, 'We want peoples' good writing, you know, their advances in the field, to have a wider audience, to try to be as inclusive as possible.' In some cases, flipped editors were able to provide direct evidence of this broader reach. One flipped editor described seeing an article they had published mentioned in a major national news venue. When the editor contacted the newspaper to ask how they had found the article, the news outlet reported finding the article through an open repository. Another flipped editor similarly mentioned one of their articles being cited in a government document, which they attributed to their OA model.

Flipped editors also detailed the benefits of enhancing the journal's reputation in terms of overall citation counts, which aligns well with studies that demonstrate an open access citation advantage.³⁴ As one flipped editor summed up, 'We are now, as I said, being cited more frequently and in more places.' Finally, some journal editors also saw reputation enhancement as a way to demonstrate the value of their professional society, rather than attributing benefits solely to the journal. As one flipped editor said, '...It's also valuable for our members to see this stuff get out there and to see it boosts [the organization's] reputation. I think, ultimately, we felt that [the journal] would be stronger as an advertisement for the [organization's] division than it is as a member benefit.' Finally, one flipped editor thought that flipping to an equitable OA model also helped diversify their author pool and resulting content. '...Moving to open actually lowered barriers for participation globally. It was much, much easier for international authors to engage with the journal, to submit papers.' This demonstrates several related benefits that are not purely values-oriented, but as one that they see as bringing more concrete benefits to the journal and/or society – an important consideration for others who may be amenable to flipping to an equitable OA model.

'some journal editors also saw reputation enhancement as a way to demonstrate the value of their professional society'

(Lack of) effect on membership

Finally, one benefit that multiple flipped editors discussed was less a benefit and more an unrealized worry: that removing access to the journal as a professional society membership benefit would result in a significant decrease in membership. As one flipped editor summed up, '...As it turned out, it did not blow up the association's finances.' Another reflected on their society's return on investment to members, saying, 'It was really clear that the main benefit is the support that we can offer our members through programming.' This self-reported unrealized decrease in membership is one that could be tested by unflipped journals through a membership survey. One unflipped editor's society did conduct a survey, noting that the results indicated that the society's members did not engage heavily with the journal and thus would not be likely to negatively perceive the removal of journal access as a member benefit. As far back as 2004, Willinsky noted that access to a society's journal as a membership benefit was becoming increasingly meaningless, while OA publishing promotes the association's larger mission.³⁵

Potential next steps

These interviews provide insights into the inner workings and decision-making structures for some LIS journals and, based on our results, point to potential next steps in terms of possible ways to support existing equitable OA journals, as well as supporting or encouraging journals that have not made the transition. These ideas are roughly ordered by feasibility and/or complexity.

Targeting journals more likely to consider a transition

In talking with unflipped editors of journals with large for-profits, we concluded that not all journals are equally poised to potentially flip and consider the large for-profit journals to be relatively 'unreachable'. As discussed in our previous research, the profit-oriented nature of large for-profit publishers leaves little room for broader values such as equitable access to information to permeate existing operations, and the unflipped editors' rationalizations for staying with the journal make it unlikely that many, if any, editorial board members would seriously consider a mass resignation or declaration of independence.³⁶

This does not mean that future action regarding equitable OA models cannot be reached for these LIS journals, but it is unlikely that individual LIS journal editors will be effective catalysts or change agents for an entire for-profit organization. The complicated bureaucracy and hierarchy at these organizations appear to make meaningful change within them difficult, and in at least one case, actively discouraged. However, other actions may help change this dynamic.

Proactive engagement with unflipped journals

As discussed previously, two unflipped editors mentioned the lack of demand from authors or editors regarding equitable OA models. While it may not be feasible for potential authors to email editors simply to let them know why they will not be pursuing publication with their journal, authors who choose to pursue publication with an unflipped journal may wish to more actively exercise their author rights by inquiring about APC waivers or requesting an addendum to their journal agreement.³⁷ Other proactive models could include active editorial board or other involvement with an unflipped journal to help promote change from within. However, the lack of formal term limits, which was mentioned by six of the eight unflipped editors, may limit the opportunities for which internal involvement may serve as a catalyst for change.

Support for LIS journal editors

Several avenues of support for editors of both flipped and unflipped LIS journals may be achievable and desirable next steps. Some editors we interviewed, both flipped and unflipped, expressed a desire for some kind of community of practice, including one unflipped editor who said, 'just having places where journal editors within our discipline can have shared discussions about these kinds of issues and brainstorm solutions would be a powerful step.' We agree that a community of practice would increase channels of communication, encourage the sharing of ideas and best practices, and potentially help inform LIS editors on OA issues and resources.

'Some editors ... both flipped and unflipped, expressed a desire for some kind of community of practice'

Beyond this, we see several potential avenues of support for editors that could help further equitable OA models, largely by working to reduce or eliminate some of the barriers previously described. For example, establishing coaching or mentoring programs for existing journal editors could help to expose more editors to the benefits of equitable OA models as well as potential mechanisms for flipping, as could creation of educational materials or resources. Creation of training materials, mentorship opportunities or similar supports to educate more librarians on serving in editor positions could help increase the potential pipeline of future journal editors to alleviate labor sustainability concerns, while also making it more feasible for more journals to have formal term lengths for editors.

'establishing coaching or mentoring programs for existing journal editors could help'

Aligning institutional expectations

Another action that many librarians can seek to address is the role of journal service as well as the value of publishing in OA venues in their institution's guidelines for reappointment, tenure and promotion. While this seemingly modest suggestion underlies a much larger and more complex undertaking than this article has the time or space to fully outline, the aligning of librarian reward systems with journal labor and publishing could go a long way toward ensuring the sustainability of many LIS journals, particularly those that rely heavily on unpaid labor, as well as those with concerns regarding the sustainability of labor. However, we recognize that this action may not be easy to implement for many librarians or institutions for a variety of reasons.

Shared-support journal model

Finally, looking at more long-term and large-scale potential next steps, we see value in a shared-support model for existing and future OA LIS journals. This model most closely mirrors that of the Open Library of Humanities, though much more work would need to be done to evaluate the feasibility of such a plan, particularly given the varied publishing workflows and structures many of the editors described. Our hope is that such a shared-support model could be funded to not only provide financially sustainable support for each journal's production workflow but also provide more consistent funding to the editors and other journal laborers to decrease the overall reliance on unpaid labor that many journal editors described.

'we see value in a shared-support model for existing and future OA LIS journals'

Conclusion

This study's qualitative interviews helped confirm some of the barriers that can prevent LIS journals from flipping to an equitable OA model, including lack of momentum to do so by people involved with the journal, publishing structures that make it difficult and stronger desires in other areas that conflict with OA, such as providing a journal as a benefit to society members. Although we hope to eventually support more LIS journals to transition, we also recognize that the competing priorities and values of large for-profit publishers might mean it is unlikely that their journals will do so in the foreseeable future, and therefore we see efforts will be best placed toward journals from not-for-profit and smaller for-profit publishers. In the pursuit of transitioning more LIS journals, the profession should not forget to ensure support for journals that already practice an equitable OA model. These journals also face struggles to continue operating sustainably, and the profession should seek to ensure that they can continue for the long-term in order to provide researchers with equitable publishing options.

These supports should include providing a community of practice for LIS editors to learn from each other and share resources that can help them, no matter the type of journal they edit. Resources can incorporate what other LIS journals have learned in transitioning, as well as organizations that offer support to equitable OA journals. However, journal editors should not be expected to bear all the burden of helping their journals transition; instead, the profession as a whole should seek what efforts can be distributed. Groups such as ACRL, SPARC, Lyrisis, Jisc and Invest in Open Infrastructure can use their organizational power and existing efforts to help push for change as well. Support for journals to transition exists, but it might be too decentralized for many journal editors, especially those not already involved in the OA world, to be aware of. Likewise, institutions that offer tenure or promotion to those who publish in LIS journals can look at their current publishing incentives to see how they can be better aligned to support equitable OA journals, such as those that give credit to OA as scholarship in their tenure or promotion by-laws.

'journal editors should not be expected to bear all the burden of helping their journals transition'

More work and research will be needed to help continue this process. Future areas of research should include studying how current LIS OA journals are faring with new funding mechanisms, including Lyrasis' Open Access Community Investment Program, as well as considering gaps in infrastructure support that, if filled, could help remove barriers for LIS journals wishing to transition. Future research projects could be enhanced by looking beyond just journal editors and including other colleagues involved in the transition.

Data availability statement

Interview transcripts from this research project will not be shared with others in order to protect the identities of participants. Interview protocols and the codebook used to analyze interview transcripts can be found at <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13135636>.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

A list of the abbreviations and acronyms used in this and other *Insights* articles can be accessed here – click on the URL below and then select the 'full list of industry A&As' link: <http://www.uksg.org/publications#aa>.

Competing interests

The authors have declared no competing interests.

References

1. "Budapest Open Access Initiative," BOAI, 2002, <http://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/read> (accessed 24 February 2025).
2. Jeroen Bosman et al., "OA Diamond Journals Study. Part 1: Findings," Zenodo, March 9, 2021, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4558704> (accessed 24 February 2025).
3. Leigh-Ann Butler et al., "The Oligopoly's Shift to Open Access: How the Big Five Academic Publishers Profit from Article Processing Charges," *Quantitative Science Studies* 4, no. 4 (November 1, 2023): 778–99, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1162/qss_a_00272 (accessed 24 February 2025).
4. "Core Values of Librarianship," American Library Association, 2024, <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/advocacy/intfreedom/corevalues>.
5. Association of College & Research Libraries, "ACRL Policy Statement on Open Access to Scholarship by Academic Librarians," Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL), 2019, <https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/openaccess> (accessed 24 February 2025).
6. Rachel Borchardt et al., "Are We Walking the Talk? A Snapshot of How Academic LIS Journals Are (or Aren't) Enacting Disciplinary Values," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, January 19, 2022, <https://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2022/walking-the-talk/>; Micah Vandegrift and Chealsye Bowley, "Librarian, Heal Thyself: A Scholarly Communication Analysis of LIS Journals," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, 2014, <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2014/healthyself/> (accessed 24 February 2025).
7. Rachel Borchardt, Teresa Schultz, and DeDe Dawson, "Financial and Other Perceived Barriers to Transitioning to an Equitable No-Publishing Fee Open Access Model: A Survey of LIS Journal Editors," *College & Research Libraries* 85, no. 1 (2024), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.85.1.96> (accessed 4 March 2025).
8. Wanyenda Chilimo et al., "Adoption of Open Access Publishing by Academic Researchers in Kenya," *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 49, no. 1 (October 2017): 103–22, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3138/jsp.49.1.103> (accessed 24 February 2025); Andy Nobes and Siân Harris, "Open Access in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: Attitudes and Experiences of Researchers," *Emerald Open Research* 1, no. 3 (January 1, 2019), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/EOR-03-2023-0006> (accessed 24 February 2025); Peter Suber, "Which Pockets Pay APCs?," *Peter Suber* (blog), 2024, <https://suber.pubpub.org/pub/j1jk6hu9/release/14> (accessed 24 February 2025).
9. Addisu Mekonnen et al., "What Costs Half a Year's Pay for African Scholars? Open Access," *Nature* 596, no. 7871 (August 10, 2021): 189–189, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-021-02173-7> (accessed 24 February 2025).
10. Mekonnen et al. "What Costs Half a Year's Pay for African Scholars?," Sara Rouhi, Romi Beard, and Curtis Brundy, "Left in the Cold: The Failure of APC Waiver Programs to Provide Author Equity," *Science Editor*, (February 21, 2022): 5–13, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36591/SE-D-4501-5> (accessed 24 February 2025).
11. Emily Cox, "Research Outputs as Testimony & the APC as Testimonial Injustice in the Global South," *College & Research Libraries* 84, no. 4 (2023), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.84.4.513> (accessed 24 February 2025); Harrison Inefuku, Curtis Brundy, and Sharla Lair, "Building Community: Supporting Minoritized Scholars through Library Publishing and Open and Equitable Revenue Models," *College & Research Libraries* 85, no. 1 (2024), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.85.1.64> (accessed 24 February 2025); Reggie Raju et al., "An Authentic Flip Subscription Model for Africa: Library as Publisher Service," *Library Management* 41, no. 6/7 (January 1, 2020): 369–81, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/LM-03-2020-0054> (accessed 24 February 2025); Audrey C. Smith et al., "Assessing the Effect of Article Processing Charges on the Geographic Diversity of Authors Using Elsevier's 'Mirror Journal' System," *Quantitative Science Studies* 2, no. 4 (2021): 1123–43, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1162/qss_a_00157 (accessed 24 February 2025).
12. Ashley Farley et al., "Transformative Agreements: Six Myths, Busted," *College & Research Libraries News* 82, no. 7 (2021), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.82.7.298> (accessed 24 February 2025); Raju et al., "An Authentic Flip Subscription Model for Africa."
13. Butler et al., "The Oligopoly's Shift to Open Access."
14. Ángel Borrego, "Article Processing Charges for Open Access Journal Publishing: A Review," *Learned Publishing* 36, no. 3 (July 2023): 359–78, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1558> (accessed 24 February 2025); Shaun Yon-Seng Khoo, "Article Processing Charge Hyperinflation and Price Insensitivity: An Open Access Sequel to the Serials Crisis," *LIBER Quarterly: The Journal of the Association of European Research Libraries* 29, no. 1 (2019): 1–18, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18352/lq.10280> (accessed 24 February 2025); Nina Schönfelder, "Article Processing Charges: Mirroring the Citation Impact or Legacy of the Subscription-Based Model?," *Quantitative Science Studies* 1, no. 1 (February 1, 2020): 6–27, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1162/qss_a_00015 (accessed 24 February 2025).

15. Alexander Grossmann and Björn Brembs, "Current Market Rates for Scholarly Publishing Services [Version 2; Peer Review: 2 Approved]," *F1000 Research* 10, (2021): 20–20, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.27468.2> (accessed 24 February 2025).
16. Ángel Borrego, Lluís Anglada, and Ernest Abadal, "Transformative Agreements: Do They Pave the Way to Open Access?," *Learned Publishing* 34, no. 2 (April 2021): 216–32, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1347> (accessed 24 February 2025); Farley et al., "Transformative Agreements"; Alison Mudditt, "Transitional Agreements Aren't Working: What Comes Next?," *The Scholarly Kitchen* (blog), April 4, 2024, <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2024/04/04/transitional-agreements-arent-working-what-comes-next/> (accessed 24 February 2025); Ben Rawlins, "Are Transformative Agreements Worth It? An Analysis of Open Access Publication Data at the University of Kentucky," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 68, no. 1–2 (April 29, 2024), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5860/lrts.68n1.8211> (accessed 24 February 2025).
17. "The Budapest Open Access Initiative: 20th Anniversary Recommendations," Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI), 2022, <https://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/boai20/> (accessed 24 February 2025).
18. Alicia Wise and Lorraine Estelle, "How Society Publishers Can Accelerate Their Transition to Open Access and Align with Plan S," *Learned Publishing* 33, no. 1 (2020): 14–27, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1272> (accessed 24 February 2025).
19. "About Us|Library Publishing Coalition," Library Publishing Coalition, <https://librarypublishing.org/about/> (accessed 24 February 2025).
20. Inefuku, Brundy, and Lair, "Building Community"; Helen Dobson, "A New Approach to Supporting Scholarly Communications: Announcing the Open Access Community Framework (OACF)," *Jisc* (blog), February 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240927232517/https://www.jisc.ac.uk/blog/a-new-approach-to-supporting-scholarly-communications-announcing-the-open-access-community-framework-oacf> (accessed 4 March 2025); "SCOAP3 – The Sponsoring Consortium for Open Access Publishing in Particle Physics," SCOAP3, <https://scoap3.org/> (accessed 4 March 2025); Martin Paul Eve, Paula Clemente Vega, and Caroline Edwards, "Lessons From the Open Library of Humanities," *LIBER Quarterly: The Journal of the Association of European Research Libraries* 30, no. 1 (March 26, 2020): 1–18, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18352/lq.10327> (accessed 24 February 2025).
21. Raym Crow, Richard Gallagher, and Kamran Naim, "Subscribe to Open: A Practical Approach for Converting Subscription Journals to Open Access," *Learned Publishing* 33, no. 2 (2020): 181–85, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1262> (accessed 24 February 2025).
22. Allison Langham-Putrow and Sunshine J. Carter, "Subscribe to Open: Modeling an Open Access Transformation," *College & Research Libraries News* 81, no. 1 (January 6, 2020): 18, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.81.1.18> (accessed 24 February 2025).
23. Heather Morrison, "Small Scholar-Led Scholarly Journals: Can They Survive and Thrive in an Open Access Future?," *Learned Publishing* 29, no. 2 (2016): 83–88, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1015> (accessed 24 February 2025).
24. Jessica Lange and Sarah Severson, "Work It: Looking at Labour and Compensation in Canadian Non-Commercial Scholarly Journals," *KULA: Knowledge Creation, Dissemination, and Preservation Studies* 6, no. 2 (May 17, 2022): 1–21, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18357/kula.151> (accessed 24 February 2025).
25. Aileen Fyfe et al., "Untangling Academic Publishing," Zenodo, 2017, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.546100> (accessed 24 February 2025).
26. Timothy W. Elfenbein, "Cultural Anthropology and the Infrastructure of Publishing," *Cultural Anthropology* 29, no. 2 (May 19, 2014): 288–303, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca29.2.06> (accessed 24 February 2025).
27. Lisa Matthias, Najko Jahn, and Mikael Laakso, "The Two-Way Street of Open Access Journal Publishing: Flip It and Reverse It," *Publications* 7, no. 2 (April 2019): 1–29, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/publications7020023> (accessed 24 February 2025).
28. Nathan Hall et al., "Leading by Example? ALA Division Publications, Open Access, and Sustainability," *College & Research Libraries* 77, no. 5 (2016), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.77.5.654> (accessed 24 February 2025); John Willinsky, "Scholarly Associations and the Economic Viability of Open Access Publishing," *Journal of Digital Information* 4, no. 2 (2004), <https://jodi-ojs-tdl.tdl.org/jodi/article/view/jodi-117> (accessed 24 February 2025).
29. Hall et al., "Leading by Example?"
30. Borchardt, Schultz, and Dawson, "Financial and Other Perceived Barriers to Transitioning to an Equitable No-Publishing Fee Open Access Model."
31. Borchardt, Schultz, and Dawson.
32. Borchardt et al., "Are We Walking the Talk?"; Jill Emery, "How Green Is Our Valley?: Five-Year Study of Selected LIS Journals from Taylor & Francis for Green Deposit of Articles," *Insights* 31, no. 0 (June 20, 2018): 23, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.406> (accessed 24 February 2025).
33. Hall et al., "Leading by Example?," 664.
34. Allison Langham-Putrow, Caitlin Bakker, and Amy Riegelman, "Is the Open Access Citation Advantage Real? A Systematic Review of the Citation of Open Access and Subscription-Based Articles," *PLoS ONE* 16, no. 6 (June 23, 2021): e0253129, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0253129> (accessed 24 February 2025).
35. Willinsky, "Scholarly Associations and the Economic Viability of Open Access Publishing."
36. Open Access Directory, "Journal Declarations of Independence," Open Access Directory, June 11, 2024, https://oad.simmons.edu/oadwiki/journal_declarations_of_independence (accessed 24 February 2025).
37. "Author Rights: Using the SPARC Author Addendum," SPARC, accessed June 14, 2024, <https://sparcopen.org/our-work/author-rights/brochure-html/> (accessed 24 February 2025).

Article copyright: © 2025 Teresa Schultz, Rachel Borchardt and DeDe Dawson. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the **Creative Commons Attribution Licence, which permits unrestricted use and distribution provided the original author and source are credited.**



Corresponding author:

Teresa Schultz

Scholarly Communication & Social Sciences Librarian

University of Nevada

Reno

USA

E-mail: teresas@unr.edu

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4518-032X>

Co-authors:

Rachel Borchardt

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8464-1045>

DeDe Dawson

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1281-5744>

To cite this article:

Schultz T, Borchardt R, Dawson DeDe, "Barriers and benefits of transitioning to an equitable open access model: interviews with LIS journal editors," *Insights*, 2025, 38: 8, 1–13; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.677>

Submitted on 30 July 2024

Accepted on 15 October 2024

Published on 06 June 2025

Published by UKSG in association with Ubiquity Press.