

SAGE Open five years on: Lessons learned and future thoughts on open access in humanities and social sciences.

blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2016/05/30/sage-open-five-years-on-lessons-learned-and-future-thoughts-on-open-access/

*SAGE Open is celebrating its 5th birthday. When SAGE Publishing launched SAGE Open in 2010, the humanities and social sciences were still grappling with how to approach open access (OA). Through its mega-journal, well over 1000 articles have now been published OA, and it is one of SAGE's most-used journals. **Dave Ross** looks back at the journal's growth and lessons learned.*



Back in 2010, we knew there was an appetite for open access publishing and we knew that SAGE was well-positioned to bring this new publishing model into the social sciences. What we didn't know was just how receptive the community would be. Following our innovative instincts – as an independent publisher, we are encouraged to forge into unproven and even unknown territory – we decided to experiment. We created a broad-spectrum, cross-disciplinary journal that we hoped would provide something new to the academy, something that traditional niche journals couldn't, in the spirit of providing a first-rate service for our authors, editors and societies.

What we've learned along the way

Growth of the journal did not come without its challenges. When we launched, there were still more questions than answers about open access in HSS such as questions about funding models, sustainability, etc. We were entering a model reliant on author side charges when we knew that the researchers who would be our authors didn't receive the kinds of funding that are available in other disciplines.



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We spent a good deal of time in the early days directly answering questions about OA from potential authors, adding to the growing conversations in the social sciences around open access by actively doing, not speculating, and supporting wide access to HSS research conducted across the globe by keeping article processing fees low. As a

result, even from the outset we saw real engagement from the community. In the first month we received 144 submissions and we were able to publish our first papers a few months later in April 2011. Today, we've published nearly 1,400 papers and received almost 7,000 submissions.

Although we started out with a traditional Advisory Board structure comprised of academics in key disciplines, as the volume of submitted articles grew, we decided to rethink our structure and began to implement a more distributed model. Today, the Editorial Board has over 500 members from 63 different countries assisting with reviews and Editorial guidance. Our editorial structure on individual articles is distributed even more widely; we commission article editors to assist on specific topics as needed. In this way, the "board" is effectively the entire community and we've engaged with a large number of scholars in the last five years (roughly 23,000) either serving as authors, article editors, or reviewers for the journal.

One thing we could have done differently is to introduce special issues earlier – although the journal has been successful with a broad scope, the response to special issues and topics has been huge. We have learned that SAGE Open has been a good outlet for individual papers on interdisciplinary and niche topics, but I don't think we realized how many of these topics could have been better served as small collections of articles that could move the research in that area forward even further. By introducing special issues, we were better able to serve the HSS community and any HSS researchers looking for new and exciting findings on a single topic across multiple disciplines. The response to developing these special issues has been positive, and impact is something we're looking forward to seeing.

SAGE Open in the future

As we look toward the future, our hope is to foster new forms of publishing and collaboration going beyond the traditional approach. Our focus will be on eData, new ways of doing research, innovative methods and article types, and continuing the conversation beyond the publication of the article as the new norm. In short, we would like SAGE Open to be a place for quality humanities and social science innovation in form, content and substance.

Supporting this strategy will be SAGE's new partnership with [Atypon](#) to host all of SAGE's journal content on Literatum, Atypon's online publishing platform. Using their pioneering technological power, SAGE Open is well positioned to move our strategy forward and provide new and exciting opportunities for publishing innovation in the social sciences.

Our strategy is ambitious and SAGE Open is still relatively new. We have established the concept but there are still answers to be sought about funding for social sciences and open access. As it has done from the very beginning, SAGE Open hopes to inform these discussions, adapt to the needs of the community, and provide a high-quality OA outlet in a field eager for innovation.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Impact blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [Comments Policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

About the Author

David Ross is Executive Director of Open Access. David is responsible for the strategic direction of Open Access (OA) in SAGE Publishing's journals program, as well as managing SAGE'S flagship OA titles: SAGE Open, SAGE Open Medicine and SAGE Open Medical Case Reports. Alongside this David is also responsible for the development of the systems, process and policies that support SAGE's OA publishing. David has a rich history of experience with OA. He managed SAGE's initial venture into OA publishing, a partnership with Hindawi, and was a founding board member of the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA). David also represented SAGE as one of the publishing partners for the Study of Open Access Publishing (SOAP), a two-year project launched in 2009 with the aim to disseminate broadly a description and analysis of models of open access publishing. David can be followed on Twitter at [@DrossUK2011](#)

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