

Three ways to support the democratisation of academic journals

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*Much of the move towards open access in academic publishing has been funded by article processing charges. However, in recent years APCs have risen by 6%, making them prohibitively expensive for some of the academic and non-profit institutions primarily funding them. Reporting on a recently published white paper, **Danielle Padula** argues that in order to rein in journal prices and facilitate open access, journal publishing must be democratised. We can all support this endeavour by rethinking how journals should be published, getting involved in developing non-profit alternatives, and by helping to increase awareness of the need for a sustainable open access future.*



According to a [recent Jisc report](#), article processing charges (APCs), often used to fund open access (OA) article production, have risen by 6% over the past few years. The OA movement promises to make journal articles freely available, but it doesn't guarantee that the publication of research will be affordable to the academic and non-profit institutions primarily funding it.

What can be done to lower journal publication costs and avoid replacing the serials crisis with an APC emergency? "[Democratizing Academic Journals: Technology, Services, and Open Access](#)," a white paper by [Scholastica](#), explores the issue and argues that in order to rein in journal prices and facilitate OA, journal publishing must be democratised. Members of the academic community must gain access to the knowledge and tools needed to publish journals and create affordable alternatives to corporate titles.



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From working to develop more sustainable OA publishing models to simply spreading the word about the issues at hand, there's a lot academics can do to catalyse the democratisation of journals. Here are three steps you can take:

Rethink journal publishing online

Now is a time of great transition in academic publishing. Scholars are embracing OA and conducting research online, diminishing the need for print journals. There's endless opportunity to produce journals more cheaply on the web, but in order to harness it we need to think about what triggered the serials crisis and how to curb those factors.

There are three primary forces behind the serials crisis to consider:

- Centralised journal control
- Control over impact measures
- Specialisation of journal publishing.

Corporate publishers have benefited from, and codified, the above trifecta. By acquiring ownership of journals, particularly high-impact titles in which scholars seek to publish their research, corporate publishers have been able to keep increasing journal prices knowing libraries will pay to ensure their communities have access to the literature. In the past, corporate publishers' access to specialised tools and knowledge needed to publish research, particularly in print and early online publishing, put them at an advantage as non-profits couldn't easily produce journals on their own. However, with the introduction of new technologies, this is rapidly changing.

Today, we're seeing examples of more affordable OA journals being produced by non-profit publishers and groups of scholars. This has led many to question the efficiency of corporate publishers, as well as how much of corporate revenue is needed to pay for journal costs and how much is built in as profit. Examples of alternatives to corporate-run journals include *Collabra Psychology*, a University of California Press OA journal that operates with a below-market APC of \$875, and *Discrete Analysis*, an arXiv overlay mathematics journal that operates with a small grant from the University of Cambridge and without author or reader fees.

A common thread among such journals is that they publish online only, and rather than contracting out production to corporate publishers, they use online services to publish on their own. OA advocate Björn Brembs argues that such service-based publishing models will introduce greater transparency to the cost of journal production. Using services, academic institutions will be able to bid for the most affordable publishing options rather than forgoing control over scholarly content and the cost of its production to third-party publishers. This rethinking of how journals should be published – by seeking publishing services rather than publishers – is key to lowering the cost of research production.

Get involved in non-profit journal publishing

It's not enough to just rethink how journals should be published, members of the academic community must also get involved in developing alternatives to expensive corporate journals. Some ways different groups can do this include:

- Non-profit organisations such as scholarly societies and university libraries launching or revitalising publishing programmes online
- Journal editors flipping paywalled journals to OA models or starting independent OA titles to compete with subscription-based journals
- Non-profit journal publishers of all sizes becoming familiar with online technologies and services that will enable them to affordably publish in-house.

A necessary component to advancing OA publishing is exploring varied journal funding models. In addition to concerns of inflation, APCs are generally problematic for certain disciplines as some have [limited funding](#). In order to

democratise journal publishing, non-profit publishers will have to consider different funding models such as grants, subsidies, and submission fees, as well as APCs, and find which option will work best for their discipline.

Spread the word about the need for sustainable OA

In addition to rethinking the corporate journal model and getting involved in OA publishing initiatives, academics can help by communicating the need to make OA publishing more affordable. Many scholars are still learning about OA and it's important that all are made aware that it's not enough to simply publish in OA journals. If those journals have exorbitant APCs then they're not contributing to a sustainable OA future. Encouraging scholars to question and avoid high OA publishing fees is key to democratising journals.

One concern for scholars when choosing where to publish their work is the reliance many academic institutions have on the journal impact factor (JIF) to gauge research quality, particularly in funding and tenure proceedings. Academics can help encourage the democratisation of journal publishing by seeking new means of showing research impact, such as article-level metrics, and pushing institutions to look beyond the JIF.

By challenging corporate publishing norms and employing online services to create affordable OA journal models, the academic community will be able to democratise journal publishing. In doing so, academics will introduce greater transparency around how research is produced and priced. We're standing at the crossroads of the OA future. Now's the time for the academic community to reclaim control of journals and ensure that not only the research in journals but also the tools needed to run them are made accessible to all.

The white paper this post is based on, "[Democratizing Academic Journals: Technology, Services, and Open Access](#)", is available for download on the [Scholastica website](#).

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

Danielle Padula is Community Development Manager at Scholastica, where she heads up community outreach and content creation. Danielle runs Scholastica's blog and social media feeds, and creates resources to help journal editors and researchers navigate the evolving journal-publishing landscape. She tweets for Scholastica at [@scholasticahq](#)

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