Cornell Open Access Publication (COAP) Fund

Background

In 2009, Cornell’s Provost was invited by Harvard’s Provost to join him as a signatory to the Compact for Open-Access Publishing Equity (COPE) (http://www.oacompact.org/), an initiative to support open access publishing options for authors at member institutions by funding the publication charges that undergird many open access models:

“We the undersigned universities recognize the crucial value of the services provided by scholarly publishers, the desirability of open access to the scholarly literature, and the need for a stable source of funding for publishers who choose to provide open access to their journals’ contents. Those universities and funding agencies receiving the benefits of publisher services should recognize their collective and individual responsibility for that funding, and this recognition should be ongoing and public so that publishers can rely on it as a condition for their continuing operation.

Therefore, each of the undersigned universities commits to the timely establishment of durable mechanisms for underwriting reasonable publication charges for articles written by its faculty and published in fee-based open-access journals and for which other institutions would not be expected to provide funds. We encourage other universities and research funding agencies to join us in this commitment, to provide a sufficient and sustainable funding basis for open-access publication of the scholarly literature.”

Cornell's Provost asked the Cornell University Library (CUL) to consider this invitation. After a recommendation from the Library Faculty Board to join COPE, the Provost contributed $25,000 and CUL matched that amount, drawing from the Library’s materials funds.

With this initial funding, Cornell became one of the original COPE signatories. CUL established the Cornell Open-Access Publication (COAP) fund at the beginning of the fall 2009 semester as a pilot project to support the fee-based open access model of scholarly publishing for journal articles. The COAP fund’s website is at http://www.library.cornell.edu/compact.

Operating COAP

COAP supports current Cornell faculty, post-doctoral researchers, graduate and professional students, staff members, and students who want to make their journal articles free to all readers immediately upon publication by paying reasonable publication and submission fees required by fee-based open access journals. The goals of the COAP Fund are to increase access to Cornell’s research and scholarship and to aid Cornell faculty, students, and staff who want to publish in open-access journals but who do not have other
sources of funding to cover article processing fees (sometimes called article process charges or APCs).

The COAP Fund is a limited resource intended to support fee-based open access publishing across the university, including the Weill Medical College. Authors are first expected to request funding for open access publication from their funding agency if they can do so (the National Institutes of Health, the Wellcome Trust, and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute will all fund open access publication as part of their research grants). The COAP fund is available to qualified members of the Cornell community who do not have access to these or other sources of funding. The fund has not, up to now, been available to Cornell alumni who are not employed by the University.

An individual author is eligible for up to $3,000 per year in COAP funding; this can be a single allocation to cover the processing charge of one article or multiple allocations for multiple publications over the course of a year. Unused amounts do not roll over to future years (i.e., Dr. Smith may receive $1,350 for a publication in PLOS One in 2013 but the unused portion of the $3,000 per maximum does not “roll over” to 2014).

In the case of an article with multiple authors, each eligible author can apply for reimbursement for a prorated portion of the publication fee. An example: An article with three authors, two of whom are from Cornell, is to appear in a journal with a $3,000 publication fee. Each Cornell author may apply for reimbursement for $1,000. In the hypothetical case of an eligible journal with a $6,000 publication fee, each Cornell author could apply for reimbursement for a prorated portion of the $3,000 funding cap per article, or $1,000.

Funding for articles that comply with the eligibility criteria has been distributed on a first-come, first-served basis.

**Supporting Open Access Best Practices**

The COAP fund supports only “pure” open access journals, in which all of the articles in the journal are openly accessible. The fund does not support publication in “hybrid” journals, in which authors can pay a publication fee to make individual articles openly accessible while the rest of the content is offered for sale. CUL believes that the hybrid business model is not a viable, sustainable pathway to open access. It is a form of publisher ‘double dipping’ and decreases cost transparency. For a longer discussion of the problems of the hybrid OA model see [http://svpow.com/2013/06/14/some-problems-with-hybrid-open-access/](http://svpow.com/2013/06/14/some-problems-with-hybrid-open-access/)

The COAP fund covers publishing charges only for journals listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) – [http://doaj.org](http://doaj.org), which exercises consistent selection criteria in terms of the journal’s subject scope, content level, and review practices.

CUL conducted vigorous marketing about COAP when the fund was first launched:

• [http://www.library.cornell.edu/node/2230](http://www.library.cornell.edu/node/2230)

The Library maintains a COAP webpage, but the initiative has mainly relied on word of mouth publicity for most of its existence. Use of the fund by Cornell authors has been steady.

**Current Status and use to date (1/16/14)**

**Fund balance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial Amount</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity Costs</td>
<td>$862 (posters, post cards, mailing)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Starting Amount</td>
<td>$49,138</td>
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<tr>
<td>APC’s paid</td>
<td>$43,874</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current Balance</td>
<td>$5,264</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average $/article</td>
<td>$1,125</td>
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**Departments receiving funding**

39 open access articles by authors from the following Cornell departments have received COAP funding since the fund was established (3 additional after the interview results):

- Animal Science-3
- Biological and Environmental Engineering -3
- Biological Statistics & Computational Biology-1
- Biomedical Engineering-1
- Ecology and Evolutionary Biology-2
- Entomology -4
- Human Development- 2 (1 after the interview results)
- Lab of Ornithology-6 (1 after the interview results)
- Law -1
- Linguistics-1
- Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering-1
- Materials Science-1
- Microbiology and Immunology -1
- Natural Resources- 3
- Neurobiology and Behavior-3 (1 after after the interview results)
- Nutritional Sciences-2
- Plant Pathology-1
- Weill Medical Center -3

**Journals published in**

BMC Evolutionary Biology- 2
Status of lead author
Assistant Professor-5
Associate Professor-5
Grad Student-6
Postdoctoral Research Associate
Professor-13 (8 unique)
Research associate-5 (3 unique)
Senior Extension Associate-1
Senior Research Associate-2
Visiting Fellow-1

Number of unique lead authors -31

To determine how the 39 articles funded by COAP compare to the total number of open access articles published by Cornell authors, a search of the PLOS database was conducted on January 16, 2014. A search of (author_affiliate:"cornell university") AND (publication_date:[2010-01-01T00:00:00Z TO 2013-12-31T23:59:59Z]) yielded 492 articles. This number should represent unique articles whose authors or coauthors identified themselves as being affiliated with Cornell University; 16 of these 492 articles were at least partially paid for with COAP funding.

The query about Cornell authors was also submitted to the PLOS managers, who produced a spreadsheet listing 272 unique articles accepted from 2010 to 2013 with Cornell authors being the submitting (lead) author. According to CUL’s PLOS contact, the figure is mostly likely lower than the database query result because the latter includes Cornell authors who were not submitting authors.

Presumably, the 476 PLOS articles by Cornell authors not funded by COAP (i.e., 97% of Cornell PLOS articles) were covered by other funding sources, including authors’ research grants. The number of Cornell authors with articles in other open access journals may be comparable to the figure for PLOS, suggesting widespread use of open access publication outlets by Cornell scientists and scholars, with a relatively minimal investment by the
University in facilitating this shift via payment of APCs. To that extent, the COAP fund is working exactly as intended: “to aid Cornell faculty, students, and staff who want to publish in open-access journals but who do not have other sources of funding to cover article-processing fees.”

CUL needs to understand how the vast majority of Cornell authors publishing in fee-based open access journals are paying the APCs. Are they specifically writing publishing costs into their grants? Are they tapping their allocated research budgets (and if so, what might be the cumulative impact on graduate student hiring, etc.?)? Are they paying out-of-pocket? Additional research is needed to understand these practices.

**COAP Author Interview Findings**

In order to better understand the COAP fund’s impact on recipients and to help decide whether to solicit resources for the continuation of the fund, I asked the CUL Assessment and Communication Unit to conduct interviews with the authors who made use of the fund. Erin Eldermire was assigned the task and she did an excellent job setting up the questions, conducting the interviews and summarizing the attached results. Three additional COAP requests were funded after the interviewing concluded. The interviews reveal that without the fund, half of those interviewed would either have published in a traditional (subscription) journal or not published at all.

What would you have done with the article if you hadn’t received the award to cover the author fee?

- 6 (42%) – would have published in traditional journal
  - 1 professor, 1 PhD student, 1 research associate, 1 senior research associate, 1 senior extension associate, 1 visiting fellow
- 4 (28%) – would have found different project money to cover fees
  - 2 associate professors, 1 professor, 1 PhD student
- 3 (21%) – would have paid out of pocket
  - 1 assistant professor, 1 professor, 1 PhD student
- 1 (7%) – would not have published article
  - 1 professor

Selected author statements from the interviews:

- *My article was a description of two new species of fish, which usually wouldn’t get a lot of attention. However, this journal is good at getting press releases out. They encourage authors to write press releases themselves (and have editors on staff who help authors do this). As a result, we had stories about our article translated to French and Portuguese and it got lots of hits and attention. None of that would have happened if we used the traditional publishing model.*

- *This paper has made a huge impact, and led to the making of documentary film. I’ve been at Cornell for 37 years, and there is no other event in my career that equates to the opportunity that publishing this paper has led to. I wouldn’t have published this*
**article without the fund. It is THE benchmark in my entire career.**

- **When publishing in open access journals I have received more inquiries from international colleagues. I don’t think this happens with traditional journals as much.** *I get more of a global reach when I publish in open access.*
- **International access to my publications is much improved.** *I do work in South America, and I know that open access has transformed science there. Brazil especially – virtually all of the journals published in Brazil use the open access model. By publishing in an open access journal, my South American colleagues have access to what I publish.*

These and other excerpts from the interviews are extremely enlightening and illustrate the importance of the COAP fund in promoting a number of Cornell’s institutional goals:

- the COAP fund assists in promoting the **global reach**, visibility, and use of Cornell scholarship by providing seamless online access to the important results of research at Cornell to the entire world at no cost to the user;
- the COAP fund assists Cornell community members, particularly **new faculty**, graduate students, and even undergrads, who may not have the resources to pay for open access publication fees;
- the COAP fund saves Cornell researchers’ time, since maintaining their own systems to distribute journal reprints is unnecessary when articles are published on an open access basis.

The COAP fund is a low-maintenance program that levels the playing field for Cornell community members who want to promote their research results by publishing in fee-based open access journals.

**Recommendations**

The COAP fund:

- should be refreshed with another one-time contribution of funds from the Provost and the Library of $25,000 each;
- should continue to be administered by the Library, since the most knowledge and experience in open access publishing models on campus resides here;
- should not be used to fund institutional memberships in open access models such as PEERJ, BMC, or PLOS. COAP funds should be allocated exclusively to individual authors for individual publications;
- should be made more visible through enhanced promotion by the office of the Provost or the Vice Provost for Research, as well as the Library.

**Further Study**

We need to understand the sources of funds other than COAP that Cornell authors are using to pay open access APCs. COAP-funded publication represents a small subset of Cornell authors’ publishing activity in pure open access journals. APCs not covered by COAP might represent hidden costs to the University.