

The Importance of Open Access

Written by Stephen McGlinchey

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<https://www.e-ir.info/2015/08/20/the-importance-of-open-access/>

STEPHEN MCGLINCHEY, AUG 20 2015

Open access is a simple idea. People should be able to access scholarship without burdensome fees, paywalls, or complicated access measures. At it's fullest, it means that someone finds something on the internet, clicks it, and it opens – in full. Of course... open access (OA) *in practice* has not been so *open*. This is because delivering content to end users/readers is not free. There are significant production costs, editing costs, and hosting costs that a publisher must cover. Publishers are coming under pressure from governments (such as in the UK) to offer OA, and the majority have settled on charging authors (or their sponsors) varying fees associated with publication. Then, with the fee having been covered, the content is provided freely.

This is one of the problems with open access. The most common OA practice – a publication fee – is the most distasteful of all, and a retrograde step disguised as a forward looking one. There is an argument over this statistic as OA can be technically facilitated if an author puts a non OA published article on their own university website in draft form (usually a pre-edited microsoft word version). However, this does not, to me, resemble any real idea of OA as the actual published article is still locked down in an archaic copyright machine. It is a countermeasure only – and an irritating one for authors and readers.

The bottom line is that most research is paid for from the public purse anyway (or straight out of researchers' own pockets) – and it is wrong that universities and private individuals should have to pay *again* to access it. Or, have to access draft versions of work – which defeats the purpose of having something 'published' in the first place. And, that sentiment is creating a momentum that has even led to the Netherlands planning a boycott of Elsevier over OA issues.

When all is settled, OA will surely become the norm in scholarship and current practices will fade. The bigger publishers will have to find a way to profit ethically from their scholarly publications (or not profit at all), much in the way that university presses commonly do. The academic world needs good publishers, and there are many of them who publish important work in the Politics and IR field. So, the hope is that as the OA train rolls to its destination, those publishers find a place for it rather than resist it or take on flawed half measures like author fees.

At E-IR we have developed a model of full OA, which is possible for us due to our non-profit status and our low cost overheads. Everything we publish is free to view, and authors do not pay a fee. This is somewhat radical, and we make it possible by operating a successful website that can raise advertising income, and by selling paperback copies of our books (which are also available for free on the website). We spend every penny we make on our publications.

E-IR's model of OA is only possible because of over 100 volunteers who devote some of their time to helping us edit and publish content. Obviously, bigger publishers cant replicate that, but we hope we are setting a good example for the industry of what is possible with OA when applied to its fullest.

E-IR is launching a series of short-form scholarly monographs presenting new and innovative scholarship from emerging and established researchers. Each book will be available for free download in high quality PDF e-book from E-IR and also on sale in paperback for a modest price. I hope these will be a success, and the first two titles are already commissioned. So, as a series editor of this project I'm excited to see them roll out.

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...One more small step for OA.

About the author:

Dr Stephen McGlinchey is the Editor-in-Chief and Publisher of E-International Relations and Senior Lecturer of International Relations at UWE Bristol. His publications include *Foundations of International Relations* (Bloomsbury 2022), *International Relations* (2017), *International Relations Theory* (2017) and *US Arms Policies Towards the Shah's Iran* (Routledge 2021, 2014). You can find him on twitter @mcglincheyst or LinkedIn.