

In response to Peter Suber and Heather Joseph,

We are grateful to be having this conversation regarding the future of academic publishing. With the planned changes described in the Nelson memo, we believe it is important that all researchers be aware of how they will be affected. The Letter to the Editor by Suber and Joseph highlighted two aspects of our original article and provided additional context that we would like to address.

First, our original article implied that the only way to comply with the changes would be to publish in an open access (OA) journal. We apologize for any misunderstanding; the Nelson memo specifies that all federally funded research must be “freely available and publicly accessible by default in agency-designated repositories without any embargo or delay after publication.” While this does not necessarily require publishing in an OA journal, publishing in a traditional subscription journal and being compliant with the new public access rules requires researchers to be informed of the requirements of the funding agency as well as the rules dictated by the journal. For example, traditional journals may allow self-archiving of the accepted manuscript in a repository, but rules may vary from journal to journal. Additionally, multiple versions of the same manuscript in different locations can lead to version control issues, where changes due to copy-editing and post-publication errata would not be reflected in the repository automatically. Publishing OA avoids these pitfalls as the final published version can be archived.

The second point raised was that not all OA journals charge article processing charges (APCs). Suber and Joseph state that 68% of journals listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) charge no APCs. We recognize that there are many options for publishing OA with no APC. However, 68% does not tell the entire story. The DOAJ gives a seal to journals that meet their best practice criteria. Only ~8% of the almost 20,000 OA journals they track meet these criteria. However, fewer than 3% of OA journals they track follow the best practices and are free, meaning it is exceedingly rare for a journal to adhere to the highest OA standards and be free of charge. Further, Suber and Joseph state that works published OA are overwhelmingly in journals that charge APCs. Many of the most prestigious journals charge heavily to have articles freely available upon publication. We would argue that the sheer number of free OA journals is not important when federally funded researchers are constrained by universities that continue to weigh publication prestige heavily during hiring, promotion, and tenure reviews.

Dissemination of results is vital to science, and journals play an important role. These policy changes are an important step in making scientific research open and equitable. Researchers at all career levels will be affected, so this continued discourse is valuable. We are grateful to JSPG for publishing this work and to the authors of the Letter to the Editor for their thoughtful input.

Signed,

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