

## Partners in Progress

### Publishers and Librarians Support Open Access Publishing

Joseph Lerro and Rachel E. Scott

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There is a tendency to discuss open access (OA) publishing as though it is monolithic. Those of us engaged in the work of researching, preparing, and negotiating, however, know OA agreements are as unique as the community they serve. Open access agreements are created based on local needs, with the input of a variety of stakeholders, and require flexibility on the part of the publisher and institutional client. Open access agreements represent a partnership, and ideally one that furthers the goals of both parties. This discussion between Joseph Lerro, Open Research Business Development Manager with Taylor & Francis, and Rachel Scott, Associate Dean for Information Assets at Illinois State University (ISU) and Editor of *Library Resources & Technical Services*, explores one such partnership that led to an innovative, social-sciences focused OA agreement. By sharing our experiences as publisher and librarian, our hope is to add complexity to discourse that has pigeonholed transformative agreements. The following prompts and our responses to them frame the considerations we brought into the partnership, reiterate our shared goals, and highlight some takeaways that we hope will be of interest to those newer to negotiating OA agreements.

***The relationship between publisher and librarian or, more broadly, corporation and client is often depicted as antagonistic. Why approach OA publishing through the frame of partnership?***

**Joseph Lerro:** When we speak with institutions about either OA or open research more broadly, our objective is to become a trusted partner who can help them achieve fundamental organizational goals. A cross-functional partnership is essential to drive value and impact of the research being produced by the institution and published by Taylor & Francis.

**Rachel E. Scott:** Open access publishing has disrupted scholarly communications in a variety of fundamental ways. As a librarian, I am committed to creating an information-rich environment that facilitates discovery and access of scholarly journal content. That has historically been accomplished via subscriptions, but librarians and publishers are no longer the exclusive locus of discovery and access they once were. I am interested in partnering broadly to ensure that my community has seamless and legal access to materials. I am also interested in leveraging available funding to make local scholarship available to readers worldwide. Given the disruptive and dynamic nature of OA models, I find it especially important to engage with trusted and established publishers—ones that aren't going anywhere, whose journals are compliant with the Committee on Publication Ethics, and whose employees make themselves available for honest conversation and work collaboratively towards solutions.

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***Widespread dissemination of information is a goal shared by both publishers and libraries. Why is OA important to your organization and the work being done by publishers and libraries?***

**JL:** Taylor & Francis’s mission is to foster human progress through knowledge. We see sustainable open initiatives as a way to achieve this by prioritizing openness, transparency, and collaboration throughout the research cycle to enable a more open scholarly ecosystem. We are committed to not only opening access to research articles, but also to opening up all the outputs of scholarly activity such as data, computer code, and citations. By increasing the availability of scholarly activity, open research can help demonstrate societal impact of research by providing the potential to assist policymakers, nongovernment agencies, the media, educators, and practitioners to put research into action.

**RS:** Open access is aligned with the very ethos of librarianship, a profession that seeks to connect users with the information they need. Milner Library at Illinois State University (ISU) committed to expanding support for scholars and OA in its 2021–2026 Strategic Plan.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, we’re investigating ways to explicitly support university authors as they publish and share their work and also ways to make it easier for them to choose OA, whether by publishing in an OA journal or by depositing in an institutional or disciplinary repository.

***Open access agreements differ considerably from traditional subscriptions. What is your approach to OA agreements?***

**JL:** Our approach with OA agreements has been to evaluate the current relationship we have with an institution and to prioritize the needs and objectives of the institution when discussing a potential agreement. We work with the institution to develop a plan for furthering the objectives of open research. We understand the unique circumstances at each institution means moving toward an open research landscape at a different pace. While we do have a general framework that aligns with other transformative efforts, we are not prescriptive in our approach. Instead, we work alongside institutions to create agreements that benefit all stakeholders.

**RS:** As Joe mentioned, it is important to consider the current relationship—the extent of recent engagement with the publisher by current faculty, staff, and students, both as authors and readers. At ISU, we’ve been intentional in balancing the OA deals on offer with the needs articulated by our community. In the case of Taylor & Francis, ISU authors consistently publish their work with the publisher and have requested support beyond Green OA deposit. I’m fortunate to work with colleagues who have a willingness to experiment and see what we learn. Our philosophy is that there isn’t one way to approach OA agreements, no right/wrong approach, only steps towards bringing institutional values, authors’ needs, and the budget into alignment.

***Open access agreements are negotiated and developed with input from (at least) two parties. Nonetheless, there is the stereotype that publishers only offer a standard transformative agreement. What was unique in this agreement?***

**JL:** During our discussion, all parties learned that a full-scale read and publish agreement would require an initial publishing investment beyond the library's capabilities. We looked at an alternative model that focuses on increased access and publishing support for specific subject areas. This customized approach was in line with the library's budget and addressed the immediate objective of providing more access to specific content areas while providing opportunity to support OA publishing of underfunded research in those same areas.

By listening to the library's stated objectives for OA support and increased access to our education journals, we were able to craft a subject-specific approach that addressed their priorities. The creation of this model has provided an option that can be replicated with other institutions based on their specific needs and objectives.

**RS:** There are many assumptions about transformative agreements, perhaps because many share certain characteristics. For example, on the read side, a transformative agreement often includes the publisher's complete portfolio of journals. In this case, we hoped to expand read access within education given the strength and size of our programs in that area and the budgetary reality of being unable to afford a comprehensive transformative agreement. Rather than assuming an OA agreement would be impossible and pursuing additional individual title subscriptions or activating the content with Get It Now, we worked with Joe and his team on an agreement that would secure access to the education journals while maintaining our current subscriptions. Although we had more targeted needs on the read side, we wanted to make the publish funds available to all university authors, irrespective of the discipline or department.

***Open access is most commonly associated with publishing in the sciences. Why did you focus on humanities and social sciences (HSS) in this agreement?***

**JL:** The costs associated with publishing OA are frequently covered by funds used from research grants. Researchers in HSS disciplines consistently face the challenge of smaller and nonexistent grants. University libraries have the ability to support those researchers with funding for OA publication. By focusing on HSS disciplines in this agreement, we have been able to work together to open a pathway for researchers wanting to publish articles OA without needing to rely on grants funding.

**RS:** Joe is absolutely correct; many faculty at ISU have confirmed that they either have no or limited funding, and certainly not enough to support OA publishing. Additionally, publishers with portfolios focused primarily or exclusively on sciences—such as Association for Computing Machinery, Company of Biologists, Institute of Physics, and Microbiology Society, among others—have more proactively promoted transformative or other OA Agreements. Milner's agreement with Taylor & Francis demonstrates to the university community our support for research, and in HSS areas in which scholars often have less grant funding and the awards are smaller. In fact, with the exception of the College of Business, faculty and students across all university colleges have published their work open access under the agreement with Taylor & Francis. ISU's Office of Research was so pleased by the explicit support for HSS—a goal of that unit—that they provided funding to expand support for the agreement.

We also see that OA publishing provides insight into scholarly communications processes; this is an important educational experience for ISU students. The library shares information on OA agreements across our social media channels, *News* site, and web homepage, and the content often gets picked up and shared by the University's Office of Research. Promoting these agreements not only increases campus awareness among active authors, but also gives students—particularly in those fields that are not as well funded and have fewer OA publication opportunities—the ability to learn about scholarly publication processes in their field and feel supported in conducting research outside of traditionally well-funded disciplines.

***Taking to the pages of Library Resources & Technical Services to discuss the agreement is an unusual approach. What do you want librarians and/or publishers to take away?***

**JL:** The ultimate objective is to promote the publication and distribution of sound science. As with institutions, each publisher experiences a unique set of circumstances that can affect the speed at which openness is obtained. It is imperative to focus on the areas where publisher and institutional objectives align and to use those commonalities as a basis for developing terms for OA. Libraries and publishers are allies in our efforts to create a more open scientific publishing landscape. It is through working together that we can achieve a more open scholarly ecosystem.

**RS:** I want to encourage librarians to advocate for the needs of their community. In conversation with publishers, I've learned that some librarians have asked what *the* OA agreement involved and seemed to assume that a publisher has a single OA agreement on offer. Joe and his team demonstrated a willingness to collaborate to help us achieve our goals of expanding read access to education journals and promoting ISU scholarship to scholars worldwide.

## Reference

1. Milner Library, Illinois State University, "Milner Library 2021–2026 Strategic Plan," <https://library.illinoisstate.edu/downloads/about/Milner-Library-Strategic-Plan.pdf>.