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A Library View of the SPARC Initiative

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support of our own argument that **Kurt Cobain** was awesome. **Questia** does not permit this, a feature for which publishers rather than students will thank them. We instead re-typed the short passage, and used **Questia**'s very fine citation feature to begin a very fine bibliography. Choice of styles: **MLA**, **Chicago Manual of Style**, **Turabian**, **Harvard**, etc.

We carried on, got some context from *The Oxford History of the Twentieth Century*, considered *European Readings on* [the grunge aspect of] *American Culture* and located a novel in which the music and milieu featured prominently. Our skull was not crushed. When we concluded our overview of the social aspects of grunge, we had footnotes and a bibliography all properly cited. We stored our paper on the **Questia** site, and headed for last call at the Internet Café, where we called up our paper to show it off to our friends, who were all deeply impressed, and went off to start their own 48-hour free trials.

Questions, Questions:

1 How does a user know when **Questia** is an appropriate tool? What topics make sense to search there? Plant hybrids? No. Regulation of nuclear waste? Probably not. Election reform? Jackson Pollock? Are contemporary topics covered as well as historical topics?

2 If I were **Questia**, why wouldn't I market university-wide subscriptions to the university administration at a reduced rate, in exchange for university support?

3 If I were the university administration, why wouldn't I in turn wrap the cost of **Questia** access (as a study aid) into the cost of tuition?

4 If I were a student, why wouldn't I use my university-supplied or university-required **Questia** subscription as a first source for liberal arts topics?

5 If I were an academic librarian, especially in a large institution where undergraduates are not always well supported, why wouldn't I support **Questia** as a well-selected "virtual college library?"

6 Would a 250,000 title collection via **Questia** serve to accredit an institution that contracted **Questia** as a library? 

A Library View of the SPARC Initiative

The Scholarly Publishing & Academic Resources Coalition

by **Carla Stoffle** (Dean of Libraries, University of Arizona)
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As in the game "Telephone," **SPARC**'s message sometimes gets distorted with each telling. There are those who swear that **SPARC** has declared war against all commercial publishers. Others accuse us of bandying about unproven assertions, overblown rhetoric and an ahistorical approach to publishing. Some out there have even charged us with being card-carrying followers of **Chairman Mao**.

So, comrades, as a member of **SPARC**'s Steering Committee since its inception in 1998, I set out here to remind readers of **SPARC**'s purpose and history while evaluating **SPARC**'s long-term effectiveness. Because **SPARC** is altering the way scholars and librarians think about journal publishing — and changing the culture of academic publishing in the process — it's important to set the record straight.

For the Record

Throughout the 1990s, members of the research and academic library community made many unsuccessful efforts to influence the scholarly publishing marketplace. Prices for many journals were skyrocketing annually without adequate explanations from their publishers. Eventually we realized that we would be much more effective working as a united front. So, using the **Pew Higher Education Roundtable's Policy Perspectives** ("To Publish and Perish," Special Issue, March 1998) as our intellectual launching pad, several **Association of Research Library** directors created **SPARC**. Our goal was to address the pricing practices and policies of scientific, technical and medical (STM) journals.

Simply put, **SPARC** was our response to unconscionable journal price increases and the declining influence of scholars over the future of scholarly communication.

Today, **SPARC** is an international alliance of approximately 200 universities, research libraries, and library associations. It is built as a constructive response to market dysfunction in the scholarly com-

munication system that has reduced dissemination of science and crippled libraries charged with providing up-to-date research materials, and this remains its primary focus.

Just as important, **SPARC** serves as a catalyst for action to create a system of communication that is more responsive to the needs of scholars and academe. **SPARC** members have followed through on their commitment to educate faculty on serials issues. As a result, we've seen a number of new electronic initiatives in scientific publishing get a much better reception from scholars than they would have just a few years ago. This is one of the ways we measure success.

More specifically, however, **SPARC**'s agenda focuses on enhancing broad and cost-effective access to peer-reviewed scientific, technical and medical research, where the economic benefits to libraries are greatest. This objective is pursued via a two-pronged strategy:

- Incubation of alternative channels of scholarly communication; and
- Public advocacy of fundamental changes in the system and the culture of scholarly communication.

SPARC's members, affiliates and endorsers (institutions in North America, the U.K., Europe, Asia, New Zealand and Australia) support its mission via a variety of local initiatives. Full members of **SPARC** pledge, in principle, a purchase commitment to **SPARC**-partnered journals that fit their collection development agenda.

Measuring Success

There's no overnight solution to the serials crisis, and we don't claim that **SPARC** is the solution, either. There are many solutions out there. What excites those of us committed to **SPARC**'s goals is that many new players have entered the STM marketplace in the past two years: not just **SPARC** journals, but other creative, much-needed initiatives like the **Public Library of Science**, **Open Archives**, and many others. While

SPARC doesn't take the credit for these initiatives, I believe strongly that scholars have responded positively in part because of the way **SPARC** member libraries have educated the research community.

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Significantly, SPARC has encouraged libraries to experiment with new models, too. Here at the **University of Arizona**, for example, SPARC helped us think through how the library could become a journal publisher by educating us on workable business models and providing legal advice. As a result, in the next few months we'll be launching a scientific e-journal edited by one of our faculty members. SPARC also acted as matchmaker between the **Cornell University Press** and the **Duke University Press**, a groundbreaking partnership which ultimately conceived **Project Euclid** (an online initiative which advances effective and affordable scholarly communication in theoretical and applied mathematics and statistics). Other library- and university-based projects are in various phases of discussion.

Overall, libraries benefit in several concrete and consistent ways from SPARC activities:

- SPARC-supported projects are significantly less expensive for libraries
- SPARC-supported products are attracting quality authors and editors, making them essential parts of the library collection

- STM journal price increases have moderated
- New players have entered the STM marketplace and new models are gaining acceptance, giving libraries greater options
- SPARC has created an environment where journal editorial boards are taking action to forge links between libraries and faculty

SPARC displays high marks on achievement in each of these important areas.

Making the Grade

As the table below (Illustration A) shows, SPARC Alternative journals—titles that compete head-to-head with high-priced titles—are significantly less expensive for libraries.

As everyone knows, prices can be calculated a number of ways: price per article, price per page, price per character. SPARC partner journals are steadily building a stable of authors and papers that will make them competitive no matter how the statistics are analyzed. Library support of these alternative titles gives them the time to build scale, gain greater credibility and publish the high-quality research the audience demands.

As they do so, these alternative journals provide libraries with a choice – a choice that didn't exist before. Before *Evolution-*

ary Ecology Research (EER), for example, there was only *Evolutionary Ecology (EE)*, a journal published eight times annually whose price jumped 19 percent per year over a twelve-year period. There were no options for a librarian whose faculty members needed that research except to continue subscribing.

Now, many libraries are switching to *Evolutionary Ecology Research*. While *Evolutionary Ecology* published only six issues in 1999 (Volume 13), the year *EER* launched, it published no issues at all in 2000 (Volume 14). *EER* published eight issues in both years. Perhaps in reaction to this challenge, *Evolutionary Ecology* announced that it has officially reduced its price. Meanwhile, *EER* continues to charge just \$305 for a print and electronic subscription, and it is covered in the major indexing services.

At the **University of Arizona**, we've made the decision to cancel *EE* and are reviewing whether or not to continue subscribing to other journals for which there is a SPARC alternative. For us, and for a number of other research libraries, SPARC journals are not an additional expense; they're an opportunity for us to provide quality research to our faculty at a lower price, and with friendlier licensing policies. In most cases, SPARC-partnered journals commit to better copyright and intellectual property policies for their authors as well.

But it's important to remember that a library like ours needn't cancel widely in order to recover its investment in one SPARC journal. For example, if a library decided to drop *Tetrahedron Letters* because it subscribed to *Organic Letters* (a partnership between SPARC and the **American Chemical Society**), it would save enough money to buy the rest of the SPARC Alternative collection—and still have money left over.

As the following table demonstrates (see pg. 38, Illustration B), authors are steadily switching from the commercial journal, *Tetrahedron Letters*, to the ACS/SPARC journal, *Organic Letters*, building the prestige of the latter.

From a library perspective, however, the quality and price of the SPARC-partnered journal doesn't tell the whole story. We also see journal price increases moderating across the board: across the STM publishing spectrum and with journals that have no official relationship to SPARC.

Texas A&M University offers data illustrating how it is benefiting from serials price moderation. The library bases this example on the cost of its Elsevier subscriptions, since Elsevier takes up such a significant part of the budget. According to the Dean, as a result of Elsevier's new pricing, Texas A & M paid about \$78,000 more for its Elsevier titles instead of the \$144,000 it would have paid if prices increased at a 12 percent annual rate.

What does this have to do with SPARC?

SPARC has given library customers a trumpet through which to blast their dissatisfaction over journal pricing. It did not escape my notice, or the notice of many others, that Elsevier's

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Illustration A

The Value of Competition:
Savings Opportunities in a Sampling of SPARC Partners

Please note: the following is a small selection of SPARC Partners.

Established Title		SPARC Alternative		Savings Oppty
Title	Price	Title	Price	
<i>Topology & Its Applications</i>	\$2,509	<i>Algebraic and Geometric Topology</i>	Free	\$2,509
<i>Journal of Crystal Growth</i>	\$8,657	<i>Crystal Growth & Design</i>	\$1,600	\$7,057
<i>Evolutionary Ecology (price reduced in 2001)</i>	\$560	<i>Evolutionary Ecology Research</i>	\$305	\$255
<i>Topology</i>	\$1,223	<i>Geometry & Topology</i>	Free	\$1,223
<i>Organic Geochemistry</i>	\$2,359	<i>Geochemical Transactions</i>	\$100	\$2,259
<i>Sensors & Actuators, A & B</i>	\$4,989	<i>IEEE Sensors Journal</i>	\$395	\$4,594
<i>Machine Learning</i>	\$1,006	<i>Jnl of Machine Learning Research</i>	Free	\$1,006
<i>Tetrahedron Letters</i>	\$9,036	<i>Organic Letters</i>	\$2,438	\$6,598
<i>Chemical Physics Letters</i>	\$9,637	<i>PhysChemComm</i>	\$100	\$9,537
<i>Jnl of Logic & Algebraic Programming</i>	\$701	<i>Theory & Practice of Logic Programming</i>	\$300	\$401
TOTAL	\$40,677		\$5,238	\$35,439

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price-moderation policy was announced the year after SPARC's launch. Because SPARC offers consistent, focused communications about the effect of publisher price increases, it has helped create an atmosphere in which journal publishers know that they can be held accountable for their policies. Most importantly, publishers now know that customers can go elsewhere if they are not satisfied.

Behind the Scenes

Unknown to most, SPARC also exerts pressure to reduce prices on journals which are not SPARC partners. Typically, an editorial board or publications committee of a journal will approach SPARC for advice on how to negotiate down the subscription cost of its journal and/or how to create a viable alternative. In the case of the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, for example, members of the **American Association of Physical Anthropologists (AAPA)** worked with SPARC to craft a demand to its commercial publisher for a new deal.

As the negotiations concluded, the journal's institutional price dropped from \$2,085 to \$1,390, with expanded editorial office support. The Chair of the AAPA Publications Committee later remarked that "SPARC played an essential role in our successful negotiations with our journal's publisher...[The publisher] knew we'd been in contact with SPARC. Both our journal and association stand to benefit substantially."

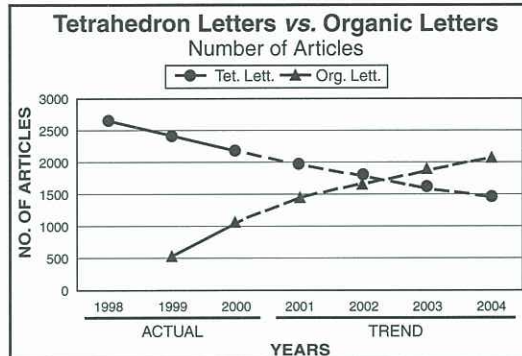
This kind of pressure is being brought to bear at other journals – some already in touch with SPARC, and surely others we don't yet know of.

Leveling the playing field

I know I'm not the only one out there who has watched with delight the seeding and greening of new players in the STM marketplace. And as the publishing playing field evens out, libraries will have even greater options. Early on, SPARC recognized the **Open Archives Initiative (OAI)** as a key strategy offering a broad range of solutions for libraries. The **Open Archives Initiative** develops and promotes interoperability standards that aim to facilitate the efficient dissemination of content. It has its roots in an effort to enhance access to e-print archives as a means of increasing

Illustration B

Note: Numbers for the period 1998-2000 are actual numbers of published manuscripts for both journals. Values for Tetrahedron Letters 2001-2004 are extrapolations based on current trends. The Organic Letters outlook is based on the 1998 project plan. Organic Letters was launched in 1999; its number of published manuscripts exceeded initial projections.



scholarly communication. The fundamental technological framework and standards that are developing to support this work are independent of both the type of content offered and the economic mechanisms surrounding that content. This promises much broader relevance in opening up access to a range of digital materials.

With the recent release of the **OAI** metadata harvesting protocol, **OAI** could well become the "killer app" that makes possible a new scholarly information landscape. **SPARC** encourages institutions to develop **OAI**-conformant repositories and services, and it is developing plans to facilitate organized information sharing, educational activities, advocacy and possibly even shared development at some point in the future.

All of these new initiatives spring from the same source: desire for community control of research; enhanced access; and use of technology to facilitate the publishing process. From **PubMedCentral**, with its institutional backing and government support, to **Public Library of Science**, with its grassroots groundswell and Web-based campaign, libraries are beginning to understand a simple truth: publishing doesn't belong just to the big firms that tell us only they can do the job right.

The Author Question

For **SPARC**, the key to a successful alternative journal is that libraries inform faculty on the serials crisis, and encourage scholars' submissions to the new generation of journals. Quality content is foremost in creating a viable alternative to traditional journals.

SPARC has served libraries well as a strong advocate within and outside of the library. The **Create Change** initiative (launched by **SPARC**, **ARL** and **ACRL**) and the **Declaring Independence** initiative (launched by **SPARC** with support from the **Triangle Research Libraries Network**) give librarians the tools they need to back up their own efforts to educate. **Create Change** lays the groundwork, offering librarians strategies for working with faculty, and pro-


viding faculty background and options for action. Its Web site is a librarian's virtual toolkit, giving us materials we all need when we're faced with a faculty member who wants to know why their journal may be cut, and what they can do to become part of the solution.

Declaring Independence expands tactically on an aspect of **Create Change**. Geared toward editorial boards of high-priced commercial journals, **Declaring Independence** is **SPARC**'s first effort to reach editors directly. It guides these community leaders down a path of responsible journal publishing, outlining ways to evaluate whether or not their journal is serving its community. It allows them to diagnose issues with their current publisher, explore options or alternatives to their current publisher, if appropriate, and suggests possible new directions.

Both of these initiatives have hit their targets, resulting in researchers resigning from journals they realized do not serve their community and starting up alternative, science- and library-friendly journals. Equally important, both of these initiatives support efforts many libraries have already launched themselves. **SPARC** acts as a valued resource for us, creating and distributing materials and data that we need to make the library more effective and the library-faculty bond stronger. This is a long-term process, and we all need to remember that significant cultural change takes time. But the tide is beginning to turn.

Glancing back, looking ahead

As librarians, it's important to look into and plan for the future. But take a moment and glance back into the past—back to the days when we were wringing our hands as we graphed the rising price of serials and saw no end in sight.

Fast forward. With **SPARC**, we aimed to change the rules of the scholarly publishing game. It was that simple, and that complex. Just a few years later, we're well on our way. There's still a long way to go, and there are many paths to follow; **SPARC** is just one. But as long as **SPARC** continues to meet our needs and exceed our expectations, I'll happily endure endless bad jokes about how well it is "sparkling" a transformation in our minds and in our libraries. 

For more information:

SPARC www.arl.org/SPARC

Create Change www.createchange.org

Declaring Independence www.arl.org/SPARC/di

Open Archives www.openarchives.org