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## Editorial: Science Communication

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*Publisher and Editor*

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The original motivation for this special issue of *Scholarly and Research Communication* (SRC) derived from the shuttering of government research programs and facilities, and the increasing pre- and post-publication censorship of scholarly and scientific research by the Stephen Harper-led Government of Canada (Chung, 2010). The significance of this government's actions can be appreciated by the difficulty any reasonable person might have in distinguishing between the information-control actions of the current Canadian government and the propaganda ministries of communist countries and dictatorships. The actions of the government are a direct attack on the democratic rights of all Canadians to access information, especially information created by our own government, scientists included. More than that, Prime Minister Harper and his office, supported by his party members, have set their sights, as science journalist Alanna Mitchell (2013) points out, on nothing less than undermining Enlightenment ideals, which are expressed through government-sponsored, disinterested information gathering by neutral, rather than partisan-inspired, civil servants. By ceasing to fund baseline monitoring of the health of the environment and the nature and extent of our natural and human resources, Harper's government is depriving Canadians of fundamental information that can avert disaster. As Chris Turner (2013) argues, it returns us to the cronyism and corruption within the civil service that Sir Robert Borden, Tory prime minister of old (1911-1920), worked so hard to expunge to bring Canada into the modern age.

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Independent of politics, looking at the penchant of the prime minister and his office for information control from the point of view of research, there is little doubt that actions taken by the government to suppress research findings, and to render certain research impossible, threatens the very fabric of science worldwide. Canada's current federal government is not only attempting to massage and suppress research findings; it is also foreclosing on world-recognized opportunities to collect information that could serve as a foundation for policy and long-term management of our society and our environment. The cases are legion – over 500 well-documented cases according to the Canadian Science Writers Association and as reported in *Nature* (Davison, 2012; Branswell, 2012). Many are well known to Canadians: converting the long-form census to a voluntary survey; attempting to close the Experimental Lakes Area in northwestern Ontario; and forbidding government biologist Kristi Miller from speaking to the media about her research into a disease that may be contributing to the decline in salmon stocks (Hume, 2013). The Harper government demands that government scientists take direction in issuing press releases. It has even gone so far as muzzling librarians and archivists (Groover, 2013).

The actions of Stephen Harper's office and his centrally controlled ministers are deplorable, but also regrettable is the relative lack of intervention by the very people being censored and thwarted. The public record of alarm is, in the main, authored by journalists, policy analysts, and other non-scientists. For years the national and international science community has offered little more than a whispering plaint. True, the frequency of objections by scientists is increasing, and the actions are increasing in significance. The October 10, 2013, Stand Up for Science protest by scientists in Ottawa, for example, was unfortunately bumped off the news agenda in yet another attempt by the Prime Minister's Office to shape and control information using – as Mike Duffy put it when addressing the Senate of Canada in October, 2013 – money and lies.

Most importantly, the message that such suppression actually undermines the very fabric of science is not getting out. Without free and open communication of research findings around the world; without the ability to pursue lines of research that show promise in enhancing our basic understanding of scientific phenomena – as well as our understanding of phenomena that directly impact our lives and the planet – the entire scientific enterprise is hobbled.

The purpose of this issue is to address the role of science communication by providing young scientists with the opportunity to tell us about the nature of science, how they became scientists, and their ideals as young scientists.

The experimental nature of this issue comes in two forms. First, each paper in this issue is not a research article; rather, it is a peer- and editorial-reviewed commentary. Second, our hope is that this issue will turn into an open, building collection. That is to say, should any scientist find his or her voice and wish to provide further commentary on the importance of free and open science communication, this journal would be pleased to add it to this collection of articles. If researchers would like to contribute anonymously, given the potentially negative career consequences, this journal will consent to setting aside the norms of scholarly practice and publish contributions without naming the contributor.

Our long-term goal for this collection is to contribute in some small way to what some call science literacy and to discuss research findings unfettered by external influence.

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