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OPEN SCHOLARSHIP POLICY OBSERVATORY



Open Scholarship and COVID-19

by Caroline Winter | 3 July 2020 | English, Observations, Observations and Responses | 0 comments



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At a glance:

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As the COVID-19 pandemic has forced research institutions around the world to temporarily close campuses and transition to online working and learning, it has also prompted researchers to make their COVID-19 related research openly available as never before.

Beginning only a few weeks after the first cases appeared, researchers in China shared data about the structure of the novel coronavirus into the open access [Protein Data Bank](#) (Burley 2020). And, as the true impact of the virus for society at large and academic society within it became clear, a group of Chief Science Advisors from 16 countries, including Australia, Canada, and the UK, signed an [open letter](#) calling on publishers to make related research immediately open access in human- and machine-readable form (Government of Canada 2020).

In response to this and other similar calls, many publishers — including [Elsevier](#), [Springer Nature](#), and

Wiley — have made all research related to COVID-19 open access for the duration of the pandemic. By early April, more than 6,000 related research articles had been published, many open access and in preprint repositories such as arXiv and medRxiv (Baker 2020). On April 27, the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA) released an [open letter](#) signed by a group of scholarly publishers calling on the community to streamline the publication process of related research in several ways, including by making preprints and research data openly, in order to make information related to COVID-19 available more quickly.

Numerous collections of open research and resources related to COVID-19 are also now available, more than 200 of which are listed in [Open Science Since COVID-19: Open Access + Open Data](#). As of early June, [SPARC reports](#) that the 59,000 articles in one of these collections, the [COVID-19 Open Research Dataset \(CORD-19\)](#), have been downloaded 18 million times (SPARC 2020).

Responses to COVID-19 by the INKE Partnership

As with many other organizations, several INKE partners have cancelled in-person gatherings or transitioned to virtual events.

The Federation of Humanities and Social Sciences, for example, cancelled this year's in-person Congress, but supported several associations in holding virtual meetings as part of its [Virtual Conference Week 2020](#). It also features several stories about HSS researchers' responses to COVID-19 on its [blog](#).

Similarly, the [Digital Humanities Summer Institute \(DHSI\)](#) postponed its in-person courses this year but hosted several [affiliated events](#) virtually. [DHSI 2020 – Online Edition](#) was open to everyone with free registration, attracting a group of over 1200 participants from around the globe.

[Compute Canada](#) has launched a [research portal](#) that offers access to advanced research computing (ARC) resources including high-performance computing and storage, consultation, and information about relevant funding opportunities. It also highlights [COVID-19 research in Canada](#) made possible by ARC resources, including [Arbutus](#), the largest of five research computing clouds in Canada. Arbutus is hosted by the University of Victoria in partnership with Compute Canada and [WestGrid](#), and [is being used by the Folding@home project](#), an international collaborative effort to analyze the protein structure of the virus that causes COVID-19.

The [Canadian Association of Research Libraries \(CARL\)](#) continues to support the Canadian research community by [calling for changes to licensing and usage restrictions](#) to enable broader access to research and learning materials in the face of university library closures. CARL is also [coordinating COVID-19 web archiving efforts in Canada](#), and has released a [copyright for digital course delivery template](#) to help academic libraries guide their communities as they shift instruction online. In partnership with the [Council of Atlantic University Libraries \(CAUL-CBUA\)](#) and the [Canadian Federation of Library Associations \(CFLA-FCAB\)](#), CARL held a [webinar](#) on June 24 on discussing [controlled digital lending \(CDL\)](#), a technology used by the Internet Archive's [Open Libraries](#), in the context of the limited access to library collections during the pandemic and the [National Emergency Library](#). These activities are undertaken in the context of CARL's ongoing efforts to support open scholarship in Canada, as discussed in the report [Advancing Open: Views from Scholarly Communications Practitioners](#) (2020).

The [Public Knowledge Project \(PKP\)](#) is supporting instructors moving their courses online with resources for using [Open Journal Systems \(OJS\) for course journal projects](#). [Kate Shuttleworth notes](#) that these types of projects are well not only suited for online learning but are also examples of open pedagogy in which students produce knowledge, which can itself be open to the broader community (Shuttleworth 2020).

COVID-19 and Open Scholarship

In light of this rapid movement toward open access and open scholarly practices, open access

advocates are calling for permanent change.

In a post for the *LSE* blog, Vincent Larivière, Fei Shu, and Cassidy Sugimoto argue that COVID-19 “exposes an inconvenient truth about science: the current scholarly communication system does not serve the needs of science and society” (2020). Although they praise commitments by the Wellcome Trust and others to make research related to COVID-19 and future public health crises open access, they question how those crises will be defined and emphasize the need for research from associated fields—in this case, fields such as neurology and pharmacology—to be open access as well (Larivière et al 2020).

Along the same lines, Victoria Heath and Brigitte Vézina point out in a post on the Creative Commons blog that global health emergencies require the type of open, international collaboration that we have seen in the fight against COVID-19, which can only be achieved when research is freely and openly available. In this context, Creative Commons reaffirms its support for OA policies such as Plan S and the UKRI OA policy (See “Plan S and cOAlition S” and “URKI Open Access Policy Review and Consultation” (2020).

A statement from SPARC Europe summarizes the key point of these and other recent statements about open scholarship in the age of COVID-19, that “[a]lthough great strides in Open Science have been — and are being — made to enable increased access to vital information, we must decide not go back to business as usual.” (2020).

As this snapshot suggests, the scholarly landscape has changed rapidly over the last several months in response to the pandemic, and will no doubt continue to do so as the global situation evolves.

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