Tricked Into Submission: Health Science Librarian's Role in Fighting Predatory Publishing and Spamferences

The topic of my paper is on the emerging problem of academic scams that prey upon the unsuspecting public. My research grows out of my experience as a tenure track academic librarian at Governors State University where I serve as chair of the Library personnel committee, (that’s our library faculty tenure review committee), and my service on the University Personnel Committee, where I served as Chair in the 2011-12 academic year. I have also taught workshops on the scholarly publishing process at the university, and assist faculty in locating publishing venues for their manuscripts.

My research interest was also prompted by the proliferation of email requests for submissions for online journals and also international, multidisciplinary conferences, and thus the name Predatory Publishing. These publishers are more interested in separating you from your money than expanding knowledge. Here are a couple of examples of emails, and I am sure many of you have received them too.

(Slide 2) So what IS the role of a health science librarian in matters of scholarly communication? We can hit the delete key, but I find that some faculty are taken in by the slick advertising and web sites. It is very difficult to tell what a legitimate journal is in the online world, even for career academics.. the online world and the opportunistic publishing practices of a growing heard of publishers has taken many by surprise. This is where librarians can play a critical role. We must help our user communities establish the legitimacy of publishers and journals so they can make an informed decision whether to submit or not, or use the information they have found.

What do we mean by open-access? Here is a crash course: Basically Open Acess journals are those where the articles are published for free on the internet at the time of original publication. This can be accomplished through either a gold pathway, which means the publisher makes it available, or a green pathway, which means the author puts their final peer reviewed article in an open access repository. There may or may not be author fees, some being substantial, for doing either or both of these.

Mr. Jeffrey Beall, librarian at the Auraria Library at the University of Colorado at Denver, publishes the Scholarly Open Acces blog, which discusses the quality of open access journals and publishers. His list of “Predatory Publishers” and “Predatory Journals” is growing. He has written for the journal Nature, Chronicle of Higher Education, and the Charleston Advisor about his research. He is probably the greatest authority on scholarly open access
publishing, although Rick Anderson of the Scholarly Kitchen blog has also made an impact.

(Slide 3) Here are a few examples of solicitations for manuscripts. Notice that I am addressed incorrectly, and the addressee is addressed incorrectly in the following slide. I am not Dr. Blobaum. How many of you have received a solicitation to present or publish with some venue that has nothing to do with your credentials or discipline? I am a librarian, not a biomedical educator. This is a letter I received from the Journal of Biomedical Education, published by Hindawi. Hindawi is an Indian online publisher. A recent article from the Budapest Open Access Initiative claims that Hindawi has a higher profit margin than Elsevier, reporting a 52% margin, while Elsevier’s is 36% (according to Scholarly OA Blog). Heavy marketing tactics such as this are part of the reason, plus the fact that it publishes 537 titles of what it claims are peer reviewed, open access journals. I checked this journal web site, there are only 3 articles published so far in 2013.

(Slide 4). My friend Barbara prefers to use Winicki as her last name. Barbara is a Reading professor, so it is unlikely she will be submitting a manuscript to this publisher which publishes fluid dynamics and other physical sciences.

(Slide 5) Librarians on the Medlib-L discussion list have been looking for checklists on predatory publishing practices. Beall’s Predatory Publishing blog lists all the criteria he uses to add journals and publishers to his predatory publishing lists. I believe we should reframe the predatory publishing discussion, to that of thinking about what a particular community of scholars or practitioners values? What are the criteria to establish an author’s legitimacy within a discipline? For example, it would not do a Reading professor any good to disseminate research in a fluid mechanics journal, and it would not help the nurse be recognized for his research if he published without peer review on his own Facebook page. Standard, authoritative indexes have a critical role to play in filtering information and establishing legitimacy. Medline is one example, and you can review its criteria for indexing journals. Journals can be dropped if the quality declines, and this has happened with respected journals who have been purchased by our friend Hindawi Publishing.

(Slide 6) I made a short checklist of indicators of quality. None of these in particular necessarily establishes illegitimacy, but the indicators do build evidence for judging the quality of the journal.
Promises of quick turn around time do not necessarily disqualify a journal. PLOS One is a respected open access journal with author fees; it too claims a quick turn around time.

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Scamademic Conferences?  
Some of the characteristics of a Scamademic Conference are similar to the publishers. Here are a few examples of how the identity of a legitimate authoritative, reputable conference backed by a professional or scholarly society is hijacked.

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ICIBET 2013 is the identity theft of “IEEE Computer Society.; International Association of Computer Science and Information Technology” conferences.  
International Association of Computer Science and Information

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Typically these conference scams seem to promise publishing credit of the proceedings and indexing in legitimate venues. We searched for the proceedings of ICIBET and didn’t find any in any of the standard conference proceeding indexes.

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International Journal of Arts and Sciences is interesting. It is the name of a multidisciplinary conference held in international cities. The proceedings are actually published BUT not on a publisher’s web site; they reside on various repositories and web sites; the “journal” provides indexing information for Google Scholar, which is the only means of accessing them, as the journal itself is not published.

If you go to the web site and click on the Study Abroad icon, you will find a video of an American professor extolling the career enhancing benefits of enrolling in what amounts to be a course from an American university. Oh by the way, if you are walking around Oxford, you may
have the opportunity to study with the famed Oxford “dons” but the oversight of the dons to the real student experience is sketchy. It might be just making a handshake. The slick marketing makes us believe this will improve our employability. It sure would look good to have “Studied at OXFORD” on your resume! But that doesn’t mean you studied with Oxford scholars! You really will study with a college professor from Missouri.

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Slide 12 credits

Paul Blobaum
Governors State University Library
University Park, IL  60484