

# Feasibility of Open Access Publishing for Journals Funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada

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## Abstract

This paper reports on the results of a feasibility study on open access publishing for humanities and social sciences journals supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada's (SSHRC) Aid to Scholarly and Transfer Journals Program. The study is part of a broader effort of the SSHRC to better understand the landscape of Open Access and how best to implement this principle into the current research programs funded by SSHRC. As such, the study was designed to assist SSHRC in making policy and program decisions regarding its Aid to Scholarly Journals Program. In particular, this study focused on the current publishing practices of SSHRC funded journals, with the ultimate goal of understanding the financial implications for these journals if they were to provide open access to the journal content. The more immediate goal of the study was to gain better knowledge of the general level of understanding among journal publishers and editors on the impact of open access and on their scholarly societies' publishing program.

**Keywords:** social sciences and humanities; open access journal; funding policy; research impact; citation analysis

## 1 Introduction

Open Access (OA) is the process by which peer-reviewed research publications resulting from public funding are made freely available through the Internet to all potential users. The purpose is to remove the price barrier and other permission barriers that restrict the dissemination and growth of further research. Though a subject of much debate, OA is now widely seen as a means to improve the accessibility and impact of publicly funded research. Evidence demonstrating that openly accessible publications are more highly cited are emerging [1] and new tools and infrastructure for maximizing the usage and innovative applications of research results are being developed, not only for the natural and medical sciences, but also for the humanities and social sciences [2].

The Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada is the largest funding agency of humanities and social science research in Canada [3], and it is also among a growing number of government funding agencies around the world actively addressing the issue of open access [4]. In 2004, SSHRC's Council adopted OA in principle and instructed SSHRC staff to consult broadly with the research community as to the best way to implement this principle into the current research programs funded by SSHRC. SSHRC has chosen to promote open access for journals because the Council understood that open access improves scholarly communication while ensuring that research is disseminated and useful to all citizens, including the public and private sectors [5].

Between 22 August 2005 and 31 October 2005, SSHRC staff conducted a survey across a significant range of actors, including researchers and scholars, scholarly associations, publishers, editors and librarians to elicit comments and views on the subject of open access. A total of 130 submissions were received (researchers and scholars 84; university presses 2; journal editors 26; librarians 12; scholarly associations 5).

The largest and arguably most significant number of responses came from the scholarly community; and within that group 54 of the 84 expressed their support of open access although many had operational concerns. The second largest group, the journal editors, was more divided with 14 supporting in concept open access and 12 opposed. However, all expressed concerns with the financial issues in the transition to open access [6].

While the findings of this consultation are useful and important for further study, the reality remains that the input from scholars, editors and publishers is very limited in quantity. It was evident that further study would be necessary if SSHRC were to move forward on the open access agenda. It was also clear that the preservation of the integrity of the present system of scholarly communication in the humanities and social sciences had to be guaranteed, and that the transition to a new model of scholarly communication must be judiciously implemented. Over time, a valuable system has been developed for the nurturing of humanities and social sciences journals in Canada and this could be replaced by a new system only if it were of greater value.

SSHRC also recognizes that while financial support for research is crucial, the dissemination and uptake of research is equally important. Research left unread or not built upon has no impact and no financial and social return. It is time to re-examine what returns financial support for SSH journals are bringing to scholarship and to the Canadian public.

The world of publishing in general has been radically altered by the introduction of electronic publishing in the last two decades. New modes of production, of access, of ownership of information, and of financing, have been changing scholarly communication in fundamental ways. In this context and in the light of the initial SSHRC investigations, the authors of this paper were invited to conduct a study of the feasibility of open access publishing for journals currently receiving support under the Aid to Research and Transfer Journals Program of SSHRC.

While the immediate goal of the study is to gain a better understanding of current journal publishing practices and general knowledge of OA amongst SSH journal editors, the longer term goal is to provide evidence on which firm and sustainable policy on OA could be developed and implemented by the Council.

## **2 Materials and Methods**

To guide the research process and to keep the scope in check, the following questions were used as guideline:

- To what extent are SSHRC funded journals already available in digital form?
- What are the costs and savings associated with the delivery of these journals in digital form?
- What are the perceived incentives and barriers to moving towards an electronic only version of these journals?
- What are the perceived incentives and barriers to open access publishing of these journals?

### **2.1 Sources of Data**

To answer the questions posted above, we drawn data from a number of sources:

#### **2.1.1. Data from Funding Application**

Between 2004-2007, 161 journals received funding of varying amounts from *SSHRC's Aid to Research and Transfer Journals Program*. To gain an understanding of the financial health and support resources of these journals, we first conducted a review of the records of the grant applications, which included the operating budgets of the various journals. A preliminary analysis of the journal contents and titles revealed that a broad range of topics with a number of titles are published in the fields of history, literature, law, economics and education, and a considerable number of titles in a broad range of Canadian area studies. The breadth and variety of the titles in both official languages of Canada led us to conclude that the research should not be based along disciplinary lines, but should be carried out within the broadly defined domains of social sciences and humanities.

#### **2.1.2. Online Questionnaire**

A web based questionnaire in both official languages of Canada was developed and invitation to participate was sent by email to the journal editors or key contacts for the journals. Respondents' identities were kept anonymous. The questions were intended to elicit responses from editors regarding the journal's delivery medium, funding support from scholarly associations, the use of commercial aggregators, electronic publishing platform, and support and concerns towards open access. The full list of questions is provided in the appendix.

### 2.2.3 Citation analysis

To evaluate the citation impact of SSHRC funded journals on scholarship, an analysis of the journals based upon ISI Journal Citation Report was undertaken. While there are well known concerns with the using is ISI JSR to access the impact of scientific literature in general and particularly with humanities and social sciences (see Discussion), the analysis is intended to serve as a snapshot of the overall visibility of SSH journals published in Canada and how these journals compared with journals in their respective fields.

### 2.2.4 Interviews

To supplement the results from the web questionnaire and to get more in-depth and qualitative information on some of the challenges and opportunities faced by journal publishers, a number of journal editors, publishers and library directors, were selected for interviews, either in person, by phone, or through email. The interviewees were asked to provide their view on the feasibility of open access for the production and distribution of SSHRC funded journals. Their views were integrated into the discussion and recommendations put forth to SSHRC.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Funding

The 161 journals that were successful in the 2004-7 competition received a total of \$6,582,255, with grants ranging from \$2,906 to \$73,370 over the three year period. Of these titles, 29 journals (18% of the titles) received the maximum grant for a total of \$2,127, 730 or 31% of the total funds allocated

In addition to SSHRC support, some journals also receive support from Heritage Canada and from the Government of Quebec, based on publicly available information on the Internet. In Quebec, the Fonds de Recherche sur la société et la culture du Québec (FRSCQ) in their 2004 competition awarded \$2,185,155 to 36 journals, 28 of which also received funding from SSHRC. Heritage Canada reported funding from both Canada Post Corporation and Canadian Heritage as of July 2005 and there are SSHRC titles on this list. However, amounts given to individual SSHRC titles are generally negligible.

### 3.2 Findings from the Questionnaire

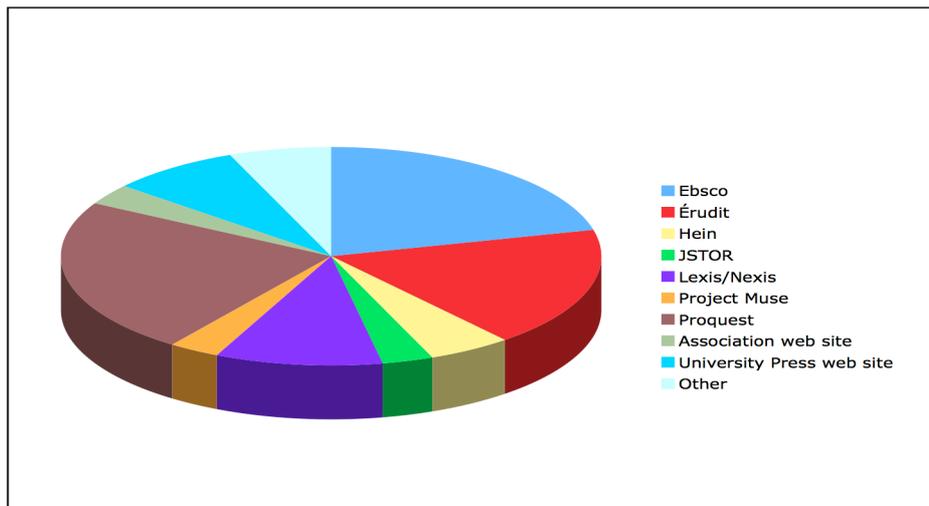
A web-based questionnaire in both official languages was sent to editors of journals supported by SSHRC [7]. The survey was opened to respondents between May 1 and July 31, 2006. It received a rate of response of 42 % (67 out of 161). Of the 67 respondents, 56 were English and 11 were French speakers.

More than 80 % of the respondents reported that articles published in SSHRC funded journals are available electronically. For journals that are online, about half came online between 2002 and 2006. A small number of journals were already on-line in the 1990's beginning with 1993. The use of aggregators was highly preferred as a means of providing electronic access, with 84.4 % of English respondents reporting using a variety of aggregators, including Érudit [8], an electronic platform for journal delivery. For the 9 French responses, 100% reported using Érudit.

Of the commercial aggregators listed in the questionnaire, Proquest was the most heavily used, followed by Ebsco and Érudit. Unfortunately, Blackwell was inadvertently omitted from the list of possible aggregators due to a programming glitch, so the number of journals using Blackwell is not clear. Slightly over 40% of the 54 respondents respond that the most recent issues are available online. The rest have no recent issue available online. 55% of 53 English respondents reported that they do not receive compensation from an aggregator on a pay-per-use basis, while 10 of the 11 French respondents reported no compensation from aggregators.

For journals published by scholarly association, 54% of the 39 English respondents reported that the journal did not receive financial subsidy from the host association, while 7 of 9 French respondents reported the same.

When asked if they are in favour of open access in principle (leaving economic issues aside for the moment), 78% of the 54 English respondents said yes, while 6 of the 10 French respondents reported yes. With regard to the timing for open access, 74% of the 49 English respondents were in favour of the moving wall solution and 14% were for immediate open access. 91% of the 11 French respondents favoured a moving wall solution and only one respondent favoured immediate open access.



**Figure 1: Chart showing the proportion of aggregators used by SSHRC funded journals**

When asked if SSHRC should make it mandatory that SSHRC supported journals be available for open access, 84% of the 57 English respondents opposed. Similarly, 82% of the 11 French respondents were not in favour of mandatory open access.

72% of the 50 English respondents were in favour of SSHRC providing funding to support institutional repositories designed to support secure and open access to research publications. Only half of the 10 French respondents were in favour of the same.

71% of 52 English respondents supported the idea that SSHRC should provide financial support for journals to become open access. Of the 11 French respondents, 64% said yes.

82% of the 49 English respondents agreed that SSHRC should provide support for open access journals and consider eligibility criteria appropriate for these titles, while 64% of 11 French respondents agreed. Respondents were also asked to provide suggestions on what these criteria might be, and most agreed that the evaluation criteria for funding support for open access journals should be based on the same quality evaluation criteria used for subscription based journals, with the proviso that the requirement for 200 paid subscribers [9] be removed for OA journals and be replaced by other metrics more suitable for the electronic environment.

### 3.3 Findings of Citation Analysis

Impact factors have long been an essential criterion to evaluate journals, particularly journals belonging to the same specialties. It is well known that using impact factors is problematic. They must be handled with caution and they can support comparisons between journals only when they belong to closely related fields. Citation cultures can vary considerably from one discipline to another, making comparison of journals across discipline even more problematic [10]. Furthermore, in the case of the humanities, where monographs remain the dominant currency, and where citations are used in extremely complex ways, impact factors have generally not been used [11].

A preliminary survey of the titles supported by SSHRC shows that they are divided between 71 humanities journals (broadly defined) and 90 social science journals. The results given below apply only to the 90 social science journals and they must be treated prudently, but they nevertheless offer some valid insights, especially when they are used to compare journals covering roughly the same fields of study.

With these caveats in mind, we looked at the rankings of SSHRC-supported journals in the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) published by the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI). In particular, we compared the impact factors of listed journals between 1997 and 2005 and compared them to the leaders in their respective field. 1997 corresponds to the earliest year covered by JCR; 2005 is the most recent year available.

Of the 161 titles searched (90 titles are in the social sciences), and of these, only 21 titles (23 %) had an impact factor assigned by ISI in 1997 or 2005. 2 titles with an impact factor in 1997 had lost it by 2005. Conversely, 3

titles had an impact factor in 2005 but not in 1997. This means that only 19 titles had an impact factor in 2005 (or 21% of the social science titles supported by SSHRC).

Journal title	Impact factor (IF) 2005	Rank in assigned subject area	Impact factor (IF) 1997	Rank in assigned subject area	Highest impact title in subject area for 2005	1997 and 2005 IF as % of leader IF
Alberta Journal of Educational Research	NIL		0.028 <sup>1</sup>	100 out of 102	J Learn Sci 2.792	0%
Canadian Geographer	0.491	31 out of 38	0.294	24 out of 31	J Econ Geogr 3.222	15%
Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences	0.191	69 out of 71	0.057	57 out of 59	Mis Quarterly 4.978	4%
Canadian Journal of Agricultural Economics	NIL		0.129	142 out of 161	Quart J Economics 4.775	0%
Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science	0.345	78 out of 101	0.348	64 out of 108	Ann Rev of Psychol 9.784	3.5%
Canadian Journal of Criminology & Criminal Justice	0.300	19 out of 27	0.213	17 out of 19	Crime Justice 2.588	12%
Canadian Journal of Development Studies	0.300	32 out of 38	NIL		J Rural Studies 2.818	11%
Canadian Jrl of Dietetic Practice & Research	0.237	50 out of 53	NIL		Prog Lipid Res 11.372	2%
Canadian journal of economics	0.635	84 out of 175	0.153	139 out of 161	Quart J Economics 4.775	13%
Canadian Journal of Political Science	0.176	73 out of 84	0.452	23 out of 73	Am Pol Sci Rev 3.233	5.5%
Canadian Journal of Sociology	0.383	63 out of 94	0.333	58 out of 95	Am J Sociology 3.262	12%
Canadian Journal on Aging	0.224	22 out of 24	0.480	12 out of 26	J Gerontol A – Biol 3.500	6.4%
Canadian Modern Language Review	0.304	37 out of 42	0.044	36 out of 40	J Mem Lang 2.815	11%
Canadian	0.648	52 out of	0.426	51 out of 108	Ann Rev of	6.6%

<sup>1</sup> ISI provides impact factors with an unrealistic number of decimals. In calculating the percentages, we have rounded off the results to two decimals.

<b>Psychology</b>		101			Psychol 9.784	
<b>Canadian Public Administration</b>	0.067	25 out of 25	0.193	19 out of 24	J Pub Admin Res Theor – 1.451	4.6%
<b>Canadian Public Policy</b>	0.295	20 out of 25	0.200	18 out of 24	J Pub Admin Res Theor – 1.451	20%
<b>Industrial Relations</b>	1.657	2 out of 16	1.148	3 out of 17	Br J Ind Relat 1.689	98%
<b>International Journal</b>	0.284	38 out of 50	0.358	27 out of 50	Int Security 2.630	10.8%
<b>Isis</b>	0.778	4 out of 29	0.344	15 out of 26	Biol Philos 1.055	74%
<b>Pacific Affairs</b>	0.353	20 out of 33	0.344	15 out of 35	China J 1.174	30%

**Table 1: The 21 titles that appear with impact factor in 1997 and/or 2005**

It must be immediately noted that no SSHRC-supported humanities journal appears in the analysis. This is not surprising: the *Journal Citation Reports* includes only two categories, science and social science; sampling the social science list of 1747 titles showed that few humanities journals were present. Only a few history and ethics journals were spotted.

For the social science titles, the following results emerged:

- The majority of SSHRC-supported journals simply do not appear in ISI.
- Those that appear, with very few exceptions, hold a very modest rank. Their impact factor compared to the leading publication in their own field is often minuscule.
- Only two titles are ranked in the top ten of their respective fields:

The absence of French-language journals is not surprising given ISI's general bias in favour of English-language publications. In the case of English-language journals, the exclusion from ISI's lists means a very low status: one cannot expect them to be read very much, and, therefore, they cannot be cited very much either. This in turn probably results from a general lack of accessibility: in other words, many Canadian scholarly journals are probably not very widely available (or visible) in foreign libraries, even when they are integrated in aggregators' packages. The relative invisibility of Canadian journals also brings into question the promise that aggregators can significantly enhance the visibility of their journals. Humanities journals, for reasons already mentioned, remain excluded from this particular analysis.

Impact factors of Canadian journals have on the whole increased 31% between 1997 and 2005, but this may be due to a variety of factors, including the growth of the ISI lists across the years. As more journals are scanned by ISI, more citations are collected, which should lead to higher impact factors.

## 4 Discussion

### 4.1 Transition to e-publishing

It appears that for SSHRC-funded journals, the transition to e-publishing is well underway. However, a number of the more established journals are still available in paper only. Moreover, when editors speak about e-publishing, they may have in mind a quick-and-dirty conversion of scanned images into pdf format with (perhaps) some ability to carry out full-text searching. Some digitization operations appear to be left in the hands of aggregators who use such fast solutions in providing articles online. The issue of meta-data is rarely addressed in a lucid way. Neglecting these issues threatens long term preservation or interoperability of formats across time. If libraries have access to inferior digital files, they will not be able to participate in the preservation effort and valuable scholarship could be lost forever.

## 4.2 The Role of Aggregators or Third Party Providers

The survey showed that most on-line access to SSHRC funded journals is provided through a variety of platforms, developed by both profit and non-profit organizations that offer a variety of services and interfaces. In some cases the publisher is also the on-line provider [e.g. Blackwell]; in other cases the vendor is a third party provider who acquires the rights from the journal publisher, usually but not necessarily an association, to provide electronic access to a title via a package of electronic journals that the vendor sells to libraries [e.g. Proquest]. Usually the aggregator will offer for a fee an electronic copy of an individual article in a journal which it controls if the requester does not have access through a subscription.

The qualitative part of the survey also reveals that there is considerable confusion, on both sides of the linguistic divide, regarding electronic publishing and Open Access. This is doubtlessly the result of the ease with which journals may be accessed when an institution subscribes to an electronic package of journals. These journals appear openly accessible only to individuals who are members of a particular university community. In fact, beyond the circle of readers with access privileges, they are “toll gated.”

However it was not clear from the survey whether journals that joined an aggregator resulted in increased usage of the journal, as many reported that they did not receive any additional revenue from aggregators. Nor were aggregators generally open to providing journals with usage statistics, as journals are generally bundled into packages and licensed to libraries in complicated schemes.

## 4.3 Compensation to the Journals from Aggregators

Our survey also indicates that many of the respondents to the survey appeared to be unsure of the exact nature of their contractual relationship to the publishers and/or aggregators, for example with regard to rights ownership as well as financial compensation. In some cases, it even appears that some contractual agreements between aggregators and journals are not being fulfilled.

The use of aggregator services comes with a cost. The economics of the services are difficult to study since many of these arrangements are confidential and aggregators are reluctant to discuss them. Aggregators are important here they are widely used by SSHRC funded journals. In theory they provide value-added services to end users; and in any economic analysis represent part of the cost of scholarly communication. However, given the low citation ranking of many of the journals who also use aggregators, it is not clear whether joining an aggregator and restricting access to the journal contents represent good return on investment.

Many editors of SSHRC journals who completed the grant application forms were open about these arrangements but it is impossible to say if this is the case in all successful applications. It is reasonable to consider that the SSHRC application form should be revised to allow the journal editor to identify specifically the aggregator used and the cost arrangements that have resulted.

## 4.4 Support for a Modified form of Open Access was Strong

The result to this question is interesting in that it emanates from a set of individuals that actually wear two hats: on the one hand, editors are also researchers and they know, from that perspective, what is good for them; on the other hand, as editors responsible for the financial well-being of journals that often need careful nurturing, they are concerned about the economic effects of Open Access on their publication. This probably explains the muted agreement in favour of some modified form of Open Access, in particular the request for a moving wall, the purpose of which is to minimize financial risks for the journal due to perceived lost of subscription.

The example of many journals in the *Érudit* collection seems to indicate that most journal editors feel fairly confident about not losing revenue with a two-year moving wall. This looks conservative to the authors of this study. There is also the perception that unlike literature in the sciences, papers in the humanities and social sciences have longer “half-life” and therefore a longer moving wall is necessary. Currently, there is no empirical evidence to support or refute this perception.

## 4.5 Mandating Open Access Is Clearly Not Endorsed By Editors

Academics do not like being forced into anything and, even though they may favour Open Access, they are intent on preserving their ability to choose freely. Obviously, using the argument of public funding to force Open Access on journals may generate a revolt. The fear is that a forced march toward Open Access could be

destructive given the uncertain financial implications.

A far more compelling case can be made on the basis of the public good that will come to the Canadian people when journals that cover topics such as adoption, mothering, social policy issues, immigration, refugees, the environment, Shakespeare and the theatre, to name just a few, are available readily to all citizens. Adult education and broad learning will advance. Such access can only improve the knowledge and well-being of the Canadian people, but the economic case for such social benefits has yet to be made and remain an important area for future study [12].

#### **4.6 Support for Institutional Repositories**

The apparently different attitudes of francophones and anglophones with regard to institutional repositories may be the unexpected consequence of the presence of *Érudit*. Since most francophone journal editors involved with *Érudit* seem to accept two-year moving walls, it may be that they wonder what the uses of institutional repositories are. It must also be remembered that *Érudit* itself incorporates a depository which further confuses the issue. On the English side, the distinction between repositories and OA journals may be a good deal clearer precisely because they are handled in very different locations: the repositories are generally in the hands of librarians while the journals are in the hand of a publisher, a scholarly association, or one (or several) aggregators.

Repositories will remain important to ensure the long-term preservation of the national scholarly heritage and librarians are very much needed in this role. It is one of their traditional functions and publishers are certainly not the best placed to take on this role. Publishers appear and disappear, while libraries remain stable. Even Elsevier has agreed to leave the preservation issue in the hands of the Royal Dutch Library. Many a small publisher of Canadian scholarly journals will disappear before Elsevier does.

#### **4.7 SSHRC Funding for Open Access**

The last response confirms hints and trends already noted above. The researcher part of the editor wants Open Access; the editor is willing to go there if there is no risk. Should SSHRC find the ways to finance Open Access, the probability is that most Canadian editors would follow the Brazilian SciELO model [13] and accept Open Access without any hesitation. In fact, they would welcome it as it would certainly enhance the international visibility of their publications. And once Open Access is guaranteed for the electronic version of the journal, the issue of a paying paper version can become an interesting strategy to bring revenue to associations or similar organizations. In any case, what is urgently needed here are some experiments and data gathering to properly assess the economics of OA publishing and the added funding needed.

Concern also exists about SSHRC's potential intent to fund open-access journals and, in particular, the impact of funding open-access titles upon the funding of traditional journals. The fear, it appears, is to see a limited pie divided into a greater number of smaller slices.

Should SSHRC decide to finance open-access journals, maintaining quality was the essential issue from the perspective of editors; on the other hand, editors were silent about relying on the number of subscribers as a criterion of funding. It appears that, in the electronic world, especially with the various packages offered by aggregators to their customers, the evaluation of usage has to be revised and can no longer safely rest on numbers of subscribers.

#### **4.8 Moving Beyond ISI Impact Factor**

Results of the citation analysis suggest that authors publishing in the SSHRC-supported journals will not be readily cited given their low visibility, at least according to ISI's JCR. With regard to impact factors, SSHRC-supported journals display characteristics similar to those observed in most journals from the developing nations. They are national journals rather than international journals, in the sense that their visibility abroad is very limited. Like journals from developing countries, SSHRC-supported journals often suffer from a vicious circle: low impact factors induce low submission rates of generally less significant articles that attract little attention and, therefore, few subscriptions. In other words, and, given ISI's claim that they select the best journals in any given field, this survey raises the general issue of perceived quality and most important, usage of SSHRC-supported social science periodicals (including law journals). The survey also raises the question regarding return on SSHRC's investment as journal articles that are not widely read and cited translate into low research uptake and impact. The question that SSHRC must address is whether it makes sense to implicitly encourage

journals to close off access to the content for the sake of a limited number of subscribers, number that are required by SSHRC's funding criteria. Or does it make more sense to trade-off the limited economic return from subscription with a potentially much larger return on readership, which may in turn leads to higher submission, usage and visibility.

Given the fact that most journals supported by SSHRC do not have impact factors, another issue emerges: what alternate evaluation criteria should be applied to these journals, particularly non-subscription based open access journals, applying in the next funding round? Obviously, when titles are available in electronic format on the Internet, new kinds of metrics can be applied, such as hits, downloads, links and, of course, citations. Development and implementation of such new indexes for the evaluation of open access journals is clearly a priority for the scholarly community and for SSHRC. In this regard it is encouraging to see the growing number of studies and projects that aim to provide alternative and better measurement and metrics of usage and research impact, particularly for literature that are openly available [14].

## 5 Conclusions

The results of the study indicate that many of the journal editors understand that providing Open Access will greatly improve the visibility and citation impact of their journals. However, many editors also worry about the financial conditions under which the transition to OA can be managed. As it stands, the return on research investment, at least as measured in citation counts, is poor for most of the SSHRC subsidized journals. Providing a special source of funding to offset possible losses of subscription revenue could become a strong incentive to move toward Open Access. Given that many of these journals have small subscription revenues, the needed financing, which could take the form of a kind of insurance policy, ought to be quite limited, but the precise amount is difficult to determine at this stage and a separate study would be required.

There is also considerable consensus that SSHRC should support open access journals and encourage journals that wish to experiment with conversion to Open Access to work collectively in a SSHRC-supported experiment designed to better understand the financial implications, author's uptake, and usage of publication before and after becoming Open Access. The experimentation will provide better data to gauge the financial viability of Open Access publishing. These results will be useful in turn to examine whether scaling up the process to a larger number of journals is desirable [mention the new funding program in a footnote?].

Perhaps the most valuable consequence of this study has been the important recognition that there is no magic way to move into electronic publishing and Open Access. Testing, exploring and experimenting while consulting and dialoguing should be the principles under which any kind of action plan should be undertaken.

With regard to electronic publishing, environmental pressures as well as various forms of inducements on the part of aggregators or some publishers have led to a transition carried out in such a wide variety of ways that "chaos" might well be the best term to describe it. In the process, SSHRC is finding itself subsidizing some very profitable commercial aggregators, while denying support to some innovative Open Access journals that are deserving of help except for the fact that they do not have any paying subscribers.

A good reason for this chaotic transition to e-publishing may well have been the consequence of the inability to create orderly experiments so as to identify best practices and enhance the sharing of new know-how. Only in Québec has there been the semblance of an organized move toward electronic publishing [15], but it may have been done in such a centralized manner that it may not fit the ethos of the rest of the country. Nonetheless, it remains a valuable source of experience. Elsewhere, there are dispersed endeavours to produce electronic journals, most of the time on tiny scales [16]. On the non-commercial front, only a very few university presses have developed in-house capacity in this regard. Whether they are willing to share this know-how is far from obvious.

Finally, it seems clear that SSHRC must take on a leadership position in this regard. As other granting councils in the USA and in Europe (particularly the UK, Germany and France) have amply shown, this is to SSHRC's advantage. More fundamentally, if SSHRC does not show some national leadership, no one else will do so, except perhaps in the form of some bid to become the monopolistic device for SSH publishing in the country. Clearly, no one wants this outcome. No one wants one university press, or, even worse, a large commercial press to become the sole provider of e-publishing services to Canadian SSH. At the same time, it is clear that the emerging digital environment is challenging all publications to globalize in an effective manner.

It is natural that journals in similar disciplines be grouped together so that a particular journal platform tends to become well known for its coverage in, for example, economics or law, and a number of journals from a variety of publishers in many countries might be housed in that disciplinary platform. But is the notion of a national platform be useful to researchers used to work on well-focused issues with information coming from all over the planet? In other words, how does one reconcile the idea of a national strategy for scientific and scholarly publishing with the universal characteristics of validated knowledge? These questions lie beyond the scope of the present study, but they are part of the changing landscape of Canadian scholarly communications as it impacts SSHRC-supported journals and they should not be neglected.

## Afterword

We are happy to report that in late March 2007, SSHRC announced a new one-year experimental program in support of open access journals [17]. The program adopted several recommendations from our initial report submitted to SSHRC in August 2006 [18]. Amongst the key innovations of the program is the adoption of usage based metrics and cost per article as basis for funding. Of course peer review and the expertise of the editorial board remain as primary quality criteria, but the addition of alternative usage and impact metrics should allow innovative open access to gain the funding support they deserve. We eagerly await the outcomes of this experimentation and we hope this program will generate the much needed economic and usage data for better planning and support of a broader range of open access journals in the humanities and social sciences.

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## Notes and References

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- [2] Following the NSF funded report on Cyberinfrastructure for the natural sciences, the American Council of Learned Societies and the Mellon Foundation also funded a parallel study supporting the development of cyberinfrastructure for the humanities and social sciences: <http://www.acls.org/cyberinfrastructure/OurCulturalCommonwealth.pdf>
- [3] <http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/>
- [4] See the The ROARMAP list of the strongest funder and university policies: <http://www.eprints.org/openaccess/policysignup/>
- [5] SSHRC's original position on OA is no longer available on its web site [http://www.sshrc.ca/web/about/council\\_reports/news\\_e.asp](http://www.sshrc.ca/web/about/council_reports/news_e.asp), first accessed in August 2004. But SSHRC's position on OA is even more clearly stated in the context of its recent announcement (March 29, 2007) on a new "Aid to Open Access Research Journals" funding program: [http://www.sshrc.ca/web/apply/program\\_descriptions/open\\_access\\_journals\\_e.asp](http://www.sshrc.ca/web/apply/program_descriptions/open_access_journals_e.asp) , accessed April 1, 2007
- [6] The survey result was made available by David Moorman, Senior Policy Advisor at SSHRC, at a meeting on March 9, 2006: [http://open.utoronto.ca/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=234&Itemid=226](http://open.utoronto.ca/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=234&Itemid=226)
- [7] SurveyMonkey, [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), was used to administer the questionnaire
- [8] Érudit is a digital publishing and dissemination platform that originated at Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal in 1998 and has since evolved into a network that support a large variety of journals, mostly from the province of Quebec. <http://www.erudit.org/>

- [9] The 200 existing subscribers was one of the requirements for journals to qualify for SSHRC funding. However, this clearly exclude journals that are already open access but still require financial support. It was also clear that some journals that were affiliated with a scholarly association were using the association's membership to inflate the number of subscribers, thereby qualifying them for the grant.
- [10] ARCHAMBAULT, E.; VIGNOLA-GAGNE, E; COTE, GREGOIRE; LARIVIERE, V; GINGRAS, Y. (2006) Benchmarking scientific output in the social sciences and humanities: The limits of existing databases. *Scientometrics* 68(3):329-342
- [11] HICKS, D. (2005). The four literatures of social sciences. In *Handbook of Quantitative Science and Technology Research*. Edited by H. F. Moed, W. Glänzel and U. Schmoch. Page 473-496. Springer Netherlands.
- [12] Studies on the enhanced economic benefits of Open Access on research and development have recently been made, for example: HOUGHTON, J.W., STEELE, C. AND SHEEHAN, P.J. (2006) *Research Communication Costs in Australia, Emerging Opportunities and Benefits*, CSES Working Paper No. 24, Centre for Strategic Economic Studies, Victoria University, Melbourne. Available <http://www.cfses.com/documents/wp24.pdf> ; HOUGHTON, J.W., SHEEHAN, P.J. (2006) *The Economic Impact of Enhanced Access to Research Findings*, CSES Working Paper No. 23, Centre for Strategic Economic Studies, Victoria University, Melbourne. Available <http://www.cfses.com/documents/wp23.pdf> . But the social benefits of OA to scholarly literature have yet to be well studied and documented.
- [13] SciELO stands for Scientific Electronic Library Online [www.scielo.br](http://www.scielo.br) . It is a pioneering project in providing open access to scientific journals published in Brazil, and now from other Latin American countries.
- [14] BRODY, T.; HARNAD, S.; CARR, L. (2006) Earlier Web Usage Statistics as Predictors of Later Citation Impact. *Journal of the American Association for Information Science and Technology (JASIST)* 57(8):1060-1072. Available: <http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/10713/>  
HARNAD, S. (2007) *Open Access Scientometrics and the UK Research Assessment Exercise*. In *Proceedings of 11th Annual Meeting of the International Society for Scientometrics and Informetrics* (in press), Madrid, Spain. Available: <http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/13804>  
BOLLEN, J.; VAN DE SOMPEL, H.; SMITH, J.; LUCE, R. (2005). Toward alternative metrics of journal impact: a comparison of download and citation data. *Information Processing and Management*, 41(6):1419-1440. Available: <http://public.lanl.gov/herbertv/papers/ipm05jb-final.pdf>  
BOLLEN, J.; VAN DE SOMPEL, H.(2006). Mapping the structure of science through usage. *Scientometrics*, 69(2):227-258. Available: <http://library.lanl.gov/cgi-bin/getfile?LA-UR-05-7070.pdf>
- [15] We are referring to Érudit, see note number 8.
- [16] Just exactly how many self-started open access journals in the humanities and social sciences produced in Canada is not known and a systematic survey of these journals and their funding and editorial practices would be an important future project.
- [17] Details of the funding program, eligibility criteria, and adjudication process are available on SSHRC's web site. Accessed April 1, 2007  
[http://www.sshrc.ca/web/apply/program\\_descriptions/open\\_access\\_journals\\_e.asp](http://www.sshrc.ca/web/apply/program_descriptions/open_access_journals_e.asp)
- [18] [http://www.sshrc.ca/web/about/publications/journals\\_report\\_e.pdf](http://www.sshrc.ca/web/about/publications/journals_report_e.pdf)

## Appendix I: Questionnaire Sent to Journal Editors or Key Contacts

### A. Transitioning to electronic publishing

1. Are the articles in your journal available electronically on the Internet?

Yes

No

If “no”, please skip to section B.

2. When did your journal become available on-line?

3. Is your journal available electronically through an aggregator or a portal?

Yes

No

4. If “yes” to question 3, please specify which aggregator or portal you are using:

Blackwell

Ebsco

- Érudit
- Hein
- JSTOR
- Lexis/Nexis
- Project Muse
- Proquest
- Association web site
- University web site
- University Press web site
- Other (please specify)

5. Are all issues, including the most recent, available on-line?

Yes

No

6. If you answered “no” to question 5, please specify which years have been digitized.

7. Who owns the digital rights to your journal?

### B. Questions regarding your publisher

8. If the publisher of your journal is not your scholarly association, is your publisher financing part of the activities related to the publication of your journal? (for example, editorial stipend, peer review process, etc.)?

Yes

No

9. Does your journal receive compensation from an aggregator on a pay-per-use basis?

Yes

No

### C. The issue of Open Access

10. The Open Access movement: Putting peer-reviewed scientific and scholarly literature on the internet. Making it available free of charge and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions. Removing the barriers to serious research. “Open Access News”, <http://www.earlham.edu/~peter/fos/fosblog.html>.

11. Are you in favour of Open Access in principle (leaving economic issues aside for the moment)?

Yes

No

12. In order to provide Open Access to your journal, you will have to devise a new business plan for your journal. Which business plan would you favour?

13. All issues immediately available, including the latest (true Open Access)?

A “moving wall” with the latest issues available only through subscriptions, and the earlier issues available in Open Access?

A publishing fee for all accepted articles?

A choice between “b” and “c” offered to authors according to their ability/willingness to use funds from various sources to publish?

14. Should SSHRC provide financial support for journals to become Open Access and non-subscription based?

Yes

No

15. Should SSHRC provide support for Open Access journals and consider eligibility criteria appropriate for these titles

Yes

No

16. If you have suggestions or comments on what these criteria might be, please list them here.

