
Preface

In the spring of 2004, Charlotte Hess and Elinor Ostrom hosted a meeting titled “Workshop on Scholarly Communication as a Commons.” The idea of this working session grew out of several parallel events, including the discussions at the Conference on the Public Domain organized and chaired by James Boyle at Duke University in November 2001.¹ It is also an outgrowth of the many years of research, case studies, and theoretical work on the commons undertaken at the Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis (Workshop), Indiana University. While earlier work focused primarily on the study of natural resources as commons, more recent interest has developed at the Workshop on the scholarly information and digital media as commons, the erosion of those commons through recent legislation, and the necessity of building new institutions in order to sustain those commons. An early attempt at struggling with these issues was our development of the Digital Library of the Commons,² which seeks to combine digital preservation of high-quality information, self-publication, and multimedia storage, while serving as the primary reference tool for interdisciplinary research on the commons.

The two-day event, funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, brought together leading interdisciplinary scholars to examine the current state of research and development of scholarly communication and the knowledge commons. Many of the participating scholars had already been thinking and writing about one of the many “commons” aspects of scholarly communication. The first objective of the meeting was to produce papers that could give other scholars as well as researchers and practitioners who create digital resources and affect digital policy, a sense of the current status of research on scholarly communication as an information commons, an idea of where it is headed,

and an awareness of critical dilemmas and policy issues. We deliberately assembled a group of scholars who could address both theoretical and empirical concerns—that is, who were able to ground discussion of future research and action in a thorough synthesis of current theory and practice.

The initial focus on scholarly communication as a commons was chosen to more carefully focus the subject and to allow for the integration of study areas that have been traditionally segregated, such as intellectual property rights, computer codes and infrastructure, academic libraries, invention and creativity, open-source software, collaborative science, citizenship and democratic processes, collective action, information economics, and the management, dissemination, and preservation of the scholarly record. Other important dilemmas within the information commons, such as globalization, complexity, westernization of knowledge, indigenous knowledge and rights, and the growing problem of computer waste were kept in mind. The group also explored the question of what models and frameworks of analysis are most beneficial in building a new research agenda for this complex commons.

Some of the questions posed were: Is it possible to transfer lessons learned from the environmental movement to the knowledge-commons ecosystem? What can research on the natural-resource commons teach us about the dilemmas of scholarly communication? How can legal scholars, social scientists, and librarians and information specialists best work together to preserve the intellectual commons? Can new technologies, rules, and self-governing communities help bridge the gaps between traditional libraries, publishers, researchers, and policymakers?

The concrete goals of the meeting were to

- Identify essential “commons” of concern within the vast terrain of scholarly communication
- Reach consensus on definitions
- Map some key knowledge gaps
- Discuss and apply an analytical framework, if possible
- Draft a report to The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation outlining a new research agenda for the study of information or scholarly communication as a commons
- Identify future actions to further this agenda

The group sought to integrate perspectives that are frequently segregated within the scholarly-communication arena, such as intellectual property rights; information technology (including hardware, software, code and open source, and infrastructure); traditional libraries; digital libraries; invention and creativity; collaborative science; citizenship and democratic processes; collective action; information economics; and the management, dissemination, and preservation of the scholarly record. Since that time, our ideas have grown and developed. We have been fortunate to add a couple of new scholars in the process, and regret that a few needed to withdraw due to previous commitments.

Our understanding of this complex commons has evolved considerably since the initial meeting. While our focus was originally on scholarly communication, we came to agree with Boyle, Lynch, and others that equating the knowledge commons with the “scholarly-communication” arena was too limiting and, perhaps, parochial. It became more and more apparent that any useful study of the users, designers, contributors, and distributors of this commons could not be cordoned off to the domain of the ivory tower. Who can any longer set the boundaries between scholarly and nonscholarly information? On the other hand, we found it useful to examine some of the long-enduring knowledge commons and related institutional rules, especially in the context of exponential technological change.

Participants included

James Boyle, William Neal Reynolds Professor of Law and Faculty Co-Director of the Center for the Study of the Public Domain, Duke Law School, Durham, North Carolina

James Cox, Noah Langdale Jr. Chair in Economics; Georgia Research Alliance Eminent Scholar; Director, Experimental Economics Center, University of Arizona

Charlotte Hess, Director, Workshop Research Library, and Digital Library of the Commons, Indiana University, Bloomington

Nancy Kranich, past president of the American Library Association; former Associate Dean of Libraries at New York University

Peter Levine, Director of CIRCLE, The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement; a research scholar at the Institute for Philosophy & Public Policy at the University of Maryland; Steering Committee Chair of the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools

Wendy Pradt Lougee, University Librarian and McKnight Presidential Professor, University of Minnesota, University Libraries, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Clifford Lynch, Director of the Coalition for Networked Information (CNI), Washington, D.C.; adjunct professor at the School of Information Management and Systems, University of California, Berkeley

Elinor Ostrom, Arthur F. Bentley Professor of Political Science, Indiana University; Co-Director, Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis; Co-Director, Center for the Study of Institutions, Population, and Environmental Change

Charles Schweik, Assistant Professor, Department of Natural Resource Conservation, Center for Public Policy and Administration, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Peter Suber, Policy Strategist for open access to scientific and scholarly research literature; Director, Open Access Project at Public Knowledge; Research Professor of Philosophy at Earlham College; Author of SPARC Open Access Newsletter; Editor of Open Access News Blog

Douglas Van Houweling, President and CEO of Internet2; Professor, School of Information, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Donald Waters, Program Officer for Scholarly Communications, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

The sessions were expertly moderated by Margaret Polski, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Development Strategies, Indiana University (IU). Some of the attendees and active contributors to the discussions were Blaise Cronin, Rudy Professor of Information Science and Dean of the IU School of Library and Information Science; Suzanne Thorin, Dean of the IU Libraries; Jorge Schement, Pennsylvania State University Distinguished Professor of Communications; Marco Janssen, Assistant Professor of Informatics; Robert Goehlert, IU Librarian for Economics and Political Science; Harriette Hemmasi, Associate Dean, IU Libraries; Laura Wisen, Coordinator of Workshop Research Library and SLIS graduate student; and Alice Robbin, IU Professor of Information Science.

While a couple of the original participants have dropped out due to previous commitments, as noted, we have been fortunate to add two outstanding thinkers on the commons:

David Bollier, Journalist, Consultant, Senior Fellow, USC Annenberg School for Communication, The Norman Lear Center, and Co-Founder and board member, Public Knowledge

Shubha Ghosh, Professor, Dedman School of Law, Southern Methodist University, Dallas

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Notes

1. See James Boyle, ed., *The Public Domain* (Durham, NC: School of Law, Duke University, 2003) (*Law and Contemporary Problems* 66(1–2)); <http://www.law.duke.edu/journals/lcp/>.
2. <http://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu>.