KENNEALLY: Most academics today expect to find open access research in scholarly journals, yet there are a growing number of OA books published each year, too. Is open access the answer to the question, what is the future of long-form scholarly publishing?

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center’s podcast series. I’m Christopher Kenneally for Beyond the Book. A recent survey from Publishers Communication Group found academic spending on open access materials tilted three to one in favor of journals, though the gap is expected to close. Just like OA articles, OA monographs are published through fees paid by the authors. The PCG survey found where the money comes from and how libraries are managing the shift to OA books. Melissanne Scheld, managing director of PCG, joins me now with more. Welcome to Beyond the Book, Melissanne.

SCHELD: Thanks, Chris. Thanks for having me on.

KENNEALLY: We’re looking forward to speaking with you. We have followed the open access issue or trend in scholarly publishing for some time now here at Beyond the Book, but we haven’t yet spoken about OA books, so we’re looking forward to that.

We’ll tell people briefly about your background. In your role as managing director at PCG, you lead a team building strong publisher relationships through global sales representation, content marketing, market research, and strategic consulting. Before joining PCG, Melissanne Scheld worked in the New York offices of Cambridge University Press, as well as at New York University Press and Columbia University Press.

A division of Publishing Technology, PCG provides a range of sales and marketing services designed to support and drive publishers’ sales strategies, particularly in the scholarly marketplace. PCG employees are based in the US, Europe, India, Brazil, and China.

Again, Melissanne, looking forward to chatting with you about the news in open access books. I guess the first place to start is with what the factors are driving the growth of open access monographs.
SCHELD: Yeah. Thanks again, Chris. There are several factors for open access monographs, and in some ways they’re similar to journals, and in some ways, they’re a little bit different. Monograph publishing, which predominantly comes from university presses, but not exclusively, has seen a dramatic drop in revenue that it had previously generated for university presses. Over the past 10 years, we’ve seen numbers like 50%, 60%, 70% drop in revenue from this stream of monograph publishing.

KENNEALLY: Melissanne, I realized as I was hearing you speak about monographs that we’re using a term that you and I are familiar with, but perhaps not everyone in the audience is. Tell us briefly what a monograph is. It’s pretty much interchangeable with a book, but these are very specific kinds of books.

SCHELD: That’s right. It’s original research conducted by one or two authors – not a big group of essays, not a group of authors – on a single focus for academic purposes. Monographs tend to be heavily footnoted, very theoretical, and they are the lifeblood for researchers.

KENNEALLY: Right. In the past, when libraries stacked their shelves with physical books, the monograph business was a pretty good one for university presses.

SCHELD: That’s exactly right. And as library budgets shrink and monograph publishing grew because more academics needed tenure, there started to become a gap of publishers needing to still produce scholarly content, but libraries were no longer able to directly purchase it in their traditional models because their budgets were not growing as fast as the production of monographs. So there became a gap, and open access monograph publishing is a piece of the solution. As you indicated in the introduction, it’s a growing piece. It certainly is not the entire stopgap, though.

KENNEALLY: If people are familiar with open access, they know that it’s essentially that author pays model. In the journal side, it is a so-called article processing charge. I suppose this might be, rather than an APC, a BPC – a book processing charge. Those are fees charged to the author or authors that help to subsidize the peer review process, the editorial process, the whole workflow of actually publishing the book from manuscript to final product.

SCHELD: Exactly. Where open access monographs differ from open access journals is in some of the new collaborative, innovative ways that funders are coming together to help out publishers or to support publishers. Just as you described, open access journal articles are predominantly funded by the authors, the researchers themselves. That story isn’t exactly the same when we look at open access monographs.
That has a lot to do with the fact that journals publishing, predominantly STM, and monograph publishing is traditionally dominated by humanities and social sciences. Humanities and social science research is not funded the same way that STM is funded in academia around the world. It’s harder for humanities and social science researchers to find the kind of funding that is more available on the science side.

KENNEALLY: Right. On the science side, Melissanne Scheld, it’s common enough for a researcher to be working from a grant, often a significant grant, from a government agency or a private funding organization, and that the article processing charge is a small piece of that larger grant. Whereas your typical English literature professor or social science professor, he or she simply doesn’t have those kind of funds to work with.

SCHELD: That’s exactly right. That’s exactly right, which is forcing more creative collaborations and partnerships among funders, among publishers, which makes open access monograph publishing a really interesting, dynamic circumstance at the moment. There’s a lot of creativity out there. There’s a lot of nontraditional partners getting together. Open access journals tend to still be within a classic academic publishing model, but open access monograph is opening the gates to nontraditional publishers participating, as well.

KENNEALLY: So in the survey that PCG conducted, which was, we should tell people, a follow-on to a survey last year looking at libraries and institutions and the way they were responding to open access, what did you discover were the funding sources for these OA monographs?

SCHELD: Largely the funding for open access monographs comes from research institutions, so the parent university or college where researchers are working. That money could trickle through the library to the publisher to the author. That money could come directly from the provost’s office. But that tends to be the core source, the academic institution, the author’s home base.

KENNEALLY: In a sense, the costs have shifted from the library budget to perhaps another line item in that large university budget.

SCHELD: That’s exactly right. When we look at open access journals, about 25-30% of the APCs that you mentioned on the journal side come directly from the library, but that number is much smaller for open access monograph publishing. The libraries are not quite yet the major funder of open access monographs as they are on the journal side.

KENNEALLY: What’s the institutional impact for libraries and librarians when they look at this, as you say, small, but still growing portion of the scholarly production
today? Are they having to rethink? Do they treat these OA monographs much as they would any other monograph? What are some of the changes that this is forcing on them?

SCHELD: Whereas the library in the past would choose the content, the books that they would want on their shelves, with an open access model, they have less need to be selective. They can have whatever’s available to them, which means more researchers have access to more content in ways that never happened before. This is essential in the US and Europe, but also in other countries where just the distribution of physical books was more difficult around the world.

KENNEALLY: Yeah, and that’s fascinating, because really open access, the goal of open access, is to ensure the distribution of knowledge as widely as possible, as freely as possible, and free in the sense of having no limitations to access, not so much free in terms of cost. So it’s easy to imagine that this would really help further that goal, because as you say, it would allow for universities and libraries in far-reaching parts of the globe to have these books when they might otherwise never even dream of doing so.

SCHELD: That’s exactly right. The collaborative nature of research – all the open access monographs still go through a rigorous peer review process, a curatorial process at each publishing house. But in an open access model, the research can be posted earlier for more collaborative feedback from other researchers working in similar fields. That revolutionizes and spurs on greater creativity in researchers’ work.

KENNEALLY: Right. Melissanne Scheld at PCG, managing director there, you’ve written about and spoken about at the recent SSP conference on scholarly monographs and the open access model, and I wonder if you can tell us about the ways that publishers are taking on board this shift. What kind of business models have they adopted so far? Is it pretty much taking the APC charge that we were saying, the article processing charge, and turning it into a BPC? Is it as simple as that?

SCHELD: Some publishers have adopted that model, and then within that model, there are variations. Some publishers charge for the book, some by the chapter, some by the word count. But there are other models that publishers are adopting as well. University of California, for example, has a library membership model, where libraries sign up to be silver or gold or various levels of members at various fees and then get access to different ranges of books as an add-on. Everybody gets one basic digital model, but if you’re a gold member, you might get some extras. So it’s that libraries are funding in part the OA model, not directly buying a book.
Then there are other publishers that put everything free digitally, but then offset those expenses by selling POD, or print-on-demand, versions of physical books – the same title.

KENNEALLY: Melissanne, you’ve got a fair amount of experience in the university press world. I wonder if you think at this point, and I know it’s still very early, whether open access really is the answer to that question I posed – what is the future of long-form scholarly publishing? Is this a road that you’d expect to find some success on for university presses?

SCHELD: I think so, because I think what it does is spur on creativity. There’s a great collaboration between University of Michigan Press, New York University Press, and University of Minnesota Press, which are all part of their libraries, where these three publishers are banding together, and they’ve got a large Mellon Foundation grant to create enhanced open access content, so moving away from a physical print book into a more dynamic set of that same range of content, but with more bells and whistles and more enhancement. That isn’t something that would have ever been possible as a monograph. But working together, these three publishers have managed to move forward into a very creative model of distribution of content.

KENNEALLY: Indeed. It is very creative and very intriguing, and we appreciate your taking us down the road in the early days of open access monographs, learning a little bit more about this topic based on a survey that PCG, Publishers Communication Group, recently conducted. Melissanne Scheld, managing director at PCG, thanks so much for joining us today on Beyond the Book.

SCHELD: Thank you, Chris. I appreciate it.

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Our engineer and co-producer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. My name is Christopher Kenneally. For all of us at Copyright Clearance Center, thanks for listening to Beyond the Book.

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