

The 2.5% Commitment

David W. Lewis
Dean of the IUPUI University Library
dlewis@iupui.edu

September 11, 2017

© 2017 David W. Lewis. This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

The Commitment: Every academic library should commit to contribute 2.5% of its total budget to support the common infrastructure needed to create the open scholarly commons.

Academic Libraries and the Open Scholarly Commons

In the end, libraries can point out the fact that their future role actually points in in two, apparently opposite, yet deeply complementary directions: on the one hand, they plunge deeply into the local production scenes since they aim at systematically sweeping, storing, preserving, and curating all that is produced in their hosting institution; at the same time, the libraries, with their sister institutions, are involved in the task of ensuring a vibrant knowledge-nurturing life for their documents: they will circulate, be discoverable, be interoperable, be evaluated, etc. With the first function, each library ensures its safe and strong function within its host institution; with the second function, the libraries connect to bring the knowledge infrastructure that we all really need. — Jean-Claude Guéron¹

In the Internet era information will be free, the only question remaining is who pays for that freedom. — Kalev Leetaru²

The two quotes define one of the primary challenges academic libraries currently face. Jean-Claude Guéron in his Budapest Open Access Initiative 15 Statement nicely describes the world that needs to be created, what Locan Dempsey nicely framed as moving from an “Outside-In” strategy to an “Inside-Out” strategy.³

What we, as the academic library community, want to create is an open scholarly commons that will be digital and distributed with colleges, universities, cultural heritage organizations, scholarly societies, foundations, and governments hosting the content created, funded, or of interest to them in repositories that would make the content openly available to the world. This community would fund and support the common infrastructure needed for discovery,

access, and preservation. Collectively we would take responsibility for curating and preserving the world's scientific, scholarly, and cultural heritage thus making it discoverable and freely available to everyone in the world now and in the future. This is the vision. We need to replace the dysfunctional system we have now with one that works. Imagining what the system could and should be is the easy part.

The hard part is Leetaru's question: Who will pay for it?

The short answer is that much of the funding for the open scholarly commons must come from academic libraries. While we always feel financially stretched, the truth is academic libraries have considerable resources at their disposal. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, in 2012, the latest year for which statistics have been published, 3,793 academic libraries in the United States spent \$2,790,039,494 on information resources and had total expenditures of \$7,008,113,939.⁴ In 2014/15 the 124 members of the Association of Research Libraries had total expenditures \$4,605,470,905, with \$1,619,589,599 spent on library materials.⁵ There is money. The critical question is: Are we in the academic library community prepared to reallocate enough of it to accomplish what needs to be done?

The Dilemma of Collective Action

In a 2017 *College & Research Libraries* article John Wenzler argues that academic libraries face the dilemma of collective action, and this will make creating the open scholarly commons difficult at best, and maybe impossible. The temptation to free ride on the efforts of others will be too great and libraries will fail to make the necessary investments. As he puts it the prospects of an open system are based on, "the hope that academic librarians will make decisions that violate their private, market-based incentives."⁶ Wenzler concludes his paper by saying, "For academic libraries to continue to achieve their traditional role of storing, organizing, preserving, and providing access to the scholarly record, they increasingly will have to take responsibility for the entire cycle of scholarly communication from publishing and editing through preservation, but it is unlikely that they will succeed in doing so through the uncoordinated actions of individual institutions and will require new experiments in cooperation and coordination."⁷ This is an important concern. Academic libraries have a long history of cooperation. Interlibrary loan, shared cataloging (OCLC) and shared collections both physical and digital (the Center for Research Libraries and the HathiTrust) are examples, but past cooperation has not generally required the level of financial commitment that will be necessary if the open scholarly commons is to come to fruition.

If we are to prove Wenzler wrong, the academic library community will need to find incentives for individual academic libraries to make significant financial investments that are not in their narrow short-term interest. Importantly, they will also need to be able to justify these investments to campus leadership in a time of fiscal constraint.

The Proposal

One incentive could be a common shared expectation of contribution. This is my proposal. I would propose that every academic library should commit to contribute 2.5% of its total budget to support the common infrastructure needed to create the open scholarly commons. 2.5% may not seem like a lot, but it is likely to be more, and in many case much more, than most academic libraries are now dedicating to support of common infrastructure.

This common infrastructure can be defined broadly but it would include at least contributions to:

1. Open source software projects that support the open scholarly commons. This would include projects like DSpace, Fedora, Hyku, the Open Journal System, ArchivesSpace or Islandora.
2. Disciplinary repositories such as ArXiv, bioRxiv, or the Humanities Commons.
3. Large repositories of open content such as HathiTrust or the Internet Archive.
4. Tools from Wikipedia to VIVO to the Open Access Button or Unpaywall.
5. Preservation organizations such as the Digital Preservation Network or the Academic Preservation Trust.
6. Open educational resources such as OpenStax.
7. Organizations that support these developments such as DuraSpace, the Center for Open Science, the Public Knowledge Project, the Open Textbook Network, Impactstory, Orchid, or Creative Commons.
8. Advocacy organizations such as SPARC.

On campus expenditures for staff, equipment, etc., even when in support of open access, would not count unless it was a direct contribution to a national project, for example contributions of developer time to writing code.

Whether for-profit organizations should count is an interesting question. Jeffery Pooley argues against it, "The main reason is that the profit motive is misaligned, fundamentally, with the core values of academic life. The market's restless rent-seeking corrodes ideals like unfettered inquiry, knowledge-sharing, and cooperative progress."⁸ And, if the company is for-profit Elsevier can, and likely will, buy it. As Heather Joseph and Kathleen Shearer put it responding to the Elsevier acquisition of Bepress, "The use of open source platforms, with appropriate community governance, is... critical to this goal and to preventing greater commercial control of scholarly content and associated services."⁹ If the infrastructure is not a community asset, we are all vulnerable. This said, contribution to for-profits can support valuable infrastructure. It is probably best to count contributions inclusively, but to create two categories. The first for core non-profit contributions and the second for other contributions that are secondary, either not core or are to for-profit organizations.

So, these are the counting rules: Total all of a library's contributions, both cash and in-kind, to projects and organizations in the above categories and divide it by the library's total budget. If the resulting percentage is 2.5% or better, the library meets the standard.

We would expect some libraries to meet the 2.5% goal easily. For others this would be an aspirational goal, at least initially. We would also expect different types of libraries to contribute to different types of projects. Research libraries would be more likely to support Fedora, ArXiv or the Digital Preservation Network. Community college libraries might be more likely to support OpenStax or other OER projects.

I have argued that a United Way like organization that would receive contributions and distribute them across the various organizations in the ecosystem would make this process more effective.¹⁰ Such an organization could take a broad and strategic view and could assess the effectiveness of funding. Unfortunately, at this time there is no organization that can effectively play this role. The best we can now hope for at is one or more organizations that would create a list of organizations that should be supported.

The 2.5% Tool¹¹

The 2.5% Tool would provide a library user a list of open commons infrastructure providers. The library would indicate the monetary and in-kind (cash equivalent) contributions the library made to these projects. The library would have the option of adding additional organizations or projects. It might be best to have two categories of contribution. The first would be for contributions that are for core infrastructure and meet established criteria (for example, are non-profit). The second would be for contributions that are either not part core infrastructure, say Zotero, or the provider is commercial, say Bepress or Atmire.

The library would also provide its total budget. The tool would calculate the total percentage of contribution broken down by core and other contributions with a total.

The library could choose to have this information made publically available as a percentage or with the details of contributions. The tool would provide a mechanism to sort libraries that make their information publically available and to create peer groups.

Infrastructure providers would be able to request inclusion in the tool and would be able to see who has claimed contribution to their project. They would also be invited to provide a summary of the project and information on how to contribute.

Potential Impact

Good figures on the total expenditures of U.S. academic libraries are not easy to come by, but based on the figures cited about \$7 billion is probably a safe estimate. If 2.5% of this was allocated to common infrastructure to support the open scholarly commons this would be \$175 million. If only two-thirds of this amount was raised it would be about \$115 million.

It is also hard to determine the current expenditures of the projects and organizations to see how much additional investment would be added. But it is hard to imagine that the current expenditures reach anywhere near that level. In 2016 the Public Knowledge Project's income was \$1.18 million; the total revenue for HathiTrust was \$3.2 million, and the 2016 DuraSpace revenue was about \$1.78 million.¹²

It is hard to imagine that contributions at the \$115 million level would not more than double the funds available to these common infrastructure organizations. This would give them the resources they need to take their work to the next level, where we all need it to be.

But just to keep this in perspective, the *Financial Times* reported that Elsevier paid \$115 million to acquire Bepress. The same article said that, "Relx (Elsevier's parent company) only spends about £300m (about \$385 million) a year on acquisitions, targeting about 25 deals."¹³ So even if we can collectively up our game, we remain the underdog.

How to Make It Happen

So, there is now a proposal floating around in the academic library world that every library should contribute 2.5% of its budget to support the common infrastructure needed to create the open scholarly commons. Why would anyone care, and more importantly, why would any library adopt make this commitment? After all, isn't Wenzler right about the dilemma of collective action?

The 2.5% Commitment only happens if it becomes the accepted standard, if there is peer pressure, if the groups your library belongs to — ARL, Oberlin Group or SPARC — declare this a group norm and reports who achieves it. The 2.5% Commitment happens if presidents and provosts and faculty become convinced this is a minimum level of institutional support for the common good. The 2.5% Commitment happens if accreditors ask about it. The 2.5% Commitment happens if it becomes a movement.

The 2.5% Commitment will happen only if we create and grow the movement.

I would suggest several action items as a way to start:

1. Organizations such as ARL, ACRL, the Oberlin Group and SPARC, individually or collectively, should create list of organizations who would count as open scholarly commons infrastructure providers.
2. Librarians should solicit support for the 2.5% commitment from national organizations representing Presidents and Provosts, such as Association of American Universities and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities.
3. A digital platform to make vetting open scholarly commons infrastructure providers and to provide academic libraries a means of accounting for their contributions should be created.

4. Organizations such as ARL, ACRL, the Oberlin Group and SPARC, individually or collectively, should recognize libraries that meet the 2.5% commitment.
5. Open scholarly commons infrastructure providers should establish incentives from libraries that are recognized as having met the 2.5% commitment. This might include lower threshold for governance involvement or other membership benefits.
6. Libraries that are in the 2.5% commitment group should create an organization to begin to coordinate contributions and assess the effectiveness of open scholarly commons infrastructure providers. This could be the beginning of a United Way like organization. One of the keys to creating a United Way like organization will be developing the library community's trust. Building from a group of early adopting libraries could achieve this.

At the end of the day, if we don't collectively invest in the infrastructure we need for the open scholarly commons, it will not get built or it will only be haphazardly half built. A 2.5% commitment will require some reallocation, but every academic library can do it if they choose.

It is time to get started.

¹ Jean-Claude Guédon, *Open Access: Toward the Internet of the Mind*, BOAI15 Statement, (February 23, 2017), <http://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/open-access-toward-the-internet-of-the-mind>.

² Kalev Leetaru, "The Internet Made Information Free: Now It Has Come For Academic Research," *Forbes*, July 31, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kalevleetaru/2017/07/31/the-internet-made-information-free-now-it-has-come-for-academic-research/#6457e9554640>.

³ Lorcan Dempsey, "Library Collections in the Life of the User: Two Directions," *LIBER Quarterly* 26(4):338–359 2016. doi: <http://doi.org/10.18352/lq.10170>
and Lorcan Dempsey, "A New Information Management Landscape: From Outside-In to Inside-Out," in *New Roles for the Road Ahead: Essays Commissioned for ACRL's 75th Anniversary* (Chicago, IL: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2015), 50-55, http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/publications/whitepapers/new_roles_75th.pdf

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, *Academic Libraries: 2012. First Look* (Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics, January 2014): Pages 10 and 12, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014038.pdf>

⁵ Shaneka Morris and Gary Roebuck, *ARL Statistics 2014-2015* (Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, 2017): Pages 21 and 9, <http://publications.arl.org/ARL-Statistics-2014-2015/>

⁶ John Wenzler, "Scholarly Communication and the Dilemma of Collective Action: Why Academic Journals Cost Too Much," *College & Research Libraries* 78(2):192 February 2017 doi: <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.78.2.16581>

⁷ John Wenzler, "Scholarly Communication and the Dilemma of Collective Action: Why Academic Journals Cost Too Much," *College & Research Libraries* 78(2):197 February 2017 doi: <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.78.2.16581>

⁸ Jefferson Pooley, "Scholarly Communications Shouldn't Just Be Open, But Non-Profit Too," *LSE (London School of Economics) Impact Blog* August 15, 2017 <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2017/08/15/scholarly-communications-shouldnt-just-be-open-but-non-profit-too/>

⁹ Heather Joseph and Kathleen Shearer, "Elsevier Acquisition Highlights the Need for Community-Based Scholarly Communication Infrastructure," <https://sparcopen.org/news/2017/elsevier-acquisition-highlights-the-need-for-community-based-scholarly-communication-infrastructure/#3>

¹⁰ David W. Lewis, *Reimagining the Academic Library*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, page 158.

¹¹ The idea for a system to monitor contributions comes from Michael Roy. See: Michael Roy, "1% for Open," https://docs.google.com/document/d/1JJKvciLGV_kTcJtT3xHH_2Keig8z0sWw64pk6T4SBJ0/edit#heading=h.4lr3bebtwqqc

¹² *2016/17 Annual Report to the Community: Take Control of Your Publishing*, Public Knowledge Project, 2017, page 22, <https://pkp.sfu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/PKP-2016-Annual-Report.pdf>; "2016-2017 Budget Report Member & Finance Committee," HathiTrust 2016 Member Meeting November 10, 2016, https://www.hathitrust.org/sites/www.hathitrust.org/files/HT_2016_member-meeting_BUDGET%20SLIDES.pdf, and "A Report from the 2017 DuraSpace Member Summit," <http://duraspace.org/node/3153> extrapolated from "revenue grew 14% or \$250,000."

¹³ David Bond, "Relx Buys Bepress to Boost Academic Publishing," *Financial Times* August 2, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/c6f6c594-7787-11e7-a3e8-60495fe6ca71>