

Bending the Truth with a PRISM

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The Association of American Publishers (AAP) recently launched a website, entitled The Partnership for Research Integrity in Science & Medicine (PRISM; www.prismcoalition.com). The partnership was created to lobby against the Federal Research Public Access Act, which was introduced to the 109th United States Congress in May, 2006, but was not acted upon before the Congress adjourned at the end of the year. It has not yet been re-introduced to the 110th Congress, which convened in January, 2007. The bill requires that all NIH-funded research be released to the public via PubMed Central after a six-month delay. A more recent Congressional effort—in the appropriations bill that includes NIH funding for fiscal year 2008—calls for the release of NIH-funded research after twelve months.

The AAP is a publisher's networking and lobbying group, whose membership comprises both commercial and nonprofit publishers. In theory, the AAP lobbies for causes supported by their members; however, on this occasion, the principles promoted by PRISM were not circulated amongst members of the organization before they were made public, and it is unclear from the website exactly who endorses them.

Although the Rockefeller University Press (RUP) is a member of the AAP, we do not sanction this lobbying effort. We strongly support the release of journal content to the public after six months—we have been doing so on our own journal websites for seven years. We also support government archiving of journal content, and, starting November 1st, 2007, all of our content will be archived on PubMed Central, where it will also be available to the public six months after publication (1).



"Wait, those weren't lies. That was spin!"

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To the Association of American Publishers:

I am writing to request that a disclaimer be placed on the PRISM website indicating that the views presented on the site do not necessarily reflect those of all members of the AAP. We at the Rockefeller University Press strongly disagree with the spin that has been placed on the issue of open access by PRISM.

First, the website implies that the NIH (and other funding agencies who mandate release of content after a short delay) are advocating the demise of peer review. Nothing could be further from the truth. These agencies completely understand the need to balance public access to journal content with the necessity for publishers to recoup the costs of peer review. After extended discussions with publishers, these agencies have determined that delayed release of content (none of them are advocating immediate release unless publishers are compensated handsomely for such release) is consistent with the STM (scientific, technical, and medical) subscription business model, in which peer review is a basic tenet.

Second, how can PRISM refer to bias when the government is mandating that ALL papers resulting from research they fund be released to the public after a short delay? The major potential for bias by the government and other funding agencies has already occurred when they decide what research to fund (e.g., stem cell research).

Third, PRISM takes issue with government spending on a repository of papers resulting from government-funded research. The government has been

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To make our position clear, RUP sent an open letter (2) to executives at the AAP on August 29th, 2007, requesting that they place a disclaimer on the PRISM website to indicate that it does not represent the views of all AAP members (see box). On September 17th, 2007, changes were made to the website, toning down some of the rhetoric about the evils of creating a repository of publicly funded research. The modified website still does not contain a disclaimer, however, and it continues to be a mystery who supports it.

References

1. Hill, E. 2007. JCB Content Automatically Deposited in PubMed Central (PMC). *J. Cell Biol.* 179:9.
2. Suber, P. (2007) PRISM doesn't speak for Rockefeller University Press. Available at: <http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/2007/08/prism-doesn-speak-for-rockefeller.html>

forced into this position by those publishers who refuse to ever release most of their content to the public.

Fourth, PRISM maintains that published papers are private property. Most of the research published by STM publishers only exists because of public funding. No public funding - no research - no millions in profit. Publishers thus have an obligation to give some of their private property back to the public, on whose taxes they depend for their very existence.

Finally, we take issue with the title: Partnership for Research Integrity in Science and Medicine. The use of the term "research integrity" is inappropriate in this context. The common use of this term refers to whether the data presented are accurate representations of what was actually observed. In other words, has any misconduct occurred? This is not the primary concern of peer reviewers, who ask whether the data presented support the conclusions drawn. It is thus incorrect to link the term research integrity directly with peer review.

I could go on, but I think you will get the point that we strongly disagree with the tack AAP has taken on this issue. We urge you to put a disclaimer on the PRISM site, to make it clear that your assertions do not represent the views of all of your members.

Yours sincerely,
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