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DOE Public Access confusions

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Synopsis: One of the biggest problems with the [DOE Public Access plan](#) is that there are multiple ingest streams for the same journal articles. This is likely to lead to multiple locations and multiple versions being made public at the same time, which is potentially a major source of confusion. Other confusions are emerging as well, including in the news reports covering the DOE plan. Confusion is the price of progress.

The problem of multiple versions and locations

There are several different ways in which a given journal article can enter the DOE Public Access system. We can think of these as separate ingest systems. Among these entry pathways are STIP, E-link, Chorus, FundRef, SHARE and possibly other repositories, etc. The source may be an author, an institution, a repository or the publisher. In some cases what comes in from the source will be an article. In other cases it may just be a link to the article, located somewhere. Or it may be both the article and a link to it.

Moreover, the version of the article may vary from source to source, including the VoR as well as different versions of the AM. Note too that in the case of multiple authors, each of whom has received federal funding, there may be multiple submissions when submission is a condition of the funding. There may also be submissions to other agency systems when more than one agency has funded the research, which is not uncommon.

The result is potentially an incredible mess, one that publishers in particular should be concerned about. For publishers the issue is eyeballs, which means having the government direct users to their websites in order to see the publicly accessible article. This is one of the primary purposes of FundRef and CHORUS. But if the government also posts versions of the article and/or links to it on other sites then the publisher's traffic is likely to be significantly reduced.

One way to avoid this problem of multiple versions and locations is to disambiguate the data, which means recognizing different instances of the same article in the ingest system. This is far from simple and probably cannot be done by a computer. In fact it could be laborious and hence expensive. It is unlikely that DOE has budgeted for this effort, or even anticipated it. Nothing in their public statements suggests that they are aware of it.

Unfortunately, a far cheaper solution is to abandon the planned approach in favor of simply collecting and posting accepted manuscripts from lead authors, just as is now done for DOE research reports. If this happens then emerging systems like CHORUS, FundRef and SHARE will become useless as far as the DOE Public Access program is concerned. The goal of the publishers and the repositories, of getting eyeballs, will be lost.

Other emerging confusions

We have a lengthy public discussion of other potential confusions in the 50+ comments on the Scholarly Kitchen's article "[US Department of Energy Announces Public Access Plan.](#)" These include the role of repositories and the nature of copyright, among others.

On the repository side there is a misconception that DOE is requiring that authors deposit their accepted manuscripts into institutional or other repositories, so that DOE can link to them. While DOE does plan to link to such manuscripts, if they are available, there is no requirement to make such a deposit. The confusion stems in part from DOE's referring to its own collection as a repository.

There is also the issue of how the federal use license, which DOE is invoking in order to collect accepted manuscripts, relates to the publisher's copyright? This confusion stems in part from language in the Public Access plan, which says that for the Version of Record the publisher's copyright governs. But this is because DOE does not claim a federal use license to the VoR, just to the AM. Moreover, in the case of the AM it is far from clear just what rights public access conveys to the users of the article.

Confusions in the news about the DOE plan

Other emerging confusions can be found in various news articles about the DOE Public Access plan. Here are some of the most prominent news articles to date:

Science Magazine:

<http://news.sciencemag.org/policy/2014/08/u-s-energy-department-make-researchers-papers-free>

Nature:

<http://blogs.nature.com/news/2014/08/us-department-of-energy-frees-up-access-to-research.html>

Physics Today:

<http://scitation.aip.org/content/aip/magazine/physicstoday/news/10.1063/PT.5.8061>

Washington Post:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-switch/wp/2014/08/04/why-open-access-advocates-arent-thrilled-with-the-does-plan-to-expand-public-access-to-its-research/>

FedScoop:

<http://fedscoop.com/department-of-energy-pages-public-access-open-gov/>

Chemical and Engineering News:

<http://cen.acs.org/articles/92/i32/Department-Energy-Launch-Public-Access.html>

The Chronicle of Higher Education

<http://chronicle.com/blogs/ticker/energy-dept-unveils-plan-to-increase-public-access-to-research-it-finances/83205>

Most of these articles contain significant misstatements about the DOE Public Access program. We will address some of these confusions in later issues of "Inside Public Access."

Conclusions

New federal programs typically create big confusions as they get worked out and the DOE Public Access program is no exception. It must be remembered that this is a plan, not a working program, and DOE has little experience with the journal industry. The confusion will grow going forward, especially as more agency plans are announced. It remains to be seen how the Federal Government will handle this inevitable confusion.

It is also possible that the problem of multiple locations and versions will cause DOE to abandon some of the most desirable features in its plan. The use of CHORUS in particular may be at risk. Very little is settled at this point.

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