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Open Access and the Association Publisher, Summary of a Presentation by Dr. Martin Blume

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Summary: Open Access and the Association Publisher: Dr. Martin Blume, the American Physical Society

The American Physical Society (APS) publishes eight titles along with *Physical Review Focus* (a free service that provides lay-person explanations of selected articles from the other APS journals) and two open access journals, *Physical Review Special Topics: Accelerators and Beams* (funded with institutional sponsorship) and *Physical Review Special Topics: Physics Education Research* (funded by author charges).

Blume gives a breakdown of submissions to APS journals: about one third come from the U.S. , one third come from Western Europe , and one third come from the rest of the world. The geographical distribution of its authors complicates the issue of government support for open access journals. Teasing out which nation should bear the burden could be difficult.

Blume states that the desire of the public to have speedy access to discoveries in medicine is not matched in physics. Blume notes that authors are free to put their articles in open access preprint archives and to add updates after the APS peer review. Current APS practices that are improving the speed of publication include paperless submissions and refereeing and the decoupling of electronic and paper production.

Blume turns his attention to the economics of publishing and poses the question: What drives prices and costs? Factors include:

- the number of submitted articles (in 2004, it was approximately 28,000)
- the number of published articles (in 2004, it was approximately 16,000)
- salaries and benefits
- office costs, “business continuity”
- servers, IT, tech costs

In 2004, the APS budget was \$30 million.

APS has tiered pricing and gives the biggest discounts to small institutions. Blume shows the hypothetical example of “Institution X,” a large research institution. Prices for subscription in 1998 are compared to prices in 2004. In 1998, a subscription to all APS journals was \$12,000, and in 2004 it was \$24,500. Blume notes that in 1998 the titles were available in print only, and Institution X had three subscriptions to all APS journals, as well as fourth subscriptions to two of the titles. Therefore, the true cost to the institution in 1998 was \$38,300. In 2004,

electronic access supplements the print subscription, so Institution X needs only one subscription to all APS journals, at \$24,500.

Blume discusses the APS copyright policy. APS requires authors to transfer copyright to APS, but it grants authors many rights, including the right to make their articles freely available online. Therefore, Blume argues, the APS copyright policy is “a form of open access.”

On the topic of open access, Blume notes two possibilities. In one version, articles are available without barriers, scattered across the web. In a more desirable version, a publisher’s content is completely available without barriers on the publisher’s site. The latter model presents challenges for cost recovery. Ways to cover costs and increase open access include payment of publishing costs by author or author’s institution, subscriptions, sponsorship, and voluntary subscriber contributions.

APS is experimenting with offering open access on a limited number of titles. One title is funded by sponsorship, and one title requires authors to pay a charge. Funding by author charges is meeting resistance, and Blume himself feels that author charges are not the best use of researchers’ grant money.

In his concluding comments, Blume lets us know that for the present, APS is not pursuing open access beyond what they already do. What is practical for small journals is not always practical for large ones. Open access is **not** a moral imperative—it is just a different business model. Blume closes with words of caution: do not risk the future on an untested model.