

CONFIDENTIAL

For the BSA Board: Thoughts on the renewal proposal from Wiley 2021

Respectfully submitted by Amy McPherson, Director of Publications, Botanical Society of America, 27 May 2021

Background:

The world is a much different place than it was when we were looking for a publishing partner in 2016-2017. We went from self-publishing in an era of the Publisher Big Deals and licensing (though we entered this in its “golden years”) to the era of Open Access and Open Data*. The Big Publishers are and always have been major players, and there’s been tremendous consolidation in recent years.

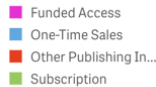
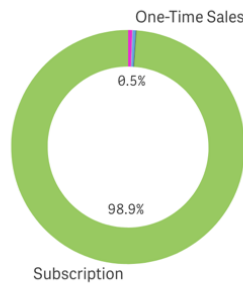
That is a conversation we could have another day; but know that it would be impossible for us to self-publish in today’s environment. We get many, many benefits by partnering with a large publisher such as a global sales team to handle licensing and subscriptions, increased worldwide exposure and downloads of our content, savings on new technology, the online journal platform, and tools/resources for authors (see the publisher’s reports). With Wiley, we are in the company of other excellent life science/plant journals. Our relationship with Wiley has its challenges, but the BSA publications staff works *very hard* to address these and we communicate often and meet regularly with our Wiley counterparts.

Wiley’s proposal for contract renewal focuses largely on transitioning from a hybrid model for AJB (subscription journal with an OA option; Green OA) to one that is fully Open Access (assuming certain criteria are met) by 2027. It also counts on raising Article Processing Charges (APCs) and significantly increasing the number of articles published by both AJB and APPS. You should note that their financial offer is a 22% reduction on the current contract deal we have with them. This is a significant reduction to BSA revenue.

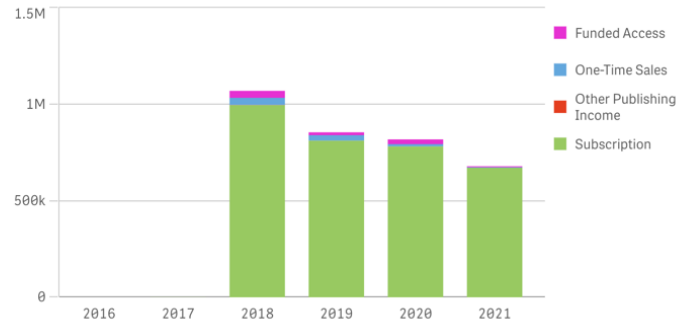
First, let’s all agree that income from our publications, primarily subscription revenues from AJB, have directly supported the important work of the BSA for most of the life of the Society. We are not unique—many societies fund their operations through their publishing programs. However, as we know, subscription revenues have been in decline for decades, and that has only accelerated as library budgets have been cut and there’s been a shift to accommodate Open Access initiatives in some sectors. Wiley has seen these declines and the writing on the wall is telling them to prepare for an Open future. Thus, they’ve been striking [transitional deals](#) with institutions, mostly in Europe where the support of OA is currently stronger than in the US.**

Here’s the income stream for AJB currently: Most of it is from subscriptions; I’m not sure where the numbers for 2021 will end up, because the information is only through the first few months, but a [survey of librarians](#) at the end of 2020 by Ithaka S+R is not encouraging.

2021 INCOME BY STREAM (\$)



INCOME TREND BY STREAM (\$)



* The data set contains negative or zero values that cannot be shown in this c...

Source: Wiley Insights, data through March 2021. [Wiley provided context for the 2020 revenue, which was shared with the Board in March. We will receive more funded OA in 2021: our July special issues on Angiosperms353 in AJB and APPS will be fully OA, largely funded by a Wiley deal with Jisc in the UK.]

So, second, let's agree that we support the *idea* of Open Access: It's in our mission to support *botany*, and we can acknowledge that communicating and sharing discoveries is essential to the research process. All authors want their research to be read, and the fewer restrictions placed on access to their papers mean that more people may benefit from the research (and they may get cited!, though there are not yet a lot of studies to support this relationship). In many ways, the OA movement is very much in line with the shared mission of researchers, scholarly societies, and publishers.

In fact, the current draft of the BSA Strategic Plan states that one of our goals is:

5.4 Move toward an entirely open access publication model while maintaining low publication fees for members.

Here's the deal, though: We're not yet ready to flip AJB to Open Access; will we be ready in the next 5+ years? Does that serve our mission? If so, can Wiley help us reach that goal? Is there an alternative?

A New Game Plan:

If you read the Wiley proposal carefully, you will find they've laid out a game plan:

Step 1: Go after authors in areas where Wiley has transitional deals. Seriously. Go after them. There's money there; we're not capitalizing on the funds available because most of our authors are US-based. Wiley has ideas on how we might capture authors in various regions, and they say they can help. (I'm from the Show-Me State, so they are going to have to prove this.)

Step 2: Raise the APCs, which are a LOT lower than our sibling (competitor) Wiley journals.

Step 3: Publish more articles! Organize special issues on trending topics. But plan on increasing our output by 8% each year; to match previous revenues, we'd need to **double** the number of articles we're currently publishing in AJB. That sounds like a heavy lift, probably unrealistic, especially with current publications staff size.

Step 4: APPS needs to publish more articles, particularly to replace the revenue stream we lost when we dropped Primer Notes—but it also needs to *grow*.

Concerns:

So, the proposal indicates Wiley has confidence that we can do this! (They include a lot of exclamation points!) I appreciate their optimism, although I am less confident, and here are some of my concerns:

1. A lot of our authors are indeed US-based, and many of them are not well-funded (see the responses to the 2020 BSA member survey in the Appendix). We want to serve our mission and

do not want to alienate our people: how can we move toward an entirely OA publication model while maintaining low publication fees for members and maintain a healthy revenue stream for the Society? Is the Board/Society willing to subsidize member APCs? Is the Board/Society willing to financially support publications in new, possibly creative ways, since it is obvious our revenue from publications will decrease at least in the next 5-7 years?

2. I do not know how we are going to attract all these new authors from Europe (Germany, especially). They produce good research in these countries, so attracting them to publish in our journals *could* fit in with our mission. Wiley says they will help, but I am skeptical that we can convince European/Chinese/Brazilian authors to flock to us.
3. How does an author-pays model fit into our goals for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion? How can we make this work? I don't know—we certainly need other areas/"pillars" of our Society to weigh in to make sure our policies and processes are equitable and inclusive. Wiley has waivers for authors from low-income countries, which is good, of course, but there are still lots of inequities built into the model.
4. Publishing twice the number of papers sounds unrealistic—where are all the papers going to come from?

Summary:

I argue that our publications are critical to the mission of the Society, in the Research and Scholarly Excellence pillar, and also in providing funds that allow the Society to carry out its other objectives. Therefore, we're worth investing in!

In negotiating our renewal with Wiley, I think we need to have frank conversations with them about how we measure whether we're hitting our goals and what to do if we're not/can't/or if Wiley isn't living up to expectations to support our efforts. And Heather needs to argue for a higher royalty rate.

The Board needs to consider how much of a priority it is to move toward Open Access, understanding that trends are heading that way for scholarly publishing in general. I'm not sure it will happen in the next 5+ years, but we've been anticipating a move to OA for almost two decades and hoping it wouldn't actually come to pass. And now here we are.

It's likely that the funding from publications will decrease significantly (at least through the next 5-7 years), so what can the Society do to diversify its income sources? Is it willing to use some of its investment funds to support publications and its other activities?

We have had our struggles with Wiley, and they seem to be continually re-organizing and re-inventing themselves—but I think that's pretty common among all the publishers today as they jockey for position in the new publishing world we find ourselves in. We could entertain hiring a consultant to work with us on these issues at significant expense. That seems somewhat unnecessary because as I mentioned earlier, there's been more and more consolidation in the industry and options for publishing partners are limited.

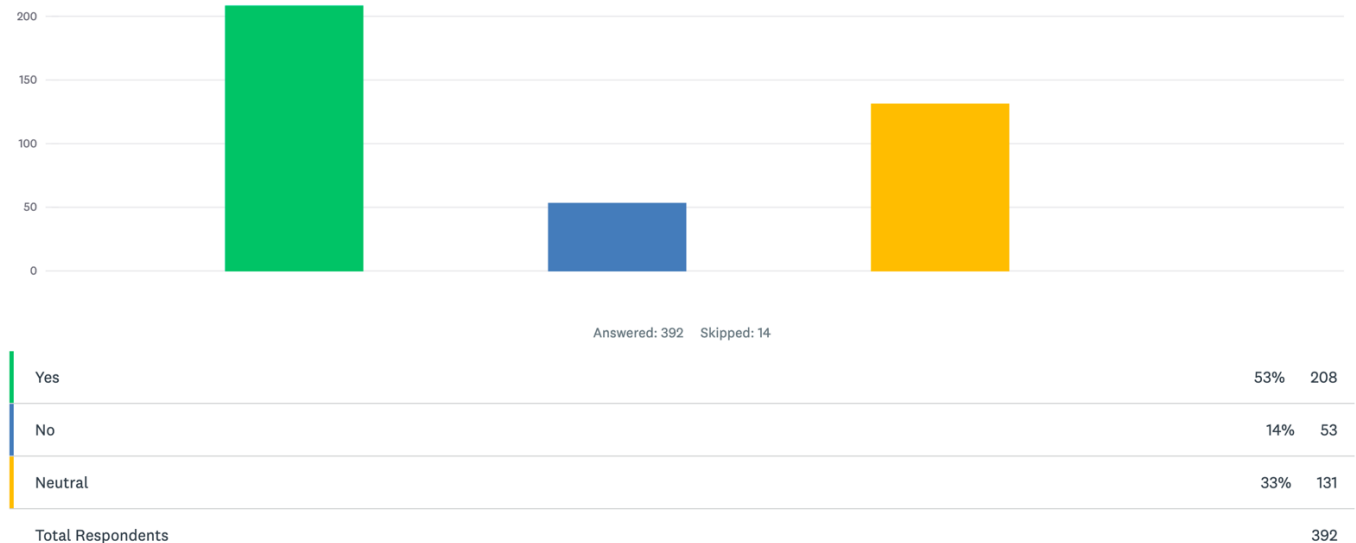
With all the uncertainties in publishing, I recommend that we stay with Wiley and try to work out the best way forward.

I welcome any and all questions and advice!

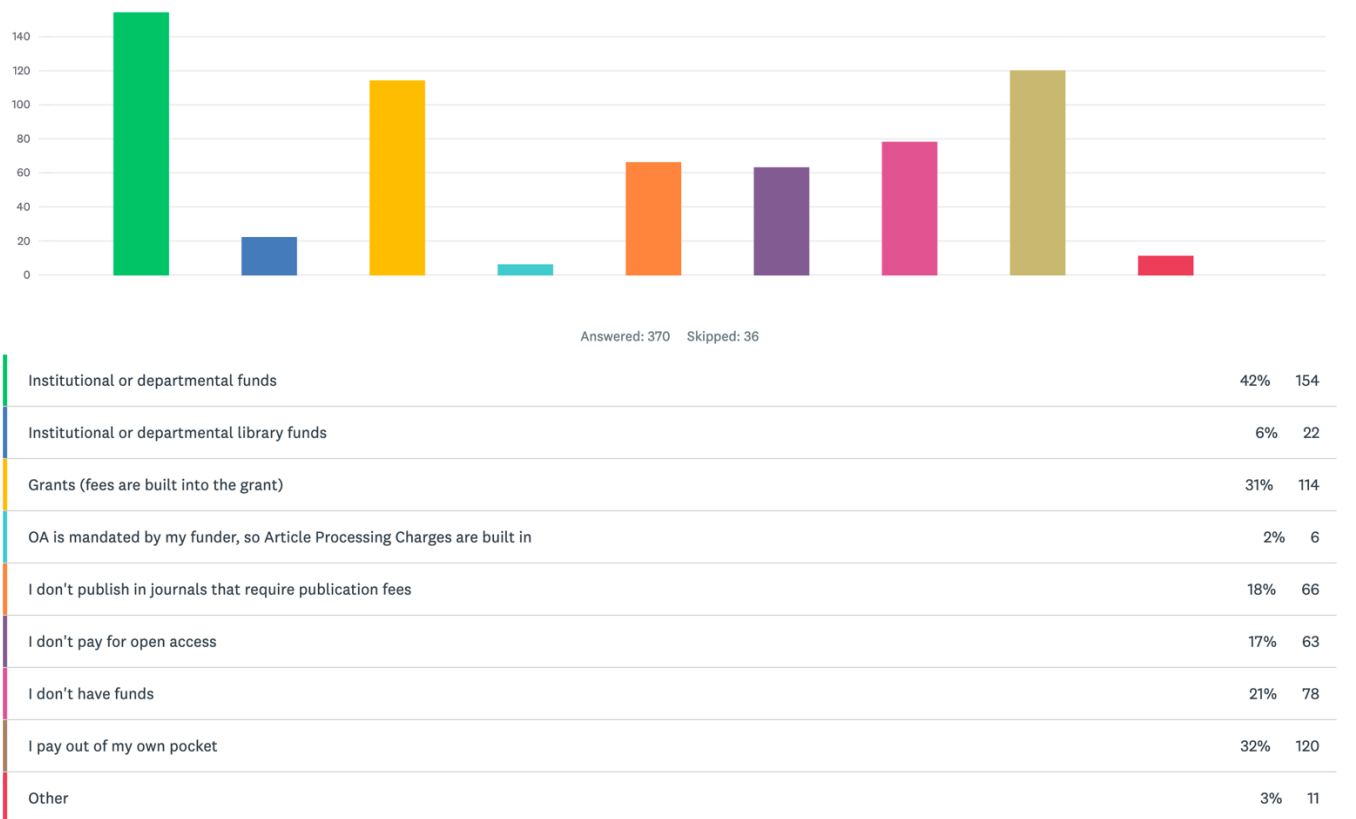
Appendix:

From the 2020 BSA member survey (which, granted, is dated, considering that the pandemic has changed so much in academia and elsewhere):

8. Is the ability to publish your work as Open Access* important to you? *In Gold OA, the authors (or funders) pay a fee to make the final version of the article free to access immediately upon publication. APPS is Gold OA; AJB has an Open Access option (discounted for members), but all content is free to view after 12 months

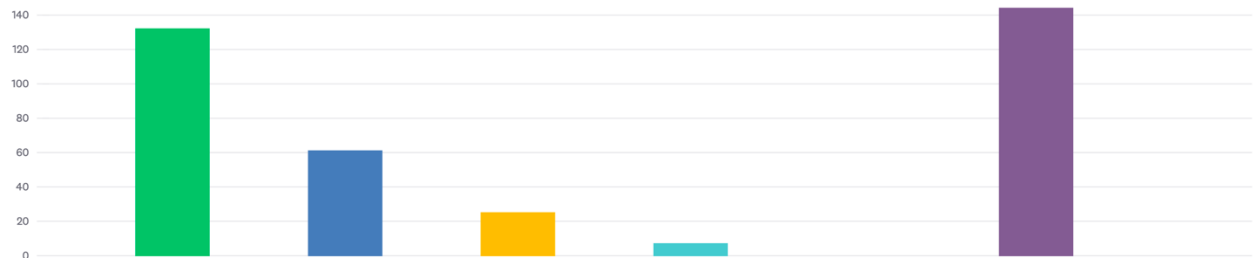


9. What sources do you use to pay publication and open access fees? Check all that apply. (Subscription journals recoup the costs of publication by charging a fee to access the content. Gold Open Access (OA) content is freely available, so the costs of production and publication are defrayed through fees, referred to as Article Processing Charges)



Note: 32% respondents say they pay out of their own pocket.

10. What is a reasonable amount you would pay to publish Open Access?



Answered: 369 Skipped: 37

| | | |
|--|-----|------------|
| \$500 or less | 36% | 132 |
| \$501 - \$1000 | 17% | 61 |
| \$1001 - \$1500 | 7% | 25 |
| \$1501 - \$2000 | 2% | 7 |
| \$2001 - \$2500 | 0% | 0 |
| I have no additional funds for open access charges | 39% | 144 |
| Total Respondents | | 369 |

We have to take the “what would you pay” response with a grain of salt. The item that stands out is, of course, “I have no additional funds for open access charges.”

Robert Harrington, Associate Executive Director, Publishing, of the American Mathematical Society, provided a primer to the Board of his society with these helpful definitions [my comments added in brackets]:

Open access (OA) refers to published scholarly content (such as journal research articles, and books) made openly available in online digital form. This content is free of charge at point of use, free of most copyright and licensing restrictions, and free of technical or other barriers to access (such as digital rights management or requirements to register to access).

Gold OA is usually meant to describe when journal articles (*version of record*) are freely available to the reader immediately upon publication because the author has paid an article processing charge (APC). It is worth noting that this changes the business model for a journal from being *reader-centric* (reader or library pays to access the article) to *author-centric* (author pays for OA). [APPS is a Gold OA journal.]

Green OA is seen when articles (most often the *accepted manuscripts*) are made freely available at no cost to the author or reader. This can happen when the author deposits the article in an external repository (e.g., personal web page, their institution’s noncommercial repository, bioRxiv.org) or the article (*version of record*) becomes open in the online version of the journal after a time delay known as an embargo period. [AJB articles are free to view after an embargo period of 12 months; authors have the option to publish OA; because we have some content that requires a subscription (“behind a paywall”) and some that is freely available (Open Access) AJB is considered to be a hybrid journal.]

Diamond/Platinum OA is when articles (*versions of record*) are freely available immediately upon publication with no cost to the author or the reader. The majority of fully open access journals listed in the [Directory of Open Access Journals](#) follow this model. These journals tend to be small ones with private grant funding or financial support from the host institution or library.

Note: Harrington's entire primer is excellent and worth a read if you are interested. Just let me know and I can send it to you.

*For a provocative, very broad summary, of how the publishing industry has changed over the past 20 years, see <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2021/05/20/content-at-scale-the-third-wave/>

**However, I am sure Wiley is carefully monitoring what's happening with the University of California and their transformative deal with Elsevier (for explainers, see <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2021/03/16/the-biggest-big-deal/> and <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2021/03/25/six-questions-with-answers-about-ucs-and-elseviers-new-transformative-deal/>), so stay tuned for more deals in the US.