

Preprint Servers

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When it comes to models for preprint servers (servers for placing text on the Web before it goes through a strenuous review process), it is clear that “one size does not fit all.”

The Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Scientific and Technical Information launched the PrePRINT Network (www.osti.gov/preprints) in January 2000. This network, said Vince Dattoria, searches and links to others' preprint servers. DOE's system provides free access to over 4000 preprint sites internationally. In most cases, full-text information on target sites is free. The network is searchable by subject. Users can create customized alerts to receive e-mail when new text is posted. The number of registered alert users tripled within the first 5 months. In typical government fashion, although the system was launched for DOE researchers, others

benefit, too. Senior undergraduate students have used the network to find mentors as they looked for jobs.

The DOE network was apparently a straightforward shot. Arthur Smith described the opposite experience of the American Physical Society (APS). APS jumped into the e-era in the early 1990s but soon discovered that each community in physics responds differently to e-prints,

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each having different needs. From July 1996 to May 2000, APS captured 1413 submissions on its server. APS's e-print server mirrors that of the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) archive (<http://aps.arxiv.org/>). APS received negative comments about its service, mostly because it competed with LANL's acceptable service. In the electronic age, APS has defined a reason for continuing peer-reviewed journals in the midst of a preprint revolution: Although researchers communicate with their institutional colleagues and others at conferences, peer-reviewed print journals translate the research so that it can be understood in the larger research

community.

Catherine Candee, director of Scholarly Communications Initiatives, described the California Digital Library (CDL) program's three preprint models. In the Technical Publishing Model, papers are collected in a repository; texts are captured, books are linked to references, and access is free. In the Dataset Model, users can download data (from a table) into their own spreadsheets and experiment with the numbers. The greatest controversy experienced by CDL has been about its online-journal model. Various disciplines respond differently to the concept of preprints. In one discipline, the journal editorial board members and advisers also serve as filters for the text to enter the preprint repository. In another discipline, articles are reviewed three or four times before being printed, and the members of this discipline are debating how to legitimize the availability of preprints. For each project, a different set of policies is developed. In some projects, authors want to have only PDF files on the Web so that users cannot “steal” the text. That concern conflicts with CDL's purpose of providing a service in which researchers freely share their information. Logistically, CDL prefers the flexibility of accepting various formats for the Web (Word, RTF, and LaTeX). Because CDL is archival, it prefers to keep all text available, including cases in which later drafts were posted or an article was ultimately rejected by the print journal. However, the policy, again, is determined separately for each project. 