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Translating Data into Action: Utilizing Cost-Savings Evidence for Read and Publish Success

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ABSTRACT

As the academic publishing landscape evolves, read and publish agreements have emerged as a crucial mechanism for balancing the costs of publishing with the goals of open access. Demonstrating the value of these agreements is critical for libraries. This project report examines how one academic library created a data gathering framework to show how cost-savings data could substantiate the benefits of these agreements, and how they developed and implemented data gathering and display tools in the library to make a strong, data-backed case for read and publish agreements.

Keywords: Read & Publish Agreements; Transformative Agreements; Open Access; Publishing

INTRODUCTION

As the academic publishing landscape evolves, read and publish agreements have emerged as a crucial mechanism for balancing the costs of publishing with the goals of open access. The effectiveness and value of these agreements often require clear, data-driven justification, and that cost-savings data can be a powerful tool in advocating for read and publish agreements. This project report shows how the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Libraries provides actionable insights into how cost-savings data can substantiate the benefits of these agreements, and how they develop and implement data gathering and display tools in the library to make a strong, data-backed case for open access and the future of academic publishing.

About UAB

UAB is an urban, R1 research university situated in Birmingham, Alabama with a total student enrollment of nearly 21,000 (Facts and Figures, 2025). The university is a major research center and is the largest employer in the state. During FY 2024, the university was awarded more than

$786 million in research grants and contracts (2025). The UAB Libraries support all academic and health science programs on campus, including for the Schools of Dentistry, Education and Human Sciences, Engineering, Health Professions, Nursing, Optometry, Public Health, the Collat School of Business, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Heersink School of Medicine. The UAB campus also includes a first-class teaching hospital, recognized worldwide as a leader in patient care and cutting-edge research.

UAB LIBRARIES' READ AND PUBLISH AGREEMENTS

A read and publish agreement is an open access publishing model where university libraries and publishers bundle the subscription costs for both reading content and publishing open access through Article Processing Charges (APCs) under a single contract. These agreements allow authors affiliated with that university to make their research available open access without incurring an APC. The UAB Libraries entered into its first read and publish agreement in 2021 with Cambridge University Press. Due to the success of this initial agreement, the library has entered into nine additional agreements with both large and small publishers, saving UAB authors over $2 million in APC costs on more than 550 open access articles.[1]

The Libraries' read and publish agreements are actively promoted through online channels and workshops led by the Libraries' Office of Scholarly Communication (OSC). As these agreements gained traction and grew more numerous, it became essential to find effective ways to demonstrate their value to the University community. In response to this need, the OSC developed a comprehensive system to track usage and participation across all areas of the University, allowing us to clearly showcase the benefits and success of these agreements through quantitative data.

DATASET DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

The OSC began the project by determining what data would best illustrate the impact of the Libraries' read and publish agreements. The most obvious data points were APC cost savings, the total number of articles funded, and open access articles published under each read and publish agreement. To demonstrate the more granular impact, the OSC also decided to collect data on what schools and departments were publishing under the read and publish agreements and information about each author's faculty rank or position.[2] Finally, data on whether the article was published in a gold or hybrid journal would also be collected. The final dataset includes fields to record the following data for all APC approvals: approval date, publisher, APC cost, type of OA journal (gold or hybrid), school / college, department, and faculty rank / staff position.

After determining what data to collect, the OSC decided what platform should be used to collect, analyze, and display the data. Specific considerations when making this decision included

[1] As of October 31, 2025, UAB Libraries participated in read and publish agreements with the following publishers: Association for Computing Machinery, Cambridge University Press, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, Emerald Publishing, IOP Publishing, Mary Ann Liebert, Royal Society of Chemistry, Springer Nature, The Company of Biologists, and Wiley.

[2] The following designations are used in the dataset: Professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, Instructor, Adjunct Professor, Researcher, Resident, Postdoc, Scientist, Fellow, Program Manager (Staff), Student (graduate), and Other.

the ease of data input and collection, the ability to analyze data both on a macro and micro level, data visualization functionality, dashboard creation capabilities, and the level of familiarity with the tools. Several options were explored, including Tableau, Microsoft Excel, and Springshare's LibWizard product, each having their own pros and cons. While any of these products could be used for this project, the OSC ultimately decided to use the Springshare LibInsight platform, a product that the Libraries were already using for other data collection needs. LibInsight allowed us to create a custom dataset that incorporates all of the data points identified above as well as an easy-to-use web-based data entry form. When designing the dataset, thought was given to how the data would be recorded, analyzed, and displayed so the proper entry format was chosen. For example, a free-form numeric field was chosen for the APC cost which allows for automatic tabulation of data and predefined fields were used for school / college and department to allow for controlled vocabulary and detailed usage analysis.

DATA ENTRY WORKFLOW

After creating the dataset in LibInsight, a new workflow was established for approving APCs under the read and publish agreements and recording the data. The new workflow consists of four steps:

- Step one. The APC request is reviewed on the publisher's read and publish dashboard, confirming that the lead or corresponding author is currently affiliated with UAB as required under the read and publish agreement. The type of journal, gold or hybrid, is identified, and the APC cost is also confirmed at this stage.
- Step two. Using the appropriate APC approval method on the publishers' dashboard, the APC is approved or denied.
- Step three. If the APC is approved, all data relating to the APC approval as described above is manually entered into the LibInsight dataset using the web-based data entry form and saved to the dataset.
- Step four. The OSC notifies authors by email that the APC was approved under the Libraries' read and publish agreement with the publisher. The email also includes the APC cost and a link to the OSC's website with information about the Libraries' read and publish program and details about other read and publish agreements.

For read and publish agreements that do not have an approval dashboard and for which manual approval is not required, data related to those agreements is collected monthly or quarterly and manually entered into the dataset. This process allows us to capture data from all of the Libraries' read and publish agreements into a central location regardless of the approval mechanism. As new read and publish agreements are added by the Libraries, the dataset can be updated to include these new publisher options. Similarly, additional departments and author types can easily be added to the dataset, as needed.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISPLAY

When this project was first initiated, the ability to quickly and accurately gather data on each of our read and publish agreements was a top priority. Not only did we want to find out what schools were publishing under the agreements but also how much money was being saved. Until then, only minimal read and publish data was being saved, often on multiple spreadsheets with little or no

enhancement. While having access to the data was useful, it did not allow for the robust analysis needed to justify and effectively promote the agreements. The initial time spent planning and designing the dataset to meet our desired outputs was well worth the effort.

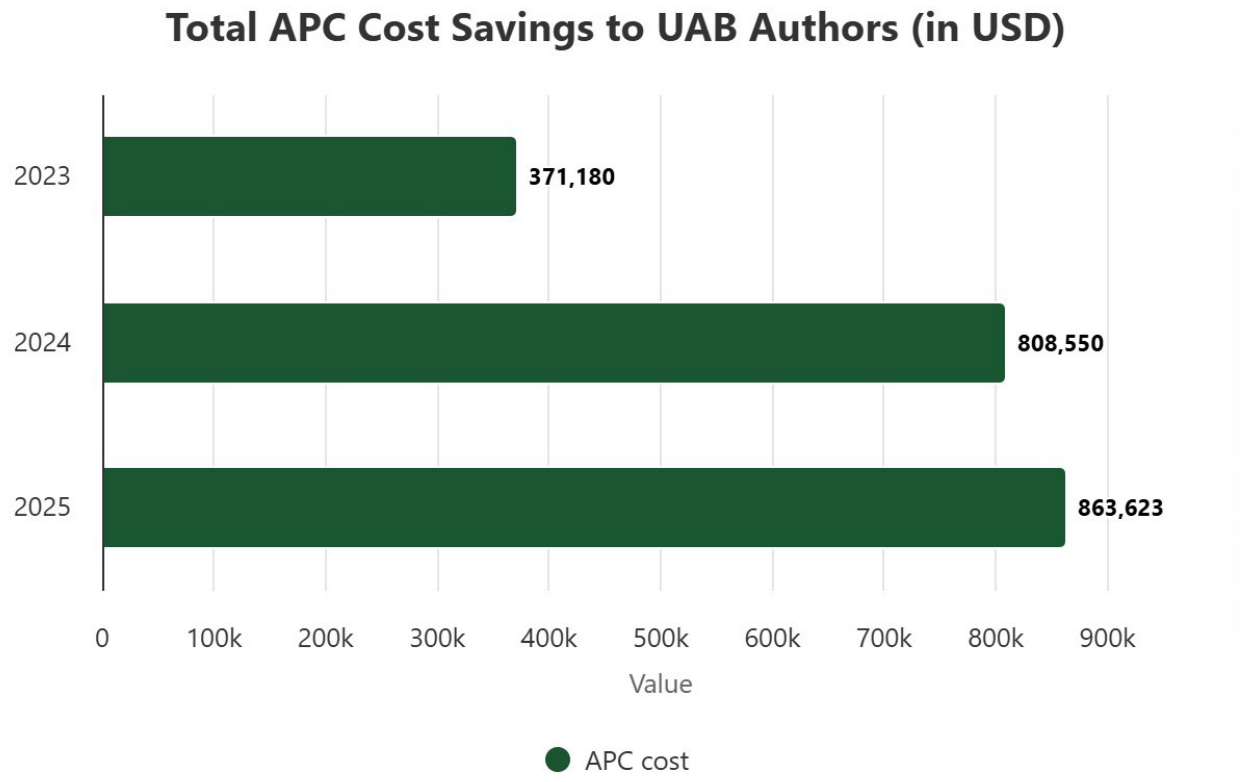

Figure 1. cumulative APC cost savings to UAB authors

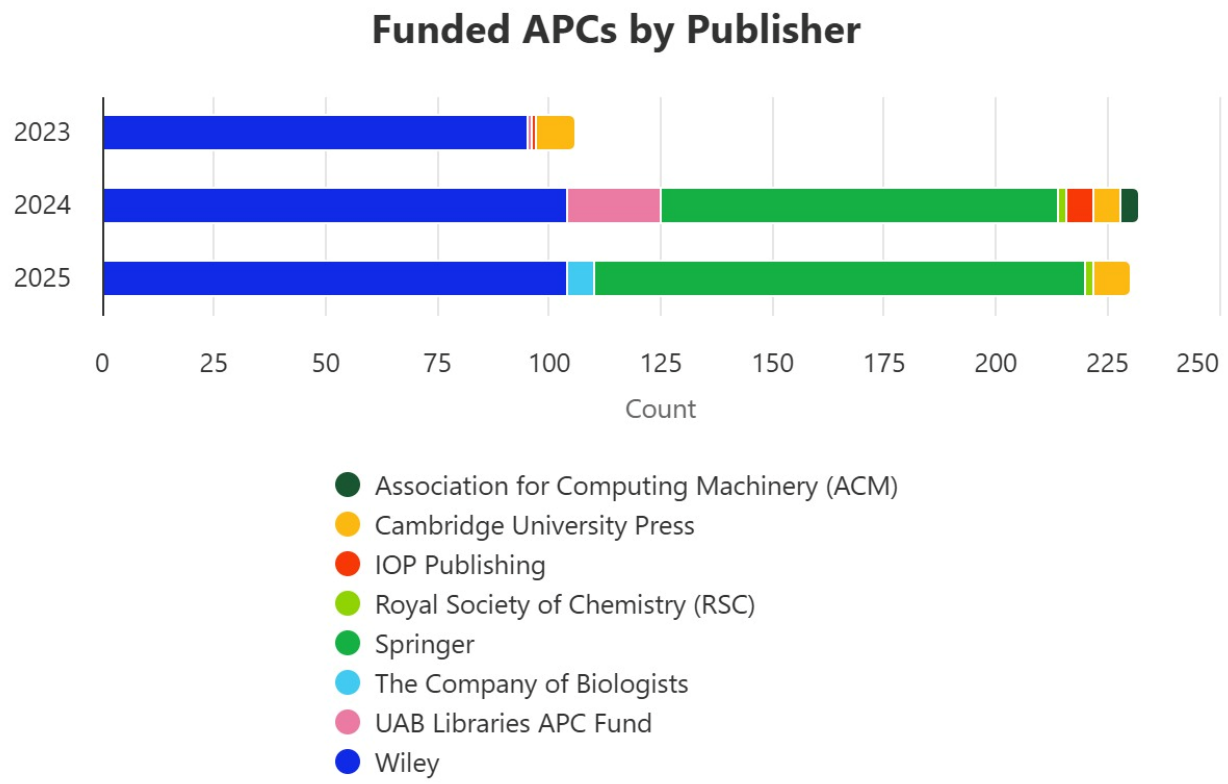

Figure 2. funded APCs by publisher

Data gathered from LibInsight has been instrumental in enabling the Libraries to easily generate charts and graphs that visualize usage and cost savings, even down to the department level and across specific time periods. There are myriad examples of how this data has been used to demonstrate value to the UAB research community. For example, during meetings with academic deans, we often provide detailed statistics including the number of APCs funded under the read and publish agreements for their schools, what departments are actively using the agreements, and the total cost savings realized by their units as a result of the agreements. On a more macro level, we can show to the University administration the overall APC cost savings realized by the University as a result of the read and publish agreements. One final example is the read and publish dashboard displayed on the OSC's website that provides real-time statistics including the total cost savings to the University and the total number of APCs funded by each publisher and for each school, all broken down by year (R & P statistics). Because the new workflow includes entry of the data into the dataset upon approval, the data presented on the dashboard is always up to date.

ASSESSMENT OUTCOMES

Data gathered using the process described above has allowed us to engage with and support a broader cross section in the University community. Usage data shows where discipline gaps exist in our current read and publish coverage, thereby allowing us to expand strategically. For example,

discipline specific usage data has informed our decision to actively seek out new read and publish agreements in the social sciences and humanities. Additionally, demonstrated cost-savings from read and publish agreements help to justify the Libraries' requests for increasing the annual library budget made to the University administration. Broader opportunities to participate in a read and publish agreement have also led to better stakeholder engagement and enthusiasm for entering into future agreements.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

We learned a lot from our experience building the read and publish APC dataset and have some key takeaways to offer. First, remember that building the proper framework takes time and planning. Don't be discouraged if you don't get it right the first time, and don't hesitate to scrap what you've done and start over. Trial and error are often a key part of success. If you build the dataset properly from the beginning, it is easy to maintain and expand once new agreements are signed or other academic units are added. Second, take time to identify the key data points you want to track and how you want that data to be analyzed and displayed. This will allow you to effectively design the framework for building the dataset right from the start. Third, when considering which platform to use, explore a wide range of options and decide which best meets the needs of your library and institution. Each platform is different so having a good understanding of how they work, and their limitations, is critical. Sometimes ease-of-use and familiarity are more important factors than unnecessary features that will never be used. Finally, and most importantly, always keep your end goal in mind: to demonstrate the value of read and publish agreements to your institution through quantifiable data.

CONCLUSION

As read and publish agreements are being offered by an ever-increasing number of publishers, both large and small, and more libraries move this subscription model, effectively demonstrating their value to the institution has become increasingly essential. Because data is recorded at the time of APC approval for many of the read and publish agreements and has been built into the approval workflow, maintaining the dataset requires minimal time and effort. The UAB Libraries' model has proven to be an easy-to-use and effective tool for recording, analyzing, and showcasing the successful implementation of our multiple read and publish agreements.

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About the authors

Jeff Graveline is a Professor and Associate Dean for Research and Scholarly Communication in the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Libraries. He also serves as Director of the UAB Libraries' Office of Scholarly Communication. His research interests focus on scholarly communication, specifically the intersection between copyright and higher education.

Peggy Kain is an Associate Professor and Licensing & Scholarly Communication Librarian in the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Libraries. She works with library resource vendors and negotiates the license agreements for resources including all Read and Publish (Transformative) Agreements for UAB Libraries.