

co-ordinated action to influence the publishing model, in ways, which will return the fruits of scientific endeavour to the public domain, is possible. We have no way of knowing what pricing models will emerge, or how the scholarly communication process will ultimately evolve in the electronic age – we do need to influence this development in ways, which are of benefit to our

scientific communities. This, for CURL, is the major advantage of the SPARC programme. Indeed, the support of ARL and SPARC colleagues, in attempting to resist the Reed Elsevier/Harcourt merger has been an excellent demonstration of the value of international co-operation. Let's continue to chip at the commercial edge!

---

## SPARC: THE VIEW FROM THE FACULTY

*Steven Bachrach*

In 1998, my colleagues and I launched the *Internet Journal of Chemistry* (IJC), an entirely electronic chemistry journal. The major aim of this journal was to demonstrate the power of the Internet for much richer chemical publication by the complete incorporation of multi-media, interactive tools, and end-use customization. In 1999, SPARC sponsored the IJC as one of its Leading Edge partners. I have served as editor-in-chief of the IJC since its inception.

As a participant in the SPARC initiative, I am very grateful for their support of the IJC project. However, while many of the goals of SPARC will be beneficial to scientists, it is worthwhile examining the fundamental precepts of SPARC and the short-term detriments we are already experiencing.

The first aim of SPARC as taken from their web page is to "create a more competitive scholarly communication marketplace, where the cost of journal acquisition and use is reduced, and publishers who are responsive to customer needs are rewarded." Now who can argue with reduced costs as being a benefit? The dissemination of science, as viewed by scientists, is not a commodity! It is our lifeblood and the essence of doing science. This is a very unusual marketplace, in that the producers of the goods (scientific articles) are also the sole consumers. Furthermore, the producers (i.e. authors) want no financial recompense, rather only that their work is rapidly distributed to the widest possible audience. Competition can act to fragment the literature further, create more journals, and make it in fact more difficult for scientists to locate the materials that they require.

A short-term (at least) effect can be seen in the

*Organic Letters* journal, a SPARC-sponsored American Chemical Society journal. This journal is targeted to compete with the Elsevier publication *Tetrahedron Letters*. *Tetrahedron Letters* is quite expensive (in excess of \$9000 for a library), whereas the alternative is considerably cheaper, about \$2500. (One might question why a brand new journal with no track record published by a not-for-profit society is priced more than their flagship organic journal, the *Journal of Organic Chemistry*.) Clearly, there is a potential for considerable cost savings here. However, *Tetrahedron Letters* is a very successful journal and most libraries will be extremely hesitant to cancel this important component of an organic chemistry collection. On the other hand, *Organic Letters* has already attracted many authors and has become an important journal. What is a library to do but subscribe to both! So what is the short-term effect? It is an increase in the journal budget! Perhaps over the long-term the competition will lead to dramatic reductions in prices or the elimination of one of these competing journals, but neither of these possibilities is assured.

The SPARC initiative perhaps is not radical enough in questioning the role of the publisher in the scientific communication question. The economics of publishing are fundamentally a minor issue of little interest to the scientific community. Rather, this community will be more interested in initiatives that improve the communication process itself.

*Steven Bachrach, Department of Chemistry, Trinity University, 715 Stadium Drive, San Antonio, TX 78212*

*E-mail: steven.bachrach@trinity.edu*

*Tel: (210)999-7379*

*Fax: (210)999-7569*