

Tackling the Rapid Growth of Predatory Publishers

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Post Url

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Scholarly Open Access, a website known for listing “potential, possible or probable predatory scholarly open access publishers” which also had a wide audience, has now been devoid of content since January 15, 2017. No particular reasons have been provided, either by the website’s creator Jeffrey Beall or by his employer, University of Colorado at Denver.

Rise of the Predatory Publishers/Journals

[Academic publishing](#), in general, can occur at different “quality” or scientific reliability levels. The quality and cost of the services provided by the publishers to researchers also vary a lot depending on different publishers and journals. Until the early 2000s, getting an article published was itself a proof of quality research as there were only a few journals in existence then. Over the past two decades, the number of publishers and journals has strongly increased owing majorly to the “open access movement.”

Although some publishers were honestly proposing a new and better service for researchers to publish their study, few others mainly entered the market to benefit from this trend, without having a full-fledged model to propose. They just created appealing journal names, launched an uncomplicated website, and harassed researchers with repeated unsolicited emails. This eventually led to the origin of “junk science”; e.g. published works that did not undergo peer review process but pretended to be so. Hence, it became tough for some scientists to sort the wheat from the chaff. Thus, [Scholarly Open Access](#) supported by Jeffrey Beall became a support to many researchers.

Jeffrey Beall and the Scholarly Open Access Blog

Jeffrey Beall is an alumnus of the University of Carolina. Since 2000, he has been a librarian on Scholarly Communications at the Auraria Library and is also a tenured associate professor at the University of Colorado, Denver. Concomitantly to the disappearance of his blog, his faculty page has also been taken down.

Beall dedicated himself to the analysis of scholarly publications and on his blog he had listed over 1,155 suspicious publishers. In an [opinion article](#) published by Nature (2012), he had described the practices of these journals and the damages caused to open access publishing. During another interview in 2016, he gave the following motivations for his blog: “It’s a big mess and the victims are researchers themselves and science itself is also becoming a victim.” His blog was launched in 2008, and attracted a large audience; it seems to have been unique in the academic landscape. Apparently unbiased, his initiative seems to have been an absolute generous one, where he would make the whole scholarly community benefit of his expertise, as a librarian, in scholarly publications. The reasons for the shutdown have not been publicly communicated, but possible ones are increased pressure by some publishers, or by UCD itself.

Criticisms of the Predatory Publishers/Journals List

In spite of its helpfulness to some, the blacklist produced by Jeffrey Beall has nonetheless raised some controversy over the past few years. For instance, Beall had been threatened to be sued by publishers such as the *OMICS group*. This publisher based in India had taken its name from the strong trend in ‘omics’ words in life sciences, after the explosion of genomics, and later, of proteomics, metabolomics and so on. Nevertheless, it is to be noted that last year the US Federal Trade Commission sued the OMICS group. This was done based on following [grounds of accusation](#): deceiving researchers, making false claims, and hiding the actual publication fees. Beall also received further threats of suing too, but none of them were followed up by actual lawsuits.

It has also been argued that some of Beall’s judgments were not documented enough. For instance, in 2015, Beall included the publisher “Frontiers” to his blacklist. This decision was strongly criticized by researchers on various social media platforms. As a reply, Beall informed Nature that “he still stands by his original decision since he has received many emails from the scientific community outlining [bad practices at Frontiers](#).”

Thus, existing criticisms to his list did seem to be mere complaints, while facts were mainly on his side.

Tracking Predatory Publishers/Journals

Predatory publishers and predatory conference organizers are a reality in Life Sciences, where budgets have increased over the past two decades. Some library websites agree with Beall’s recommendations and they often suggest: Consider the following before submitting your manuscript:

- How long has the journal been in existence? How extensive is the available archive of back issues?
- Examine the quality of research published within the journal in previous issues
- Does the publisher provide full and transparent details of the peer review process?
- Is the journal indexed in major academic databases e.g. JSTOR, Scopus, Web of Science etc. or the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)?

- Ask your colleagues if they have published in or are familiar with the publication (Library of the [University College of Dublin](#)).

Suspicion about fraudulent practices generally arises among researchers when they receive frequent emails asking them to submit their work to a given journal or editor.

An analysis of existing predatory publishing practices carried out at the Hanken School of Economics in Helsinki, Finland, was published in BMC Medicine in 2015. The [publication analyzes the fees](#) covered by dubious publishers and their geographical origin. An earlier study by Xia et al. (2015) had also highlighted that those publishing in “predatory” journals were mainly “inexperienced researchers from developing countries”, with India, Nigeria, and Pakistan at the top of the list.

Follow-up on Scholarly Open Access

Scholarly Open Access is now an empty web page. However, scholarlyoa.net still exists. This page bluntly criticizes Beall’s work and probably serves publishers which have been criticized by Beall on his former web page. Researchers used Scholarly Open Access before deciding where to submit, and whether the “Invitation to submit” they were receiving were sound or not. These researchers would rather see a revival of the website again, in its old version or in a new one. However, researchers are now looking for other forms of support before submitting their manuscript. The sudden shutdown of Beall’s page suggests that such a website would need academic or institutional support to survive the legal assaults of publishers.

Reference

1. Jingfeng Xia et al. (2015) *Who Publishes in “Predatory” Journals?* Retrieved from:



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