

It's Been a Year

Discussion published by Yelena Kalinsky on Wednesday, December 2, 2020

A post from [Feeding the Elephant: A Forum for Scholarly Communications](#).

by the [Feeding the Elephant Editorial Collective](#)

Before we start, we need to acknowledge something: 2020 was a year. If you are reading this in December, you have our deepest gratitude and respect for sticking with us. Here's to making it through! If you are reading this from the future, let's just say, we hope things got better.

Incidentally, it's also been just over a year of [Feeding the Elephant](#). In September 2019, Catherine and Yelena started this forum for scholarly communications on the [H-Net Book Channel](#). We hoped to bring together voices from the worlds of publishing, libraries, and the university around issues of common interest and common cause. When we [launched](#), we were thinking about the stakes of scholarly communications—the nose-to-tail process of researching, publishing, and disseminating ideas—and how the institutions that sustain that process are increasingly under pressure, piling the risks of making ideas public onto individuals. At the same time, we were curious about the ways that digital technologies are providing new ways to make research public. Thus we wanted not only to speak of the deep challenges facing scholarly communications, but also to highlight the ongoing projects and teams of people who were thinking their way through, around, and beyond these challenges. Not only to acknowledge the elephant in the room, so to speak, but also to feed and care for it. Thus, Feeding the Elephant was born.

In spring 2020, we brought in a third editor, Dawn, whose presence helped strengthen the sense of an real editorial collective and ushered in a more regular publication schedule. We have since launched series, like [Working with Your Editor](#) and [\[1:3\]](#), reported back from conferences like [#AUP2020](#) and [P2L4](#), and had the pleasure of working with over twenty different [guest contributors](#). We hope that you've found some value in the forum. We have many ideas for the coming year, and we'd love to hear your ideas as well. At this point, we would each like to reflect on the past year of Feeding the Elephant and to highlight what we have in store for the future.

[Yelena Kalinsky](#):

For me, the most interesting thread has been [open access](#), its possibilities and challenges. As an idea, it has the potential to enhance the work of every area of scholarly communications. As a model, it requires investment and collaboration from institutions to make it sustainable. On the Elephant, we wrote about recent trends related to the [open access monograph](#) and the UK's [Plan S](#), discussed [open source publishing tools](#) and projects like Brown University Library's [Digital Publications Initiative](#), and spoke with a press director about the [economics of OA](#). In the coming year, I would like to see us delve even further into what it will take to make OA sustainable and how we can make it a more accessible option for scholars around the world, those working off the tenure track without

institutional support, or those in the non-profit sector.

Dawn Durante:

Joining the Feeding the Elephant team was a bright spot amid the challenges of 2020. After the opportunity to contribute [a guest post](#) on leveraging a press's previously published content, there were many things that drew me to the efforts of the collective. I was especially attracted to the initiative's potential as an avenue to support efforts to demystify publishing. Posts like Walter Biggin's "Previously Published Material in Your Manuscript" in the [Working with your Editor](#) (WWYE) series and the newly launched [Working with your Librarian](#) (WWYL) series are in service of that aim, and I am excited about adding more topics, perspectives and voices to those series in the coming year. Hand in hand with demystification efforts, the forum's foundation is to give insights into issues and topics relevant to stakeholders across the scholarly ecosystem. For instance, the inaugural [1:3] post brought together the perspectives of a publisher, librarian, and professor on the [early impacts of COVID-19](#). I see access to publishing information and conversations about the publishing ecosystems as foundational to the diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts across academia and academic adjacent work that Catherine discusses.

Catherine Cocks:

It's been a big year for recognizing inequities, especially racial inequities. Scholarly publishers have been taking stock of and attempting to redress their role in structural racism and other forms of injustice for [several years](#). The events of this year added urgency to those efforts. The Elephant wrote about the AUPresses's Gender and Cultures of Respect [report](#), and circulated [resources](#) on structural racism as the protests against the police murder of George Floyd—and then Breonna Taylor, and then too many more—filled city streets with demands for justice. We covered the [conversation](#) among the 2020 Mellon University Press Diversity Fellows at the Association of University Press's 2020 annual meeting, and Northwestern University Press fellow Liz Murice Alexander wrote about [how to diversify acquisitions](#). Looking beyond broadening the pool of people starting careers in publishing, the AUPresses's meeting also included a [panel](#) on equity, retention, and career development. The Triangle Scholarly Communications Institute's 2019 [workshops on equity](#) produced the first of three toolkits, the [Antiracism Toolkit for Allies](#) in early August. What's next? Putting all our outrage and information and tools to work tearing down structural barriers and paving paths toward equity and dignity for all.

As for the forum, we have a couple of ideas we are working on, including:

- More guest contributors and editorial members who will bring more voices and viewpoints.

- We recently started a newsletter-style roundup to point to news and items of interest beyond the forum.
- New and continuing series on collaboration, historical perspectives on publishing, and much more practical advice for WWYE and WWYL.
- More focused discussions around urgent topics, format TBD.

But most of all, we want to hear from you. What would you like to see from the Elephant? How can all of us from our different areas work together to support the scholarly communications ecosystem? If you want to stay in touch with the forum, [subscribe](#) to the H-Net Book Channel to receive our weekly posts, follow/use the hashtag #FeedingTheElephant on Twitter, and join the conversation. We welcome replies and discussion.

We'll be taking the rest of December off, but we'll be back in January with fresh ideas and topics. We hope you will join us.

Have something to say on this topic? Reply to this post or [email the Elephant](#) about writing for us. We welcome submissions from stakeholders on all sides of scholarly publishing.