

Course Unit:

Introducing the Research Cooperative: An Online Social Network for Better Research Communication

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1. Science communication and the Internet

Researchers and research organizations supported by public funds should choose and support online publishers that focus on their educational function, not on private profit. Private publishers do need profit to develop and survive, but public support for such publishers should be based on the quality of the service provided.

2. History and aims of the Research Cooperative as a social network

The Research Cooperative was created in response to a bottleneck in the process of communicating research: the process of writing and publishing.

Publicly-funded support for research writing and publishing is not in balance with the support given to research. The communication of public research would be much more effective if more funds could be made available to pay for professional editing, translation, illustration, and publishing services. At the same time, mutual support among researchers can help without the need for financial exchange. Mutual support requires negotiation and communication skills that are not taught as part of research training.

Communication between researchers and between researchers and professional service providers is scattered, lacks focus, and is inefficient. The Research Cooperative is aimed at improving the communication needed among all parties involved in research communication. Better research communication means clear reporting of the research to appropriate and diverse target audiences. This requires the efforts of a diverse range of support services.

3. How it works now

The Research Cooperative website is poorly understood by many people who join. This may be a fault of the website design and content, or it may be because the cooperative philosophy of the website is unfamiliar (many education systems focus on achieving success through competition rather than cooperation). Critical feedback is needed for the website to improve, and development of an income stream is needed to support the site into the long-term future.

4. Becoming a member

Membership is free.

5. Using the site

Members need to study the site to learn how to effectively use the site for their own benefit, and the benefit of others. Our network does not follow the same model as many more popular and commercial social networks, though it does employ some of the same tools.

6. Providing feedback

The Research Cooperative needs more feedback, but also lacks financial resources to respond to feedback quickly or effectively. We need to solve multiple issues simultaneously.

7. Summary of known pros and cons

Pros – Remains the only open-access social network dedicated to better research communication, with a cooperative philosophy.

Cons - Under-resourced in terms of human power, technical support, and financing for site development and promotion. Lack of transition process (succession plan) for when the present site sponsor and administrator is no longer able to support the network.

8. Future possibilities for the network and science communication generally

Most likely positive scenario is continued slow expansion of the network, with increasing feedback as use of the site forums increases. Ideally, the network will contribute to greater support for the many journals and publishers that do valuable work but that are also under-resourced.