CHALLENGE
Predatory journals are a threat to the integrity of scholarly publications and to academic careers across the U.S.

#1
While open-access journals have been beneficial in making research literature available online without price barriers, open-access has led to the rise of predatory journals.

Promoted as academic, peer-reviewed publications, predatory journals are operated purely for profit. As a result, the journals accept all submissions (unknown to the applicant) and then charge the applicant a publishing fee that generally exceeds one hundred dollars, with some predatory publishers charging over a thousand dollars. In comparison, genuine academic journals will either waive a publishing fee or charge a fee below one hundred dollars, though there are exceptions to this price range.

Because faculty members of academic institutions, including KU, are required to publish throughout their career, predatory journals have become a growing concern at colleges and universities. As a result, KU has
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begun a series of initiatives to educate faculty and staff on spotting predatory journals. Sponsored by the Center for the Enhancement of Teaching (CET), in partnership with the Rohrbach Library, initiatives have included workshops, presentations, and guest speakers.

Recently, the CET, in collaboration with the library, hosted Dr. Robert Hironimus–Wendt, a Sociology professor at Western Illinois University. Dr. Hironimus–Wendt’s presentation, “Journals, Open Access and Predators,” explored his discovery and research of predatory journals, as well as his suggestions for educating faculty on predatory journals.

Through his research, Dr. Hironimus–Wendt discovered that thousands of predatory journals exist. Promoting themselves as being widely indexed and/or having fast turn–around times, the journals lure unsuspecting faculty, particularly young or new faculty members.

According to Dr. Hironimus–Wendt, “Teaching and publishing are not consistently ‘taught’ in graduate school…we need to recognize that in almost all cases, new colleagues have not been taught how to teach and have not been taught how to publish.”

In turn, Dr. Hironimus–Wendt emphasized the need for senior faculty to fill this teaching gap by educating new or junior faculty members.

As Dr. Hironimus–Wendt explains, “We have a mutual and moral obligation to help them [junior faculty] develop into bona fide professionals...We can do this best by effectively mentoring them through the publication process.”

As mentors, senior faculty can teach junior faculty about the common traits of predatory journals, as well as familiarize them with tools for researching a journal’s validity. Experienced faculty can also introduce their new colleagues to library faculty, who Dr. Hironimus–Wendt considers to be experts on journal indexing.

While assisting junior faculty requires additional commitment and time from senior educators, it also serves to preserve the reputation of an academic institution, such as Kutztown University, which junior and senior faculty represent when publishing their work.

Aside from guest speakers, the KU librarians and Dr. Gil Clary have hosted workshops and given presentations. Recently, Bob Flately and Ruth Perkins held an information session on the techniques used by reputable databases, such as SCOPUS, to prevent predatory journals from becoming a resource in databases.

The undertakings of the librarians and Dr. Clary have not gone unnoticed by Kutztown University’s President, Dr. Kenneth Hawkinson.
Speaking on the matter, Dr. Hawkinson said, “I am grateful to the library faculty and staff and all other constituencies who have taken the lead in bringing the issue of predatory journals forward at Kutztown University. The initiatives put in place to educate our faculty, staff, and administrators on the deceptive practices of those involved with these journals is noteworthy and will place KU on the forefront in confronting those who would corrupt the academy, usually for profit.”

The Rohrbach Library and the efforts of its librarians will continue to support KU’s role as a leader in predatory journal education, with several workshops scheduled in the coming year.

For more information on predatory journals and the work of the Rohrbach Library, visit www.library.kutztown.edu/OpenAccessJournals. In addition to including recordings of previous workshops and presentations, the site also contains valuable information and resources for evaluating journals.

Librarians Bob Flatley and Ruth Perkins host a workshop on the methods used by database vendors to avoid predatory journals.
A recent addition to the Rohrbach Library, STEAMworks offers a broad selection of technologies and tools, such as 3-D printers and VR gear, which provide hands-on learning opportunities at KU.

This year, STEAMworks was invited to join KU’s Planetarium Outreach event, hosted by Dr. Erin Kraal and Dr. Phill Reed. During the event, elementary school children visited and explored KU.

During the event, which was held at the outdoor classroom by the Rohrbach Library, the STEAMworks team helped children create buttons, some featuring planets, with the button maker. Kids also watched a STEAMworks 3-D printer make a meteorite.

Based on the experience, Dr. Kraal would recommend STEAMworks to her colleagues. It provides faculty, staff, and students a way to add a creative touch to class projects or assignments. In fact, Dr. Kraal hopes to return with her Freshman Seminar class to use STEAMworks’ stop-motion animation studio for the students’ final project.

The role of professors, such as Dr. Kraal, in sharing STEAMworks with students is invaluable. By incorporating the center into coursework, students are able to have hands-on learning experiences outside of the classroom. As well, students can use STEAMworks to create a variety of items, such as buttons and decals, to promote on-campus clubs or events.

To learn more about STEAMworks stop by the center, located on the ground floor of the Rohrbach Library, or visit online at www.library.kutztown.edu/STEAMworks. The STEAMworks team can also be reached by email at steamworks@kutztown.edu.