

Letter to Tri-Council re: Open Access Policies

To whom it may concern,

I write on behalf of the Editorial Board and Editors of the *Canadian Historical Review*, published by the University of Toronto Press, and since 1920 the flagship journal for historians of Canada. We are replying to the Tri-Agency call for feedback on the draft Open Access Policy.

At the outset, we would like to emphasize that we are not against the principle of Open Access. In fact, the journal has already made some of its contents Open Access (such as its Table of Contents and more than 160 articles and book reviews since 1896), and plans to continue to do so in the future, including an extensive Bibliography of *Canadian Historical Review* articles relating to the First World War as we approach the centenary of that event's beginning in 2014. Yet we have serious reservations about the draft Tri-Agency policy, which is based upon the existing CIHR Open Access Model. This model is not well-suited to the Humanities in general, history in particular, and would not serve well the *Canadian Historical Review* or other similar journals in Canada.

Both the "gold OA" and "green OA" models put forward in the draft policy are problematic and insensitive to the realities of a humanities journal such as the *Canadian Historical Review*.

First, the "gold OA" model, making publications based on funded research freely available within twelve months does not reflect the reality of historically based research, writing and publication timelines. In many instances, the articles in our journal, usually around 10,000 words in length, are often published after the completion of the grant, owing to the nature of historical scholarship. This presents a myriad of problems—how do authors fund a publication if they are no longer holding a grant when the piece is published? Moreover, the most common source of funding, SSHRC Insight grants, only has a 30% success rate, and therefore some CHR article authors do not even have funding.

More broadly, complication created by moving to such a model one which may privilege funded research over non-funded research, and skews publishing decisions based upon this distinction. Such a change would be decidedly unhealthy for scholarly integrity and threatens the rigorous peer-review model practiced by journals such as the *Canadian Historical Review*. How, for instance, will this model discriminate against postdoctoral fellows or graduate students who do not have research grants per se? Will this mean that they are essentially excluded from publishing in journals such as our own? It would be a tremendous loss were this to be the case. Outstanding graduate students and post-doctoral fellows have long looked to publication in the *Canadian Historical Review* as one of their first opportunities to present their innovative findings to the scholarly community at large. We can foresee how this model can threaten the integrity of the editorial process. Indeed, the policy may have the perverse effect of pushing Canadian scholars to publish in international journals that do not operate on the Tri-Council/CIHR guidelines.

Nor does this model reflect the reality of the journal itself. The *Canadian Historical Review* publishes articles that often do not begin to be accessed by readers in significant numbers until three or four years after publication. A twelve-month embargo would not be adequate to protect the revenue base of the journal, given it is a subscription/royalty-supported journal that requires a source of revenue to function.

As it stands, the *Canadian Historical Review* is already readily available and works very hard to reach its public. Indeed, in 2013, readers viewed the journal's content over 100,000 times. It is predominately an academic journal and academics, university and college students, and anyone with

access to a major library can access it through their institution. Moreover, this access is available at a relatively lower cost compared to the medical/science journals from which this CIHR model tends to draw. We feel strongly that access should not be solely tied to granting agencies, and that that Editorial Board and Publishers are in the best position to make decisions about increasing readership and accessibility as they best understand the readership of the journal and the revenue and marketing models for the journal.

In short, while the gold OA model may work in the sciences and even the social sciences, it is not appropriate to the humanities.

Further, the “green OA” model suggested in the draft guidelines, wherein an author deposits the full text of a peer-reviewed manuscript in a freely digital archive, also poses problems. High quality peer review, the editorial process, superior copyediting, and linked metadata mean that the original submission is often very different from an article that is shepherded through the review process. An article with the same author and the same title may generate consideration confusion if the content is substantially different. Moreover, the 12 month embargo period relating to Green OA offers the same threat to revenue as Gold OA above. Without a reliable revenue base, the Canadian Historical Review cannot continue to provide the Canadian research community with the high-quality service that is synonymous with the Canadian Historical Review.

Our view is that there is a need for discipline specific approaches and sensitivities rather than one policy for all three granting agencies. Such a “one size fits all” model does not reflect the very different realities of the academic enterprise across disciplinary boundaries, and is a disservice to scholarship in Canada.

Sincerely,

Dimitry Anastakis, Ph.D.

On behalf of the Editorial Board of the Canadian Historical Review