

Coalition S
Science Europe
Rue de la Science, 14
1040 Brussels, Belgium

Dear members of Coalition S:

Humanists, akin to our colleagues in all fields, greatly value openness. Communication of ideas and knowledge stands at the very heart of what we do as scholars, especially because of the uncertainties with which humanists grapple. Without open debate, placing our evidence on the table in an arena with many doorways, we lose the critical edge that marks our scholarship and our teaching.

Plan S, however, as applied to the humanities, is likely to limit scholarly discourse, even close some doors. Its underlying assumptions and hence its path forward ignore significant differences among various disciplines in the realm of funding and publishing scholarship. Plan S, akin to much open access policy, assumes that all academic publishing has the same imperatives and exigencies as research in the biomedical and physical sciences. There are, however, important differences, including funding models, time value of research, and the structures and cultures of scholarly publishing.

The American Historical Association joins our colleagues in other humanities disciplines in explaining how the Plan S bias toward article processing charge (APC)-funded “gold” journals will essentially close them off from the wider community of scholars.

For historians, like scholars in many other humanities and social science disciplines, “openness” is an ethic that must refer to the production of scholarship as well as to its consumption. A historian doesn’t need an expensive laboratory, and is not likely to be supported by a grant that can include publication subsidies. “Open” means that our journals are open to publication by our colleagues who are independent scholars, faculty in community colleges and other higher education institutions that lack significant financial support for research, or employees of museums or even parks. These historians do research that is qualified for publication in major scholarly journals; they would not have access to resources that would enable them to pay article processing charges.

Moreover, there currently exist few barriers to readership for the majority of humanities publications. By design, humanities journals work on a model of low costs and affordable subscriptions. The American Historical Association’s journal, the *American Historical Review*—one of the oldest and most significant journals in the field—costs less than \$950 per year for the largest institutions, and much less for smaller institutions, in some cases under \$300. The *William and Mary Quarterly*, one of the top journals in early American studies, which attracts many authors from the United Kingdom, has an institutional subscription fee of \$175 annually. An institutional subscription to *Agricultural History*, a journal that draws 20 percent of its authors from Europe, costs just \$230 annually.

International inequalities are a red herring as well. Through arrangements with publishers, many humanities journals are already available for free in countries where institutions are unable to afford even these modest subscription fees. The *American Historical Review*, for example, is free in over 60 countries around the world, and available at a greatly reduced price in over 40 more. Subscriptions in the rest of the world support this valuable outreach to our colleagues in the global south.

Finally, the *American Historical Review* and some other journals actually do permit authors to offer their articles without charge to anyone who inquires. *AHR* authors can place a toll-free link to their *AHR* publications on their *curriculum vitae*, and/or on an institutional repository. So the issue is not whether scholarship is available, but rather the terms on which it is available.

The insistence upon CC-BY also disadvantages humanities modes of communication. Humanists carefully craft language to build arguments; editors devote time and expertise to the collaboration that enhances the form, structure, and elegance of that prose. Allowing reuse that would give blanket rights to create derivatives would make it possible for scholarship to be taken out of context and reused in potentially dishonest ways that remove the vital context that is an important part of humanities scholarship. Under this license, imprecise or even inaccurate translation is a possibility as well.

For these reasons the *American Historical Review* will not adhere to the requirements of Plan S. Moreover, few of the most important humanities journals on this side of the Atlantic Ocean are fully open access, nor are they likely to make the transition.

While we have worked to make access available to international readers, we worry about excluding international authors. Many of the most significant and high impact journals in the humanities are published outside of Plan S countries. Plan S-funded humanities scholars will be unable to choose the highest prestige journals because of the expectations of immediate open access and the ban on publishing in hybrid journals. This will exclude scholars from Coalition S countries from being a part of vital international exchanges and scholarship, and severely limit their ability to build international reputations.

Scholarly associations in the humanities continue to work in a range of ways toward broad access to the resources required to create new knowledge and share it as widely as possible. We share with our colleagues in other disciplines a commitment to open scholarship, access to data, and circulation of ideas. But one size does not fit all. Along with removal of barriers to access, freedom also means scholars and researchers should be allowed to choose when, where, and how to publish. How humanists conduct research, the funding they receive to do so, and the goals of publishing their scholarship require different mandates to ensure the future of scholarly communication. We urge Coalition S members to consider this carefully as the plan moves toward implementation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "JRMcNeill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Professor John R. McNeill
President
American Historical Association