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## **Paying APCs: 8 Years of an Open Access Fund**

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Paying APCs: 8 Years of an Open Access Fund

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The University of Kansas began a pilot subvention fund for article processing charges (APCs) in 2012. In fiscal year 2015 (FY2015), the Open Access Authors Fund (OAAF) shifted from a pilot program to an established program and changed various requirements, the amount of funds available each month, and the review process to ensure that those early in their career had opportunities to publish openly. This article explores the OAAF from its re-conception to the end of FY2022.

**Methods:** Applicants' information is stored in a Google Sheet, which was exported to Microsoft Excel. Authors' emails were replaced with random identifiers for deidentification. Pivot tables were created to support data analysis, and the "COUNT" and "AVERAGE" functions were used to summarize the statistics.

**Results:** The OAAF received 473 applications and paid 173 awards during this period. Most applications and those earning funding came from science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, with researchers at the medical school being the majority. APC fees increased through this 8-year period, causing the number of grants to decrease.

**Discussion:** Requests for funds to publish openly increased, as did the fees charged by publishers. Graduate students received the largest number of grants and the highest total of awarded funds. Unsurprisingly, STEM fields asked for and received the most funding.

**Conclusion:** Overall, the fund in its new configuration achieved its goal to provide funding to those assumed to need it most, but, by FY2022, it demonstrates that this model is no longer a desired method for researchers to participate in open access publishing.

**Keywords:** author funds, subvention funds, open access, author processing charges

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## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

1. An initial motivation to establish open access (OA) subvention funds was to provide financial support for more scholars to publish openly, and financing for successful funds came from academic institutions and libraries. However, over time, the viability of funds decreased, and many funds ceased. To ensure longevity, subvention fund administrators should consider establishing criteria that benefit authors with less ability to pay article processing charges (APCs), such as by securing money from outside the library budget and requiring that a journal to be listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals and that a publisher be a member of Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association, thereby confirming that authors are publishing in recognized OA journals and that the limited funds are spent with publishers who adhere to accepted OA standards.
2. Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) researchers submitted the majority of applications and consequently earned the most awards. Our data confirm that subvention fund awards are unintentionally skewed toward STEM fields, likely due to these authors being required to publish openly. Our research indicates that it may be possible that articles in social science and humanities specialties could be published at the same or higher rate than STEM due to low or no APCs in these field's journals. If author funds want to support a variety of researchers to publish openly, then perhaps the criteria should be adjusted to favor authors in the social sciences and humanities.
3. Payment of APCs from subvention funds became unsustainable as non-open journal prices increased, APC costs rose, and publishers expanded OA publishing models, and libraries paid for all of them. Institutions with subvention funds should examine their data to determine whether the return on investment of paying APCs is worth the effort to administer the fund or whether, given current library budgets, investing in other forms of OA would be more beneficial.

## INTRODUCTION

The University of Kansas (KU) has been a leader in open access (OA) since the Lawrence campus Faculty Senate in 2009 passed the first OA policy at a public university, where each faculty member grants the university permission to deposit peer-reviewed articles in the institutional repository ([University of Kansas Governance, 2009](#)). In the summer of 2012, the libraries of the Lawrence campus (KUL) and the University of Kansas School of Medicine (KUMC) established a joint subvention fund to pay article processing charges (APCs). The Open Access Authors Fund (OAAF) received a total of \$50,000 to fund 2 years of awards from the KU Provost and KU Vice Chancellor for Research & Graduate Studies at

KUL and the KUMC Executive Vice Chancellor and KUMC Vice Chancellor for Research. During the pilot program, scholars received funds as they applied: if the applicant met the researcher qualifications, and the journal met established quality standards, they received a grant. Researchers applied for up to \$2000, and the entire \$25,000 for each of the first 2 years were granted in 4 and then 6 months (Gyore et al., 2015).

After 2 years, an ad hoc faculty advisory group evaluated the program. They recognized the importance of the OAAF, but the awarding of funds needed additional criteria and could no longer occur on a rolling basis. The ad hoc group suggested allocating the funding once a month, decreasing awards from \$2000 to \$1500, limiting awards to one per year per researcher, and establishing an evaluation method based on points in which those assumed to have less access to funding earned more points, such as graduate students, early-career researchers, and tenure-track faculty (Gyore et al., 2015).

The restructured OAAF supported scholars from the Lawrence campus, KUL's urban campus (known as Edwards), KUMC's main campus in Kansas City, Kansas, as well as KUMC campuses in Wichita and Salina. Applicants applied using Jotform, an online tool that creates forms and which then deposits the information into a Google Sheet before a formula awards each application a point value. In addition to points for a first application to the fund, most points were based on the applicant's status: graduate students earned five; non-tenure track, early-career researchers in their first 5 years earned three; tenure-track earned three; non-tenure track with 5 or more years earned one; and tenured earned one. The point system aimed to improve the likelihood that the fund would cover APCs of those believed to have less ability to pay those costs and who benefited the most by publishing. Examples of point values are as follows: a graduate student making their first application earned seven points, whereas a tenured professor who already earned OAAF funding earned one. Each month, the OAAF review team distributed one-twelfth of the total annual funding still available at that time, with \$1500 being the maximum award amount. If multiple applications met the eligibility criteria (i.e., journal listed in Directory of Open Access Journals [DOAJ], publisher a member of Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association [OASPA], article not published), those with the highest points earned an equal portion of the month's available balance. Those funds were then encumbered for 4 months, at which point, if the award was not used, they were transferred back into the funding pool (Gyore et al., 2015). Funding continued to come from the same offices (whose names changed over time) in 2-year cycles that totaled \$25,000 from each campus. Although funded from outside the library, a committee of librarians from KUL and KUMC reviewed applications monthly and administered the program.

This study examines the OAAF from December of fiscal year 2015 (FY2015) through the close of FY2022 in June of 2022. The main research question of this assessment is to

determine whether the newly configured OAAF met the goal to increase the number of publications by those beginning their research careers. The secondary questions are whether changing publishing practices and increased library options for OA decrease the need for the OAAF, and how do these data inform the long-term future of this and other subvention funds?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### History of OA funds

Implementation of OA funds by academic institutions was first documented by Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) when it launched the *Open Access Funds in Action* resource in 2009 (Tananbaum, 2014). SPARC's records document that the earliest funds were established in 2005 at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The majority were founded between 2012 and 2016. According to SPARC's *Open Access Funds in Action* spreadsheet, 44 funds were created during this 4-year period, and, as of March 2024, of those funds, 21 are currently active, and 23 are inactive (SPARC, n.d.). In general, institutions that established an author compensation fund from 2012 to 2016 had similar requirements and financial commitment.

The intention of most institutions when they established an OA fund was the potential to expand OA publishing and increase the dissemination of scholarship from their institutions. Grand Valley State University (GVSU) had the following goals for OA publishing: "removing financial barriers, increasing visibility of scholarship at GVSU, raising the university's awareness of OA publishing options, and increasing the number GVSU authors publishing OA" (Beaubien et al., 2016, p. 5). At their outset, other institutions adopted similar goals. Over time, author funds were discontinued (Sinn et al., 2017). This commonly occurred for one of two reasons: 1) the institutions operating the programs could no longer financially support the funds; or 2) they moved away from subvention funds to financially support more relevant and strategic OA initiatives such as Read and Publish (R&P) and other transformative agreements that provide a greater benefit to their organization and the global research community (University of Arizona, n.d.). The shift to more intentional OA strategies frequently happened after a subvention fund closed due to lack of funding or because an institution made an intentional shift toward other open publishing approaches that could create a greater impact than what APCs offer. Examples of institutions that made this strategic change include Duke University in 2022 (Welborn, 2022), the University of Minnesota in 2019 (University of Minnesota, n.d.), and the University of Arizona also in 2019 (University of Arizona, n.d.).

## Distribution of funds

The literature on OA subvention funds demonstrates considerable consistency in who earned awards, limitations of what type of publishing is supported, and how APC invoices are paid. Most grant programs shared similar applicant categories with awards distributed to the same groups of recipients (Click & Borchardt, 2019; Gyore et al., 2015; Teplitzky & Phillips, 2016; Zuniga & Hoffecker, 2016). At several institutions, “Graduate students are given priority to receive grants,” as noted by Click and Borchardt (2019, p. 28). Additionally, these authors determined that applicants from STEM fields were funded at a higher rate (69%) than other disciplines (Click & Borchardt, 2019, p. 25). However, according to the findings of Cantrell and Swanson, for faculty in the social sciences and humanities, payment of an APC was largely not required for publication of an OA article (p.7).

Overwhelmingly, the funds required publishing in gold OA journals over those categorized as hybrid (Click & Borchardt, 2019, p. 29). To verify whether journals met the gold OA standard, funds commonly required a journal to be listed in the DOAJ and the publisher to be a member of OASPA (Click & Borchardt, 2019, p. 28). Generally, funds had maximum grant amounts, ranging from \$1500 to \$2000, although some are higher. Although funds are notably similar, they differ in how the funds are distributed over a year. A portion of schools began with a set amount allotted once or twice a year, and awards were granted without monthly limits until all of the money was encumbered, whereas other institutions had an annual pool of money with awards granted uniformly throughout the year (Luo et al., 2022, p. 432; Zuniga & Hoffecker, 2016, p. 3). Also, some institutions paid publisher invoices directly, and others reimbursed the authors (Luo et al., 2022, p. 439).

Several funds have reevaluated their criteria to determine whether modifications were needed to improve the distribution of grants. Those administering Boston College Libraries’ fund found “...that there is a time gap between fund approvals (i.e., when the money is encumbered from the perspective of the OA fund manager) and the researcher’s actual submission of an invoice for reimbursement (i.e., when the money is actually spent), which leads to about one-third of the fund money not being utilized compared to the totally allocated open access publishing fund” (Luo et al. 2022, p. 431).

When GVSU established their fund in 2011, faculty and graduate students were each eligible to receive \$3000 per year, and publishing was permitted in either gold OA or hybrid journals (Beaubien et al., 2016, p. 5). As of 2021, GVSU’s maximum grant today is \$2000, and it no longer supports hybrid journals (Grand Valley State University, 2025).

The University of Idaho established their Open Access Publishing Fund (OAPF) in July 2018 as a 3-year pilot program. Criteria for scholars included the following: “article reimbursement capped at \$2,000, the journal must be listed in DOAJ, the publisher must be a member of OASPA, no hybrid journals and author funding capped at \$3,000 per fiscal year. After the pilot period, the OAPF’s allocation in FY22 was split 50/50, with half the allocation (\$17,500) made available between July 1, 2021, and December 31, 2021, and the other half between January 1, 2022, and June 15, 2022” (Doney & Kenyon, 2022, p. 67).

In early 2019, Virginia Tech University discontinued funding articles accepted in hybrid journals (McMillan et al., 2023, p. 361). After changing this requirement, they surveyed fund applicants and determined that “the principal reason for authors not receiving support from the OASF (Open Access Subvention Fund) was because their articles had been accepted in hybrid journals” (McMillan et al., 2023, p. 364). McMillan et al. admitted that the decision not to fund articles in hybrid journals was not popular (2023, p. 361).

### University financial support

OA subvention funds are financed from various sources, including libraries, offices of research, or university administration. From 2015, “in a survey of libraries that provide OA funding, 70% stated that OA funds came from the existing materials budget, and 24% indicated that they came from a new budget allotment unrelated to materials” (Click & Borchardt, 2019, p. 32, as cited in Lara, 2015). The University of Kansas Open Access Authors Fund used a different approach, in which money came from entities outside the library, including the offices of the KUL Provost, KUL Vice Chancellor for Research & Graduate Studies, KUMC Executive Vice Chancellor, and KUMC Vice Chancellor for Research (Gyore et al., 2015).

The future for financing author funds is precarious due to competition for library and university funds to pay for other OA efforts. As stated by Click and Borchardt, “in the age of uncertain library budgets for many libraries, identification of non-library campus partners may be critical for the long-term continuation of these funds” (p. 32). As McMillan et al. (2016) determined in the *ARL SPEC Kit 353*, in which they surveyed 77 libraries, “the majority of responding libraries (62%) either discontinued their APC fund or have no plans to start one, with lack of funding cited as the most common reason” (as cited in Reinsfelder & Pike, 2018, p. 139).

In addition to dealing with shrinking collections budgets, libraries are paying subscription fees for hybrid and paywalled journals, and some libraries are budgeting for the APCs required to publish in gold journals. The act of paying a subscription fee for a hybrid journal while also paying the APC for an open article in the same journal is known as double-dipping (Pinfield et al., 2017, p. 2248). As stated by Halevi and Walsh (2021), “Publishers are constantly

coercing libraries to provide extra funds, in addition to subscriptions, to cover APCs. Whatever name it is called, whether read-and-publish or transformative agreement, the end result is increased payment by the library or, in the best case, cost neutral, therefore leaving the problems of increased APCs unresolved” (p. 396).

Although the source and availability of funding and the distribution of awards varied across institutions, most OA subvention funds began with similar goals of expanding OA publishing and increasing the visibility of their institution’s scholarship. Since 2005, author funds evolved or ceased due to budgetary issues or the development of alternate, open publishing opportunities. These new publishing opportunities have flaws and have failed to alleviate already stretched library collection budgets, but their increasing adoption may signal the end of subvention funds.

## METHODS

This study analyzes the OAAF’s applicant and award data from the fund’s reconfiguration in December 2014 (mid-FY2015) through June 2022 (FY2022). To apply for funding, individuals completed a Jotform on the OAAF website. This form requests details from the applicants, including contact information, campus classification (e.g., graduate student), KU campus, article title, article status, journal title, publisher, any relevant grant funding, and an explanation of any special circumstances regarding the request. A Jotform integration automatically sent application information to a Google Sheet and applied points to the application. The reviewer’s application data and annotations indicating details such as reasons for rejection, why the money was not used (when that information was available), and other notable pieces of information from the review and payment process were added to this Google Sheet.

For this investigation, the data for the time under study were exported to Microsoft Excel. Because the form allowed for free-text entry of publisher, journal, and department name, those values were reviewed by filtering the respective columns to identify and standardize variations. Each was then categorized by discipline based on KU classifications. Those receiving a STEM classification were associated with KUMC’s School of Health Professions, School of Medicine, and School of Nursing or KUL’s School of Engineering or School of Pharmacy or if their department or Research Center was in the Natural Sciences & Mathematics group of KUL’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences ([KU Medical Center, n.d.](#); [University of Kansas, n.d.](#)). Other departments, all at KUL, were classified into either Social & Behavior Sciences, Humanities, International & Interdisciplinary Studies, and Arts. Then, using pivot tables, Excel created summary statistics using the “COUNT” and “AVERAGE” functions. Finally, applicant emails were replaced with random identifiers to allow for deidentified data for this article.

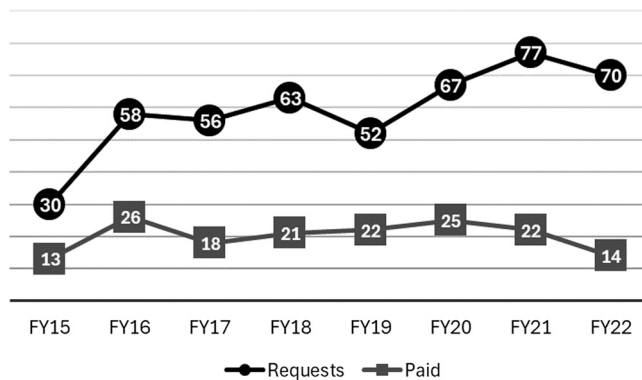
**LIMITATIONS**

Most of the Jotform contains free-text cells. Consequently, individuals might enter the same thing differently, resulting in inconsistencies. During the monthly review process, reviewers were not concerned with inconsistencies and rarely made corrections. However, once downloaded to Excel for this project, the data were cleaned to be more unified and consistent. It is assumed all of the data cleaning was correct, but there is a potential for errors.

Throughout the history of the OAAF, funding required the prospective journal to be in the DOAJ and the publisher to be a member of OASPA. During this 8-year period, listings in these two resources have changed. Overall, the number in both has increased, but some titles/publishers have lost these credentials. Consequently, applications in 2015 that were denied funding because of a publisher’s lack of membership to OASPA would meet that requirement and be approved in 2022.

**RESULTS**

During the years analyzed for this study, there were 473 applicants, of which 112 applied for funding more than once (Figure 1). FY2015, which included only 6 months, had the fewest applicants at 30, and FY2021 had the most at 77. The average number of applications per year was 59. When excluding the 30 FY2015 applicants of the partial year, the average increased to 63. Although the number of applications received steadily increased from FY2015, there were three declines in FY2017 (56), FY2019 (52), and FY2022 (70). Of the 473 total requests, the OAAF rejected 228 (48%), and 245 (52%) were offered funds. Of those offered funding, the OAAF paid either all or a portion of 173 APCs. In FY2019, the largest percentage of applications (42.3%) received funding. The year with the least funded applicants was FY2022 at just 20%.



**Figure 1.** Yearly total applicants and awards paid.

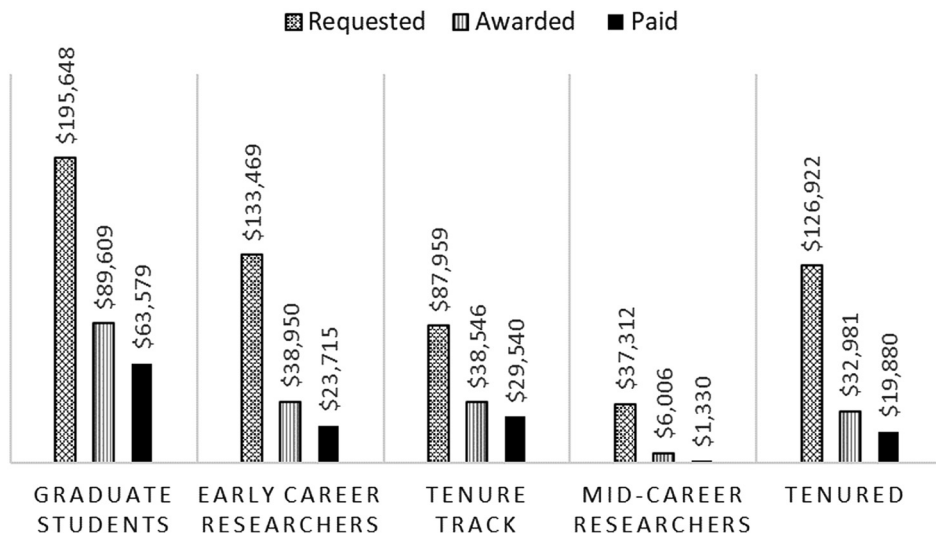
Of the 473 applicants, 282 (59.6%) were from KUMC, 20 (4.2%) were from KUMC Wichita, and 171 (36.1%) were from KUL (Table 1). Researchers at KUMC earned the largest number of awards at 144 (57.6%), totaling \$106,191, with KUL in second at 93 (39.8%) with \$73,332 and KUMC Wichita at 8 (2.6%) with \$4849 in paid awards. Overall, the two medical school campuses earned 60.2% of all funds paid.

| Campus       | Applicants | Applicants Paid | Paid APC Totals | Percentage of Total |
|--------------|------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| KUMC         | 282        | 144             | \$106,191.00    | 57.6%               |
| KUMC Wichita | 20         | 8               | \$4849.00       | 2.6%                |
| KUL          | 171        | 93              | \$73,332.00     | 39.8%               |
| TOTALS       | 473        | 245             | \$184,372.00    | 100%                |

**Table 1.** Applicants and paid APCs by campus

Graduate students made up the largest category of applicants with a total of 167 (35.3%). Early-career researcher/staff (first 5 years, non-tenure track) applicants made up the second largest group at 107 (22.6%). Non-tenure track (mid-career, longer than 5 years) had the lowest with just 33 (6.9%) applicants. Tenure-track, untenured totaled 67 (14.1%), and there were 99 (20.9%) tenured applicants.

In total, scholars requested \$581,310 in APC fees (Figure 2). Graduate students requested the most at \$195,648. Early-career researchers, non-tenure track requested the second most at \$133,469. Tenured faculty members requested the third largest amount at \$126,922.



**Figure 2.** Requested, awarded, and paid by status.

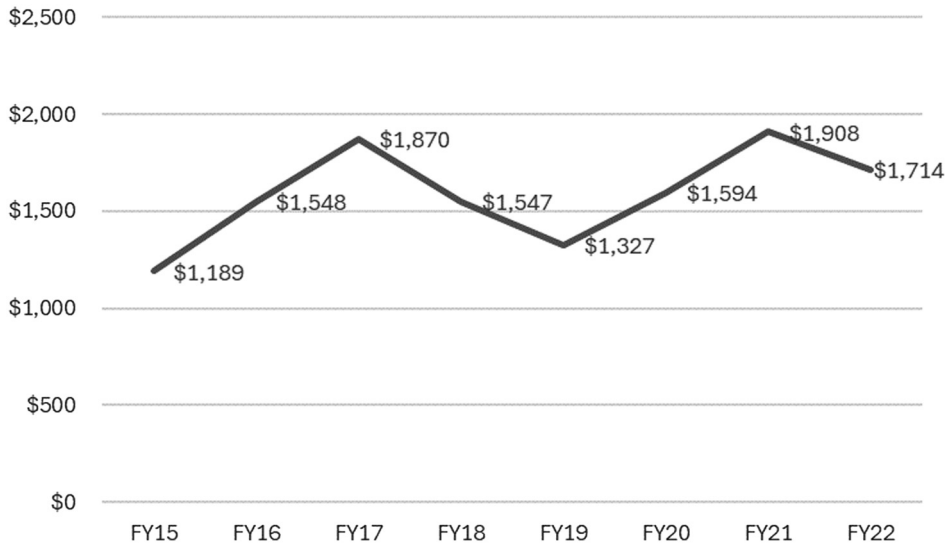
Coming in fourth were tenure track, who applied for \$87,959, and in last were mid-career researchers at \$37,312. Because not all applications met the various funding requirements, many were rejected and not offered funds. Because the pool of money was divided each month, many awarded applicants did not receive an allocation matching their request.

Most applicants, 383 (80.9%), were from STEM departments/fields. Social & Behavioral Sciences made up the next largest category at 79 (16.7%). The Humanities and International & Interdisciplinary Studies each had 5 (1%). The Arts had one article, or 0.2% of the total applicants. When the 383 applications from STEM fields were broken down, Medicine was the most represented group at 246 (64.2%). The second largest STEM group, at 63 (16.4%), were from the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. The School of Health Professions totaled 44 (11.4%). Engineering came in fourth with 15 (3.9%), followed by Nursing with 10 (2.6%) and, finally, Pharmacy with 5 (1.3%).

Investigation at the academic department level indicates that Medicine was not on top. Three units at KUL that share many joint appointments, i.e., Ecology & Evolutionary Biology, Biodiversity Institute, and the Natural History Museum, had the most applicants of any unit with 41 (8.6%) of the 473 applicants. Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Science came in second with 32 (6.7%). Internal Medicine came in third with 21 (4.4%), Psychology came in fourth with 19 (4%), and Orthopedics had 18 (3.8%).

Although the OAAF paid a maximum of \$1500 toward APCs, the application process collected the total APC charged to publish (Figure 3). The total amount of required APCs submitted to the fund was \$793,595.52. The lowest APC requested by a publisher during the period was \$550, and the largest was \$5000. The average for all 473 totaled \$1936.89, and the median was \$1775. Although the general trajectory for APCs was upward from year to year, the average varied significantly. The average amount paid per award totaled a mean of \$1196.52 and a median of \$1475. The highest total paid was \$1605, which exceeded the \$1500 limit, and the smallest was \$80.

Application requests included 91 different publishers. The publishers with the largest dollar amounts of required APC requests were as follows: BioMed Central (\$108,874), Frontiers (\$98,158.50), MDPI (\$72,445.35), Public Library of Science (PLoS) (\$65,519.00), and Wiley (\$47,971.00). BioMed Central had the most requests at 53 (11%). Frontiers followed with 48 (10%), and, in third, MDPI and PLoS tied with 42 (8.9%) requests each. Over this period, there were 276 unique journals and 91 unique publishers. No publisher received payments from the fund in every year under investigation. BioMed Central, with payments in all but one year, had the most of any publisher, receiving \$27,075 in APC payments for 21 articles. Frontiers received payment for 22 articles totaling \$21,330. PLoS, with 16 articles,



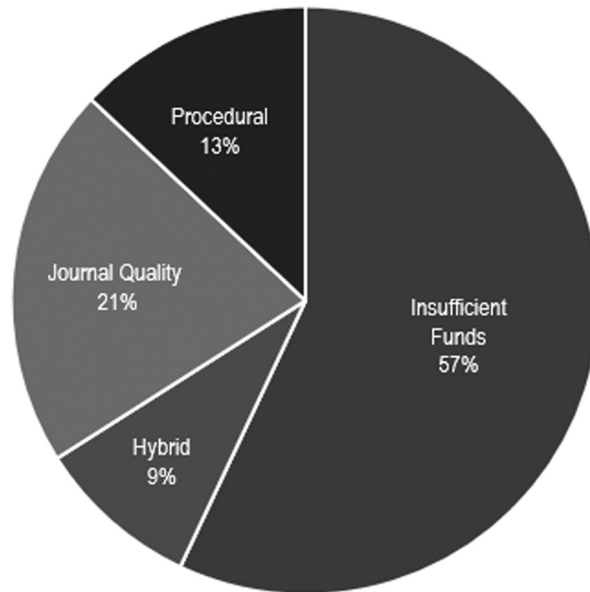
**Figure 3.** Average APC charges.

received \$19,895 from the OAAF. Although 20 articles were published with MDPI, they only received \$9827.23. Sage and Elsevier both had 13 publications funded, and the totals paid were \$9074 and \$7009.31, respectively. Overall, the OAAF paid 49 different publishers.

Requesters were asked whether the project was supported by a grant. Of the 473 applicants, 191, or 40.3%, had funding for their research. However, only 74 (15.6%) of the applicants indicated that they had funds available to help pay the APC. The reasons why researchers with grant funding still needed help in paying the APC varied from no more funds, the grant ended, and the grant does not support publishing.

The fund requires the paper to be ready for submission at the time of application. Researchers are asked to indicate “Manuscript Accepted for Publication,” “Manuscript Submitted,” or “Manuscript Ready to Submit.” A total of 218 (46%) of the articles were accepted. A total of 95 (20%) were ready for submission, and 160 (34%) authors had already submitted their papers.

The fund denied 228 applicants after the review of their applications (Figure 4). A total of 21 (9%) were denied because the journal was a hybrid, 47 (21%) due to questionable journal quality, 29 (13%) for procedural issues (e.g., already published, already earned an award), and 131 due to insufficient funds. As funds were limited, the 57% denied funding due to insufficient funds met the criteria but had lower points than the other applicants during the same month.



**Figure 4.** Denial reasons.

Some authors who were granted funds did not use them. The largest group at 25 were those whose award expired after not being used during the 4-month encumbrance. Eighteen no longer needed the funds for reasons such as submitting to a different journal without an APC, or an invoice was never received. Fourteen authors did not use the funds because their article was rejected. Ten are categorized as unknown, and five were for administrative reasons.

**DISCUSSION**

When the OAAF relaunched in 2015, the OAAF’s goals included growing the visibility of KU’s scholarship, increasing OA publishing, and helping researchers starting their career who likely had no or minimal research funds to publish openly. The data indicate that graduate students and early-career researchers made up 57.9% of applicants and earned payments totaling \$87,294, or 63%, of all expended funds. This demonstrates that the implementation of the point system worked. Although tenured faculty frequently applied, they only earned 14% of the total payments. Those with tenure who earned funding benefited from the monthly review, as they earned awards during months when there were fewer applicants.

The KU OAAF is similar to other author subvention funds in that, during the early years of OA publishing, researchers from STEM fields far outpaced those in the Social & Behavioral Sciences, Arts, and Humanities, both in the number of application requests and the number of awards. The distribution of applicants and awards, at 59.6% and 60.2%, respectively, going to

researchers at the KUMC campuses indicates that the funds overwhelmingly supported health-related fields. On the KUL campus, the departments affiliated with STEM programs requested and received funds at a higher rate than the departments affiliated with Social & Behavioral Sciences, Humanities, and Arts programs.

APC amounts requested by publishers spanned a wide range above and below the maximum \$1500 award, and, unsurprisingly, the Arts, Humanities, and Social & Behavioral Sciences averaged below the maximum, and the Natural Sciences and STEM fields exceeded that threshold. Not surprisingly, the publishers with the most requests for funding, i.e., BioMed Central, MDPI, Frontiers, and PLoS, are primarily science publishers. These publishers also had the highest-priced APCs. The lack of requests from those outside of STEM fields could demonstrate that publishing openly is not something that they pursue, that there is a lack of gold OA journals in these areas, or perhaps, as concluded by Cantrell and Swanson, that those “outside of the sciences more often may encounter free waivers or non-APC journals” (p. 7).

It is also not surprising that most of the research conducted by those who indicated that they had grant funding were in STEM fields. What is surprising is that, of the 40% with funding, only a few indicated that they had funds to pay the APC to publish their findings. Assuming that many of these projects were funded by federal grants, this response conflicts with established requirements that articles must be published openly, and APCs may be paid for with research funds. It also indicates that paying to publish is not perceived as part of the project like other expenses, is an afterthought, or is something scholars believe that they do not need to budget for because a different source will provide publishing funds.

The OAAF’s approval requirements, points system, and limited budget resulted in a high percentage (48%) of denied applications. The highest number of those receiving a denial was due to a lack of available funds in a particular month. This demonstrates a high desire among scholars at KU to publish openly but lack the resources or hope to find funding outside of their research grant or department. The high number of rejections due to unqualified journals/publishers or either not being in DOAJ or members of OASPA indicates that applicants either did not read the criteria or assume that all OA is equal. At KU, additional education regarding the various forms of OA, which today is more complicated than just hybrid versus gold, needs to be a priority when librarians communicate about scholarly communication.

After generally increasing, the number of applications peaked in FY2021 at 77, and then the number decreased the following year. Curiously, the percentage of funded applications dropped dramatically during FY2020 to FY2022, from 37.7% to 20%, which leads to multiple conclusions. The decline in awards is due to the high number of applications, increasing APC costs (rising an average of \$672 over time), and a static amount of funding received from

the OAAF's institutional sponsors. An article's status, i.e., accepted for publication, manuscript ready to submit pending approval, and manuscript submitted, also played a role in whether an award was paid. APCs were paid on 81% of articles that were accepted for publication at the time of application, whereas other categories were lower. This data point indicates that the combination of an article not accepted by a publisher at the time of application and the OAAF's 4-month award window increased the likelihood of the awarded APC not being paid. Toward the end of this study period, it is possible that the global COVID-19 pandemic affected not only scholarly productivity but also the length of time it took to review manuscripts (Flaherty, 2022; Drozdz & Ladomery, 2024). Recognizing this, the fund administrators granted extensions of up to 6 months during the pandemic, but awards may still have expired due to a breakdown in the scholarly publishing system. Modifying the application process to only award applicants with accepted manuscripts could improve this, but the turnaround time of payments to publishers might be too quick for the review process.

KU offered a few fully funded open publishing initiatives during the time under analysis; however, for most scholars, the OAAF remained the only option. During the last year of this study and in the years since, library-supported open publishing opportunities have increased. In 2022, KUL began an All-In agreement with PLoS, giving authors the ability to publish in any of their journals without a fee, as well as an agreement with the Association for Computing Machinery. In 2023, both campuses entered an R&P agreement for hybrid journals with Elsevier, and KUL began an R&P agreement with Cambridge University Press. In the following year, the libraries licensed even more of these agreements. This increase of opportunities to publish without APCs (over 2000 titles with Elsevier alone) has caused applications to the OAAF to decrease.

## CONCLUSION

Publishing, librarianship, and scholarly communication underwent significant changes during the years under investigation. Today, publishers are trying new methods of OA, from diamond OA to Subscribe-to-Open (S2O), R&P, Flat Fee Publish agreements, and Transformative Agreements. At the same time, the US Government is increasing requirements for federally funded research to be open via the Office of Science and Technology Policy memo (Nelson, 2022). All of these options have created confusion for many, but they are particularly problematic among campus administrators who control library funding. There is a misbelief that most research will be freely available, and that supporting libraries for subscription access to materials or for facilitating open publishing through a budget line is no longer necessary (Seeman, 2018). This is not the case, and it is imperative that we as a profession take this opportunity to teach financial stakeholders about the thorny and evolving nature of scholarly communication. Little is truly free, and the way that research becomes

open still requires financial resources and both paid and unpaid labor by humans, inside and outside of libraries.

This project offers future research opportunities. Next steps might include surveying awardees and those denied funding for feedback, as well as asking scholars about their understanding of various types of OA and whether the newly available publishing opportunities (e.g., Elsevier, PLoS) have resulted in a shift of where they consider publishing. Another potential research endeavor would be to seek data from administrators on their perceptions concerning how scholars, administrators, and libraries should financially support open and firewalled publishing. A shortcoming of the OAAF is that it only includes articles. There are many scholars at KUL whose primary format of sharing knowledge is monographs. KUL does not offer any subvention funding for authors to publish books openly (except our institutional repository) but has supported larger book projects such as JSTOR's Path to Open. Although OA books are just coming of age, determining how to help our scholars publish openly in this format could be informative and another research opportunity.

The OAAF at the University of Kansas in its reenvisioned post-pilot iteration met its goal of increasing open publishing opportunities for individuals at KU. Graduate students and early-career researchers indeed benefited the most from these funds and tenured faculty the least, thanks to the implementation of the points system. Although the point system achieved this goal, a factor that went under the radar was the distribution of funds by subject areas. The fund skewed heavily toward the sciences and overwhelmingly funded publications from KUMC. Outreach or another modification of the points system to favor social scientists and humanists may have improved this. In the last few years that were under investigation, the changing nature of scholarly publishing affected the OAAF's ability to support local scholars. As APCs and the demand for funding from the OAAF increased, it became rare that an entire APC could be paid with funding from the OAAF. Therefore, although the fund met its goal of helping newer scholars, they were often left to find funds to pay for their entire APC. Eight years of flat financial support at a time when the number of gold OA journals increased resulted in the fund helping fewer individuals.

The OAAF administrators, recognizing the problems caused by increased APC fees, asked both campuses to increase their donations to \$36,000. With these additional funds, the team argued that the APC limit could be increased from \$1500 to \$2000, and a larger portion of an APC could be paid. Although campus leaders provided the increased amount, they did so with skepticism and indicated that the OAAF should not anticipate funding in the future.

At the same time, both KUL and KUMC increased opportunities to publish openly without paying APCs. It is important for institutions to diversify OA publishing opportunities to

include all types of journals and publishers because researchers fail to understand the nuances among the various types of journals and “want to publish their work in whatever journals they consider most prestigious” (McMillan et al., 2023, p. 367) In January 2023, a new R&P agreement with Elsevier permitted free publishing in hybrid journals. Other agreements on one or more campuses include The Company of Biologists, Cambridge University Press, Frontiers, and PeerJ. Perhaps because of these “free” alternatives, the OAAF witnessed a decrease in applications starting in FY2023. Not surprisingly, even with fewer applications, the total requested dollar amount of APCs increased. KUMC left the OAAF at the end of FY2024. Today, in FY2025, only KUL participates in the OAAF, and the funding, i.e., \$10,000, comes from the KUL library budget. Requests for funding continue to decline, and, in some months, no applications are received.

The future of the OAAF after June 2025 has yet to be determined. However, it is evident that a once successful tool to help scholars publish openly is no longer thriving. The closure of the OAAF will result in some scholars not being able to publish openly because other avenues provided by the library do not fit their needs. Additionally, allocating these funds and the time necessary to administer the OAAF might be better spent on other OA opportunities. Still, this stopgap measure filled a need at a time when OA publishing was beginning, but, because of these changes, this fund is at a natural ending point.

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