

# Cabells Scholarly Analytics Is a Force of Knowledge Against Predatory Publishing— An Interview With Simon Linacre



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*Because of the significance this topic poses for medical writers and editors, I am pleased to continue our planned series of articles about predatory publishing for the AMWA Journal.*

## INTERVIEW WITH AMWA

We welcome Simon Linacre, an expert on predatory publishing and the Director of International Marketing & Development at Cabells Scholarly Analytics (see Box). Simon had previously spent 15 years at Emerald Publishing specializing in journal acquisitions, Open Access, and business development. He holds a diploma in journalism and master's degrees in Philosophy and International Business. In 2020, he was co-opted to serve his first term as a trustee for the Committee on Publication Ethics.

**AMWA:** *From 2003 to 2018, you worked at Emerald Publishing, which held a unique portfolio of journals related to librarianship, as they prepared to move toward providing Open Access. How did you connect with Cabells during that period?*

**Linacre:** During my career at Emerald Publishing, I was the contact for citation, journal rankings, and indexing for Cabells' lists of journals related to library titles. Like other commercial publishers at that time, Emerald also faced the difficulties of trying to move from a subscription-based model to the Open Access free-to-read model. In 2015, I oversaw this launch in response to what the United Kingdom mandated for all commercial publishers. In the transition to an Open Access route, all sorts of technical issues can arise for publishers. For example, a few discovered that one of their journals had been hijacked by a predatory publisher who had copied and pasted the publisher's website using a slightly different URL. No link worked except the "pay here" button that led directly to the predator's site. Such examples highlight the tactics of predatory publishers. One must be extremely careful and remain on the lookout.

**AMWA:** *For background, can you describe Cabells' initial concept of creating a list that would help critically assess scholarly journals?*

## Background on Cabells

For more than 40 years, Cabells Scholarly Analytics (<https://noaa.cabells.com/>) has achieved an exemplary reputation for analytics across 18 disciplines in more than 11,000 international journals. In 2015, Cabells began their work to vet predatory journals by establishing analytics for this group of Open Access journals. In 2017, they launched a multidisciplinary journal blacklist of an initial 4,000 predatory journals that met 60 "behavioral indicators" that identified violations related to integrity, peer review, metrics (eg, impact factor), and publication and business practices. Today, Cabells offers subscriptions to its Predatory Reports (formerly the Blacklist) with 14,000 titles and to its Journalytics (formerly the Whitelist) with 11,000 titles—soon to expand with the addition of more than 5,000 medical journal titles.

**Linacre:** In 1978, Management Professor David Cabell had the idea to establish a verified and verifiable list of journal information that would serve as a time-saving guide for researchers, tenure committees, and doctoral students who were searching to find the right journal to publish their scholarly business research. The first list included important factors for tenure, such as times to review, accept, and publish in a reputable journal in the management field. This original directory of recommended business journals expanded in the early 2000s to include journals from the fields of social sciences and computer sciences. This would later evolve into what was then called the Whitelist (renamed now as Journalytics), which indexed across all areas except medical, engineering, and some humanities. Within the next few months, Journalytics will add a new medical list that indexes data and analytics for more than 5,000 more journals.

**AMWA:** *As Open Access began to gain momentum in the early 2000s, a group of predatory publishers emerged who would exploit the Gold Open Access model with aims to collect article processing charges (APCs) at the expense of quality. Tell us about Cabells' transition in expanding the directory to add predatory journals.*

**Linacre:** By 2015, Cabells began their product development to vet predatory journals and create a new list using a unique set of analytics judged by an internal review team. As part of this effort, they convened a conference panel in Boston in 2017 on the subject of predatory publishing; I was part of the panel of experts that also included Jeffrey Beall (see Sidebar). It was sheer coincidence that Beall removed his list early in 2017 and Cabells launched their Whitelist and Blacklist several months later, with an initial listing of 4,000 journals.

**AMWA:** *The specific criteria are clearly defined in Predatory Report Criteria v1.1, with violations rated from minor to moderate or severe. Can you explain how these criteria are valuable in helping researchers and medical writers avoid predatory journals and in understanding the depth of Cabells' undertaking?*

**Linacre:** The initial multidisciplinary journal Blacklist (renamed now as Predatory Reports) included predatory journals that violated more than 60 criteria, called "behavioral indicators," used to ascertain the legitimacy of a publication. These metrics indicate violations in issues of integrity, website, publication and business practices, and indexing and metrics. Today, Cabells' Journalytics indexes 11,000 scholarly titles, and its Predatory Reports lists nearly 14,000 predatory journals from all academic disciplines, with medical biological sciences and medicine forming a large proportion of the total.

Predatory Reports is a searchable database that identifies the specific types of predatory behaviors that Cabells specialists identify and analyze among the behavioral indicators. Like Journalytics, Predatory Reports provides basic background on the journals, such as publisher, website, and geographic origin, but it uniquely provides a misconduct report about specific violations. Cabells also tracks new trends in deception or other predatory practices and welcomes researchers to alert them on any new suspect journal.

**AMWA:** *From your studies at university to your focus in Open Access at Emerald Publishing and your initial connection with Cabells, how did your talents and experience coalesce toward 2018 when you joined Cabells' global effort against predatory publishing?*

**Linacre:** At university, I developed my critical faculties, sometimes being extremely cynical and doubtful. However, today, I use this experience to identify what's legit and what's not in helping researchers navigate through this period when publisher launches are almost exclusively Open Access.

Given my positive 15-year relationship with Cabells, I reached out to them when I left Emerald Publishing. The timing was right. Cabells was a North American-focused organization with most of its customers based in the United States. However, they were looking to internationalize, creating more

The term "predatory publisher" was coined by University of Denver, Colorado, Librarian Jeffrey Beall in 2010 to describe this academic publishing model that exploited the Gold Open Access model. In 2012, he began Beall's List, which provided free lists and reports of potential or probable predatory journals and publishers; it was based on an initial set of 26 criteria that he used to define predatory behaviors (eg, deceptive business practices, lack of ethics and integrity, corruption to the scholarly literature). When Beall removed his blog in 2017, he was an expert on the explosive growth of these predatory publishers and tirelessly devoted to protecting the research community while working full-time as a librarian. He was controversial for his criticisms of the social Open Access movement and for shortcomings of his blacklist approach. Nonetheless, his blog's absence left a huge gap in scientific communication. There is only one legitimate archived Beall's List (<https://bealllist.net/> accessed October 12, 2020).

business in the United Kingdom, Europe, and elsewhere. We began our product development initiatives and a thought leadership program, such as our educational blog, The Source, and educational seminars for researchers.

**AMWA:** *Your blog post, "Cabells' top 7 palpable points about predatory publishing practices," highlights the gravity of the issue: "Over 4,300 journals claim to publish articles in the medical field (this includes multidisciplinary journals) – that's a third of the journals in Predatory Reports." What are some of the strategies in 2021?*

**Linacre:** Cabells started at the other end of the spectrum in business. Until recently, the Journalytics database did not cover medical journals, although they have always been a significant part of the Predatory Reports list. Medical journals were not initially included because medical areas are huge and dynamic: they have the most journals and a rapid, high churn of journal articles. Customers had great demand for us to create a biomedical product that would list medical journals; they had many questions, especially if a particular journal was on a list. Finally, Cabells was ready to tackle the daunting field of medicine: it would necessitate its own team of experts, creation of its unique database, and its own unique set of criteria and analytics. Toward this aim, in 2018, we assembled our team of auditors to annually review all titles in Journalytics and to guide our product development in the field of medicine.

For Journalytics, publishers push their titles to Cabells for review and listing. However, we are very judicious before assigning a title to one list or the other. A common reason for a journal not to make it into Journalytics is that the journal has not been publishing long enough or is too niche. At least 1 or 2 years of citation data, robust peer review, and a minimal level of activity are needed for our team to ensure the title legiti-

mately belongs in Journalytics (<https://www2.cabells.com/selection-policy2>). With low citation, niche journals may never be listed on the Web of Science.

**AMWA:** *What about a Greylist?*

**Linacre:** Many of our customers have asked about this possibility. Given that most journals do fall into this in-between area, a Greylist would be larger than the combination of Journalytics and Predatory Reports. Therefore, more than 30,000 journal titles would not meet criteria for being either scholarly or predatory and would fall into this grey zone!

**AMWA:** *The medical area is more likely to attract predatory publishers. What global innovations are on Cabells' horizon?*

**Linacre:** For predatory publishers, the fields of medicine and biological sciences are the most fertile areas because they can charge higher APCs and take advantage of the publish-or-perish, high-churn culture. For Cabells, these fields are also the most difficult to characterize. Therefore, we are working on new products that use complex design technologies to bring radical changes in safeguarding scholarly publishing. For example, rather than a list analogue, a university system might red flag any author interacting with a predatory journal for research or submission.

**AMWA:** *Simon, thank you for sharing your perspective and expertise on Cabells' commitment. Any final points that you would like to make?*

**Linacre:** Compared with scholarly biomedical journals, predatory journals often include a country or origin in their title, advertise as a generic multidisciplinary field, and take advantage of the publish-or-perish culture. They especially target post-doctoral students or faculty seeking tenure. I always advise authors to do their own research and weigh each journal against a set of selection criteria, such as those from our lists. Cabells is working toward developing other products that may someday cover a portion of the costs related to producing these scholarly analytics so that they can become more widely available.

## IN CLOSING

Research your research. Researchers face the need to publish their research, and increasingly, these publications will be in Open Access format, as promoted by national and international initiatives such as Plan S. Researchers must dig deep, and they have all the skills to do it.

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