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The Roles of Academic Librarians in Promoting Gold Open Access to Faculty: A Review of the Literature

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Abstract

Since the advent of Open Access (OA) publishing as a response to the serials crisis in scholarly communications, academic librarians have often served as OA guides for faculty as they navigate the research process. However, as more studies have emerged on faculty perceptions of gold OA, the roles of librarians in promoting OA have come into question. This literature review article aims to examine articles and book chapters published from 2010 to 2023 with a geographic focus on North America that discuss how and why librarians have promoted gold OA to faculty. The literature reviewed suggests that librarians should focus on the benefits for faculty authors when discussing gold OA, and early career researchers may be more inclined toward OA than those later in their careers. Librarians have used various types of outreach, including workshops, speaking engagements, social media, and more to advance OA on their campuses. Challenges for OA outreach include a lack of understanding of OA practices, article processing charges (APCs) for OA journals, predatory OA journals, and reluctance from librarians to adopt OA for their own publishing methods. Further study on both faculty and librarian perceptions of OA; on factors that influence researchers to choose specific journals and publishing methods; and on how commercial publishers and libraries are continuing to adapt to the OA movement will provide a better understanding on the roles of librarians in influencing faculty toward gold OA.

Article Type: Literature review

Introduction

In the constantly evolving world of scholarly communications, Open Access (OA) has evolved as an alternative method of publishing and disseminating one's work. OA refers to works that are free to view and use; typically, these works are online, although print manuscripts have also emerged. Advocate Peter Suber (2012) defines OA as literature that is "digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions" (p. 4). For a deeper

understanding of OA, Folds (2016) recommends that librarians review three important initiatives in the movement: the Budapest Open Access Initiative, the Bethesda Statement on Open Access Publishing, and the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities. These initiatives provided definitions and recommendations for how to implement OA practices into the world of scholarly communications, serving as the foundation of the current OA movement. While traditional, also called toll-access, publishing has typically been conducted through journals with subscription

systems, often paid for by academic libraries as provisions for their patrons, OA journals allow readers to access their publications without a paywall or subscription.

In an early report on the relationship between academic libraries and scholarly communications, Cummings et al. (1992) realized that the ability to separate the need for ownership from the ability to access content is revolutionary. The beginning of the 20th century saw issues forming with journal prices increasing at an unsustainable pace (Ogburn, 2016). The inability for academic library budgets to increase at the same publishing rate as new, expensive information not only posed a threat in the 1990s but still remains a problem today. OA allows for researchers to view and cite publications without having to pay subscription fees, which ideally would help ease the burden on academic library budgets, offer alternatives to traditional publishing, and help mitigate the serials crisis. Because academic librarians have long served to connect journals with scholarly readers through paying for subscriptions, they have a vested interest in the OA movement and the overall future of scholarly communications. As libraries act as “crucial mediators for bridging the creators of information and knowledge to end users” (Xia & Li, 2015, p. 16), librarians have begun familiarizing with and even advocating for OA publishing among faculty at their institutions.

While libraries and librarians were often early adopters and educators of OA (Haider, 2018; Johnson, 2014), librarians are still actively considering how they can play a role in its future (Collister et al., 2014; Tenopir et al., 2017). Despite the ever-growing advances in the publishing field, faculty have not adopted OA publishing at the same rate (Peekhaus & Proferes, 2015). For libraries to continue to play a significant role in the heart of institutional scholarship, they may need to become advocates for scholarly communication best practices and OA publishing (Tenopir et al., 2017). Librarians may influence the culture of OA at their institutions; Folds (2016) writes that “the success of open access at an institution is linked closely to the role the librarian plays in advocacy for this movement” (p. 50). Throughout the

2010s and early 2020s, there have been literature reviews, case studies, book chapters, and surveys published to examine how librarians have factored into faculty’s decisions to publish via OA methods and what (if at all) librarians are doing at their institutions to promote OA. With a focus on research in or including North America, this manuscript aims to analyze existing literature from 2010 to 2023 on the roles of academic librarians in influencing faculty toward publishing in OA journals.

Methodology

To examine the relevant literature from 2010 to 2023, databases, academic journals, and eBooks were consulted with an aim toward exhaustive coverage. Keywords such as “open access,” “library outreach,” “faculty perceptions,” “open access benefits,” and others were used to search for articles that contained information about how faculty view OA, how they choose journals for their publishing needs, and how librarians promote OA to their faculty. Literature from before 2010 was screened for a broader understanding of the history of OA within the academic librarian profession and cited for background information but was not the focus of analysis. The literature review framework developed by Templier and Paré (2015) influenced the steps undertaken in research and writing that resulted in the creation of this manuscript. Over 20 articles or book chapters were read, assessed, analyzed, and cited for this manuscript.

Faculty Perceptions of OA Publishing

Faculty members are both authors and consumers of research, so they are invested in the research dissemination process (Helge et al., 2020). Further, a faculty member’s scholarly reputation can be built upon several factors, including the quality of the journals within which they choose to publish (Holley, 2018). Because some journals may not offer the peer review and editing processes needed for accurate, high quality scholarly publishing, faculty have the added duty to critically examine the journals to which they are considering submitting their work (Holley, 2018). With many factors weighing on

faculty as they consider their publishing options, understanding how faculty perceive, use, and discuss OA can be illuminating for librarians who act as a bridge between their faculty and the constantly evolving technologies and policies in scholarly communications.

Several surveys and studies have been conducted to determine faculty perceptions of OA publishing and what they may mean for librarians. Holley (2018) published a literature review that aimed to determine the current and future prospects of OA, covering the three-year-period of 2015 to 2018. Holley (2018) found that researchers and authors considered a myriad of factors in choosing a journal for their publications, and that traditions surrounding publishing varied between departments. Likewise, a 2015 survey of 51 colleges and universities noted that there was no specific department or field that expressed the most engagement with OA; according to the libraries surveyed, a variety of departments were found to be interested in OA (Moses, 2015). The majority of the sampled libraries from this survey had a digital repository and took part in OA initiatives, such as hosting workshops and webinars, providing OA funding for author fees, and creating LibGuides and other promotional materials (Moses, 2015).

Keeping in mind the role of librarians in the world of gold OA, Tenopir et al. (2017) conducted a survey to collect feedback from researchers about their own perceptions of gold OA. The survey of graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, and faculty at four North American research universities found that their prevailing attitudes toward OA were ones of ambivalence, which in turn creates opportunities for librarians to help inform and educate faculty on OA (Tenopir et al., 2017). The survey also found that individuals who were at an earlier point in their academic careers had more positive views toward OA than those who were more established in their careers; Tenopir et al. (2017) notes that these viewpoints could be due to generational differences as well as personal and professional experience. Dalton et al. (2020) also remarked on generational differences in attitudes toward OA: “Younger and early career

researchers, both students and faculty, are more interested in OA and tend to be more sympathetic to open research principles than older, more experienced faculty” (p. 78). Librarians can create workshops, programs, and marketing that specifically target certain populations to help balance these generational and professional differences (Tenopir et al., 2017).

Factors in Choosing OA and Other Journals

When asked what the single most important argument was for encouraging faculty to cooperate with OA initiatives, most respondents in the aforementioned Moses (2015) survey mentioned the importance of visibility. Because OA publications are not hidden behind paywalls, they can be more easily discovered, viewed, and downloaded by researchers around the globe, increasing the authors’ reach in their field. Costs and quality assurance are also important considerations for faculty when publishing via OA methods. Moses (2015) notes that the “quality of materials should be measured, as well as cost to implement, promote, and maintain OA” (p. 24). Faculty may be concerned about article processing charges (APCs) (Neville & Crampsie, 2019) and the perception that, in order to publish in an OA journal, they need to pay their way in (Dalton et al., 2020). McDonald (2017) believes that “Much of the controversy shaping faculty’s publishing behaviors—such as concerns about APCs and the fear of predatory publishers—is centred [sic] on OA journals” (p. 2). Both reputable and predatory OA journals may charge APCs, confusing potential authors and making the process of selecting a trustworthy journal more difficult. However, reputable OA journals provide quality peer-review, copyright information, and data management services that predatory OA journals do not (Burton, 2024). Libraries that have funding for faculty to publish in OA journals can strategically promote this service to faculty who are considering making their research open but are concerned about APCs.

A journal’s peer-review status and general reputation were also important factors for faculty making publication decisions. A survey of faculty

at two Canadian research universities found that, out of eight identified factors, most faculty chose the journal's peer-review status as the most important factor influencing their decisions on where to publish (McDonald et al., 2017). Likewise, a global study from Nicholas et al. (2022) that focused on early career researchers found that the peer-review status and standards of a journal were important considerations for authors. Further, Neville and Crampsie (2019) suggest that "tenure and promotion criteria need clarification as to whether open access publications will be considered in the same light as traditional, fee-based journals" (p. 604). More clarification on how OA and traditional journals are given credence within one's department, institution, or even the global audience can help faculty understand their publishing options. If peer-reviewed OA journals are given the same weight as peer-reviewed traditional journals in the promotion and tenure process, then faculty may be more incentivized to publish their work as OA.

Many factors influence a faculty member's decision on where to publish their work, but a lack of understanding and unfamiliarity with OA will limit their options. McDonald et al. (2017) found that the faculty comments in their survey "made it clear that many faculty are struggling with the concept of OA and how to differentiate it from subscription publishing" (p. 15). If faculty believe that publishing in an OA journal is like publishing in a traditional journal (Suber, 2012) with the same considerations for the journal's scope, reputation, editorial board, and general fit for their research; and if faculty have institutional support for APCs; then they may be more likely to try the OA route.

Benefits of OA Publishing for Authors

If academic librarians want to encourage their institution's faculty to publish their works as OA, the literature suggests that the benefits of OA publishing for authors need to be addressed and promoted (Holley, 2018; Moses, 2015; Neville & Crampsie, 2019). Benefits such as the quick pace of OA publishing (Neville & Crampsie, 2019) and the increased discoverability of OA articles need to be considered from the

perspective of the publishing faculty. The COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the need for faster-paced publishing for the "rapid access to research" (Nicholas et al., 2022, p. 609). In particular, early career researchers looked for journals that had a quick turnaround between accepting and publishing submissions (Jamali et al., 2023). While researchers may not have prioritized OA publishing in and of itself during the pandemic (Jamali et al., 2023), gold OA can be used as a method to ensure that a researcher's work meets the need for fast dissemination.

Because researchers' careers depend on their research impact, expanding the visibility of their research is key (Harnad et al., 2008). OA publishing has the ability to increase "the potential audience, including the potential professional audience, far beyond that for even the most prestigious and popular subscription journals" (Suber, 2012, p. 16). Because OA articles are not hidden behind paywalls or subscriptions, they may be more likely to be discovered, viewed, downloaded, and shared by users. McKiernan et al. (2016) notes that "researchers can use open practices to their advantage to gain more citations, media attention, potential collaborators, job opportunities and funding opportunities" (introduction). An article's reach ties into its overall research impact, which is important for researchers whose jobs and academic reputations rely on their work being read, cited, and built upon (Harnad et al., 2008). When an author's motive for publishing is to "share their knowledge and to have successful academic careers" (Holley, 2018, p. 235), OA can help them achieve these goals through making their work easily discoverable and accessible to other authors and readers.

Librarian Outreach and Advocacy for Open Access

Academic librarians use programs, newsletters, social media, and other means of communication to connect with and educate faculty, staff, and students on their campuses. The Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) (2023) recently established core competencies for

academic library outreach, including advocacy, communication, and professional growth. For librarians whose roles include scholarly communications work, outreach attempts to promote the library's services in this area—such as professional help offered by the library to find OA journals, publish data, understand author rights, or use an institutional repository—are paramount. Librarian efforts toward OA promotion have not been deeply analyzed in recent literature, but several articles and case studies have recorded examples of and suggestions for OA outreach and advocacy.

Understanding the current and preferred practices of scholarly communication within an institution is necessary for a librarian's successful approach to OA promotion. Through surveys, focus groups, or user needs assessments, librarians can begin to determine the current publishing landscape of their campus (Price et al., 2016). Speaking roles can also play a part in promoting OA; librarians may conduct lectures or discussions in faculty senate, class environments, and meetings to encourage the use of OA on their campus (Helge et al., 2020). Established events like Open Access Week present a prime opportunity for librarians to promote OA initiatives. Hosting workshops, presentations, panels, and speakers are all ways that librarians can celebrate Open Access Week (Price et al., 2016; Helge et al., 2020). Librarians have also created content such as videos, photos, flyers, banners, signs, and research guides to advertise OA efforts and events (Johnson, 2014). Going beyond events and traditional outreach, some libraries even publish their own OA journals. Collister et al. (2014) reports on the progress of the University Library System at the University of Pittsburgh, who at the time of the case study was publishing 35 journal titles, most of which were OA. Libraries who are able to publish and support OA journals are cementing themselves not only as OA promoters but also as active contributors in the publishing sphere (Collister et al., 2014).

Adding OA-specific initiatives to the everyday tasks of a librarian is another helpful way to promote OA. Librarians themselves can self-archive and publish in OA journals, add OA

resources to research guides and instructional materials, and establish institutional funding for APCs (Price et al., 2016). Both formal and informal conversations about OA in the workplace can also contribute to faculty's understanding and appreciation of OA. Asking questions about how faculty are currently approaching their research can help librarians determine how to best assist them (Swoger et al., 2015). Further, discussions with faculty about OA should focus on the benefits for faculty authors if librarians want to convince them to try OA publishing (Holley, 2018). Librarians can use persistent marketing tactics and conversations with department heads to advance the knowledge and support of OA at their institutions.

Dawson (2014) recommends developing support services for authors' rights, expanding financial support for APCs, and implementing ongoing programs that promote OA education and awareness. Faculty may be more willing to publish in OA journals if their APCs are funded by libraries or institutions rather than if they must use grant money (Dawson, 2014). With increased financial support and education on OA initiatives, faculty can begin to better understand and add their research into the OA publishing process. Further, assisting faculty with copyright, fair use, and intellectual property questions—all duties commonly cited in scholarly communication librarian job descriptions in the early 2010s (Xia & Li, 2015)—allows librarians to build trust within their institutions as active participants in the research process. Librarians have historically helped educate their communities and been involved in scholarly communications (Folds, 2016; Helge et al., 2020); focusing outreach efforts on OA and its benefits for authors is another way that librarians can play their part in the world of research.

Challenges Facing Librarians in the Promotion of Open Access

Suber (2012) believes that the biggest challenge to the OA movement is misunderstanding, which arises from a lack of familiarity and being too busy. Other documented challenges include misinformation, unfamiliarity with OA (McDonald

et al., 2017), a lack of time and resources, and a fear of predatory journals (Zhao, 2014). Faculty who are accustomed to traditional publishing and who have a high regard for a journal's impact factor may not jump at the chance to publish in a lesser-known OA journal. Without a current understanding of the fast-paced, constantly evolving research environment, faculty may be unaware of the benefits, problems, or general processes of gold OA. Some researchers may assume that all OA publishing is predatory and, as a result, avoid gold OA as a whole (Zhao, 2014). Interestingly, Dalton (2013) observed through a global study of librarians' research habits that some librarians themselves seemed unsure or uncomfortable with OA publishing and tended to rank OA as a low factor when considering a journal. This reluctance toward OA poses a considerable challenge to librarians' efforts at OA promotion. Preparing a survey to examine libraries' involvement with Open Access Week, Johnson (2014) asked if there was a discrepancy between what librarians believe they should do and what they are actually doing when it comes to OA promotion. If even the librarians who are aware of gold OA do not choose to publish in OA journals, then any attempts made by them to promote gold OA may seem facetious. Like faculty in other disciplines, academic librarians tend to consider a variety of factors in choosing a journal, with aspects such as the fit, scope, and peer review status of the journal often ranking as more important than whether the journal is OA (Neville & Crampsie, 2019). However, librarians have traditionally been equipped as mediators within the world of scholarly communications. Librarians can educate themselves on the benefits and barriers of OA through reviewing literature, attending conferences, watching webinars, and attempting to publish in an OA journal themselves. Folds (2016) believes that "librarians who understand how to evaluate journals and can articulate the various aspects of open access . . . can assist patrons and faculty in overcoming these fears" (p. 46). As practiced learners themselves, librarians can then help faculty understand the value in OA publishing.

Librarians have long interacted with and upheld ACRL's Framework for Information Literacy for

Higher Education, and can, likewise, apply this type of instruction to OA promotion. Helping researchers understand concepts such as the difference between predatory and trusted OA journals, best practices for OA publishing, author rights, discoverability, and altmetrics is all part of scholarly publishing literacy, a term coined by Jeffrey Beall (2012) and expanded on by Linlin Zhao (2014). Armed with knowledge on copyright, bibliometrics, data management, and research evaluation, librarians are well poised to assist their faculty with their publishing questions (Zhao, 2014). As librarians teach information and media literacy to their constituents, they should also teach scholarly publishing literacy. Developing a strong understanding of scholarly publishing is critical for a researcher's success in the current publishing environment (Zhao, 2014). After all, "just because a work is open-access doesn't mean it's good" (Beall, 2021, p. 3), and just because a journal exists in one's field does not mean it is the right journal for a researcher's work.

A question for librarians to consider is whether they should approach OA from an advocacy platform at all. Zhao (2014) believes that librarians should not necessarily promote OA publishing per se but rather promote scholarly publishing literacy that allows researchers to make educated choices regarding their dissemination practices. Zhao (2014) notes that librarians should "focus on providing well-researched information and generating critical thinking on open access publishing and scholarly publishing literacy" (p. 14) rather than advocating for or against OA methods. While OA began from a place of advocacy and altruism, there is growing concern that the APC methods involved in gold OA have led to new problems in the industry rather than delivering on the original promises of the OA movement (Dalton et al., 2020; Holley, 2018; Schöpfel, 2018; Šimukovič, 2018). Rather than focusing solely on gold OA advocacy, which due to APCs may not be feasible for some authors—particularly those in developing countries (Dalton et al., 2020)—librarians can instead embrace the challenge of helping faculty find the best publishing routes for each individual and their work. Although the emergence of OA was

originally thought to be a threat to traditional forms of publishing, Holley (2018) notes that “without some major unexpected change, open access, paywalled, and hybrid journals will coexist for the foreseeable future” (p. 236). Gold OA, green OA, and traditional publishing are all ways of disseminating scholarly information with benefits and barriers that should be weighed by the aspiring author. Faculty who are equipped with the knowledge of how to choose a journal that fits their work, reaches their intended audience, and boosts their academic reputation can better navigate the ins and outs of publishing.

Conclusion

Regardless of how librarians approach their roles in the world of OA, the reviewed literature suggests that understanding how OA works can be helpful to both academic librarians and the faculty at their institutions. When faculty understand and apply the differences between legitimate and predatory OA journals, responsible OA publishing and its benefits may be more attractive to them. Early career researchers and younger faculty have more initial interest in OA and could be recruited as partners with librarians in bringing more OA efforts to a campus. For many librarians, focusing on scholarly publishing literacy rather than just promoting gold OA may better benefit their faculty. As the world continues to evolve following the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic, changes in how faculty approach their publishing duties and how OA is used by authors and readers alike may emerge. Further study on both faculty and librarian perceptions of OA; on factors that influence researchers to choose specific journals and publishing methods; and on how commercial publishers and libraries are continuing to adapt to the OA movement will help illuminate the future of OA publishing and promotion. In the meantime, librarians can continue to serve as bridges between researchers and publishers, helping researchers not only find ways to disseminate their work but also understand and appreciate the avenues that are available to them.

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