Open Access Is Not Going Away –
We All Need to Keep Up

BY TOM REINSFELDER AND JOHN BARNETT

By now, most people working in or around an academic library have heard something about open access, a term and concept most frequently used when discussing peer-reviewed scholarly journal articles. The term “open access” should not be confused with the phrase “open source”, which refers to software such as an integrated library system (ILS) developed, distributed, and modified in an unrestricted environment.

Open access scholarly publishing frees readers from the barriers created by hefty subscription fees. At the same time, it provides authors with greater opportunities to distribute their work to anyone who is interested in reading it, not just those who can afford to pay. Librarians are also hopeful that open access publishing will eventually provide some relief to collection budgets strained by continually increasing journal subscription fees.

According to Peter Suber, an expert on this topic, “open-access (OA) literature is digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions” and is also “compatible with copyright, peer review, revenue (even profit), print, preservation, prestige, quality, career-advancement, indexing, and other features and supportive services associated with conventional scholarly literature” (Suber, 2013).

It is generally agreed that there are two paths to achieving open access to scholarly literature.

- **Gold OA** refers to Open Access journals that publish articles online with no access restrictions. Some require author fees while most do not and instead rely on other forms of support.

- **Green OA** is possible when authors make their work available online using personal webpages or databases, known as repositories, which are maintained by an institution or other organization.

Another way to understand open access is through the concept of gratis OA versus libre OA (Suber, 2008):

- **Gratis OA** removes price barriers to research. There is no cost to access or use the scholarship.

- **Libre OA** removes not only price barriers but also at least some of the permission barriers to research. Others are allowed to reuse and remix scholarship, building upon it to create new works and scholarship.

Some academic librarians have a basic understanding of open access scholarly publishing while others are more intimately involved with the details, and work closely with aspects such as copyright, peer review, and publisher agreements. Whether you are new to the idea of open access or you have been following its growth for many years, it is critical to keep up with the frequent and often dramatic developments. This is not only for our own benefit, but so we may better support the faculty and students we are employed to serve.

The open access movement has been gaining momentum for well over a decade and conditions continue to evolve, even on a weekly basis. Scholars and scholarly organizations are regularly introducing new open access journals, universities are adopting new policies related to open access, lawmakers at both the state and federal levels are introducing and passing legislation related to open access, and publishers (both open access and non-open access) are evaluating how they conduct their businesses and adjusting accordingly. Meanwhile, faculty on our campuses sometimes receive conflicting and confusing messages about open access from various sources.

Two recent events have generated quite a stir among academics and fueled the discussion and debate over open access. Both provide examples of developments where librarians must be ready to step in with further information and be prepared to answer questions from our patrons.

First, in December 2013, many authors of scholarly articles were shocked, confused, and even angered when they learned Elsevier was demanding that copies of their works be removed from Academia.edu and other websites that scholars use to share, store, and promote their work. These scholarly spaces included the institutional repositories of several universities. In this instance, librarians can help authors by clarifying a few points:

1. Elsevier is not technically or legally doing anything wrong here. Elsevier is only doing what the authors agreed to when the publication agreement was signed. Authors must understand their contracts with publishers, especially if they are transferring partial or complete ownership of the work.

2. In many cases Elsevier does allow authors to post a copy of a published article on a personal or

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institutional website. However, the agreement usually states that this must be the author’s own copy of the work (also known as a pre-print or post-print) and not the final formatted and edited PDF file produced and distributed by the publisher. It is critical to understand this difference. Elsevier’s action was in response to too many authors posting the wrong version – the version Elsevier wants to protect.

Second, in October 2013, writer John Bohannan published his controversial “sting operation”, “Who’s Afraid of Peer Review?” in Science magazine (Bohannon, 2013). In this study, Bohannon submitted a spoof research article to 304 open access journals listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (doaj.org) and Beall’s List of predatory OA publishers (scholarlyoa.com/publishers). Some 157 of the journals accepted the article for publication with scant to no evidence of peer review, or evidence of poorly conducted peer review, raising questions about quality control among open access journals.

Many journals that accepted the article were located in the developing world, but also included open access journals published by Elsevier, Wolters Kluwer, and Sage. Eysenbach (2013) notes that the Journal of International Medical Research (JIMR/Sage), rated number one by impact factor in its field, also accepted the journal, while other notable OA publishers such as Hindawi and PLoS One rejected the spoof study.

Eysenbach (2013) and others criticized Bohannan’s study for its own lack of research quality, noting that:

- The author did not submit the spoof article to any non-OA (closed access) journals.
- No control group was used; this was not a scientifically conducted study.
- The author’s own article was not peer-reviewed.
- Science is an expensive, closed access journal.
- Ultimately, Bohannan’s article may be viewed as more of a rebuke of poor-quality peer review, which is not limited to OA journals.

In earlier years most faculty remained unaware of open access publishing and its possibilities, but now many more people are starting to pay attention. However, there are often misconceptions about open access. As laws and policies continue to change, we have an opportunity to educate others and advocate for the best interests of our libraries, and universities.

What Can Librarians Do?

- Keep up with new developments and be ready to answer questions from patrons.
- Host informational sessions to discuss open access publishing.
- Suggest authors publish in gold open access journals, like Pennsylvania Libraries: Research & Practice palrap.org.
- Encourage authors to read and understand their publishing agreements.
- Suggest that authors distribute the proper version of their published works either on personal or institutional websites (when permissible).
- Learn about open access policies being implemented at institutions across the country and serve as a resource on your campus if/when questions arise locally.
- Help develop and promote local publishing services such as an institutional repository or other online publication.
- Become informed about Creative Commons licenses (creativecommons.org), which allow authors to choose how they want to share and control their works.
- Use SHERPA/RoMEO (www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo) to help yourself and authors become familiar with publisher copyright policies, whether they can self-archive their works, and which version (e.g., pre-print or post-print) they can store in an institutional repository or a personal website.
- Alternately, use ROARMAP (roarmap.eprints.org) to learn about institutional open access policies and SHERPA/JULIET (www.sherpa.ac.uk/juliet) to learn about open access policies of research funding organizations.
- Share information with students from The Right to Research Coalition (www.righttoresearch.org) on how the high cost of scholarly publishing affects their access to research materials and how open access can help facilitate fair access to research.
- Be aware of the differences between gold and green OA and gratis and free OA. Also understand what hybrid OA (libraries.mit.edu/scholarly/hybrid-journals) may mean to scholars and library budgets.
Recommended Resources


SPARC®, the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition. www.sparc.org

Open Access Directory oad.simmons.edu/oadwiki/Main_Page

SHERPA RoMEO – Publisher Copyright Policies & Self-Archiving www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo

ROARMAP – Registry of Open Access Repositories Mandatory Archiving Policies roarmap.eprints.org

SHERPA JULIET – Research Funders’ Open Access Policies www.sherpa.ac.uk/juliet

Creative Commons creativecommons.org

Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) www.doaj.org

The Directory of Open Access Repositories – OpenDOAR www.opendoar.org

Beall’s List of potential, possible, or probably predatory scholarly open-access publishers scholarlyoa.com/publishers

References


**Tom Reinsfelder** is a reference and instruction librarian, Penn State University Libraries – Mont Alto. He is currently reading 1984 by George Orwell.

**John Barnett** is scholarly communications librarian with the University Library System, University of Pittsburgh. He is reading Le Libraire by Gérard Bessette. Reinsfelder and Barnett are co-editors of Pennsylvania Libraries: Research & Practice, an open access journal of the Pennsylvania Library Association.

SAVE THE DATE!

**PaLA College & Research Division Spring Program**

“Open and Shut: The Case for OA in Libraries”

May 30, 2014

Arcadia University

Keynote Speaker: Sue Kriegsman from Harvard’s Office of Scholarly Communications

**Topic:** Open Access Policies for Colleges and Universities

Additional presentations and breakout sessions during the day will focus on related topics including digital repositories and the role of the library as publisher.

BEA AUTHOR BREAKFAST

BookExpo America (BEA) is the #1 book & author event in the US for librarians to discover thousands of new titles and meet hundreds of top authors!

This year’s Author Breakfasts will include **Neil Patrick Harris, Tavis Smiley, Jason Segel, Carl Hiaasen, Alan Cumming,** and **Lena Dunham**.

Stay tuned as more authors are announced for the Breakfasts and Autographing!

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