

**How does open access function in academic librarianship? A multi-institutional survey of
open access in the academic library.**

Research Proposal

By: Sadie Davenport

Introduction

Since the 1990s, academic librarians have changed how they maintain their library collections. Rather than growing one library's collection for internal use only, universities are increasingly turning toward collaboration to create larger, linked collections in which students across multiple universities can borrow and lend material in one library system. This is known as the interlibrary loan system. The trend toward collaboration continues in academic libraries today with the recent growth of open access, a new system of sharing academic information.

Open access is a growing movement aiming to make academic information freely available to the public. This movement was created in response to the current academic publishing system, which limits access to academic information through publishers' paywalls. Along with the potential solutions open access raises to existing issues in academic publishing, it also presents new challenges to the field. The UC Berkeley Library asks an important question in their description of the movement: "If we replace the subscription system with OA end products, who gets paid and how?" (UC Berkeley, unk.). Others don't see this as an issue. In *Publishing Perspectives*, Mendeley co-founder and president Jan Reichelt is quoted as saying "I think scientists in general don't necessarily publish for financial reward, but more to have an impact within the academic community, build their reputation, and to advance society in general" (Nawotka, 2014). There are many players in the open access movement, which makes it difficult to understand open access thoroughly.

Research Problem

Different players in academic publishing and research hold different views toward open access, showing that no academic publishing system is perfect. open access itself is a complex

system which academic librarians should evaluate thoroughly before determining what is best for their library's collection. Yet existing studies on open access only address small aspects of the phenomenon, and often from a perspective other than a librarian's. For example, Bower et. al (2017) focuses their study on how Open Access can be successfully promoted on campus. Alternatively, Bjork (2011) studies different features of open access journals, but from a statistically insignificant sample that is not necessarily reflective of open access as a whole. Coonin (2011) conducts a study similar to this one, but consults authors as his sample population. What is missing from this list is an overview of open access for librarians. Academic librarians would benefit from knowing how others in their field weigh the nuanced risks and benefits of open access.

Research question

What do academic librarians across different academic institutions consider to be the benefits and risks of open access in academic librarianship?

Literature review

Scholars began discussing open access in the early 2000s with initially oversimplified, theoretical predictions of the movement's future. In the following twenty years since, open access has become a real phenomenon, and its scholarly discussion has since shifted into three observable patterns. The first is a debate between experts for and against it. The positioning of scholars for or against open access has changed the concept into a charged movement. Another pattern is the increased focus on open access issues and acknowledgement of open access as complex. The final pattern is an emergence of studies that identify key patterns and comparisons

in the open access journals existing today. When considered altogether, the benefits and consequences of open access are scattered across this range of literature, in a disorganized and at-times contradictory manner. There is a gap in the existing research for in-depth, issue-based assessments of open access from academic librarians' perspective.

Debating open access:

Two key and opposing players, Peter Suber and Jeffrey Beall, have lead the debate on open access. Peter Suber is an early supporter of open access and whose work is frequently referenced. Suber (2003) wrote the librarian's introduction to open access, in which he argues that open access is a solution to two "crises:" the first concerns the increasing prices of research journals since the 1960s, and the second concerns emerging "legal barriers" to research access with the emergence of digital journals (p. 92). In contrast, Suber describes open access as freely and publicly available to anyone wanting to view the research. An issue in Suber's work is that he speaks in absolute terms with statements including "if open access reduces pricing and permission barriers to zero, then it clearly solves both crises" without explaining how this is possible (p. 93). Suber does acknowledge peer review as an obstacle to making research free, labeling it "the most significant expense" of publishing research material" (p. 93). However, Suber quickly dismisses peer review as "essentially editorial judgment and paper shuffling" and suggests vaguely that "sophisticated software" will sufficiently quicken the peer review process for open access to work (p. 93). This overgeneralization of open access makes clear that much work needs to be done in order for Suber's goals to be remotely realistic. Suber does answer an important question regarding open access. He states that "authors write for impact, not for

money, [and] want the widest possible dissemination for their work” (p. 94). Other scholars use this perspective of academic and research literature as the driving force behind open access.

Jeffrey Beall is a scholar who urges caution toward open access, and has faced legal and financial threats from publishing companies for his stance. Beall has identified and criticized potentially predatory publishing companies involved in open access. Beall (2015) wrote “a framework for analyzing scholarly open-access publishers and journals” as predatory or not (p. 1). The criteria he provides concern the journal or publishing company employees, management, integrity, standards and practice. It is important to separate Beall’s concern with potentially predatory publishing companies from his view of Open Access. He describes the latter as ‘being poisoned by predatory publishers’ in an interview with Kristen Wilson (2013, p. 126). Neither does Beall simplify Open Access. He instead describes it as “two things...a publishing model and a social movement” (2013, p. 127). In this interview, Wilson also reveals that Beall faced a one-billion dollar lawsuit for critical comments against publishing companies working with the Canadian Center of Science (2013, p. 127). The involvement of publishing companies in scholars’ stance on open access and their potential criticism of publishing companies creates bounds on what the debate on open access can cover.

Elaborating on open access issues:

Some scholars have shifted away from debating open access and instead work to explain what it is. The first important elaboration on the complexity of open access is attempting to define it. There exist multiple, different definitions of open access from different organizations, which Bailey (2007) reviews. The Bethesda Statement, Berlin Declaration, BOAI, and BBB are all slightly different assessments of what Open Access is. Bailey also identifies which aspects of

open access are possible or in existence. For example, he mentions that ““no-profit’ journals” existed in the 1980s and 1990s, and although these journals disappeared, their existence shows that it is possible to have an academic journal without seeking profit. Bailey acknowledges some level of complexity in open access by stating “there can be significant differences between STM journals and humanities/social science journals...” (p. 12). But other scholars (Chen & Olijhoek, 2016; Finley, 2019) more clearly address just how complicated open access is in practice. Bailey states that the effects of open access are hard to predict, since there are different levels of “open” to consider (p. 14).

Potential challenges to open access users have also been addressed. Finlay (2019) reviews the existing literature on open access to assess the accessibility of free literature through existing “library technologies” (p. 9). Finlay lists the main challenges faced in academic libraries as: identifying open access articles, managing open access resources, metadata standards, and consistency across research platforms. Hybrid journals, which contain both traditional material and open access material, may not make clear which articles are traditional and which are open access. Additionally, an article may be openly available on one journal, then closed on another, without a method to track where the article can be found. Labeling open access articles through their metadata does not have a consistent, set guide to follow.

Elaborating on open access issues is important because it reveals what needs to be fixed or improved for open access to work. These studies help open access by identifying what open access is, what features it includes, and what challenges open access users face. The following scientific studies measure these issues and make it easier to find patterns in the features and challenges previously addressed.

Studies establishing patterns in open access:

An important observed pattern in open access as “experimental” concerns the unusual characteristics of open access journals. Bjork (2011) studied the effectiveness of different features within open access journals. Assessing the success of open access journals based on consistently successful features helps scholars in the field make more informed predictions on the future of open access. Bjork studied journals’ peer review methods, format, interactive media and publishing revenue models (p. 1). However, Bjork studies twenty-four open access journals, which is not a statistically significant sample. Still, Bjork finds a journal publishing thousands of articles a year, and another journal pioneering new payment systems for open access authors (p. 9). Although there are issues with Bjork’s study, he is notable for revealing that open access journals “experiment” with characteristically standard journal issues like peer review and revenue models (p. 7-9). Bjork also criticizes the literature surrounding Open Access as “characterised by a lack of hard evidence” (13).

A universal method of comparing open access journals is important to the future growth of open access. Chen & Olijhoek (2016) provides such a tool for scholars to use and evaluate the “openness” of an Open Access scholarly journal. Previous literature like Bailey (2007) and Suber (2003) do not address hybrid journals, which are partially open-access and partially traditional. Bjork (2011) attempts to study journals but does not assess enough to provide statistically significant and observable patterns. Chen & Olijhoek conducted a study measuring eight-hundred journals’ “degree of openness” (p. 109). No journal was measured as “fully open,” and only nine journals “received a score of zero” (p. 111). This means that nearly all journals have some level of openness. Chen & Olijhoek established their criteria for “openness” as: “reader rights, reuse rights, copyrights, author posting rights, automatic posting, and machine

readability” (p. 110-111). This study brings clarity to the discussion on open access by establishing a level field for all journals to be compared evenly.

Need for research:

The existing research on open access is headed in a positive direction toward increasing clarity, measurement, and issue-based assessments. However, this research is scattered and inconsistent. Additionally, the existing studies fail to survey actual academic librarians weighing the benefits and consequences of including open access literature in their institutions. Coonin (2011) conducted a survey similar to the one currently proposed. In 2011, Coonin surveyed scholars who authored business research articles on their view of open access. This study is important because its survey questions scholars’ relationship with publishing, their scholarly reputation, their career goals and authoring experience. Coonin collects this information to capture these authors’ perception of open access overall. This survey and overall study set an example for what a similar survey on librarians can accomplish.

Other scholars have commented on the importance of librarians’ input on open access. According to Bailey (2007), librarians have the “skill set needed to successfully support institutional repositories” (p. 22). Additionally, librarians are well suited to develop their own open access systems, digitize content for open access, and subsidize open access journal fees (p. 25). Additionally, the issues Finlay (2019) evaluates reveal how entrenched academic librarians are in open access as users, authors, and gatekeepers of information. Academic librarians’ unique position is a key role in open access that has been historically overlooked.

Section 3:

Study population:

Our study population consists primarily of scholarly communications librarians working at higher education institutions in the United States. We are targeting these librarians' understanding of their library's scholarly communications budget, mission, and supply and demand. This is explained on the cover letter sent with the questionnaire, as well as in the mission statement on the instruction form with the questionnaire. We are targeting this specific study population because it is essential to ensure that our study responses come from librarians who are familiar with the concepts behind academic publishing as well as those behind open access. If participants are unfamiliar with methods to publish and distribute academic content, they may misguide the results of this study.

Sampling design:

Because the study population consists of specifically scholarly communications librarians, we will use purposive sampling to ensure these librarians in particular receive our survey. It is important to reach scholarly communications librarians specifically because we aim to limit nonresponse bias in our study. We also want to avoid misinformed or uninformed responses from participants lacking experience with open access.

We will still use randomization to limit sampling bias. First we will consult a few different directories and lists for our population sample. First, we will assemble lists of all the public, private and for-profit academic institutions in the United States, respectively. These will be pulled from state government websites. From these three lists, we will randomly select 150 institutions from which we will pull staff directories. From each of the 450 directories, librarians

in the collection acquisitions department will be emailed. We are emailing such a large list anticipating some amount of nonresponse bias (Fincham, 2008). We plan to combat this by ensuring a sample size that grants statistically significant data.

Data collection instrument:

We will collect data regarding academic librarians' assessments of open access via survey questionnaire. This is attached below. This method is most appropriate because it suits our data analysis capabilities. Our survey questionnaire will be emailed to each recipient with clear instructions on how to complete it online. The completed form will be automatically sent to our designated research study email.

The questionnaire has been created with an intended audience in mind: scholarly communications librarians, who are the most informed library professionals on open access. Those chosen from our population sample will receive our letter, instructions and questionnaire via email. If they choose to participate in the survey, they will complete all questions within the survey questionnaire electronically. The results will be sent to our designated online survey inbox automatically. By keeping all elements of the questionnaire digital, we are preparing our survey results for the data analysis process.

The survey questionnaire is structured with three sections. The first section includes questions about librarians' academic institutions. The second section asks questions about how prevalent open access materials are within each institution. The third section includes questions about how open access compares to other forms of scholarly communication. Each question within these three sections provides information regarding how open access functions within academic libraries. As a whole, these questions illustrate the effects of including or excluding

open access from scholarly communication at academic libraries. Our goal is to provide library professionals with the information they need to predict how open access will affect their academic institution.

Questions 1-3 seek information about the institution at which the participating librarian works. These questions are intended to link views about open access with institution organization, program type, and student population. When analyzing response data, these institution identifiers may help explain observed patterns in our results. Each of these three questions is multiple-choice. Question one, which concerns an academic institution's organization, allows only one option to be selected; an institution can only be private, public, or for-profit. Question two enables multiple options to be selected, since an academic institution can offer students multiple kinds of programs to choose.

Question 4 accounts for the participating librarian's familiarity with open access. The term "rate" was deliberately chosen for quantitatively measuring academic librarians' consideration of Open Access. A simple numerical rating of familiarity provides us with a way to calibrate other in-depth responses regarding open access issues. This allows us to see how an individual librarian's personal knowledge or lack thereof may sway their responses.

Question 5 is two-part and tackles two related open access issues: first, how prevalent open access is at different institutions, and second, which subjects they concern. This question helps library professionals consider whether similar programs at similar academic institutions offer open access materials.

Questions 6 and 7 concern how open access functions as part of scholarly communication within an institution. Question six addresses patron group as a factor influencing the demand or lack thereof for open access. Question seven asks specifically how open access affects a library's

budget. By considering how their patrons' needs help determine changes in academic library collections, and how open access fits an academic library budget, library professionals can more clearly picture how open access can become part of their scholarly communication collection.

Question 9 and 10 address other aspects of scholarly communication that may be noteworthy for different institutions. Question nine addresses a more recent issue with open access: locating articles that are offered via private access and open access journals. Question ten asks librarians to list other scholarly communication methods they use. From these questions, other library professionals can interpret how open access compares to other methods of distributing scholarly literature.

Questions 10 and 11 ask how frequently different library patrons at different academic institutions need to obtain scholarly materials not currently available in their existing library collections. Library professionals experiencing similar amounts of requests as other academic librarians in this study can see if a certain level in demand corresponds to providing open access content.

This survey was pilot tested by a scholarly communications librarian at a private, for-profit health sciences university. This librarian provided valuable insight and suggested important changes that improved the structure and content provided in our survey questionnaire. First, this librarian caught that initially our budget question was phrased with a negative, which affected his initial interpretation of the question. Additionally, he suggested we eliminate the question regarding affiliation with specific publishing companies, and we removed this question from the survey. Another question he suggested we reword: initially we included a question asking how library professionals kept track of open access availability. He suggested instead we change this to if librarians promote open access. We decided to remove this question altogether.

As a result of these changes, we have created a survey questionnaire that we are confident will provide a realistic overview of the scholarly communication librarian's perspective regarding open access.

Additional Concept Definitions

To explain the concepts measured in this survey questionnaire, I will define a select few terms in my research question. These include: "different academic institutions," "benefits," and "risks." These terms are defined below to explain the bounds and details of this study, as well as the wording of the questions in our survey questionnaire.

The phrase "different academic institutions" means that the type of academic institution at which the librarians work is not limited. However, characteristics about the different academic institutions will be taken into account in the study as potential factors in librarians' different views toward open access. These characteristics include: the number of students enrolled in the academic institution, the offered majors at the academic institution, and the number of employees working in the library.

The "benefits" and "risks" will be determined through targeted survey questions related specifically to open access as a function of an academic library. These questions will be carefully worded to prevent survey participants from being led toward specific answers. Instead, the survey participants will be asked to select from a list which parts of academic librarianship will benefit from open access, and in a different question with the same list, survey participants will select which parts of academic librarianship will be risked by embracing open access.

Data analysis techniques:

We will use quantitative analysis to analyze this data. Through coded programming, we will analyze our survey responses for patterns. We expect that only a limited amount of coding is required. Although there are no free-answer questions, we do provide “other” as an option with a space to fill in a short, custom phrase response. The amount of time, budget and coding required to interpret these results will depend on how many “other” responses we receive. We anticipate that three months provides more than enough time to complete data analysis, including the analysis of all possible “other” responses.

Project schedule:

The following project schedule provides our expected completion dates for all major steps in this project:

Steps toward study completion	Date range for step completion
1) Literature review research & organization:	February 2021 - May 2021
2) Design of questionnaire:	February 2021 - May 2021
3) Research proposal presentation:	May 31, 2021 - June 7, 2021
4) Human Subject Committee review:	June 2021 - July 2021
5) Data collection:	August 2021 - October 2021
6) Data analysis:	October 2021 - December 2021
7) Research study write-up completion:	January 2022 - February 2022

Qualifications:

Two key members, M. Trainey and T. Nedbark, who both lead this research group, have an extensive background in studying and researching scholarly communication and publishing. M. Trainey has worked as an academic research librarian at Oregon Northridge University for twenty years, and has spent that time contributing her own literature to the field. T. Nedbark has worked as a scholarly communications librarian at Charvard University for the past forty years and is well-known within the field as an expert on open access. As a result, both Trainey and Nedbark have seen the emergence and growth of open access as part of scholarly communication. Their leadership has been essential to establishing our research goals, creating our survey questionnaire, and editing and revising our study to ensure its results will be helpful for library professionals.

Significance of Work:

Within the existing literature on open access, there lacks a clear understanding of the academic librarian's perspective on the topic. Yet these librarians, particularly those working in scholarly communications, are highly involved in acquiring, searching, providing and sharing open access content. This study will benefit library professionals who seek information on how open access materials will affect their library. These librarians can read our issue-based analyses of open access that acknowledge both its benefits and consequences. Additionally, the results will show how these statistics change by institution type, and so librarians can find what experiences best match their own library institution.

Summary

This research study is intended to answer the following research question: “What do academic librarians across different academic institutions consider to be the benefits and risks of open access in academic librarianship?” We derived this topic from an existing gap in scholarly literature on open access. We will attempt to answer this question by conducting a research study in which we consult scholarly communications librarians at a variety of academic institutions to share their nuanced experiences in a survey questionnaire. By analyzing these surveys for patterns, we hope to provide other librarians who are unsure if they should use open access with the information they need to decide what is best for their own library.

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**Appendix
Cover Letter (Email)**

Michelle Trainey
Oregon Northridge University Library
12 Grand Avenue
Northridge, Oregon 97213

Darren Tobey
Northeastern State University (NSU)
600 N Grand Avenue
Tahlequah, OK 74464-7099

Dear Darren,

I am Michelle Trainey, the academic research librarian for Oregon Northstate University, and I am writing to request your participation in the following research study. I am currently leading a research study with other librarians on the topic of scholarly communication. This study specifically concerns the role of open access in scholarly communication at higher education libraries in the United States. Because of your involvement in scholarly communication at Northeastern State University, you have been selected to participate in this research study. By participating in this study, you will help provide an informed assessment of how open access functions in academic libraries today. Our goal is to provide this information for librarians who seek guidance in deciding how open access fits into their own institutions.

If you decide to participate in this research study, you may do so by completing the questionnaire you will receive shortly via email. This questionnaire has been designed to capture the scholarly communications librarian's experience with open access. In all, the survey should take less than fifteen minutes to complete. This survey will be available for you to complete from August 1, 2021 until October 31, 2021. You do not need to complete the survey in one sitting; you will have the option to save your progress and return to the survey at your convenience. If you do not wish to participate, you do not need to respond to the questionnaire.

Additionally, your privacy will be protected. No questions in this survey will reveal private or identifiable information about yourself or your library institution. The data obtained from survey responses will be analyzed for the purpose of this research study alone. We anticipate that this survey will inform a research paper we plan to have finalized by February 2022. If you wish for a copy of this research paper, email us at the address below.

All the best,

Michelle Trainey
m.trainey@nsulibrary.edu
Oregon Northeastern University Library

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

We are grateful for your participation in this professional development research study. You have been randomly selected from a sample of 750 librarians to participate in our study, which is sponsored by the ACRL Scholarly Communication community. The results of this survey will be used to create an issue-based analysis of open access. Our goal is to provide this analysis for librarians, so that they can make informed decisions about the role of open access within their respective institutions. This survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. No identifying information will be captured or stored. All entries are anonymous. **This online survey application does not use cookies or other similar tracking technologies.**

Contact us:

For more information, please contact us by:

Email: m.trainey@nsulibrary.edu

Mail: Oregon Northridge University Library
12 Grand Avenue
Northridge, Oregon 97213

Survey available until May 30, 2021.

Instructions:

Please answer the following questions as fully and honestly as possible. Please mark your answers using blue or black ink. If you choose to submit your responses to this study, please complete all questions.

1) Which of the following best describes your institution? *Please select one response.*

- ☐ Private
 - ☐ Public
 - ☐ For-profit
-

2) Which of the following best describes your institution? *Select all that apply.*

- ☐ Community college
- ☐ Two-year college
- ☐ Trade school
- ☐ Four-year undergraduate university
- ☐ Graduate university

3) What is the approximate student population of your institution? *Please select one response.*

- ☐ 0-5,000 students
 - ☐ 5,001 - 15,000 students
 - ☐ 15,001 - 25,000 students
 - ☐ 25,000 + students
-

4) How would you rate your personal experience acquiring, using and sharing open access material? *Move the bar along the scale to select your numerical rating.*

1 _____ *//* _____ 5

5) Do you offer open access journals at your current library institution for patrons to access?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, for which of the following disciplines does your current library institution offer open access journals? *Please select all that apply.*

- ☐ Humanities (literature, languages, communications, journalism, art, theater, dance)
- ☐ Liberal arts (history, anthropology, political science, business, economics, sociology, psychology)
- ☐ Engineering (general, electrical, computer, mechanical, civil, environmental, industrial, molecular, chemical)
- ☐ Life sciences (biology, general & organic chemistry, geology, biochemistry)
- ☐ Physical sciences (physics, astronomy, physical chemistry)
- ☐ Career fields (various)
- ☐ Trades (various)
- ☐ Other:

6) Within your institution, who uses open access journals and articles the most? *Please select one response.*

- ☐ Students
- ☐ Faculty
- ☐ Librarians
- ☐ Administration
- ☐ Other:

7) How has providing open access materials affected your library's budget? *Please select one response.*

- ☐ Expanded library budget
- ☐ No effect on library budget
- ☐ Limited library budget

- 8) Please rate the process of locating articles available via open access on a scale from 1 to 5, with one meaning difficult and five meaning easy. *Move the bar along the scale to select your numerical rating.*

1 _____//_____ 5

- 9) What alternatives to open access do you use at your academic library? *Please select all that apply.*

- ☐ Interlibrary loan
- ☐ Purchasing requested materials (materials meaning: journals, articles, books, multimedia)
- ☐ Private-access journal subscriptions
- ☐ Other:

10) How often do you have to purchase a requested article or journal for a patron? *Please select one response.*

- ☐ More than once per day
 - ☐ Once per day
 - ☐ Once per week
 - ☐ Once per month
 - ☐ Once per quarter or semester
 - ☐ Once per year
 - ☐ Never
-

11) How often do you receive interlibrary loan requests? *Please select one response.*

- ☐ More than once per day
- ☐ Once per day
- ☐ Once per week
- ☐ Once per month
- ☐ Once per quarter or semester
- ☐ Once per year
- ☐ Never