

Leaders or Followers? It's Time for Health Faculty to Open Up

Canada is home to many of the world's leading advocates for open access, with much of this work initiated through leadership in the library community. In contrast, Canadian leaders in health care research, education, and clinical care have been disappointingly complacent in the movement to broaden the reach of our knowledge. Why is it that those of us who entered our chosen fields with the lofty goal of improving human health have remained virtually silent on something that can support just that?

When the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) introduced a policy in 2007 requiring that CIHR-funded research output be made freely available (1) - a policy consistent with other major research funders internationally - there was little celebration among those the policies affect. Yet open access publishing allows anyone with an internet connection to read, use and distribute health research and analysis, ensuring those who need information can access it. Access isn't limited to academics with expensive institutional journal subscriptions.

We believe that it is time for our academic health care institutions to step up their commitment to the open access movement.

October 14th, 2008 - the world's first Open Access Day - seems like a prime opportunity for Canadian healthcare academics & institutions to take on a role as leaders rather than followers.

In affirming their commitment and support for open access publishing and its contribution to better health care, we call on health science faculties to:

1. Establish support funds for faculty and student publication in open access journals.

Open access journals maintain the same standards of peer review and editing as their non-open counterparts but do not generate income from selling their work through individual or institutional subscriptions or pay per view options. As such, many open access journals are looking for new models of financial sustainability, including publication charges to cover review, editorial and production costs. In addition, some traditional publishers are allowing content to be made free online for a separate charge. While many of the national level funders are allowing researchers to include publication charges in their grant applications, institutional support is necessary, certainly in the short term, to support faculty in their ability to publish in open access venues.

In June 2008, the University of Calgary became the first (and, at this time, only) Canadian institution to establish a substantial fund to cover publication charges for authors to make their work publicly available (2).

2. Adopt an open access mandate for publications generated from within their Universities, and provide the necessary tools for authors to comply.

Faculty members at Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Science and Harvard Law School, and Stanford University School of Education have unanimously embraced strong open access policies mandating that "each Faculty member grants to the President and Fellows a non-exclusive, irrevocable, worldwide license . . . provided that the articles are not sold for a profit"(3). This means that faculty must deposit the final versions of their scholarly work into their online repository, at which time the work becomes freely accessible, searchable, and usable, with attribution to the author and university, but cannot be used for commercial purposes.

Athabasca University is the only Canadian University to adopt an open access policy, encouraging (albeit not mandating) its faculty to post copies of their scholarly work in their institutional online repository (4).

To achieve successful open access policy implementation, we encourage you to not only adopt strong policies regarding open access publication for your staff, but to also provide the tools they need to ensure the process is as seamless and efficient as possible. The Stanford University School of Education Policy and Resources website offers an

excellent example of how this can be achieved, detailing their policy, what academics need to do to comply with the policy, a publication agreement addendum and links to other university archiving policies, articles describing the citation advantage of open access publishing, directory of open access journals/mandates and links to a comprehensive open access wiki (5).

The Registry of Open Access Repository Material Archiving Policies (ROARMAP) is also an excellent resource, providing copies of current and proposed institutional, departmental and funding agency open access mandates, and their histories (6). (see <http://www.eprints.org/openaccess/policysignup/>).

3. Champion open access for our learners

Tuition costs continue to soar along with the costs of learning material such as textbooks, CDs and course notes. Health care knowledge is not only becoming prohibitive in cost, it's also unnecessarily duplicative. The internet provides us the unprecedented ability to share information. Educators can embrace this opportunity by adapting existing programs and course material in order to build a network of resources. There is no longer any sense in reinventing the wheel.

In 2001, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) launched OpenCourseWare, an initiative to make a repository of educational courses and course material freely available online with the goal of improving education on a global scale. The initiative, driven by MIT faculty, currently has over 1800 courses online (7). Capilano College in North Vancouver, British Columbia is their only Canadian academic institutional partner. In comparison there are 156 participating institutions in China.

The Connexions Project through Rice University also offers free on-line learning materials or print materials for a fraction of the cost of traditional publications (8).

We encourage Faculty to seize the opportunity to be part of an open global education movement.

As we celebrate Open Access Day, we think it is time that those publishing research with applications for human health consider that not only do they have the opportunity to decline restrictive copyright laws that have previously prevented full dissemination of their work, they have the obligation to do so. Publishers can no longer prevent authors from posting their own research on their institutional websites in order to maximize the impact of their work on patients and policy. Furthermore, the use of open copyright licenses (<http://creativecommons.org/license/>) in scholarly publishing allows authors to distribute their own work to their students. It isn't time to follow the leader it's time to be the

leader, and for our academics and institutions to lead Canadian health care publishing into the open.

References

1. Canadian Institutes of Health Research. CIHR Policy on access to research outputs. 2008 Feb 19 [cited 2008 Sep 30]. Available at <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/32005.html>
2. U of C funds Open Access Authors Fund. 2008 Jun 23 [cited 2008 Sep 30]. Available at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/news/june2008/authorsfund>
3. Stanford University. Questions and Answers on Harvard's Open Access Motion. 2008. [cited 2008 Oct 7]. Available at <http://ed.stanford.edu/suse/faculty/open-access-qa.html>
4. Athabasca University. Open Access Research Policy. 2007 Mar [cited 2008 Oct 7]. Available at <http://www.athabascau.ca/policy/research/openaccess.htm>
5. Registry of Open Access Repository Material Archiving Policies (ROARMAP). Registry of Open Access Repository Material Archiving Policies. [cited 2008 Oct 7]. Available at <http://www.eprints.org/openaccess/policysignup/>
6. Stanford University's School of Education Open Access Policy. 2008. [cited 2008 Oct 6] Available at <http://ed.stanford.edu/suse/faculty/dspace.html>
7. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). MIT OpenCourseWare. 2008. [Cited 2008 Oct 6] Available at <http://ocw.mit.edu/OcwWeb/web/home/home/index.htm>

8. Rice University. Connexions. [cited 2008 Oct 7]. Available at <http://cnx.org/>