



Evidence Summary

Administrator Interest is Perceived to Encourage Faculty and Librarian Involvement in Open Access Activities

A Review of:

Reinsfelder, T.L., & Anderson, J.A. (2013). Observations and perceptions of academic administrator influence on open access initiatives. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 39(6): 481-487.
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Abstract

Objective – To better understand the roles and influence of senior-level academic administrators, such as provosts, on open access (OA) activities at the institutional level, including whether librarians perform these activities regardless of administrative interest.

Design – Web-based survey questionnaire combined with multiple regression analysis.

Settings – The research was conducted online using surveys emailed to potential participants at not-for-profit public and private academic institutions in the United States with a FTE of greater than 1000.

Subjects – Academic library directors at selected colleges and universities.

Methods – Using directory information from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and filtering institutions according to not-for-profit status, size, and special focus, a survey sample of 1135 colleges and universities was obtained. Library websites were used to acquire contact information for library directors. In summer 2012 the 43-item survey questionnaire was distributed to respondents online using Qualtrics. The four primary variables were each comprised of multiple questionnaire items and validated using factor analysis, and the data was explored using multiple regression.

Main Results – The survey received 298 respondents for a 26% response rate, though the number of incomplete responses is not stated. Among four stakeholder groups (faculty, publishers, librarians, and senior academic administrators), library directors perceived librarians as having the greatest influence in regards to the adoption of open access (mean = .7056), followed by faculty (.3792), administrators (.1881), and publishers as having a negative impact (–.3684). A positive correlative relationship was determined between Administrator Attention to Open Access—a key variable operationalized by combining eight questionnaire items—and the variables Librarian Commitment to Open Access, Faculty Commitment to Open Access, and Faculty Proclivity Toward Open Access, with the latter especially the case at lower levels of administrator support. Regarding institution size, library directors perceived a higher likelihood of faculty adherence and librarian commitment to OA at large institutions (over 20,000). A given institution’s public or private status and geographic region were not significant predictors of faculty or librarian commitment or adherence to open access.

Conclusions – The study finds that academic library directors perceive librarians to have the strongest influence upon adoption of open access, and senior academic administrator attention to open access is positively linked to the OA activities of faculty and librarians. Larger institutions are considered to have greater commitment to OA, potentially due to differing missions according to institution type. The authors recommend that open access advocates consider administrator roles and target administrator support when seeking to increase participation in OA.

Commentary

Open access publishing is the subject of much interest and debate in the library, academic, and publishing communities. A considerable body of research addresses various stakeholders’ positions on the adoption of open access, and these works frequently

provide insights into how certain populations approach OA concepts and practice. Such studies have primarily focused upon the attitudes of either faculty and researchers (Xia, 2010) or librarians (Palmer, Dill & Christie, 2009). The only prior research considering academic administrators’ roles in the open access environment is that of Reinsfelder (2012). The study at hand makes a valuable contribution to the literature on open access in that it addresses the understudied population of academic administrators and their perceived attention to OA. In general, the authors accomplish their goal of increasing understanding of administrator influence on faculty and librarian participation in OA.

The most significant strengths of this research include the well-explicated methodology, appropriate statistical procedures to validate the primary variables and test significance of the results, and the discussion and interpretation of the findings. Regarding the sample, the inclusion and exclusion criteria are made clear and the survey response represents a sufficient sample size and response rate. The research instrument and accompanying answers are included in the appendix, increasing the feasibility of replicating the study.

Despite a strong overall design and reporting of the results, some limitations impacting the strength of the evidence were identified. The implications for practice and future research are minimally considered. The authors recommend additional studies in this area using quantitative and qualitative methodologies but no specific suggestions are offered. One such approach might be a citation analysis of administrator publishing histories to identify publications appearing in OA titles. The study lacks a mention of its limitations, which would be useful information for readers wishing to interpret and evaluate the findings and conclusions. Another point of consideration is the data source. Only one of four stakeholder groups, library directors, is consulted. Although possibly outside of the scope of this paper, it would be highly illuminating to compare directors’ responses with those of another group, such as academic

deans and chairpersons, to distinguish where their perceptions intersect or diverge. Despite these limitations, the methods, findings, and conclusions are sound and provide useful evidence regarding the research questions examined.

This work is a timely and insightful investigation of library directors' perception of various stakeholders' influence, particularly academic administrators, upon OA practices at colleges and universities in the United States. The most valuable aspect of this research is that it reflects on the role of administrators, an often-overlooked group, and identifies their importance in the dynamic and politically charged OA landscape. Practical implications suggested by the authors include advising open access advocates to solicit support from administrators, who indeed must be involved in the OA conversation to improve progress in this vital movement that features prominently in the future of scholarship. Additionally, the influence of library directors upon academic administrators, including how directors might educate and solicit support for OA, can and should be considered in practice. Future work in this area should examine the perceptions of

multiple groups to better identify how each comprehends OA efforts in relation to one another.

References

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