



*Evidence Summary*

**Awareness of Open Access Issues Differs among Faculty at Institutions of Different Sizes**

**A Review of:**

Kocken, G. J. & Wical, S. H. (2013). "I've never heard of it before": Awareness of open access at a small liberal arts university. *Behavioral & Social Sciences Librarian*, 32(3), 140-154.  
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**Abstract**

**Objective** – This study surveyed faculty awareness of open access (OA) issues and the institutional repository (IR) at the University of Wisconsin. The authors hoped to use findings to inform future IR marketing strategies to faculty.

**Design** – Survey.

**Setting** – University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, a small, regional public university (approximately 10,000 students).

**Subjects** – 105 faculty members.

**Methods** – The authors contacted 397 faculty members inviting them to participate in an 11

question online survey. Due to anonymity issues on a small campus, respondents were not asked about rank and discipline, and were asked to not provide identifying information. A definition of OA was not provided by the authors, as survey participants were queried about their own definition.

**Main Results** – Approximately 30% of the faculty were aware of OA issues. Of all the definitions of OA given by survey respondents, "none . . . came close" to the definition favoured by the authors (p. 145). More than 30% of the faculty were unable to define OA at a level deemed basic by the authors.

A total of 51 (48.57%) of the survey respondents indicated that there are OA

journals in their disciplines. Another 6 (5.71%) of the faculty members claimed that there are no OA journals in their disciplines, although most provided a definition of OA and several considered OA publishing to be “very important.”

The remaining 48 participants (46%) were unsure if there are OA journals in their disciplines. Of these survey respondents, 38 answered that they have not published in an OA journal, 10 were unsure, and 21 believed that their field benefits or would benefit from OA journals.

Survey respondents cited quality of the journal, prestige, and peer review as extremely important in selecting a journal in which to publish.

**Conclusion** – The authors conclude that the level of awareness related to OA issues must be raised before IRs can flourish. They ponder how university and college administrators regard OA publishing, and the influence this has on the tenure and promotion process.

### Commentary

As the authors point out, OA is most often discussed by librarians and faculty at large research universities, leaving a void in the literature related to OA awareness and motivations at smaller schools. This paper attempts to address this gap, but falters in communication of methods and results.

A stronger methods section would benefit the paper; the authors never specifically state a list of the questions they asked participants, and mention of the recruitment process is briefly referred to only in a footnote. While the authors place survey respondents into groups based on vague, basic, or advanced understandings of OA, they never define a rubric to explain how these decisions were made. Understanding how various groups were defined is key to replicating the study or for comparison purposes.

Aside from issues with methods, a further flaw in this article relates to gaps in the reporting of results. The authors never specifically state the level of OA unawareness found. Instead they write, “the results of the authors’ survey indicates that a greater percentage of faculty members . . . do not know, or simply have a limited understanding of, what open access is” (p. 149). Later, they mention the opposite of unawareness: “. . . the findings of our research suggest that open access awareness . . . was closer to 30%” (p. 152). If awareness is near 30%, than unawareness must be approximately 70% – a significant difference from the 15% found by Xia (2010) in a study that the authors frequently cite. The authors fail to address this significant difference.

Adding to the issues with the results is that the authors fail to make a distinction between “not understanding” OA and “unawareness” of OA. Additionally, despite mentioning that the participants’ level of awareness of their institutional IR would be investigated, these results are never discussed.

While there are significant issues with this study, a helpful feature is the authors’ suggestions of potential strategies librarians might employ to better engage faculty in discussions about OA and contributing to IRs. The authors suggest focusing outreach on specific disciplines (p. 153), and highlighting specific OA journals that would be beneficial to particular departments (p. 148). Overall, this study fails to contribute in any significant way to the literature. Perhaps the most useful aspect of this article is that it raises the question of how OA understanding among faculty differs based on institution size, and calls for further research from the perspective of smaller schools.

### References

- Xia, J. (2010). A longitudinal study of scholars’ attitudes and behaviors toward open-access journal publishing. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 61(3), 615-624.  
<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1002/asi.21283>