Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Evidence Summary

Faculty at an R2 University Show Varied Perceptions Toward Publishing and Using Open Access Scholarship

A Review of:
Scott, R. E., Murphy, J. A., Thayer-Styes, C., Buckley, C. E., & Shelley, A. (2023). Exploring faculty perspectives on open access at a medium-sized, American doctoral university. *Insights the UKSG Journal, 36(1),* 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.620

Reviewed by:
Abbey Lewis
STEM Engagement Librarian
University of Colorado Boulder
Boulder, Colorado, United States of America
Email: Abbey.B.Lewis@Colorado.edu

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Abstract

Objective – To examine faculty members' preferences, experiences, and current practices for publishing and using Open Access (OA) content.

Design – Qualitative interviews and inductive coding of participants' responses.

Setting – Illinois State University (ISU), a public R2 university.

Subjects – Twenty-five faculty members, representing all of ISU's colleges.

Methods – Authors recruited participants via a faculty electronic mailing list, selecting 25 faculty members representing all of ISU's colleges, as well as differing academic ranks and length of time since earning their terminal degrees. Interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed over Zoom. Authors used inductive coding to identify themes, while also seeking input from participants and

external professionals to guarantee accurate and detailed representation of participants' responses to the interview questions.

Main Results – All participants placed themselves somewhere on the spectrum between being completely opposed to, and enthusiastically participating in, OA publishing, with many noting tension between a principled belief in OA scholarship and difficulties with carrying out those beliefs due to journal quality or article processing fees. Some scholars were able to make use of grants, transformative agreements, or departmental funds to cover the costs associated with OA publishing. Disciplinary norms governed the sharing or use of unpublished, publicly accessible scholarship, with scholars in the sciences being more likely to place works in disciplinary repositories, such as arXiv. Participants expressed hesitation to post preprints to repositories due to lack of peer-review, legal considerations, and having one's research ideas "scooped." Lack of peer-review also contributed to hesitancy to cite preprints, although arXiv emerged as a highly regarded repository in terms of article quality for relevant scientific disciplines.

Conclusion – The authors conclude that perceptions of OA publishing are heavily determined by disciplinary norms, leading to a broad range of practices even within an R2 university. This necessitates multiple approaches by libraries to make OA publishing more possible and palatable for scholars including facilitating access to funds that alleviate or cover article processing fees, hosting OA journals, and providing quality education and support for publishing in reputable OA journals in one's field. The authors see sustained shifts toward publishing in OA models as also likely to lead to scholars' increasing their use of others' OA materials.

Commentary

Publication in open access journals offers benefits for readers by facilitating free access to research, and for scholars by increasing impact through citations, as well as reaching a more diverse readership (Huang et al., 2024). Academic libraries have responded by attempting to understand scholars' considerations when choosing publication venues and minimizing barriers to publication in OA models (Johnson et al., 2024; Kipnis & Brush, 2023). The current study aims to understand the publishing needs and preferences of faculty at an R2 university in order to provide better support for producing and using OA scholarship (Scott et al., 2023).

This evidence summary uses Letts et al.'s (2007) Critical Review Form to assess the study. Several factors contribute to the study's overall high quality. The authors' conscientious selection of participants from across Illinois State University ensured adequate representation of disciplines, rank, and professional experience. Research questions are clearly stated and addressed in detail through the authors' summarized observations and in interview participants' own words. The study captures a varied landscape of approaches to, and perceptions of, OA publishing.

The Critical Review Form also prompts the consideration of emerging phenomena. Within the study's findings, science faculty appear as more likely to view preprint repositories in a positive light and to make use of them at various points in the research process. This supports the authors' claim that participation in, and perception of, OA publishing practices are heavily influenced by disciplinary orientation. Academic rank and length of professional experience are likely to be heavily correlated and the authors also note the particular apprehensions of early-career faculty regarding OA publication practices, affirming that their criteria for inclusion in the study was well-founded.

Although differences within the community of ISU faculty are given careful consideration, the authors have stated a goal of distinguishing the unique needs of these scholars as distinct from what might be typical at an R1 institution. While they state that these needs are unique, the article does not explore concrete differences between R1 and R2 scholars. The study's literature review mentions the concerns of R2 institutions related to the elimination of the embargo period for OA publication of federally

funded research. This particular aspect could have been specifically addressed through interview questions or more explicitly connected to the participants' responses.

The authors use their findings to identify several pathways to increase the likelihood of ISU scholars publishing OA research that could be applicable to other colleges and universities. Engaging in agreements with publishers to reduce OA publishing costs can help erase barriers, and focusing on disciplines less likely to receive substantial funding is an astute strategy that aligns with the observed disciplinary considerations. Apprehension about predatory journals is well-founded, especially for scholars needing to publish in the "right" journals to achieve tenure and promotion. The authors see this as an appropriate area for libraries to step into, offering education and services that better equip scholars to navigate the publication process. They also acknowledge areas, such as preprint publication and usage, where change may be slower, but still influenced by larger shifts toward open practices.

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