Tips from the Experts

Talking with Your STEM Faculty About Open Access: A Checklist

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Introduction

STEM librarians and liaisons work with their faculty in a variety of ways depending on the structure of the individual institution. Outreach is often central to our interactions with faculty. One issue that we are increasingly called upon by faculty and library administration to address is open access (OA). We may find ourselves educating, or advocating, or both.

It is important to keep in mind, though, that first and foremost, faculty seek to disseminate their research as widely as possible, but particularly to their peers. Faculty also seek success in their careers, and recognized research and publication is closely associated with the promotion and tenure process. As STEM librarians, we continually seek ways to support faculty in our liaison areas. OA is one area where we can engage with faculty and is a publishing trend that we as librarians often feel an obligation to discuss. However, concentrating just on OA alone does not take into account that faculty have personal goals with respect to publication, research, teaching, and career advancement. At least some of our success in this OA endeavor comes through our understanding of, and alignment with, their personal professional goals (Burris 2009). Building OA discussions around these professional goals addresses faculty needs and also offers an opportunity to engender a stronger relationship between librarians and faculty.

Thiede (2014), in her essay "On Open Access Evangelism," highlights some reservations that arise as we engage faculty in discussion around OA publishing. These include the idea that OA as a publishing model presents a threat to the peer review process. The concern is that OA publishing may result in a decline in the quality of publications.

Open Access Discussion Checklist

This checklist for OA publishing is meant to provide a guide for both new and more experienced STEM librarians and liaisons new to such outreach. Particularly for a STEM librarian approaching faculty for the first time about OA, it can be helpful to first assess existing publishing practices across departments. Discussion venues around OA publishing can take many forms, such as faculty meetings, individual meetings, and faculty workshops. This checklist can serve as guide to preparation for any of these venues.

Before the meeting

- Explore publishing trends in the discipline, especially related to attitudes and practice of OA publishing. Begin by looking for articles that discuss these.

  Example: Google Scholar search for "engineering faculty AND open access"

- Investigate the publication requirements for tenure and promotion in the disciplines represented in your STEM departments.

  This information may be partially available in the faculty manual of the university and/or in documents prepared by individual departments. Ask also about the relative value placed within the discipline upon different types of publication (e.g., books, book chapters, articles, conference proceedings). Are specific journals more valued than others? Disciplines have their own publication cultures. The more you know about this, the more comfortable you will be discussing open access with your faculty.

- As noted above, faculty place high value on recognition by peers in their discipline (Burris 2009). Acceptance of articles for publication in highly respected journals within their discipline is one form of evidence that the faculty member is recognized by their peers. Citation impact (how often their works are cited and by whom) may be another.
- Investigate OA articles published by faculty in your STEM departments.

  - Do any of the faculty already publish in OA journals?
  - Are the articles a collaborative effort with other institutions or departments and could that have an impact on the choice to publish research as open access?

  To identify a list of selected OA articles published by the faculty in a department, Scopus can be helpful. In Scopus, you can search for your institution in the "Affiliation Search." Refine to "All Open Access" and add a Subject designation. Another option is to search by researcher name or your institution in Dimensions (Dimensions [date unknown]). An affiliation search is not available in the free version of Dimensions, but you can gather some information by adding your institution as a keyword (for greater accuracy, use quotations, e.g., "East Carolina University"). You can refine to "All OA" and select related "Fields of Research" or individual faculty using the "Researcher" option.

- 'Enlist' allies within the STEM department faculty.

  Review your compiled OA article list for the department (see above) to identify faculty who have consistently published OA articles. These researchers may be helpful allies as you meet with faculty in the department.

- Check to see if your university has a mandate or policy on OA publishing or institutional membership discounts offered by various publishers for OA publishing.

  For information on a university-wide open access mandate, check with colleagues or review the library and/or university website. Consult also the Registry of Open Access Repositories, also known as ROAR (Registry… [date unknown]).

  Some publishers offer a discount on article processing charges (APCs) through institutional memberships. For example, SAGE selectively offers discounted APCs for eligible authors publishing in their OA journals. The process for applying the membership discounts varies.

- Be aware of relevant tools to navigate the OA environment.

  You do not have to be an expert on all of them to begin a discussion. For example, different OA types are currently commonly described using a color system. The most recognized names are "green", "gold", and "hybrid" open access. Start with those. Georgia State University Libraries has created an easy-to-use LibGuide with a run-down on the current colors (Georgia… [date unknown]).

  Familiarity with Sherpa Romeo is also helpful as it is a database of publisher copyright policies and self-archiving information (Sherpa Romeo [date unknown]). You can use it to assist faculty to determine which version of their article they may be allowed to archive. It classifies publishers into colors for easy identification. Sherpa Romeo is not comprehensive but it is a good starting place. Be sure to check the publisher's website as well.

- Be as prepared as you can with relevant data and examples about current trends and development in OA publishing.

  Some helpful resources include:

  - General information on OA like SPARC Open Access website (SPARC [date unknown-b])
  - Scholarly communication blogs like Scholarly Kitchen (Scholarly Kitchen [date unknown])
  - Conferences or conference proceedings websites like the Charleston Conference Proceedings (Charleston Library Conference [date unknown])
  - Following individuals or organizations on Twitter and/or checking out hashtags like #openaccess

- Be aware of predatory (deceptive) publishing and be prepared to discuss. It is a very common misunderstanding that OA publishing implies predatory publishing. If you or your library has tools to assist with this or is willing to consult with faculty about predatory publishers, offer these services. One excellent guide (of many) is the University of Toronto's Deceptive Journals Checklist (University of Toronto… [date unknown]).

- Does your library or campus have an Open Access Fund to help with article processing charges for OA publishing? If yes, be prepared to discuss the fund guidelines and eligibility.

  Resources and examples of OA funds include:

    o SPARC Campus Open Access Funds (SPARC [date unknown-a])
    o East Carolina University Libraries (East Carolina… [date unknown-b])
    o Florida State University Libraries (Florida… [date unknown])
- Become aware of granting agencies (e.g., NIH, NSF) that have OA mandates or requirements. Find your campus's list(s) of faculty who have obtained grants. This is often found at the college level. Look for faculty in your departments who have obtained grants from agencies that have mandates.

  Sherpa Juliet is a searchable database that can help you determine whether a grant funder has an OA mandate in place (Sherpa Juliet [date unknown]).

- Prepare a handout or LibGuide to refer to during the meeting and to share after the meeting.

  At East Carolina University (ECU), we use our Journal Selection and Evaluation LibGuide (East Carolina… [date unknown-a]) with faculty when having conversations around identifying publishing outlets, especially OA journals or publishers.

- Prepare questions for your meeting with the faculty member or department.

  Example questions may include:

    o Currently, how do you select a journal to publish in?
    o How familiar are you with OA?
    o Have you considered publishing in OA journals?
    o If you have not published in OA journals, what is holding you back from doing so?
- A department may contain several sub-disciplines. For example, a psychology department might include school psychology, industrial/organizational psychology, and neuroscience, each potentially having a somewhat different publishing culture.
- Meet them where they are. If OA publishing in a journal is not an option for your STEM faculty at this time for whatever reason, be prepared to discuss alternatives (e.g., deposit in institutional repository).

During the meeting

- Listen carefully. Learn about their current publishing practices and research agendas.

- Note any issues that need follow-up.

- Offer to meet with graduate students to discuss OA publishing trends in the discipline.

- Thank those who visited with you and ask if there were any questions or concerns not addressed at the meeting.

- Send a follow-up email. Include the links to the LibGuides, handouts, or other relevant information.

- Refresh the offer to help as needed with predatory publishers and journals.

- Schedule a return visit or check-in.

- Review your aims for the meeting to see if these were met.

Creating the Checklist

As scholarly publishing has changed over the years, we looked for ways to increase engagement with our STEM faculty about OA. One avenue we used to increase discussions around OA is the library's Scholarly Communication Committee. The Committee includes a faculty representative from ECU's Faculty Senate, several librarians from both the main campus and the health sciences campus, support staff, and representation from library administration. Increasingly, we were seeing an interest in OA publishing from individual academic faculty members and department chairs. We were also finding that concerns were expressed by our campus faculty centered around deceptive publishing practices. While that is an area of education the library focuses on, we did not want deceptive publishing to be the sole focus of our outreach concerning OA publishing. Faculty interest also evolved as a result of their participation in workshops hosted by ECU's Office for Faculty Excellence. The workshops were developed and led by the Health Sciences Research Librarian and the Head of Scholarly Communication. Academic department meetings were scheduled at the request of department chairs or faculty in those departments who were familiar with OA publishing. Scholarly Communication Committee members presented at these meetings.

Ideas for portions of this checklist emerged while preparing for academic department meetings. Compiling the checklist was a simple way of organizing our efforts for faculty outreach around OA. Additionally, the checklist will serve as a template for use in future scholarly communication outreach efforts. Anticipated topics at ECU include impact metrics and data management.

Conclusion

Our guiding principle in creating the OA checklist was to center on faculty's publishing needs and goals. This emphasis was designed to make us better partners with our faculty in the publications process.

The full impact of the checklist will become clearer as we plan and execute additional faculty meetings and individual consults on OA. Anecdotally, we know that faculty are looking to the library for a deeper understanding of OA.

Before compiling the checklist, we were already seeing an increase in interest in OA publishing on the part of faculty, including inquiries for more OA information received by the Libraries from the ECU Faculty Senate. The checklist offers a consistent response which helps build

confidence in the library's expertise in this area. Faculty-library partnerships thrive best in an atmosphere of trust and competence. The checklist bolsters both.

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