

## **Open Access and the Practice of Academic Librarianship: Strategies and Considerations for "Front Line" Librarians**

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# OPEN ACCESS AND THE PRACTICE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIANSHIP: STRATEGIES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR “FRONT LINE” LIBRARIANS

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## **Abstract**

Librarians working in academic libraries are often exhorted to advance the cause of open access through their daily work with scholars and students in the institution. For experienced librarians as well as those new to the profession, there may be some confusion about how to carry out this work. There may be a lack of understanding about potential roles in a changing vision of scholarly communication that includes advocacy for openness as well as a responsibility for participation in local, national and global efforts. Librarian roles may not have changed to incorporate new models of scholarly communication. Library leaders may be using a level of rhetoric that may not resonate with the actual experience of librarians in their work in reference, instruction, collection development, or liaison work with teaching faculty. Librarians, often seeing themselves as members of a service profession seek to make available and provide services around the traditional library collections desired by institutional faculty and students. Incentives may not exist to produce the kinds of changes to collections or services that are held up as the future vision of the library. Also, whether they hold professional staff or faculty appointments, librarians endeavor to publish their own research in the established corpus of scholarly literature of library and information science (LIS). Librarians may not be invested in changing their own publishing behavior to match the messages they are asked to convey about open access to those in other disciplines. In library schools, LIS educators may not be integrating scholarly communication topics of relevance to future public services librarians into their curricula. The focus may be on digitization efforts and less on the types of services that librarians offer every day to faculty and students in reference encounters, liaison work, instruction or collection development work. After more than a decade of open access advocacy in libraries, it may be time to focus on the practical side and to move toward the promulgation of specific actions that are likely to produce real and positive result. Librarians working on the front lines will benefit from a better understanding of the type of contributions they can make. This paper is focused on the practical impact of open access on public services, collection development and other common academic librarian roles.

**Keywords:** Open access, scholarly publishing, collection development, public services, liaison roles, reference, academic librarians, science librarianship

## **Introduction**

Academic librarians, especially those working in science roles have undoubtedly been following the open access conversation for many years. Librarians have heard the exhortations that they must take part in the open access movement and transform library practices to reflect new paradigms in scholarly communication. Librarians on the “front lines” may have wondered what effect a near total adoption of the principles of open access would have on the library itself, especially on daily work

in public services and collection development. Librarians, many possessing skillsets honed over many years of professional engagement, may be casting a skeptical eye at those who would seem to be espousing radical change to the work of those in the library. It may be possible, at this juncture, to take stock and bring a more nuanced conversation to the library. Librarians may be eager to take action but have not been sure how to do so in roles that involve liaison work with faculty who have become entrenched in disciplinary traditions and cultures. Faculty members are toiling in an environment increasingly focused on assessment and accountability with a promotion and tenure bar that is set higher and higher. Librarians are also caught up in a whirlwind of increasing workloads and the changing priorities of institutions of higher education. Rather than setting out an overwhelming set of expectations, librarians may wish to examine all aspects of public services, collection development and technical services workflows to integrate open access practices in ways that will be welcomed by faculty, staff, students and the reading public.

Rather than articulating a vision without follow through, librarians can take steps both small and large to integrate the principles of open access into daily professional work. Wholesale change may not be realized, and librarians may not embrace that model. Many may have become fatigued by strident rhetoric that does not speak to the goals and objectives of many excellent academic librarians. Individual libraries can take on the challenges of change in small and measured ways. Library and information science graduate programs can engage a new cadre of professionals in understanding the options that are available to every librarian that will likely play an integral part in the scholarly communication dialogue. Librarians working as liaisons in a subject specialty, in public services, technical services or any number of emerging roles will become professionals engaged in a rapidly changing scholarly communication landscape. The learning curve may be steep for some, whether new or experienced, and it is the responsibility of libraries to ensure that, as the “intellectual heart of the university,” the library promotes a deep and ongoing knowledge and dissemination of open access principles and practice. Library practices can incorporate open access but only if library administration and library education make the appropriate transformation away from “business as usual.” Much of the background information to this paper is detailed in the book “Open Access and its Practical Impact on the Work of Academic Librarians: Collection Development, Public Services, and the Library and Information Science Literature (Mullen, 2010). Since the publication of that work, new conversations present exciting opportunities for engagement by all academic librarians. The way forward seems paved with small experiments, interesting collaborations of all types, and technical innovations that create opportunity to make open access vision more a reality.

### **Public Services, Collection Development and Open Access**

In the open access discussion, there is often a lack of focus on the academic librarian involved in collection development, liaison and public services work. The work of technical services librarians is vital, but is not included in this particular analysis. Those in public services roles in the library, often utilizing the collections built by other librarians are the “front line” librarians with great potential for outreach to the university community. This ability for outreach allows public services librarians to weave a vital and dynamic conversation further out into the university and the public sphere. Those in research libraries may only recently have begun to struggle with providing access to the all of the scholarship that researchers need, and may want to reassess collection building practices to focus on a wider variety of scholarly materials, including those out on the web. Open access presents opportunities and challenges for extension of library collections and services. For those libraries that have historically struggled with access, librarians are now able to add quality open access materials to collections and services. However, all librarians may be looking for practical strategies to maximize access to quality free web materials. Along with advocacy, librarians will need to integrate open access practices into everyday workflows if moving a stated agenda is to be realized. Often, library work goes on in response to the research needs of the university or community and not much changes.

## **Open Access Advocacy and Librarian Behavior**

In the United States, as the large library organizations continue to stress an open access advocacy role for academic librarians, there has not been a large scale movement of individual librarians to change their own open access behavior. [Palmer, Dill & Christie, 2009][Way, 2010] This behavior might include self-archiving of their own postprints or other scholarly works, choosing open access outlets for their own articles, by libraries changing expectations for promotion and tenure for librarians, or by open access behaviors by librarians in public services and collection development capacities. If librarians are not following open access behavior in their own discipline, it may be postulated that they may not have the kind of first-hand experience that might translate to discussions with departmental and teaching faculty. More research is needed on librarian attitudes to determine if many are “on board” with changing paradigms in everyday work in order to match the stated overarching support for the open access movement.

The major association in the US for academic librarians, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) has recently changed the business model of its flagship journal, *College & Research Libraries*, to become open access. [Branin, 2011] The membership has been vocal in support of this change, seeing this move as an example of the library association’s support for open access. C&RL has not made clear how this change will be monetized, and one hopes that this top LIS publication will never be in jeopardy due to financial burden. In another important statement from ACRL, the recently circulated draft of the ACRL Standards for Libraries in Higher Education [ACRL, 2011], scholarly communication, and specifically open access does not seem emphasized. Information literacy standards documents from the same organization have begun to address the issue, but librarians may still be left wanting concrete suggestions on teaching specific strategies to students if open access is to be a priority. Often, content of library instruction sessions struggle to include open access materials, and may focus instead on more traditional, albeit electronic scholarly book and journal content. Issues of copyright, fair use and plagiarism are presenting some new challenges for institutions and must also be covered by instruction librarians incorporating scholarly communication discussions into class sessions.

## **Reference and Collection Development Librarians and Open Access**

In reference work, whether traditional or virtual, librarians may often be focused on delivering service based on the content of the individual library’s collections. Librarians may have had training in the reference encounter, and may use a traditional approach based on existing library collections. Librarians may have been attracted to working in the libraries with the most highly regarded collections, and reference librarians in research libraries, especially, may see little need to offer scholarly materials outside of the resources traditionally available. Reference librarians may not have many models of change available to them. Most of all, reference librarians may see their work as a reflecting a service profession and may be responding to the stated needs of faculty and students for access to traditionally considered collections.

Collection development may still be focused on purchasing outright (or licensing) scholarly content. Although there is talk of support for open access to publications, librarians involved in collection development roles may be working to build excellent collections in traditional ways. Assessment of collection strength relies on established “core” indicators and ranking tools. Librarians working in the disciplines endeavor to build collections that include the materials most desired by faculty and students. Accreditation or librarian reputation may be affected by changes to collecting practices such as taking on large journal cancellation initiatives. Librarians may not have found the existence of article versions on the web in repositories, or new open access journals adequate substitutes for high-priced commercial offerings. The institution’s teaching faculty may see the librarian role as one that will continue to teach the value of “library resources” over free web resources. Often, professors ask students to use the library’s collections, rather than what may be found on the web. Librarians also wish to make clear what the library collection represents. Otherwise, the library as it exists in the minds of faculty and students may be in jeopardy.

As part of their liaison work, many academic librarians are being asked to focus on engaging more deeply with scholars, to “embed,” to “turn out” into the community. [ARL, 2011] Librarians will need support for these new conversations, whether discussion will be focused on research data management, the promotion of green open access, or the movement away from traditional metrics such as impact factor. Librarians may not feel they have enough information or motivation to engage in these conversations with sometimes reluctant researchers. One challenge is pointed out in published reports of what faculty and other researchers want from libraries [Schonfeld, 2010]; results that many experienced front line librarians do not find surprising. New roles may require conquering a steep learning curve and a willingness to struggle through the likely delay in real result or change in the scholarly communication system. Librarians working in collection development, instruction and reference roles may not be sure what level or type of knowledge that taking on these new roles will require. Librarians also may need ways to measure “success” in terms of scholarly communication initiatives. They will want to have a real idea of mission and goal when it comes to changing what is done in the library.

Librarians may have to begin by showcasing open access materials in various ways. Including open access materials and resources in library catalogs, discovery systems, research guides, and lists of indexes and databases is a place to start and a value add for the library. Adding Directory of Open Access Journals(DOAJ), Open J-Gate, and Google Scholar, for instance, into the library web list of indexes is a common strategy for aiding discovery of open access articles. Integrating “free to reader, free to library” books, journals, media, indexes, databases, documents and other materials into library collections will show the extension the library’s reach out onto the open web. These materials will all require vetting and organization in order to realize robust usage. Scholarly materials may all be integrated regardless of business model or method of acquisition or access. Librarians don’t have to “reinvent the wheel” but can model openness by creating guides, such as LibGuides (or open source equivalent research guides) on specific open access materials and initiatives to share with other interested librarians. Each library will need to develop strategies and discuss parameters. Seeing the library with amorphous boundaries will be increasingly necessary.

### **The Repository and its Successful Integration with the Library**

Libraries hosting institutional repositories will find that all librarians will need to be conversant on issues of faculty and student deposit of scholarship as well as all of the other potential initiatives that can be built on the capabilities of the repository. With more marketing by all public services librarians, the repository can be seen as the epicenter for open access initiatives for the institution. It will be important to leverage its potential to be considered the “place to go” for innovative scholarly communication. The repository cannot be seen as a silo with mixed content and mission. If it is not integrated into all the discovery tools of the library, it may be considered “off the radar” to the institution’s scholars and students. Not only a place of content, but of service, the success of the repository depends in part on the public services and collections librarians marketing it value by exposing and indexing practical and desired services like open access ETD(Electronic Theses and Dissertations) programs. If all librarians interact more meaningfully with the repository, remembering to include it in all discussions of public services and collections, it will be more likely to become a successful implementer of open access initiatives. Reference and collections work may not be adequately interacting with the repository in many institutions.

The interplay between disciplinary and institutional repositories must be studied and action taken to maximize the potential for collective public good. The mission of each repository must be clear to librarians so that they may discuss this potential with their constituencies. Librarians, search experts, can assist repository development by engaging with the discovery aspects. Subject librarians may wish to provide assistance with metadata issues, and public services librarians may be invaluable to the marketing of open access journal publishing programs. Interlibrary loan librarians are well positioned to speak with researchers while evaluating issues of versioning, and will decide what to offer library users when they may not expressly accept alternate versions of branded publisher articles. All public services librarians are uniquely positioned for conversation and collaboration. Library administration can be tasked with moving the conversation throughout

the organization, making sure that training and open discussion are available to librarians in every role.

### **Librarian Engagement with Book Digitization Projects**

Libraries will need to engage in discussions around major book digitization projects like Google Books (even with its legal challenges), HathiTrust, Europeana and many others. Librarians will find a major role not only as information providers, but evaluators and integrators of information into the library's new "collections." Reference service can be based on these agreed-upon quality "free" resources. Library users will come to realize that business model does not equate with quality when information is evaluated for inclusion into academic libraries' offerings. Each library will decide how to integrate both major and minor digitization projects into their offerings. Library users may not expect to find free web materials as part of library offerings, and information literacy efforts can explain the value that librarians bring to evaluation of quality scholarship. Website redesign can assist with exposing open access choices.

### **Libraries Spending Scarce Funds on Open Access**

Libraries will need concrete examples of open access success stories in order for all librarians to think it best to put scarce resources toward these ends. With closing ranks and poor budgets, libraries will need to be very clear about library and institutional priorities in terms of beginning new initiatives focused on open access. Open access has a cost to the library, and most libraries will need to spend more money on subscriptions in the coming years in order to keep collections at current levels [Bosch, Henderson & Kluendorf, 2011]. If libraries are going to pledge money for an initiative like SCOAP3, or provide funds for open access resources like DOAJ, D-Lib Magazine or arXiv, support from existing budgets will have to be identified and business plans studied.

Establishing open access funds for authors is another area where the library can show support- but some institutions may choose to wait to analyze the experiences of early adopters. A scholarly communication office or librarian in each institution may be charged with evaluating what the correct mix of support might be for innovative open access programs, especially the costs associated with "library as publisher" programs. Libraries may not have the available skill sets on board to manage data curation programs, to publish journals or books, or to partner successfully with university presses or college stores. Every library does not have to be expert on everything, but to leverage relationships and collaborations with peer institutions, consortia, and other interested parties. Library sharing will reach into new areas such as open source library product development, data curation support for the disciplines, collaborative collection development initiatives like 2CUL [2010] or virtual reference networks with cooperatives of reference librarians. One challenge is that librarians may wish to see funds spent on traditional collections, knowing that the institution's faculty and students are likely to agree with that position at this point.

### **Open Access and Traditional Library Materials and Buildings**

Librarians need to understand the whole publishing ecosystem and the stresses on that system. Library budgets may not present growth areas for publishers, and there will be constant change in what is available to libraries. Libraries will need to focus on the availability of quality scholarship. Libraries will need to take advantage of the growth of open access in the commercial publishing sector by integrating freely available articles. At the same time, collection development librarians will have to make sure to recoup any savings promised by the reaching of that tipping point where authors (or funders) are paying more of the costs inherent in the system.

Librarians may wonder that a heavy reliance on an open access message may render the library irrelevant. The "library as place" is important to many in the institution and librarians wish to preserve the role of the library as it exists as the "intellectual heart of the university." Libraries can use their busy library buildings to promote information access in many exciting ways. With a move away from print collections on shelves, space has opened up for real engagement and discussion of both web and traditional materials for student and faculty research. Online open access

“reference shelves” combined with traditional electronic reference materials will provide expanded reference collections. In order to showcase open access, librarians can plan activities for Open Access Week, and promote initiatives such as the SPARKY awards. For instance, Faculty of 1000 (F1000) is even providing open access to posters, a great service to students working on projects. [F1000, 2011] Students will benefit from the continuing evolution of open access textbook solutions. Librarians will add value by assisting students with evaluating information from all sources and by organizing those materials for discovery. Open source solutions will provide excellent results for organizing course materials going forward, and the library will have to emphasize a role here. Teaching use of open source citation managers such as Zotero will be welcomed and may allow libraries to get away from commercial solutions.

### **Peer Review, Tenure and Promotion**

The system's linchpin is peer review, and many recent studies are focused on what seem to be the entrenched and intractable systems of peer review and promotion and tenure in the academy. Recent discussions on experimentation with open peer review and the peer review of data certainly emphasize what libraries will likely be “collecting” in the future. [Harley & Acord, 2011, p.45] It may be difficult to envision a transformation of the vision of academic library collections, with greatly expanded boundaries out into the web, until changes to disciplinary-based peer review and evaluation systems occur. A major challenge is the evaluation of scholarship by everyone in the system, and the need to be able to take advantage of constant change without threatening the position of the library in the institution or in the mindset of library users. As assessment and ranking issues become more emphasized in every institution and discipline, commercial products such as Scopus and Web of Science with their research productivity tools and institutional assessment suite of products will certainly take advantage of the current thirst for metrics of all kinds. Commercially based open access journals have fared well in terms of ranking in many cases, and there may be confusion among librarians in terms of the various open access models and how they are being evaluated by scholars. A role of librarians will be the monitoring of citation analysis tools, and how to promote open access materials within the confines of the strictures of available and recognizable metrics products. Librarians will have to be able to continue to identify materials of quality; peer reviewed scholarship will be a focus and is not affected by a move to open access.

Library creators and marketers of open access materials must keep a constant eye on issues of discoverability, usability, net neutrality, and quality of peer review. Librarians can benefit by collaboration on all fronts; working in publisher partnership areas, participating in repository policy and development, joining scholarly communication committees in their institutions and LIS associations, attending publishing conferences to understand the “article of the future,” continuing deep discussions with scholars in teaching departments as well as putting a focus on issues of LIS scholarship. The message of the past few years with its focus on embedded librarians, librarians as part of research teams and adding data responsibilities, has been to reposition librarians in a different way into the intricacies of the research process. Libraries can be more than the intermediaries between publishers and readers. Librarians with a thorough knowledge of scholarly communication will be able to contribute to open access initiatives wherever the opportunity presents. This might take the form of marketing a library published open access journal, adding open access materials to the library, but also suggesting excellent open access resources to students and faculty in the reference encounter.

### **Education of Future Librarians**

The background of the discussion is not complete without a thorough review of the education of future librarians. Going forward, librarians will need to possess a different kind of understanding of the information ecosystem, including the role of all of the various stakeholders. Once, academic library practices were standardized, core reference materials set the tone for library services and collections and library leaders were well known. With the advent of changes to digital libraries, it has become more important to understand information production and for librarians to add value to a growing variety of formats amid a more uncertain future. All academic librarians will need to keep up with changes in the information landscape. Subject specialist librarians in particular have

responsibilities to the literature and data of the disciplines, and boundaries are blurring. The academic library community must clarify expectations for those coming into the profession.

Interdisciplinarity is creating further opportunity for librarian teamwork and learning. Creating research guides, building collections or answering reference questions may require an expanded focus on teamwork as the disciplines merge. As digital humanities create new opportunities for scholarship and text mining, the focus on a print heavy collection will continue to lessen. Science librarianship may have a new focus on data but will not be the only area focused on open access, as humanities collections and services also find opportunity. Flexibility will be a key attribute required of librarians. As librarians work with others in the institution on data management or new knowledge creation, teamwork with repository managers, copyright specialists, and even publishers will be required. Support for open access can evolve into a support for openness and collaboration but will require leadership by both institutions and individual librarians in many areas, including public services and collection development. The open access conversation cannot remain a peripheral one but must extend throughout the library.

## **Conclusion**

A positive role for the academic librarian requires more than having a vision and articulating a position. Librarians have extensive skill sets often developed over many years. Librarians may not believe that “scholarly communication” or “open access” has much relevance to their busy roles in the library. Librarians may be becoming fatigued with the rhetoric of the open access movement without clear direction on how to change how everything is done every day in the library. Practical information may be lacking. Open access had not saved most libraries money, or delivered them from the “serials crisis.” After many years of promotion, many libraries have not seen repositories fill with articles; green open access has not taken off where it has been voluntary. Librarians want to promote open access, but may not be sure what that means in practice. Open access terminology may cause confusion. Academic librarians look to scholarly communication committees and library organizations to provide information that may assist them in promoting the agenda in the academy. Library education programs may not be preparing new library professionals with the background to effect change in the library of the future. It may be difficult to identify the library leaders that will help transform existing systems. For all of the emphasis on open access, there may not be much actual change in the library. Further research, collaboration, and discussion are needed for libraries to truly realize the potential of the open access movement to transform the academic library’s everyday practices to the benefit of all.

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