Open access policies on scholarly publishing in the university context

By A. Christie Hurrell.

The Information Policy Committee and students at the School of Library, Archival and Information Studies, The iSchool at The University of British Columbia have partnered to provide a valuable resource to information professionals.

The BCLA Browser and the IPC are pleased to feature work researched and written by students participating in the iSchool's Information Policy course. The students created entries on a variety of current information policy issues for posting on a private class wiki. Students then had the opportunity to have their complete entries posted on the IPC blog and synopses published in the BCLA Browser.

Read Christie's full article here.

Open Access Policies

Open access (OA) policies set guidelines for authors to make their published, peer-reviewed scholarly writings freely accessible online. This article provides a brief summary of how OA policies have developed, and outlines the ways in which librarians, researchers, and publishers have responded to them.

OA offers libraries a way to provide access to scholarly output without the expense and complexity characteristic of many current journal licensing agreements (Swan and Chan 2009). Voluntary OA policies encourage or suggest that authors make their work OA, while mandatory ones require it. Currently, Concordia University is the only Canadian university to have an OA mandate, while other Canadian institutions have adopted voluntary policies, or mandates at the faculty or department level ("About the Repository - ROARMAP" n.d.). A number of Canadian funding agencies, especially those involved in funding health and/or development research, have also been active in developing OA mandates (E-prints n.d.).

University libraries have been active in developing and supporting infrastructure that promotes OA in three primary areas:
- Developing, maintaining, and promoting institutional repositories (IRs), web-based portals designed to collect, organize and archive scholarly materials (Canadian Association of Research Libraries 2012a).
- Offering OA publishing services for journals or manuscripts (Hahn 2008).
- Providing OA authors' funds, which provide subsidies for authors wishing to publish in OA journals that charge a publishing fee (Fernandez and Nariani 2011).

Stakeholder responses to OA

Library associations in North America are also active in OA initiatives, through the development of position statements and the maintenance of web-based resources on OA (Association of College and Research Libraries 2009; Canadian Association of Research Libraries 2012b; Canadian Library Association 2008; Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition 2009).

There is conflicting evidence about the behavior of academic authors with regards to OA policies. Some studies show that researchers are generally supportive of OA mandates, both in theory and in practice (Sale 2006; Swan and Brown 2005). Other studies show no solid evidence that OA mandates actually increase faculty awareness of self-archiving practices (Morris and Thorn 2009). Additionally, some have questioned the value of OA mandates, arguing that they may undermine peer review, or interfere with current tenure and promotion practices (Harley 2007; McMullan 2008). An OA mandate is not enough to transform the complex system of scholarly publishing, which is deeply tied to academic cultures and reward systems (Xia et al. 2012).

Traditional publishers vary in their responses to university OA policies. The SHERPA-RoMEO database provides information on the policies of various journals with regards to self-archiving (University of Nottingham 2011). Some commercial publishers have been active in anti-OA advocacy, although they have directed most of their energy towards OA policies of large research funders, not individual institutions (Association of American Publishers 2012; Howard 2012; Poynder 2012).

Conclusion

The OA movement has been gaining momentum for a number of years, and many resources now exist to assist librarians in developing or supporting OA initiatives at their institutions. Because OA is a complex issue, librarians are advised to develop new initiatives based on the research evidence and on an understanding of the culture at their institution (Baker 2010).

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