

Open Access Resources

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SURVEY RESULTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Faced with ever-increasing journal subscription costs and declining library collections budgets, libraries are expanding their collections by making open access (OA) research literature available through their catalogs, Web sites, open URL resolvers, and other resources. While not free to produce, as defined by the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) this literature is made freely accessible to users by removing price and permission barriers.

The purpose of this survey was to gather information on whether and how ARL member libraries are selecting, providing access to, cataloging, hosting, tracking usage of, and promoting the use of open access research literature for their patrons by using established library resources such as the OPAC and link resolvers. It was hoped the survey results would provide valuable information for those libraries interested in incorporating OA content into their collections.

The survey was sent to the 123 ARL member libraries in March 2007. Seventy-one responses were received by the deadline, a return rate of 58%. All but one of the survey respondents provide access to OA resources. These 70 libraries represent 57% of the ARL membership. The results indicate that although many of the ARL member libraries have embraced a wide range of OA literature and have fully integrated it into their selection, acquisition, cataloging, and promotion processes, others have been less active in this area.

Linking and Hosting

The survey asked to which kinds of open access resources the library provides links for users. Sixty-nine respondents (97%) provide links to journals, the category most commonly associated with the open access movement. Sixty-two (87%) provide links to government documents, literature that is typically available without charge. A majority provides access to monographs or theses / dissertations (80%), followed by conference papers / proceedings or technical reports (62%). A little more than a third provide access to legal documents. While the BOAI definition of open access literature primarily encompasses journal articles, respondents to this survey apparently use a broader definition. Forty-one percent link to OA resources that include digitized photos, maps, and other images, video and audio files, statistical and geospatial data, and other resources that are not scholarly writing. This is not unexpected, as these all belong to the broader class of freely available electronic resources. Fifty-two of the responding libraries (74%) host OA resources on their own servers.

Libraries are using multiple channels to provide links to OA resources. Survey respondents commonly provide access to locally hosted OA resources of all types through OPAC records (82%), Web pages (70%), and institutional repositories (56%). For journal articles, they also use open URL resolvers, a third-party title list or portal such as Serials Solutions or EBSCO, and electronic resource

management systems. For externally hosted titles, they most often use OPAC records (94%), open URL resolvers (79%), Web pages, (73%), or a third-party title list or portal (67%). As one respondent explained, they use “all the same channels as non-OA resources.”

The survey asked for an approximate number of OA titles linked to. Many respondents noted the difficulty or impossibility of providing counts of titles by specific categories. However, from those who attempted an estimate, the three types of locally hosted resources with the highest median title counts were government documents (15,050 titles), theses and dissertations (493), and technical reports (170). The externally hosted resources with the highest median title counts were government documents (37,155), theses and dissertations (3,500), journals (3,102), and legal documents (2,000).

Selection and Financial Support

Most of the responding libraries (84%) do not have collection development policies that specifically address criteria for selecting externally hosted OA resources, though several libraries report that collection development policies are undergoing revision and there are plans or desires to address OA resources in their policies. Typically, the selection criteria (79%) and the selectors (91%) for externally hosted OA resources are the same as for other electronic resources. Some libraries provide access to all titles in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) rather than making title-level decisions.

Because they are usually not supported by subscription fees, many open access journals get their funding through fees paid by authors or their institutions. These author fees are often paid by libraries at the author’s institution. The majority of responding libraries (68%) provide financial support for externally hosted OA journals, either directly or through a consortium. Many contribute to BioMed Central, Public Library of Science (PLOS), and the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, among others. Only a few (36%) provide financial support

for internally hosted OA journals. Although some don’t provide direct financial support for these resources, they do provide staff time and support for processing.

Cataloging

For externally hosted OA resources, the most popular methods of obtaining catalog records are downloading records from OCLC (86%), creating original, full records in the library (69%), and acquiring records from another third party such as Serials Solutions (56%). About a third also create original, brief records or acquire them from other libraries such as consortial partners. Catalog records for locally hosted OA resources are most commonly obtained by creating original, full records (87%), creating original, brief records (56%), and downloading records from OCLC (42%). Other methods of obtaining descriptive data for both locally and externally hosted OA resources include the automated harvesting of XML metadata, records created by the authors, brief records created by an electronic resource management system, and records provided by the publishers. In all but three of the responding libraries (95%), the staff who create catalog records for OA resources are the same staff who create records for other electronic resources.

Although two libraries report spending 100 to 120 hours per month cataloging OA resources, most spend fewer than 20 hours per month. Others don’t track the time. Several respondents pointed out that cataloging of OA material was a very minor portion of cataloging work, perhaps less than 1% of total time spent on cataloging. Others emphasized that they did not treat the cataloging of OA resources differently than non-OA resources—catalogers simply integrate work with these material into their usual workload. In many libraries, both professional catalogers and support staff create catalog records. Most of the libraries (89%) that create original records for OA resources contribute them to OCLC. Of the libraries that include links to OA resources in the OPAC, 40% identify these

records by some kind of field or tag. These fields include source of acquisition (039), electronic location and access (856), notes, and added entries for title (730, 793), series (including locally created series statements) and author (usually corporate), as well as indications in holdings records. Host item entry (773) was used by at least one library to identify open access resources.

Link Maintenance and Usage Tracking

As with other electronic resources, records for OA resources require ongoing maintenance. URLs in catalog records, Web sites, and other tools quietly become outdated every day. Almost all of the libraries (90%) respond to reports from users of problems with links and many (64%) rely on a data provider (such as Serials Solutions) for link checking. Some libraries (33%) use third-party software or scripts for link checking, while others (21%) use locally developed solutions. A few use manual checking, ILS link checking software or some other method. Routine link checking is not always the practice; 19 respondents (28%) report that they don't systematically monitor or maintain links locally.

Respondents use link checking software from integrated library system vendors such as Innovative Interfaces and Endeavor (5 libraries), OCLC PURL link checker software (3), Xenu (3), LinkBot (2), JTurl (1), and LinkScan (1).

Many respondents noted that the URLs of OA resources are less stable than those of subscription resources and that OA resources sometimes change from free to paid or simply disappear. OA resources can take longer than subscription resources to resolve access problems and may be down more frequently than purchased resources. However, non-OA resources also require their share of link maintenance.

Libraries can spend a great deal of time tracking the use of resources that they purchase. Many are also interested in the return on the investment they make to select, process, and promote OA resources. Slightly fewer than half of the respondents (46%)

track the usage of internally hosted OA resources; a little more than half (55%) track usage of externally hosted OA resources. For locally hosted resources, usage data is provided by repository software and server logs. For other OA resources, usage data is acquired from open URL resolvers such as SFX from Serials Solutions, and from other sources.

Promotion

While 75% of the survey respondents report that they don't promote OA resources differently than other resources, they still actively alert library users to the availability of OA resources and help staff and users understand what they are. In addition to simply listing OA resources in library catalogs, many include OA resources in pathfinders or subject guides (79%). Others discuss OA resources during instruction sessions (54%) or in newsletter articles (48%), promote them using library Web pages (46%), discuss them during the reference interview (45%), and send e-mail alerts about newly available OA resources (36%). Other methods include campus forums and contacting faculty by means of flyers, meetings, etc. One respondent commented that they must promote OA resources more than traditional resources because they are relatively new. On the other hand, several respondents said they promote paid resources more than OA resources; OA resources have a lower priority in general and libraries have a hard enough time getting patrons to use paid resources.

Conclusion

Almost all of the ARL member libraries that responded to this survey provide access to open access literature, linking to externally hosted content and hosting OA content on their servers. Many of their institutions have made formal statements in support of open access efforts and the majority of these libraries provide financial support for external OA resources by paying author fees, etc. Some provide financial support for locally hosted content that is in addition to hosting and staff time.

From selection to promotion, the libraries' processes for OA resources are largely the same as for other library materials. Often, collection development policies do not address OA literature specifically, though a few respondents plan to update their policies to do so. In most libraries the selectors and the selection criteria are the same as for other materials, especially other electronic resources.

Cataloging methods and staff are also largely the same for OA resources as for other electronic resources. Most of the responding libraries download OCLC records, create original, full catalog records, or acquire records from Serials Solutions or other third parties. Some, however, harvest XML metadata to create catalog records, or use records created by publishers, authors, or local electronic management systems. Typically, they use a MARC field to identify these resources as open access. For link checking, many libraries rely on a data provider such as Serials Solutions, but some use third-party or locally developed software.

In addition to providing links to a variety of externally hosted OA resources, the responding libraries also host a wide range of OA resources on their own servers. These resources include digital collections and archives, pre-publication material, lectures, primary source material, finding aids, theses and dissertations, grey literature, Web sites, and databases, as well as journals. As with print collections, the libraries provide storage, access, and maintenance for these local digital collections.

The most common place to list OA resources is the library's primary finding aid, the OPAC. They also can be found along with other electronic resources on Web pages, in open URL resolvers, and

in other third-party title lists or portals. Of course, locally hosted resources are often found directly by searching institutional repositories.

While most libraries promote OA resources in the same ways as other resources, many of the responding libraries are actively educating faculty and students about open access and other issues in scholarly communication and make a point of introducing this relatively new type of resource through Web sites, newsletters, campus forums, flyers, and blogs. Efforts are made to provide introductory material on open access as well as portals for further research participation or utilization of open access materials. Some institutions also include detailed information on their Web sites about journals' author fees and any institutional support or discounts available for authors who publish in open access journals.

While OA titles are fully integrated into many libraries' procedures for selection, processing, and promotion, and typically are treated no differently than any other material, in a few libraries, time constraints prevent them from assigning a significant priority to OA resources; instead they focus on their purchased resources.

Regardless of whether they choose to distinguish between open access and traditional, subscription-supported resources when selecting, processing, and promoting materials, ARL member libraries have embraced open access resources and integrated them into their existing workflows. Providing access to these resources lends support to the open access movement and serves students, faculty, and staff by connecting them to an important body of high quality scholarly output.