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Librarian Publishing Preferences and Open-Access Electronic Journals

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Abstract

Librarians have often led the way in championing Open-Access (OA) journals on the Internet as an alternative to established journal titles that are subscription based. In the discipline of Library and Information Science, all types of journals continue to be published—paper and electronic, subscription-based and free. Using a survey, this article explores how some librarians view OA titles. The article collects suggestions for editors of OA journals. The article also asks questions about the relationship of OA journals to the promotion and tenure process for academic librarians.

Background

While recently reviewing journal titles, I became interested in the fact that many of them still existed in paper format in my own discipline of Library and Information Science. As an advocate for OA journals, I wondered why so many librarians continued publishing in a traditional print venue. Discussion has recently surfaced about Open-Access (OA) journals and citation analysis,¹ but there has not been much research on OA journals. Open-Access journals can be defined as serial titles that are freely accessible on the Internet or are not subscription based. Many OA titles include standard serial features such as an editorial board, a blind review process, volume and numbering regularities, an ISSN, and indexing in tools such as LUMINA.

Survey Rationale and Design

I began with the premise that the most appropriate participants in an OA survey would be librarians/information professionals who were already published authors. I wanted to know why someone had published in a particular venue, not why “in theory” one might or might not publish in an OA journal. In May 2006, the survey’s web link was

mail to authors who had published within the last year in an established library journal still available in print format. These publications are all indexed, and the majority of them are refereed. Author names and email addresses were gathered from these publications: *Library Trends*, *College & Research Libraries*, *College & Research Library News*, *Library Hi Tech*, *Library Technology Reports*, *Library Administration & Management*, *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, *Government Information Quarterly*, and *Journal of Academic Librarianship*.

One hundred surveys were e-mailed to individualized groupings of authors, with the expectation that the survey would not be dismissed as junk mail if the subject line were specific, such as *Subject: Library Hi Tech authors*. Additionally, participants were guaranteed anonymity, since their responses would go to a third party's collection box housed at SurveyMonkey.com, the software tool used to compile and conduct this survey.

The Survey

Recognizing the limitations of e-mail surveys,² it was limited to six questions. Because of the large sample (one hundred participants) and geographic constraints, it was not possible to conduct face-to-face personal interviews. The survey incorporated both quantitative and qualitative questions, with several opportunities for open-ended comments by participants.

Web-based survey:

Publishing preferences Survey

[Exit this survey >>](#)

When publishing, what is most important to you?

1. **From this list, please select the one factor you would consider the most important to you when selecting a journal to publish your article. Later in the survey you will have an opportunity to rank all these factors.**
 - Relevance of the journal to my article's subject matter
 - Prestige of the journal
 - Open Access journal available for free on the Internet
 - A refereed /peer-reviewed journal
 - Ease of submission and contract fairness
 - Most widely read in my area of specialization
 - Indexed
 - Other (please specify)

2. **Have you ever considered publishing in an Open-Access journal that is freely available on the Internet?**
 - Yes
 - No, and please comment
3. **Have you published in an Open-Access journal?**
 - Yes
 - No
4. **What do you think of this statement: "Usually I do not publish in free electronic journals because they are viewed by myself or by my institution as 'lesser' than established journals titles."**
 - True
 - False
 - Uncertain, and please comment
5. **What would need to change before you would consider publishing in an Open-Access journal?**
6. **Please rate each of these items when selecting a journal to publish your article.**

	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Relevance of journal to my article's topic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prestige of the journal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Free/Open-Access on the Internet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Refereed/Peer reviewed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ease of submission and contract fairness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Most widely read in my area of expertise	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Indexed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Survey Results

Because of the anonymity of responses, it was not possible to send reminders and encourage non-respondents. After two weeks, the survey was closed. By most measures, the return rate was very high, at sixty percent.

Of the one hundred authors polled, eighty-eight turned out to be academic librarians. This was determined from the position titles of the authors and their email address extensions. Although not planned as an academic librarian survey, the survey results are indicative of those employed in academe. Academic issues were particularly noticeable in the open-ended comments.

For **Question 1**, which listed the factors most important when selecting a journal, most (forty percent) favored “*Relevance of the journal to my article’s subject matter,*” while twenty-two percent registered as their top choice, “*A refereed/peer reviewed journal.*” All other options in the first question fell short of these top two choices.

For **Question 2**, “*Have you ever considered publishing in an Open-Access journal?*” eighty percent said yes; and for **Question 3**, forty-two percent of the authors indicated that they had already published in an OA journal.

The responses to **Question 4**, “*Usually I do not publish in free electronic journals because they are viewed by me or by my institution as ‘lesser’ than established journal titles*” are quite interesting. Nineteen percent believed that statement was true, and thirty-three percent were uncertain about it. These established authors had already stated that they were in favor of publishing in Open-Access titles (eighty percent). Yet, only forty-eight percent denied the statement that free titles were somehow “lesser.”

Question 5 solicited ideas for “*What would need to change before you would consider publishing in an Open-Access journal.*” The vast majority took time to answer this question.³ Many authors responded that nothing needed to change. Of those that thought change was needed, their answers can be grouped into three broad categories:

- The Quality Argument: “Has to be peer reviewed,” “rigorous, with editorial control,” “double-blind refereed,” “great reputation,” “permanence,” “on par with the print,” “indexed,” or “legitimacy.”
- The Development Argument: “Needs to develop,” “has to cover specialized topics,” “more journal title options,” “more information about the journal,” or “more marketing on topics they are willing to cover.”
- The University Tenure Argument: “Needs buy-in from the institution,” “perceptions in higher education,” “would that such a venue would be equally acceptable in education,” or the generic “institutional attitudes.”

All comments follow, although some are edited to preserve the author’s identity.

What would need to change before you would consider publishing in an Open-Access journal?

1. As above, it would need to be peer reviewed, and also indexed in the major indices.
2. Nothing. I have already published in such e-journals
3. There needs to be a open access journal relevant to my specialization.
4. Acceptance of them on the same level as print journals. Which is coming in time.
5. I already would consider this.
6. Nothing would need to change for me -- open access is the only way to go for genuine scholarship. The etymology of the word publish is "to make public." The tradition of publishing in closed venues that institutions have encouraged up to this point is a non-sequitur on a large scale.
7. I already do
8. I would need to find one or more open access journals that are relevant to me. I haven't looked for any, so I suppose I would also need to have a look.
9. It has to be peer reviewed, and better to be indexed in ISI.
10. They would have to be considered "quality" publication outlets by colleagues.
11. Researchers in my field seem to (now) accept open access as long as there is some level of peer review.
12. It just hasn't come up yet. I will no doubt do this - its big in my library system.
13. unknown
14. Nothing really - I've been remiss in not seeking out more opportunities. There is a call out right now for an OA journal issue that a colleague and I are going to pursue.
15. I've agreed to write one more. . . [some text deleted] and after that, I will no longer publish in Haworth, Elsevier, or Emerald publications, just to name a few. Instead, I intend to publish only in peer-reviewed, open access publications.
16. I don't have anything against publishing in an open-access journal---I just haven't written an article (yet!) that would be a good fit for the ones that I am familiar with.
17. Rigorous and well recognized peer-review, quality content and editorial control.
18. More detailed information about the journal.
19. Higher education's perception
20. The academic culture's value system. More importance needs to be given to the influence factor so that those actually contributing something worthwhile in their writing rather than "place" of publication is highly valued. "Worthwhile" might be defined in terms of influence upon practice, future research, clarity of

thinking about issues/problems, originality, creativity, ability to synthesize and summarize in meaningful ways.

21. I would have to find out if such a venue would be equally acceptable toward tenure/promotion in my College.
22. They will have to be on the same par with the print which may or may not happen. To be totally honest, I prefer the print.
23. Awareness within the profession of the legitimacy of open access journals as vetted and credible publications
24. Not many in my field-hoping that will change soon to rival the acceptance in fields of science
25. A double-blind peer review process. Well known and respected in the field
26. More overall buy-in from institution perhaps. Although I have already considered it.
27. Different standards for tenure and review
28. As long as the Open-Access journal is one with a great reputation I would consider it
29. Would have to be accepted as peer-reviewed or refereed, be indexed.
30. More marketing on topics they are willing to cover, covering specialized topics as well as the general ones or IT stuff.
31. public perception and institutional attitudes
32. I think this is more critical outside the library world-- such as in the Science world, where they need the prestige for tenure
33. I have published in one, so this is N/A
34. They need to be widely read and accepted by colleagues as a legitimate venue for publishing.
35. Change in mind-set about how academic institutions view these in relation to peer-review print journals. Print is still a "permanent record" whereas e-access might vanish.
36. Depends on the readership of Open-Access journal
37. N/A
38. I have published in an Open-Access journal. I think the scholarly community will need to accept these Open-Access journals as prestigious and legitimate venues for scholarly communication.
39. Open Access journals would have to individually develop the prestige of paper titles. It's absolutely possible but it's not here today
40. Better understanding of permanent nature of open-access journals
41. I need to be confident that it is peer-reviewed.
42. Not a thing...
43. more journal title options.

Question 6 concludes with a rating of items when considering a journal for publication. As with Question 1, the most important factor is the relevance of the journal to the author's topic. However, despite their overall support for OA titles, forty-one percent of those surveys thought that OA free access on the Internet was not important. Complete quantitative results follow:

6. Please rate each of these items when selecting a journal to publish your article.

	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important	Response Total
Relevance of journal to my article's topic	70% (37)	28% (15)	2% (1)	0% (0)	53
Prestige of the journal	22% (12)	48% (26)	24% (13)	6% (3)	54
Free/Open-Access on the Internet	7% (4)	28% (15)	24% (13)	41% (22)	54
Refereed/Peer reviewed	56% (30)	28% (15)	13% (7)	4% (2)	54
Ease of submission and contract fairness	13% (7)	48% (26)	30% (16)	9% (5)	54
Most widely read in my area of expertise	43% (23)	44% (24)	11% (6)	2% (1)	54
Indexed	24% (13)	46% (25)	19% (10)	11% (6)	54
Total Respondents					55
(skipped this question)					5

Conclusion

I was encouraged by the findings of this survey and by the support and openness displayed by the survey participants. On the other hand, as shown in Question 6 above, supporting OA journals through a conscious effort of publishing in them instead of an established, print title, is clearly not a priority with most authors.

Some further observations can be drawn from the Publishing Preferences Survey. It appears that editors of electronic OA journals are doing an overall good job, but more work still remains. The written comments indicate that OA titles are not yet on par with their paper/electronic subscription based counterparts. OA editors need to ensure that their journals are peer reviewed, indexed, and of general high quality. Permanence in and of itself can also lend credibility to the title. It also appears that librarians think that even if the journal is indexed and peer reviewed, the editors can do a better job of marketing the title so that more librarians are aware of this new venue for publishing.

For their part, librarians could routinely explore OA journals when seeking a publication venue. There seems to be a lot of interest percolating in the discipline. Moreover, in at least one comment, the percolation has boiled over. As one librarian wrote, "I've agreed to write one more...and after that, I will no longer publish in

Haworth, Elsevier, or Emerald publications, just to name a few. Instead, I intend to publish only in peer-reviewed, open-access publications.”

Librarians can also play an active part by engaging in a discussion with OA journal editors. If quality is a concern, that can be expressed to an editor. How many of us have told an editor of an OA journal that having articles peer-reviewed is of utmost importance? Other issues such as indexing and permanence would also be legitimate concerns to express to editors with hopefully a positive outcome.

For academic librarians, is it time to lead promotion and tenure discussions at universities to help open the door and legitimize OA publications? For librarians with tenure, those discussions of course can be more proactive. Most of us with tenure sit at some point on review committees and can educate others about electronic journals that have the same rigor as their print counterparts. In the normal course of reviewing or updating tenure documentation, one could also introduce specifics about quality, peer reviewed articles, no matter what the format or delivery mechanism.

Perhaps this would also be an opportunity for librarians to mentor junior librarians (especially new library faculty) in pointing out legitimate publication venues in the OA sphere, or at least in some combination with print publications for their dossiers. In some ways, only time will establish the permanence and legitimacy of these journals, but librarians are in a position to push the envelope.

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- [2] “Evaluation of digital libraries using snowball sampling.” *First Monday* 10 (May 2005). Retrieved May 22, 2006 from <http://www.firstmonday.org> shows a lower response rate and quality of responses with web or email surveys.
- [3] I would like to thank all the authors who participated in this survey and especially those that took the time to write comments. Thanks also to SurveyMonkey.com for their free software for surveys.

[Back to Contents](#)

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