



## INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

## International Open Access Week at Small to Medium U.S. Academic Libraries: The First Five Years



Paula C. Johnson\*

New Mexico State University Library, MSC 3475, PO Box 30006, Las Cruces, NM 88003-8006, USA

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## ABSTRACT

This research seeks to expand the body of knowledge surrounding International Open Access Week (OA Week) practices among small to medium-sized U.S. institutions, examining the rationales guiding these, and creating a baseline activity inventory which may be elaborated upon as open access continues to evolve and as OA Week matures beyond its fifth (2013) anniversary. An electronic survey with closed- and open-ended questions was used to collect data, which were analyzed for recurring themes. Of respondents whose campuses did observe OA Week, the most reported reason for doing so was related to supporting the library's educational outreach program; fewer respondents cited the library's philosophical commitment to open access. Lack of time was the most frequently given reason for OA Week non-participation, however around one quarter of non-participating respondents reported that they were unaware of OA Week, and another quarter reported that it did not figure in their strategic plan. The conditions that were found to best support celebrating OA Week included a grasp of the principles guiding OA on the part of at least one librarian, reinforced by: the educational mission of the library; adequate personnel; and sufficient time for planning. This exploratory study yields points for library- and self-assessment.

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## INTRODUCTION

The global push for “free and unrestricted online availability” of scholarly research outputs first coalesced during the Open Society Conference at Budapest in December 2001. There, attendees from various disciplines developed the Budapest Open Access Initiative, which continues to garner signatures. In the words of the initiative, “we invite governments, universities, libraries, journal editors, publishers, foundations, learned societies, professional associations, and individual scholars who share our vision to join us in the task of removing the barriers to open access and building a future in which research and education in every part of the world are that much more free to flourish” (Chan et al., 2002). Six years later (Oct. 14, 2008), the movement had gained such impetus that the first international Open Access Day was commemorated, sponsored by SPARC (Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition), the Public Library of Science (PLOS), and Students for Free Culture. At that time, Heather Joseph (Executive Director of SPARC) said, “The momentum behind Open Access to research has been accelerating ... Open Access Day will provide a perfect way for folks to come together, consider, and celebrate the ramifications of the global shift we're experiencing” (McLennan, 2008). Librarians and student groups were urged to host

meetings around a live broadcast, that year featuring a Nobel Prize winner and the Founding Editor-in-Chief of PLoS Computational Biology.

The following year (2009), Open Access Day became Open Access Week, and ever since has been held during the last full week of October. 2009 also saw the launch of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Scholarly Communication Road Show, an annual initiative that sends expert trainers to five selected host college and university libraries to provide librarians with an overview of the scholarly communication system. This program is designed to motivate and facilitate individual librarians and their libraries toward developing strategic and action plans for transforming the landscape of this system.

The call for action on the part of college and university libraries to provide leadership on their campuses concerning scholarly communication/open access issues has only amplified with time. Open access is now embraced by groups such as EDUCAUSE, the American Library Association, and the Association of Research Libraries. The establishment of an Open Access Week placed this cause on the calendar alongside such celebrations as National Library Week (April) and Banned Books Week (September) — events now often incorporated into library programming. Using an email survey of academic librarians, this research explores the extent to which librarians at small to medium U.S. colleges and universities (enrollments from 2000 to 17,000) have actively engaged in organized and sanctioned activities to mark International Open Access Week during the first five years of its existence.

\* Tel.: +1 5756364008.

E-mail address: paulacj@nmsu.edu.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

## CELEBRATIONS OF OPEN ACCESS WEEK

In 2010, in an introduction to two articles written by participants in the first (2009) Open Access Week celebrations, Jennifer McLennan, then Director of Programs and Operations at SPARC said: "...Open Access Week has evolved into a truly global phenomenon thanks to the ongoing leadership of the library community. Not simply an awareness-raising exercise, librarians have made Open Access Week a platform for advancing policy changes on research sharing and dissemination, including institution-wide commitments to open access" (Jones, Waller, & McLennan, 2010, p. 21). It has been noted that hosting open access (OA) events highlights the significance of the issue on campus and is an important part of keeping academic libraries relevant (Jennings, 2013).

Limited literature exists that discusses the development and/or hosting of Open Access Week celebrations held at U.S. colleges and universities. 2009 Open Access Week activities at the University of Northern Colorado included a library display, handouts, a LibGuide, and a cross-campus faculty panel discussion on open access (Rathe, Chaudhuri, & Highby, 2010). Ohio State University's 2009 OA Week program also featured a faculty panel discussion, bringing together those who edit or publish in open access journals with representatives from commercial and society journal publishers (Gilliland, 2010). Duke University's 2010 OA Week included a faculty panel very much like the one at OSU (Cryer & Collins, 2011), while their 2009 Open Access Week program targeted graduate students via a mandatory Responsible Research Conduct course. This course included an overview by the Library's scholarly communications officer of the pros and cons of publishing in open access venues.

Within the context of discussing Florida State University's scholarly communication program, Vandegrift and Colvin (2012) mention FSU's 2010 and 2011 Open Access Week events, noting that "specific outreach programs like Open Access Week provide another opportunity to share information about scholarly communication topics and about the university's initiatives" (p. 388). Florida State University's 2013 OA Week programming was redesigned based on feedback from previous years: moving away from panel discussions, FSU elected instead to create events targeting specific user groups (Vandegrift, Bolick, & Rose, 2013). A faculty-focused event was a digital repository article upload-a-thon, and the student event involved asking students to endorse the Right to Research Coalition's "The Student Statement on the Right to Research" (Right to Research Coalition, 2010). FSU took particular aim at undergraduate students, a group they believed has been overlooked in OA programming.

The challenge associated with initiating a limited-time event such as Open Access Week in order to discuss the manifold issues embedded in open access and the scholarly communications system has also been documented in the scholarly literature. Wright (2013) discussed the yearlong program offered at Furman University Libraries that covered evolving scholarly communication models and practices, geared toward both librarian professional development and outreach to the greater campus community. She identified the value of a lengthier OA discussion: "by holding the events throughout the year, we would capitalize on both the start of the academic year and Open Access Week while extending the conversations above and beyond those few days" (p. 3). In an ACRL conference poster titled, "If You Build It, Will They Come? Hard-won Lessons from 3 Years of Open Access Week Events," Fernandez and Radom (2013) discussed 2010–2012 OA events held at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. They included their focus, audience, and promotion methods, as well as specific challenges and successes. Among their future plans: "We will advocate for OA Week events that are part of larger year-long strategy."

## ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS' INVOLVEMENT WITH OPEN ACCESS

While surveys have been conducted to assess librarians' attitudes and roles vis à vis open access, the closest inventory of the type undertaken here was a Fall 2012 study conducted by the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL). The ASERL surveyed 37 member libraries to learn the type and degree of their engagement with open access activities generally, including Open Access Week (Fruin, 2013). Most of the ASERL libraries (26) were involved with a broad range of OA advocacy activities (e.g., putting OA titles in the OPAC and providing direct support to the Directory of Open Access Journals). Twenty-three member libraries had celebrated Open Access Week, and four were developing plans to do so. Additionally, half of these libraries incorporated scholarly communications or open access advocacy into their liaison/reference librarian work responsibilities.

Since the beginning of the drive toward greater open access of scholarly products, there has been a connection between OA advocacy and academic librarians. OA exists as a movement and as a practical means for sharing scholarship: it encompasses both the political/philosophical issue of unfettered access to scholarly research, and also the pragmatic issue of affordability. In an interview with Richard Poynder, Peter Suber, sometimes called the father of the OA movement, called librarians "some of OA's best friends" (Poynder, 2011). Suber credits librarians with greatly contributing to the advancement of OA, and notes that their support derives from both the accessibility and affordability perspectives. Poynder himself said, "On average, [librarians] understand [OA] issues better than any other stakeholder group, including researchers, administrators, publishers, funders, and policymakers" (Poynder, 2011).

As mentioned previously, ACRL began offering intensive training in scholarly communication topics to selected academic librarians and libraries on an annual basis during International Open Access Week's inaugural year: these train-the-trainer workshops include a module on OA. The Scholarly Communication Road Show is intended to empower participants to serve as a catalyst for change in the areas of scholarly communication and OA within their home institutions. While data are not available, anecdotal evidence suggests that the Road Show has led directly to some of its participants to initiate outreach educational programming on OA – e.g., Open Access Week celebrations – at their institutions (Vandegrift & Colvin, 2012).

During the Road Show workshop, participating librarians establish their personal and professional ethics concerning OA issues. Possessing a comfortable comprehension and thoughtful, informed opinions regarding OA enables librarians to fulfill the educator and advocate roles they may be called upon to perform on their campuses. Without a framework like the Road Show, librarians may struggle to develop knowledge and perspective on OA issues. One recent lecture concerning OA was entitled "Is a Rational Discussion of Open Access Possible?" (Anderson, 2014), and this gives an indication of the polarization and diversity of opinions that can be found on this topic within the academic press, and on scholarly communication blogs and listservs. Potvin (2013) observed that OA work can be "mission- or values-driven" (p. 69). She goes on to say "A notable impediment to ... determining and developing competencies for future roles related to OA is academic libraries' collective uncertainty around what libraries' roles are – or will be – in shaping [scholarly communication] generally and responding to OA in particular" (p. 70). Some years prior to this assessment, Palmer, Dill, and Christie (2009) conducted a national survey of academic librarians on their opinions of open access. They discovered that a majority of those surveyed were supportive of OA's basic principles and believed that these were related to their work as librarians. The traditional librarian activities of user education (but around OA) and helping users locate items (in this instance, OA materials) were the OA activities garnering the highest levels of support. A key finding of the Palmer et al. study, however, was that there was "discrepancy between stated support of library involvement in open access initiatives and significantly lacking

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