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## Faculty Members Who Teach Online: A Phenomenographic Typology of Open Access Experiences

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## ABSTRACT

The open access (OA) movement today incorporates a number of different threads reflecting disagreement among information professionals, publishers, institutions and advocates about how OA is defined and facilitated. It is unclear in this environment how faculty members involved in teaching and research construct understanding about open access and what range of understandings among this constituency may currently exist. This paper reports the results of a study using phenomenography to understand the open access experiences and perceptions of faculty members who teach online; a growing subgroup of faculty whose professional context positions themselves and their students differently in relation to subscription-based digital and print-based library collections and support than in a brick-and-mortar educational environment. Faculty members in this group experienced open access in five qualitatively distinctive ways: *as resources for teaching; as a publication channel; as a social justice movement; as open source, and as 'free for me'*. These findings have implications for outreach and communication efforts for university libraries and higher education administrators, and offer insights into the concerns and challenges faced by faculty members while engaging with open access materials.

## Introduction

Open access (OA) publishing is an increasingly popular model for communicating the products of scholarship, with the number of open access articles published rising by 20% per year since 1993 by one estimate, as compared to just 3.5% annual growth for subscription-based articles. (Laakso et al., 2011). However, factions of the information profession continue to vie for dominance in defining exactly what open access means, includes and excludes, and what processes for open access publication and sharing are viable and remain true to the overall intentions and objectives of the original open access movement.

Information professionals, publishers, and OA advocates have variously argued that subgroups of open access with terms such as *green* or *gold* open access can be defined or should not be; that article processing charges (APCs) or *author-pays* publications are either a core feature of open access or anathema to it; and that open access refers strictly to peer-reviewed scholarly articles, or that it includes datasets or other types of scholarly output.

Many individuals in these communities also liaise with stakeholder groups such as university faculty members, and through their interactions create awareness among faculty members of contemporary trends

and issues in scholarly communications and often facilitate participation in the associated processes. It is likely that faculty members in many contexts are constructing understandings of open access and its advantages or limitations out of a somewhat mixed set of messages from colleagues, librarians, higher education administrators, textbook publishers and other sources, each of whom brings their own understandings to the situation out of these ongoing debates.

More universities and university libraries have initiated strategies to encourage faculty publication in open access outlets, with measures such as support for author publication fees, revisions to promotion and review processes and publication weighting, and even the adoption of faculty resolutions in support of the broad goals of open access. Despite this, various studies suggest that faculty member uptake of open access for research and teaching has been slow. Attempts to identify barriers to open access participation among faculty have yielded useful insight, but in some cases have also revealed what seem to be fundamental misunderstandings between faculty, librarians and administrators about open access and related concepts. For instance, Creaser et al. (2010) reports that some faculty member focus group participants who were otherwise well aware of open access concerns and goals, made no conceptual connection at all between open access and any kind of

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academic repository; a connection which might seem intuitive to some information professionals.

An essential question for information professionals in higher education then, is how exactly do faculty members perceive of and understand open access and its associated movements? What is the range of possible ways that a faculty member might think about open access when librarians or higher education administrators raise the topic? It is possible that in many cases, the interested parties are talking past each other entirely in conversation, outreach and professional communication efforts. A broader effort to uncover and communicate the perspectives of key constituencies on open access in the context of these debates is necessary to move the conversation forward.

To that end, this research seeks to identify and reveal the varying range of ways that a single subgroup of faculty, those who teach online, experience open access. This group merits study independent of faculty members at large for several reasons.

First, many of the higher educational organizational processes and characteristics known to influence open access behavior and perceptions among faculty members, such as promotion and tenure processes, are distinctive between online and brick-and-mortar educational models. In fact, differences in the information behaviors of faculty members and students attributed to online educational environments, as well as the types of services academic libraries have developed to support those behaviors, have yielded an entire subfield of library science dedicated to distance and online library services, with its own dedicated professional society chapters, journals, conferences and discussion lists. Differentiation of this group in this study follows precedent and logic.

Additionally, distance and online higher education enrollment has expanded in recent decades alongside traditional higher education enrollment to the extent that today, nearly 1 in 3 tertiary learners in the United States is enrolled in at least one online course (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016), a growth trend which will likely continue in the years to come. The perceptions and insights of faculty members who elect to work in online environments, who tend to be younger, more comfortable with educational technology and less satisfied with the status quo (Lloyd, Byrne, & McCoy, 2012), may lend insight into what could be considered the 'forefront' of perception on this phenomenon. The collective consciousness about a phenomenon like open access can shift over time, and it may be the case that the population of faculty members working in online higher education today can give a range of understandings which may become more prevalent in the future as their ranks increase.

We use phenomenography (Marton, 1981; Marton & Booth, 1997), a qualitative research approach focused on uncovering variation, to understand the range of perceptions and experiences faculty members in online education globally may exhibit with regard to open access materials. The findings include a set of five categorically different understandings with structured variations in how these faculty members define open access as well as how they perceive open access in different contexts, for instance in teaching versus in publishing.

While this study focuses on the experiences of faculty members engaged in online teaching and learning, the research also contributes to the knowledge base around faculty member experiences and perceptions of open access material and the open access movement more broadly. This understanding helps higher education administrators, publishers, and academic libraries in all kind of contexts to more accurately assess the views and understandings of their own constituents, and to identify appropriate communication and outreach strategies around open access programs and services.

## Literature review

A growing number of articles discuss faculty members' attitudes and behaviors towards open access, and as a whole they seem to demonstrate wide variation in perception and experience.

On the one hand, faculty member participants across a range of studies employing various methodologies have expressed uncertainty, lack of familiarity, confusion and apprehension about open access terminology, concepts and institutional services related to open access publication and archiving.

For instance, a survey of authors who submitted to medical journals found that prior to being provided with a definition, a 47% minority of authors reported they were familiar with the phrase *open access* and 38% reported that they were familiar with the term *author-pays publishing* (Schroter & Tite, 2006). Hahn and Wyatt (2014) found in their survey of 8600 business school faculty that 69% of respondents did not know if their institution had an institutional repository available to them. Creaser et al. (2010) found in focus groups on authors' attitudes toward open access repositories that some authors found the term *repository* confusing and had difficulty defining what kinds of material should go into a repository. Moreover, they found that having an awareness of open access in general did not necessarily correspond with awareness of what repositories are. Other studies suggest that barriers to self-archiving in repositories for scholars include copyright concerns, uncertainty over embargo periods, the time and technical skills needed, and concerns over tenure and promotion (Creaser et al., 2010; Davis & Connolly, 2007; Kim, 2010; Peekhaus & Proferes, 2015). In terms of copyright, these studies found that faculty members experience confusion over whether they have the right to share their work in an institutional or discipline repository.

On the other hand, large proportions of participants across existing studies also demonstrate keen awareness of and familiarity with open access, but vary in terms of how they view some of the associated limitations and advantages of open access for various stakeholders.

In terms of the advantages of open access, many faculty members perceive that these include allowing free access to information, but also more exposure of their own work and increased readership, potentially leading to increased citation counts on their own work (Creaser et al., 2010). Several articles have found that open access journals do get higher citation counts than non-open access journals, although this metric can vary between disciplines (Antelman, 2004; Norris, Oppenheim, & Rowland, 2008).

Many faculty members are also motivated to publish open access by the thought of providing benefits for other researchers who use self-archiving research content. Faculty members who appreciate the easy access to research and information want to reciprocate this benefit to others, and recognize an added advantage of helping researchers to find collaborators. Moreover, scholars hope that open access journals will speed up the publishing process (Kim, 2010; Xia, 2010).

In terms of limitations, Hahn and Wyatt (2014) report that the business faculty members in their study expected that publishing open access would not increase citation counts nor increase the impact of their work. This study, like others, suggests that tenure and promotion concerns are often linked with the perceived quality of open access journals, with many authors reporting that they perceive open access journals to be of lesser quality and unable to meet the requirements of tenure. Another study found that authors who do choose to publish in open access journals do so when reporting that the tenure and promotion process is not a concern or obstacle. Authors did consider the impact factor and reputation of the journal in order to make decisions about which open access journals to publish in (Nariani & Fernandez, 2012). In either case, tenure or promotion is clearly an influencing factor on the resulting faculty member experience, attitude and behavior towards open access. Schroter and Tite (2006) also found that considerations such as journal impact factor, audience and perceived prestige are more important to faculty members when making publishing decisions than the access features of the outlet.

In some cases, these factors may inhibit faculty members from participating in a scholarly process that they are otherwise positive about. For example, Davis and Connolly (2007) found that although some faculty members expressed a belief that open access provides

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