Open Access up for Review: Academic Attitudes towards Open Access Publishing in Relation to Tenure and Promotion
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Background and rationale
Our proposed study will investigate the knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs around Open Access (OA) publishing among academic faculty and administrators who sit on tenure and promotion committees. Scholarly publishing is currently undergoing significant changes, due to factors such as the new publishing opportunities afforded by web-based publishing, initiatives by funding agencies and institutions to increase access to research outputs, and the increasing financial pressures on scholarly presses (Bazerman et al., 2008; E-prints, n.d.). Thus, the pressure on (and in some cases, the requirements for) scholarly authors to make their outputs OA is increasing. However, for tenure track faculty, publishing is a key factor in the tenure and promotion process, which represents key measures of success in academic life (Kling & Callahan, 2005). If tenure and promotion committees do not recognize newer forms of scholarly outputs, including OA materials, as legitimate, then authors may be reluctant to explore these new options.

Open Access refers to digital, online scholarly articles that can be accessed without monetary costs to institutions or individuals. By removing
cost barriers like subscriptions and fees, as well as permission barriers like copyright and licensing restrictions, OA aims to make research results more accessible beyond the traditional realm of the academy. OA is generally described as following two major “roads”: the gold road, which involves publishing in an OA journal, and the green road, which involves self-archiving non-OA articles in OA repositories (Harnad et al., 2004). The movement towards increasing OA has been evolving since the late 1980s, when many libraries were forced to cancel a raft of journal subscriptions due to skyrocketing costs (Albert, 2006). Since then, a variety of actors within the scholarly publishing system (including authors, library advocacy groups, universities, funding agencies, and publishers) have been spearheading initiatives to digitize scholarly communications and make publishing less costly and more accessible (Albert, 2006). However, the changes in scholarly publishing have not been without conflict, and debate continues to exist around the definition of OA publishing, its key concepts, and its perceived strengths and weaknesses.

Some studies have suggested that non-traditional forms of scholarly communication are not well-received by tenure and promotion committees, perhaps because they are perceived as less legitimate, or because committee members tend to be senior scholars who may not be familiar with or knowledgeable about alternative means of scholarly communication (Anderson, Sack, Krauss, & O'Keefe, 2001; The University of California
Office of Scholarly Communication, Program, & Greenhouse Associates, Inc., 2007). The potential disconnect between change in the scholarly publishing world and stasis within academic committees could present significant problems for academics seeking promotion or tenure, and thus, the research community at large. However, very little recent research has specifically targeted members of tenure and promotion committees to assess their perceptions of “gold road” OA publishing, and so the extent of this potential problem is not well described. Most research studies focus on a range of issues, such as the quality of OA journals and their peer review process. When studies did target members of tenure and promotion committees specifically, they often focused on new modes of scholarly publication in general.

**Relevant Literature**

*Overview of studies and their findings*

Few studies have focused specifically on members of tenure and promotion committees, but findings seemed to be consistent across these articles. Harley et al. (2006) explored how academic value systems influence the publishing behaviour of faculty. They interviewed several faculty and steering committee members who were all directly involved with advancement cases. Even though the interview guide is not included in their article, it is clear that the authors investigated subjects’ opinions on online
publishing, cost issues and OA publishing, and the importance of the peer review process. They found that younger faculty members perceive online-only publishing as a threat to the tenure process. They feared that material thus published would be of lesser quality, and would therefore not weigh up to the tenure review. Faculty members in general feared that quality control would be absent in OA journals, that lower standards of scholarship would be used, and that there would be no peer review process. There is a perceived necessity of traditional publication methods for advancement and achieving tenure, and a fear that reviewers will not accept newer forms of publication. Surprisingly, even though this study took place in 2006, scholars seemed to have minimal, if any, understanding of OA models of publishing.

This unfamiliarity with new modes of publications and OA is a consistent theme in the literature, as seen for example in a study by Andersen and Trinkle (2004). They conducted a survey in 2000, to assess the degree to which products of digital scholarship are used in the tenure and promotion processes of history departments in the US. Among the chairs of history departments who responded to the questionnaire, there was considerable confusion as to the definition of e-journals, whether they were OA, and whether they were peer reviewed. The survey found that few departments have formal policies regarding non-traditional forms of scholarship. Nevertheless, mixed opinions were held about e-journals (36% said they were valued; 30% said they were not valued by the university).
Online publications and projects were seen as substandard to monographs, although younger faculty were more likely to view them in a positive light than older faculty.

In 1995, Cronin and Overfelt analyzed official tenure and promotion documents with a view of exposing variations in codified practice regarding the legitimacy of e-journals in the tenure and promotion process. They extracted key themes from a series of official university tenure and promotion guidelines, and found that the quality of publications is more important than quantity; the peer review process and the quality and status of a journal in which is published are very important; and the issue of e-scholarship was not yet addressed by most committees. Since this study took place in 1995 the term OA was not well developed, and no distinction is made between For Fee (FF) and OA e-journals. The findings from a study by Sweeney (2000) are consistent with Cronin and Overfelt’s results. In this study, the purpose was specifically to investigate the attitude of tenure and promotion committee members towards publication in electronic journals. Survey questions, which are included with the article, focused on whether formal guidelines existed regarding e-journals; whether faculty included e-journals in tenure and promotion dossiers, and how these publications were perceived; and what the general attitudes and perceptions regarding e-journals were. One of the results was that the primary evaluation critique for publications is their peer-review status and process, not the medium (print or online). Many
universities do not have specified policies regarding e-journals, but most respondents were of the opinion that e-journals should be weighed equally in the tenure and promotion process. Again, no specific distinction was made between OA publications and e-journals.

Several studies have focused on the attitudes of faculty and other academics towards a range of scholarly communication issues. The University of California Office of Scholarly Communication (2007) conducted a survey among faculty members from its campuses, to understand faculty perspectives and behaviour regarding scholarly communication issues. The survey included questions on the perceptions on the overall health of scholarly communication; the perspectives on the role of tenure and promotion processes; copyright; and alternative forms of publication and scholarship. The authors found that faculty generally conform to conventional scholarly communication behaviour for their discipline, and that the current tenure and promotion system impedes behaviour change. Faculty are not willing to “put themselves on the line” to foment change in scholarly publishing. This could be, partly, because they are unaware of many OA-related issues. While senior (tenured) faculty are more willing to take risks, there is a large gap between positive attitudes towards OA publishing and actually publishing in an OA journal. Subjects often had positive opinions on OA, but that did not mean that they were willing to publish their work in an OA journal.
Mann et al. (2009) have attempted to identify reasons for the existence of this gap between the appreciation and the use of OA, and publishing in OA journals. They investigated academics’ publishing behaviour and patterns; attitude towards OA; experience with and intent to publish in OA journals; expectation of citation rates; and expectation of the effect on tenure and promotion processes. One of the findings was that 61% of the respondents fear that OA might jeopardize their chances of tenure and promotion. One of the main reasons given for this is that the impact factors are seen as insufficient.

To determine why authors chose to publish in OA journals and to gain insight into disciplinary culture that might influence publishing practices, Coonin and Younce (2010) surveyed authors from OA journals in the field of education, who were asked questions about their perception of publishing practices within the discipline, and about their own publishing practices. Especially relevant to our study are the findings that 42% of the respondents were tenured, while 25.9% were on the tenure track. Peer reviewed journals were the most highly viewed publication type for the tenure and promotion process. While 49.4% of respondents thought that OA journals were not less prestigious than subscription-based journals, 31.8% saw them as less prestigious. However, 69.1% responded that publishing in OA journals would not adversely affect chances of promotion. The same authors performed a very similar study in 2009, where they investigated the reasons for
publishing in OA journals in the fields of business, psychology, women studies and music. Again, all respondents reported that publishing in a peer-reviewed journal was the most important consideration regarding tenure and promotion (Coonin & Younce, 2009).

Nowick (2008) compared the academic rank of authors who have published in OA or FF journals, to determine whether tenure status affected the authors’ decision of where to publish their scholarly articles. Nowick found that there was a small, but significant tendency for assistant professors (un-tenured) to publish in OA journals and for full professors (tenured) to publish in FF journals. Full professors did, however, make up the largest group of authors in both categories, so the results could be somewhat skewed because of that. The existence of a peer review process in any given journal was considered more important for tenure deliberations than whether the journal is OA. Nowick suggests that un-tenured faculty might publish in OA journals because it is easier to evaluate the impact of the published articles, but this conjecture seems to be based on an equation of OA journals with e-journals, which are not necessarily the same. It is indeed easier to trace citations for online published articles, than it is for print articles.

A valuable study that synthesizes many previous surveys is that undertaken by Xia (2010), in which he examined the changing pattern of scholars’ attitudes toward open-access journal publishing from the early 1990s. He made a time-series analysis of existing surveys on attitudes
towards OA, focusing on three main areas of interest: awareness of OA, action (whether one published in OA), and attitude towards OA. Specifically related to our subject of the relation between OA publishing and the tenure and promotion process, he found that scholars are afraid that their careers can be negatively affected if they regularly publish articles in OA journals. They believe that it can directly influence their chances of tenure and promotion. Concerns about this have fluctuated over the years, but no significant change can be observed in this analysis. Regrettably, because of the diversity of the surveys synthesized, Xia was not able to make a distinction between junior and senior scholars, nor could he include more than two of the scholars’ reasons for their attitudes towards OA publishing. The data therefore gives us little insight in the beliefs and attitudes of different levels of faculty.

Other studies that touch upon the question of the role of OA publishing in the tenure and promotion process include a survey undertaken by Swan and Brown (2004), in which one of the questions was whether publishing in OA journals adversely affected chances of appointment or promotion. Forty percent of OA authors thought this was important, versus 42% of non-OA authors. This suggests that respondents do not perceive publishing in OA journals to negatively affect tenure and promotion decisions, and that there is no difference in perceptions between OA and non-OA authors. Bazerman (2008) asked whether scholars who had published OA e-books in the
humanities had listed that publication on their CVs, if so, how, and whether they had received any tenure-review related feedback on it. All contributors had received tenure, and none received any, positive or negative, feedback on the book. A study by Kim (2010) shows that the ‘green-road’ of OA publishing (self-archiving), is most often believed to have little effect on the tenure and promotion process. This result seems to be mostly true, however, for articles that have been published in a FF journal previous to self-archiving.

The attitude towards online-only publications has been examined by Anderson et al., (2001), who found that authors perceive online-only publications as second-tier publishing, which is not as highly regarded as print publications by tenure and promotion committees. However, all authors who had applied for tenure included the online-only articles on their CVs, which did not seem to have a significant negative effect as long as their other publications were deemed acceptable.

Overview of methodologies used

The majority of studies included in this review have used surveys of various kinds to investigate knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs towards OA. The surveys range from formal questionnaires that sampled large numbers of researchers, to small, informal, and sometimes poorly described assessments of small populations.
One of the most relevant studies to our research question was also the largest: the University of California’s Office of Scholarly Communication (2007) received responses to their survey from 1,118 faculty members from all ten University of California campuses. Participants were randomly stratified from all academic ranks and departments. Within the 32-item, web-based survey instrument that addressed attitudes towards scholarly publishing, five questions specifically probed issues relating to OA publishing and its relationship to tenure and promotion processes. Two of these questions were in the form of Likert scales, and asked participants to agree/disagree or place a level of importance on a series of statements. The remaining three questions either asked participants to rank a series of questions by level of perceived importance, or to choose responses that were relevant to them from a pre-defined list. The study procedures are well-described by the authors, and the entire survey is available for other interested researchers to examine and assess. One of the strengths of this survey is that the designers explicitly defined potentially confusing terminology, such as “scholarly communication” and “open access.” When dealing with a complex and relatively novel concept such as OA, defining key terms is important to ensure that participants understand the questions and that their responses are valid.

A similar, although smaller and more focused study, surveyed 481 researchers from three different scientific disciplines in an attempt to
identify reasons for the gap between attitudes and practices towards OA publishing (Mann et al., 2009). The survey instrument is not well-described in the article, but was also delivered via the web, and used Likert scale questions to develop quantitative measures of faculty perspectives on whether OA publishing might jeopardize their chances of being successful at tenure or promotion. Two articles by Coonin and Younce (2009, 2010) also took the approach of surveying a specific academic discipline or disciplines. Both studies surveyed researchers publishing in OA journals: the earlier study focused on authors in business, psychology, women's studies, and music, while the second study focused on authors in education. Both studies used a quantitative web-based survey to determine why authors choose to publish in OA journals. The studies’ results are probably not generalizable to the entire academic community in these disciplines, since they only look at authors who have already published in an OA journal. However, they are valuable because they present clear quantitative data on perceptions of OA in relation to tenure and promotion, and they provide insight into the culture of researchers in the social sciences and humanities, which according to the authors may be “behind” disciplines such as medicine and science when it comes to uptake of OA. Bazerman et al. (2008) also focused on authors in the humanities: specifically, 21 authors who had contributed to an OA book. This article mostly consists of a reflection by a group of senior scholars on the process of publishing an OA book (the authors were the co-editors of the
book), but contains data gathered through an informal survey of contributors who had been up for promotion or tenure since the book was published. Only 5 of the 21 contributors fit into this category, and the survey is not well-described, making this study less useful from a methodological point of view.

Swan and Brown (2004) also used a web-based survey, developing two different questionnaires designed to assess authors’ perspectives on publishing in OA journals. One questionnaire was answered by 154 authors publishing in OA journals, while the other received responses from 157 authors from non-OA journals. Only one question in the survey specifically addressed tenure and promotion, and it suffers from slightly awkward wording. Participants were asked to respond, on a scale of “very important” to “not at all important,” to the following statement: “Publishing my work in OA journals may adversely affect my chances of appointment/promotion.” In this case, the response options do not seem to align well with the statement (a better scale might have been “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”), but the responses to this and other questions do seem to suggest that respondents interpreted it correctly.

Three articles included in this review used surveys containing both closed- and open-ended questions, and thus generated quantitative and qualitative data from participants. Sweeney (2000) surveyed 62 faculty members and administrators from the Florida State University system to assess their attitudes towards electronic publishing (the study does not
specifically focus on OA publishing). Sweeney’s web-based survey seems to have included open-ended text boxes after each question or set of questions, so that respondents could add qualitative responses as they felt necessary to elaborate upon, or qualify, their quantitative responses to the Likert scale questions. Interestingly, much of this qualitative data seems to contradict the quantitative findings. These apparent discrepancies may be due to the fact that many respondents were confused as to what constituted an e-journal, and thus did not interpret the questions correctly. Indeed, in his reporting of the qualitative findings, Sweeney notes that many respondents criticized the way his survey was constructed, and indicated that they were unsure of what was being asked of them (perhaps a hazard of surveying academics, but a valid criticism of his study nonetheless). Another study that garnered a mix of qualitative and quantitative data surveyed 66 chairs of history departments to ask them about their perception of technology-enabled scholarship (including e-journals) and its value in the tenure and promotion process (Andersen & Trinkle, 2004). Again, the qualitative responses do not always align with the quantitative data: for example, although four respondents stated that their institutions had formal policies for assessing technology-related activities in the tenure and promotion process, none of those respondents said that these policies related to teaching, service, or research, leaving the authors wondering whether respondents had interpreted the question correctly. Similar to Sweeney’s (2000) study,
respondents’ remarks in the qualitative sections of the survey revealed that they were often ignorant or confused with regards to definitions and attributes of electronic journals.

Using a somewhat different approach than the other survey-based studies in this review, Kim (2010) used a quantitative survey to gather data from 684 faculty members at Carnegie universities in the United States, and then followed this survey up with telephone interviews of a subset of 41 of these respondents. Kim’s study focuses specifically on self-archiving behaviour, so is not completely relevant to our research question, but does assess attitudes about tenure and promotion. Although survey respondents did not see positive effects of self-archiving with respect to tenure and promotion, seven interviewees did note positive effects. Again, this discrepancy between data gathered through quantitative and qualitative methods draws into question the validity of Kim’s results.

Harley et al. (2006) also used an interview methodology to explore academic perceptions of scholarly communication practices. Their findings, although limited to one campus community, generated rich data on the reasons why faculty may be reluctant to accept electronic publications as equivalent to traditional journal articles in the tenure and promotion process. Similar to the other qualitative data generated by articles included in this review, Harley’s study also revealed a lack of understanding among faculty as to the policies and procedures related to electronic and/or OA publishing.
These studies suggest that due to the high level of unfamiliarity that academics exhibit towards OA issues, qualitative research methods may provide a better means of assessing knowledge, attitudes, and practices towards OA. Quantitative questions may be misunderstood by many researchers, and thus result in invalid data.

A study by Anderson et al. (2001) interviewed 11 authors who had published in an online-only paediatrics journal, but also did bibliometric analysis of a larger set of articles (n=266) from the same journal. This study’s findings were interesting because although authors perceived their online-only articles were second tier publications when compared to print publications, some of the assumptions that the authors made (e.g. that online-only articles received less attention and citations) were proven incorrect through web statistics and citation analysis. This study’s design allowed for comparison of two types of data sources, and thus provides a unique insight into some of the ways in which academics might benefit from increased education about electronic journals.

Nowick’s (2008) study used a different style of bibliometric analysis to examine publishing practices among tenured and non-tenured faculty. The study examined 100 randomly-selected articles from 6 peer-reviewed journals, half of which were OA and half of which were traditional (FF) journals. The study found a small but significant tendency for full professors to publish in FF journals, and this correlation suggests that more senior
faculty (who are more likely to sit on tenure and review committees) may not be as aware of, or accepting of, OA journals.

The final study to examine the textual content of documents performed content analysis on 49 sets of tenure and promotion guidelines from various levels of US universities (Cronin & Overfelt, 1995). The sample included all levels of guidelines, from departmental documents to institution-wide documents. The authors solicited the guidelines from university deans and chairs, and some of these sent unsolicited comments to accompany the guideline documents. While none of the written documents explicitly referenced the admissibility of new forms of scholarly communication in the tenure and promotion process, some of the respondents did address this issue in their written comments. These results suggest that an engaging and comprehensive invitation to participate may have encouraged respondents to provide additional information. Of course, the accompanying proviso to this unexpected, yet welcome, data source is that only respondents with particularly strong feelings on the subject may have been prompted to make written comments, resulting in a biased sample.

**Conclusion**

This overview of past research into the attitudes towards OA publishing, and its role in the tenure and promotion process, has made it clear that additional research is necessary. No study has specifically
investigated the knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs around OA publishing among academic faculty and administrators who sit on tenure and promotion committees, and the effect that those attitudes might have on their judgements. Scholars and faculty in general are afraid that their careers will be negatively affected by publishing articles in OA journals, and that tenure review committees will not accept this newer form of publication. There is therefore a perceived necessity of publication in traditional media for advancement and achieving tenure. Perhaps surprisingly, many scholars have a limited understanding of OA models, and many assumptions are made. There is a fear of a lack of quality control, the presence of lower standards, and the absence of a peer review process. This perceived absence of a peer review process is seen as one of the most important problems with OA publishing, since many studies have shown that peer reviewed journals were the most highly valued publication type for tenure and promotion processes. The quality of a scholar’s publications is seen as being of higher importance than the quantity, and for this peer review is of the utmost importance.

Overall, OA publications are seen to have a slightly negative or neutral effect on one’s academic career. Only the study by Kim (2010) shows somewhat positive expectations of the effect of OA publications. Whether the outcomes of such publications are actually negative is often unclear, but in the few studies that have included, or that imply, the results of tenure
processes they seem to not have had an effect. Since no study has investigated this issue of OA publishing from the specific point of view of tenure and promotion committees, no definitive conclusions can yet be drawn. In addition, many of these studies are somewhat dated, especially considering the rapid pace of change within scholarly communications. It is possible that perceptions of OA publishing have changed recently, but research is needed to investigate this hypothesis.

Considering the methodologies that have been used in these studies, it has become clear that in order to gain access to scholars’ attitudes and beliefs we will need to use surveys with at least some open-ended questions, or interviews. Bibliometric analyses provide good quantitative data on patterns and trends, but cannot really assess motivations or perceptions. Of those studies that included both qualitative and quantitative questions, the data that was generated through these two methods often contradicted each other. Since it has been shown that a great deal of confusion exists regarding the exact definition of terms like OA or e-journals, it could be possible that respondents are not interpreting the quantitative questions as they are intended. This is a convincing argument for including a qualitative component to a survey or for using interviews, whether they are a follow-up to the survey, or a stand-alone methodology. For this reason, it will also be important to assume an overall low familiarity with the issues involved, and
to make our definition of OA publishing clearly known to participants in the study.

In summary, this literature review provides convincing evidence that an updated and focused investigation is needed into the knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs around OA publishing among academic faculty and administrators who sit on tenure and promotion committees. The conclusions that can be drawn from this literature suggest that un-tenured faculty currently occupy a difficult position with regards to their publishing choices: on the one hand, they are being pressured by funding agencies and/or economic realities to disseminate their work via OA means; on the other hand, they have legitimate fears about the acceptability of these outputs in the view of tenure and promotion committees. A study that specifically examines perceptions of OA among tenure and promotion committees has the potential to add valuable knowledge to the field of OA and scholarly publishing, knowledge that could assist in improving educational and outreach efforts. Much of the evidence presented in this review points to misconceptions about OA journals (e.g., that they are not peer reviewed). Our proposed research project has the potential to uncover more about the way OA is perceived, and its results could feed into ongoing educational initiatives by academic libraries and other interested stakeholders.
References

All references are in American Psychological Association (6th ed.) style.


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