

Rewarding open access: The power of promotion and tenure

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Abstract

This paper outlines faculty consideration for promotion and tenure as a major barrier for open access publishing. Through quantitative and qualitative study, faculty report feeling compelled to follow promotion and tenure requirements, which often include publishing in prestigious paywalled journals, rather than publishing according to their needs and preferences. While this is still the institutional norm, this study shows that there is some evidence that a number of institutions are increasingly incorporating open access publishing into promotion and tenure considerations, and that this trend is continuing over time. This paper further discusses opportunities for librarians in academic institutions to promote Open Access (OA) through proactive involvement in OA policy and practice in the realm of faculty promotion and tenure.

Introduction

As the open access movement continues shifting scholarly publishing practice, there is strong evidence that when scholars disseminate their work, they must choose between their own beliefs and publishing needs, and outdated institutional requirements for promotion and tenure. This movement to change scholarly practice has been building momentum since its inception in 2003, but institutional barriers remain. Suber wrote in 2010, “the OA movement has to work, or start working, within the existing system of incentives”. (p. 115). Almost ten years later, this is still a relevant reminder that to make real change in entrenched publishing practices, open access advocates need to get to the source of these requirements that act as barriers. In order for the open access movement to fully mature, works published in open access journals must be recognized rightfully as legitimate and worthwhile scholarship by senior faculty and administration who create the guidelines for, and sit on promotion and tenure committees.

Several surveys indicate that scholars support the principles of open access publishing (Peekhaus and Proferes 2015, Xia, 2010), with one study by Dallmeier-Tiessen et al. (2011) showing that 90% of faculty believe that open access has benefited their field (Rodriguez, 2014). However, studies indicate that “subjects often had positive opinions on OA, but that did not mean that they were willing to publish their work in an OA journal”. (Meijer-Klein and Hurrell, 2011, p. 8). Scholars’ choices do not always reflect their publishing preferences or, attitudes or beliefs, as they are pressured to publish in journals in which promotion and tenure committees perceive as prestigious. It is overwhelmingly the case where promotion and tenure committees evaluate the quality of a candidate’s scholarly articles on the prestige of the journal in which they are published, and not the actual content of the work (Suber, 2008). This paper will illustrate this entrenched barrier to open access publishing, and will also discuss the evidence that this is changing. There are several well-known universities that are institutionalizing their commitment to open access, including explicitly encouraging or even requiring faculty to publish in open access journals in their policies. In many

cases this includes a further step of an explicit favourable mention or even a requirement of publishing scholarly works in open access journals or the institutional repository for promotion and tenure consideration. While leaders in this regard such as Harvard, Indianapolis University-Purdue University, McMaster and others are changing the cultural landscape of evaluating their faculty, most universities are still unmoved in rewarding scholars who are committed to publishing in open access journals with consideration for promotion and tenure. Misconceptions about what constitutes as a quality journal is a major factor in continued reluctance to recognize open access publishing; that is, long-established, and paywalled journals are considered prestigious and rigorous in their peer-review, while open access journals are often not. Further, promotion and tenure committees often rely on research metrics developed by the traditional paywalled journals such as impact factor (IF) to evaluate the scholarly impact of a work, rather than the actual quality, reception by the scholarly community, reach of the article, or other factors. Unfortunately for scholars there is incentive to publish in a prestigious journal and obtain a high IF, rather than to disseminate quality research for the benefit of fellow scholars, the wider community and the advancement of knowledge in a given discipline.

As long as scholars are evaluated on the perceived prestige of the journal in which their work is published, with scholars choosing between publishing based on their preferences, principles, and funding agency requirements, and their own career advancement or even job security, the shift to open access publishing will be limited. This paper will point to successes in recognizing open access publishing by institutions and by promotion and tenure committees, where in some cases the policy has been implemented for several years already. Also it will outline several opportunities for scholarly communications librarians and open access advocates to get involved in developing and supporting open access policies at their institution, while highlighting ways to engage promotion and tenure committees in particular.

The perceptions and practices of scholars and promotion & tenure committees

A study done by the University of California Office of Scholarly Communication in 2007 indicated approximately half of their faculty experience a disconnect between attitudes and scholarly publishing habits. Peekhaus and Proferes (2016) cite several other studies as specific examples corroborating this, though in particular the study by the Taylor & Francis Research and Business Intelligence Department (2013) exemplifies it well, where 66% of respondents agreed to some extent that all research outputs should be available for free online and 67% agreed that the dissemination of research should not be monetized in any way. However, substantially less, 40%, have decided to publish in open access journals. (Peekhaus and Proferes, 2016). Interestingly, though scholars are not necessarily willing to publish in open access journals, Rodriguez discovered in a study that faculty “overwhelmingly affirmed they would use articles found in OA journals in their research” (2014, n.p.).

Though not exclusively, this discrepancy between attitude and publishing practice can largely be attributed to the perception of open access scholarship by promotion and tenure committees. It is well documented in several studies that consistently show over time that scholars are reluctant to publish in open access journals out of fear of a negative impact on their careers. (University of California, 2007; Norwick, 2008; Xia, 2010; Rodriguez, 2014; Peekhaus and Proferes, 2016). A study done in the UK suggests that scholars are “tailoring their scholarly production and publication decisions to fit institutional evaluation criteria” (McKiernan, 2017, n.p.) regardless of scholar support of open access principles. Nicholas et al. (2017) conducted a study of scientists in the UK that showed scholars are being influenced by promotion and tenure committees as much, if not more than by funding agencies, and that as a result scholars are choosing to publish in paywalled journals with established prestige. In the labour market with precarious academic appointments becoming commonplace, many scholars feel publishing in newer, less prestigious journals is just not worth the risk to their careers, despite what publishing method they prefer.

The influence of promotion and tenure perceptions are unsurprisingly most pronounced in faculty without tenure. A study by Peekhaus and Proferes indicates that non-tenured LIS faculty are the most likely to personally support open access publishing yet are the least likely to publish open access than all other ranks of faculty, due to a fear of negative perceptions of their work by promotion and tenure committees (2016). Conversely, the same study indicated that full professors are more likely than assistant professors to publish in an open access journal, and are least concerned about promotion and tenure when publishing open access. He iterates that though his study was LIS specific, these findings are similar across disciplines.

Despite widespread support of open access in principle and with the majority of scholars understanding its benefits, the misconception pervades that open access means lesser quality than their longer established, paywalled counterparts, with a lack of peer review. This includes both scholars and promotion and tenure committees. However, those in the LIS field with direct experience publishing in open access journals are likely to report that they view open access publishing favourably. (Peekhaus and Proferes, 2016). Further, engagement in OA publishing is based on “acquaintance with OA ideas and practices” (Xia, 2010, n.p.) This suggests the importance of the need to diminish misconceptions among scholars, particularly senior faculty on promotion and tenure committees, about open access.

Current shifts through institutional mandate

Some institutions were early adopters of rewarding open access publishing by considering it for a candidates for promotion and tenure, though North American institutions have been slower to implement this change. European institutions were the first to sign onto the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to the Sciences and Humanities in 2003, whereas the first North American institution, Harvard University, signed in 2010. Several institutions in North America have followed suit, such as

Duke University, University of Oregon, Purdue University, Concordia and McMaster University.

Though limited to the sciences and humanities, and not a direct statement that open access publishing is considered and rewarded with promotion and tenure, it is a litmus test to understand the number of institutions actively engaging with the open access movement in this way.

Furthermore, an institution creating an open access policy or signing an open access declaration does not necessarily mean that promotion and tenure committees will change their perceptions about open access publishing. Strategic plans of universities often point to community engagement, public good, dissemination of research, international collaboration, etc., all goals that fit with open access publishing of scholarly output. However, because of lack of awareness of open access publishing, slowness to adapt, or skepticism about the strength of the peer-review process, or an attachment to entrenched practices and measurements of scholarly impact, promotion and tenure committees aren't always applying these initiatives to considerations of the work of the scholars they are evaluating. Furthermore, in the case of Simon Fraser University, a new open access policy was adopted where scholars must submit preprints to the institutional repository, it explicitly states that scholars may opt-out if there is a conflict with a necessary publishing method for promotion and tenure. That indicates while the university is making a commitment to open access, there may not be a mandate for promotion and tenure committees to consider this kind of scholarly work. At the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire for example, most promotion and tenure guidelines "provide reviewers with a tremendous degree of flexibility to evaluate the scholarly achievements of faculty peers." (Wical and Kocken, 2017, p.115). Unless explicitly stated in promotion and tenure guidelines, candidates are evaluated based on the perceptions of the individual committee, regardless of strategic plans, university goals, or even open access policies, which is a very common approach.

There are several models institutions are adapting to mandate open access publishing and to consider peer-reviewed open access publishing as on par or even better than traditional publishing methods. Some universities have chosen to require scholars to publish in open access journals or

publish according to the green model, in the institutional repository, to even be considered for promotion and tenure such as McMaster University, and the University of Liege. Others have taken an opt-out approach, where scholars are required to publish open access or in the institutional repository, barring there are no copyright concerns if they chose to publish in a journal where they must sign away the copyright, such as Simon Fraser University and Harvard University. Others have chosen to roll out these considerations in certain faculties only, perhaps suggesting that they are piloting a new policy to be evaluated, such as at the University of British Columbia. If successful they may choose to implement it elsewhere or across the board. See Table 1 below for a cross-section of examples of various approaches different institutions of varied sizes and level of prestige with to open access policies in relation to promotion and tenure.

Table 1: Open Access Policies in Relation to Promotion and Tenure

Open Access Policies in Relation to Promotion and Tenure		
Institution Name	Year First Adopted	Notes
Cornell University	2005	Opt-in OA policy; submit to any suitable repository; no mention of P & T
University of Liege	2007	Mandatory; requirement for consideration for P & T
Virginia Commonwealth University	2010	No mention of opt-in or out OA policy; resolution from University Senate that OA be considered for P & T
Concordia University	2010	Opt-out OA policy; submit to IR; no mention of P & T
Harvard	2011	Opt-out OA policy; required for P & T in certain faculties
McMaster	2012	Opt-in OA policy; required to publish OA for consideration for promotion to Associate Professor
McGill University	2012	Opt-out OA Policy; submit to IR; open science referred to in P & T guidelines
University of British Columbia	2013	Opt-in OA policy; considered for P & T in educational Leadership Stream only (2016)
University of Windsor	2015	Opt-out OA policy; submit to IR; references high impact of OA articles for P & T

Indiana University - Purdue	2016	Opt-out OA policy; considered for P & T
Simon Fraser University	2017	Opt-out OA policy; can opt out for P & T considerations; required for P & T in publishing program

While the majority of institutions have been slow to explicitly place value on open access publications, especially when considering candidates for promotion and tenure, there are some leaders who have quickly adopted a different approach. Every year more institutions are introducing enhanced guidelines recognizing open access publishing, even if it's only catching on in certain disciplines. It's no surprise that there is a delay in the incorporation of open access scholarship into promotion and tenure considerations, as there is parallel with past concerns with the inception of online scholarship. Institutions were slow to accept online journals as scholarly output worthy of consideration for a candidate's promotion and tenure when print journals were seen as standard form of scholarly communication. Non-traditional forms of scholarship may have been seen as less legitimate, or that senior scholars serving on promotion and tenure committees may be less familiar with new forms of publishing. (Meijer-Kline and Hurrell, 2011; Wical and Kocken, 2017). "Today promotion and tenure committees may still favor older more established peer-reviewed journals that are not open access to those that are open access, just as promotion and tenure committees had been leery of electronic journals in their early days" (Wical and Kocken, 2017, p. 113). However, biases and misconceptions about e-scholarship have changed over time. It is therefore reasonable to expect that perceptions will change as open access scholarship gains more legitimacy, most importantly through following the lead of institutions that have successfully mandated change, as well as through positive experiences of individuals publishing open access, and improved overall education on open access issues and mitigating misconceptions.

We are already beginning to see more institutions create policies moving this change forward. Most institutions large and small have some form of institutional repository and are typically seeing

deposit rates between 5-30% (Rentier, 2015). However Rentier, the architect of the Liege model of open access where the only works that can be considered for a candidate for promotion and tenure are required must be in the institutional open access repository, iterates that with this type of policy, compliance rates are 90%. He further states that with this shift, dissemination is much higher, specifically, “when in-house and self-downloads are excluded, [this policy] increased the download rate 30 times” (n.p.). Besides the obvious issues with the actual rights the author's' own research being signed away their rights to with paywalled journals and sold back to the institution that funded that research, institutions are investing time and money on these repositories, therefore strengthening the mandate with incentives for promotion and tenure for supporting an in-house publishing method greatly increases compliance rates and more importantly increases the reach of the faculty's work. From the institution's perspective, it is also an opportunity to further promote its brand through use of in house repositories, and centralize the storage of its own research output.

Opportunities for open access advocates and librarians

There is a huge opportunity to for librarians to do more, both inside and outside the library. Despite having all the tools to publish in open access journals or institutional repositories often times because of external pressures, faculty are just not choosing to go this route. While having the tools and support is a precondition to having a robust open access policy that includes mention of promotion and tenure considerations, simply having the tools is not enough. Odell states, “even as libraries offer a growing number of OA services (including repositories, funds, journal publishing, data management, and altmetrics tools), efforts to reform the institutional scholarly communication culture will lag if the explicit and implicit values of P&T committees do not adapt.” (2016). Librarians and advocates must be more involved in championing open access publishing to promotion and tenure committees than simply offering services and hoping faculty will access them.

Secondly, there are some gaps in scholarly literature with a lack of qualitative and quantitative studies showing how open access publishing is perceived by tenure and promotion committees, leaving opportunities for LIS scholars. “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.” (Meijer-Klein and Hurrell, 2011, p.10). Knowing more about this complex process and how decisions are made on a more macro level would be highly beneficial for advocates and librarians to attune their education and advocacy based on such findings. As Wical and Kocken state, “the review document is ultimately interpreted by the reviewers” (2017, p.115). With an individualized and subjective process we are unable to determine how these vital documents are being interpreted, something we must learn more about to be effective advocates for open access publishing.

Further, there are several ways that librarians can act as liaisons between the library, faculty departments and higher administration. First, librarians can assess what specific publishing requirements promotion and tenure committees are looking for to communicate this to scholars looking to disseminate their work. In doing this, they may also act as advocates for open access publishing, highlighting the fact that in open access journals the peer-review process is comparable to the journals they may consider to be prestigious, and explain the issues with journal level metrics to assess quality. Librarians may also attend departmental meetings to discuss scholarly communications issues as another way to be a positive driver to update evaluation plans. (Wical and Kocken, 2017). This advocacy can be taken to a higher level to discuss the benefits of open access publishing to university administration, along with the effectiveness of explicitly including open access publications from the top when considering a candidate for promotion and tenure. Connecting this initiative with the institution’s strategic plan is a compelling way to make this case,

as many institutions include things like community engagement, research ethics, research dissemination and more, that directly relate to the aims of open access publishing.

However, there needs to be not only a top-down policy approach, but also bottom-up components interwoven into this change. Rentier highlights the biggest challenge in adopting this policy as winning over the authors, as there are still a proportion of unconvinced faculty. Particularly they had to iterate to scholars that “they were not infringing the law, and refute myths such as the idea that open access endangers patents, bypasses peer review, gives competitors an advantage and other such nonsense” (2015, n.p.). Regardless of the approach taken, whether it be an optional consideration or a mandatory requirement, changing a policy will not necessarily dispel the myths surrounding open access, and authors must be supported in mitigating their fears and misunderstandings of open access. Odell speaks to the experience at Indiana University - Purdue University and explains, “P&T committee members must be attentive to the OA statement in the guidelines. Likewise, faculty authors must be confident that OA dissemination will be valued by the P&T committees. For these reasons, IUPUI librarians have focused equally on a bottom-up outreach and education strategy”. (2016, p. 324). That includes ensuring that the policy is understood and followed, with education outreach and awareness, where Odell highlights a strategy of “equipping authors, tracking and reporting the adoption of OA practices, and enabling best practices for research evaluation.” (2016, p. 324). This is an ongoing process in which librarians and advocates must be involved to ensure two-way communication is continued between stakeholders as long as the policy is in place.

Conclusion

Open access publishing has no doubt changed the academic publishing realm, and studies have shown that the majority of scholars support this shift, and believe that this change has overall improved their discipline. However, fears of consequences such as diminished job security and

career advancement - real or not - are affecting the continued shift to open access publishing.

Misconceptions by both promotion and tenure committees and scholars, namely lack of peer review, fuel these fears of open access publishing. While these fears and misconceptions still lead to the systemic barrier of the shift to open access publishing, there is evidence that this is changing, with several institutions formally recognizing or even requiring open access publishing in their promotion and tenure guidelines.

There has been monumental progress in creating the infrastructure to support the open access movement, with a plethora of scholarly research supporting its positive impact on scholarly publishing. However, there is still much work to be done to communicate these benefits to scholars and senior faculty who sit on tenure and promotion committees, as well as administration who have substantial weight in making university policies and resolutions. Further, there are several gaps in the scholarly literature that provide opportunities for LIS scholars to further investigate the attitudes of promotion and tenure committees on open access publishing, as well as more robust studies on the institutions that have embedded open access policies that explicitly referenced in promotion and tenure guidelines. This advocacy also includes challenging the perceptions of quality and instituting fairness in evaluation of work. McKiernan writes, "The use of proxy measures, like journal impact factor (IF), to judge the quality and importance of articles is still pervasive in academic evaluations". Instead, articles should be evaluated on their worthiness and merit, rather than the prestige of the journal in which it is published. "Universities should care more about quality, especially article quality and candidate quality, than journal citation impact" (Suber, 2010, p.121). This need for a shift in recognition of quality and impact is a huge piece of advocating for institutional acknowledgement for open access in relation to consideration for promotion and tenure.

Thanks to institutional leaders such as Harvard, Indiana University - Purdue University Indianapolis, and others, there is an array of resources available for librarians and institutions interested in

exploring ways to implement open access policies and incorporating open access publishing into promotion and tenure considerations. Institutions that are interested in incorporating open access in promotion and tenure guidelines, as well as open access advocates looking to communicate the benefits and successes can reference these resources, with one highlight being the Harvard Wiki *Good Practices for Open Access Policies*. Following measured success is the best strategy for incorporating open access publishing into promotion and tenure considerations.

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