

The Open Access Librarian: Educating and Advocating for Change

Robyn Hall- Mailbox 162

LIS 9410

Faculty supervisor: Ajit Pyati

Thursday, August 13, 2009

Abstract

A great deal of literature on the development of open access (OA) publishing of scholarly research has emphasized the important role that academic librarians have played and will continue to play as the OA movement advances. Investigations into what continues to motivate this support have acknowledged librarians' commitment to enhancing library collections, scholarly communication processes, research innovation, and the visibility of institutions' scholarly output. However, far less attention has been given to the ways that OA can also help librarians enrich students' educations, particularly the many undergraduates who will lose their online access to scholarly research made available through their libraries upon graduation. With this in mind, I explore ways that academic librarians in Canada have begun promoting OA to students, while also suggesting further methods they may employ to ensure students know about these resources and understand their potential uses and limitations. In this manner, this paper reveals ways that librarians advocating on behalf of the OA movement may garner further support, while at the same time advancing academic librarians' overall commitment to fostering lifelong learning and information literacy.

Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	2
Section One	4
Introduction	
Section Two	6
Relationship to the Literature	
▪ Crises in Scholarly Publishing	6
▪ Opening Access to Research and Scholarship	8
▪ Information Literacy in the Digital Age	11
▪ Summary	15
Section Three	17
Advocating and Educating	
▪ Commitment and Support	18
▪ Promotion and Education	20
Section Four	26
Discussion and Conclusion	
<i>References Cited</i>	28

Section One: Introduction

Academic librarians have been recognized as leaders in the open access (OA) movement in Canada and around the world. Their contributions have been explored and discussed extensively in the literature on OA, serving to inform, motivate and inspire continued involvement from within the profession and more broadly. At the same time, a great deal of contemporary library and information science (LIS) literature has emphasized the important role that academic librarians play in the development of information literacy skills among their largest user group, undergraduate students. However, very little attention has been given to exploring ways that each of these evolving roles for librarians might interact and to what end.

In the following paper, I draw complementary parallels between the established importance of information literacy skills among undergraduate students and the ultimate goals of the OA movement. Specifically, I investigate to what degree academic librarians in Canada have exposed undergraduate students to OA content amid their many efforts to support and further both students' educations and OA initiatives. In doing so, I argue that academic librarians need to do more to not only promote scholarly OA resources to undergraduate students, but to also teach them how to evaluate these resources in addition to those that are typically covered in information literacy instruction sessions, including personal and commercial Web sites and academic subscription journals. This is particularly important since OA can provide students with access to reliable, credible and authoritative scholarly literature that is of comparably high quality to content in the many scholarly journals that libraries subscribe to that students lose their access to upon graduation. That said, this paper reveals ways that academic librarians advocating on behalf of the OA movement may garner further support, while at the same time advancing librarians' overall commitment to fostering lifelong learning and information literacy.

I begin this paper by establishing what significant factors led to the 'serials crisis' in

scholarly publishing in the 1980s, which was soon after worsened by the so-called ‘permissions crisis’ (Suber, 2003), each to the ongoing detriment of library collections worldwide. This will lead me into a discussion of how and why the OA movement has emerged in an attempt to extinguish these crises and increase rather than restrict access to scholarly output using the Internet. Having presented the basis for the OA movement, I explore how librarians have herein been recognized as playing an active role in the creation, maintenance and dissemination of OA resources. I then draw attention to literature that has focused on what benefits and challenges digitized content--including that which is OA--poses for librarians attempting to help students develop information literacy skills that will serve them for the rest of their lives. This leads to a summary of the literature that I have discussed, whereby I emphasize its focus on librarians’ important role as agents for change. Their significance to the OA movement and students’ educations is hereby established against a backdrop of prevailing, widespread economic challenges that continue to devalue and undermine both scholarly communication processes and student learning.

The second section of this paper begins by describing specific ways that academic librarians in Canada have worked to foster a commitment to and support for scholarly OA resources. Following this, I describe the far more limited measures they have taken to promote OA and educate users about its relevance, focusing on ways that they have and have not exposed undergraduate students to these materials. To this end, I suggest a range of methods librarians might employ to ensure students know about OA resources and understand their potential uses. I conclude with a discussion of areas central to information literacy instruction as well as the promotion of OA within the university community that are in need of further research and development if the full potential of the OA movement is to be realized.