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Documenting an Open Future in a Post-Policy World

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Documenting an Open Future in a Post-Policy World

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This session continues the work of a 2019 survey that investigated library policies related to Open Access (OA). Specifically, this study sought to address the self-selection of participants by randomly selecting and directly contacting academic librarians at libraries within one of four different Carnegie classifications to request input on their library's collection development policies and the existence of OA policies or informal practices related to library collections. The findings surface disparities in the documentation of OA collection practices among institution classifications and highlight concerns about both OA and policies in the collections strategies of academic libraries.

KEYWORDS open access, collection development, academic library, policies

Collection development policies have historically outlined precisely what content would be added to academic library collections, in what formats, and with which limitations. A 2019 survey investigated academic librarians' attitudes, practices, and policies regarding Open Access (OA) and asked if they write policies to ensure that they approach OA intentionally and systematically.¹ The results indicated that although librarians report favorable beliefs about OA and integrate OA into technical and public services, they seldom create OA policies, or even informally articulate how OA content should be integrated into collections. The lack of OA collection policies may be related to the complexities of OA but may also be related to a decline of policy writing in academic libraries.²

This session continues the work of the 2019 survey to consider why OA is not documented in collection policies and the implications of this practice for the future integration of OA into academic library collections. This research aims to explore the current state of OA collection policies in academic libraries across different Carnegie classifications, to promote reflection on obstacles to crafting OA policies and how these intersect with library procedures and workflows, and to investigate whether and how it might serve libraries to explicitly include OA in their collection policies.

Methodology

In order to address the previously mentioned survey's limitations, including self-selection of survey respondents, and to increase the diversity of higher education institution types represented, the authors randomly selected twenty-five institutions from each of the following groups of Carnegie Basic Classifications: Doctoral Universities, Master's Colleges and Universities, Baccalaureate Colleges and Baccalaureate/Associate's Colleges, and Associate's Colleges. The authors emailed a librarian at each of the 100 total institutions and requested that

they complete a linked survey or forward the survey to the most appropriate person at their institution. The collected responses were analyzed for differences in libraries' approaches to OA collection development practices and policies, with a particular focus on how institution type, library budget, and staffing levels affected institutional policies and practices.

The complete survey instrument was approved by the University of Memphis Institutional Review Board (IRB) as exempt of review and is available as Appendix 1. The first part of the survey inquired after institutional demographic information, such as the current student enrollment and public or private status, as well as library-specific information, such as the resource budget and number of personnel employed. The second section asked participants to respond to questions regarding their existing collection development policies, or lack thereof, and indicate whether their policies or procedures explicitly address OA content.

The survey concluded with an open-ended question: "If your institution does not have a collection development policy or your library collection development policy does not address OA, please expound on these decisions. For example, did your institution previously have a collection development policy, and if so, why did this change? Does your library provide access to OA, and if so, why is this not articulated in the collection development policy?" Responses to this question provide insight into current trends and perspectives on OA in the collections strategies of academic libraries. Exploring themes that emerged from these responses will be the focus of the results and discussion.

Results

Institutional/Library Demographics & OA in Collection Development Policies

The survey had a 21 percent response rate, with twenty-one of the 100 institutions contacted completing the survey. As depicted in Figure 1, the majority of responses received

were from doctoral-granting institutions, followed by master's degree with seven responses, and only three responses from institutions whose highest degree conferred is a bachelor's degree. There were no responses received from institutions where an associate's degree was the highest conferred.

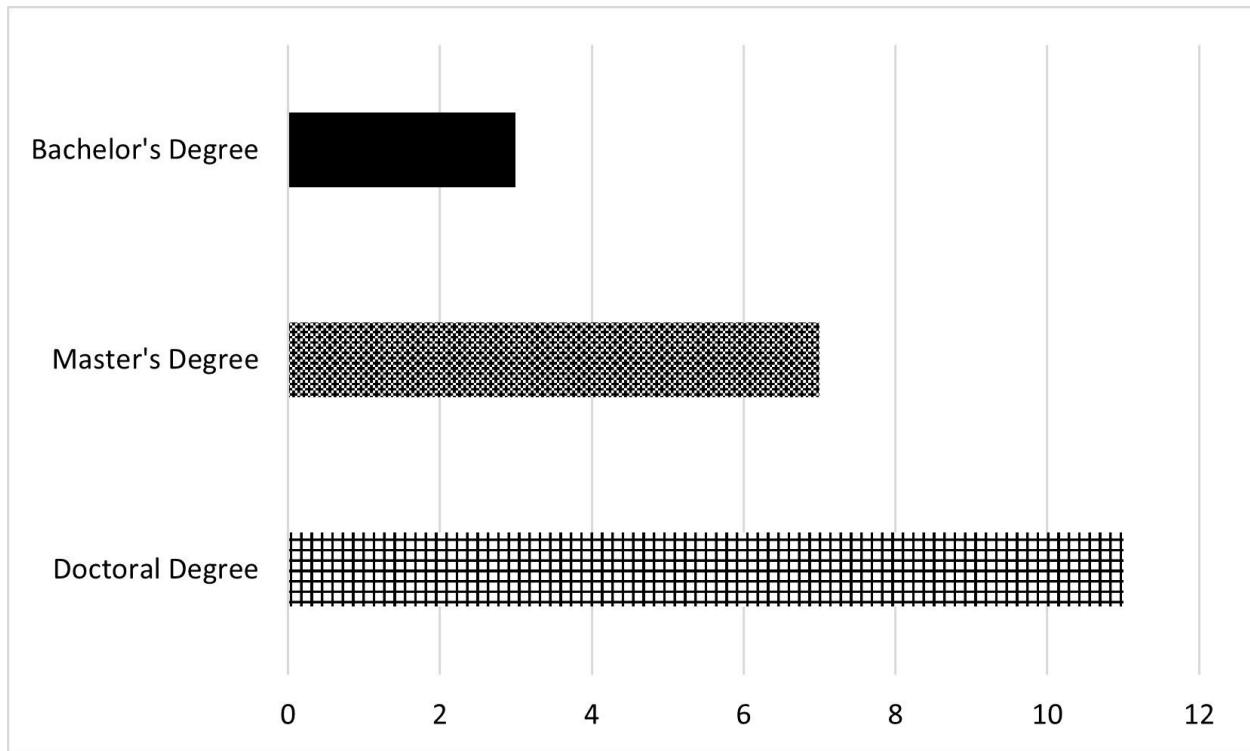


Figure 1 Highest Degree Conferred Survey Responses

Highest Degree Conferred

The results were analyzed for potential relationships between the highest degree conferred and the resource budget and number of library personnel. Only institutions granting doctoral and master's degrees had budgets of over twenty million dollars. The majority of responding doctoral institutions had budgets between \$250,000 and \$10,000,000. Most master's degree institutions reported budgets less than \$250,000 or less than \$1,000,000. And bachelor's degree institutions were split evenly between less than \$250,000, \$250,000 to \$1,000,000 dollars, and \$1,000,000 to \$10,000,000. There were no institutions that had a budget between

\$11,000,000 and \$20,000,000. This quick snapshot of degrees conferred by budget indicates that the higher the degree an institution offers, the higher their resource budget may be.

The doctoral-granting institutions had either eleven to twenty personnel or more than twenty personnel. Only the master's degree institutions reported one to three or four to ten personnel. Across degrees, there were almost an equal number of institutions in the eleven to twenty range and more than twenty personnel groups.

Collection Development Policy

Of the twenty-one respondents, seventeen reported that they have a collection development policy, three do not, and one respondent was unsure. The authors used highest degree conferred, number of library personnel, and resource budget to determine whether these data points affect the existence of a collection development policy. All three of the bachelor's degree institutions have a collection development policy, along with six out of seven master's degree institutions, and eight out of eleven doctoral degree institutions. The only "unsure" response was from a doctoral degree institution, and the most "no" responses were also from doctoral-granting institutions. Only one master's degree institution reported that they did not have a collection development policy.

There was a relationship between the number of library personnel and the existence of a collection development policy. In Figure 2 there is a slight crescendo of "yes" responses, building from one to three personnel to four to ten personnel, and peaking with nine institutions that employ eleven to twenty personnel and do have a collection development policy. The single unsure is at an institution with more than twenty personnel, which was also a doctoral-granting institution. The three "no" responses are split between one to three personnel and more than twenty personnel.

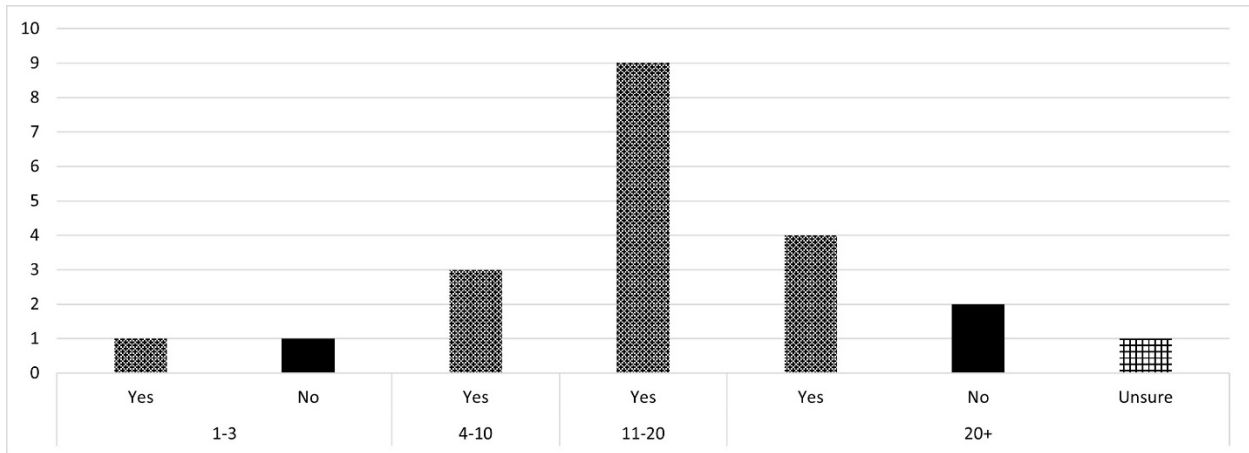


Figure 2 Collection Development Policy by Personnel

The final comparison point for the existence of a collection development policy is the institutions' resource budget. Although only a small number of responses were received, it is clear in Figure 3 that a high resource budget does not directly relate to the existence of a collection development policy.

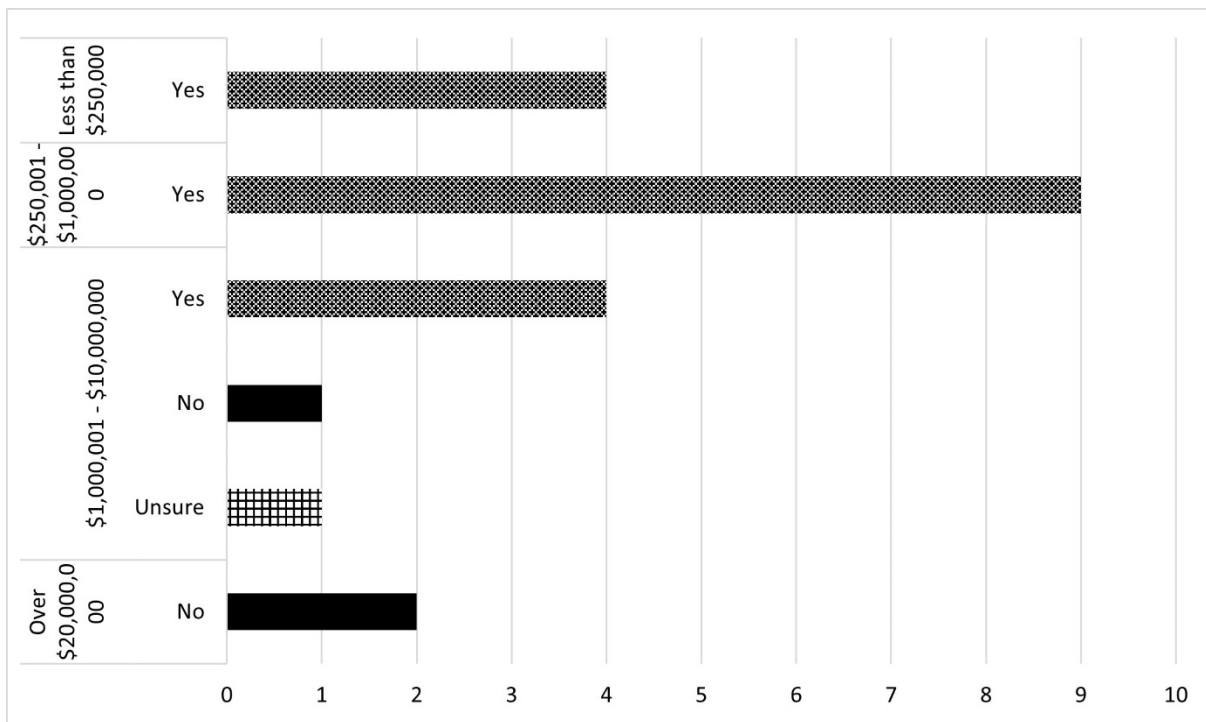


Figure 3 Collection Development Policy by Resource Budget

OA Policy

The final set of comparisons relate to whether OA is addressed in the library's collection development policies. The number of responses shrunk from twenty-one to seventeen because institutions that reported uncertainty as to whether they had a collection development policy or indicated that they did not have a collection development policy were excluded. Of the seventeen institutions that reported having a collection development policy, the majority stated that their policy did not address OA, and the final six responses were split evenly between "yes" and "unsure" responses.

The highest degree conferred, number of personnel, and resource budget are again examined for their impact on the inclusion of OA in an existing collection development policy. Doctoral granting institutions have the greatest difference between "yes" (2) and "no" (6) or "unsure" (2) responses. The master's and bachelor's degree institutions have more evenly divided responses; one "yes" for both master's and bachelor's, three and two "no" responses respectively, and one "unsure" response reported by a master's degree institution. The high number of "no" responses from doctoral-granting institutions is partially because of the high number of doctoral-granting participants in the study.

Figure 4 depicts the relationship between number of personnel and the inclusion of OA in an existing collection development policy. The responses here are split evenly except for the spike in "no" responses for institutions with eleven to twenty personnel. For the institutions that responded to the survey, it does not appear that the number of personnel has any significant impact on the inclusion of OA in their collection development policies.

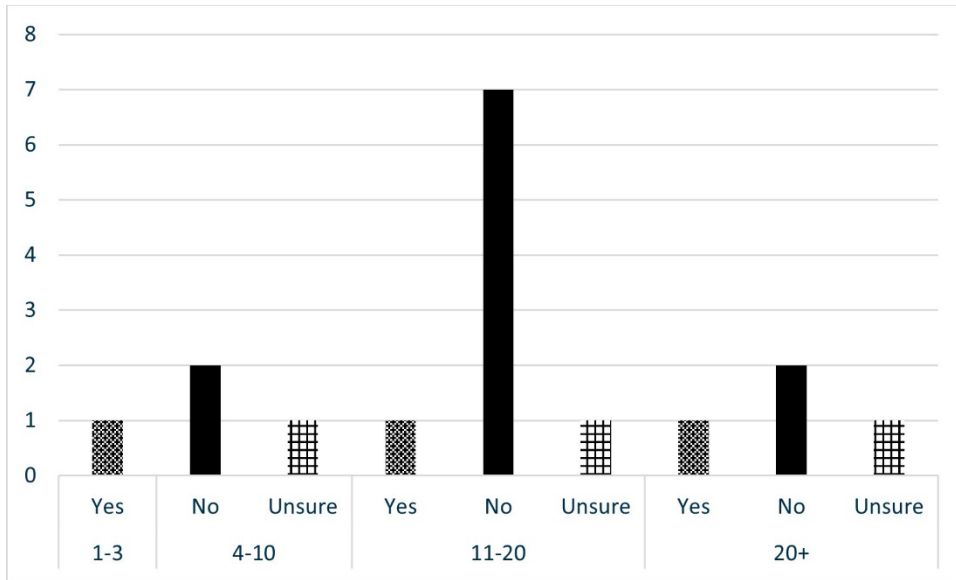


Figure 4 OA Policy by Library Personnel

Figure 5 attempts to determine whether the resource budget is a predictor of inclusion of OA in an institution’s collection development policy. Figure 4 looks similar to figure 3, where responses are fairly evenly distributed between the different resource budgets. There is again a spike of “no” responses in the \$250,000 to \$1,000,000 budget range, but otherwise it does not appear that budget has a clear impact on the inclusion of OA in existing collection development policies.

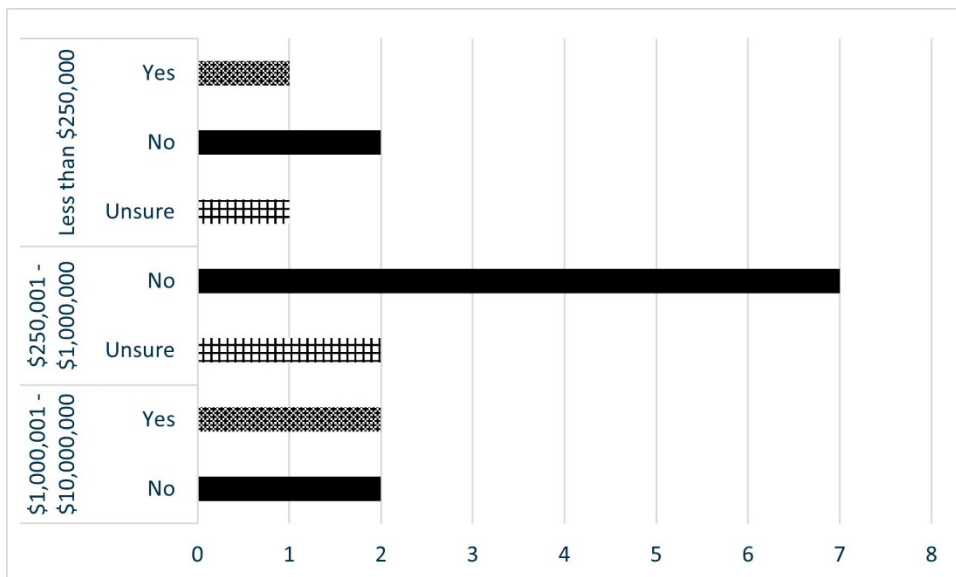


Figure 5 OA Policy by Resource Budget

Perspectives on OA in Collection Development Policies

The concluding survey question asked participants to expound on the decisions that their library had made surrounding collection development policies, and whether OA was accounted for. The responses to this question varied considerably and revealed much about the evolving role of policies and OA in libraries, including specific concerns about including OA content amidst carefully curated and paid content. The following section presents several quotations from survey participants' responses to the concluding survey question with the goal of providing rich data in their own words.

Many responses indicated that a library's collection development policy, if one still exists, had not been updated in a long time. A comment indicative of this trend suggests: "Policy is at least fifteen years old and no one seems concerned about updating it." One respondent specifically attributed lack of interest to library administration: "Because the library's leadership has not updated the policy in over a decade." This lag in updating collection development policies has implications for newer models of acquisitions or publishing capabilities, including OA models. As one participant writes, "It wasn't really a decision not to have an OA policy in the collection development policy, it is just something that hasn't been addressed yet." This sentiment was echoed by others who noted, for example, "We've just never formalized an OA policy."

Several respondents indicated that their collection development policy was due for an update, noting, for example: "[. . .] our policy needs some work. It is undergoing revisions and will include some elements of OA in the future," and "We need to revise and update our collection development policy." Others noted that theirs had not been updated due to lack of

resources, whether personnel, financial, or time: “Our collection development policy has not been updated in more than fifteen years. At that point in time, open access wasn’t really a consideration. Were we to have the time and staffing to update it, I’m sure it would include OA.”

Other respondents indicate a shift from comprehensive collection development policies to shorter and less specific statements. For example, one participant noted: “Our collection development policy is very basic. We do some OA collection development in our digital collections. And some OAs are added with our ILS consortium sets,” and another noted: “We recently replaced our old collection development policy with a much shorter document that is a broader statement about the types of resources that are collected.”

A few respondents noted a difference in collection development policies versus internal procedural documents. One noted, for example: “We have not had an overall CD [collection development] policy for many years. We do have brief outward facing descriptions, and more detailed internal procedural documents. OA is addressed in some of the internal documents. This is partly about how we identify open content for discovery, and sometimes about making financial decisions to support (or not) OA initiatives. We also have procedures which are not well documented, e.g. we have been loading DOAJ titles into our catalog.”

For some academic librarians, collection development policies remain the purview of purchased content, and not gift or OA content. Others consider gifts alongside purchased content, as demonstrated in this example: “Our collection development policy addresses mostly items we actively purchase, gifts, and items we weed.”

Some respondents expressed confusion at what a collection development policy that addresses OA might look like. “[. . .] what exactly do you mean by ‘OA?’ [. . .] actively including various OA packages in [the] discovery layer? [. . .] open content like government

documents or institutional repositories?” Different types of OA content warranted different collection development approaches.

Respondents used the survey to express their own concerns about OA, including the potential of including unvetted and lower quality materials in the library’s otherwise carefully curated content. One respondent noted: “Mostly, it [OA] is not articulated in our collection development policy because each decision of adding OA content is predicated on many factors. [. . .] Content for content's sake can turn your discovery layer into a firehose of irrelevant information.”

Another reply shared concerns about predatory publishers and less-than-helpful metadata: “[. . .] we are also wary of many predatory journals who may also show up in these larger, OA collection sets. [. . .] The metadata in these collections are not always helpful, either.”

A few respondents noted that although OA is not explicitly addressed in their collection development policies, their libraries are nonetheless very engaged in this work. One respondent noted, for example, that “[. . .] the library is actively involved in promoting open access, especially open educational resources. Catalog records are added for select open access books and select open access journals have been added to our periodical knowledge base. Librarians are also available to assist faculty with locating open access resources to be used in their courses.” Another noted that, “We publicize access to OA and OER mostly on our LibGuides and via the work of our OA Librarian. We link to some OA resources on our A-Z Databases list. We catalog OA resources only for resources that we have supported financially.” Simply stated, some librarians “provide access to as much OA as we know about.”

Discussion

Study Participation Rate

While this study was designed with the intention of addressing some of the limitations of the authors' 2019 study, similar issues of self-selection were encountered. Despite creating an equal opportunity for participation across four broad Carnegie classifications, the authors were unsuccessful in securing participation among associate-degree granting institutions and saw the highest response rate from doctoral-degree institutions. Furthermore, only twenty-one out of one hundred institutions contacted responded, which is too small a sample from which to draw any generalizations. The lower number of responses from associate- and bachelor-degree granting institutions may be attributed to their smaller staff sizes and lack of specialized positions related to OA relative to masters- and doctoral-degree granting institutions. Fewer study participants from associate- and bachelor-degree granting institutions chose to participate in this survey than the 2019 survey, which may reflect their relative interest or ability to engage with questions about OA at this time.

Role of Budget in Collection Development Policies

This study began with the authors' hunch that a higher resource budget would be a clear indicator of the existence of a collection development policy, but the survey results suggest the opposite. All institutions reporting \$1,000,000 or less in collections budgets have a collection development plan and only half of those institutions reporting \$1,000,000 or more in yearly collections expenditures reported having a collection development plan. The limited findings suggest that collection development policies may be more important to institutions with smaller resource budgets. These findings may reflect a broader trend of academic libraries moving away from policy writing generally, even in collection development, where they were long perceived as essential. Several respondents suggested that the very nature of policies was too limited to encompass something as messy as OA and had moved to different types of documents, including

procedural documents, basic (less specific) policies, or guidelines. The institutions that reported having collection development policies may not have had the resources to revise these in alignment with best practices surrounding OA and other collections strategies and methods.

Open Access is Consistently Uncommon in Collection Development Policies

The limited results did indicate that OA is unlikely to be addressed in collection development policies. Only three of seventeen participants reported that their collection development policy includes OA. These were spread evenly across institution type and staffing level, but diverged on the question of collection budgets. Of the three institutions that included OA in their collection development policy, one reported a collection budget of less than \$250,000 and two reported collection budgets of one to ten million dollars.

Conclusion

Disparities in how librarians articulate and document their engagement with OA have implications for which libraries will be equipped to thrive in an open future. Librarian respondents articulated a variety of questions and concerns about the role of OA in collection development and even fundamental questions about OA itself. These questions have served as obstacles to writing policies in most participants' institutional settings. The goal of this research approach was to frame the discussion in such a way that academic librarians from any institution size could find an issue or question on which to reflect or engage. Unlike OA discussions around article processing charges or institutional repositories, which tend to exclude smaller libraries, this research intentionally targeted a broad and inclusive pool of candidates. The results indicate that despite this effort towards inclusion, however, understanding the ways in which librarians at smaller institutions engage with OA will require a deeper, more targeted investigation.

NOTES

1. Rachel Elizabeth Scott, Caitlin Harrington, and Ana Dubnjakovic, “Exploring Open Access Practices, Attitudes, and Policies in Academic Libraries,” *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 21, no. 2 (2021): 365–388, <https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2021.0020>.

2. Tony Horava and Michael Levine-Clark, “Current Trends in Collection Development Practices and Policies,” *Collection Building* 35, no. 4 (2016): 97–102, <https://doi.org/10.1108/CB-09-2016-0025.22>; Sharon Dyas-Correia and Rea Devakos, “Open Access and Collection Development Policies: Two Solitudes?” *International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions World Library and Information Conference*, Lyon, France, August 16–22, 2014, <http://library.ifla.org/839/1/108-correia-en.pdf>.

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

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APPENDIX

Survey Instrument

Caitlin Harrington (University of Memphis) and Rachel Scott (Illinois State University) invite you to participate in this study of Open Access (OA) policies in academic libraries. In this study, OA refers to scholarship, or other published content, that is digitally accessible without subscription, purchase, or other additional cost. That is, we are focusing on the question of cost (gratis OA) and not questions of copyright or license (libre OA). Many studies have highlighted the OA perceptions and attitudes of librarians. This study seeks to establish the extent to which OA is written into academic library policies.

We expect this survey to take approximately ten minutes to complete. This survey is anonymous and entirely voluntary; you may exit at any point. Although you will not receive any direct benefit for participating, we anticipate that this study will reveal current practices, benefits, and limitations of OA policies in academic libraries. This instrument was submitted to the local Institutional Review Board (IRB), and was determined not to require IRB approval or review. Please respond by Monday, April 19, 2021.

Part 1: Demographics

1. What is your job title
2. What is the highest degree conferred by your institution?
 - a. Doctoral Degree
 - b. Master's Degree
 - c. Bachelor's Degree
 - d. Associate Degree
3. How many full-time personnel does your library currently employ?
 - a. 1-3
 - b. 4-10
 - c. 11-20
 - d. 20+
4. Is your institution public or private?
 - a. Public
 - b. Private
5. What is the total Spring 2021 enrollment at your institution?
 - a. 2,000 or less

- b. 2,001 to 10,000
 - c. 10,001 to 20,000
 - d. 20,001 to 30,000
 - e. More than 30,000
6. In the last fiscal year, approximately how much of your budget was allocated to purchased or subscription resources?
- a. Less than \$250,000
 - b. \$250,001 - \$1,000,000
 - c. \$1,000,001 - \$10,000,000
 - d. \$10,000,001 - \$20,000,000
 - e. Over \$20,000,000

Part 2: Collection Development Policies

7. Does your library have a collection development policy?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
8. Does the collection development policy address Open Access (OA)?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure

9. If your library collection development policy does not address OA, or your institution does not have a collection development policy, has your library formulated any unofficial guidelines or practices regarding OA for your collections?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
10. If your institution does not have a collection development policy or your library collection development policy does not address OA, please expound on these decisions. For example, did your institution previously have a collection development policy, and if so why did this change? Does your library provide access to OA, and if so, why is this not articulated in the collection development policy?