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You Might Not Realize It, but You're Probably Reading an Open Access Article ...

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MONDAY OCTOBER 25, 2021

You Might Not Realize It, but You're Probably Reading an Open Access Article ...

By Simon Robins

Open Access, as opposed to paid, subscription-based access to scholarly literature, empowers authors to license their research in a way that makes it freely available to anyone with an internet connection, resulting in a wider dissemination of findings and increased inquiry. To celebrate Open Access (OA) Week this year (Oct. 25-31), UD Libraries has decided to highlight UD's usage of open access content in learning and research.

Every year, the University Libraries take a deep dive to examine usage across all of our e-journal subscriptions. By and large, this analysis is to measure how our *non-open access (paid) content* is being used and to make sure that the content we purchase is being used by UD students, faculty and staff. It's worth noting that these subscriptions cost the University Libraries — and nearly all university libraries across the country — increasing sums of money that no single university will likely be able to sustain in the long term. The open access movement aims to reduce this financial challenge by making our nation's publicly funded research readily available to researchers, students and the general public without subscriptions.

This year we were pleasantly surprised to see that some of our most heavily used journals at UD were open-access titles.* Out of our 10 most popular journals, four were open access, and this is out of an analysis of UD's usage across tens of thousands of individual journal titles:

1 *Scientific Reports* (open access; 2,871 article downloads)

2 *Nature* (2,335 downloads)

3   *PLoS One* (open access; 2,214 downloads)

4   *International Review of Economics & Finance* (1,970 downloads)

5   *Journal of Business Ethics* (1,883 downloads)

6   *American Journal of Public Health* (1,617 downloads)

7   **Nature Communications** (open access; 1,511 downloads)

8   *IEEE Transactions on Power Electronics* (1,389 downloads)

9   **International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health** (open access; 1,388 downloads)

10   *The New England Journal of Medicine* (1,261 downloads)

While University Libraries can't measure every instance where one of our students, faculty and staff downloads an open-access journal article that they discover through Google or other commercial search engines, we can measure the open-access downloads occurring within the search engines that we manage locally (in databases such as UDiscover, Academic Search Complete, CINAHL, etc.). In many cases, these databases house the full-text PDF versions of open-access journal articles directly within the search interface, allowing UD users to directly access the content when they search for their curricular or research needs. Importantly, these open-access PDFs appear alongside our paid subscriptions, creating a situation where it might not always be easy to distinguish what is open access and what's not. We see this as a good thing.

Unsurprisingly, these top 10 journals all fall within STEM or business-focused disciplines, reflecting the heavy reliance on journal articles as the predominant mode of scholarly publication in these fields. It also reflects the heavy impact that the open-access movement has had on STEM and medicine publications — and the relative lack of

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impact it has had on journal articles in the social sciences and humanities.

Our analysis also found that our students, faculty and staff are linking to open-access content from databases such as Academic Search Complete, UDiscover, and SocINDEX. This access has been facilitated by Unpaywall and through our custom links to the Directory of Open Access Journals. By turning these two features on within our databases, UD users are able to reach the full text of articles more seamlessly. Over the past year, we recorded over 9,000 uses of these two features, resulting in thousands of open-access article downloads.

Across all this usage, we are pleased to see faculty, students and staff indicating to us that fully open-access peer-reviewed journals (also known as "gold open access" journals) can be just as relevant (and just as popular) as subscription-based peer-reviewed publications when it comes to their learning and research. We support this ongoing use!

*Usage was measured from July 2020 to June 2021. Nearly every e-journal subscription at UD was measured within a single dataset, and this data is part of an ongoing analysis (numbers might change).

— Simon Robins is an assistant professor and coordinator of electronic resources and discovery in the University Libraries.
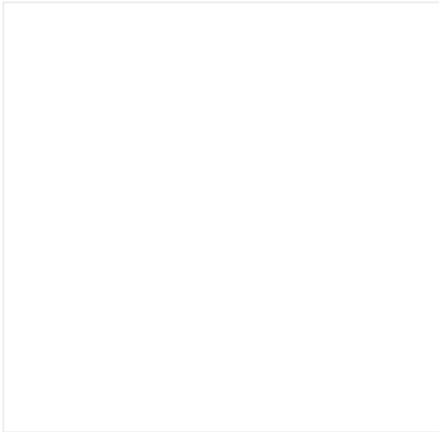
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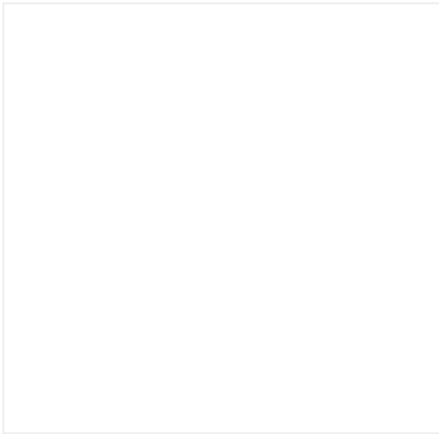
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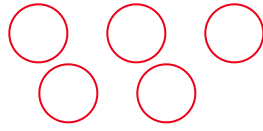
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