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Managing, Marketing, and Measuring Open Resources

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Abstract

Academic libraries face many opportunities and challenges in managing, marketing, and measuring open resources (OR). Many questions arise when incorporating OR into an academic library collection. How do libraries select quality OR for inclusion in the collection? What tools and practices are used to manage electronic access? How can libraries better market OR to faculty? How can libraries measure the use and usefulness of OR? This paper outlines a project launched to improve the management of OR at the University of Florida's George A. Smathers Libraries; as well as incorporating feedback garnered at the Charleston Conference discussion forum on the topic, particularly on how academic and special libraries are handling OR offered to users.

Introduction

The University of Florida (UF) Libraries have been offering open resources to users for many years. Our definition of open resources (OR) includes both open access (OA) journals and books, as well as media and curricular materials often referred to as Open Educational Resources (OER). OR provided by the UF Libraries are collected from numerous channels. The largest segment of OR offered are catalog records downloaded using the vendor tool Serials Solutions for thousands of journals, e-books, and other resources from the Directory of Open Access Journals, PubMed Central, Highwire Press, etc. Additionally, OR are gathered from large repositories like HathiTrust and digital libraries such as Internet Archive. Digital content from the library's curatorial collections and the UF's Institutional Repository is also an important homegrown segment of these resources. The amount of resources being offered to users at the Smathers Libraries is substantial; as of 2015, approximately 70,000 e-journals and 220,000 e-books identified as OR were made available to users of the UF Libraries.

Despite all these open resources being made available, the UF Libraries have not developed systematic methodologies for review, selection, or deselection of these resources. Because machine-readable cataloging (MARC) records for OR are batch-loaded into the library's catalog and discover tools at frequent intervals, many librarians, subject specialists, and staff at the libraries are often unaware of OR content, particularly in their subject disciplines or areas of expertise. Unsurprisingly, marketing and assessment activities for OR are also not being performed in any sustained or systematic way. Thus, a team of four librarians launched a project to gather information and better organize the management of OR. Goals of the project were simple:

- Review the literature and lead a discussion at the Charleston Conference to determine current practices for managing OR at other academic and special libraries
- Develop new procedures and criteria for reviewing, selecting/deselecting,

marketing, and assessing OR at the UF Libraries

- Incorporate knowledge gained into collection policies

Review and Selection

The review and selection process for open resources is very similar to the processes used for purchased online resources. Devising basic selection criteria is a recommended practice and can be adapted for OR (Johnson, 2013). Setting parameters for what is selected can include content or subject matter; language; scope; reputation of the author or publication; quality of scholarship; relation to curriculum and research; user levels; format; access; and whether a journal is peer-reviewed. An exhaustive review and set of important criteria for selection of OA journals were offered by Schmidt and Newsome (2007). Another important aspect of review and selection for libraries to consider regards hybrid OA journals and predatory publishers. Hybrid journals are publications that offer some or partial free access while other content must be purchased. Bullock, Hosburgh, and Mann (2015) highlight one problem associated with hybrids; many hybrid journals are listed as OA journals by knowledge bases and OPACs, which can only distinguish at the title, not article, level, leading to confusion and frustration for librarians and users alike. Predatory publishers are an even bigger nuisance. Predatory publishers can be defined by a set of characteristics that include lack of peer-review despite claims; dubious quality; or even in some cases charging author fees to make a profit. Berger and Cirasella (2015) provide an excellent review of the landscape of predatory journals and note that librarians must be careful in labeling a journal predatory; for example, not all OA journals that charge author fees are predatory.

One measure of a journal's quality has always been its inclusion in a reputable index. The Web of Science database has added some features that are particularly helpful with OA, including an OA filter in both Web of Science and Journal Citation Reports (the database for looking up Impact Factors and other metrics).

Managing Access and Discoverability

After selection decisions have been made, open resources, primarily OA journals and books, must be incorporated into a library's discovery and access points. There are many challenges associated with adding and maintaining OR in library systems, some of which are similar to licensed content and some unique to OR. Most of these challenges are related to the knowledge bases used to activate resources and the metadata, or lack thereof, on these resources contained in these knowledge bases. As Bullock, Hosburgh, and Mann (2015) point out, "A knowledge base's greatest strength—centrally managed collections—becomes a weakness when titles or holdings fall out of date and library staff have to initiate troubleshooting."

Metadata on open access titles, as listed in most commercial library knowledge bases, is very often lacking. Basic bibliographic information and date ranges of freely accessible content can be incorrectly listed or missing altogether, and predatory titles may be listed in broad subject-based collections next to legitimate gold open access (GOA) titles. Depending on the functionality of the knowledge base, selecting one title from a collection, often at the request of a subject librarian, requires selection of the entire collection. As proactive access checking is problematic even for licensed content, much less open content due to the sheer scale, it is not uncommon for libraries to provide notes on OA titles to users in link resolvers and other discovery points warning that the dates of accessibility may be incorrect.

As Lagace and Tananbaum (2013) state, "Thus in the case of hybrid journals—which consist of both open access and subscription articles—OA availability through a link resolver is often a 'hit or miss' situation when displayed on a library's service menu because the articles themselves are not tracked in these knowledge bases." This leaves librarians two choices, either include hybrid OA journals and know patrons will hit pay walls for subscription articles or exclude hybrid OA journals and know users will not be able to discover select OA resources through library

systems. Some libraries have taken the route of excluding hybrid titles altogether.

Profera, Walker, and Cook (2014) called for publishers to “. . . provide stable link resolver data, adequate metadata, and standardized use statistics for their unpaid content.” The National Information Standards Organization’s (NISO) Open Discovery Initiative (ODI) (<http://www.niso.org/workrooms/odi/>) addresses many of the issues librarians have with discovery service indexes and knowledge base listing. Though ODI does not specifically focus on OR, it has the potential to have an impact if OA content providers are willing to participate. One attendee at the session pointed out that while it is important to maintain a certain level of service to our users, it is much more proactive and effective for librarians to work with standards organizations, like NISO, to develop national standards to deal with the issues we face; to focus on the macro, not the local. Finally, services such as the Open Access Button (<https://openaccessbutton.org/>) and 1Science (<http://www.1science.com/>) may provide local options that alleviate some of the technical pitfalls associated with OR.

Marketing Open Resources

Marketing of open resources can be as simple as making them discoverable alongside all other resources in the catalog, subject guides, and websites, as searchers are usually seeking resources on a topic rather than type of information container. Even those searching a known item are not necessarily concerned with their open or proprietary status. Marketing efforts can also be expanded to focus solely on OR. For example, one attendee mentioned how their library has created guides exclusively showcasing OR. Additionally, highlighting specific resources in instruction sessions, newsletters, correspondence, and conversations can increase use. Taking the time to specify the “openness” of OR should be encouraged. Attendees of the discussion forum pointed to the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC, see

<http://www.sparc.arl.org/>) as a resource for advocating and marketing open initiatives on campus.

Librarians point to liaise activities with faculty as a means to promote and advocate for open resources. This is logical since these are the users assigning resources to students and seeking publishing outlets; however, several attendees rallied around the idea of marketing OR to other user groups. Students could benefit an awareness of OR particular to their major, as they will likely lose access to licensed resources upon graduation and will need to know how to locate and use reliable, alternative sources. Additionally, instructional designers on campus who work with faculty to build online courses could benefit from learning about OR as they may influence faculty members’ decisions regarding course assigned readings. Finally, one attendee referenced a mini-grant program their library offered to faculty to develop open textbooks for their courses.

Assessing Open Resources

Every library collection and incoming electronic resource, whether purchased or freely accessible, should undergo periodic evaluation and assessment to determine value to the research and instructional missions of the institution. Not surprisingly, the process of assessing open resources made available to users is similar to assessing purchased resources. The first phase of assessment is defining and categorizing the resources. There are several key questions that can help guide this process:

- (1) How many resources and what formats are being provided?
- (2) What subject areas/disciplines are being supported?

The first two questions necessitate creating several reports, most often generated from an integrated library system (ILS) or electronic resources management tool (ERM). There are various formats of OR. E-journals, e-books, and digitized texts and other objects are the most common. ILS and ERM reports can provide

Table 1. University of Florida title & usage report for open source journals.

Database/Provider	Subject Areas Supported	No. of Journal Titles	Uses	Avg. Use per Title
BioMedCentral Open Access	STEM; Med	332	19,696	59.33
Directory of Open Access Journals	STEM; Med; Hum & Soc Sci	6,155	65,071	10.57
Free Medical Journals	Med	1,673	25,181	15.05
Freely Accessible Journals	STEM; Med; Hum & Soc Sci	6,196	107,761	17.39
HighWire Press (Free Journals)	STEM; Med	474	40,407	85.25
Hindawi Pub. Open Access	STEM; Med	234	1,451	6.20
IngentaConnect Free/OA	STEM; Med	217	3,605	16.61
J-Stage (Japanese Sci & Tech)	STEM	536	5,405	10.08
Open Access Digital Library	STEM; Med; Hum & Soc Sci	4,427	36,798	8.31
Open Hum., OJS, Open Source, PLOS	STEM; Med; Hum & Soc Sci	454	12,079	26.61
PubMed Central	STEM	1,857	108,532	58.44
REDALyC & SCIELO	Latin America (all subjects)	1,258	8,229	6.54
Total		23,813	434,215	18.23

should not be the sole measuring stick to determine collection and user value, but usage is certainly a cornerstone metric for librarians reviewing and deselecting OR. One problem with usage is that the definitions of the data collected often vary across publishers and platforms (for example, what constitutes a “download”). If applying a consistent statistical measurement, the reports can be quite useful. Table 1 shows a report generated by the ERM tool at the UF Libraries using a “click-through” metric (click-through is defined as the user accessed the provider’s platform through the libraries link resolver). This report is a seven-year compilation of statistics for journal titles received and tagged as OR. It provides the name of the resource provider or collection, the subject areas supported, the number of titles made

librarians a better sense of what and how many OR are made available across broad subject areas. Unfortunately, most of the MARC records for OR do not offer call number or subject headings, but often OA collections in knowledge bases are labeled with subject designations (e.g., “Freely Accessible Medical Journals”) that can provide broad categories.

(3) What type of usage statistics are available and *what* is the impact of this data?

Inevitably, usage statistics play a crucial role in assessing electronic resources. Relying on usage

accessible, uses, and average use per title. Not only is the number of uses quite high (no. = 434,215) but the average use per title is very strong (avg = 18.23). This table shows only a summary of the usage in each collection, but the usage data is available for librarians to sort by subject areas, the individual journal titles, and usage for detailed review. Additionally, the COUNTER compliant Journal Report 1 Gold Open Access (GOA) can be used to assess usage of OA articles and journals from a particular publisher or provider.

(4) What qualitative assessments can be utilized?

Conducting qualitative assessment of e-resources is fraught with challenges. Librarians know how difficult it can be to get users to respond. Equally problematic is gauging user satisfaction and relevance across subject areas for hundreds or even thousands of open resources. It would be fair to assume that most of the OR made available to users go undiscovered; but, given the usage statistics and number of quality peer-review journals and respected OR available, users are placing value on at least a significant portion of these resources. Determining that portion is the key. Survey tools, focus groups, and one-on-one discussions with faculty and researchers are recommended methods of exploring user feedback. Usually the best approach to evaluating electronic resources, including OR, is to conduct a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods of assessment.

Impact on Collection Management

It is not just the abundant amount of open resources many libraries are offering users that is having an impact on collection development activities in academic and special libraries. It is the significant number of respected and important resources that are now available. Attendees overwhelmingly agreed that open access materials made available to users were considered part of library collections, which supports Bullock, Hosburgh, and Mann's (2015) findings that 71% of librarians considered OA materials as part of their library collection. As of December 2015 the *Directory of Open Access Journals* (DOAJ) listed almost eleven thousand peer-reviewed journals from over a hundred countries constituting more than two million articles (2015). While this metric seemingly validates libraries incorporating these and other high quality OR into collection building, a Google search of academic library collection policies shows little mention of OR. At the Charleston Conference discussion session on this topic, librarians in attendance reported OR were not systematically incorporated into formal collection

policies; although many librarians indicated it would be very useful to have updated policies on OR to share with users and faculty at their institutions. Finally, incorporating OR into instructional activities was identified by librarians attending the discussion as an important future focus, which also ties into marketing efforts.

Conclusion

This project was immensely interesting and informative, and is still ongoing. Clearly there is a need for libraries to develop guidelines for reviewing and selecting open resources. Improving the discoverability and consistency of the resources is an important issue, as is finding better methods of marketing and sharing the wealth of OR that are available to users. A key step is using both quantitative and qualitative measures for assessing the OR being offered, to ensure the value of the resources and as an evidence-based means to deselect. Finally, creating or adapting collection policies for OR would be beneficial for libraries as a more formal reference for communication with stakeholders.

The project review and the informative discussion at the Charleston Conference will assist the Smathers Libraries in the management of OA resources going forward. Here are the key takeaways from the project and discussion forum:

- Developing a more organized and systematic process for review and selection of OA resources.
- Developing a systematic way to implement and track selector decisions and review metadata/links
- Developing improved ways to communicate with faculty and users about OA resource availability
- Developing routine OA resource evaluation processes
- Incorporating OA resources into collection policies

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