Open Access: A Platform to Share

The following excerpt is based on an interview conducted at the Coalition for Netwonked Information (CNI) 2010 annual meeting by Gerry Bayne, EDUCAUSE multimedia producer. To listen to the full podcast, go to <http://www.educause.edu/er/Kriegsman>.

Gerry Bayne: Can you tell us about the open-access policies in place at Harvard and what drives the decision to choose open access?

Sue Kriegsman: Harvard’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences passed an open-access resolution in 2008, requiring faculty members to allow the university to make copies of their scholarly articles freely available online. Today, four other Harvard schools—the Graduate School of Education, the Business School, the Law School, and the Kennedy School of Government—have adopted open-access policies. A lot of faculty want to support teaching and research. They have recognized that having open-access policies and sharing their work with a broader community gives them another platform to distribute the kinds of work and research they have been doing. Open access also provides good exposure for the faculty, bringing more attention to their work. They certainly want their work out there, which may be one reason they are in a teaching field. We are seeing an increase in usage of the materials that have already been deposited in our open-access repository, DASH (Digital Access to Scholarship at Harvard). And we are continuing to get submissions from the faculty as their interest increases in the work we have been doing.

Bayne: How does an open-access policy translate into the infrastructure and process of an institution?

Kriegsman: I think every institution is handling this a little differently. At Harvard, the Office for Scholarly Communication (http://osc.hul.harvard.edu/), which spearheads open-access initiatives, was developed after the resolution by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. The idea was to have a centrally supported department that could look at the issue across the schools. OSC is based in the University Library, which has an existing infrastructure to support the different schools at Harvard, because the schools do all operate independently.

But the outreach at the different schools has changed. Some of the schools want their library staff and their librarians to be doing the outreach to faculty to collect the data to be put into the repository. Through OSC, a team of students can knock on faculty members’ doors to collect materials, and some of the schools are taking advantage of that. Other schools want to leave the outreach to the existing relationships that they have with their faculty.

Everybody is handling the process a little differently, and I think that reflects varying cultures at different schools and different institutions. There is certainly no one single method that’s working everywhere to collect data and help support open-access policies.

Bayne: What are the funding considerations around open-access publishing?

Kriegsman: Some of the funding considerations around open-access publishing have to do with whether the university is going to start supporting its own open-access content with a repository to store the materials and a way to push the materials out. At Harvard, we decided not to put a lot of effort into the front end of our repository; instead, we are putting more effort into the back end to make sure that our data is being pushed out to search engines, indexing services, places like Google Scholar. So when somebody uses Google Scholar, that person is going to hit on materials that we are storing in our repository.

The other thing happening with open-access publishing is that sometimes open-access journals have an author’s fee associated with publication. In September 2009, Harvard was one of the first institutions to join the Compact for Open-access Publishing Equity (COPE, http://www.oacompact.org/). The compact states that the university will provide a durable, sustainable model for supporting open-access publishing. Through the Harvard Open-access Publishing Equity fund (HOPE, http://osc.hul.harvard.edu/hope), if an author wants to publish in an open-access journal that has an author fee, Harvard will help pay the fee if the journal is a pure open-access (not hybrid) journal.

Thus, we are trying not only to store and distribute our own scholarship but also to help other journals produce open-access publications, so that more people have more access to the scholarship.

Bayne: Who pays for the implementation and staff?

Kriegsman: At Harvard, a combination of the provost’s office and the university libraries is supporting the funding.
I haven't heard of many other models. I think everybody is trying to figure out if open-access support is going to fit into existing departments and infrastructures or if this is something that needs to be spun off independently. At Harvard, we have done a mix of the two: we started a new department, but we put it under existing university libraries—in a central place that can support all of the schools at Harvard.

Bayne: How does Harvard plan to measure the success of open access?

Kriegsman: One of the things we are doing to measure success is looking at usage statistics: how many of the materials in our repository are actually being utilized? And we are finding that these statistics are very positive. We are also looking at how many articles we’re getting in to the repository—as an indication of the kind of support we are receiving from faculty. Yet we still need to coax faculty to put materials in. This is not because they aren't supportive of the open-access policy; it's because this is just one more thing they have to do. So we are trying to find ways to make the process of depositing materials as seamless as possible for the faculty. The big change that needs to happen is for the faculty to build this into their standard operating procedure, and I think that’s going to be a long process.

Bayne: It's a cultural shift.

Kriegsman: It's a big cultural shift, but we are getting there. A year ago people said: “Open-access policies? Yes, I remember voting on that, maybe, but what does it really mean?” Now people are saying: “Oh yeah, the open-access policy. I need to get you my materials, and here is the best way to work with me to get that done.”

Bayne: Are there any drawbacks that you see to adopting open-access policies?

Kriegsman: None.

Bayne: That’s a great note to end on.

Update: In June 2010, BioMed Central named Harvard University one of its three open-access institutes of the year, along with the University of Zurich and the Chinese Academy of Science.

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