

A Crash Course on Open Access

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Digital Repository at the University of Maryland (DRUM)

What is Open Access and why am I hearing so much about it?

You may have heard the term “open access” floating about recently. The idea is pretty simple, really. “Open Access” (OA) refers to the principle that research should be accessible online, for free, after publication. Proponents of OA seek just that – access open to all, free of monetary, legal and technical barriers.

The movement for OA grew out of both the expansion of the internet and the scholarly communication crisis. The crisis in scholarly communication is one of rising costs and shrinking accessibility. According to the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), journal prices have risen 227% since 1986, while the inflation rate has only risen 64%. Libraries and scholars are facing shrinking budgets and increasingly tough choices about which journals they can afford. Thus, access to scholarly information and, by extension, scholarly research itself, is suffering.

While the idea of OA is simple, implementation can be more complex. OA challenges traditional models of revenue and copyright. In general, there are two avenues for making scholarly materials more accessible: publishing materials in OA journals, and archiving materials in OA repositories, such as the Digital Repository at the University of Maryland (DRUM).

Open Access Publishing

The people who oppose OA are, first and foremost, publishers. OA challenges their income scheme. As traditional publishing becomes less relevant, publishers are facing a crisis of their own. Whereas they traditionally have made their money from subscriptions and sales of their publications, the OA movement asks them to look at other models. Some journals have successfully transitioned to an OA model where authors, or their sponsoring institutions, pay a processing fee. Other journals receive subsidies from their own universities or scholarly associations. One of the more successful peer-reviewed OA journals is *PLoS Biology*, co-founded by Nobel Prize-winning scientist Harold Varmus.

Open Access Archiving

Another strategy for increasing access includes publishing pre-prints or archiving post-prints to a digital archive, or OA repository. If articles have been previously published, an author may need to obtain permission from the publisher before depositing work in an OA repository.

OA archives take many shapes and forms. Some are discipline based, like Cornell's arXiv.org, an archive of e-prints in Physics, Math, Computer Science and Biology. Some are government initiated, like PubMed Central, the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) archive of biomedical and life sciences journal literature.

Finally, still other OA archives are institution based, like DRUM (www.lib.umd.edu/drum). DRUM is the place for UM faculty members to make their research available to the campus and the world. DRUM accepts not only published articles, but also less traditional scholarly expressions and formats such as conference presentations, video and audio files, websites, and raw data. Our policy simply asks that works be substantive works of scholarship. In other words, they should be complete, not in notes or draft form. Depositing your work in DRUM not only adds to the University's visibility, but also makes work easily accessible through search engines like Google and Google Scholar. As a result, this increased visibility and accessibility increases the chances that the work will be cited.

Recent Developments

The OA movement has advanced significantly during the past year. Most notably, the NIH Public Access Policy was signed into law requiring scientists to deposit articles from research funded by NIH in PubMed Central. Previously, the policy merely encouraged authors to make research funded by NIH openly available. Needless to say, the initial policy carried little weight and very few researchers volunteered to deposit their articles.

Even though OA is more prevalent in the sciences, important gains have been made in the humanities with the debut of Open Humanities Press – a publisher of seven peer-reviewed journals in critical and cultural theory.

Many institutions have passed resolutions in support of open access (something the University of Maryland has yet to do) but a few notable institutions have gone the extra step and passed mandates. Harvard

University's Faculty of Arts and Sciences adopted a policy last year that requires faculty members to allow the university to make their scholarly articles available free online via their digital repository. The Harvard mandate is particularly noteworthy because it was the first in the US and the first to be adopted by faculty rather than administrators. Following shortly on the heels of this decision, the Harvard Law School adopted its own mandate to allow free access to its research. On the West coast, the Stanford School of Education passed a similar motion, and other institutions are sure to follow. In fact, a proposal is under consideration in the University of California system.

What Can You Do to Support Open Access?

- Deposit your research in DRUM and link to it from your personal website.
- Publish in journals that are OA friendly. SHERPA/RoMEO (www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo) summarizes the copyright and self-archiving policies of more than 400 publishers.
- Retain your rights when signing agreements. Publisher contracts often require you to transfer all of your copyrights to them. Scrutinize them carefully and utilize an author addendum, such as the Scholars Copyright Addendum Engine (scholars.sciencecommons.org), to ensure you retain the rights you need to reuse your research.
- Publish in open access journals when possible. *The Directory of Open Access Journals* (www.doaj.org) lists more than 3,800 titles.
- Consider using grant funds or see if your department has a special fund for paying author fees to make research openly available after publication. The UM Libraries passed a resolution in 2008 to devote funds to pay open access author fees on behalf of library authors.
- Consider using your influence by refusing to review for expensive journals or declining to serve on their editorial boards.
- Invite library participation in faculty departmental meetings and graduate seminars to discuss scholarly communication issues.

As a scholar, each faculty member can make a difference by becoming an active participant in the open access movement. To find out more about these issues, contact Terry Owen, DRUM Coordinator (towen@umd.edu), or a unit's library liaison.