Faculty familiarity with open access (OA)

Open Access (OA) is transforming access to scholarly and scientific contents. OA repositories facilitate access to institutions’ scholarly work, encouraging collaboration and wider dissemination. OA repositories can serve as a platform for all educators to exchange ideas and expand their research agendas as well as curricular offerings. More than a decade after the OA declarations the perception of scholars regarding OA publishing remains unchanged. Despite all the benefits described by the proponents of OA, a large number of scholars remain unfamiliar with OA and its goals.

The term open access is poorly understood by faculty in general and often misunderstood. Faculty have been reluctant to embrace OA repositories. This study with the faculty and educators at a public university reveals that more than half (62.3%) of faculty were not familiar with any OA declarations, or their goal. The data presents faculty members’ awareness of OA publishing, based on faculty age, college, rank and status.

Data collection

Data was collected through anonymous, web-based confidential questionnaires administered through the online tool Qualtrics. All faculty members at University of North Texas (1156) were invited to participate in the survey via e-mail. A total number of 172 surveys were partially completed (14.8% responses rate), and 138 were fully completed for a total completion rate of 80%.

Familiarity with OA based on age

Results show that faculty aged 61 to 70 were the least familiar with any of the three open access declarations with 72.5%, followed by age group 31 to 40, with 66.6%, then 41 to 50, with 60.4%, and faculty over 70, with 55.5%.

Faculty familiarity with OA based on rank and status

The faculty members that identified their rank as Other (possibly librarians, adjuncts, lecturers, etc.) showed the highest familiarity rate (45%), followed by assistant professor (35%), full professor (34%) and associate professor (32%). It is interesting to note that overall, the non-tenure track faculty showed higher familiarity rates (43%) than tenure track (37%) and tenured faculty (34%).

Faculty intent to deposit & familiarity with OA

The Chi-square test shows that there was a statistically significant relationship between respondents’ familiarity with OA and the colleges (X² (1, N = 138) = 31.25, p = .000, φ = .476). Coll of Visual Arts and Design and Coll of Merchandising, Hospitality and Tourism the least familiar with 100%, followed by Coll of Music with 87.5%, Coll of Education (83.4%) and Coll of Business with 80%. Colleges with the highest familiarity were Coll of Information with 75%, and Libraries with 72%.

Conclusion & future research

In conclusion, there was a significant difference between faculty age group, academic field, ranks and status and their awareness of OA goals, that has a direct impact on the intent to deposit their work into an OA repository. Pomerantz and Peek (2016) argue that the term open continues to be used in new ways which leads to more confusion. The term open seems to have a different meaning to different individuals due to the fact that OA is a movement and a concept that is still progressing thorough different outreach efforts.

The goal of future research is to investigate the evolution of faculty understanding of OA principles. With the increasing roles of information professionals in the scholarly publishing process a longitudinal study that traces what the term “open access” publishing means to faculty and educators in different academic fields is necessary.

References

