

# Exploring faculty perspectives on open access at a medium-sized, American doctoral university

Faculty hold widely varying perspectives on the benefits and challenges afforded by open access (OA) publishing. In the United States, conversations on OA models and strategy have been dominated by scholars affiliated with Carnegie R1 institutions. This article reports findings from interviews conducted with faculty at a Carnegie R2 institution, highlighting disciplinary and individual perspectives on the high costs and rich rewards afforded by OA. The results reiterate the persistence of a high degree of skepticism regarding the quality of peer review and business models associated with OA publishing. By exploring scholars' perceptions of and experiences with OA publishing and their comfort using or sharing unpublished, publicly available content, the authors highlight the degree to which OA approaches must remain flexible, iterative and multifaceted – no single solution can begin to accommodate the rich and varying needs of individual stakeholders.

## Keywords

open access; scholarly communications; higher education; Carnegie R2 universities; academic publishing; academic library



RACHEL E. SCOTT  
Associate Dean for  
Information Assets  
Milner Library  
Illinois State  
University



JULIE A. MURPHY  
Collection  
Assessment Librarian  
and Physics Librarian  
Milner Library  
Illinois State  
University



CASSIE THAYER-  
STYES  
Acquisitions Librarian  
Milner Library  
Illinois State  
University



CHAD E. BUCKLEY  
Head of Collection  
Development and  
Biological Sciences  
Librarian  
Milner Library  
Illinois State  
University



ANNE SHELLEY  
Scholarly  
Communication  
Librarian and Music  
Librarian  
Milner Library  
Illinois State  
University

## Introduction

Open access (OA) publishing holds a variety of challenges and opportunities for authors. Many faculty support making published research outputs publicly available and recognize that this can increase the impact of their work, make scholarship more equitably available to readers and perhaps even accelerate the pace of research. However, many also express serious concerns about how current OA models may exclude those who cannot pay to play, encourage predatory practices among publishers and not be aligned with disciplinary expectations for publication. Studies exploring OA publishing opportunities, mandates, preferences and practices in the United States have previously focused primarily on faculty employed at Carnegie R1 (Doctoral University – Very high research activity) institutions; scholars at Carnegie R2 (Doctoral Universities – High research activity) institutions have frequently been spoken over rather than having had their voices heard.

2 For some of the same reasons that OA remains fraught and contentious among authors, it continues to be among the most complex facets of academic librarianship. Open access models continue to proliferate, additional sources have not materialized to fund OA and the considerable differences in scholars' preferences, practices and disciplinary contexts make librarians' path forward uncertain. To better understand and support the needs of local scholars, librarians at Illinois State University (ISU), an R2 institution, conducted interviews with 25 faculty members representing all the University's colleges. This article reports faculty responses to questions related to openness. The research questions under consideration are:

'OA ... continues to be among the most complex facets of academic librarianship'

1. How do faculty perceive open access publishing?
2. What experiences do faculty have with paid open access publishing?
3. What are faculty members' experiences and comfort using or sharing unpublished, publicly available materials?

By understanding faculty preferences and practices with respect to OA, the authors hope to better design collections and services that meet the needs of their campus authors. As OA models evolve and proliferate and opportunities for librarians to support publishing increase, it is essential that funds invested in OA support are aligned with the articulated preferences and needs of one's community.

## Literature Review

Open access has benefits that are widely recognized and largely accepted. A number of studies have legitimized the OA citation advantage, and increased engagement is an obvious by-product of freely available content.<sup>1</sup> OA is perceived as altruistic, and some authors consider making their work available free to read as a social responsibility.<sup>2</sup> Some embrace OA as one component of open science, which has the goal of promoting transparency and replicability.<sup>3</sup> Some scholars have drawn a connection between OA and open educational resources (OERs) and articulated a desire to contribute to a body of literature that can also be freely used in a classroom setting.<sup>4</sup> A variety of OA agreement types – Subscribe to Open (S2O), read and publish (R&P), memberships that discount publishing costs and subscriptions that bundle in a set number of article processing charges (APCs) – allow librarians to fund publishing alongside read access, and each agreement is uniquely negotiated.<sup>5</sup>

Although OA offers significant advantages, it also has numerous problems, most of which focus on costs and reputational aspects. Because many OA venues impose an APC or other fees, many scholars associate OA venues with predatory practices, less rigorous peer review, and a 'pay to play' scheme in which subpar articles are accepted for the sake of profit.<sup>6</sup> Average APC costs are high (Note 1), and APC waiver initiatives have not ensured equitable access to all authors.<sup>7</sup> Research has shown that grant-funded, tenured, male scholars at Association of American Universities (AAU) institutions publish OA most frequently,<sup>8</sup> suggesting that OA is inaccessible to authors who do not match that profile. OA is relatively new,<sup>9</sup> and its venues are accordingly less established than the flagship journals within any discipline. This may lead to perceptions of instability relative to journals that are behind a paywall and reiterates that an excellent academic reputation and high readership within one's discipline are important when considering publication venues, whether OA or not.<sup>10</sup>

'many scholars associate OA venues with predatory practices, less rigorous peer review, and ... "pay to play"'

In the United States, studies related to OA are primarily focused on R1 universities. (Note 2) Most of the OA publishing agreements have been signed by R1 institutions and much of the leadership and advocacy has come from this sector. (Note 3) In stark contrast, administrators at R2 universities have voiced concerns regarding OA. Research managers at Midwestern R2 institutions, for example, submitted a letter to the Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy in opposition to the proposed elimination

3 of an embargo period for federally funded publications, saying, 'Rapid elimination of the current embargo period, without a compensatory source of publication funds, would disproportionately and negatively impact the research productivity of a majority of U.S. higher education institutions that are essential for training a diverse U.S. STEM workforce.' (Note 4) Although this is only one example, it demonstrates that the tone of discussions surrounding OA in R2 institutions has been hesitant and skeptical. Such statements may lack input from librarians who understand that agreements with publishers are negotiated locally and are not monolithic. Studies of R2 faculty related to OA include a survey on an OA subvention fund,<sup>11</sup> a survey investigating faculty publishing habits and OA perceptions,<sup>12</sup> a baseline assessment of faculty research output<sup>13</sup> and an editorial for library administrators at R2 and smaller institutions that explores the implications of OA expansion.<sup>14</sup> This article fills a gap by reporting OA perceptions and practices of R2 faculty members in their own words.

'the tone of discussions surrounding OA in R2 institutions has been hesitant and skeptical'

## Methodology

The ISU Institutional Review Board approved this study's protocol and interview instrument as exempt. The authors recruited participants via the University faculty e-mail list. There were 56 faculty members who expressed an interest by emailing the principal investigator, and the team selected the 25 whose college, school/department and rank promoted the most diverse perspectives for in-depth, semi-structured interviews. (Note 5) Participants represented all of ISU's academic colleges and 22 distinct departments/schools (see Appendix A), and conduct research in diverse areas within applied sciences (criminal justice, family studies, geography, human development, information technology and kinesiology); arts and humanities (film studies, history, literary studies, music education and musicology); business (finance and management); formal and natural sciences (biology, chemistry, math and physics); health sciences (communication sciences and disorders and nursing); and social sciences (anthropology, communication, economics, psychology, sociology, social work, special education and teaching). By rank, ten Assistant Professors, seven Associate Professors, six Professors, and two Instructional Assistant Professors participated. One participant is currently serving in an administrative capacity, one is currently in a doctoral program and one completed additional coursework beyond their master's degree. Participants completed their terminal degrees between 1987 and 2022 (see Appendix B). 'Academic age' and faculty rank have both been tied to OA funding and are accordingly included in this study.<sup>15</sup>

Two members of the team conducted interviews via Zoom in September and October 2022 (see Appendix C). At the beginning of each interview, they received permission to record the interviews and enabled transcription. During the interviews, both took notes, which they afterward reconciled to ensure their interpretations matched and nothing was omitted. The authors used inductive coding to organize the data into themes and sub-themes. To promote the validity of the data, the authors embraced triangulation, in which researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources; member checking, in which researchers take the data and interpretations to participants for their input on the credibility of the information and account; the audit trail, in which professionals external to the project examine the account and consider its credibility and thick, rich description which 'creates verisimilitude, statements that produce for the readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described in a study.'<sup>16</sup> The inclusion of thick, rich description amplifies the voices of participants and conveys in their own words the fullness of their preferences and experiences.

'in-depth interviews ... provide a nuanced view of the OA perceptions and practices of faculty in the United States'

## Limitations

The authors do not assert the generalizability of their findings; however, in-depth interviews have yielded rich description of the divergent perspectives within a Carnegie R2 context and provide a nuanced view of the OA perceptions and practices of faculty in the United States. Due to the abundance of diverse themes that emerged while analyzing the interview data, the

- 4 authors decided to split the findings into discrete manuscripts. Doing so allowed the authors to examine the themes in great detail but could also be considered a limitation. Because participants' responses could lead to their identification, the interview data could not be satisfactorily anonymized and will not be shared.

## Results

### RQ1. How do faculty perceive open access publishing?

Participants placed themselves on a spectrum from antagonistic, or completely opposed, to actively embracing OA. All participants fell somewhere between active and antagonistic – no one claimed either of these extremes – and for many, their relationship with openness is complicated. Although several expressed strong convictions that knowledge should be freely available – especially scholarship produced by faculty at a public institution – just as many expressed equally strong concerns about existing OA publishing models, venues or processes. Conflict between OA in principle and practice surfaced as the most prominent theme.

#### ***Negative perceptions of open access publishing***

Those who were more antagonistic than active expressed concerns about the quality of OA journals in their field and existing OA models. A social sciences scholar identified as closest to adversarial: 'In theory I like the idea of OA, but I don't understand the business model.' Of their 49 articles, none have been published OA. They noted that it is expensive to publish in OA journals and authors already provide free labor. They compared OA to vanity publishing, saying, 'We've seen a lot of these (journals) go into a vanity publishing model. Some are legit, but they definitely favor people with resources, passive income, trust funds.' A humanities scholar agreed: 'It always seems like the fees to publish open access are astronomical. I don't know where I would come up with that money.' In business, there is more movement toward OA, but the focus is still on venue prestige. This aligns with findings from several studies that identify venue, target audience and quality – not OA – as authors' most important considerations when submitting their work.<sup>17</sup>

'Conflict between OA in principle and practice surfaced as the most prominent theme'

Some early career researchers have been counseled to avoid OA journals, or at least APC-based OA journals. This interacts with hierarchies of journals in various fields: 'Because I'm so junior, I'm constrained by the value hierarchy of my field. I don't think anyone in my field cares about open access.' One social scientist was told to avoid OA because it takes control of the narrative away: 'You want to control the narrative of what you're doing, and so you don't always want to make everything available to everybody.' Another earlier career participant confirmed they were told by mentors not to publish in journals that charge APCs. For them, this comes into conflict with their desire for people to read what they are writing and putting labor into their core values around serving and helping the community: 'I also will admit my bias in terms of coming from a social justice lens ... How are we serving the community?' They acknowledge that practitioners are not going to be able to pay for their article: 'those in the field who are getting paid dimes on a dollar, they're not going to pay US\$39 for my article, no matter how great it is.'

'I'm constrained by the value hierarchy of my field. I don't think anyone in my field cares about open access'

Scholars in health sciences noted strong concerns about predatory OA journals. One said, 'research articles are not created equal, and it's important to have a critical lens to see when a good article is published in an OA journal. This doesn't mean that in the future I wouldn't publish in an OA journal, but I would be incredibly selective.' Another acknowledged the costs of OA publishing as well as the benefits to independent researchers and scholars at institutions with fewer resources. They hope to publish in an OA journal soon and struggled to identify a reputable, accessible, affordable option that would allow them to retain copyright. They expressed concerns about increasing costs despite printing and shipping no longer being factors and indicated: 'I don't see how the landscape can change in the near future.'

5 A scholar in the applied sciences located their distrust of OA publishing in APCs. They look for journals that don't require a fee and are 'turned off by APCs.' They gave an example of guest editing an issue and struggling to recruit prospective contributors who could not pay the US\$2,500 APC. They acknowledged that, 'as science, everything should be transparent' and stated that scientific progress can be slowed by current OA models that preclude those who cannot afford APCs: 'OA APCs are discriminatory – only faculty at the big schools have the funding. Grants are unbelievably hard to get, especially for newer faculty.' They also indicated that newer faculty were more susceptible to predatory OA journals. 'All journals sometimes publish crappy science,' but in their estimation, OA journals seem to do so more consistently.

### ***Neutral or mixed perceptions of open access publishing***

A social sciences scholar is neutral because they see the problems and the advantages: 'OA means the reader gets access, but APCs reduce access to authors – especially at smaller institutions that don't have the funding to pay for it.' They provided an example of a journal in which they had previously published going OA a couple years ago: 'now there's a US\$400 fee and I could try to get that, but I've just decided to submit to other places.' They would support a funding model that was truly open to both authors and readers but acknowledged that models supported by advertisement and philanthropy also face challenges.

On the one hand, another social sciences scholar is 'not a fan of this open access stuff,' but on the other hand, they have benefited from OA publishing with a European co-author whose institution covers APCs. They have done research on the proliferation of their field's journals' impact on quantity and quality of research and extrapolated this to OA journals – sometimes the quality is questionable, so they are not as highly rated as subscription journals. They wondered why anyone would bother to pay an APC for certain kinds of research: 'Some of the research we are doing does not have direct real-world applicability or commercial value.' They contrasted this with research in the hard sciences and indicated that it might make more sense for those scholars to 'pay and expose their research findings to the most people.' They acknowledge that OA is here to stay, and all must learn to live with it.

An education scholar does not seek out OA but is open to publishing in one of their subfield's few good OA venues: 'Those journals, at least in our field, are good for articles that maybe aren't going to make a top tier journal, but they're still worth publishing.' They like OA 'until you have to pay for it' and 'think it makes scholars look bad, at least in our field, if they've published in an OA journal and paid for that.' This is because they think fee-based OA publishing can be ethically questionable: 'I know there are more reputable open access journals, but there are a lot of them that are article mills, with poor production value and poor editing.' On the other hand, they note that one of their OA articles is among their most read and most cited because of its OA status. Their general philosophy is that there are several quality journals, and it simply is not necessary to pay an APC in their field.

### ***Positive perceptions of open access publishing***

More participants identified as more active than adversarial with respect to OA. When a natural scientist is 'flush with grant money,' they elect to publish OA. Their primary concern is predatory journals that publish bad science, but they will happily pay an APC to publish in established OA venues such as *PLOS*. An applied sciences scholar typically publishes OA because their conferences are OA upon registration. They highlighted that OA is also important for citations and impact: 'If readers cannot access your article, they cannot include it in their review section, this signifies the impact both directly and indirectly.' They indicated that the better journal venues in their field are gold OA, and the less desirable ones are hybrid. An education scholar identifies as somewhat active: 'It helps the public, my colleagues, the field, and my students.'

'They indicated that the better journal venues in their field are gold OA, and the less desirable ones are hybrid'

An applied sciences scholar is conflicted but also interested in OA publishing: 'I'm interested in everyone having access to all the academic knowledge that's produced, but I appreciate that given the way that the current system is configured, what would actually be happening

6 if I successfully had open access for an article would be (that) I would be elevating the availability of my article in a field of others.' They stated that OA is especially important given that ISU is a public institution. They also underlined that this is an equity issue by asking who has access to the OA publication funds. 'Senior men with large grants? Who are the people who are harder to cite – women, people of color, humanists?'

One social scientist identified as 'aspirationally active' on the openness spectrum. In their estimation, OA is among many professional things that are 'nice to do,' rather than essential. They would need more of an incentive to make all their work openly available. They gave an example of working with a co-author who advocated for adding the article to arXiv. At this point, if they have a choice between two journals and everything else is equal, they go for the OA option; they also choose to review articles for OA journals.

An arts scholar is 'definitely not anti-open access.' Although they were initially passive, they have had the opportunity to value OA resources. Referring to an OA book in their main research area, they said: 'I was chuffed I could read that book online way before the print copy, purchased at a lower cost than typical, arrived. Even when I've been on campus, and I needed to quickly engage with some aspect of that text, although the book was at home, I could look up something that crossed my mind and gained access that way.' They also had the recent experience of publishing an article OA through a transformative agreement: 'For me, especially with this essay about one of my former professors and mentors who's passed away, it was really special to get to think of more people having access easily about something that was really written as a sort of historiography of his work ... So I was stoked.'

'Some scholars who are otherwise open to OA publishing noted concerns about costs'

Some scholars who are otherwise open to OA publishing noted concerns about costs. A humanist 'would love to publish more things OA, but there are limited opportunities in (my field), and they charge me to do it. I wish it was easier to do.' An applied sciences scholar is not opposed but finds APCs too costly. They shared an example of having accidentally selected OA for a journal article. 'It was a mistake, but I was asked to pay US\$4,000, so I changed the decision. When I'm publishing several articles per year, I don't have that kind of money.' They, too, reiterated, 'We write for free, we conduct research, ... and we didn't charge anybody, but we have to pay in order to have it be open access to get more people to read it. I really don't know if that is a fair game.'

A scholar in business shared: 'Ideally everything would be open access, but journals and publishers have to make their money.' They stated that OA options are too expensive and 'we can't afford them.' They deposit pre-publication copies in an OA repository and link it from their ISU online profile. A natural sciences scholar said, 'I think open access is a good idea as someone who has struggled to access things. It is a very good idea in principle. In practice, I don't have funding to pay. Some of them are pretty expensive.' They have published OA and are committed to doing so when possible because 'Information should be out there – that's why we're doing it. As a scientist I want to do something and hopefully someone will find it useful and interesting. Hopefully people can build on what I'm doing.' As noted by others, this scholar shared concerns that 'Publishers have made a lot of money on the backs of researchers and restricted access to things that could be useful to other researchers and the world as a whole.'

'We want to uphold the rigor of publishing, but my article is not helpful sitting on a shelf in Milner (Library).'

A scholar in the health sciences is in favor of OA publishing and actively pursues it when possible because they work in a field of practitioners. 'It is not helpful if my work is published, and only researchers read it. ... What's most important to me is that the clinicians see it, that my patients and their families can see it, and they can access it. That's what's most important to me.' They noted concerns about predatory publishing and pay-to-publish models: 'We want to uphold the rigor of publishing, but my article is not helpful sitting on a shelf in Milner (Library).'

A formal sciences scholar is also a proponent of OA and skeptical of predatory journals. Their department has discussed creating a list of predatory journals in the spirit of Beall's List, but this has been delayed by concerns about infringing on people's academic freedoms:

7 'One person's list is not the other person's list, so we are ... trying to deal with it on a case-by-case basis.' The goal would be to distinguish predatory journals from credible OA journals in a centralized manner. Other than predatory publishing, however, they have no concerns: 'What can go wrong, making your research available right away? I don't see any downside to that. I haven't heard any arguments against it.' They think that if a journal is reputable, the University should pay for OA publishing, 'and that should be the end of that; I certainly shouldn't have to pay to publish it or to read it. You know, I'm the producer, I'm giving them my product. Why should I have to pay for it myself?'

One participant is 'very strongly in favor of access, whatever format access takes.' They make their articles openly available and subscribe to the Golden Rule: 'Be the change you want to see in the world, doing to others as they do unto you.' Their argument is that if they put all of their articles on arXiv, as close as possible to the journal version, host supplemental materials on their website and link it to an arXiv article, and make every resource in the article accessible, they have done their part. They are far more inclined to review for and submit to society journals that 'treat me right. I'm not going to do free labor for a Springer journal.'

## **RQ2. What experiences do faculty have with paid open access publishing?**

Only a handful of participants have published their work open access via payment. One natural sciences scholar has used grant funds to pay for APCs but has only used University funds for page charges. Another noted that their only OA publication had low costs, so they were able to use existing internal grant money. Neither have made an explicit request for OA publishing costs. A scholar in the applied sciences has used grant money to cover conference registration fees that publish proceedings OA. They have not, however, specifically written APC funding into a grant application. A natural scientist has requested funding from their college to publish OA in a high impact factor journal. A humanist recently benefited from Milner Library's transformative agreement with a university press to publish their article OA. They have also received publication subventions and other small grants from campus offices, but nothing else specific to OA publishing.

Several participants offered insight into the departmental funding that is available and some of the shortcomings of existing funding sources. A social scientist noted that their department pays submission fees, which typically range from US\$50 to 200, but not OA fees. They indicated that they have not requested funding for OA publishing, and probably never will. Their philosophy is: 'If you like my topic, ask me for a copy and I will send it to you.' An applied sciences scholar shared that although there is an option for department and matching funds from the University's Office of Research, it 'doesn't even make a dent in the APC.' They are aware of other people writing APCs into grant applications, 'but I haven't and won't.' A scholar in business has not used internal grants to fund OA publishing but noted that R1 researchers getting external grants could write APC costs into those. They asserted that people who need access to articles will get it somehow, suggesting that gold OA publishing is not the answer, and asked, 'What is fair? Is it fair for the journal to create an issue and for the author not to get paid?'

Another business scholar is equally uninterested in OA, but because of negative perceptions around pay to play journals. They have used grant funds for other research and publishing-related expenses and have no intention of paying an APC. 'I guess it's like the pay to play journals, where, if I submit this work, and I pay X amount of money, they'll just publish it. It's not only frowned down upon by universities, but I would say that reputation is your currency in academia, and publishing in those types of journals is certainly looked down upon, so I wouldn't be looking for funding for that.' One scholar was quite outspoken on the topic, condemning 'any journal that's going to charge me money for the privilege of selling my paper to someone else. That is a scam. That is evil.' A social scientist said internal grants do not cover the cost of APCs and the University has not adapted to make this a viable option for most researchers. If paying APCs became the norm, they would adapt, but they would not be pleased.

8 Some participants have more potential interest in publishing OA but have found it to be cost prohibitive. A humanities scholar recently had the option to pay US\$800 to publish an article OA but could not afford to do so. A scholar in education would be interested, but they have opted to use departmental funding for editing services and not OA. A social sciences scholar also noted that although their department has funding available, they have investigated and found the costs were higher than expected. They experienced challenges when investigating APC costs – complicated formulas for calculating costs depending on the age of the article – and several journals to whom they sent inquiries did not bother to write back. They spoke to the benefit of having funding available to publish ISU scholarship OA. ‘Another thing that would be really beneficial, especially if research expectations go up, but even being what they are, would be ... the provision of some funds to make our articles open access, because that’s extraordinarily expensive and it could be very beneficial, right? If there were some articles of mine that were not paywalled, then more people would read them, and cite them.’

### RQ3. Are faculty comfortable using or sharing unpublished, publicly available materials?

With the exception of scholars in the formal and natural sciences, participants indicated that their disciplines have not embraced sharing preprint or other unpublished materials, regardless of their peer review status. As one participant put it, ‘If there is a community of sharing preprints in my discipline, I’m not aware of one.’ arXiv and SSRN were the two disciplinary repositories favorably named by participants. ISU ReD, Illinois State University’s institutional repository, was also favorably named by a few participants. An applied sciences scholar mentioned ISU ReD to note that a colleague had deposited an accepted version and said, ‘I’m interested in supporting OA, but it’s so much work to give this to the community. I should, but I just don’t know where to find time.’ Participants spoke about their own depositing practices, their willingness to read and use unpublished materials and disciplinary practices regarding unpublished manuscripts.

‘participants indicated that their disciplines have not embraced sharing preprint or other unpublished materials’

A business scholar indicated that top authors in their field post their works on their websites, and they personally deposit their articles in a repository, though the practice is not widespread in their department. They clarified that in SSRN, prepublication versions are usually the accepted versions and records are updated and reclassified if the version of record is uploaded in place of the preprint. The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) also has articles that tend to get published in top economics and finance journals. Another business scholar would be apprehensive about using unpublished sources in their work and alluded to a study that documented drastic changes from dissertation to published article.<sup>18</sup> In order for them to cite an article, it ‘needs to have gone through peer review.’

Several participants spoke to consulting or citing unpublished sources, but strongly preferring reviewed sources. An education scholar is not opposed to reading the accepted version, especially given slow publication processes. ‘SAGE has online-first, and I would read those articles, but I try to cite the latest version in my article. By the time my article goes to print, the other article has, too.’ An applied sciences scholar agreed that long publication processes make consulting accepted manuscripts and ‘first view’ articles acceptable, but they would also be comfortable citing a manuscript if researching an untouched topic – with an acknowledgement the data is not peer-reviewed. Scholars of economics, psychology and special education also picked up on the novelty of a topic as a driver of engagement with unpublished content. One of the social scientists stated, ‘Unless it’s really novel and will blow my mind, I wouldn’t read many preprints.’ They are not aware of a culture of open peer review and sharing preprints in their field.

According to one participant in the applied sciences, ‘(My field) isn’t as urgent; people wait until the research is published.’ This scholar is active as a peer reviewer and enjoys that insight into unpublished work. One social scientist ‘won’t read something on the web that’s not peer reviewed unless I’m doing someone a favor, like they want my feedback. ... I



9 would rather wait three days and get the publisher's version through ILL than get immediate access to the preprint.' Another indicated their field is traditional, and depositing preprints is not common. A third social sciences scholar is fine reading 'whatever gives you access to the different ideas and materials,' but was told by their dissertation coach not to cite dissertations and theses. 'Citing depends on disciplinary standards, and it depends on what the project is. I would be less comfortable citing a preprint for a top-tier journal submission but more so with a conference proceeding.'

A natural scientist quipped, 'The only pre-peer-review manuscripts I read are the ones I'm reviewing.' They are open to reading content on government-funded repositories, but less enamored of preprint archives like bioRxiv. One humanities scholar wants the final version only and does not know anyone in the field who would rely on the unpublished version. Another humanist concurred that they typically read the version of record and scholars in their field do not post accepted versions or preprints. On a very small scale, people will send a book manuscript to a group of colleagues, or an advisor might share a book manuscript with someone who is working on their dissertation. They attributed this reluctance to share more broadly to 'a paranoia of getting scooped until something is published.' A scholar spoke to nursing's 'culture to connect with researchers on an individual basis before publication, not through a formal repository: '(My field) has a really formal, linear process.'

There can be serious repercussions for sharing unpublished materials. A natural sciences scholar noted that their primary professional society will not publish work in their journals that has been released as a preprint. 'In general, preprints are not something we do in (my field) because then most journals consider it published and because they're not peer reviewed. (My) field puts a high importance on peer review and even our department – when it comes to tenure and promotion guidelines, raises, and all that – puts a large emphasis on peer-reviewed publication. In terms of that, a preprint would mean nothing.' They acknowledge that while some publishers let authors post accepted manuscripts in an institutional repository or on their own website, in their experience the publisher has discouraged deposit, or their co-authors have not supported doing so. An applied sciences scholar reiterated legal considerations around depositing work and using published and unpublished materials: 'I used to work with the copyright officer on study instruments; there is anxiety about what I am allowed to post without losing my job.' A social scientist noted concerns around mandates to share data: 'I have nothing to hide. But if you give me your data in Excel, I will write one paper every week. I don't want to do that, you know. I mean somebody else did the work. And then, you know, research is relatively easy, but people don't understand. The scale has shifted.'

'There can be serious repercussions for sharing unpublished materials'

arXiv was central to conversations with participants in IT, mathematics and physics. One scholar is happy to look at unpublished materials when doing a general literature review or generating ideas, but they do not post articles on arXiv: 'I don't want somebody else to work on the same idea that I'm working on.' Another participant has more experience using and posting content to arXiv. They shared an experience of posting an article to arXiv and retracting it after hearing from someone about a mistake with the work. This leads them to think the quality of articles on arXiv is generally sound: 'I mean you would hear about it if something was wrong with it, or you know somebody's a crackpot. But I think these days they are putting the brakes against that. As far as I know, it used to be that anybody could just go and post something. Now I have been grandfathered in, and I can go and post stuff, but otherwise I think there are some hoops that you have to jump through.'

Yet another participant had much to say about arXiv and its very different cultural norms from one field to the next. Posting on arXiv at the point of acceptance is the norm, but 'in some fields, it's very normal to put a paper on the arXiv the same day you submit to the journal. That is, you plant the flag, and if the paper ends up rejected from the journal, for whatever reason it will still exist in a permanent form on the arXiv.' They have some articles in arXiv that were not published elsewhere 'but at the very least, you know work is done, and on the arXiv for someone to assess other than the reviewer.' Regardless of when you submit, scholars repost the article after the review process so the version in arXiv is as close as possible to the final version published by the journal.

10 This same participant argued that ‘a paper on the arXiv is as good as a paper in a journal, as far as I’m concerned, even if it hasn’t been accepted yet. And this is because I apply my own scrutiny independent of whatever a referee may have thought of the paper.’ They noted that although this is an exception, there are scholars in their field who have stopped publishing in journals and only post their research on arXiv: ‘It’s a waste of their time to engage with journals.’ It certainly demonstrates the confidence the field has in arXiv and depends on the vetting process that requires new posters to be sponsored by an established member. This is what separates arXiv from other preprint servers and ensures ‘there’s very little crackpottery that gets onto the arXiv.’

‘there are scholars in their field who have stopped publishing in journals and only post their research on arXiv’

## Discussion

Although making one’s published work publicly available is ideal in principle, disciplinary perceptions surrounding OA publishing and concerns about costs and business models continue to limit uptake among faculty at ISU. Most of the participants in this study do not have ample funding – to support OA publishing or otherwise. Apart from one natural scientist and one applied scientist, the only participant to publish an article OA with payment did so via the Milner Library’s transformative agreement with a university press. This suggests that one way Milner can add value for those ISU scholars without funding is to strategically invest in agreements that include or significantly discount OA publishing costs. Milner has intentionally focused its OA agreements on those disciplines in which applying for external funding is less common and the awards are smaller, as well as on publishers whose business models are transparent and fair. Although some participants are opposed to writing OA publishing costs into grants, others were more open to doing so; this suggests an opportunity for librarians to promote OA publishing by working with their institution’s Office of Research to facilitate this practice among interested authors.

Disciplinary perceptions about OA publishing will be challenging for librarians to overcome. The prestige of publishing one’s article in the flagship journal of the national association or book with a top university press holds great significance to scholars in many disciplines. Scholars on the tenure track, especially, must publish strategically to ensure that their application for tenure will be successful. Although librarians may not have direct influence on the publishing decisions of scholarly societies and organizations, by hosting OA journals as part of their scholarly publishing services, subscribing to open specific titles and paying into crowdfunded initiatives to flip content open, libraries are contributing to an environment in which a variety of OA options are available.

Librarians have also provided education about predatory publishing practices and will be likely to need to continue to support some early career and student scholars as they identify publication venues and vet them for quality. The connection between any payment related to publishing and predatory practices persists among some researchers. There is understandably skepticism that when money is or has the potential to be exchanged, peer review processes will be less rigorous. Some participants also indicated that finding clear information about APCs was challenging, and perhaps this is another service that librarians can offer to assist in determining costs, identifying discounts, and assisting with waiver applications.

Most participants shared skepticism about using and sharing unpublished, publicly available materials. The publisher’s version of record is considered the standard; preprint servers and institutional or disciplinary repositories do not yet generally offer a viable alternative. Disciplinary differences were strongly articulated on this question, but participants across numerous fields revealed fears of getting scooped and of others using their data or ideas to produce scholarship. Some consider depositing materials ‘good to do’ but one of many things on a long list of non-essential tasks. Sharing preprints and depositing various versions of published work are nonetheless relatively new phenomena. As worldwide mandates and practices shift expectations toward public availability, disciplinary principles and practices will be likely to follow.

## Conclusion

This article draws attention to the perspectives of faculty at a Carnegie R2 institution on a variety of elements of openness – perceptions of OA publishing, payment for OA publishing and sharing and consulting unpublished, publicly available content. By using the participants' own language, the authors amplify and validate the experiences and perspectives of this understudied group, voicing their unique perspectives on the costs and rewards of OA. The findings suggest that perceptions of OA are informed by disciplinary values and practices, tied to tenure and promotion, imbued with some assumptions and intertwined with current OA business models. The shift from subscription-based model to payment-based, and especially APC-based models, is highly uncomfortable to authors for whom the exchange of money compromises the integrity of peer review. The participants also outlined several roles for librarians to provide education in addition to OA funding.

'The findings suggest that perceptions of OA are informed by disciplinary values and practices, tied to tenure and promotion'

In order to best serve their communities, librarians must continue to ask questions about local needs with respect to OA and be willing to listen to passionately held and sometimes conflicting points of view. Rick Anderson provides a framework for discussing OA rationally: acknowledging pros and cons, taking the time to listen and comprehend, focusing on the substance of statements, considering unintended and unexpected consequences and inviting all stakeholders to discuss the issue.<sup>19</sup> This framework serves as an important reminder that there is no single best approach to OA, even among universities that share the R2 classification. Approaches to OA must be informed by the needs and resources of local stakeholders based on their institutional principles and strategies. The authors encourage librarians at R2 and non-AAU institutions not to be sidelined from discussions around OA, but rather to engage in sustained conversation with a variety of stakeholders and to take a flexible, iterative and multifaceted approach to OA. No single solution can begin to accommodate the diverse needs of our unique and dynamic communities, and no R1 librarians should presume to speak for us.

'librarians must continue to ask questions about local needs with respect to OA and be willing to listen to passionately held and sometimes conflicting points of view'

### Appendix A. College and School/Department

College of Applied Science and Technology – Criminal Justice Sciences; Family and Consumer Sciences; Information Technology; Kinesiology and Recreation

College of Arts and Sciences – Chemistry; Communication; Communication Sciences and Disorders; Economics; Geography, Geology and the Environment; History; Languages, Literatures and Cultures; Mathematics; Physics; Psychology; Social Work; Sociology and Anthropology

College of Business – Finance, Insurance and Law; Management and Quantitative Methods

College of Education – Special Education; Teaching & Learning

ISU College of Nursing – Nursing (2)

ISU College of Fine Arts – Music (2)

### Appendix B. Year of Terminal Degree

1987

1993

1994

1999

2005 (2)

2006

2008

2009 (2)

2011 (2)

2013

2016

2017 (5)

2018

2020

2021

2022 (3)

**Appendix C. Interview Instrument**

## Demographic

- In which department(s) do you teach?
- Which subject area(s) do you research?
- In what year did you complete your terminal degree?

## Openness

- Talk about your experience and preferences with respect to Open Access publishing. Would you characterize yourself as 1) passive, in that you read OA content in journals, repositories, or elsewhere; 2) active, in that you have published OA and take advantage of options to share your work in OA repositories; 3) adversarial, in that you are opposed to OA; or other. Why?
- Have you received funds from the University (department, college, ORGS subvention, library transformative agreement, or other) to fund OA publishing?
- What is your comfort level in reading an accepted manuscript versus the publisher's version of record? Is this dependent on whether you'll be citing it, availability of supplemental data, or other factors?

**Notes**

1. For example, *Nature* hybrid journals charge US\$11,690 for APCs as of 27 January 2023, <https://www.springernature.com/gp/open-research/journals-books/journals> (accessed 26 May 2023).
2. See, for example, studies such as Zheng Y. (Lan) Yang and Yu Li, "University Faculty Awareness and Attitudes towards Open Access Publishing and the Institutional Repository: A Case Study," *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication* 3, no. 1 (2015), eP1210. <https://doi.org/10.7710/2162-3309.1210> (accessed 26 May 2023).
3. The ESAC Transformative Agreement Registry tracks the agreements of those who submit them, <https://esac-initiative.org/about/transformative-agreements/agreement-registry/> (accessed 26 May 2023).
4. Letter dated May 6, 2020, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Open-Access-RFI-Comments-Reduced-5.pdf> (accessed 26 May 2023).
5. Purposeful selection increases the relevance of information and richness of the pool by selecting based on specified criteria. Joseph Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (SAGE, 2013), 96–7.

**Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to thank Illinois State University for the University Research Grant received to support this work.

**Abbreviations and Acronyms**

A list of the abbreviations and acronyms used in this and other *Insights* articles can be accessed here – click on the URL below and then select the 'full list of industry A&As' link: <http://www.uksg.org/publications#aa>.

**Competing interests**

The authors have declared no competing interests.

**References**

1. Heather Piwowar et al., "The State of OA: a Large-scale Analysis of the Prevalence and Impact of Open Access Articles," *PeerJ* 6 (2018): e4375, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.4375> (accessed 26 May 2023).
2. Robert Heaton, Dylan Burns, and Becky Thoms, "Altruism or Self-Interest? Exploring the Motivations of Open Access Authors," *College & Research Libraries* 80, no. 4 (3 May 2019): 485–507, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.80.4.485> (accessed 26 May 2023).
3. John Willinsky, "The Unacknowledged Convergence of Open Source, Open Access, and Open Science," *First Monday* 10, no. 8 (2005), <https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/download/1265/1185?inline=1> (accessed 26 May 2023); Erin C. McKiernan et al., "How Open Science Helps Researchers Succeed," *eLife* 5 (2016): e16800, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7554/eLife.16800.001> (accessed 26 May 2023).
4. Rachel E. Scott and Anne Shelley, "'Having a Textbook Locks Me into a Particular Narrative': Affordable and Open Educational Resources in Music Higher Education," *Notes, the Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association* 79, no. 3 (2023): 303–32, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/not.2023.0000> (accessed 26 May 2023).
5. Sara Bosshart, Rod Cookson, and Philipp Hess, "Open Access through Subscribe to Open: A Society Publisher's Implementation," *Insights* 35 (2022), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.567> (accessed 26 May 2023); Ángel Borrego, Lluís Anglada, and Ernest Abadal, "Transformative Agreements: Do They Pave the Way to Open Access?," *Learned Publishing* 34, no. 2 (2021): 217–232 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1347> (accessed 26 May 2023); Karen Brunsting, Caitlin Harrington, and Rachel E. Scott, *Open Access Literature in Libraries: Principles and Practices* (Chicago: ALA Editions, 2022), deposited <https://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/fpml/163/> (accessed 26 May 2023).
6. Bonnie J. Swoger, Sue Ann Brainard, and Kimberly Davies Hoffman, "Foundations for a Scholarly Communications Program: Interviewing Faculty at a Small Public Liberal Arts College," *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication* 3, no. 1 (2015): e1219, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7710/2162-3309.1219> (accessed 26 May 2023); Rachel E. Scott and Anne Shelley, "Music Scholars and Open Access Publishing," *Notes, the Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association* 79, no. 2 (2022): 149–78, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/not.2022.0093>.
7. Sara Rouhi, Romy Beard, and Curtis Brundy, "Left in the Cold: the Failure of APC Waiver Programs to Provide Author Equity," *Science Editor* 45, no.1 (2022): 5–13, <https://www.eifl.net/system/files/resources/202205/csev45n1-pp5-13.pdf> (accessed 26 May 2023). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36591/SE-D-4501-5>

8. Anthony J. Olejniczak and Molly J. Wilson, "Who's Writing Open Access (OA) Articles? Characteristics of OA Authors at Ph. D.-granting Institutions in the United States," *Quantitative Science Studies* 1, no. 4 (2020): 1429–1450, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1162/qss\\_a\\_00091](https://doi.org/10.1162/qss_a_00091) (accessed 26 May 2023); Yimei Zhu, "Who Support Open Access Publishing? Gender, Discipline, Seniority and Other Factors Associated with academics' OA practice," *Scientometrics* 111, no. 2 (2017): 557–79 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-017-2316-z> (accessed 26 May 2023).
9. Jie Xu et al., "Chinese Researchers' Perceptions and Use of Open Access Journals: Results of an Online Questionnaire Survey," *Learned Publishing* 33, no. 3 (2020): 246–58, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1291> (accessed 26 May 2023).
10. Melissa Blankstein, *S+R US Faculty Survey 2021: Research Report*, (Ithaka, 2022), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.316896> (accessed 26 May 2023).
11. Jylisa Doney and Jeremy Kenyon, "Researchers' Perceptions and Experiences with an Open Access Subvention Fund," *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice* 17, no. 1 (2022): 56–77 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18438/ebliip30015> (accessed 26 May 2023).
12. Elisabeth Shook and Amy Vecchione, "Faculty Perceptions of Open Access Publishing: Investigating Faculty Publishing Habits to Evaluate Library Collection Alignment," *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication* 10, no. 1 (December 2022): eP13216, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31274/jlsc.13216> (accessed 26 May 2023).
13. Susan Vandagriff, "Publications and Evaluations: Conducting a Baseline Assessment of Open Access Adoption and Support at an R2 University," *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication* 8, no. 1 (2020), eP2392, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7710/2162-3309.2392> (accessed 26 May 2023).
14. Tim Schlak and Alexis Macklin, "Open Access Overtaking Academic Library Leadership: Staying Ahead of the Organisational Dynamics an Increasingly Open Future May Bring," *New Review of Academic Librarianship* 28, no. 2 (2022): 117–24, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13614533.2022.2079539> (accessed 26 May 2023).
15. Anthony J. Olejniczak and Molly J. Wilson, "Who's Writing Open Access (OA) Articles? Characteristics of OA Authors at Ph. D.-granting Institutions in the United States," *Quantitative Science Studies* 1, no. 4 (2020): 1429–50, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1162/qss\\_a\\_00091](https://doi.org/10.1162/qss_a_00091) (accessed 26 May 2023).
16. John W. Creswell and Dana L. Miller, "Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry," *Theory into Practice* 39, no. 3 (2000): 124–30, at 129. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1207/s1543042tip3903\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/s1543042tip3903_2)
17. Stefanie E. Warlick, and K. T. L. Vaughan, "Factors Influencing Publication Choice: Why Faculty Choose Open Access," *Biomedical Digital Libraries* 4, no. 1 (2007): 1–12, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/1742-5581-4-1> (accessed 26 May 2023); Anna Severin et al., "Discipline-specific Open Access Publishing Practices and Barriers to Change: an Evidence-based Review," *F1000Research* 7 (2018): 1925, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.17328.2> (accessed 2 June 2023); Scott and Shelley, "Music Scholars and Open Access Publishing"; Manjula Wijewickrema and Vivien Petras, "Journal Selection Criteria in an Open Access Environment: A Comparison Between the Medicine and Social Sciences," *Learned Publishing* 30, no. 4 (2017): 289–300, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1113> (accessed 26 May 2023).
18. Ernest Hugh O'Boyle Jr., George Christopher Banks, and Erik Gonzalez-Mulé. "The Chrysalis Effect: How Ugly Initial Results Metamorphose into Beautiful Articles," *Journal of Management* 43, no. 2 (2017): 376–399, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206314527133> (accessed 26 May 2023).
19. Rick Anderson, "Is Rational Discussion of Open Access Possible?," *Insights* 27, no. 2 (2014): 171–80, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1629/2048-7754.162> (accessed 26 May 2023).

**Article copyright:** © 2023 Rachel E. Scott, Julie A. Murphy, Cassie Thayer-Styes, Chad E. Buckley and Anne Shelley. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the **Creative Commons Attribution Licence**, which permits unrestricted use and distribution provided the original author and source are credited.



Corresponding author:

Rachel E. Scott

Associate Dean for Information Assets

Milner Library

Illinois State University, US

E-mail: rescot2@ilstu.edu

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5847-3378>

Co-authors:

Julie A. Murphy

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2686-8986>

Cassie Thayer-Styes

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-4811-0223>

Chad E. Buckley

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0937-6832>

Anne Shelley

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-9065-5998>

To cite this article:

Scott RE, Murphy JA, Thayer-Styes C, Buckley CE and Shelley A, "Exploring faculty perspectives on open access at a medium-sized, American doctoral university," *Insights*, 2023, 36: 14, 1–14;

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.620>

Submitted on 24 March 2023

Accepted on 03 May 2023

Published on 04 July 2023

Published by UKSG in association with Ubiquity Press.