Shilpa Rele

Open Access Publishing Fund (OAPF) at Rowan University

A look back at the last five years (2017–2022)

Rowan University has seen rapid expansion in terms of enrollments, undergraduate and graduate programs, and research activity over the last decade and has grown from a state college into Rowan University. It is a unique academic institution in that it is one of only three in the United States with both allopathic and osteopathic medical schools. Its acquisition of the Rowan School of Osteopathic Medicine and establishment of the Cooper Medical School of Rowan University were significant factors in the university's research-intensive Carnegie classification R3 in 2017 and R2 classification in 2018 respectively.

Until May 2022, I was the scholarly communication and data curation librarian at Rowan University Libraries (RUL), specifically at the Campbell Library, which is one of three libraries that comprises RUL on the main campus in Glassboro, New Jersey. RUL serves 22,640 students and has about 53 staff across three libraries.

In this role, I was responsible for overseeing the Campbell Library's Open Access Publishing Fund (OAPF). It was established in 2017 (soon after I started working at Rowan) with the intention to support Rowan faculty with their open access publishing efforts. With Rowan University's updated research-intensive Carnegie classifications, the library determined that Rowan researchers and faculty would be engaged in increased research and scholarly publication efforts and felt it important to create a fund that would help offset the cost of article processing charges (APCs). With an increased focus on research, we thought funding from external agencies would be needed to meet open access publishing requirements. We were also curious to understand what the open access publishing needs were on campus.

The OAPF was established with an initial funding of $20,000, and this amount was allocated from the Campbell Library's collection budget. Since the funding came primarily from Campbell Library, the OAPF was only available to faculty at the Glassboro campus. Initially, applications were limited only to tenured and tenure-track faculty members, but in 2021, application eligibility was extended to professional staff as well. The OAPF makes awards towards articles published in gold open access journals only, which are indexed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), and to authors who do not have other funding sources to offset the cost of the APCs.

I chaired the library's OAPF Committee, which oversaw implementation of the fund and provided oversight for its daily management. It was composed of four librarians (including

Shilpa Rele, formerly of Rowan University, is now program manager at Incentivizing Collaborative and Open Research (ICOR), email: shilpa.rele@gmail.com.

myself) and the director of research development from the Division of University Research (DUR). RUL works very closely with the DUR, and we felt it important to have a DUR representative on this committee to expand promotion and outreach about the OAPF to researchers and to help raise awareness and understanding of open access publishing issues and challenges. The OAPF Committee was responsible for managing the applications that were received, setting policy in collaboration with library administrators, and communicating any changes in policy and workflows with the campus community. As the chair of the OAPF Committee, I was the point person for the OAPF and fielded inquiries about application eligibility requirements, assisted with vetting journals for eligibility, engaged in conversations with faculty and administrators about hybrid open access publications, and explained why the OAPF did not support specific publications, which was often a point of frustration for many faculty.

To manage the submission workflow for OAPF applications, we leveraged the backend tools of Bepress's Digital Commons platform, which is used by RUL for its institutional repository (IR).

This platform has built-in tools to manage submission workflows for journal publication. None of the applications are publicly posted to the IR, however. We added all the relevant policies, eligibility criteria, and important dates to the landing page for the OAPF in the IR.[1] Authors submitted their applications and supplementary files using a submission form that collected information about the authors, the publication, and the APC requested. Authors were also required to agree on the form to deposit the final publication supported by the fund in the IR.

The OAPF was promoted through multiple venues—university senate meetings, the faculty center, college and research administrators, department faculty meetings, university sabbatical committees, new faculty orientations, library workshops about open access, and so on. Librarians also promoted the fund to faculty during one-on-one conversations. We also included promotional messages about the fund in the online daily campus announcer, which were sent out twice a month during the academic year. Although we scheduled the usual promotional messages for the fund for the daily online campus announcer at the beginning of the academic year in fall 2021, unfortunately none of them made it into the announcers. Despite this, we received a record number of applications in the last academic year and were able to deplete the entirety of the fund before the end of the fiscal year. We believe we conducted enough outreach in previous years and that word of mouth helped keep the OAPF on everyone's radar.

In the first couple of years, the OAPF received only a handful of applications. After informal conversations with faculty, we determined that the award limit of $2,000 at the time was not considered sufficient for those who wished to publish in an open access journal with an APC higher than the award limit. With uncertainty over how to pay the remainder of such an APC, we realized some faculty were simply not able to consider the OAPF to meet their open access publishing needs. Hence in 2019 we raised the award limit to $3,000 per award per author, which resulted in many more applications being submitted. We also received several applications for hybrid publications, for which the APCs are much higher than for gold open access journals. This experience aligns with the studies mentioned by Philip Boyes and Danny Kingsley.[2]

Several faculty inquired about eligibility criteria and expressed frustration about the OAPF not being available for publishing in journals that would count toward their tenure and promotion requirements. This led me to review tenure requirements for different colleges. and surprisingly —with the exception of one college, which had a specific list of journals that faculty were required to publish in (since that counted toward the college's accreditation)— many of the scholarly publishing requirements for tenure considerations largely emphasized publication in peer-reviewed scholarly journals. Perhaps faculty follow an unofficial list of prestigious journals for their publication purposes that count toward their tenure considerations based on their disciplines and department/college expectations.

The majority of applications received were from faculty in the STEM disciplines, with a handful from education and social sciences disciplines. The OAPF has funded the open access publication of about forty-five articles thus far. In the last two years during the COVID-19 pandemic, we also saw a rise in the number of inquiries about the OAPF as well as the number of applications submitted. In fall 2021, RUL subscribed to OAble (before its acquisition by Wiley) to streamline making APC payments to the various publishers.

Given this increased demand and RUL's commitment to "open,"[3] as of May 2022 RUL was to increase the total amount in the OAPF to $30,000 for the next academic year. The two medical libraries were also to contribute $15,000 each from their library budgets to the OAPF to support open access publishing needs at their respective campuses.

One of the biggest advantages to the OAPF was using it as a means to advance conversations with campus stakeholders about issues relating to open access publishing and challenges relating to the current scholarly communication system writ large. This fund helped build the library's relevance in a new way for faculty and staff as well as establish the library as a key player in a faculty member's scholarly publication lifecycle. Conversations about open access publishing often led to conversations about topics related to open scholarship, thus helping advance knowledge about "open" more broadly. While many faculty saw the benefit of having such a fund to tap into, there were others who pushed back on the irrelevance of it due to their inability to publish in gold open access journals that did not reward them during their process of seeking tenure or their inability to reach a desired audience if they chose a gold open access journal.

Managing pushback was an interesting process as it resulted in an understanding, on part of the author, of the different pathways to open access publishing but also to an understanding on part of the library of an author's pain points about their inability to fulfill certain *perceived* university requirements. At times, it also resulted in an opportunity to engage in a dialogue with senior college administrators (which itself is a great opportunity to build one's patience and communication skills) and to persuade them to broaden their thinking about open scholarship and open publishing. One take away from my experience being in a position to administer such a fund is the importance of having regular communication with campus stakeholders about the intent of the fund as well as the significance of open scholarship, and why it is relevant for the success of the institution as a whole.

I acknowledge that the APC funding model for open access publishing is problematic and creates and raises serious equity issues and concerns. The breadth of these issues is outlined in great detail in the Budapest Open Access Initiative's Statement from February 2022.[4] New and alternative funding models for open access publishing are currently being explored and

implemented, and I will be eager to see which models become prominent enough to help ease some of the current challenges of open access scholarly publishing. ✄

Notes

1. Campbell Library Open Access Publishing Fund. https://rdw.rowan.edu/oa_pubfund/.

2. Philip Boyes and Danny Kingsley, "Hybrid Open Access: An Analysis," *Unlocking Research: Open Research at Cambridge* (blog), October 26, 2016, https://unlockingresearch -blog.lib.cam.ac.uk/?p=969.

3. "Open Values Statement," Rowan University Libraries, https://www.lib.rowan.edu /about/open-values-statement.

4. "The Budapest Open Access Initiative: 20th Anniversary Recommendations," Budapest Open Access Initiative, February 2022, https://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org /boai20/.