

Gavin Baker

Student activism

How students use the scholarly communication system

Faculty aren't the only users of the scholarly communication system. Students also depend on it for their education, research, and to disseminate their own ideas. And students, like faculty, have taken action to broaden access to the academic literature and maximize the value of this important resource. Libraries should seek to engage students as change makers in the scholarly communication system.

How students participate in the scholarly communication system

Students participate in the scholarly communications system in a variety of ways: as users, authors, editors, and constituents. I will focus on journal literature, but the situation is similar for monographs, grey literature, and other scholarly sources.

1. Students are users of journal literature. The research paper is a staple of student life, from the eight-page paper to theses and dissertations. Typically, a student will be assigned to review relevant literature on his or her topic, as well as to cite scholarly sources in the paper itself. This process will include searching, assessing, filtering, analyzing, and synthesizing information. These acts are inherently educational, and broad access to the literature enhances the student's education.

In addition to encountering journal literature in their research, students are frequently assigned journal literature as class readings in addition to, or in place of, textbooks. In some cases, a professor may copy articles for his or her students, or make articles available via e-reserves. However, these approaches are facing challenges from publishers keen to protect royalties from reprints. The professor

might link students to a copy of an article in a library-subscription database, or to an open access copy, where available. Nevertheless, in classes that rely on large numbers of journal articles, students often are required to purchase a coursepack or sourcebook containing the readings, typically prepared by a college bookstore or copy center. The cost of these coursepacks can rival the cost of textbooks. Unlike textbooks, however, coursepacks often have no resale value, since their precise content can shift from term to term as the instructor adjusts the class readings, resulting in a significant net cost to the student.

2. Students are authors of journal literature. Some students, particularly graduate students, will have the occasion to publish their work in a scholarly journal, often co-authored with a faculty mentor. For students' first few publications, the pressure to publish in a high-prestige journal may be particularly intense, as the student strives to "prove" him- or herself. Frequently, students rely on the advice of their faculty with scholarly publishing issues, and may never seek out a librarian with these concerns.

Students also have their own network of scholarly journals, such as journals of undergraduate research and global affairs journals. These journals provide a student's first experience with publication, and may help shape later attitudes and publishing behaviors.

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Authors in these journals are not motivated by the prestige of the journal—typically, a journal affiliated with the student’s own institution—but are looking for the experience of publishing, impact for their ideas, and feedback on their work.

3. Students are editors of scholarly journals. As aforementioned, students produce their own scholarly journals. These journals are sometimes edited and “peer-reviewed” by faculty, sometimes by students, or perhaps by both. Student journals are almost inevitably nonprofit and are financed in whole or large part by subsidy, such as from the university or student government. Articles published in student journals are unlikely to be referenced in the work of professional scholars, and generally do not constitute an access problem. However, as with their student authors, these journals will provide the first editorial and publishing experience for their student editors and may shape later behaviors.

In addition to student journals, students also edit professional scholarly journals. Law reviews, for example, are frequently wholly student-edited and typically more prestigious than other student publications. Some students, particularly doctoral students, start their own journals or serve on the editorial board of journals. Articles published in these journals are more likely to be referenced in the work of professional scholars. These journals may be financed by a variety of business models.

4. Students are constituents of the scholarly communication system. Students are a constituency of university governance—often formally, such as through a student government or graduate student council. As students speak up for their interests in other aspects of academic and campus life, they can and should speak up for their interests in scholarly communication—and some of them are doing so.

Finally, students are also citizens and taxpayers, who have an interest in maximizing the public investment in science, just like any other taxpayer.

How students have been involved

Students have been involved with changing scholarly communication since at least 2003, when the Berkeley Graduate Assembly issued a statement on the serials crisis. In March 2006, the University of Iowa’s Graduate Student Senate became the first graduate representative body to specifically endorse open access.

Students have been particularly involved with public access to taxpayer-funded research. Three student organizations—the American Medical Student Association (AMSA), Universities Allied for Essential Medicines, and FreeCulture.org—are members of the Alliance for Taxpayer Access; AMSA was a founding member of the coalition. In June 2006, the University of Florida Student Senate became the first university-wide representative body to endorse the Federal Research Public Access Act (FRPAA), which would provide public access to the research output of eleven government departments and agencies. Oberlin College and Trinity University followed in March 2007. Students at Ohio University, Indiana University, University of Florida, San Jose State University, and Harvard University editorialized in support of FRPAA in those schools’ student newspapers. Student reporters at Swarthmore College and Macalester College also covered the bill favorably.

Students have also supported open access in more creative ways. CALPIRG, the California Student Public Interest Research Group, in 2005 released a report endorsing open access journals and institutional repositories. Since 2005, Project Open Source | Open Access at the University of Toronto has funded research awards for students studying aspects of open access. In February 2007, Asheesh Laroia, a graduate student in computer science at Johns Hopkins University, and a panelist at a

Interested in learning more?

Come to the ACRL-SPARC Forum in Philadelphia during the Midwinter Meeting, Saturday, January 12, 2008, 4 to 6 p.m. The topic will be on student approaches to scholarly communication issues.

preconference of the Professional and Scholarly Publishing division of the Association of American Publishers, urged publishers to embrace open access research. Also in February 2007, FreeCulture.org (now Students for Free Culture) organized a day of action on its campuses, with chapters hosting events and activities to call attention to open access.

Students have also embraced open access for their own research. In 2007, Rasmus Bjørk, a graduate student in astrophysics at the University of Copenhagen, deposited his article, "Exploring the Galaxy Using Space Probes," in the physics preprint server arXiv. Journalists became aware of the article prior to its journal publication, and the research was covered in venues such as *The Guardian*, BBC, and *New Scientist*.¹ Students have also started new open access journals, such as the *Journal of Physics Students*.

Dozens of students have signed petitions for public access to research and joined groups on the social networking site Facebook to support open access.

Personally, after I finished my degree, I took an internship with SPARC, the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition. Over the summer, I researched the state of student engagement with open access, designed a student outreach campaign, and drafted informational materials for students. From SPARC's Washington, D.C., office, I had the opportunity to speak with numerous interesting thinkers and experts, as well as to attend stimulating events produced by organizations and universities in the area, while doing work that was both personally and socially relevant.

What libraries can do

Libraries seeking to build support for open access would be wise to invite students as allies. Though less influential than faculty, students can bring youthful optimism to the issue, uninhibited by the baggage and cynicism that older researchers might have. Moreover, today's students are a generation that has grown up with the Web and its attendant culture of sharing. Students never

knew a world without electronic publishing; it is fully natural to them that access should be "as easy as Google."

Aside from the effort to change scholarly communication, open access also can and should be presented to students as part of library services and information literacy programs. Guiding students to open access resources alongside other library resources helps information-seekers find what they're looking for, reclaims the library's role in information retrieval, and educates students about open access in the process. It's also a "teaching moment" to talk about the various forms and models of scholarly communication, the process and function of peer review, etc.

If librarians offer workshops on getting published or on copyright, they should not miss the opportunity to emphasize the benefits of open access to the author. Early research suggests that student authors are particularly motivated by the accessibility and impact of their work.² Discussing the dynamics, legal aspects, and market forces of scholarly communication will help students to make informed choices about sharing their research.

Luckily, librarians aren't alone when it comes to campus outreach. SPARC is developing a student outreach campaign, including a brochure and Web site of informational materials that libraries can use. For more information about the campaign and for help connecting with students on your campus, contact SPARC.³

SPARC is also sponsoring a video contest for students on the theme of information sharing. The best entry will receive \$1,000 and a screening at the ALA Midwinter Meeting, January 11–14, 2008, in Philadelphia. Entries are due December 2, 2007, so be sure to let students know about this opportunity. Entry details are available from the Sparky Awards Web site, and winning entries will be posted in early 2008.⁴

Conclusion

It's an exciting time in scholarly communication. New technology has paved the way for
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library's first floor but want to tune out the accompanying hum of activity, expanding the days during which the library is open for extended hours during final exams, and providing lockers for student use.

SLAC also serves as a focus group. When redesigning the library Web site a few years ago, SLAC members provided valuable feedback about how and why students use the Web site and what information they seek.

The students also provide insight into why online services are (or are not) used; feedback about language, location of links, and the types of media our students prefer is valuable for evaluating current services and planning for the future.

Some suggestions made by students are not feasible to implement, but we take every suggestion under consideration and keep careful documentation. It is critical to report back to students about actions taken on their concerns; this demonstration of our commitment to their concerns encourages future feedback.

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incredible new opportunities. Students stand to gain significantly from these changes. Many students are stepping forward to claim their rightful place, demanding a better future for scholarly communication. Librarians can encourage even more students to raise their voices and take action.

Notes

1. Søren Bertil Fabricius Dorch, "To students: Publish your essays and become world famous!" Copenhagen University Library (2007), www.kb.dk/en/kub/fag/nat/emner/oa_nyt.html.

2. Margaret Pickton and Cliff McKnight, "Research students and the Loughborough institutional repository," *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* 38(4) (December 2006): 203–19.

3. Visit SPARC's site at www.arl.org/sparc/.

4. For more information about the Sparky Awards, visit www.sparkyawards.org/. ❧

The Monroe Library loves its SLACers, and the students enjoy the committee, as well. When asked what being part of SLAC meant, Gabriel Falcon ('07) responded:

Being a part of the Student Library Advisory Committee has been an amazing experience. It lets students know that the library is constantly trying to improve itself so that students can get the most out of such a valuable tool. Every suggestion made during meetings is taken in by the staff and they do their best to try and utilize these suggestions or find better ways of going about things in the library.

Loyola has an open period from 12:30 to 2:00 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays known as the Window. No classes are scheduled during the Window, and so SLAC meetings are held at this time. The library provides lunch, and students provide thoughtful comments and suggestions for improving the library. ❧

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