

Stephanie Davis-Kahl

# Engaging undergraduates in scholarly communication

## Outreach, education, and advocacy

**T**he open access movement has typically engaged graduate students and faculty in discussions and advocacy around changing the scholarly communication landscape. Undergraduates, however, have an important role to play as future graduate students, scholars, and as citizens, one that should catalyze librarians who serve this population to acknowledge and act on a shared educational imperative. Undergraduate student awareness of, and engagement with, issues such as open access, public access, creator rights, and the economics of publishing should become part of our mission and vision of undergraduate education so students can become effective advocates for access to their own work, or for access to research that can aid them in becoming informed and critical researchers, consumers, and citizens.

Undergraduate students are a prime audience for outreach and education efforts around scholarly communication issues. They are highly aware of the cost of their education and resources that support and enrich it, especially when it comes to the cost of textbooks and student loans. College students are also highly attuned to issues of social justice and are more likely to be involved in civic engagement initiatives.<sup>1</sup> Developing a holistic approach to educating and developing awareness around scholarly communication issues in the curriculum, in the library, and on campus can help to create a culture of sharing that will impact the scholarly landscape in the future.

### **Curricular integration and connections**

Within the curriculum, there are several points at which key scholarly communication

concepts can be effectively embedded into information literacy settings. In a first-year seminar, for example, where the focus is writing, research, and taking the first steps to creating new knowledge, major open access resources, such as the Public Library of Science (PLOS), arXiv, the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, and PubMedCentral, can be used in two ways. First, they can be introduced as authoritative databases for locating information, and, second, they can be integrated into exercises in which students are required to critically read and evaluate a set of Web sites. In each case, the characteristics and tenets of open access can be emphasized in relation to the scholarly resources provided by the library and with students' own experiences encountering pay walls on the Internet. Framing a class discussion around students' own temporary access to academic, scholarly sources will spark a conversation about the costs of creating, producing, and disseminating information, providing students an alternative and nuanced view of sharing scholarship via publishing.

An article by Scott Warren and Kim Duckett provides a number of clear and useful examples on how to introduce several of these concepts to students that can be adapted for other groups of students (or faculty).<sup>2</sup> In

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addition, the Right to Research Web site has several excellent handouts, videos, and posters to use as stepping-stones and background for discussions and assignments.<sup>3</sup>

Another way to integrate notions of sharing into information literacy sessions with undergraduates is to turn the focus to creative work. Developing an exercise or preclass assignment requiring students to locate art, music, or other media that they can reuse, remix, or redistribute legitimately broadens the conversation about open access for academic scholarship, and helps to highlight copyright issues and the role of Creative Commons (CC) in licensing creative works. Outcomes of the assignment and follow-up discussions could include developing awareness of well-established online sources such as Flickr, ccMixter, and the Internet Archive, identifying and understanding the different CC licenses, and being able to locate creative works to use in their own projects according to the creator's conditions, and selecting a CC license for them to apply to their own work when completed.

Asking students to consider if and how they want their own work to be shared and used by others shifts the nature of discussions from cautionary and reactive to reflective and proactive, and explicitly acknowledges that the students' work is valued enough to be shared if they choose. An added bonus to integrating exercises about open access, author rights and copyright, and CC is that faculty, if present at the instruction session, will be educated at the same time, and can be invited to participate in the discussion to share their stance on open access of their work.

The practice of disseminating work especially comes into play with undergraduate research, defined by the Council of Undergraduate Research as "An inquiry or investigation conducted by an undergraduate student that makes an original intellectual or creative contribution to the discipline."<sup>4</sup> Working with undergraduate researchers provides a perfect opportunity to talk to students and their faculty mentors about a crucial element of the research process: publishing and sharing re-

search. Since undergraduate research is inclusive across disciplines, librarians who provide information literacy instruction to humanities, social science, and sciences students have the opportunity to provide focused information on how a specific discipline views open access, how authors typically share their work, and effective ways to approach authors/creators to gain permission to use their work. Connecting with organizers of campus or departmental research symposia can be useful for educating both faculty and students about open access and sharing work and can also function as a gateway to discussions about archiving student work.

### **Undergraduate student publishing**

The library, in collaboration with departments and teaching faculty, can provide the infrastructure and expertise to build upon the undergraduate research experience to support student publishing in the form of journals. Though student journal publishing requires a high degree of faculty-librarian-student dedication, time commitment, and investment of financial and human resources, it can be a valuable and exciting experience for all involved.

At Illinois Wesleyan University (IWU), the library provides the publishing infrastructure for undergraduate student journals in a variety of disciplines. The *Undergraduate Economic Review (UER)*<sup>5</sup> is an example of librarian-faculty collaboration that builds on the department's senior capstone course by involving the students in a real-world publishing experience. The *UER* is a born-digital, open access journal, open to submissions from any undergraduate economics student in the world. The IWU Economics capstone course brings together writing, critical thinking, information and data literacy skills, and critical peer review and asks students to apply their disciplinary knowledge to publishing other undergraduates' work. Training for the student reviewers includes an introduction to open access and public access principles, examples of how open access is a global movement, and how their work constitutes

a valuable contribution to the ongoing efforts. The faculty advisor and student editor-in-chief introduce the article review criteria and hold practice review sessions during the academic year for reviewers. Working up through the ranks of reviewer to managing editor to editor-in-chief provides excellent leadership training for students, and gives them a unique experience to include on their résumés. This program can help students become more aware of audience and effective use of evidence in their own writing, amplify the departmental profile with prospective students and alumni, and foster good working relationships between teaching faculty and librarians. A publishing experience that puts them in the role of reviewer and editor closes the loop for students who learned about open access, author/creator rights, and the costs of information in previous courses.

### **Alumni**

We cannot forget that our students eventually become our alumni, and will have information needs as consumers and citizens. As students, access to high-quality, peer-reviewed research is abundant; as alumni, the abundance is replaced by pay walls and “members only” attitude. Though awareness-building efforts around the costs of information and the inequities of information access should ideally begin before senior year, framing our education and outreach efforts with seniors can focus directly on locating and evaluating high-quality open access resources, why such resources exist, and why some disciplines are more open than others.

Alumni can also be reached with guides designed for them, specific to their discipline, connecting them to open access resources that could help them in their work post-graduation. Alumni in high-need/low-paying jobs, such as education and social services, could benefit the most from this effort, and the library could collaborate with the campus alumni office to develop and market the guides to graduates. Seniors and current alumni could also benefit from learning about legislative and policy efforts by the Alliance

for Taxpayer Access, especially around access to medical and health research.

### **Library-wide and campus-level advocacy opportunities**

Incorporating elements of open access and other scholarly communication issues into the general library environment will increase awareness and understanding of open access and author rights within a library’s culture, and can serve in a general outreach campaign for all library users. Library exhibits, blogs, Twitter accounts, and other marketing tools can be used on a consistent basis to showcase open access and scholarly communication resources, as well as examples and policy initiatives, such as the Federal Research Public Access Act (H.R. 4004) and the Research Works Act (H.R. 3699). In addition, adding and highlighting open access resources on existing online subject guides will complement scholarly communication newsletters or Web sites, in turn supporting any information literacy session using these resources. Students in those sessions could even be asked to design a brochure or exhibit based on the information they learned during class.

One excellent and participatory way to highlight open access is by joining Open Access Week,<sup>6</sup> organized by the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) and sponsored by PLoS, BMJ Open, and SpringerOpen, among others. Open Access Week is a great opportunity to engage both students and faculty around these issues and to introduce resolutions or other formal declarations of support around open access. Since October 2008, the inaugural Open Access Day has expanded into a weeklong event that shares educational materials around open access topics, including Webcasts and interviews with faculty and students around the globe about the importance of open access and how researchers have successfully advocated for open access mandates. This year’s Open Access Week is scheduled for October 25–28, 2012.

While the institutional repository can itself be a demonstration of campus support of

open access and sharing scholarly research, it can also be a powerful tool for library instruction and teaching. The repository can be introduced as a source of research, especially if the repository includes the products of undergraduate research programs mentioned above. Current undergraduate researchers can look back, using the repository, to see what work past students have accomplished in order to move a topic forward or to respond to another student's past work.

An example is the Ethnography of the University Initiative (EUI) at the University of Illinois.<sup>7</sup> Other creations, including work by student artists, creative writers, set design, and music composition and performances can also serve the same purpose, as well as providing examples of how and why students chose to share their work within a campus community or to the world. Teachable moments around copyright and CC result from discussions and decisions about disseminating student work. Articulating the criteria for excellence in undergraduate research and creative activity can be the basis for collection development discussions for a repository. Engaging with faculty about the definition of excellence is key, since the content of the repository will speak volumes about the quality of an institution's undergraduate experience and faculty engagement with students and their work to prospective students, alumni, and donors.

However, an institutional repository is not necessary to advance discussions and advocacy of open access and other scholarly communication issues. Many of the same lessons and conversations can engage students and faculty using disciplinary or subject repositories, or undergraduate student journals. Faculty may be more familiar with their own discipline's open access repositories, and may contribute to them on a regular basis. Finding these faculty and profiling their actions could help set an example for students. Even if they don't contribute to a campus or disciplinary repositories, finding out why is both useful and interesting to add to the general discussion of open access on campus.

## Changes in our profession

It is my hope that this article has provided ideas and conversation starters for librarians and faculty to engage in teaching about open access and scholarly communication no matter what the current library or campus culture may be. There is more for us to do collectively to promote progress, both in the realm of scholarly communication advocacy and information literacy, and it's vital that librarians who work within each community come together to share lessons learned and build upon the accomplishments of both groups.

An effort to do just that began at the 2012 ALA Midwinter Meeting in Dallas, where several librarians involved in scholarly communication and information literacy met to begin discussions about how to work together in the future. More information will be forthcoming as the conversation continues.

The current ACRL Information Literacy Standards<sup>8</sup> are under review by the Information Literacy Competency Standards Review Task Force, and this may be a perfect opportunity to strengthen and amplify the language in Standard Five regarding student understanding of the "economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information" to include more specific outcomes or performance indicators focused on open access, public access, and author rights.

Librarians could create opportunities to work more closely with the Right to Research Coalition to create open educational resources aimed at undergraduates, possibly based on Standard Five.

By working together, we can fulfill key aspects of the new ACRL Plan for Excellence, specifically under Student Learning: "transform[ing] student learning, pedagogy, and instructional practices through creative and innovative collaborations." Our efforts, in tandem with the efforts of SPARC and the Alliance for Taxpayer Access to break down barriers to research and scholarship, have the potential to fulfill the ideal put forward in Joyce Ogburn's October 2011 *C&RL News*

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The participation of alumni would extend the message of acceptance beyond the college gates, revealing support from and for members of the Union community who perhaps did not experience the same tolerance during their time as students. The recognition of change is powerful, as seen in other campaigns such as *It Gets Better*; the highly successful social media movement organized by gay rights activist Dan Savage to encourage struggling LGBTQ youth to have hope.

More local participation, as mentioned, is a key to making this project an annual priority on campus. While we have targeted faculty members who are likely to have potential contributors in their classes, we could visit studio art classes on our own to present the project to students, set up an informational table in the campus center, develop a greater Web presence for the exhibition, or, perhaps, offer more substantial prizes. A Web page would also allow us to post additional photos of installations and receptions, and could be a place to showcase interviews with artists, speakers, or other LGBTQ community members.

To bring more project events into the library space, the gallery exhibition could be followed by the installation of selected works in the library building, or the library could

purchase pieces for permanent display. The library could also host panel discussions with artists on campus and local LGBTQ activists, to coincide with the gallery exhibition. And, of course, the Collection Development Office should continue to purchase LGBTQ and arts-friendly materials in all formats, which could be fodder for future library exhibitions, Web pages, or LibGuides.

Library and gallery staff members were pleased to be part of this project, to provide the labor to make it happen and the voices to speak its message. It truly was a collaborative initiative, with many groups having something to contribute to the LGBTQ dialogue. An art exhibition is a time-consuming undertaking, but finding partners with a shared commitment to your message makes the work manageable, rewarding, and a fine example of what community librarianship can accomplish.

## Notes

1. See LGBTQ: A Library Perspective at [www.union.edu/library/galleries/lgbt/index.php](http://www.union.edu/library/galleries/lgbt/index.php).

2. Wikoff Student Gallery 2009, "LGBTQ: A Union Perspective," Schenectady, New York: Wikoff Student Gallery, Guestbook. *✍*

3. Right to Research Coalition, see <http://www.righttoresearch.org>.

4. Council of Undergraduate Research, see [www.cur.org/about.html](http://www.cur.org/about.html).

5. *Undergraduate Economic Review*, <http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/uer>

6. Open Access Week, [www.openaccessweek.org/](http://www.openaccessweek.org/).

7. Ethnography of the University Initiative: <http://www.ideals.illinois.edu/handle/2142/755>.

8. ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, see [www.ala.org/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency](http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency).

9. Joyce L. Ogburn, "Lifelong learning requires lifelong access: Reflections on the ACRL Plan for Excellence." *C&RL News* 72, no. 9 (2011): 515. *✍*

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*("Engaging..." cont. from page 215)*  
article "Lifelong learning requires lifelong access."<sup>9</sup>

## Notes

1. The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. Understanding a Diverse Generation: Youth Civic Engagement in the United States, published 2011, accessed March 7, 2012, [www.civicyouth.org/featured-new-study-dispels-stereotypes-about-young-voters-ahead-of-2012-elections/](http://www.civicyouth.org/featured-new-study-dispels-stereotypes-about-young-voters-ahead-of-2012-elections/).

2. Scott Warren and Kim Duckett, "Why Does Google Scholar Sometimes Ask for Money? Engaging Science Students in Scholarly Communication and the Economics of Information," *Journal of Library Administration* 50, no. 4 (2010).