**Management of Open Access Collections: Current Scenario in American Academic Libraries and a Sample Work Flow**

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**Abstract:** Open Access (OA) resources are increasingly becoming very popular among the information seekers, library professionals and publishers. Author briefly describes nature of OA collections and provides interesting statistics regarding the dynamic growth of OA collections. Paper includes summarized results from a brief five questions survey conducted on Electronic Resources Librarian (ERIL) listserv about the concerns and challenges American academic libraries are facing for managing OA collections. Building on a paper previously published in the Journal of E-resources Librarianship, author lists several problems related to OA collections and describes best practices adopted at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) library for managing OA collections. Reference section includes a bibliography, hyperlinks to the actual survey results and a handy list of ninety (90) OA collections that provide full-text access to more than 47,000 free journals and documents.

**Keywords:** Digital Collections, Open Access, Academic Libraries, Open Access publishing, Open Access Journals, Open Access Movement, Open access Initiatives and Open Access Statistics.

Open access, in general terms, refers to the “free and unrestricted online availability” of scholarly literature, available in OA collections and repositories [6]. Institutional OA repositories provide open access to articles, usually subscription based, through their centralized digital repository to institutional members, whereas OA journal collections provide unrestricted access to the full text content via Internet. OA collections are growing quite dramatically [4, 5]. A quick look at the following statistics provides actual numbers in great detail.

1. More than 10,963 fully open access peer-reviewed scholarly journals in the world are published in more than 100 countries and contain over 1.7 million articles in Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). Roughly one third of the world’s scholarly journals.
2. Close to 50,000 free-to-read journals of academic interest with free back issues are available in these collections.
3. Open access monographs are experiencing a rapid growth of annual growth rate of over 40%.
4. Directory of Open Access Books currently lists more than 3,789 books from 77 publishers and is experiencing more than 40% annual growth rate.
5. More than 2,700 OA repositories containing approximately 64 million free full text documents are available on Internet.
6. Highwire Free at [http://highwire.stanford.edu/lists/freeart.dtl](http://highwire.stanford.edu/lists/freeart.dtl%20) includes over 2.3 million free articles and 160 completely free sites.
7. PubMedCentral contains more than 3.7 million free full text documents.
8. Internet Archive at <https://archive.org/index.php> includes over 430 billion web pages and 8.8 million texts in public domain.
9. Social Science Research Network (SSRN) at [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/DisplayAbstractSearch.cfm](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/DisplayAbstractSearch.cfm%20) has 546,478 full text papers and is experiencing an annual growth rate of 13%. In the last 12 months, 12,171,170 full text papers were downloaded from SSRN web site and 301,239 authors have published with SSRN [9].

Besides being very supportive of OA initiatives, scholarly community is working diligently for setting up long term rules and regulations that ensure unhindered access to qualitative information. Registry of Open Access Repository Mandates and Policies (ROARMAP) [8] is a database that allows one to register a new policy and also search for an existing policy. Currently ROARMAP lists 771 OA policies that have been adopted by universities, research institutions and research funding bodies.

OA collections are gaining a reputation of being a preferred mean for publishing and delivering scholarly content via Internet, and yet, OA collections pose several challenges to the publishers, authors and the librarians. Most significant among them are outdated content, foreign language, poor navigation, under developed user platforms, low quality search mechanism, image signature access methods, non-availability of PDF readers in foreign language, download time, virus and pop blockers, no guarantee of full text content and mixture of paid and free content on the same user platform [1]. Missing information, outdated content and absence of reliable contact information plagues most of the open government collections. Additionally, some of the OA collections may be littered with fund raising information and unnecessary advertisements [1]. Further, predatory OA publishers thriving due to the fear generated by the policy of “publish or perish” among the scholarly community, pose special challenges to the new and experienced authors [2, 7].

**OA collections at FGCU library.**

Our collection development (CD) policy does not include specific wordings about selection of OA resources and rests primary responsibility for acquiring any material with the subject librarians. We do, however, encourage members of university community to submit recommendations for appropriate scholarly material, either free or paid, that supports academic pursuits and our curriculum.

FGCU library provides access to ninety (90) OA collections that include 45,777 full text free documents including journal articles [11]. We use SerialsSolution’s 360 applications for tracking OA collections and ensuring discovery of free content via MARC records, OPAC, A-Z e-journal portal, discovery services and article linker. We have made sure that all the tracked OA collections via SerialsSolutions 360 are unanimously approved by our Research, Reference and Instruction (RRI) group. OA collections that support our curriculum but are not yet included in SerialsSolutions 360 are available via Subject LibGuides and Database Locator (DBL) page maintained by the subject librarians and the web development librarian. Currently we are using two discovery services, Mango; a homegrown service and the WorldCat Discovery but at this time, we have not activated any OA collections for searching via WorldCat Discovery Service.

Initially, we established access to ninety six (96) free collections but soon after that we discovered several issues related to the broken links and outdated content that was adversely impacting our unmediated Inter-library loan, UBORROW program. Based on the failed transaction reports submitted by our ILL staff we were able to identify and deactivate six erring collections. Initially our subject librarians preferred listing curriculum related but non trackable OA collections through SerialsSolutions 360 in their LibGuides but lately, as more and more reliable OA databases are being created by the governmental and medical organizations, we have observed a noticeable growth in requests for providing access to such resources through the DBL page.

During the last summer semester, we received ten requests for adding free collections that were not available via SerialsSolutions 360 for tracking to our DBL page and it became absolutely necessary for us to establish a process that would ensure a non-biased review and careful selection of free resources. In the absence of any CD policy or selection guidelines for free resources, I decided to explore this issue further and check out how other libraries are managing OA collections. I was also curious to learn if other academic libraries have created any CD policy regarding OA collections or if they have created any special teams for selecting OA collections and deciding preferred access points. I further wanted to explore how libraries, if at all, handle troubleshooting and maintenance issues and justify staff time spent on managing OA collections. Therefore, I decided to create a simple five questions survey and post it on E-resources Librarian Listserv (ERIL). I first submitted my survey questions to our Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval and after securing their permission, I posted the survey on the ERIL listserv on January 30, 2015. Survey was completed by six librarians and I posted the results on March 6th 2015 [10]. Following paragraphs list actual survey questions, a general summary and individual answers:

1. **Do you have an open access collection policy that describes a selection process and steps to determine access points? If yes, would you be willing to share with me? Answer received = 6  
   Summary:** All respondents mentioned having a comprehensive Collection Development (CD) policy for selecting general library resources and only one respondent mentioned about having some loose guidelines about selection and maintenance of OA collections. Respondents indicated that at present there is quite an ambiguity about selection of OA resources and a clear set of guidelines regarding selection and management of OA collections is still being worked out.

* One librarian responded not having an OA selection policy but noted receiving frequent request about adding individual OA journals and OA collections not included in SerialsSolutions 360 to the library’s collection. It was also noted that it is a difficult judgement call and an updated CD policy is required to help guide selection and cataloging of free resources.
* One librarian did not mention anything else, other than the fact that they do not have any CD policy for OA collections.
* One librarian responded that their CD policy does not discuss OA collections and as a rule they select only those free resources that are indexed and discoverable in Summon Discovery Service. It was further noted, that if few users are going to search for a specific free journal or a collections such as DOAJ, it is worth providing access to only that journal or collection.
* One librarian mentioned about treating open access journals like any other journal and cataloging them like subscribed resources and adding them to the subject specific LibGuides. It was noted that single free OA journals are judged very carefully and if the journal is published by a trusted publisher only then it is catalogued at their library.  
  Further, their CD policy clearly states that OA resources that are either no longer relevant to the curricular, clinical or research mission of the university may be dropped from the catalog at any time without providing any reason or further notice.
* One librarian reported having an informal OA policy that includes information about the selection process. Subject librarians are allowed to submit or recommend an OA collection to be linked from their “Article & Database” page, Subject guides, Database locator page, A-to Z list and catalog.
* Only one librarian reported having specific guide lines and clear criteria about selecting, maintaining and weeding of OA collections (referred to as free collections) in their CD policy. They select only those free and stable OA collections that add depth and breadth to the existing collections, provide unbiased, accurate current information, are user-friendly in their approach, present well-organized content and offer American Disability Act accessible information [3].

1. **Do you have a Database and Serials Evaluation Team (DSET) that decides which open access collection is worth linking through DBL or other access points such as OPAC, E journal portal or LibGuides? Answers received = 6  
   Summary:** Setting up a Database and Serials Evaluation Team (DSET) is an idea that is well liked by all the respondents. Other terms in use are: Collection Development Team (CDT), Electronic Resources Workgroup (ERG), (IRRG: explanation not provided) and Discovery Strategy Team for a group of library employees responsible for selecting online resources. One library reported having a workflow in place that ensures distribution of free links to other departments responsible for maintaining MARC records, OPAC, database locator page and discovery services. Currently, selection of OA resources appears to be Subject Librarian’s responsibility in all the libraries.

* One respondent reported that they are in the process of establishing a Discovery Strategy team responsible for coming up with ideas for enhancing the usage of existing resources and OA collections might be discussed in near future.
* One respondent mentioned not having any team that was responsible for selecting OA collections.
* One respondent mentioned distributing the process of selecting OA resources among the subject librarians because they are the experts in the field. They are in the process of floating the idea of creating a database selection team whose main responsibility would be to evaluate and recommend new e-resources, paid or OA, and determine access points.
* One librarian reported setting up access to several OA collections and quickly withdrawing them after they realized it caused several troubles such as constant maintenance of broken links, outdated content and accountability.
* One respondent reported that DBL page is not an optimum location for listing OA collections because users are not aware of exact names of these collections and are not likely to search them at the DBL page.

1. **Do you currently provide access to open access collections through library's DBL page or include them in Subject LibGuides or individual LibGuide for open access collections? Answers received = 6.  
   Summary:** Libraries are still in the process of figuring out how to ensure 100 % discoverability of an OA collection from access points like OPAC, e-resources portals and discovery services.Preferred access points for OA Collections include OPAC, DBL page, A-Z portal, Subject LibGuides, OA LibGuides, PubMed Link Out feature, BrowZine App and Discovery Services. Libraries prefer to mark OA collection with an “open lock” icon in the DBL records. Icons like “Internet Link” or “Free Resource” are also in use.

* One librarian mentioned about not liking the idea of mixing free resources with paid subscriptions and believes that it is not a wise idea to overburden the DBL page with free resources.
* One librarian even went a step further and stated that DBL records must be created only for the most critical resources or for resources which are high on the priority list. For narrow focus or interest, subject guides are ideal.
* Subject LibGuides or OA LibGuides are widely preferred access point for OA collections simply because liaison librarians are solely responsible for adding appropriate subject resource to their subject guides, answering content related questions, and updating content, if necessary.
* Two librarians reported using their Electronic Resources Management Applications (ERMS) such as SerialsSolutions 360 and SFX for managing a variety of OA collections.
* One librarian reported a hybrid approach about setting up access points to OA collections. Depending on the reliability of subject content, occasionally OA collections are added only to the subject LibGuides and not to the DBL records at their library.

1. **Do you have a staff member especially assigned to troubleshoot open access database issues? Answers received= 6  
   Summary:** General conception is that is takes too much time to maintain ever shifting content and is not a good use of the staff time. It is common to find inaccurate dates, missing content and broken links and users must be warned about these issues. First priority is always troubleshooting paid resources and that itself is a huge challenge. Therefore, troubleshooting OA resources is “Nice to have” kind of a thing but not a core duty. Office of E-resources librarian is the main point for troubleshooting access issues but in the larger picture of other assignments that E-resources librarian handles, this is the last priority.

* Only one librarian reported having one and half time staff member designated for troubleshooting OA collections but it is was further specified that OA troubleshooting activities are rolled out in to their general e-resources and serials troubleshooting process.
* Five respondents reported not having a designated staff member for maintaining accurate access to OA collections.

1. **Have you ever taken any steps to review how much staff time is used to maintain and troubleshoot OA collections? Answers received=5  
   Summary:** None of the respondents reported keeping a track of time spent for managing OA collections because in most cases it is an acceptable fact that OA collections are not reliable and not much effort is placed in continuous maintenance of these collections. Maintaining free collections is generally considered a waste of time and the first priority is always to ensure appropriate access to paid subscriptions. No proper method is in place for calculating how much time is being spent and one librarians mentioned that it could be a full time job, and truly believed that it is a waste of time. Troubleshooting open access resources is rolled in to general e-resources and serials troubleshooting process.

* One librarian reported that Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) is quite a reliable resource. When major issues are reported to DOAJ administrators, they are quite responsive in cleaning up the errors.

**Summary of OA collection management process at FGCU library:** Although I did not receive a huge number of responses, the survey results were quiet helpful in understanding current OA environment in six US academic libraries and observing that all these academic libraries are quite interested in working with OA collections but at the same time they are skeptical as well. I reported the survey results to our E-resources team and invited them to engage in a brain storming session on this topic and come up with suitable process for working with OA collections. The general consensus among the team members was that OA collections that are not trackable through SerialsSolutions 360 cannot indeed be ignored anymore but it was strongly felt that we should not set up access to each and every free resource either. We agreed that it is productive to continue tracking useful OA collections through SerialsSolutions 360 and create DBL records for OA collections that are not available through SerialsSolutions 360, provided such collections support university curriculum, are thoroughly evaluated by subject librarians and finally, approved unanimously by our RRI group. And, this means that subject librarians must set up an ad-hoc evaluation team for evaluating OA collections just like they do for paid subscriptions, provide systematic feedback, make a case to RRI group, seek their approval for adding them to library’s collection and finally be responsible for adding and maintaining such resources to their LibGuides as well. Further, we decided to list OA collections alphabetically under the OPEN ACCSS database type on the DBL page and identify them with an open lock icon.

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