

ASIS&T Scholarly Communication Survey: Open Access Authors

by Margeaux Johnson and Nancy K. Roderer

Open access to information is an important and relevant discussion in the field of library and information science. Open access (OA) publication refers to the free availability of scholarly literature without any access restrictions or fees. Currently there are two models of open access publishing – the “gold road” and the “green road.” In the gold road to open access, the publication model is drastically changed. Either the author must pay for publication or publication costs must be covered by grants or institutional contributions. Green-road open access follows the traditional subscription-based publication model, but allows authors to make their articles freely available by self-archiving or by contributing them to their institutional repository. In 2008 the *Journal of the American Society for Information Science & Technology (JASIST)* became a green-road open access journal. Under this policy authors publishing in *JASIST* may post preprints to their own websites or their institution’s repositories with links to the final article and to the online journal.

Prior to this decision the ASIS&T Board of Directors developed a survey to explore how this new policy would affect readership, submissions and subscriptions. The survey was targeted toward ASIS&T members, *JASIST* authors and researchers

publishing in the field of information science (seen as potential *JASIST* authors). Created in conjunction with the *JASIST* publisher, Wiley-Blackwell, the survey was intended to serve as a baseline for subsequent surveys. It was distributed to 2,414 ASIS&T members and to 3,740 authors who had published in the field of information science. We received 581 responses. For a detailed description of the survey and overall survey results, please refer to the *ASIS&T Scholarly Communication Survey* [1]. For a look at the survey results as they apply to ASIS&T members specifically, please see the *ASIS&T Membership Survey 2008: Responses from ASIS&T Members* [2].

Among survey respondents, there was an overwhelmingly high level of awareness of open access (OA). Almost all (95.7% of participants) knew about open access journals and 60.4% indicated that they knew “a lot” or “quite a lot.” Among ASIS&T members there was even a higher level of awareness, with 96.3% responding that they knew about OA. Despite the high level of

awareness, only 26% of ASIS&T members reported having ever published in an open access journal. This figure was slightly higher, 29.4%, among all respondents. This paper will examine the survey responses of the 29.4% (N=171) authors who have published in OA journals.

From the survey data, we were able to answer the following four questions:

- Who are the authors participating in open access?
- What are the greater publication trends among open access authors?
- What level of access do open access authors have to journal literature?
- Do their attitudes toward open access differ from general survey respondents or ASIS&T members?

Who are the authors participating in open access?

Authors publishing in open access journals stand out demographically from the general survey respondents in three ways: they are more international, they are

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more likely to be employed by universities and they have more research experience.

In our overall survey results we saw increasing numbers of information scientists outside of North America and Europe. This globalization is even more noticeable among the subset of OA authors. Only 78.4% of OA authors reported living in North America or Europe compared to 83.3% of general respondents and 94.2% of ASIS&T members. Among the OA authors 7.6% reported living in Asia, 4.6% lived in Australia, 4% lived in the Middle East and 1.1% lived in South America. Additionally, Africa was accidentally omitted from our survey choices and we received several comments from researchers working in that region. Information science is becoming a global subject, and OA may allow more opportunities for international participation.

Professionally, OA authors are much more likely to work in institutions of higher learning. This correlation is probably related to the requirements for publication associated with university employment. Nearly 83% of OA authors reported working for a college or university compared with 70% of general respondents and 63.5% of ASIS&T members.

Related to their higher level of professional affiliation with colleges and universities, OA authors tended to have more research experience than the larger survey population. The largest group of OA authors, 30.4%, reported having 21+ years of research experience. Only 23.8% of the general responses indicated the same level of research experience. Among

the larger survey population and the ASIS&T member subset there seemed to be a large gap between those who were new to research and those who were established researchers with a lot of experience. This observation is not true for the subset of OA authors. Among this subset, there seem to be researchers at all levels of their career from beginning researchers to experienced researchers.

What are the greater publication trends among open access authors?

OA authors are more likely to submit to peer-reviewed journals, have a higher publication rate and have published more over their careers. Almost 93% of OA authors in our survey submit articles to peer reviewed publications. This figure is much higher than the percentage of general survey participants (68%) and ASIS&T members (53%), who submit papers to peer-reviewed journals. This increase in submission rates is probably related to the higher levels of employment in colleges and universities among OA respondents, as are the other publication trends discussed in this section.

When asked how many articles they had published in the past three years, OA authors were more likely to have published multiple articles than the general respondents. 43.6% of OA authors had published more than five articles in the past three years. 35% of the general survey population had the same publication record.

OA authors were also more likely to have published more articles over their careers, which is reflective of their profession and their greater number of years of research experience. Of the OA respondents 31.4% had published more than 25 articles in their career, whereas 25% of the overall group had published 25+ articles.

Even though submission and publication rates differ between OA authors and our larger survey population, both groups consider similar factors and value the same top journals when considering where to publish their work. Participants were asked to rank how important/unimportant certain factors were in deciding where to publish on a five-point Likert-type scale. The top three factors in deciding where to publish an article were the same for the survey participants and the OA subset:

1. The right kind of readership (4.1-overall; 3.9-OA subset)
2. The speed of reviewing (4.0-overall; 3.7-OA subset)
3. The standing of the editorial board (3.9-overall; 3.6-OA subset).

Among the subset of OA authors “having the journal available in electronic format” was tied for 3rd (3.6), whereas this consideration was not within the top five factors considered by the larger survey group. Both groups also considered “impact factor” (which tied for 3rd in the overall with 3.9; 3.5-OA subset) and “coverage by abstracting services” (3.8-overall; 3.5-OA subset) within their top five factors.

When deciding where to submit an article, all groups consider a similar list of journals. The top four journals considered by the entire survey population and the OA subset are identical:

1. *JASIST*
2. *Information Processing and Management*
3. *Journal of Documentation*
4. *Library and Information Science Research (LISR)*

Furthermore, all but one title is the same in the top 10 journals considered for both groups and 20 of the top 25 journals considered by each group are the same. The similarity in journal choice for submission is not surprising. Since our sample size was taken largely from ASIS&T members and from authors publishing in *JASIST* peer publications (*Annual Review of Information Science & Technology*, *Information Processing and Management*, *Information Research*, *Journal of Documentation*, *Journal of Information Science*, *Library Information Science and Research* and *Scientometrics*) the responses are heavily biased toward these journals.

What level of access do open access authors have to journal literature?

The majority of OA authors, 77.2%, described their current access to the journal literature as “excellent” or “good.” Only 5.2% rated their access as “poor” or “very poor.” OA authors have a similar level of access to journals as the overall survey participants.

When asked about access to *JASIST* specifically, 82.9% reported reading *JASIST* and 33.9% reported reading every issue. This was slightly higher than the general survey population in which 80% read *JASIST* and 33.6% reported reading every issue.

Participants were asked to indicate how they accessed *JASIST*. Online access was favored by all the groups, but was even more prevalent among OA authors. Almost 41% of OA authors accessed the journal online through their library’s electronic license, compared with 31.6% of the overall survey respondents. An additional 26.3% of OA authors used online access as members. There seems to be a preference for online access to *JASIST* articles among the OA authors.

Do their attitudes toward open access differ from general survey respondents or ASIST members?

As noted in the introduction, there was a very high level of awareness of open access among our survey population with 95.7% reporting that they knew about OA and 60.4% reporting that they knew “a lot” or “quite a lot.” Only 29.4% had published a paper in an open access journal, whereas, almost 68% had published papers in peer-reviewed journals. This may seem to indicate a bias against OA publication. However, there is no distinguishable difference in attitudes toward open access between the entire survey population and the OA subset. Both groups had a positive attitude toward

open access. Both groups associated open access with positive attributes like “free to access” and “high quality.” The OA authors commented on their positive support for the publication model and 61% of the 44 comments made by this group mentioned open access specifically.

Interestingly enough, neither group associated open access with “author pays to publish,” which is a common publication model for gold road open access. Several comments in the OA authors’ responses spoke out against the pay to publish model of open access. Comments typical of this sentiment included, “In library science, an open access model where authors pay to publish their work will not be a solution” and “I am strongly in favor of open access journals, but not if they charge substantial fees to authors.”

A key factor in green road open access, which gives authors the *right* to self-archive their works, is the individual author’s *ability* to self-archive. This function can be carried out on personal websites or in institutional repositories (IR). Thus, it is important to consider whether OA authors have personal websites or have contributed to an IR. The authors who have published in OA journals are more likely to have a website (63.7%) than the general survey population (48%). On their websites, 24.5% of the OA authors have posted “the text of papers that have been accepted for publication” and 15.8% have posted “preprints of papers that have been submitted for publication.” The OA respondents were much more likely to contribute to their institution’s repository.

Indeed, 43.8% had already contributed to an IR. In contrast only 24.6% of the total survey population had contributed to an IR. However, there seemed to be an interest in contributing to IRs in the future on the part of the larger population. 56.6% indicated that they had not yet deposited scholarly materials in an IR, but that they were interested in doing so in the future.

Conclusions

The information science research community, and ASIS&T members in particular, are very aware of open access. There is a definite interest in participating in the open access movement. Our survey was able to answer the following four questions about information science authors who are already publishing in OA journals:

Who are the authors participating in open access?

Authors who have published in OA journals differ from the larger survey population in three ways – geographically they are more international, professionally they are more likely to work for a college or university and they are more likely to have more years of research experience.

What are the greater publication trends among open access authors?

OA authors have higher publication rates than the larger survey population and a higher number of publications in their careers. Nearly 93% submit articles to peer-reviewed journals. However, when considering which journals to submit manuscripts to, OA authors have similar preferences to the general survey

respondents. They also tend to consider the same factors in deciding where to submit.

What level of access do open access authors have to journal literature?

Overall, there is “good” or “excellent” access to journals among the group we surveyed. There is a noted preference for electronic access to journals among OA authors.

Do their attitudes toward open access differ from general survey respondents or ASIST members?

No. Overall there is a relatively positive attitude toward the concept of open access, particularly green road open access. Authors indicated an interest in archiving their scholarly works in institutional repositories. ■

Resources Cited in the Article

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