Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Interviews with Practitioners in the United Kingdom Reveal Effective Strategies for Open Access Outreach to Researchers
Dawson, D. (2018). Effective practices and strategies for open access outreach: A qualitative study. Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication, 6(1), eP2216. https://doi.org/10.7710/2162-3309.2216

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A Review of:
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Abstract

Objective – To discover effective outreach methods used by academic libraries to promote open access (OA) publishing to researchers.

Design – Semi-structured interviews

Setting – 7 large research universities in the United Kingdom (UK)

Subjects – 14 individuals responsible for OA outreach at their institution, including librarians and other OA practitioners

Methods – Purposive sampling was used to select universities based on their membership in the UK's Russell Group, designation in the top 20 of the Research Council UK's OA grant-size ranking, and suggestions from other professionals. The author contacted individuals responsible for OA at these institutions by email to inform them of the study and solicit their participation. The subsequent semi-structured interviews occurred in person. Areas of focus in the interview included: job responsibilities and overview of offered scholarly communications services; sources of OA services at the institution; evolution and effectiveness of OA outreach activities; support and scholarly

communication knowledge needed by researchers; and advice for fellow practitioners conducting OA outreach. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded using the qualitative software NVivo. Inductive analysis was conducted to identify key themes.

Main Results – The author identifies four primary themes in the coded interviews: "The Message"; "Key Contacts and Relationships"; "Qualities of the OA Practitioner"; and "Advocacy versus Compliance" (p. 1). Participants advocated for straightforward, frequent messaging tailored to the audience. The author identifies relationships as important to outreach – especially support from influential administrators and buy-in from key researchers – highlighting that face-to-face interaction is helpful when cultivating these types of relationships. Participants emphasized important qualities for OA practitioners to possess, including expertise, diplomacy, and perseverance. Establishing credibility as an expert was identified as important to generating buy-in from researchers. Finally, the author discusses the library's role in OA advocacy vs. compliance. Some participants suggested an overemphasis on compliance to meet funder requirements may overshadow promotion of the inherent value of OA in academic publishing.

Conclusions – The author suggests that because UK open access efforts are robust and have been in progress for many years, OA practitioners from the UK may possess useful insights for North American librarians with growing initiatives. The study highlights implications for practice including the identification of effective outreach strategies, evidence of the need for balanced messaging, and observations on why faculty may be resistant to outreach from librarians. The author recommends further research to determine what type of messaging is most valuable and when, suggesting less complex policies in North America may allow for more focus on the public good of OA. Successful outreach is predicated upon having enough time to gain the necessary depth of knowledge, and the study acknowledges that librarians with diverse job responsibilities may have less

time to invest in this way. The author also suggests more research is needed to evaluate the impact of the dynamics between librarians and classroom faculty. The article posits that librarians who participate in research and tenure processes may find communication easier and have opportunities to promote OA through participation in university governance. Finally, the author observes that librarians are poised to have a positive impact on the scholarly publishing system through outreach to researchers who can drive systemic change.

Commentary

Studies related to library OA outreach often focus on lessons learned from efforts at specific institutions, mainly in the United States (Otto, 2016; Vandegrift & Colvin, 2012). Fruin (2017) conducted an environmental scan of OA initiatives in the United Kingdom, including some exploration of outreach activities, although this was not the primary focus of the study. *Moving Open Access Implementation Forward* provides some suggestions for advocacy based on the experiences of UK practitioners (Blanchett & DeGroff, 2017). The author's study expands on the literature by focusing specifically on outreach at multiple large UK universities, synthesizing these efforts into useful recommendations for practitioners.

The study demonstrates strengths when evaluated using the qualitative study critical review tool created by Letts, et al. (2007). The author clearly articulates the context and value of the study, highlighting existing OA challenges, the maturity of efforts in the United Kingdom, and trends in the current literature. Additionally, the research focus is clearly stated, the qualitative research design is appropriate, the process for selecting participants is articulated, and findings are well-presented. Useful recommendations for practitioners based on study findings are provided.

There are also several areas for study improvement. First, it is possible that interviewing multiple practitioners from the

same institution led to less diverse results. Furthermore, although the author states that the purpose of the study was not to assess individual OA practitioner characteristics, the inclusion of some demographic factors could have provided more nuance in the interpretation of results (e.g. faculty status, highest degree earned, years of experience, etc.). Additional details on the coding process and inductive analysis used to identify themes would have further bolstered validity. Information on the perspective and background of the researcher would have also provided greater context for results, because as Braun and Clarke (2006) note, "data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum" (p. 12). Finally, an evaluation of potential study limitations would have been valuable.

The results of this study may be of interest to librarians and other practitioners involved in advocating for OA initiatives to researchers. Librarians at academic institutions in countries where initiatives are still being developed and barriers to buy-in exist may find the study's recommendations particularly applicable. Further research inclusive of institutions of varying types, sizes, and locations could provide insight into outreach methods relevant to diverse contexts. Survey research may be a complementary way to evaluate outreach efforts more broadly across many institutions.

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