

Interim Report of the Provost's Task Force on Open Access and Scholarly Communication

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Introduction

The Provost's Task Force on Open Access and Scholarly Communication was established in the summer of 2019 to promote dialogue about open access (OA) and scholarly communication and to explore how the community might best advance one of the University's core missions: the dissemination of knowledge for the benefit of society. The task force was given a specific mandate to:

- gather information and review the broader context;
- review relevant policies and practices at Western and other institutions;
- consult broadly with the campus community to inform the work of the task force;
- provide recommendations, for consideration by Senate, on the development of a Western University commitment to the advancement of open access and sustainable scholarly communications and publishing models.

These activities would help the Task Force achieve a better understanding of the needs and perspectives of Western's researchers and scholars with respect to scholarly publishing. They would also allow the Task Force to recommend how Western can move towards more open methods of scholarly dissemination, and address questions of financial sustainability and improving access to the scholarly output of Western's researchers.

Specific questions the task force was asked to address included:

- How might Western promote and enable sustainable models of scholarly communication?
- What resources are necessary to support Western's scholars and researchers in their scholarly communications efforts?
- How could Western focus or enhance existing services and supports for open access and scholarly communication?
- How should Western best ensure ongoing awareness of scholarly communications and publishing issues among the campus community?
- How might an open access policy or principles statement or other practices support the adoption of open access by Western University researchers?

To carry out this mandate, the task force met over the summer and fall. The task force brought in Western Libraries experts as resources to speak on the cost of collections and scholarly publishing, theoretical and practical aspects of scholarly communications, and the various types of institutional support for open access and the viability of those approaches. The task force had an open understanding of its mandate, with conversations leading to new areas of inquiry. The task force members developed and delivered a survey for Western scholars, librarians, students, and staff in order to better understand

our community's perspective on open access issues, and to identify salient areas for further inquiry and consultation. In addition, an Academic Panel of task force members was convened as a campus event on October 23, 2019 as a part of Open Access Week programming.

This report includes preliminary responses to the questions posed as part of the task force mandate. These responses are based on the activities outlined above.

The task force believes and recommends, however, that we will benefit from an extended mandate into early 2021 to allow for more extensive consultations and research. We recognize that open access raises different issues for stakeholders across Western University, and additional time would ensure that these various perspectives are fully represented in our deliberations. Additionally, the task force is aware that there is ongoing discussion and planning around new Tri-Agency policies, in particular, policies on research data management. We believe it would be prudent to maintain a body able to comment on and otherwise engage with these emergent policies and to incorporate any potential policy changes into our recommendations.

It is the preliminary conclusion of the Provost's Task Force on Open Access and Scholarly Communication that a campus-wide consultation should be undertaken on attitudes towards and issues informing open access, scholarly publishing, and institutional support for researchers and authors in these areas. Specific recommendations are detailed below.

How might Western promote and enable sustainable models of scholarly communication and what resources might this require?

First and foremost, Western faculty, students, and staff need an expanded understanding of how scholarly communication is undertaken, how content is licensed, and the alternative models that are available. While there are existing pockets of expertise on campus, there remains a significant opportunity to educate our colleagues on the details of the scholarly publishing environment. Scholarly publishing is complex, and open access is one piece of a much larger system. A well informed campus that understands this system will be critical if Western is to successfully navigate into the future.

Second, as a university, we have an opportunity to address structural and capacity issues in our ability to support open access publication and scholarly communication at Western. One opportunity is a potential transition of the institutional repository to a locally or regionally hosted system; the library is currently in exploratory conversations with the Ontario Council of University Libraries' Scholars Portal on what a solution could look like. Additionally, we have opportunities to build campus capacity to undertake outreach on open access issues and sustainable scholarly publication models; including consultation on author rights and author fees, structural support for open access publishing, dialogue and discussion on scholarly communications, and investment in expertise and infrastructure to support open data.

The library is well positioned to expand upon this work, as the recent library reorganization has enabled us to create a team of Research and Scholarly Communications librarians; having identified the importance and complexity of this work, we (the library) can redouble our focus on outreach, education, and service improvement. That said, sufficiently addressing these issues will require an ongoing campaign of engagement and consultation, which the task force should undertake. The task force estimates that these tasks will take an additional 12-18 months.

How should Western best ensure ongoing awareness of scholarly communications and publishing issues among the campus community, and how should the task force go about engaging in this consultation?

First and foremost, the task force needs to continue to collect data. While the preliminary survey below is a first step to better help us understand attitudes towards and knowledge of open access at Western, there is still much to learn. With this data, we can work to understand what supports and information our colleagues need, and we can undertake targeted outreach to help shape attitudes and raise awareness. We propose to model our consultation on the Freedom of Expression policy consultation, exploring the issues on which to consult in the spring of 2020, developing our methods and tools in summer 2020, and rolling out extensive consultation in fall 2020.

Ultimately, while the task force has a role in supporting and driving this consultation, and will issue a final report containing recommendations to the Provost, any actions adopted from these recommendations will need to be supported by campus researchers and faculty, with the engagement of bodies such as Senate, UWOFA, and Western Libraries.

How might an open access policy or principles statement or other practices support the adoption of open access by Western University researchers, and what type of policy should we investigate?

There are many types of OA policies and they have various advantages and disadvantages. Broadly, OA policies can be understood as falling into one of three categories:

1. Normative – Normative policies state that “authors are encouraged to...” deposit articles in a repository or publish in open access journals. These resolution-based policies tend to be less controversial among university constituents, and they provide a goal of openness that faculty can aim towards while allowing authors the highest degree of control over their content. They also, however, are less effective than mandatory deposit policies.
2. Contractual/Rights-Based – In these policies, authors grant the university a set of rights and are prohibited from giving all their rights to publishers; while still retaining the right to publish and deposit in venues and journals of their choosing. While they tend to be more challenging to pass, they are in

place at Simon Fraser University¹ and at several US institutions. Contractual OA policies tend to be more effective because they reduce barriers to deposit, as the employer (and the library) have the right to deposit authors' work. There would, of course, need to be a well crafted grant of rights to ensure that the university is granted sufficient rights to deposit articles in the repository and at the same time does not unduly infringe on author rights.

3. Compulsory – Compulsory policies tie open access publishing into some other benefit or requirement. For example, the Tri-Agency Open Access Policy on Publications requires that peer-reviewed publications arising from agency supported research be freely accessible within 12 months of publication. This requirement can be met through deposit to an institutional repository, in a form and on a timeline consistent with copyright transfer agreements. Meeting tri-council requirements is only one of many reasons for Western University to actively pursue open access publication of the research output of Western University researchers.

Given the above, the task forces' preliminary research and analysis reveals that while compulsory and contractual/rights based solutions are the most effective drivers of open access and progressive scholarly communication policy, they require a high level of understanding and engagement by campus partners in order to be successfully implemented. It is the belief of the task force that additional consultation with our campus community is necessary in order to identify what would be possible at Western. We are aware that there is still much to learn about open access attitudes at Western, and we believe that we have extensive consultation to undertake before proposing any policy change.

Conclusion

The single most striking revelation from the work of the task force is that open access publishing and scholarly communication is an exceedingly complicated domain. The task force brought together individuals with a variety of diverse expertise, and it was only through mutual discussion and investigation that we have come to a common understanding. OA and scholarly publishing implicate budgets, ease of access to materials, social justice, promotion and tenure, and faculty rights and workloads, to name a few areas, and it is vitally important that any recommendations, decisions or policy balances and respects those important concerns. As such, we believe that extending the mandate of the task force for an additional 12-18 months is a prudent course of action, to enable in depth consultation and communication with our community.

¹ <https://www.lib.sfu.ca/help/publish/scholarly-publishing/open-access/open-access-policy#policy>

Appendix A

Questionnaire on Open Access

As part of the Task Force's communication plan, a questionnaire on open access (OA) was prepared and distributed via mass email to all members of the campus community. The purpose of this questionnaire was to gather information that would help task force members achieve better understanding of the needs and perspectives of Western's community with respect to scholarly publishing.

Respondents

870 respondents started the survey. 425 respondents completed only the question that asked them to identify their role on campus, and a further 42 respondents did not answer any question. This left 403 usable responses. Table 1 shows the number of usable responses in each respondent category.

Table 1. Respondent category and number of usable responses.

Full-time Faculty	132
Part-time Faculty	15
Graduate Student	96
Undergraduate Student	85
Staff Member	66
Librarian	9
Total	403

Questionnaire Responses

The questionnaire asked respondents to rank seven areas of inquiry that the task force had identified:

- Cost of books and serials (such as magazines, newspapers, journals, annuals, and periodicals)
- Access to scholarly materials
- Promotion and tenure
- Predatory publishing
- Institutional repository
- Open access article processing charges (APCs)
- Retention of intellectual property rights

Figure 1 shows how the respondents prioritized these seven areas.

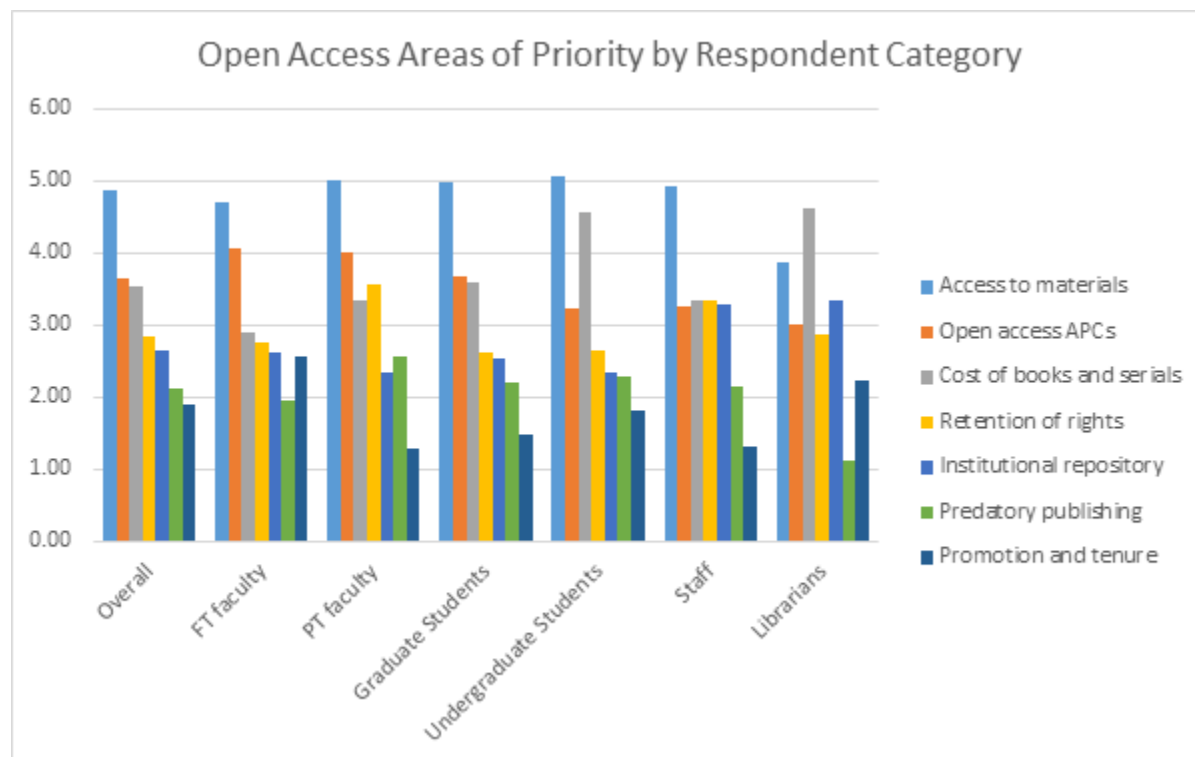


Figure 1. Areas of Inquiry identified by the Task Force and the priority level as indicated by questionnaire respondents. A higher bar in the chart indicates that the area was a higher priority for respondents.

The remaining questions were open-ended, allowing respondents to provide free-text answers.

Open-ended responses to the question “How might Western promote and encourage scholarly communication?” largely mirrored the areas of inquiry above, with two exceptions. There were no responses related to predatory publishing or retention of intellectual property rights. Several respondents provided a variation on the general suggestion to “encourage open access publications,” without further elaboration of how Western could do so. Additional suggestions included: provide education about how to publish OA, start a press or provide other local options for publishing, and investigate policies to encourage OA publication.

The second open-ended question was “Besides funding, what resources are necessary to support Western’s researchers in their scholarly communications and open access efforts in the future?” Many responses related to all seven areas of inquiry above. In particular, many responses focused on the areas of promotion and tenure and the institutional repository. Additional suggestions again included to provide education and to start a press or provide other local publishing opportunities. Several responses also identified qualified library staff as important resources to support this work.

The final open-ended question was “Have we missed any areas of inquiry?” Again, many responses related to the previously identified areas of inquiry. In particular, with respect to the cost of books and serials, many respondents mentioned prioritizing open access in publisher negotiations, with some specific references to following the example of the University of California in their negotiations with Elsevier. Other suggestions included: education and training, publish OA journals, and broaden the scope beyond journal articles to include Open Science, open data, Open Educational Resources, and monographs.

The questionnaire responses confirm that the task force’s areas of inquiry are important to the campus community. Respondents also identified additional areas of inquiry, notably education, local publishing, and consideration of the task force’s scope beyond the open access journal article.