Gavin Baker

Open access

Advice on working with faculty senates

Tim Hackman's October 2009 Scholarly Communication column, "What's the opposite of a pyrrhic victory?," discussed the failure of the University of Maryland to adopt an open access policy. Responding to the advice in Hackman's piece, this column offers some suggestions on the process of proposing a policy at your institution.

This column assumes the goal of a binding open access policy, like those adopted recently at Harvard[1] and MIT[2] (but see caveats below). In general, I won't discuss the actual workings of the policy here. For more information on crafting the policy itself, see SPARC's campus policy resources.[3]

Getting started

My overall advice: consider your endeavor a political one. Yours won't involve street demonstrations or smoke-filled backrooms (probably), but it certainly will involve making friends and changing minds. Politics is not only about logic and reasoning, but also emotion and relationships. Be prepared for it.

One theme echoed by Hackman and others who have proposed open access policies is to not overestimate faculty's understanding of open access. To the contrary, expect to spend considerable time and effort informing faculty and responding to their questions and concerns.

Most of the remainder of my advice will focus on *what* to communicate and *how* to do so. But first, two caveats:

• **Be practical with the specifics of the policy.** A bit of flexibility with the details could mean the difference between passing a policy or nothing. Most important is the principle: faculty adopting a collective commitment to make their research open access. The right details can influence the effectiveness of the policy, but don't lose sight of the principle.[4] Working with hesitant faculty can build trust; look for ways to address their concerns without significantly weakening the policy.

• **Think strategically about the scope of your proposed policy.** While MIT's policy was adopted university-wide, Harvard's policies have been adopted by individual schools. Elsewhere, policies have been adopted by individual departments, or even by the library faculty itself.

The best approach at your institution will depend on its governance structure as well as the readiness of different groups of faculty to endorse open access. If you think that adopting a university-wide policy could take many months of groundwork and negotiation, but one department seems ready to adopt a policy much earlier, it may make more sense to start small. Moreover, a working policy in one department can serve as an example to others.

What to say

Message control is key to any political endeavor. Formulating clear, succinct messages—and sticking to them—ensures that your most effective and favorable arguments will be communicated.

I've seen myriad different arguments for open access, some of them extraneous, con-

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fusing, or even antithetical to faculty interests. Be ever mindful of your audience. Speak their language and tailor your message to their concerns.

One critical message is the harm to scholarship that comes from lack of access. Communicate budgetary challenges, subscription cuts, and journal price hikes. Of particular interest to humanities faculty, explain how cost inflation in the serials market has shrunk the budget for monographs acquisitions. Make clear that the access problem affects researchers and students throughout the academy, in all fields and at all institutions. Be sure to frame it as a faculty problem, not just a library problem; always stress how it hurts research and education.

Also crucial are the opportunities from open access—most importantly, the benefits for faculty. Highlight the studies that demonstrate that open access can lead to increased readership, citations, and impact for research.[5] Mention how an open access copy can cut down on reprint requests for an article.

In addition, discuss the benefits of open access to education and research overall. The progress of scholarship depends on communicating the results of research, and open access can more effectively disseminate those results. Finally, refer to the university's mission to society—for instance, how open access can support patients seeking medical information.

Another important message is continuity and simplicity. Emphasize that faculty will continue to be able to publish in the journal of their choice. A significant point of faculty hesitation is the concern that open access policies will restrict their publication opportunities. Therefore, reiterate that the vast majority of publishers have policies congruent with open access policies, and offer resources for faculty with questions.[6]

Communicate that it's easy to deposit in the institution's repository; in fact, many of your faculty probably have already deposited in repositories such as arXiv or PubMedCentral. Express the library's willingness to help with training and consultations.

Another approach: peer pressure can be a tremendous motivator. Demonstrate that an open access policy is not an untested idea with unpredictable results, but rather one with wide and growing acceptance. In addition to top institutions like Harvard, MIT, and Stanford, open access policies have been adopted at public universities like the University of Kansas, as well as liberal arts colleges like Oberlin College.[7] Their examples—and momentum—are the best response to faculty concerns of all kinds.

Finally, appeal with the messages of leadership and responsibility. Having established that an open access policy is valuable, important, and feasible, call faculty to action: now we have to do something about it. Scholars need to take responsibility, ameliorating the access problem and helping realize the opportunities of open access by adopting an open access policy.

How to say it

The first component of *how* is *who*. That is, who says something has a lot to do with how the message is perceived.

For starters, you don't want to be alone. Find a few champions who are willing to work and see the policy through to implementation. Ideally, they should be respected members of the body you seek to influence —for instance, members of the faculty senate.

Find out how your proposal would be considered. What channels would you have to work through? Familiarize yourself with the process, and personalities, involved. You may have more than one procedural option: find out the pros and cons of each approach.

Several successful policies have been the product of officially chartered task forces or ad hoc committees. A task force has more legitimacy than a proposal by a few individuals. Consider asking a relevant body for a charge. In addition, official status gives you entrée to begin discussing the proposal with faculty, building support and answering concerns.

People like to be consulted. Asking for someone's input demonstrates respect, which helps build the relationships you need to pass

your proposal. The last thing you want is for someone with the ability to stop your proposal to feel like you have sprung it on them at the last minute.

Identify the people you want to influence. This should include the president of the faculty senate and members of relevant governance committees. It might also include deans, provosts, and department chairs. Who are the thought leaders in the senate? Would the faculty union take a position?

Correspond with your contacts, then meet with them individually or in small groups. Small or private informational meetings, proceeding at a deliberate pace, help to avoid triggering alarms or making anyone feel they have been left behind. One librarian who is advocating for an open access policy at his institution told me, "It is necessary to go to smaller departmental meetings and other places where faculty discuss academic matters and talk one-on-one to those who raise concerns, issues, or fears. Whenever an objection or concern is raised, we try to arrange an invitation to go talk with the group that is worried. These are not always comfortable meetings, but I am convinced that they are the *sine qua non* for a successful process."

As you proceed, be aware of the fault lines and diversity within your institution. The proposal shouldn't come toward a vote with anyone feeling, "People like me weren't consulted." You want to demonstrate support across the disciplines, from both junior and senior faculty. Diversity in terms of major demographics like sex and race is desirable, as well.

With time, be willing to cautiously take the debate more public. An article in the campus newspaper, an op-ed in the faculty newsletter, or a public lecture can help raise awareness of the proposal.[8] Going public can surface new sources of both enthusiasm and hesitation. Incubate support, and work with skeptics to tease out and respond to their doubts.

At all stages, exhibit confidence in your proposal. Without being untruthful, always focus on the positive aspects; let critics do their own work. But always be willing to hear concerns, and be patient in addressing them.

Be careful at all times about the language you use. One librarian told me, "We are always trying to strike a balance between creating the legal effect that we need and using language that allays anxiety and does not appear to overreach."

When the time finally comes to move toward a vote, round up all the support you can. Statements of support from upper administration, prominent faculty, the dean of libraries, student representatives, and others can help make your case. Recruit a group of senators, representing the diversity of support for open access, who will speak in support of the proposal.

Finally, one principle of politics is: never take a vote unless you know you will win it. If possible, do a "whip count" in advance to ensure your proposal has sufficient support to pass. Lobby waverers until they're prepared to vote for the proposal, and delay a vote until then.

If things turn sour at the last minute, try to escape without getting the proposal killed. (You hope it won't happen, but it's better to be prepared.) For instance, you might offer an amendment from the floor to address concerns raised in debate and make the bill more palatable. If persuasion and negotiation fail and passage seems out of reach, a motion to recommit the bill to committee may be a better option than risking losing a floor vote. If the bill is recommitted, at least you live to fight another day and can try to work out the issues in committee.

Hopefully, however, your faculty will opt to join the growing ranks of institutions committed to ensuring open access to their research. If so, congratulations! Take your supporters out for a celebratory round of drinks. Share your success with open access advocates at other institutions. Get ready for the work of implementing the policy, knowing that your actions have helped change scholarly communication for the better.

Notes

1. See osc.hul.harvard.edu/OpenAccess /overview.php.

2. See libraries.mit.edu/oapolicy.

3. See www.arl.org/sparc/advocacy/campus/.

4. One librarian, who had unsuccessfully worked for a binding open access policy at his institution told me, "Focus on the principle of an open access policy, not the implementation. Unfortunately, we focused on the implementation, and the faculty saw it as another workload being forced on them by administration, and they did not support it."

5. See opcit.eprints.org/oacitation-biblio.html.

6. In the worst case scenario, most American institutional policies (including the MIT and Harvard policies) offer an opt-out, which faculty could use in the unlikely event of a recalcitrant publisher.

7. See www.eprints.org/openaccess/policysignup/

8. With the press especially, stick ruthlessly to your message. ✐

("Social media," continued from page 12) from time to time with different or unorthodox posts, but, as with any experiment, remember to note results. See which posts get responses and attempt to replicate them.

Social media, like any other technology, takes a bit of time and play to learn. Once you do get the hang of it, though, you will see a growing, active community begin to emerge. This community can be a powerful thing, and the benefits to both your library and patrons will become clear.

Notes

1. "Statistics," Facebook, 2009, www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics (accessed November 5th, 2009).

2. Michelle McGiboney, "Twitter's Tweet Smell of Success," Nielsen Wire. 18 March 2009, blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/twitters-tweet-smell-of-success/.

3. Chris Bourg, "Our Library Facebook Page," Feral Librarian. 16 October 2008. chrisbourg.wordpress.com/2008/10/16/our-library-facebook-page/ ✐

http://ceps.georgiasouthern.edu/conted/infolit.html

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