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# Evaluating an Open Access Publishing Fund at a Comprehensive University

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**INTRODUCTION** As the open access movement has fostered a shift from subscriber-funded journals to author-pays models, scholars seek funding for the dissemination of their research. In response to this need, some libraries have established open access funds at their institutions. This paper presents an evaluation of an open access fund at a comprehensive university. **DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM/SERVICE** Wanting to learn how faculty have benefitted from an open access publishing fund, Grand Valley State University Libraries surveyed recipients of the fund. The survey asked authors why they chose an open access publishing option and whether the fund influenced this decision. Authors were also asked whether they perceived that selecting an open access option broadened exposure to their work and about their likelihood of choosing open access in the future. **NEXT STEPS** This article shares the results of this small survey and explores next steps in promoting and evaluating the fund and opportunities for focusing educational efforts across campus.

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade there has been a steady shift from the traditional academic publishing business model toward an open access (OA) model, offering unrestricted availability of scholarly journal articles via the web for anyone to discover and use. This may be accomplished through authors self-archiving a pre-print or post-print of an article in an open access repository (Green OA) or by publishing in an open access journal (Gold OA). Some subscription-based journals also offer a hybrid model that allows authors to opt-in to making their articles open access. Though open access literature is freely available to readers, there are still costs associated with producing or publishing open access content. In the traditional subscription model, the consumer of the publication pays the majority of the cost of producing a journal. In the open access model, “those with an interest in disseminating the content pay the production costs upfront so the access can be free of charge” (Suber, 2012, p. 136). This producer-pays model sometimes results in the cost being shifted to the authors of the article.

David Lewis argues that by the year 2025 ninety percent of all scholarly journal articles will be published in gold OA journals (2012). Lewis believes this transformation will affect all of the actors in the scholarly publishing ecosystem, from authors to libraries to publishers (2012). Lewis points out that authors will benefit from wider readership and the possible benefits of post-publication review, as well as the greater acceptance of OA publishing in tenure and promotion reviews (Lewis, 2012). However, he does not discuss the possible negative consequences authors might face as scholarly publishing moves from a consumer-pays to a producer-pays model.

While the majority of OA journals charge no fee to publish an article, often referred to as an Article Processing Charge (APC), many of the most prominent OA publishers, including Public Library of Science, BioMedCentral, and Hindawi, do charge APCs (Directory of Open Access Journals, n.d.). In addition, many legacy publishers such as Wiley-Blackwell, Elsevier, and Nature have established open access journals that charge APCs, and many also allow authors to pay an APC to make individual articles in traditional subscription based journals open access. In all of these instances authors who want to publish in one of these gold OA or hybrid journals must be able to pay the APC, which can range from a few hundred dollars up to \$5,000 for a single article. Although some authors will be able to take advantage of grant funds to pay these fees, there remains a large portion of authors who either do not have access to grant funding or the means to pay for these fees on their own. The lack of available funds creates a hindrance to both the scholar’s career, which is dependent on publication and dissemination, as well as to the transition of scholarly publishing to an open access model.

To overcome this potential barrier, some have called for libraries to establish OA publishing funds (Renfro, 2011 and Richard, Koufogiannakis, & Ryan, 2009). The Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) defines these funds as “a pool of money set aside by an institution specifically to reimburse article processing or membership fees for articles published by members of the institution in open access journals” (n.d.). In 2011, Grand Valley State University (GVSU) Libraries established just such a fund to support faculty and students looking to publish in open access journals. This article provides an overview of our fund and the evaluation the Libraries conducted of this program.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview of Open Access Funds

Greg Tananbaum’s *Campus-Based Open-Access Publishing Funds: A Practical Guide to Design and Implementation* (2010a), which was produced on behalf of SPARC, provides the most comprehensive look at OA funds. This resource guides readers through different considerations when establishing a fund, ranging from determining what kinds of publications will be funded to how much will be budgeted in the fund overall and per article. Tananbaum (2010b) suggests that supporting faculty through OA funds “establishes a dialogue between an institution and its authors to better assess their specific interests and concerns, and to direct financial resources appropriately.” Fruin and Rascoe (2014) cover much of the same ground as Tananbaum as they provide an overview of open access funds and considerations for libraries intending to establish one. In their article they also provide an overview of new and emerging models for funding open access articles and journals and their implications for libraries. These include *PeerJ*’s author membership model, consortial models such as SCOAP3, and discounts or credits to authors such as those provided by *F1000 Research* and the American Chemical Society.

SPARC maintains an *Open Access Funds in Action* (2014) list. This is a compilation of OA funds at universities in North America and includes information on how much money has been allocated to the fund, when it was established, who is eligible, what kinds of publications are eligible, reimbursement levels, and information on the use of the fund. There are currently 36 funds listed, most at research universities. Each has taken a slightly different approach to policies for awarding funds. According to Tananbaum’s *North American Campus-Based Open Access Funds: A Five-Year Progress Report*, “Nearly 4,000 research articles have been published in Open Access journals with the support of these Funds” (2014). This represents a 435% growth rate from 2009 to 2014. Although the funds are administered differently at each institution, this dramatic growth rate speaks to the needs of scholars in disseminating their work.

Surveys and case studies of academic libraries with open access funds have examined implementation strategies, characteristics, and impact. Jane Monson, Wendy Highby, and Bette Rathe (2014) surveyed ten libraries with funds and compared those responses with their own experiences in establishing an open access fund at the University of Northern Colorado. Leila Fernandez and Rajiv Nariani (2011) surveyed twenty-nine Canadian research libraries and found that twelve of the eighteen respondents had established open access funds to support their campus authors. Both surveys highlight the variation in funds across institutions, from policies for use, eligible recipients, sources of funding, and promotional and advocacy initiatives. In a later survey of Canadian institutions, Crystal Hampson (2014) concluded that while open access funds “could not be considered a standard service” as of 2012, they were becoming quite common (p. 11).

### **Faculty Perceptions of Open Access Publishing**

There is a growing body of literature also investigating the impact of these funds on faculty adoption and perceptions of open access publications. Several note that faculty continue to identify open access journals for publication in much the same way that they select traditional journals: based on reputation, peer review, and speed of publication (Coonin, 2011; Coonin & Younce, 2010; Nariani & Fernandez, 2012; Solomon & Björk, 2012). Through interviews and survey responses from twenty faculty at York University, Bryna Nariani and Leila Fernandez found that authors who had already published in an OA journal at least once perceived few barriers to publishing in OA, the greatest challenge being the payment of OA fees. Authors stated that they wanted their work published in a high-quality journal with wide dissemination and readership that is cited by their peers. Julia Rodriguez (2014) surveyed faculty at Oakland University to investigate whether generational differences influenced perceptions of open access. The results of her study suggest that faculty members still hold misconceptions about open access, however, “faculty authors are not prejudged by their age or tenure status as to their perception of or experience with OA” (p. 609). Bryna Coonin and Leigh Younce noted that Education authors reported similar familiarity with open access across all age groups they surveyed. For authors without funding, some indicated that the APC was also a factor in selecting a journal (Solomon and Björk).

Faculty ignorance and suspicion of OA publications is still evident. In a survey of Business researchers, 55% of respondents indicated a belief that OA journals were less prestigious and that publishing in these journals could negatively impact chances of promotion (Coonin, 2010). Creaser (2010) found that there was much confusion among researchers in the United Kingdom regarding what OA means and the quality of articles made available in these publications. There are still some perceptions that OA is synonymous with vanity publishing.

In the literature, it's clear that many institutions are exploring the research and publication practices of their faculty. They are also employing a variety of educational and supporting services to encourage participation in open access publishing. Open access funds are one component of a growing number of these.

## **DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM/SERVICE**

In order to support and promote publishing in open access journals, the GVSU Libraries established an Open Access Publishing Support Fund in the fall of 2011. The Libraries initially committed to allocate \$25,000 per year for the fund. The primary goal of the fund is to remove financial barriers that prevent faculty and graduate students from making their scholarship open access. In addition, the library identified five secondary goals:

- Increasing visibility of scholarship performed at GVSU
- Raising the university's awareness of OA publishing options
- Increasing the number of GVSU authors publishing in OA publications
- Providing financial support for alternative forms of scholarly publishing
- Collecting data that can be used to measure the effectiveness of the program

Funding is available to all GVSU faculty and graduate students, and authors are eligible to receive up to \$3,000 in funding per year. The fund covers fees related to making articles open access or freely available, and the library entertains applications requesting support to pay fees associated with publishing in both gold OA and hybrid journals. Charges like page fees, color charges, or any other non-open access related fees are not covered by the fund.

## **Use of the Fund**

In the first four years of the fund's existence, the Libraries awarded 50 grants to 71 unique recipients, which include faculty and graduate students. As the Libraries continue to engage in outreach and build awareness of the Open Access Publishing Fund, there has been a steady increase in applications. In 2014-15, the fund was expended three months prior to the close of the fiscal year, which is indicative of the interest GVSU faculty have for open dissemination of their work. As of June 30, 2015, the GVSU Libraries had funded a total of 55 articles in 50 different journals. Of those 50 journals, 16 were gold OA journals, while 34 were hybrid journals. The faculty who received funding came from 24 unique departments and units, ranging across the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. Although graduate students are eligible for funding, up to this point no graduate students have applied directly (though several have been co-authors on funded articles.)

The uptake in applications for GVSU's fund is encouraging, but it doesn't reveal what faculty perceive to be the benefits of funding open access publication. To measure the success of this program and to assist in making long-term decisions about budgeting, advocacy, and educational programming, the Libraries wanted to gather feedback from authors who had successfully applied for the fund to determine what, if any, effects they saw as a result of making their articles open access.

## Evaluation of Program

While descriptive statistics and information gathered from our fund indicated that we were meeting some of the goals, such as *increasing the number of GVSU authors publishing in OA publications, providing financial support for alternative forms of scholarly publishing, and collecting data that can be used to measure the effectiveness of the program*, we needed to use different approaches in order to assess our other goals. To look at the other goals, *increasing visibility of scholarship performed at GVSU*, and *raising the university's awareness of OA publishing options*, we developed a survey that was sent to all successful applicants of the fund.

### Survey of Faculty

In the spring of 2015, the Libraries sent a survey to the 49 individuals who had received funding up to that time. The survey was completed by 27 of the 49 recipients, a response rate of 55%. Authors were asked four questions: why they chose an open access journal, whether the availability of the OA Publishing Support Fund influenced this decision, whether publishing in an OA journal impacted their article's exposure, and whether they would consider publishing in an OA journal again in the future. The authors determined that IRB approval or exemption was not necessary for this study. (See Appendix for survey questions.)

When asked why they chose to publish their work in a journal that supports open access, 23 faculty responded that they wanted to increase the visibility of their work. This question allowed for multiple responses, and other important factors included support for the open access movement (18 respondents) and that the journal was seen as the best journal for disseminating their work (16 respondents); approximately half of the respondents indicated that these were significant factors. A few respondents offered comments, including "was invited to publish in journal" and "more rapid time from submission to publication."

When asked how the availability of the Libraries' Open Access Publishing Support Fund influenced their decision to publish their article as open access, 24 respondents chose *The*

*availability of the fund had great influence, I would not have been able to afford the Open Access fee without support from the fund.* The response to this question is especially valuable, as it communicates to the Libraries that faculty value the fund, and that it directly made a difference in their decision to pursue open access publishing.

The most open-ended question asked on the survey was *What impact, if any, has publishing your article Open Access had on the exposure and impact of your work?* Three respondents skipped this question. Of the 24 who responded, four shared comments indicating that it was too close to the publication date to determine a noticeable difference, or that they had not been able to document a difference between their open access publications and those restricted to subscribers. Twenty respondents had observed some benefits to disseminating their work via open access. Two broad themes became apparent in these comments: appreciation for their work reaching a global audience, particularly in developing nations, and evidence that their work had greater visibility, in some cases by virtue of being shared via less traditionally academic channels such as social media. One commenter shared, “I found that my work was posted on some social media sites (twitter, facebook), which suggests that individuals who do not ordinarily access scholarly journals may now be reading my article. I view this as exciting [sic].” Another indicated appreciation for “Increased visibility by scientists at foreign institutions that cannot pay for typical academic access to journal articles.” Responses to this question were largely positive, and seem to demonstrate that, while it takes time to notice the benefits, authors are enjoying greater exposure to their work and value providing access to scholars across the world.

In response to *How likely are you to consider publishing your article in a journal that supports Open Access in the future?* a majority of participants (20) said they will definitely pursue this option. Seven respondents indicated that they were highly likely to participate in open access publishing, and no respondents selected neutral, unlikely, or definitely not.

Perhaps the most compelling feedback gathered in this survey were the optional comments that faculty shared. There were several identifiable themes in the comments, including general, positive support for the fund and open access publishing; appreciation of the wider reach of their publications; connectedness with university values and/or initiatives such as globalization and student/faculty research partnerships; constructive feedback on the fund’s policies and procedures; and appreciation for the speed with which open access articles are disseminated. For example, one respondent remarked that, “GVSU Libraries are doing a great job by providing the support for publishing open access articles...It promotes GVSU name at its best.” Another respondent indicated that, “Support from GVSU’s Open Access fund is instrumental in how I publish. I know this type of support is not broadly available within academia, and I truly value it.” Others used this question as a venue to provide feedback



on the fund application process and/or policies, such as this commenter, who said, “The current open access fund rules at GVSU discourages collaboration outside the university. When publishing with non-GVSU coauthors, the fund will not pay the full amount...” This particular comment references GVSU’s policy of only funding our researchers, which does require proration of the fund on coauthored papers with collaborators at other institutions. The tone of the comments was overwhelmingly positive. The comments also revealed some areas, such as the application process and criteria, where there may be a need for additional outreach and education.

### Other Measures

Since the fund’s inception in 2011, applications and awards have tripled and feedback from recipients is very positive. Over the life of the fund, GVSU Libraries has supported 71 faculty authors in 50 unique journals. Of these publications, 34 were published in hybrid journals, the cost of which is significantly higher per article than gold OA publication fees. The average cost of supporting one hybrid journal is just over \$2,250, more than twice the average cost of supporting an article in a gold OA journal. This is consistent with Pinfield, Salter, and Bath’s (2015) observation that the hybrid journal APCs are being set considerably higher than those of other journals. When the fund was established, GVSU Libraries determined that we needed to support faculty in publishing open access in any ways they felt comfortable doing so. Including hybrid journals in the criteria helped faculty expand the reach of their scholarship without compromising where they published their work. Now that we have been working with the fund over four years and have much more knowledge about how the fund is being used, we will be re-examining how we support hybrid journal publication. We would like to know more about why authors chose hybrid journals, whether they would be willing to publish in gold OA journals as alternatives, and whether they felt they achieved enough value from paying the higher fees for OA access of their articles in these publications. In addition, we have explored the idea of integrating an educational component into the fund application, in which we would initiate a conversation about hybrid publications with our applicants and increase awareness of gold open access publication options for future consideration.

As mentioned earlier, two of the secondary goals of the Open Access Publishing Fund are *raising the university’s awareness of OA publishing options* and *increasing the number of GVSU authors publishing in OA publications*. From our survey results and the increase in applications to the Open Access Publishing Fund, we are confident that we are making progress toward our goal of increasing the number of GVSU authors publishing in OA publications. It is more difficult to measure success in meeting the goal of raising the University’s awareness of OA publishing options. In order to meet this goal, the Libraries

has developed a suite of scholarly communications services, including author rights and open access advocacy, an institutional repository, publishing services, and resources providing guidance on the quality of open access publications. Each of these components is accompanied by outreach, programming, and in some cases tangible resources designed to engage students and faculty. Anecdotally, we perceive that the pendulum is swinging toward a positive change in faculty perception of open access publishing. Our librarians receive an increasing number of questions from faculty and are regularly engaged in conversation about open access publishing. While not a quantifiable measure, this points toward a broadening awareness of open and alternative publishing models and a willingness to explore those publication venues.

## **NEXT STEPS**

It will be important to continue educating our faculty on open access options, as well as renewing efforts to demonstrate that peer reviewed open access journals are of the same rigor and quality as their subscription-based counterparts. In response to faculty questions about the quality of open access publications, the Libraries has developed a set of Open Access Journal Quality Indicators (<https://www.gvsu.edu/library/sc/open-access-journal-quality-indicators-5.htm>). In addition to providing guidance to authors, the indicators were also developed with the intent of inviting faculty to engage in conversation with librarians around issues of quality in open access publications. Through an earlier study we learned that the Indicators are helpful in alleviating quality concerns (Beaubien & Eckard, 2014) and continuing to highlight these as we talk with campus departments and faculty will be key in addressing faculty concerns. We also encourage liaison librarians to use these indicators as part of their student instruction on critical evaluation of all information resources.

We continue to look for opportunities to promote and educate our community about open access and the publishing fund through programming, exhibits, and events such as our annual Author Recognition Celebration, where we feature successful applicants of the OA Fund in our annual Author Bibliography. Liaison librarians continue to play a significant role in educating our community about open access and the Publishing Fund. Developing tools and resources they can use in their information literacy instruction sessions and conversations will continue to be key in advancing the conversation and deepening awareness of open access publishing models.

## **CONCLUSION**

While we recognize that this fund is supporting only a small number of authors, and that funds are limited, we see the value in continuing to support this program. In many cases,

this fund has made the difference in an author's ability to choose an open access option for their work. GVSU's experience and the feedback from faculty members demonstrate that there is demand for OA publishing support beyond research institutions. In fact the relative lack of grant funding at comprehensive universities and liberal arts colleges may make this kind of support even more important to faculty in these types of settings. Over the four years of the fund's existence, we have seen a shift in faculty attitudes toward placing a higher value on the ability to disseminate their work globally. We have observed that many authors want to publish in their preferred journals, whether or not those are open access or subscription-based, yet they demonstrate an increasing openness to sharing and a desire for the support to make that possible. We believe this bodes well for emerging publication models and a continual shift toward more open sharing of research and data.

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## APPENDIX

### Survey Questions

1. Why did you choose to publish your article in a journal that supports Open Access? (can select multiple)

*Answer options:*

- Best journal for disseminating your research
- Funded research had an open access deposit requirement
- Support for the open access movement
- Wanted to increase visibility of your research
- Wanted to ensure your research could be deposited in GVSU's ScholarWorks repository for long-term storage
- Other (please specify)

2. How did the availability of the Libraries' Open Access Publishing Fund influence your decision to publish your article as Open Access?

*Answer options:*

- The availability of the fund had no influence, I had already decided to publish Open Access before learning about the fund
- The availability of the fund had little influence, I was leaning toward publishing Open Access with or without the support of the fund
- The availability of the fund had great influence, I would not have been able to afford the Open Access fee without support from the fund

3. What impact, if any, has publishing your article Open Access had on the exposure and impact of your work?

4. How likely are you to consider publishing your article in a journal that supports Open Access in the future?

*Answer options:*

- Definitely
- Very likely
- Neutral
- Unlikely
- Definitely not

5. Comments