

Assessing Awareness of Repositories and the Open Access Movement Among ETD Faculty Advisors

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ABSTRACT

In 1998 West Virginia University became the second university in the United States to require electronic deposit of theses and dissertations (ETDs) from its graduate student population [1]. With the program in place for over a decade, numerous faculty have been exposed to the process of electronic deposit in their role as faculty advisors to graduating PhD and Masters degree students. WVUScholar, the university's institutional repository, stores and shares ETDs with the scholarly community at large. Faculty adoption of WVUScholar, however, has been mostly non-existent. With the end goal of increasing faculty awareness of and participation in the repository, the WVU Libraries conducted a survey of faculty who have acted as advisors to ETD-depositing students. The survey assessed their existing awareness of the repository, its features, open access concepts and principles, and tried to answer the question, "has the ETD program acted as an ambassador of open access to WVU faculty?"

Keywords (Required)

Institutional repositories, open access, Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETD)

INTRODUCTION

For many years, the ETD and institutional repository communities have grown in parallel. Universities that were forerunners in mandating electronic deposit of theses and dissertations may not have had a strong faculty interest in deposit of their own work in an institutional repository. And universities that were forerunners in the implementation of repositories may have only recently begun to mandate ETD deposit for their graduate students. As these two communities unite and intermingle, common goals emerge. Repositories are the logical provider of ETD storage and dissemination, and both communities share the goal of long-term preservation of content within the university library system.

As more US funding agencies, including the National Science Foundation (NSF) [2] and National Institutes of Health (NIH) [3], mandate open access to research publications and data, the need for long-term, persistent, access to faculty publications has grown. By providing faculty with a ready-made storage and access solution in the form of the university's institutional repository, libraries can work with departments across the university to prevent duplicate data-sharing efforts. By bringing their content under the umbrella of the library, the faculty will also reap the benefits of the library's mission to provide preservation and access.

A goal of the WVU Libraries is to increase faculty participation in WVUScholar. Because WVU has mandated ETD deposit for graduate students for more than a decade, a large number of faculty have acted as thesis advisor or dissertation committee chair to students whose work is deposited in WVUScholar. To assess whether this has increased their awareness of repositories and open access, we have surveyed faculty who have acted as heads of student thesis or dissertation committees.

BACKGROUND

WVUScholar was created in 1998 as a repository for the deposit of electronic theses and dissertations completed by the graduate students of West Virginia University. While originally maintained in tandem with a print deposit process, WVUScholar is now the location of record for student ETDs. As of August 2011, WVUScholar is home to 5223 ETD instances. With the move from WVU's home-grown repository software to use of Digitool, ExLibris's repository system, the library sought to broaden the purpose of the repository to include content such as undergraduate honors theses and faculty publications. To date, however, faculty adoption of the repository has been almost non-existent.

Because WVU is almost uniquely positioned as a university that implemented mandated electronic deposit of theses and dissertations before recruiting faculty content for the repository, it seems helpful to survey faculty to see if the use of

WVUScholar for ETD deposit over the last 10+ years has made them better informed about the repository in particular and about open access issues in general.

METHODS

The survey was sent to all faculty on record in WVUScholar as the head of a dissertation or thesis committee since the beginning of WVU's mandated ETD deposit in 1998. Faculty were asked to participate in a 19 questions survey designed to assess whether they had used the WVUScholar ETD interface, whether they use the repository as a way to access past students' dissertations, what they know about the repository in general, and whether they have published any of their own work under open access guidelines, or are aware that the option exists. The survey was made available on the web through Qualtrics, a survey tool developed by the WVU College of Business, and the participants were contacted by email. 278 faculty members were invited to take the survey, with a total of 92 completing it, for a response rate of 33%. 31% of respondents were faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences, 16% in the College of Engineering, 15% from the College of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Design, and 11% from the College of Education, with the remainder divided between other WVU schools and colleges. The respondents were almost equally divided among faculty who had significant (serving 10 or more times) experience as ETD committee chairs, moderate (5-10) experience, or light (less than 5) experience. 69% of the respondents had served in positions other than the chair for 10 or more student dissertation committees.

FACULTY AWARENESS OF THE INSTITUTIONAL REPOSITORY

Faculty awareness of WVUScholar was found to be high, and 94% of respondents correctly identified that WVUScholar is hosted by the University Libraries. However, 80% of these faculty have not used WVUScholar in any context beyond submitting approval of their graduate students' theses or dissertations. Of the 20% who have used WVUScholar outside the context of ETD approval, most of their interactions were limited to searching and reading students' dissertations. One professor consulted WVUScholar "when [he] did not get a copy" of the dissertation in print. At least one faculty member was aware of the embargo options offered by the repository, and used it to "[make a] thesis unavailable for 2 years to protect data prior to publication." Only one faculty member mentioned the repository as a source of information he/she used in compiling an annual promotion and tenure report. This faculty member used the repository to "[compile] the list of student committees I served in during the academic year."

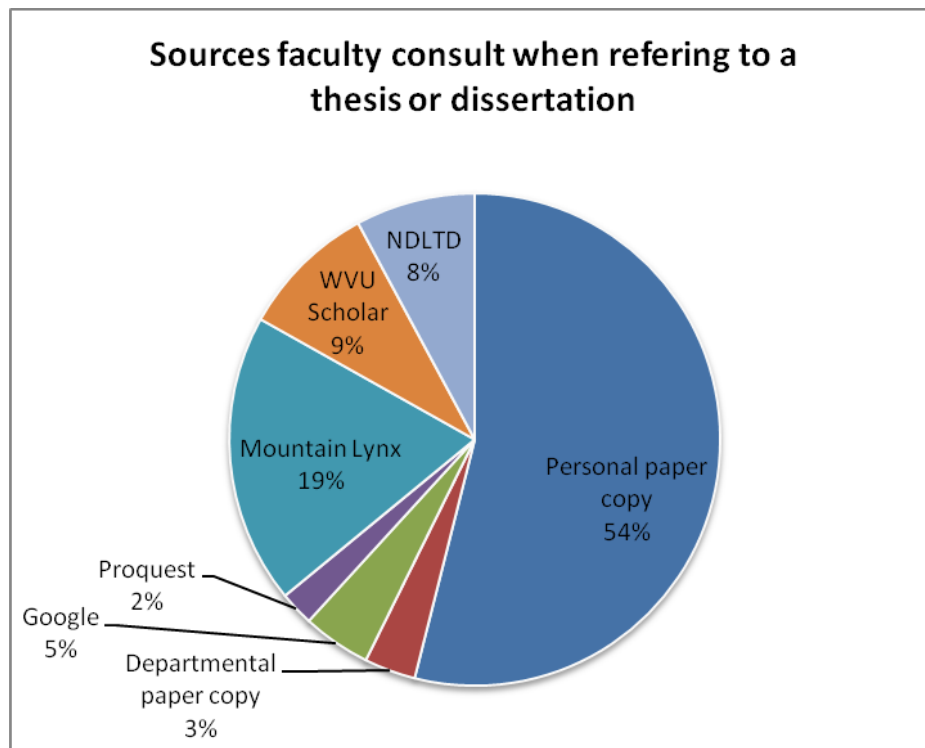


Figure 1

Perhaps the most striking result of the survey was that 57% of respondents, when they need to consult a past dissertation from one of their own students, still prefer to consult a printed paper copy that they keep in their office or department. Although these faculty members are involved in the ETD process, and so are presumably aware of the availability of searchable electronic copies, they reach for the source closest at hand. This suggests that ETD access has far to go before it becomes ingrained in faculty habits. Of the remaining respondents, 19% search for the dissertation in MountainLynx, the university's library catalog, while 9% go directly to WVUScholar, 8% to the NDLTD database, and 6% to either Proquest or a Google search. (See Figure 1.)

While faculty were very aware of WVUScholar as a place to deposit ETDs, awareness that it could be a place to deposit their own work was not high. 25% of respondents knew the repository could be used for graduate and undergraduate student work, but only 20% saw the repository as a place to deposit their own work, and only 17% were aware that the repository could be a home for any WVU-related content. (See Figure 2.) These results are consistent with a 2007 survey of University of California faculty that found 82% of those surveyed were "not aware of" or "aware of but, don't know much about" institutional repositories [4,5].

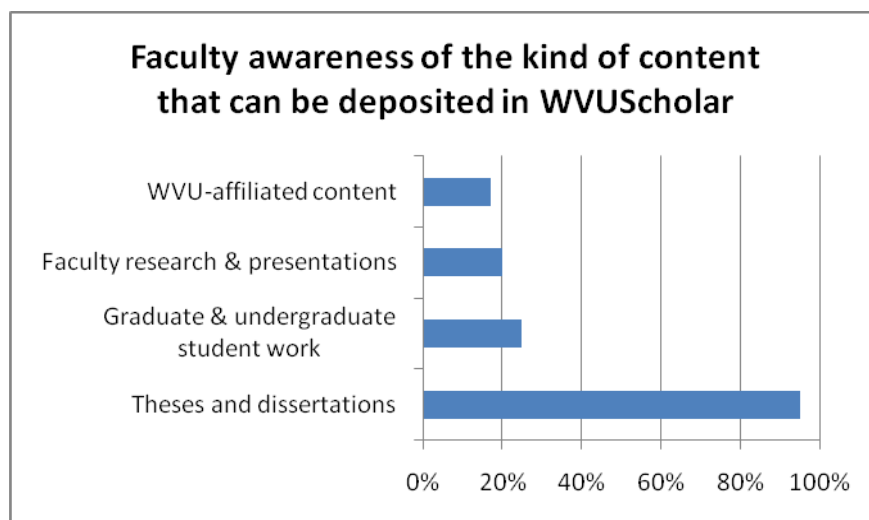


Figure 2

In a 2007 article based on interviews with faculty at Cranfield University in the UK, Sarah Watson found that 25% of the faculty members who had heard of the university's repository had not deposited any of their own work there, indicating that "hearing about [the repository] does not equate to understanding its purpose" [6]. This correlates with the present survey's finding that, while almost all faculty have heard of the repository due to the ETD deposit process, few have realized that it is available for their own work as well.

FACULTY ATTITUDES TOWARD OPEN ACCESS

Faculty were then asked about their knowledge, prior to this survey, about the concept of open access. 30% of the faculty had never encountered the term before. Of the 70% of faculty who were familiar with OA, by far the most common source for their knowledge were colleagues in their own field. (See Figure 3.) A small portion of the respondents had learned about OA through a current or past university's library, and a few were introduced to the concept when a federally funded grant required them to share their results through open access. No faculty mentioned learning about OA through a formal outreach effort such as Open Access Week, suggesting that education efforts might be more productively targeted to faculty on a one to one basis. A 2007 survey of University of California faculty discovered that faculty knowledge of scholarly communications issues was inconsistent and varied, except when it came to issues touching on tenure and promotion [4]. This suggests that education efforts will bear the most fruit when a clear connection is made between the benefits of open access in relation to promotion and tenure. And since tenured faculty are a trusted source about the P&T process for their pre-tenure colleagues, education efforts directed at trusted tenured faculty will stand a good chance of spreading to other faculty members.

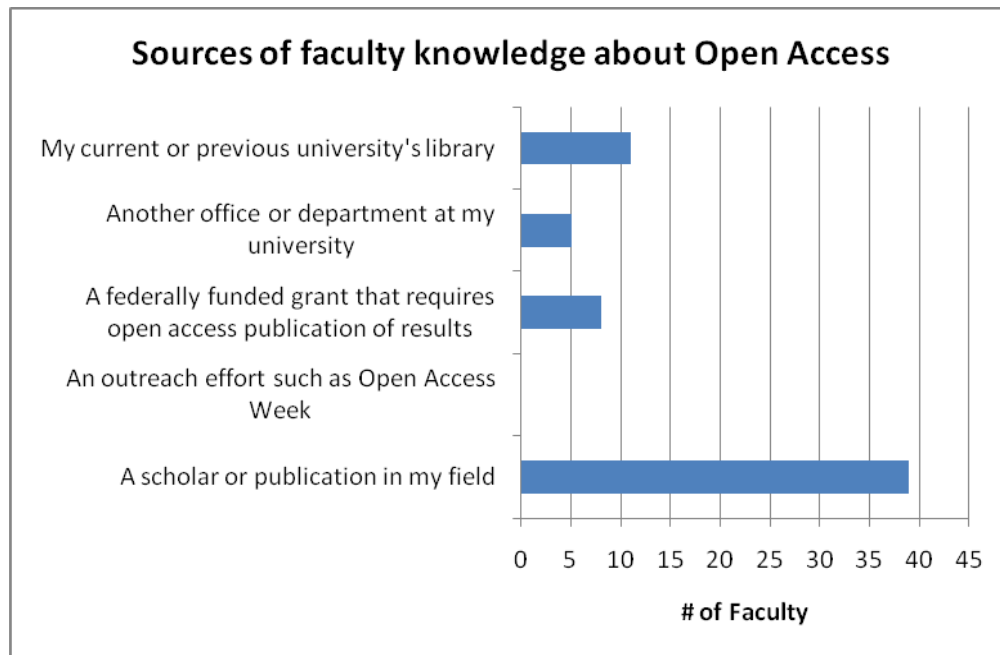


Figure 3

Out of faculty who were familiar with OA, 60% said they had at least one publication that was available through open access. In 92% of those cases, the publisher offered open access as a standard part of their publishing agreement. Only 8% of faculty members requested open access rights themselves as an addendum or modification to their contract.

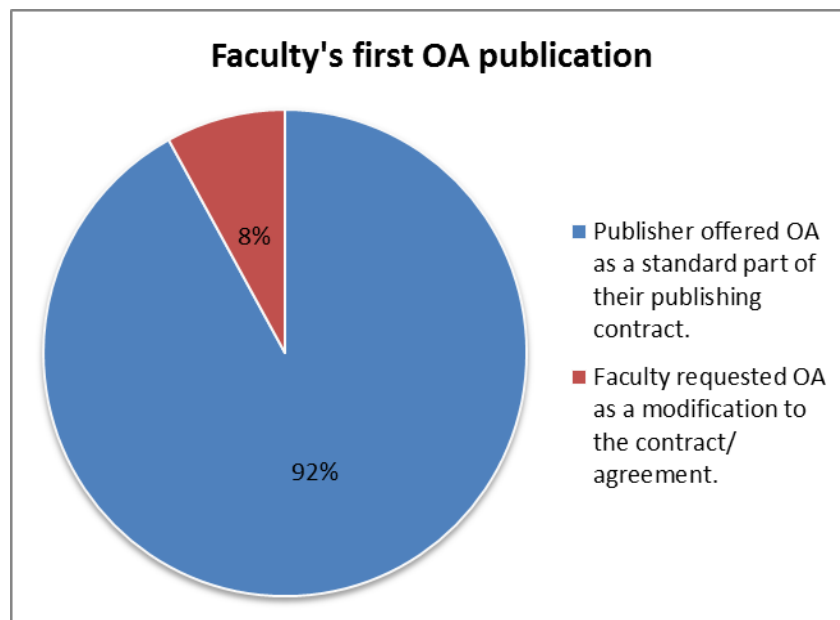


Figure 4

When asked about their attitude toward future open access publication of their work, 91% of faculty were supportive. (See Figure 5.) Most supported the concept, but were not planning to make a special effort to ensure their work would be available through open access, which indicates that changing publisher practices might be the most fruitful method of ensuring open access to future scholarship. Of the 9% of faculty who were unsupportive of open access, 7% didn't see any need for change to the current scholarly publication process, while only 2% had specific criticisms of open access. Faculty who felt open access publication was undesirable listed the following objections: concern with copyright compliance, sustainability, harm

to traditional publishers, and the idea that “more information is not necessarily better information.”

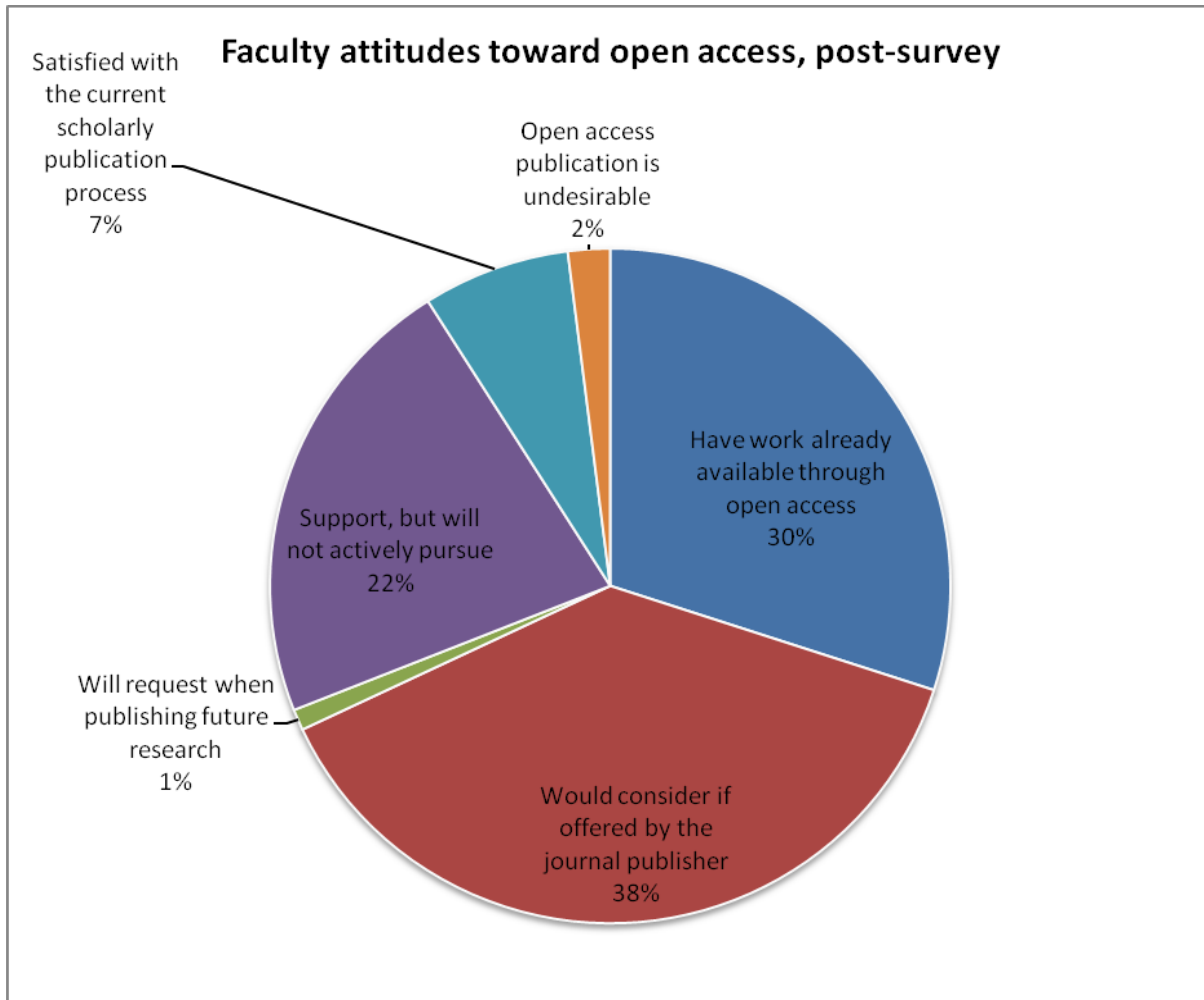


Figure 5

Survey results indicated that funding agency mandates are raising awareness of and participation in open access. Of the faculty members who had published something via open access, 11 had experience with both funders who mandated results be shared by open access and/or funders who required a data sharing plan in the grant proposal. Another 14 faculty had experience with either one or the other of these situations. When asked where they planned to host and share the data for these projects, most faculty planned to either use a site hosted by the grant funding agency itself, or their own departmental website. (See Figure 6.) It would be helpful for further research to look at what motivates the faculty to default to their departmental website when making data-sharing decisions. Possible reasons might include familiarity, convenience, and perceived or actual control of the process.

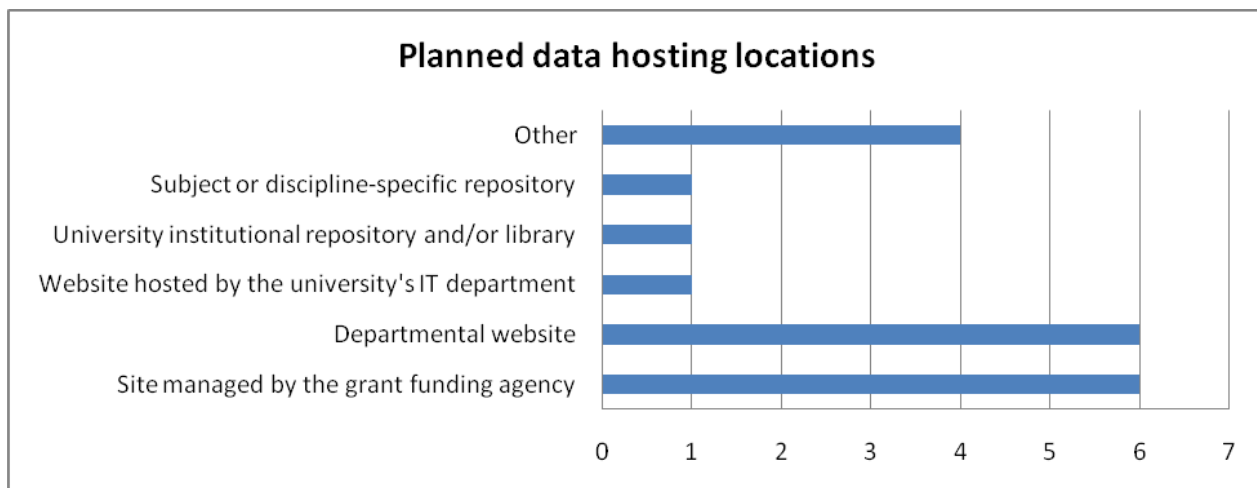


Figure 6

When asked what type of content they would like to share and preserve online through open access, the majority of faculty were looking for a place to put the final published versions of journal articles. (See Figure 7.) Faculty expressed a clear preference for sharing post-prints (89%) over pre-prints (43%), but they were also looking for a place to share conference presentations, data sets, and audio/video. The responses indicate that there are many faculty who would make use of the repository once they are aware of it, and if the upload process is easy to integrate into their workflow.

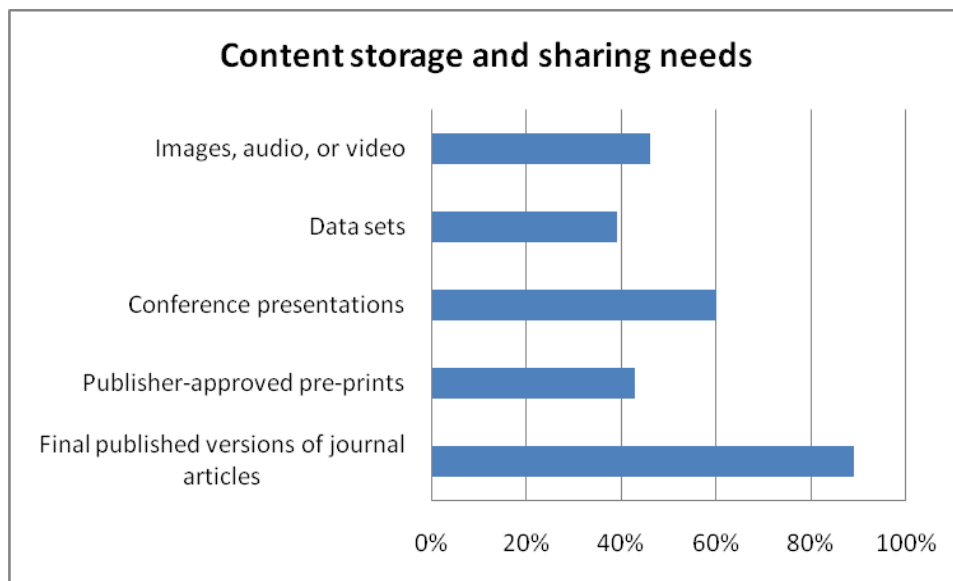


Figure 7

CONCLUSIONS

This survey suggested several avenues for future research and faculty recruitment efforts. Foremost among these is the idea that faculty repository participation will only increase when there is a simple, hassle-free way to integrate the deposit process into the scholar’s normal workflow. Faculty are interested in the idea of a place to store their work, but do not seem to think of the library as the first place to look when they want to host such content. Education efforts targeted at individual “thought leaders” may be the most productive path towards increasing faculty repository participation.

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