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Princeton U. Adopts Open-Access Policy

September 29, 2011, 2:25 pm

By Jennifer Howard

The movement to make research freely available got a high-profile boost this week with the news that Princeton University's faculty has unanimously adopted an open-access policy. "The principle of open access is consistent with the fundamental purposes of scholarship," said the faculty advisory committee that proposed the resolution.

The decision puts the university in line with Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and a growing number of other institutions with policies that encourage or require researchers to post open copies of their articles, usually in an institutional repository. Unpublished drafts, books, lecture notes, etc., are not included in the Princeton policy, which gives the university a "nonexclusive right" to make copies of its faculty's scholarly journal articles publicly available.

"Both the library and members of the faculty, principally in the sciences, have been thinking for some time that we would like to take a concrete step toward making the publications of our extraordinary faculty freely available to a much larger audience and not restricted to those who can afford to pay journal subscription fees," said Karin Trainer, Princeton's university librarian. She said they had encountered "no resistance at all" to the idea among faculty members.

The new mandate permits professors to post copies of articles online in "not-for-a-fee venues," including personal and university Web sites. The faculty advisory committee that recommended the policy said that it will keep faculty members "from giving away *all* their rights when they publish in a journal."

Authors may request a waiver for particular articles. Addressing fears that the waiver proviso would render the policy "completely toothless in practice," the committee said that other universities' experiences showed that journal publishers will often adjust their contracts when an author's university has an open-access policy. Ms. Trainer said that the policy does not suggest any penalties for authors who do not comply with it.


Career pressure on junior scholars as well as differences in publishing practices among disciplines mean that some faculty are not in fact going to be in a position to comply with the new policy without asking for a waiver," Ms. Trainer said. "And we know that." She added that even faculty members likely to ask for waivers "understood that it was in the overall university's best interests to have such a policy in place."

Unlike Harvard, which has established a repository and an upload procedure for researchers to follow, Princeton does not yet have a system in place to help faculty members make their work available. The faculty committee that recommended the policy encouraged the university to establish an open-access repository. "An open-access policy without a ready means for faculty to post their scholarly articles and an equally ready means of retrieval would be of very limited value," it said. But it also acknowledged that "there are many issues of implementation and resources to be considered."

Princeton already has a public data-storage archive, DataSpace, but there's not a lot of material in it yet. The faculty committee said it thought DSpace could be adapted to serve the open-access mandate. "We are still sorting out our options here," Ms. Trainer said.

Open-access advocates welcomed Princeton's decision. Lorraine Haricombe, the university librarian at the University of Kansas, said she was delighted by the news. She helped put together the Coalition of Open Access Policy Institutions, or Coapi, to share experiences and open-access strategies. She said the group would invite Princeton to join its discussions. "This shows strong support for what universities do, and that is share their scholarship for the support of the cause and as a public good," Ms. Haricombe said.

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As a PhD student not currently enrolled anywhere due to financial circumstances, I applaud open-access initiatives everywhere. It helps me to keep current with the latest thinking and research that I cannot otherwise afford to access.

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slack 2 hours ago

How does one acquire a change in the publication agreement with a publisher? The contract I sign when an article goes to press seems pretty boilerplate--almost always with a stipulation that I don't post a copy of the article for a number of years. What is the difference between posting my article in a "university repository" that is accessible by all and posting it on my personal website?

Like Reply



major_ray 1 hour ago

Open access is good. Now PhD creation scientists [the frightened ones] who do not have open access can remain cloaked as they dismantle the Darwinian deception.

Like Reply

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