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## UCLA Previously Published Works

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Improving Open Access Discovery for Academic Library Users

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***Improving Open Access Discovery for Academic Library Users***, by Ixchel M. Faniel, Brittany Brannon, Lesley A. Langa, Brooke Doyle, and Titia van der Werf. Dublin, OH: OCLC Research, 2024.  
<https://doi.org/10.25333/4xem-xr80>

As the principles and values of the open science movement make their way into institutional as well as national policies and agendas, the volume of open access (OA) research outputs as a result of these policies has also been increasing. But while more publications have become openly available, are they also then discoverable by users?

To gain some insight into this question, OCLC Research partnered with two Dutch library consortia – Universiteitsbibliotheken en Nationale Bibliotheek (UKB) and Samenwerkingsverband Hogeschoolbibliotheken (SHB) – to survey library staff and library users about the state of OA discovery in the Netherlands. In the first phase, the working group and steering committee conducted group interviews with library staff from seven institutions within the two consortia to gain insight into library staff's activities around OA discovery at their respective institutions. In the second phase, the project team administered a survey to users at these seven institutions about their experience searching for scholarly, peer-reviewed publications, including specifically OA publications.

The authors of the resulting report summarize the findings in four areas of OA discovery activities: selecting and adding OA publications to library collections; increasing OA awareness, knowledge, and engagement; improving metadata to support OA discovery; and measuring the effects of library effort. Each section pairs library staff responses about their work with results from the user survey to highlight how aligned library activities are with user search behaviors and needs. The report also includes some takeaways for stakeholders beyond the surveyed population, such as publishers, content aggregators, and technology providers.

As shown by the structure of the report, the authors highlight the idea that OA discovery is impacted not just by metadata quality, but also by collection development decisions, users' search behaviors, the interoperability of systems, and users' knowledge and understanding of OA. Many of the challenges to OA discovery that library staff articulated may seem familiar to those working with OA resources, such as evaluation challenges with OA collections; trying to meet users where they are, which often means moving beyond the library catalog; and managing the complex ecosystem of systems that aggregate, harvest, and feed metadata from one platform to another.

On the other hand, for catalogers of OA materials, the metadata section in particular is interesting, notably the absence of the cataloging function within this OA discovery landscape – as library staff responses indicated more responsibility with managing existing metadata coming from different sources – as well as the types of metadata that were called out as important for OA discovery, such as “peer review, version, and license information....[which] other staff described them as necessary for external stakeholders who harvested OA publications.” These metadata elements are not always found in catalog records, and it could be interesting to consider how they may be more broadly incorporated into MARC cataloging of OA resources, for instance.

The final section on measuring the impact of library efforts also offers a familiar experience. As one respondent puts it, “I don't have any idea if we have any clue [laughter] to know if there is any impact.” But, as the report points out, libraries know that all this activity to promote OA comes at a cost,

that “OA isn’t free.” Even if a library does not pay directly for a resource, the time spent managing the metadata, fixing broken links, and getting relevant resources in front of users is a cost, hopefully one that ultimately aligns with a library’s mission and goals, and is thus worth it.

Overall, this report offers data and insights into the relationship between library efforts to make OA resources more discoverable and user behaviors and needs. The analysis of library activities alongside user survey responses highlights the importance of engaging a variety of library functional areas – from collection development to metadata to outreach – to improve OA discovery and better meet users’ research needs. Though the findings are specific to a Dutch context, the research questions posed by the research team, as well as the survey methodology and instruments used (and helpfully included in the appendices), can likely be adapted for any institution or consortia interested in better understanding how their current OA activities support user needs, as well as where areas of opportunity might exist for the library to further position itself as a champion of open science and open access.

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