

Satellite Meeting: Serials and Other Continuing Resources Section &  
Acquisition and Collection Development

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## **Investing in Open Access: Identifying, Evaluating, and Supporting Open Access Resources**

### **Katy Mathuews**

Collections Assessment and Access, Ohio University, Athens, OH, USA.  
mathuews@ohio.edu

### **Lisa Mackinder**

Acquisitions and Collections Services, Ohio University, Athens, OH, USA.  
mackinde@ohio.edu

### **Janet Hulm**

Collections and Digital Initiatives, Ohio University, Athens, OH, USA.  
hulm@ohio.edu



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### **Abstract:**

*The Ohio University Libraries are committed to supporting the creation, access, and use of scholarly open access resources. In order to strengthen the commitment to open access materials, the library formed the Investing in Open Access Task Force to identify, evaluate, and recommend open access resources for financial support. Using a comparative rubric, the task force identified several evaluation criteria including mission, funding model, subject coverage, format, ease of use, faculty benefit, significance to teaching and learning, credibility, and whether the resource was emerging or established. After evaluation, the task force recommended to recommit to three open access resources already being supported by Ohio University Libraries in addition to three new resources. The library contributed financially to the selected resources to help support their development and sustained availability. The library will provide access to the resources through its online catalog and website. This paper outlines the task force approach to evaluating open access resources.*

**Keywords:** open access, task force, evaluation, selection

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## **Introduction**

In 2015, several coinciding factors led the Ohio University Libraries (OUL) to begin an effort to identify and prioritize open access initiatives for funding. First, under the leadership of the Assistant Dean for Research and Education Services, Kelly Broughton, a small team of subject librarians created a community of practice for scholarly communication and open access outreach. This team quickly became interested in developing an incentive program to provide monetary awards to faculty who both participated in a short series of library sponsored workshops and developed a plan to reduce the costs of their required readings by moving toward open access resources and/or library purchased resources. Dubbed the Alt-Textbook Initiative (Ohio University Libraries, n.d.), the call for applications to this program serendipitously opened in the fall of 2015, around the same time as International Open Access Week. Heather Joseph, Executive Director of SPARC (the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition) came to speak at OUL in open forum (SPARC, n.d.). The Libraries have had a long supporting membership with SPARC, but this had been the first community event highlighting SPARC's efforts and making a case for faculty participation. Also around this same time, a university-wide committee was formed, initially called the Textbook Cost Reduction Initiative, and both Assistant Deans from OUL were asked to participate. The initiative aimed to develop ways to address the high cost of course materials (Instructional Innovative, n.d.).

That fall, OUL began financially supporting a limited number of open access resources. Scott Seaman, Dean of Libraries, was introduced to the Open Library of Humanities (n.d.) and was compelled to support the open access model that provided humanities content with no author fees. Meanwhile BioMed Central (n.d.) reached out to the Assistant Dean for Collections & Digital Initiatives, Janet Hulm, with a compelling message for support with their expanded journal titles, subjects, reasonable membership fees, and author fee reductions. Although OUL agreed to support both initiatives, when several additional opportunities came up weeks later it became evident that a strategy was required for future investments. OUL could not continue to invest in every initiative without knowing what might come around the corner next. It was decided to create a task force to identify the broadest scope of open access initiatives possible and then review and recommend which of those initiatives would be the most meaningful for OUL to support.

## **Investing in Open Access Task Force**

In the spring of 2016, Dean Seaman initiated a charge to form the Investing in Open Access Task Force with the aim to identify open access resources in which the library could support with a financial investment. The charge from the Dean outlined the goals of the task force, offered guidance for the process, and prescribed outcomes of the investigation. The charge was as follows:

The Investing in Open Access task force is responsible for researching established and emerging models for supporting open access across formats and disciplines and identifying one or several for funding. The task force will consider the purpose, business model, faculty benefit, ease of use, and other factors determined to be relevant and/or significant to Ohio University research, teaching and learning. The task force will develop a short presentation of the most notable initiatives and describe those which would best reflect the research interests and needs of the Ohio University community.

The task force approach was appropriate because it allowed a collaborative and inclusive method to complete a defined, short-term project. More importantly, the task force approach allowed for wide representation from many functional units within the library with a wide variety of subject specialties. The task force was chaired by the Head of Collections Assessment and Access and included the Assistant Dean for Collections and Digital Initiatives (ex-officio), the Head of Acquisitions and Collections Services, and subject liaison librarians from the sciences, humanities, social sciences, arts, and archives. The expansive range of expertise on the eight-member task force ensured a knowledgeable research team who could represent the varied interests within the library and patron community.

### **Process**

The task force embarked on this project during Ohio University's 2016 summer semester. Though the summer timeline allowed us to take advantage of slower summer months at school, summer is often the season for conferences and vacations. To accommodate this schedule, the group decided to meet in person three times throughout the summer to discuss the approach, discuss possible open access resources for investment, and to make final decisions. This allowed for the research and exploration of resources to be done individually at the convenience of each member in the meantime.

The first task force meeting was held on May 23, 2016. During this initial meeting, the group discussed the charge and planned how to proceed with the project. It was decided that a common tool to evaluate potential open access resources was needed. This was a valuable approach to ensure that research on each resource was organized and easily comparable. It was determined that a comparative rubric would be the best tool as it would allow for listing criteria in a way that was easily comparable among resources. To build the rubric, an extensive list of characteristics on which to base the evaluation was compiled including finding model, purpose, content/subject, format, faculty benefit, ease of use, significance to teaching and learning, emerging or established, and credibility. The rubric proved valuable for organizing findings about each open access resource. The rubric was an easy way to compare resources and did not establish mathematical scoring. The evaluation criteria is described in more detail in the following section.

Following the first meeting, task force members gathered potential open access resources to consider in their fields of specialization. Lists of resources were added to a shared digital folder accessible to each task force member. At the second meeting of the task force on July 5, 2016 the committee decided that the priority was to invest in quality, emerging resources in order to promote and support the growing open access mission. The task force used this priority to narrow the list of possible resources and each member offered one or two resources from the larger lists to consider for further investigation. This conversation resulted in seven resources to explore in greater depth. The task force also decided this would be an excellent opportunity to review the three existing open access resources OUL was already supporting. Thus, using the established rubric, the group agreed to review a total of ten resources including existing and potential emerging open access resources. In an effort to achieve efficiency in the process, each task force member was assigned 1-2 resources to investigate in depth. Each member investigated the rubric criteria for their assigned resources and added the information to a shared Excel spreadsheet.

## **Evaluation Criteria**

Given the goal to help build and further the mission of the open access movement, it was paramount to determine the funding model used by each open access resource investigated. The task force was particularly interested in the ways in which the resource was funded, either as a whole, or for specific projects being undertaken by the entity. The task force was also interested in whether funding opportunities were ongoing or one-time in nature, whether funding was accepted ad hoc or at certain times for certain projects, or if funding for the resource was achieved through grants, rather than library contributors. Another key point was how funding amounts were calculated – if the organization allowed funders to contribute as they had the money available, or if funding was determined by the size of the library, the size of the project, or some other criteria. These characteristics helped the task force determine whether OUL could financially contribute in a sustainable way.

Second, in order to determine appropriateness to OUL's collections, the task force was interested in determining the purpose, or mission, of each open access resource evaluated. Therefore, as the task force looked into open access organizations, it was important that the purpose of those entities, and the projects being created, were clearly identifiable. For example, the mission of several open access resources is to make scholarly content available for classroom use or to further research activity. Such a scholarly purpose, then, would align well with OUL's mission to support the research, teaching, and learning of the faculty, staff, and students of Ohio University.

The third factor considered was the content, or subject, of each resource. This was important to ensure balance within OUL's collections and whether a resource might support one of OUL's special projects, a specific major or course, or faculty research. Fourth, related to subject, the task force wanted to consider whether the format, scope, or other benefits would be an added value for faculty. For example, one of the projects evaluated included workshops conducted by the open access organization, on the funder's campus, in which faculty would learn how to incorporate the content in their own courses. Another project included a crowd-sourced (and growing) bank of questions that faculty could use to create assignments. Along with faculty benefit, significance to teaching and learning was also considered as a fifth factor. Specifically, the task force was interested in learning whether a project could be used to offset the rising cost of textbooks, and whether the format and/or the content could be used to support different learning styles of students.

The sixth factor was the ease of use of each open access resource. The task force was specifically interested in whether MARC records were available for any titles included in a project. Available MARC records would not only make integration of the resources into the collection more seamless, but would also assist with the discoverability of the resource. Especially important considerations for the task force were whether the resource was readily discoverable in the EBSCO discovery service or if the content was indexed and discoverable by Google. Related to ease of use, particularly for OUL patrons, was the seventh factor of format. It was noted if the open access resource or project offered e-books, e-journals, images, videos, and the like. This information was valuable in determining whether the project might be useful when held up against the user habits of patrons.

Finally, credibility and whether the resource was emerging or established were the eighth and ninth factors considered. Credibility was, perhaps, the most difficult and subjective category to consider. While the task force consulted resources such as Beall's List, the group primarily relied on peer endorsements to gauge credibility. If peer or aspirational institutions were

supporting an open access organization and its projects, then the task force considered this an endorsement and therefore ranked those as having higher credibility. It was also important to determine whether the open access organization was emerging or established. This information, together with the credibility factor, helped to narrow down which projects were most meaningful for OUL support. Whether an entity or a project was emerging or established, in and of itself, was neither positive nor negative. Instead, this criterion helped the task force determine where financial support may have the most impact in expanding access to resources.

## **Results**

Accumulating research via the comparative rubric on each of the resources chosen for in-depth consideration helped facilitate our final discussion on August 23, 2017. At the task force's final meeting, the findings were reviewed as a group. Each member reported findings their assigned resource and made a recommendation whether they felt that the resource was appropriate for investment based on the rubric criteria. Through this process, the task force affirmed continued investment in the three resources OUL had already invested in including SPARC, BioMed Central, and Open Library of the Humanities. The task force also chose to invest three new resources including Knowledge Unlatched, Reveal Digital, and Open Textbook Library. Several reviewed resources were deemed not appropriate for our mission, were not within the scope of our collection, or overlapped with resources OUL already had.

Open Textbook Library was chosen because the group felt the resource was doing important work in helping to address the affordability of textbooks, a goal OUL continues to explore. The resource also covered a wide range of subject areas such as social sciences, natural and physical sciences, humanities, math, business, and more. Similarly, Knowledge Unlatched was chosen due to the potential for use as a classroom resource to provide more affordable access to scholarly material to students. The third resource, Reveal Digital, was chosen for the innovative way in which the resource sought to bring together disparate special collections to build robust digital collections that center on social themes. OUL is proud to support these emerging resources in an effort to support affordable course material to students, to support open access, and to sponsor innovative work in special collections.

The task force's work was complete when on October 14, 2016 the chair of the task force presented the recommendations to OUL's Dean and Associate Deans. The group was pleased with the affordability of each resource, and it was decided that OUL could allocate funds to invest in all three. After the financial transactions are complete, OUL will incorporate the resources into its online catalog to provide access to users.

## **Commitment to Open Access Resources**

The Investing in Open Access Task Force was a valuable initiative for Ohio University Libraries. Financially supporting open access initiatives solidifies the commitment to ensuring sustainable access to scholarly work. Financial investment also solidifies the commitment to ensure equitable access to knowledge to advance discovery, innovation, and education.

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