Evaluating the impact of open access at Berkeley: a qualitative analysis of the BRII program

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Introduction

The Berkeley Research Impact Initiative (BRII) was one of the first campus-based open access (OA) funds to be established in North America and one of the most active, distributing more than $344,000 to support UC Berkeley authors. In April 2010, we conducted a qualitative study of 138 individuals who had received BRII funding to survey their opinions about the benefits and funding of open access.

Most respondents:
- believe that their articles had a greater impact as open access
- expect to tap multiple funding sources to pay OA fees
- support the UC Open Access Policy but prefer gold OA

Survey

1. Did the availability of the Berkeley Research Impact Initiative (BRII) to help pay the Article Processing Charge (APC) or open access fee for this article affect your decision about where to publish?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Not sure

2. If you had not received funds from BRII to publish your article open access, would you have:
   - Published in a journal that required an article processing charge (APC)
   - Published in a journal that permitted this article as open access without a fee
   - Published in a closed access journal
   - Other

3. How many open access articles had you published prior to the one you received funds for?
   - 0
   - 1-5
   - 6-10
   - 11-20
   - 21-40
   - 41-60
   - 61-100
   - More than 100
   - Not sure

4. Do you feel that your article had a greater overall impact because it was open access?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Not sure

5. Compared to articles you have published in subscription-based journals, do you believe your open access article benefited from any of the following? (check all that apply)
   - Increased citations
   - Increased downloads
   - A higher impact factor
   - Increased visibility and reach
   - More social media mentions
   - Increased funding
   - Greater access
   - Other

6. How have you previously covered Article Processing Charges (APCs) for open access publications? (check all that apply)
   - Departmental funds
   - Grants
   - Author's fees
   - BRII funding
   - Other
   - Not sure

7. In your opinion, how should open access publishing costs be covered?
   - By external grants
   - By institutional or campus OA funds
   - By APCs, but a smaller contribution
   - Not applicable

8. With the UC Open Access Policy, faculty can post the final author's version of their scholarly articles on their websites. Please indicate how (if at all) these policies impact your decision to publish in an open access journal that requires an article process charge.
   - Will post final version of the article on my personal website
   - Will post final version of the article on my personal website and on this journal's website
   - Will collate the final version of the article on my personal website
   - Other

9. Are there other comments you wish to share about the BRII or open access in general?

Results

BRII recipients were surveyed in April 2015 using Berkeley licensed Qualtrics software. Our survey response rate was 72%; 99 out of 138 of our pool completed the survey.

Greater impact:

Most respondents (62%) believed that their article had a greater overall impact because it was open access. They listed greater number of views and more downloads as the primary benefits of open access.

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"The press office wrote a release, and we got a front page story in the SF Chronicle on day of publication. A German and Baby Mouse Fish program officer read the article, and reached out to me. That contact has since resulted in almost $800k in funding. and has many other impacts on the direction of my research. I think Open Access makes a difference in reporter's interest in covering stories, though I can't prove it."
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Gold over Green:

Many respondents were supportive of the UC Open Access policy but stated that it would not influence where they publish.

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"...open access journals are still preferred to me over posting my paper on my own website (or on a repository such as the one at UCSB) because it removes one step in the process for other scientists trying to get a hold of a copy of mine."
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Funding from multiple sources:

Respondents support the use of multiple funding sources to pay APCs, but feel that the university should offer greater contributions.

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"If grant funding is available then open access charges should come from the grant. But when the grant is finished and there are no alternate funds, I feel that the final version of my article is immediately available as open access.
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Conclusions

• Survey respondents believe that their open access articles received more attention and had a greater impact than they might have had in a subscription journal.
• They are willing to draw from multiple sources to fund open access fees, including grants and campus OA funds like BRII.
• Respondents believe that the university should do more to defray costs and support researchers, especially those with limited or no funding.
• Respondents support the goals of the UC Open Access Policy, but overwhelmingly prefer to publish in OA journals that provide immediate access to their articles.
• Berkeley researchers are concerned about the future of scholarly publishing and knowledge about how to maximize the reach of their work within the present system.
• The Berkeley Research Impact Initiative remains a valued resource for these authors and fills a vital role as a funding source for open access publications.

Acknowledgements

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Sources

Greg Tananbaum of SPARC (Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition) has reported extensively on campus-based OA funds. Among the reports consulted for our study and available on the SPARC website are: Campus-Based Open-Access Publishing Funds, North American Campus-Based Open Access Funds: A Five-Year Progress Report, and Open Access Funds in Action.

Further information

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