

Addressing Faculty Publishing Concerns with Open Access Journal Quality Indicators

Sarah Beaubien *Scholarly Communications Outreach Coordinator, Grand Valley State University Libraries*

Max Eckard *Metadata & Digital Curation Librarian, Grand Valley State University Libraries*

Abstract

BACKGROUND The scholarly publishing paradigm is evolving to embrace innovative open access publication models. While this environment fosters the creation of high-quality, peer-reviewed open access publications, it also provides opportunities for journals or publishers to engage in unprofessional or unethical practices. **LITERATURE REVIEW** Faculty take into account a number of factors in deciding where to publish, including whether or not a journal engages in ethical publishing practices. Librarians and scholars have attempted to address this issue in a number of ways, such as generating lists of ethical/unethical publishers and general guides. **DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT** In response to growing faculty concern in this area, the Grand Valley State University Libraries developed and evaluated a set of Open Access Journal Quality Indicators that support faculty in their effort to identify the characteristics of ethical and unethical open access publications. **NEXT STEPS** Liaison librarians have already begun using the Indicators as a catalyst in sparking conversation around open access publishing and scholarship. Going forward, the Libraries will continue to evaluate and gather feedback on the Indicators, taking into account emerging trends and practices.

INTRODUCTION

The scholarly publishing paradigm is evolving to embrace innovative open access publication models such as mega journals, rapid peer review, and author fees. While this environment fosters the creation of high-quality, peer-reviewed open access publications, it also provides opportunities for journals or publishers to engage in unprofessional or unethical practices. Although unethical practices have always been an issue in scholarly publishing, even in traditional, print-based publications, they are exacerbated by technological advances and the increasing ease and speed of disseminating information. For example,

within open access publishing, the ease of starting an online publication has combined with the author-pays open access journal model to allow some individuals and organizations to create substandard journals in order to take advantage of researchers who are eager to publish.

Whether a journal charges authors to publish or not, researchers need strategies for identifying high quality open access publications. This is clearly articulated in a statement from the Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association (OASPA): “the publishing community needs stronger mechanisms to help identify reliable and rigorous journals and publishers, regardless of

Received: 01/28/2014 Accepted: 03/31/2014



© 2014 Beaubien & Eckard. This open access article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Unported License, which allows unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

access or business model” (OASPA, 2013). As noted by OASPA, this issue is pertinent for the entire academic community—for all disciplines, and for both faculty and administrators.

Fortunately, librarians are experts in evaluating and selecting publications and are often involved in the open access movement. As a result, we are well-positioned to provide guidance and facilitate conversation around this topic. At the Grand Valley State University Libraries, we have developed a set of Open Access Journal Quality Indicators (the Indicators) with the goal of providing a resource to enable faculty to evaluate open access publications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many factors that scholars consider when selecting a journal for manuscript submission, regardless of whether that particular journal uses an open-access or traditional publication model. Some of these factors include (a) the likelihood of manuscript acceptance, that is, the “fit” between the journal, its target audience and the manuscript, (b) journal reputation, (c) journal visibility, credibility and potential article impact, (d) the speed with which a journal will respond and the time taken between submission and publication, and (e) philosophical and ethical issues, such as self-archiving and author rights policies (Knight & Steinbach, 2008; van Teijlingen & Jundley, 2002). Traditional factors of fit, perceived quality, and speed of publication still appear to outweigh the benefits of open access in authors’ journal selection decisions (Dalton, 2012; Witt, 2003).

The dynamic nature of the open access landscape adds to this complexity. There are thousands of peer-reviewed open access journals, with new titles emerging rapidly using a variety of models. Many of these are high-quality, peer-reviewed open access publications. There are some journals and publishers, however, that engage in what have been described as “predatory” practices. *Predatory* refers specifically to a practice in which open access publications exploit the author-pays model by “set[ting] up bogus publishing operations and trick[ing] authors into thinking that they are legitimate scholarly publishing outlets” (Bornemann, 2013, p. 13). While the term *predatory* has gained traction in describing a subset of unethical journals, *unethical* is a broader term that will be used here to refer to any practice in which

a journal or publisher, whether or not they are open access (or charge author fees), knowingly engages in fraudulent or unprofessional behavior.

One of the primary concerns with unethical publishers is that they accept articles with little or no peer review or quality control, as noted in a recent *Science* article about open access journals (Bohannon, 2013). While there were some limitations to Bohannon’s methodology, including the facts that “flawed articles were sent only to a selected group of Open Access journals, and no comparative control group of subscription-based journals was used,” the study emphasizes the importance of scrutinizing a potential publication venue (Joseph, 2013). The same is true for publishing companies. Authors, faculty members, and open-access advocates, for example, contend that some articles submitted to companies like the OMICS publishing group do not undergo peer review and “have even contained mistakes that should have been corrected in previous drafts” (Stratford, 2012).

Another complaint associated with unethical open access journals is that they notify academics of article fees only after papers are accepted (Stratford, 2012). Because scientists are often asked to sign over their copyright to the work as part of the submission process, they can “feel unable to withdraw the paper and send it elsewhere” (Beall, 2012). Conversely, OASPA requires transparency regarding author fees, and encourages authors to retain copyrights by suggesting that they grant nonexclusive licenses to their work, rather than “transferring rights exclusively to publishers (the approach usually followed in subscription publishing)” (OASPA, n.d.).

Unethical journals have also been known to aggressively campaign for academics to submit articles or serve on editorial boards. While “new publishing outfits may legitimately use aggressive marketing tactics to recruit authors,” unethical journals use phishing/spam emails with malicious intent to lure in unsuspecting scholars (Butler, 2013a). OASPA addresses this issue in its *Membership Criteria*: “Any direct marketing activities publishers engage in shall be appropriate and unobtrusive” (OASPA, n.d.).

When their recruiting techniques don’t work, some unethical journals may list academics as members of editorial boards without their permission (Elliott,

2012). In other cases, they may not allow academics to resign from editorial boards, and some academics “have found it difficult to disentangle themselves from these journals once they mistakenly agree to serve on their editorial boards” (Kolata, 2013).

Finally, some unethical open access journals mimic the name or website style of more established journals in an effort to dupe potential authors (Kolata, 2013), going so far as to “attend to the closest of details, displaying on multiple websites not only the titles of authentic journals, but also their impact factors, postal addresses and serial numbers” (Butler, 2013a). One of these forged sites looked so convincing that it initially misled Thomson Reuters, the company that produces the Scientific Citation Index (Butler, 2013b).

Addressing unethical open access publishing

One of the ways librarians and academics have provided guidance on unethical open access publishing practices—particularly “predatory” publishers—is by developing lists of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ journals. *Beall’s List of Predatory, Open-Access Publishers*,¹ for example, is a well-known attempt to address unethical open access publishing by identifying and maintaining a list of predatory publishers. (Others have gone the opposite route and have developed lists of *high-quality* open access journals; see, for example, “Examples of OA journals” from the University of Oregon Libraries.²)

The list approach has received criticism because binary lists do not account for the nuances of determining the quality of a particular publication. Paul Peters, president of OASPA, is one of many outspoken critics who suggest that Beall “often relies heavily on analysis of publishers’ websites rather than detailed discussions with publishers, and this might lead to incorrect or premature conclusions” (Butler, 2013a). Other critics at OASPA worry that he “risks throwing undue suspicion on start-up publishers,” especially those with “poor copy-editing and user-interface design on their website” (Butler, 2013a).

Besides being challenging to maintain because new open access journals emerge every day and publisher

practices change periodically, lists also inherently reflect the bias of their creator. In Beall’s case, his bias has been explicitly exposed in his *tripleC* article, “The Open-Access Movement is not really about Open Access.” He purports that the “open-access movement is really about anti-corporatism” (Beall, 2013, p. 589) and goes on to say that “open access advocates think they know better than everyone else and want to impose their policies on others” (Beall, 2013, p. 593). Clearly, this represents an extreme opinion that could influence Beall’s views of open access publications.

Some scholars have called for and have begun to create mechanisms for authors to review their experiences with journals and publishers. For example, Deaner (2013) suggests “the development of a crowdsourced, ‘author reviewed’ journal-evaluation Web site.” Deaner’s essay describes a service where authors would evaluate a journal based on factors like turnaround time on reviews and publication, editor and reviewer “fairness and constructiveness,” and would find information such as impact factor, publication fees, open access options, etc. (Deaner, 2013). An exciting initiative that may address this need is *Journalysis*,³ a site developed by Dr. Neal Haddaway to help authors “identify a suitable home for their next manuscripts, and help to *praise* journals with good publishing standards and *flag up* journals with poor publishing standards” (2014). Both of these examples have a broader scope than our Indicators, and address overall experiences rather than ethical practices only. Like the Indicators, however, they demonstrate a need to empower authors to make the best possible decisions regarding dissemination of their scholarship.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

Background

In the past two years, librarians at GVSU have noticed an increase in questions from faculty regarding open access publishing. Typical questions include:

- “I’d like to find a high quality open access journal to publish my work. Can you please advise?”
- “I’ve been solicited to submit research (or to serve

¹ <http://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/>

² <http://library.uoregon.edu/scis/sc/oa-journals.html>

³ <http://www.journalysis.org/>

on an editorial board) for *Journal X*. Can you help me determine if this is a good publication?”

- “A member of our department has published an article in *Journal X*. We need to determine the quality of this journal for his/her tenure review. Can you assist?”

In addition to individual questions from faculty, there have been more formal department-level conversations about how to approach open access publishing and emerging publishing models. For instance, the scholarly communications outreach coordinator has had conversations with one department chair who is supportive of open access publishing, but is concerned about the need to guide his junior faculty toward publications that will reflect well on their scholarship and the department. Rather than dismiss open access altogether, his department asked the libraries for tools and resources that would alleviate some of the burden of evaluating journals and publishers.

Development of Indicators

Given the increase in questions from individual faculty regarding open access publications, the University Libraries discussed how to approach this in a way that would potentially help our entire faculty identify the characteristics of high- and low-quality open access journals. The University Libraries' Scholarly Communications Advisory Committee (SCAC) began to discuss strategies to provide a starting point for evaluating open access journals.

SCAC reviewed the literature and looked for examples of tools and resources developed by other institutions. There are many excellent examples of LibGuides and other web resources that address this issue, but none were aligned with the committee's objective. Some were broad, providing many links to articles, blog posts, and other resources. This approach is exhaustive and overwhelming for the user, requiring a significant time investment on the part of faculty who really just wanted an answer to a question. Others did not express or articulate the complexity of determining high-quality versus disreputable open access publications.

Others tools and resources, such as lists of unethical publishers, were very specific and focused on negative qualities. Committee members determined that referring

faculty to an existing list of unethical publishers would not be effective because (a) it cannot be comprehensive enough to address all open access publications, (b) it would not provide a comparable list of ethical publications, and (c) it would undermine the intellectual process a faculty member engages in when evaluating and selecting a publication venue.

Rather than creating a LibGuide or list of ethical or unethical journals or publishers, SCAC decided that the most effective approach would be the development of a set of indicators that faculty could apply to a potential publication venue. The committee determined three main priorities in the development of the Indicators:

1. Each journal should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by the faculty member. The criteria should function as a starting point, and faculty would be ultimately responsible for making a decision.
2. The criteria should offer enough information to be effective, but be brief enough that faculty would not find it onerous to read and apply them.
3. There is no single criterion that indicates high or low quality. Rather, users of the Indicators should look for a cumulative effect of more positive or more negative criteria.

The committee drafted two lists of indicators, those which pointed to positive qualities and those pointing to negative qualities. It was quickly determined that the lists were too long, and that some of the indicators were redundant, or could be logically combined. The committee worked to refine and simplify the criteria, attempting to develop a core list of indicators that could be applied to open access journals in any discipline. Finally, the committee also looked at the list for jargon that may not resonate with faculty in all disciplines and attempted to neutralize terminology to better represent all scholars. (Although the indicators are meant to be relevant for all faculty, because there are disciplinary differences in approaches to open access publishing, faculty are encouraged to engage with their liaison librarians for specific input on these issues.)

OPEN ACCESS JOURNAL QUALITY INDICATORS

The Open Access Journal Quality Indicators begin with a brief preamble describing the open access movement

generally and the role that universities and libraries play in educating their faculty and students about issues related to open access (Appendix A). The introduction briefly defines open access and enumerates the benefits of publishing in an open access venue. The Indicators go on to acknowledge the complexity of open access publishing and its many models, including the unethical practices of predatory open access journals. This is followed by a purpose statement: the Indicators are guidelines designed “to help [the researcher] evaluate open access publications as [he or she] consider[s] appropriate publication venues, or invitations to serve as reviewers or editors.” The introduction concludes by reminding researchers that no single criterion or list can indicate sufficiently whether a particular journal is reputable or not; rather, it is the cumulative effect of both positive and negative quality indicators that should inform a researcher’s final decision.

The Indicators are divided into two columns, positive and negative indicators.

Positive indicators. In general, an ethical publication will have characteristics we have labeled “positive indicators.” This set of indicators encourages the researcher to evaluate factors such as the scope of a journal, its primary audience, and the reputation of its editorial board, and societal or institutional affiliations. These are all judgment calls that are best made by the researcher who knows his or her discipline better than the librarians who created the Indicators, and can better assess whether or not the articles contained within a particular publication meet the standards of the discipline.

Other positive indicators ask the researcher to ensure that any fees or charges for publishing are easily found on the journal website and clearly explained and to look for unique identifiers such as a Digital Object Identifier (DOI) or an International Standard Serial Number (ISSN), which indicates that a journal or publisher adheres to international standards.

Some positive indicators are external to a journal’s or publisher’s website. If a publisher is a member of the OASPA, or a journal is indexed beyond Google Scholar in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) or a commercial database, for example, then it meets the membership criteria and the criteria for coverage, access and quality outlined on their respective websites

(OASPA, n.d.; DOAJ, 2013). These criteria often exceed the positive and negative qualities outlined in the Indicators.

Another positive external indication that an open access journal or publisher is reputable is if it is registered in UlrichsWeb, a directory of journals, regardless of whether those journals or publishers follow traditional or open access publication models. This points to a journal’s commitment to inclusion in well-regarded directories.

Negative indicators. In addition to indicators that an open access journal or publisher is ethical, there are also indicators that an open access journal or publisher is unethical. We have labeled these characteristics as “negative indicators.” If the journal or publisher’s website is difficult to locate or identify, for example, then that journal or publisher may not be reputable. The same is true even if a journal or publisher’s website is easily located, but “About” information is missing or does not clearly indicate a relationship to a mission to disseminate research content, scope is absent or extremely vague, or information on peer review or copyright is absent or unclear.

Users are also prompted to consider a journal or publisher’s advertising practices. If they practice “spamming” or their advertising is obtrusive, an author may want to reconsider accepting invitations to publish or serve as an editor. Repeat lead authors in multiple issues may also indicate that a journal is low quality. Finally, the negative indicators prompt researchers to survey appropriate listservs and scholarly sources like The Chronicle of Higher Education for indications that a journal’s reputation is poor or has declined.

FEEDBACK

It was important for the creators of the Indicators to solicit feedback from faculty in order to determine if the Indicators were effective. After the Indicators were completed and shared with faculty members, the Libraries sent out invitations to researchers in diverse disciplines to attend a focus group to discuss open access and the newly created Indicators. Faculty from the Psychology, Geology, Movement Science, Biology, and Writing departments attended the focus group, which was granted an exemption by the Grand Valley

State University Human Research Review Committee. All participants were either tenure-track or tenured.

Design. The agenda for the day was based on two guiding documents which discuss effective focus group planning and interviews (Eliot & Associates, 2005; Krueger, 2002). The focus group was moderated by a librarian trained as a focus group facilitator, while the scholarly communications outreach coordinator and the metadata and digital curation librarian listened in from another room and took notes.

After a brief period of greetings, consent form signing, introductions and courtesy guidelines, the conversation roughly divided into four topics: 1) their understanding of open access; 2) their perceptions of open access publishing; 3) the organization and clarity of the Indicators; and 4) suggestions for new Indicators (Appendix B). The first and second topics were chosen to get the participants thinking about larger, more abstract ideas, while the second two topics were chosen to get more specific feedback on the Indicators.

Focus Group Results

Open access. This part of the conversation introduced open access and helped participants place the issue into its broader context. Participants praised the opportunity to share their work more widely via open access. One participant expressed feeling a moral obligation to disseminate his research via open access because his sub-discipline is important to developing nations. Others acknowledged the fact that many open access publications are as highly regarded as some traditional journals.

Perceptions. The participants perceived that the peer review process for open access journals can be murky and researchers should go into the process of selecting an open access publication “with their eyes open.” Some participants resented the fact that some more experienced faculty members in their respective disciplines view open access as a vanity press. At least one faculty member was extremely enthusiastic about open access because he felt that this was the only publication model in which “scholars win.”

Researchers also talked about how they decided where to publish and how open access factored into that

decision. Participants discussed turnaround time; potential impact; target audience; the reputation or “tier” of a journal; whether or not there were student coauthors; the “paradigm” or “type” of science that a journal published; and altmetrics, including the social media impact of a particular publication. One researcher stated that she chose journals to publish in because they were the journals “that [she] reads.”

Organization and clarity. Overall, participants thought that the two-column format of the Indicators was clear and well organized. One participant suggested that a visual cue be employed to bring more attention to the fact that the negative indicators should be avoided. Participants stated that they would have liked to have seen more information on indexing, indicating that the existing information was unclear.

Suggestions for new Indicators. Participants had some suggestions for additional Indicators. Some had been considered by SCAC during the development of the Indicators. One participant, for example, stated that the usability and design of a journal website might be an indicator of its quality. SCAC had decided against this because the quality of web design is not necessarily indicative of journal quality. Another participant suggested that a restrictive geographic focus could be a negative indicator. SCAC decided against this because it may be unnecessarily prejudicial.

Participants also had suggestions that the committee had not previously considered. One participant, for example, wanted to see more explanatory information on unethical open access journals. Another stated that an additional positive indicator could be that the copyright status of an article explicitly stated that it could be shared and disseminated, not just read. As a result, the committee integrated both of these suggestions into the Indicators. Introductory text was minimized to provide adequate space for describing predatory journals and more immediate access to the Indicators. A statement was also added in the positive column regarding rights and re-use policies of the journals (*Journal clearly indicates rights for use and re-use of content at article level (e.g., Creative Commons CC BY license)*). Based on other feedback from the focus group, the Indicators were modified to improve clarity and usability. Some changes were design-related, such as enlarging headings, while others involved editing content.

NEXT STEPS

The Indicators have already been used by liaison librarians as a catalyst in sparking conversation around open access publishing and scholarship. Going forward, the committee plans to periodically review the Indicators and suggest improvements based on trends and best practices in open access publishing. Faculty feedback will be gathered from diverse disciplines via informal channels, such as questions and comments from individual faculty members, and formal channels, such as surveys or focus groups.

The Indicators in their current form were intentionally limited to open access publications because authors in higher education are still grappling with how to evaluate them and because predatory open access journals have received so much attention. However, we recognize that unethical practices also occur with commercial publishers, such as the well-known conflict of interest case involving an undisclosed affiliation between Merck, a pharmaceutical company, and Elsevier (Singer, 2009). In light of issues like this, the committee is considering revising the Indicators to be Journal Quality Indicators rather than just Open Access Journal Quality Indicators.

CONCLUSION

Deciding on appropriate publication venues is a highly individual process for most faculty members; factors such as tenure and promotion guidelines, impact factor, discipline-specific guidelines, and personal reading habits may all play into decisions regarding where to submit their research. The complex and evolving nature of the publishing landscape makes this decision all the more challenging. Even when lists or guides are available, any author can be deceived by tempting offers from unethical journals. Education is paramount; it is more important to prepare faculty to navigate the dynamic open access publishing environment than to attempt to create authoritative lists of ethical or unethical journals. Faculty members are conversant with the nuances of scholarship in their disciplines and are in the best position to evaluate journal content. As they do so, it is the hope of the University Libraries that the Open Access Journal Quality Indicators will become a useful tool that simplifies their decision-making process.

REFERENCES

- Beall, J. (2012). Predatory publishers are corrupting open access. *Nature News*, 489(7415). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/489179a>
- Beall, J. (2013). The open-access movement is not really about open access. *tripleC*, 11(2), 589-597. Retrieved from <http://triplec.at/index.php/tripleC/article/view/525>
- Bornemann, E. (2013). Exposing predatory publishers. *Information Today*, 30(6), 13.
- Butler, D. (2013a). Investigating journals: The dark side of publishing. *Nature News*, 495(7442). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/495433a>
- Butler, D. (2013b). Sham journals scam authors. *Nature News*, 495(7442). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/495421a>
- Dalton, M. (2012). Traditional factors of fit, perceived quality, and speed of publication still outweigh open access in authors' journal selection criteria. *Evidence Based Library and Information Science*, 7(4). Retrieved from <http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/EBLIP/article/view/18055>
- Deaner, R. (2013, May 17). It's time for journals to be author-reviewed. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/blogs/conversation/2013/05/17/its-time-for-journals-to-be-author-reviewed/>
- Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). (2013). FAQ. Retrieved from <http://doaj.org/faq>
- Eliot & Associates. (2005). Guidelines for Conducting a Focus Group.
- Elliott, C. (2012, June 5). On predatory publishers: A Q&A with Jeffrey Beall. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/blogs/brainstorm/on-predatory-publishers-a-qa-with-jeffrey-beall/47667>
- Haddaway, N. (2014). Journalysis. Retrieved from <http://www.journalysis.org/>
- Joseph, H. (2013). Science magazine's open access "sting." Retrieved from <http://www.sparc.arl.org/blog/science-magazine-open-access-sting>
- Kolata, G. (2013, April 7). For scientists, an exploding world of pseudo-academia. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/08/health/for-scientists-an-exploding-world-of-pseudo-academia.html?_r=0
- Krueger, R. A. (2002). Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews.

Knight, L. V., & Steinbach, T. A. (2008). Selecting an appropriate publication outlet: A comprehensive model of journal selection criteria for researchers in a broad range of disciplines. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 3, 59-79.

Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association, (n.d.). Membership Criteria. Retrieved from <http://oaspa.org/membership/membership-criteria/>

Singer, N. (2009, May 13). Merck paid for medical 'journal' without disclosure. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/14/business/14vioxxside.html>

Stratford, M. (2012, March 4). "Predatory" online journals lure scholars who are eager to publish. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Predatory-Online-Journals/131047/>

van Teijlingen, E., & Hundley, X. (2002). Getting your paper to the right journal. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 37(6), 506-511. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.2002.02135.x>

Witt, P. A. (2003). Readership is more important than publication outlet. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 35(3), 331-334.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Sarah Beaubien
Scholarly Communications Outreach Coordinator

LIB Mary Idema Pew Library
1 Campus Dr.
Allendale, MI 49401-9403

beaubisa@gvsu.edu

APPENDIX A.

OPEN ACCESS JOURNAL QUALITY INDICATORS
 (<http://www.gvsu.edu/library/sc/oaqi/>)

The screenshot shows the Grand Valley State University Library website. At the top left is the university logo and name. A search bar is prominently displayed with the text "Find articles, books, & more" and a "Find It!" button. Below the search bar is a navigation menu with "Find", "Services", and "About" options. The main content area is titled "Scholarly Communications" and includes links for "Author Services", "Copyright Resources", and "ScholarWorks@GVSU". The "Open Access Journal Quality Indicators" section is highlighted, featuring a list of benefits of open access publishing and a paragraph explaining the complexity of the open access landscape. A "Chat now" button is visible in the bottom left corner of the page.

University Libraries
library@gvsu.edu
 Phone: 616-331-3500

Scholarly Communications
 Author Services Copyright Resources ScholarWorks@GVSU

Open Access Journal Quality Indicators

Open access journals make articles freely available on the Internet, permitting any user to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search or link to the full text. Benefits of publishing in an open access venue may include:

- Increased visibility, usage, and impact of your research
- More efficient dissemination compared with traditional publishing models
- Retention of some or all of your copyrights
- Contribution to societal good by providing scholarly content to a global audience
- Rigor of traditional peer-review before publication
- Ongoing feedback through social media

The open access landscape is complex. There are thousands of peer-reviewed open access journals, with new titles emerging rapidly using a variety of models. While there are many high-quality, peer-reviewed open access publications, there are also journals/publishers that engage in unprofessional or unethical practices. The following guidelines are intended to help you evaluate open access publications as you consider appropriate publication venues, or invitations to serve as reviewers or editors.

Note that there is no single criterion that indicates whether or not a publication is reputable. Rather, look for a cumulative effect of more positives or more negatives. If you still have questions, please contact your liaison librarian.

Scholarly Communications & Copyright
 Sarah Beaubien
beaubisa@gvsu.edu
 Phone: 616-331-2631

Positive Indicators

- Scope of the journal is well-defined and clearly stated
- Journal's primary audience is researchers/practitioners
- Editor, editorial board are recognized experts in the field
- Journal is affiliated with or sponsored by an established scholarly society or academic institution
- Articles are within the scope of the journal and meet the standards of the discipline
- Any fees or charges for publishing in the journal are easily found on the journal web site and clearly explained
- Articles have DOIs (Digital Object Identifier, e.g., doi:10.1111/j.1742-9544.2011.00054.x)
- Journal clearly indicates rights for use and re-use of content at article level (e.g., Creative Commons CC BY license)
- Journal has an ISSN (International Standard Serial Number, e.g., 1234-5678)
- Publisher is a member of [Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association](#)
- Journal is registered in [UlrichsWeb](#), [Global Serials Directory](#)
- Journal is listed in the [Directory of Open Access Journals](#)
- Journal is included in subject databases and/or indexes

Negative Indicators

- Journal web site is difficult to locate or identify
- Publisher "About" information is absent on the journal's web site
- Publisher direct marketing (i.e., spamming) or other advertising is obtrusive
- Instructions to authors information is not available
- Information on peer review and copyright is absent or unclear on the journal web site
- Journal scope statement is absent or extremely vague
- No information is provided about the publisher, or the information provided does not clearly indicate a relationship to a mission to disseminate research content
- Repeat lead authors in same issue
- Publisher has a negative reputation (e.g., documented examples in [Chronicle of Higher Education](#), [list-servs](#), etc.)

Open Access Publication Models

Open access journal: All journal content is available for researchers to read, print, download, distribute, or link to without fees.

Hybrid journal: Some content is open access, typically via publication or author fees.

Embargoed open access: Also called delayed open access. This is a subscription model that provides open access to content after an embargo period expires. For example, the most current content may only be available to subscribers, while the archived issues are open access.

For more information, contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

1 Campus Drive
 Allendale, MI 49401-9403
 USA - [\(616\) 331-5000](tel:(616)331-5000)

- [Apply Now](#)
- [Athletics](#)
- [Giving](#)
- [Inclusion/Diversity](#)
- [Library](#)
- [Schedule a Campus Visit](#)

APPENDIX B.

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS: OPEN ACCESS JOURNAL QUALITY INDICATORS

Topic 1: Understanding of open access in general [brief]

- What does the phrase 'open access' mean to you?
- Have you used open access resources in your research?

Topic 2: Perceptions of open access publishing

- What factors do you consider when deciding on appropriate publication venues?
- Have you ever published or considered publishing in an open access journal?
- Is open access a factor when deciding where to publish?
- In your discipline, are you aware of any respected open access journals or publishers?
- What, if any, discipline-specific concerns do you have about open access publishing?
- What do you see as benefits of open access?
- How do you determine the quality of an open access publication?
- What specific tool or resource have you used to help determine the quality of open access publications?

Topic 3: Organization and clarity of the open access journal quality indicators

- Where is the language in the indicators clear or unclear?
- Are there any changes you would make to the indicators?
- Do you have suggestions related to formatting or visual appearance of the indicators that would make them easier to read/use?

Topic 4: Using the open access journal quality indicators

- Can you think of ways these indicators could help you decide whether or not to publish in or serve as an editor for an open access journal?
- What services or resources could the Libraries provide that would help you evaluate the quality of open access journals?
- Is there anything else you'd like to add that may help us improve the effectiveness of the indicators?

Copyright in this article is owned by the author(s). The article is licensed under the Creative Commons license noted at the bottom of the first page of the article; the license dictates the terms of use for readers/end-users of this article.