

Open access: Unlocking the doors to faculty research

Like many other faculty members at the FSU College of Medicine, Xan Nowakowski focuses much of her research activity on serving marginalized populations in Florida.

“People with asthma and other chronic health conditions living in financial hardship, in rural areas and in substandard housing represent key audiences for many of my publications,” said Nowakowski, a researcher in the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Social Medicine. “Consequently, being able to share publications with members of the public is crucial, both for me and for all of us as a school.”

But the ability to share publications was severely restricted — until February. That’s when the Florida State University Faculty Senate voted unanimously to adopt a university-wide open-access policy.

If you’re neither a researcher nor a librarian, you might not appreciate the ensuing jubilation. Suffice it to say this was a welcome solution to a thorny, longtime problem for many College of Medicine researchers. The new policy allows FSU to make scholarly articles publicly available for noncommercial purposes.

Many believe that, until now, profits had been placed ahead of advancing discovery in academic publishing. Legally downloading a single journal article without a subscription costs around \$30, and even searches on narrow topics can return thousands of articles.

“Journal prices have been rising twice as fast as the price of health care over the past 20 years, so there’s a real scandal there to be exposed,” Harvard University Director of Scholarly Communication Peter Suber told the *New York Times*.

The costs strain library budgets, including FSU’s.

“Currently, the College of Medicine funds the Maguire Medical Library at nearly \$1 million annually to license and provide access to the electronic resources used in medical education, biomedical research and related interdisciplinary endeavors,” said Library Director Martin Wood.

Any cost savings related to open access likely will be evident only in the long term, Wood said. “The chief change with this new policy initially,” he said, “will be greater interaction between our medical librarians and medical and biomedical

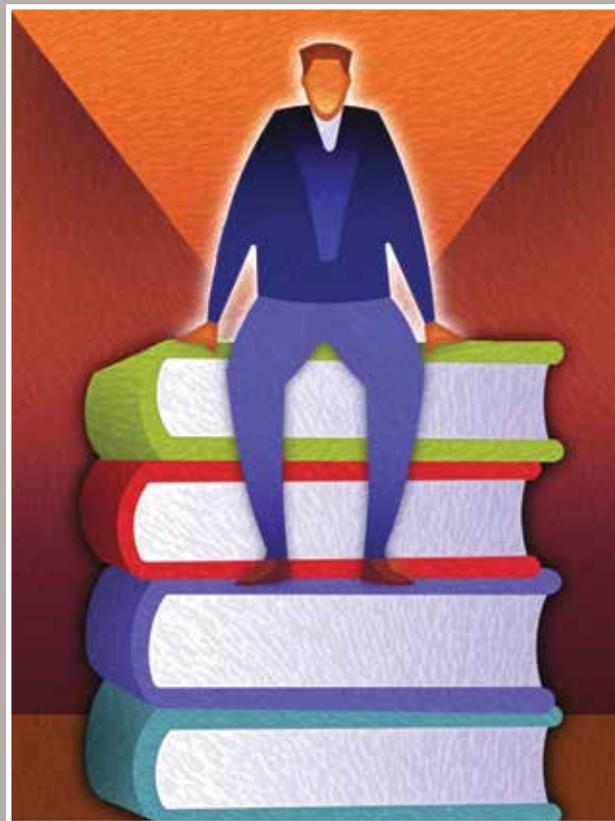


Illustration Works

PLAID (“People Living with And Inspired by Diabetes”) was created by Wood, who said its subscription could cost \$3,000 if it weren’t an open-access publication. In creating *PLAID*, he cited the importance of having a forum where good, research-backed information about diabetes is widely accessible.

Researchers everywhere want colleagues to see their results and run with them, according to the medical school’s scholarly communications librarian, Roxann Mouratidis.

“There is something called the ‘open access citation advantage,’” she said, “which means that theoretically, articles that are freely available are likely to be accessed by more researchers worldwide, which in turn means those articles would be cited more often.

“And if scholars are unable to access research articles because their library or institution cannot afford the cost of subscriptions, how can those researchers ethically cite and build upon the existing research?”

Open-access policies now exist at Harvard, MIT, Duke, Kansas, Georgia Tech, the University of California system and at least 50 others.

Nowakowski welcomes the new policy.

“Being able to share my research more systematically with the communities I serve and the key non-academic partners with whom I collaborate will enhance my ability to help members of marginalized social

researchers who are publishing their work and want to have their publications featured in DigiNole, FSU’s research repository.”

One publication already enthusiastically supporting open access before the Faculty Senate weighed in was *The PLAID Journal*.

and economic groups organize for targeted action engaging research and evaluation findings,” she said. “It is much easier to build a multi-stakeholder coalition for grant writing and project planning when you can share your publications widely and know that your potential collaborators will be able to review these works in detail.”