Abstract

Support for Open Access (OA) as an accepted model for scholarly publishing is changing the academic landscape for today’s graduate students. The Open Access movement has the potential to impact many facets of the graduate experience. This may include participation in peer-reviewed publishing initiatives, learning to become members of the community of researchers and producers of scholarly works, and finally, involvement in the Open Education Resource (OER) movement.

Graduate student participation in student peer-reviewed journals is increasing as tomorrow’s scholars seek both the experience of the publishing process first hand, as well as the opportunity to get a professional “foot in the door”. Current OA journals using efficient Open Journal System (OJS) tools and work flows provide a low-cost, inclusive point of access and play an important role in introducing the critical peer review process to future faculty and researchers. When we are educating graduate students, acquiring confidence in the practice of scholarly research, writing and review is as important as the discipline-specific expertise.

Many of our students may find OA publishing of their thesis to be an important step in their induction into the academy. At the University of Toronto the eThesis initiative requires that all graduate students contribute their thesis or dissertation to the institutional repository where it may be immediately accessed to scholars in their field and prioritized by primary scholarly search engines. The policy and practice related to OA publishing observed within the university environment will inform their understanding of cultural norms. This eThesis program provides an early exposure to Open Access publishing practice.

Finally, as global citizens, our students value the opportunity to share their work beyond the borders of the relatively wealthy western world institutions of higher education, and also to access resources beyond the subscription limitations of their own place of study. New patterns of practice rooted in a new culture of social networking are emerging for the graduate student community.

Introduction

Given the rising interest in “openness” in all aspects of education, support for Open Access (OA) as an accepted model for scholarly publishing presents both challenges and opportunities in meeting the needs of today’s graduate students. The Open Access movement has the potential to impact many facets of the graduate experience including: 1) participation in peer-reviewed Open Journal System (OJS) publishing initiatives 2) induction as researchers and producers of scholarly works, 3) participation in the Open Educational Resource (OER) movement. The aim of this paper is to explore the relevance of Open Access publishing to the graduate student experience at the University of Toronto using examples and evidence from our academic programs and scholarly community.

1. Participation in Peer-Reviewed Online Journal Publishing Initiatives

Graduate student participation in student peer-reviewed journals is increasing as tomorrow’s scholars seek both the experience of the publishing process first hand, as well as the opportunity to get exposure for their best work. Current OA journals using efficient OJS tools and work flow provide a low-cost, inclusive point of access and play an important role in introducing the critical peer review process to future faculty and researchers. When we are educating graduate students, acquiring confidence in the practice of scholarly research, writing and review is as important as the discipline-specific expertise. It is
critical that we develop appropriate institutional frameworks for support of graduate students in this activity.

The changing environment of scholarly publishing is giving graduate students easier access to publishing opportunities and the opportunity to participate in the publishing process at an earlier point in their academic careers. One growing phenomenon is the emergence of peer reviewed publications managed and hosted within Open Journal System software. The OJS software supports the process of scholarly journal publication management through a suite of interconnected tools. The journal provides a public presence through the journal web site, an online submission system, peer review and editorial work flow tools. The work flow steps include copy editing, layout editing, proofreading, indexing, online publication, and full-text searching (Bird, Devakos & Stranack, 2008).

The availability of technology-based delivery platforms is a key factor in access to publishing forums. John Willinski (2005), pioneer of OA publishing using OJS software, notes that the workflow efficiencies inherent in the OJS software allow publishers to significantly reduce their operating costs. What was once the realm of the established members of the academy is increasingly available to a new generation of scholars. Furthermore, the younger generation of tech-savvy students has a much higher level of comfort working with materials in an online environment. While a resistance to peer review persists within the context of course work and assessment of academic performance for the purpose of assigning grades (Kurzel & Wood, 2008), there is a positive pride of ownership in publishing of materials in a peer-reviewed public form for which the reward is recognition within the research community.

A student peer-review journal, recently launched by a Toronto-based collaborative provides an exemplary model for undergraduate and graduate student participation in an OJS publication process. Esurio (Figure 1) is a student refereed academic journal on the topic of poverty and hunger. Approximately half of the submissions for the first issue were authored by graduate students. The editorial board includes representatives from several local institutions of higher education as well as from sponsoring community organizations. Graduate students serve as senior level reviewers while Undergraduates are Junior Reviewers.

![Esurio Web Site](image)

Figure 1: Esurio Web Site
An important component of the joint initiative is the Student Reviewer Development Programme which is seen as central to the function of the journal as an educational platform. The project website states: ‘The Esurio Reviewer Development Programme is central to the aim of the journal as an educational platform. Building on-going personal relationships as well as related hard and soft skills is critical to the process and outcomes of the journal. A reviewer development programme will be run by the editors, experienced senior reviewers, and project advisors with a focus skill development through local workshops at participating institutions and the summer Esurio conference.’ (Esurio, 2009)

It also states: ‘The project is also committed to development of skill related to scholarly research including editing, research methods and academic coaching. It is expected that students will learn “through practice how to effectively engage in collaborative editing, ensure accurate citation, and identify major stylistic and grammatical errors; learning the basics of research methods in the social sciences in order to critically review the journal submissions.”’ (Esurio, 2009)

It can be anticipated that this model for engaging students in reflective practice will increase awareness of the quality of their work, increase their awareness of the role of peer evaluators and improve their development of skills directly related to scholarly publishing. These skills are particularly valuable to graduate students who are maturing in their contribution to their discipline-based research community. Esurio also provides unique opportunities for the graduate students who sit on the Editorial board of the publication.

2. Induction as Researchers and Producers of Scholarly Works

Some graduate students may participate in peer-reviewed publications, while others publish in recognized scholarly journals prior to completion of their degree. However, for many, the first formal recognition of their work within their discipline will come through publication of their thesis or dissertation. In this shifting landscape of scholarly publication, the requirements institutions set out for archiving and distribution of graduate theses must certainly send an important message to our students. Those institutions that continue to require print submission of theses and dissertations which are then stored on the shelves of a single library, or scan those print submissions to non-searchable image file formats demonstrate a rigid adherence to traditional publishing models. On the other hand, universities that provide an opportunity for students to publish their thesis in digital format and have it archived in an Open Access institutional repository are setting the stage for changing attitudes within the academy. Electronic submission, storage, and dissemination of student theses and dissertations are increasingly supported in universities and colleges worldwide.

At the University of Toronto the eThesis initiative (Figure 2) requires that, effective September 2009, all graduate students contribute their thesis or dissertation to the institutional repository where it may be immediately indexed and made available to scholars in their field and prioritized by primary scholarly search engines. The School of Graduate Studies facilitates the process, and support submission of materials using PDF software as well as non-text elements such as multimedia, sound, video, as well as text and hypertext links. (University of Toronto School of Graduate Studies, 2009). Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs) are archived in T-Space (Figure 3), the university’s digital library Open Access repository used to capture, store, index, preserve, and redistribute scholarly research material in digital formats (T-Space, 2009).

The benefits of the eThesis initiative using the T-Space repository are many, including:

- Flexibility in format and media choices leading to the opportunity for greater expressiveness (Fyffe & Welburn, 2008)
- Thesis materials that are searchable and indexable
- ETDs that are immediately and easily available to all other researchers in the field.
- Improved recognition and citation by peers
- Savings in print publication costs
- Graduate students having familiarity with the process of OA publishing to their institutional repository.
Figure 2: University of Toronto eThesis Initiative

Figure 3: University of Toronto Institutional Repository: T-Space
In many cases, Electronic Theses and Dissertations are a first target of implementation of an institutional repository initiative. An eThesis program may provide a forum for discussion among graduate students, faculty advisors and academic leadership regarding issues such as open access, intellectual property and other scholarly communication issues. It should be expected that graduate schools will continue to recognize the role of thesis committees to ensure the academic integrity of work and that related academic standards are maintained. However, the policy and practice related to OA publishing observed within the university environment will inform graduate students’ understanding of cultural norms and act as an important step in their induction into the academy. Creating the opportunity for conversation about the changing landscape of scholarly publishing and the value of Open Access publishing to the individual, the institution and to the common good will be an important part of a well developed implementation plan.

3. Participation in the Open Education Resource Movement

Finally, as global citizens, our students value the opportunity to share their work beyond the borders of the relatively wealthy western institutions of higher education, and also to access resources beyond the subscription limitations of their own place of study. The Open Access movement stands as a subset of a larger global trend toward Open Education Resources (OER), a worldwide effort to ensure that educational materials and resources offered freely and openly for anyone to use. As noted by Atkins, Brown and Hammond (2007) the OER movement was catalyzed in part by initiatives funded by the Hewlitt Foundation, with the intention of creating incentives for a diverse set of stakeholders to enlarge and sustain a new culture of contribution.

Our graduate students today have access to resources, data, participatory research initiatives, eResearch infrastructure, and, perhaps most importantly, access to conversations about those resources. Web 2.0 technologies have enabled these students to become producers rather than simply consumers of content and also to participate in social learning. Social learning is a concept which may be described as being based on the premise that understanding is constructed through conversation about that content and through grounded interactions with others regarding problems or actions (Atkins, Brown and Hammond, 2007). Graduate students are an important community thread of the fabric of interaction manifested as a result of the new culture of contribution.

With traditional barriers to collaborative inquiry being overcome and socially constructed understanding increasingly recognized as a valid model for the building of knowledge, our next generation of researchers and scholars need relevant models and frameworks within their own educational experience. One of the intersections of the OER movement and the growing phenomenon of social learning is the Open Access sharing of that which one has produced. Learning content is a sub-set of OER which includes course materials, content modules, learning objects, collections, and journals. If we fail to provide examples and opportunities for their participation in emerging practice in support of OER (and OA publishing as a supporting practice), it may come to pass that the post-graduate degree requirements will become out of step with scholarly activity and development within many disciplines.

With regard to journals and published research specifically, there are many opportunities within our institutions for our graduate student population. Firstly, with dwindling library budgets and limited funds for acquisitions or subscriptions to costly journals, support of OA publishing provides an alternative for students in our own schools, as well as those in other locations around the globe, practitioners in the field and other interested community members. Secondly, we may take advantage of new opportunities to facilitate graduate student participation in peer review processes, Open Journal Publishing, and Open Access publishing of their thesis or dissertation. Such activities only begin to scratch the surface of the revolution in scholarly publishing into which we are releasing our newly-minted graduates. As institutions of higher education we must take care not to segregate our research activities from our academic programs, but rather to work toward alignment of our academic program practice and policy with our research practice.

Today’s students are tomorrow’s faculty members, and the social networks they develop and the cultural norms absorbed will form the foundation of their participation within the academic community. Brett and Freeman (2005) note that ‘Graduate education, particularly at the doctoral level, is traditionally
characterized as an apprenticeship in which students are learning the practice of research by working for and with faculty supervisors and other students.’ Their research further indicates that ‘Research knowledge and skills may be similar, but practice will have subtle differences (Conrad, Duren & Howarth, 1998; Lee, Green & Brennan, 2000). Thus students may arrive with different cultural experiences of academia and technology; they may experience their program with different, perhaps local, supports from available communities; and they may have different values associated with the research they will practice upon graduation.’

Support of OA publishing activities reinforces the increasingly accepted value of “openness” including the principle that access to research outcomes by the broad public supports a greater global building of knowledge. In order for a graduate student to find a place in their discipline network it is valuable for him or her to have an audience and be an active member in the social learning community as a part of the process of induction into the academy. As described in the statement of the goals of Esurio ‘… there is value in provision of an educational programme through which young scholars will be given the opportunity to express and explore their voices on topical multi-disciplinary issues. As a network forms… students, editors, and advisors will be engaged in creating a difference in various fields of research, study, and applied learning.’

4. Conclusion

The new paradigm of openness is being readily adopted by a generation that has grown up in a culture of access. Rather than a rationale to justify the provision of information, they are more likely to question why they may not have access to any and all educational resources relevant to their interests and study needs. Support of Open Access publishing within the broader context of support for Open Educational Resources will set the tone for the apprenticeship of tomorrow’s academic leaders and ensure coherence between emerging principle and practice in post-graduate education.

References


