What Librarians Can Do to Promote Open Access

Launch an open-access, OAI-compliant institutional eprint archive, for both texts and data.

- The main reason for universities to have institutional repositories is to enhance the visibility, retrievability, and impact of the research output of the university. It will raise the profile of the work, the faculty, and the institution itself.

- A more specific reason is that a growing number of journals allow authors to deposit their postprints in institutional but not disciplinary repositories. Even though this is an almost arbitrary distinction, institutions without repositories will leave some of their faculty stranded with no way to provide OA to their work.

- "OAI-compliant" means that the archive complies with the metadata harvesting protocol of the Open Archives Initiative (OAI). This makes the archive interoperable with other compliant archives so that the many separate archives behave like one grand, virtual archive for purposes such as searching. This means that users can search across OAI-compliant archives without visiting the separate archives and running separate searches. Hence, it makes your content more visible, even if users don't know that your archive exists or what it contains. http://www.openarchives.org/

- There are almost a dozen open-source packages for creating and maintaining OAI-compliant archives. The four most important are Eprints (from Southampton University), DSpace (from MIT), CDSWare (from CERN), and FEDORA (from Cornell and U. of Virginia). http://www.eprints.org/software/

Help faculty deposit their research articles in the institutional archive.

- Many faculty are more than willing, just too busy. Some suffer from tech phobias. Some might need education about the benefits.

- For example, some university libraries have dedicated FTE's who visit faculty, office by office, to help them deposit copies of their articles in the institutional repository. The St. Andrews University Library asks faculty to send in their articles as email attachments and library staff will then deposit them in the institutional repository.

Consider publishing an open-access journal. Here are some early examples but not a complete list.

- Philosophers' Imprint, from the University of Michigan, is a peer-reviewed OA journal whose motto is, "Edited by philosophers. Published by librarians. Free to readers of the Web." Because the editors and publishers (faculty and librarians) are already on the university payroll, Philosophers' Imprint is a university-subsidized OA journal that does not need to charge upfront processing fees. http://www.philosophersimprint.org/

- The library of the University of Arizona at Tucson publishes the OA peer-reviewed Journal of Insect Science. For detail and perspective on its experience, see (1) Henry Hagedorn et al., Publishing by the Academic Library, a January 2004 conference presentation, and (2) Eulalia Roel, Electronic journal publication: A new library contribution to scholarly communication, College & Research Libraries News, January 2004. http://www.insectscience.org/

- The Boston College Libraries publish OA journals edited by BC faculty. See their press release from December 16, 2004. http://www.bc.edu/libraries/

- The OA Journal of Digital Information is now published by the Texas A&M University Libraries. http://jodi.tamu.edu/

Consider rejecting the big deal, or cancelling journals that cannot justify their high prices, and issue a public statement explaining why.

- See my list of other universities that have already done so. If they give you courage and ideas, realize that you can do the same for others. http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/lists.htm#actions

- Give presentations to the faculty senate, or the library committee, or to separate departments, educating faculty and adminstrators about the scholarly communication crisis and showing how open access is part of any comprehensive solution. You will need faculty and administrative support for these decisions, but other universities have succeeded in getting it.

Undertake digitization, access, and preservation projects not only for faculty, but for local groups, e.g. non-profits, community organizations, museums, galleries, libraries. Show the benefits of OA to the non-academic community surrounding the university, especially the non-profit community.

Join SPARC, a consortium of academic libraries actively promoting OA. http://www.arl.org/sparc/

Join the Alliance for Taxpayer Access, a coalition of U.S.-based non-profit organizations working for OA to publicly-funded research. See the existing members of the ATA. If you can persuade your university as a whole to join the ATA, then do that as well.
http://www.taxpayeraccess.org/member.html

A Very Brief Introduction to Open Access
by Peter Suber http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/hometoc.htm

Open-access (OA) literature is digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions. What makes it possible is the internet and the consent of the author or copyright-holder.

OA is entirely compatible with peer review, and all the major OA initiatives for scientific and scholarly literature insist on its importance. Just as authors of journal articles donate their labor, so do most journal editors and referees participating in peer review.

OA literature is not free to produce, even if it is less expensive to produce than conventionally published literature. The question is not whether scholarly literature can be made costless, but whether there are better ways to pay the bills than by charging readers and creating access barriers. Business models for paying the bills depend on how OA is delivered.

There are two primary vehicles for delivering OA to research articles: OA archives or repositories and OA journals.

OA Archives or repositories:

OA archives or repositories do not perform peer review, but simply make their contents freely available to the world. They may contain unrefereed preprints, refereed postprints, or both.

Archives may belong to institutions, such as universities and laboratories, or disciplines, such as physics and economics.

Authors may archive their preprints without anyone else's permission, and a majority of journals already permit authors to archive their postprints. When archives comply with the metadata harvesting protocol of the Open Archives Initiative, then they are interoperable and users can find their contents without knowing which archives exist, where they are located, or what they contain. There is now open-source software for building and maintaining OAI-compliant archives and worldwide momentum for using it. The costs of an archive are negligible: some server space and a fraction of the time of a technician.

OA Journals:

OA journals perform peer review and then make the approved contents freely available to the world. Their expenses consist of peer review, manuscript preparation, and server space.

OA journals pay their bills very much the way broadcast television and radio stations do: those with an interest in disseminating the content pay the production costs upfront so that access can be free of charge for everyone with the right equipment. Sometimes this means that journals have a subsidy from the hosting university or professional society. Sometimes it means that journals charge a processing fee on accepted articles, to be paid by the author or the author's sponsor (employer, funding agency).

OA journals that charge processing fees usually waive them in cases of economic hardship.

OA journals with institutional subsidies tend to charge no processing fees.

OA journals can get by on lower subsidies or fees if they have income from other publications, advertising, priced add-ons, or auxiliary services. Some institutions and consortia arrange fee discounts. Some OA publishers waive the fee for all researchers affiliated with institutions that have purchased an annual membership. There's a lot of room for creativity in finding ways to pay the costs of a peer-reviewed OA journal, and we're far from having exhausted our cleverness and imagination.