

## The Senate Resolution on Open Access at Concordia University

*"There is not much point in being the 'first' to do something if one does not do it right: the only university that has done it right university-wide so far in Canada is Concordia. Let us hope that this will now inspire many emulators."*<sup>i</sup>

Concordia University's *Resolution on Open Access* was passed by the university's Senate, its highest academic body, on April 16, 2010.<sup>ii</sup> Within weeks it was being celebrated as the first university-wide Green OA mandate in Canada and the 90th worldwide. This article will briefly describe the way in which Concordia's OA initiative unfolded over the 18 months prior to the Senate Resolution.<sup>iii</sup>

Concordia University is one of Canada's largest comprehensive universities, with some 45,000 full- and part-time students and well over 1,500 faculty members spread across two campuses in Montreal, Quebec. When I arrived at Concordia in July 2008, open access was already a topic under discussion at many universities in Canada and abroad. More than one hundred universities worldwide had given their support to open access, either by mandating their faculty to deposit peer-reviewed versions of their research in an OA repository prior to publishing it in an academic journal; or by issuing policy statements and initiating programs that were generally supportive of the movement. Concordia had hosted lectures on the topic and was in the process of creating its own institutional repository (IR). *Spectrum: Concordia University Research Repository* was eventually launched in 2009 during Open Access Week.<sup>iv</sup>

After a few months in my new position I had the very good fortune to meet Dr. Ron Rudin, a history professor who had recently been appointed the Academic Convener for the 2010 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences. The Congress is the largest annual gathering of academics in Canada, and Concordia would be hosting it for the first time under the theme "Connected Understanding". As we talked about the library's possible contributions to the Congress, the topic of open access came up. Professor Rudin mentioned that he wanted the Congress theme to have a legacy: should we bring a few like-minded individuals together to explore the possibility of an open access resolution, something like the one recently adopted by Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences?<sup>v</sup>

As a result, an Open Access Working Group, comprising about a dozen faculty, administrators and librarians, was created late Fall 2008. I was appointed its Chair and the Working Group made a few important decisions right away: that its initiative should embrace all four faculties; it should be primarily aimed at raising the level of awareness about the benefits of OA among faculty members; and – if enough were in agreement - it should have a Senate Resolution as its ultimate goal. Working back from the May 2010 date for Congress, we realized we had no time to lose in preparing the ground. We developed a plan whereby department chairs in all

faculties were encouraged to discuss open access at the departmental level over the winter and summer terms prior to discussions and votes at Faculty Councils in the Fall 2009. The results from Councils would form the basis for taking the issue to Senate in Spring 2010. Thanks largely to the support of the university's senior academic administration, including all of the Deans, we were able to stick quite closely to this roadmap despite the sheer logistical difficulty of getting OA onto the agendas of an extremely busy bunch of people. We did this partly by insisting that the conversation had to be completed in time for Congress.

We also "positioned" that conversation quite carefully. We commissioned and distributed a report on what OA might mean for Concordians; librarians developed a very useful Web page on the topic; and the Working Group helped me prepare a brief presentation that introduced the principal issues.<sup>vi</sup> These important resources encouraged faculty to explore the aspects of OA that concerned them most, and gave them access to materials prepared by advocacy groups such as SPARC (the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition). However, I always began any discussion by recognizing potential barriers and asking for advice from faculty. After all, when talking about academic publications, librarians are addressing something intimately tied to a researcher's professional advancement and sense of self. A discussion about OA is a great opportunity for any librarian to learn more about what matters to researchers in a particular discipline. The academy has been called a reputation economy, and if so then even very general statements about research are likely to provoke deeply personal responses.

Furthermore, the conservative structural core of academic life is still heavily defended and relatively untouched. At Concordia we mostly argued for OA support as a sensible values-based commitment to research dissemination that would respect – not overturn - the traditions of scholarly communication. The internet, we said, has delivered the potential to enhance the accessibility and impact of research, particularly for the benefit of developing nations and other less privileged communities, while preserving academic freedom and the essential integrity of the peer-review publishing process. Also, the receipt of public funds for research in Canada and elsewhere is increasingly linked to a requirement that the results be made publicly available in an open access forum. We wanted to enhance Concordia's reputation by being among the first universities to recognize officially what was already happening.

It turned out that hardly any faculty were against the principle of OA. Many professors and librarians – and students -- were pleased to add their own arguments in support of ours, even if they saw practical challenges. The three most commonly raised concerns were (1) the amount of time it took to verify author rights and deposit research in an OA environment; (2) the possible negative impact on scholarly publishing within certain disciplines; and (3) the fear that OA implied a loss of authorial control. A persistent opponent was the Faculty Association (CUFA), whose President eventually decided to e-mail a lengthy call to all its members to

oppose the OA Resolution less than 48 hours before the scheduled vote at Senate. The nub of CUFA's objection was not the principle behind OA but rather the requirement that the Resolution was seen to impose on its membership. Concordia's OA conversation would have undoubtedly been much less controversial as well as much less interesting if the Open Access Working Group had yielded to pressure from some quarters and merely encouraged, rather than required, OA deposit of scholarly articles accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. Fortunately, the text of the Draft Resolution was constructed to respond to the concerns raised in numerous faculty meetings in many different contexts. Exceptions to the requirement were included to cover those concerns. By the time of the Senate vote, the Resolution had already received overwhelming support in all Faculty Council votes. And although a sympathetic fellow Senator took me by the arm as I entered the Senate meeting room on April 16 and said how sorry he was that the Resolution was doomed to fail, it in fact passed - after yet one more long and animated debate - with only 2 or 3 votes against it.

So Concordia's successful OA initiative was celebrated at Congress as planned – our high-risk timetable had paid off! The Open Access Working Group is still meeting regularly but now, of course, we are living with the reality that even a Senate Resolution does not mean faculty members have the time or inclination to deposit their research or creative output in an IR or other OA venue. I am personally very proud of our initiative, and I believe it demonstrates one way in which academic libraries can play a critical role in enabling positive change. The debate we sparked across campus has greatly facilitated the university's long term engagement as a leader in the scholarly communications debate. It remains, however, a "hearts and minds" Resolution. As such, it is only one of many starting points from which Concordia's academic researchers may wish to explore ways to maximize the benefit of their work in the world today.

Gerald Beasley, University Librarian, Concordia University

---

<sup>i</sup> Stevan Harnad, Canada Research Chair in Cognitive Science at UQAM, blog entry May 10, 2010: <http://openaccess.eprints.org/>

<sup>ii</sup> *Whereas* Open access makes the results of publicly funded academic research and creative work accessible to everyone via the internet and succeeds by supplementing but not replacing peer-reviewed journals and other established publishing venues, *and whereas* Concordia University wishes to take a leadership role in Canada and exemplify social responsibility by supporting the principles of open access, and has recently launched *Spectrum*, an open access repository freely available to receive the refereed academic research output and creative work voluntarily deposited by Concordia faculty and others, with assistance from librarians and other library staff as required, thereby satisfying the requirements of a number of funding agencies in Canada and elsewhere without affecting the intellectual property rights, responsibilities and academic freedom of faculty members; *Be it moved that Senate recommends that Concordia University from now on* encourages all its faculty members to deposit an electronic copy of their refereed research output and creative work in *Spectrum*, along with nonexclusive permission to preserve and freely disseminate it, *and furthermore, in the specific case of any scholarly article accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal, from now on* requires all faculty members to deposit an electronic copy in *Spectrum* along with non-exclusive permission to preserve and freely disseminate it. This requirement is not binding in cases where publishers, co-authors or other rights holder disallow such a deposit.

---

Faculty members may also, without prejudice, opt out of the requirement by notifying the University Librarian in writing that their work has appeared, or will appear in another Open Access format; or by citing other factors that currently discourage them from depositing their work in an Open Access repository.

<sup>iii</sup> I am grateful to Jocelyn Godolphin, AUL, Collection Services, Concordia University, for her close reading of this text.

<sup>iv</sup> Spectrum: Concordia University Research Repository: <http://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/>

<sup>v</sup> <http://osc.hul.harvard.edu/hfaspolicy>

<sup>vi</sup> Open Access at Concordia University: A Report for the Office of Research. By Kathleen Shearer, MLIS, Consultant March 27, 2009. The report and other relevant readings are currently all available via Concordia Libraries' open access web page: <http://library.concordia.ca/research/openaccess/>