
THE EVOLVING ROLE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN THE AGE OF OPEN ACCESS

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Abstract : *Open access is reshaping how scholarship is produced, shared, and assessed. Academic libraries sit at the center of this change because they connect researchers, publishers, funders, and the public. This article explains how libraries support open access through policy guidance, repository services, publishing platforms, transformative agreements, rights education, data stewardship, and open pedagogy. It pairs practical service models with issues of equity, quality assurance, and sustainability. The article also outlines metrics to track impact and concludes with recommendations for building an inclusive, ethical, and durable open access program that strengthens research and learning.*

Keywords : academic libraries, open access, scholarly communication, repositories, transformative agreements, research data, rights retention, metadata, assessment

Introduction :

The promise of open access is simple to state: research should be available to read and reuse without paywalls or unnecessary restrictions. Since the Budapest Open Access Initiative articulated this vision in 2002, open access has expanded from a movement to a mainstream expectation across many fields (Budapest Open Access Initiative, 2002; SPARC, n.d.). Policies from funders and governments now require free and immediate access to articles and, increasingly, to underlying data. Examples include the 2022 U.S. OSTP guidance on public access and updated mandates at the National Institutes of Health (OSTP, 2022; NIH, 2025). With these shifts, academic libraries have moved from being primarily collection managers to becoming partners in scholarly production and open knowledge infrastructure.

This article describes the evolving roles that libraries play in the age of open access. It focuses on practical services that any library can adapt, from small institutions to research universities, while addressing equity and sustainability so that open access benefits a wide set of scholars and readers.

Open Access in Context :

Open access takes different forms. Gold open access makes articles freely available on the publisher's website. Green open access relies on authors depositing accepted manuscripts in trusted repositories, often after an embargo period. Diamond or platinum

open access provides free reading and free publishing, supported by institutions or consortia. Directories such as DOAJ help authors identify quality open access journals and policies (DOAJ, n.d.). At the policy level, initiatives like Plan S push for immediate access and standardized rights across funders and countries (cOAlition S, n.d.). Libraries help researchers navigate this landscape, select suitable venues, and stay compliant.

Open access also intersects with open research practices beyond articles. The UNESCO Recommendation on Open Educational Resources encourages open teaching materials, while data communities promote FAIR principles so that data can be found, accessed, interoperated, and reused (UNESCO, 2019; Wilkinson et al., 2016). As stewards of institutional knowledge, libraries are well placed to connect these strands.

3. Core Roles for Academic Libraries :

1. Policy translators and advisors :

Researchers face a mix of publisher rules and funder requirements. Librarians interpret mandates, explain rights, and help authors choose legal pathways that preserve reuse. This includes guidance on the NIH and other funder public access policies, Plan S requirements where relevant, and institutional open policies that enable deposit without friction (NIH, 2025; cOAlition S, n.d.; ACRL, 2025).

2. Repository infrastructure and metadata quality :

Institutional repositories are a backbone for green open access. Libraries configure deposit workflows, maintain persistent identifiers, and curate metadata that exposes research to global discovery systems. Interoperability guidelines, such as OpenAIRE's repository standards, help libraries align metadata with aggregators and funder reporting (OpenAIRE, 2022). Good metadata is not decoration. It drives search, compliance tracking, and real world use.

3. Library publishing and open journals :

Many libraries now run journals or conference series, often using open source platforms. Library publishing can reduce costs, improve transparency, and keep control of rights with authors and institutions. Publishing teams collaborate with subject librarians on editorial workflows, peer review support, accessibility checks, and ethical policies that guard against predatory practices. Where possible, libraries advocate diamond models that do not charge authors.

4. Transformative agreements and APC management :

Subscription budgets are slowly shifting toward open models. Libraries participate in read and publish or publish and read agreements that offset article processing charges, benchmark costs, and increase open output from their authors (ESAC, n.d.; SPARC, 2025). They also design local funds or waiver processes that prioritize equity, for example by supporting authors who lack grants or by discouraging unnecessary APC spending in hybrid journals when greener routes exist.

5. Rights retention and author education :

Copyright and licensing determine what readers can do with scholarship. Librarians teach authors how to retain the right to share accepted manuscripts, how to select Creative Commons licenses, and how to use tools like the SPARC Author Addendum. They also promote ORCID for persistent identity and improved attribution across systems, which reduces confusion and strengthens researcher profiles (ORCID, n.d.).

6. Research data, FAIR practices, and reproducibility :

Open articles often depend on open data. Libraries build data services that include management plans, curation, repository selection, and training on FAIR principles. They coordinate with research offices and IT to provide storage that protects privacy while enabling reuse where appropriate (Wilkinson et al., 2016).

7. Assessment and visibility beyond the journal impact factor :

Open access changes how research impact is traced. Libraries set up dashboards that combine repository downloads, citations, open citations, policy mentions, and community use. They teach responsible metrics and help departments include open practices in promotion and tenure language.

8. Open pedagogy and open educational resources :

Academic libraries collaborate with faculty to develop open textbooks and other OER that reduce student costs and allow adaptation to local context. This aligns teaching with the same open values that shape research, and it draws on the UNESCO recommendation as a policy anchor (UNESCO, 2019).

Practical Service Models :

Embedded liaison model :

Subject librarians integrate open access guidance into research consultations and graduate seminars. Short, timed sessions during proposal writing or manuscript submission tend to be most effective. Documentation lives in a visible toolkit or guide for reuse across departments (ACRL, 2025).

Repository first workflow :

Authors deposit accepted manuscripts through a simple form. The system captures ORCID iDs, checks publisher policies through services like Sherpa, validates metadata, and queues records for public release at the right time. Staff perform light curation and help authors select licenses aligned with funder terms (Jisc, 2024; OpenAIRE, 2022).

Library publishing studio :

A small cross functional team offers journal hosting, template design, editorial training, and accessibility checks. It adopts clear selection criteria, a statement on fees, and

a commitment to long term preservation.

Transformative agreement support :

Libraries maintain a public page that explains which publishers are covered, what authors need to do to qualify, and how to avoid surprise charges. They review costs annually, publish usage data, and compare options using resources from SPARC and ESAC (SPARC, 2025; ESAC, n.d.).

Data and reproducibility clinic :

Regular drop in hours help researchers with data management plans, repository deposit, and FAIR friendly documentation. The clinic maintains sample readme files and consent language.

Equity, Ethics, and Quality :

Open access should lower barriers, not create new ones. Libraries can mitigate inequities that result from article processing charges by preferring green routes, by negotiating agreements that include waivers, and by prioritizing no fee journals where appropriate. They should also screen for deceptive or predatory outlets and teach due diligence, for example by using quality criteria and directories with transparent standards such as DOAJ (DOAJ, n.d.).

Rights and privacy require care. Not all data can be open. Sensitive information must be protected, and consent must be respected. Libraries can help researchers plan tiered access, share code when data cannot be open, and deposit non sensitive documentation that still supports verification. Transparency in costs and contracts matters as well. Publicly sharing the outlines of transformative agreements and publishing policies builds trust with the campus community (SPARC, 2025).

Measuring Impact and Managing Risk :

A small, meaningful set of indicators will help leaders track progress without creating busywork. Examples include repository deposits and growth trends, percentage of articles available open within a year of publication, use of persistent identifiers like ORCID, downloads and citation upticks for open versions, author satisfaction, and compliance with specific funder policies such as NIH timelines (NIH, 2025). Risk should be managed openly. This includes monitoring publisher workflow changes, agreement costs, license compliance, and local staffing needs as services scale.

Challenges and Practical Responses :

- **Budget pressure.** As open costs move into library budgets, price transparency and lifecycle costing are essential. Libraries can cap APC support, prefer fully open journals that meet quality criteria, and coordinate with consortia to negotiate agreements.
- **Workload and skills.** Scholarly communication touches legal, technical, and

cultural skills. Cross training, clear role definitions, and participation in communities of practice help teams deliver consistent service.

- **Policy complexity.** Requirements are evolving. Libraries can maintain a single, continuously updated web guide, send short policy alerts to liaisons, and schedule annual policy refresh sessions with research offices.
- **Quality concerns.** Authors worry about journal credibility. Using directories and checklists, plus local consultations, helps them choose journals that match ethical and disciplinary standards (DOAJ, n.d.; SPARC, n.d.)

Recommendations :

1. Adopt a concise campus open access policy that permits deposit of accepted manuscripts and aligns with major funder mandates.
2. Make the repository the default disclosure channel with simple deposit, strong metadata, and ORCID integration (OpenAIRE, 2022; ORCID, n.d.).
3. Publish clear guidance on journals, licenses, and agreements, and include equity rules for any APC support (ESAC, n.d.; SPARC, 2025).
4. Build a visible author education program, including rights retention, data sharing options, and responsible metrics.
5. Expand library publishing where it fills a disciplinary gap and can be sustained.
6. Track a small metrics set, report regularly, and use feedback to improve workflows.
7. Connect open access to open pedagogy so that students benefit directly through OER adoption (UNESCO, 2019).

Conclusion :

Open access has changed what it means to support scholarship. Academic libraries have become policy navigators, infrastructure providers, educators, negotiators, and publishers. When these roles are coordinated, open access does not only satisfy mandates. It increases the reach and usefulness of campus research, strengthens accountability to the public, and supports teaching and learning. With pragmatic workflows, attention to equity and ethics, and honest assessment, libraries can guide their communities through the next phase of open scholarship.

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