Katharine Dunn: Open access is still viewed as a bold step—when it should be the norm

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**Katharine Dunn** is Scholarly Communications Librarian at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the premiere educational institute in the world. She works with Scholarly Communications and Collections Strategy department (SCCS) that aims to transform scholarly communications for the digital age with innovative and sustainable stewardship of the MIT Libraries' collections. She supportsfaculty and researchers working with the MIT Faculty Open Access (OA) policy and research funder requirements.

In this interview for Open Interview with Santosh C. Hulagabali, Katharine Dunn shares the growth story and OA initiatives at MIT. She throws light on how the OA initiatives such as OpenCourseWare, DSpace and open policy were introduced at MIT and how MIT puts a lot of resources into its policy implementation with a dedicated team to look after OA affairs, and policy advocacy and its implementation. Further, she talks on how MIT's scholarly communication office deals with article/book publishing charges, publishing models, self-archiving, negotiations with publishers, etc. She openly shares how challenging is it to be a scholarly communications librarian, be it MIT or anywhere.

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.• Indeed, the open access (OA) community, educators, researchers, library professionals and learners owe a lot to MIT community as it was a pioneer in introducing path-breaking learning and knowledge dissemination platforms viz. OpenCourseWare in 2001, DSpace in 2002 and many other significant pro-OA initiatives. When many academic institutes yet to come forward for open sharing, how MIT could do it way back in 2001 and made significant impact?

In broad terms, it's easiest to go back to MIT's mission statement:

> _"The Institute is committed to generating, disseminating, and preserving knowledge, and to working with others to bring this knowledge to bear on the world's great challenges."_

"Dissemination of knowledge" is a core value that people return to again and again when making decisions around open sharing—including during the creation of OCW, DSpace, and MIT's faculty OA policy.

That said, OpenCourseWare wasn't originally meant to be "open." Its history is recounted in a great article in the MIT Faculty Newsletter on the 20th anniversary in 2021. The short version is that a faculty committee formed in summer 2000 to look at how MIT could sustainably make money from online courses. They didn't come up with "financially viable and exciting" ideas, so they turned to MIT's values and asked how the Institute could be a leader and make an impact in the relatively new era of the World Wide Web.

The committee advocated for freely sharing course materials. And, once Creative Commons launched in 2001, OCW adopted CC licenses so anyone around the world could share, reuse, and remix copyrighted material.

When asked why MIT decided to give away teaching materials for free, then-President Charles Vest said:

> "When you share money, it disappears; but when you share knowledge, it increases."

• DSpace is 20 years old now. Undoubtedly, DSpace is one of the remarkable milestones in the OA domain. No one can tell this better than a librarian! I should say— MIT not only gave birth to a path-breaking technical platform but set a classic culture of openly sharing scholarly literature. how could this happen?

My answer here would be similar to what I said before. MIT has a long history of this work, though many others outside of MIT have been pushing "open" too.

• MIT adopted the first campus-wide OA policy in 2009. What is the current status of open access policy adoption in the leading institutes of America?

Many of the top-ranked universities in the US have OA policies, including Harvard, Princeton, Columbia, Caltech, University of California, University of Chicago. Overall in North America, about one hundred universities or research institutions have OA policies, according to ROARMAP (Registry of OA Repository Mandates & Policies). (There are around 2,600 four-year colleges in the US).

Overall, it's not a huge number, but that's not necessarily a surprise. The top-ranked universities are among the best-resourced institutions in the world. It takes a lot of effort and time to get faculty and university leadership buy-in to make an OA policy happen. We've had one for so long at MIT that we can sometimes forget this. Even non-controversial matters can take a lot of time to get through university bureaucracy, and open access is sometimes still viewed as a bold step—when it should be the norm.

• One thing I could sense more frequently in your white paper i.e. *Open Access at MIT and Beyond: A White Paper of the MIT Ad Hoc Task Force on Open Access to MIT's Research* that there is an increased awareness about OA Policy among

MITians and also we could see its high compliance rate too. What makes the policy implementation and its compliance successful?

We put a lot of resources into our OA policy implementation. Libraries' staff make OA policies happen, and in our library we have a fulltime employee dedicated to reaching out to faculty to get papers and depositing them into our institutional repository, DSpace; a manager of the repository; a scholarly communications librarian managing OA implementation; tech support for DSpace; and a mission and vision in the Libraries and at MIT more broadly that that support this work.

About 55% of faculty papers published since the OA policy passed in 2009 are now open access in DSpace@MIT. This, we think, is quite a high percentage compared with other universities (though it's tough to find statistics on this), but it's still only about half of the articles faculty have published. In part, this is because our policy is not a mandate; it's not tied to research funds like the NIH public access policy, or Plan S, for example.

• In the white paper, you have discussed on present OA policies and movements in Europe plus the United States to present a broader context to what OA means in practice. In a similar context, how do you see the Asian scenario?

You're right that the white paper doesn't address OA outside of North America and Europe. There's not a great reason for why we didn't broaden out more globally, other than that we were looking at where OA blossomed early on, and a lot of that history is in Europe and the UK.

In some ways, Asian countries seem to have more in common with European ones than with the US when it comes to open and OA. According to an interview posted on the Scholarly Kitchen, three countries in Asia have national-level OA policies (China, Cyprus, and UAE). This isn't a huge number (though China is apparently the world's biggest producer of scholarly articles), but it's more like what countries in Europe and the UK can do and that the US has trouble doing: We are much more fragmented and less centralized here. (Though there is a push to create a national OA policy for the US, it's not yet become law after many years of effort.)

It's heartening to see the work happening in India under the Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy (STIP) from 2020. There are two interesting aspects that I wanted to highlight: one is that the policy prioritizes green OA, or self-archiving of manuscript versions into repositories, over a national push towards funding article processing charges (APC) for OA publishing (gold OA).

Here at MIT we do a mix of both, of course—we have an OA policy and sign OA publishing agreements with publishers. But green OA is a more equitable approach. APCs and "read and publish" agreements are arguably a kind of commercial open access that exclude a lot of people, and, as we all know, there are other ways to go about opening up scholarship.

The policy also includes the "One Nation, One Subscription" idea: National-level subscriptions to journals whose terms include read access to any reader in India—not just on-campus researchers. Both the national OA mandate and national subscription are still in the works, I believe. But both will hopefully happen.

• What is thestatus of self-archiving at MIT? How challenging is self-arching by faculty or authors? The reason is, not to offend any author or institute–– some librarians are silently archiving in the absence of self-archiving. It's true in the case of Indian educational institutes including IISc. It is also true that self-archiving is high in some disciplines. What is your take on this?

It's very common for MIT researchers to self-archive their preprints, depending on the field they're in. Physics folks put everything in arXiv, for example, and economists use SSRN. Lots of people are depositing to the arXiv "clones" like bioRxiv and socArXiv.

When we look for papers to deposit under the OA policy, we often find them in preprint repositories like these. The physics community so consistently uses arXiv that years ago the MIT Physics department head told us to go there to find papers when we were doing outreach under the OA policy.

Researchers also post on commercial sites like academia.edu and ResearchGate. We don't actively discourage using these sites (as it's not our place to police where people post), but we teach classes and do outreach around what versions to post and how these for-profit, ad-based sites have different priorities from DSpace and other open repositories.

I think of our work depositing papers to DSpace on behalf of authors under the OA policy as a form of self-archiving. The structure of it is the same whether they're doing it or we are: The OA policy is permission from authors to share and reuse their articles. We, in the Libraries, are making it easier for them to comply with the policy by "self"-archiving for them.

• The publishing dynamics of faculty in in-house journals and outside journals differ. The MIT Press is also publishing eight OA journals which frequently include articles by MIT faculty. Could you please share on how MIT Press is promoting OA and connected with your scholarly communication division/librarianship?

Our MIT Libraries department (Scholarly Communications and Collections Strategy) works closely with the Press, and we have for quite a few years. We've given financial support to OA journals like Quantitative Science Studies, Neurobiology of Language, Rapid Reviews: Covid 19; as well as the Press' new Direct to Open (D2O) model for funding OA monographs. The Press currently has 14 open access journals, and it will have 15 next year.

MIT Press Director of Journals and Open Access Nick Lindsay is on our scholarly communications strategy team in the Libraries; this is where we make many decisions about where to spend funds on OA and other open initiatives.

• It is heartening to note that there is a significant commitment by individual faculty of MIT to make their books openly available. Could you please throw light on OA book publishing, OA text-books at MIT in particular and the United States in general?

We've had an OA fund to support APCs for articles in fully open access journals for more than a decade. In the last couple of years, we started getting requests from MIT authors to support making their monographs open access. We've funded half a dozen OA monographs so far.

The MIT Open Access Task Force (for which I wrote the white paper you refer to) recommends that MIT adopt an OA policy for monographs as well as establish a fund to help offset book publishing charges for OA monographs.

The former hasn't happened yet—it is a harder sell to create an OA policy for books than for articles. But we recently got funds from the MIT Provost to do a one-year trial of funding MIT-authored monographs. We are now figuring out the best ways to reach authors on campus, particularly those from "under"-funded fields, or who are women or people of color, or who are publishing in areas with a social justice focus. We want to try to distribute the funds in as equitable a way as possible, and we're just starting to determine how best to do that.

In terms of textbooks, at MIT we haven't been working on this issue in the Libraries, though of course the Institute is very active in open education via OCW and MITx.

In the US more broadly, there's an Open Textbook Pilot program that the US Congress has funded since 2018; in March they announced $11 million in new funding for open textbooks. There is also legislation that, like OA legislation, has gone through several Congresses without passing. The Affordable College Textbook Act would expand the use of open and freely available textbooks across US campuses.

• How does MIT handle APC related issues?

We try to think very carefully the money we have and how we spend it. As I mention above, the Libraries have a fund for OA article APCs. It's popular; we have run out of money the past two years. And we are now paying book publishing charges (BPCs) on a limited basis as well. But we are also wary of APCs. We know there are many issues with them, including the fact that they can exclude authors who don't have the means to pay them.

As MIT Libraries Director Chris Bourg and a faculty colleague wrote last year,

> *"Our experience has led us to become increasingly concerned about the implications of per-article payment models. Locking in a norm where an author, funder, and/or institution must pay an opaque and often costly fee for the right to publish an article risks locking out scholars from less privileged institutions and less well funded disciplines. Equitable opportunity to contribute to scholarly literature is as important for the integrity and usefulness of scholarship as is the open accessibility to read."*

We have been signing agreements with publishers like Royal Society of Chemistry, ACM, Springer, Wiley, Taylor & Francis, that give our authors free OA publishing; they don't have to worry about whether they have funds to pay APCs or not. This is very important to us. But the global equity issues are more complex; many institutions cannot afford to sign agreements like these.

We are big fans of diamond OA (free for both readers and authors), and we want to do more in this space. We support several diamond OA journals that are funded through community action.

• To get archive maximum number of papers, you negotiate agreements with publishers to automatically receive papers of MIT's research community. How hard it is to negotiate with the publishers and what is the common response you get from publishers?

Back when the faculty OA Policy first passed in 2009, some smaller publishers reached out to us and asked to implement an auto-deposit process. Others have engaged with us on this more recently as we support their exploration of new financial models to sustainably increase open access in scholarly communications.

In many cases, there are some light-weight options that even publishers with smaller technical support teams can implement. In other cases, where more structural work is necessary, we work closely with publishers to collaborate on a system that works for both parties, and troubleshoot the issues together. Because of our flexibility and pragmatism, it is rare for a publisher to not at least explore the options around this element of the Framework with us.

• You deal with the best of best minds at MIT. How challenging it is to be a scholarly communication librarian at MIT?

I think it's challenging to be a scholarly communications librarian anywhere! Nearly every day there's an announcement in the world of OA, open scholarship, publishing, or author rights. It can be tough to balance keeping up with changes, innovations, and setbacks while at the same time serving your community.

MIT is in some ways an easier place for a scholcomm librarian to be because there are so many researchers and faculty members on board with "open" and with pushing boundaries. We wouldn't have an <u>OA policy</u>, the <u>OATF recommendations</u>, an <u>MIT Framework for publisher contracts</u> without MIT researchers who care a lot about these issues.

As our director Chris Bourg <u>recently said</u> at a conference,

> *"[We've had] amazing progress considering we have asked the least powerful stakeholders (libraries) to take on the most powerful (publishers) with an eye to 'minimizing burden on authors.'"*

This progress requires collective action by and with faculty and university leadership, and that's what we've been trying to do and doing since we started having a scholcomm program in the MIT Libraries.

• What are the key OA areas where in MIT is presently working and also for immediate future?

A team made up of folks from across the MIT campus has been implementing <u>recommendations from the OA Task Force</u>. Some of these will take a good deal of effort from the community, particularly MIT leadership, so they will take time.

For example, recommendation 10 calls for the Provost to direct departments, labs, and centers on campus to create plans to encourage open sharing. This is a huge task, and there are many complications: the pandemic threw a wrench in everything and priorities on campus shifted.

We also know that "encouraging open sharing" is not enough to make fundamental changes to scholarly communications so that it's more open and equitable. We believe the ways in which <u>promotion and tenure are measured and rewarded</u> need to be changed. Incentives for researchers should move away from making "science as a commodity" to "science as a public good," <u>as framed</u> by Arianna Becerril García, Professor and Executive Director of the Mexican Digital Library Redalyc, in a recent interview.

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Note • *All the answers/ opinions expressed in this document are of the interviewee.*

Courtesy • *Dunn's introduction: <u>mit.edu/</u> & image: <u>2019charlestonlibraryconference.sched.com/</u>*

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