

Open Access, Federal Librarians, and Open Source Integrated Library Systems

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As a current LIS student and active advocate for Open Access, here are some of my recent reflections on Open Access:

Open Access in Context

For a paper on open source, I proposed two working concepts on open source: (1) the [spectrum of open information](#) and (2) [web of open information](#). Open Access Week is part of the larger Open Access movement. In turn, Open Access can be viewed more broadly, by which I mean, it is worth discussing the idea of “open source” as a concept and how it relates to other “open” movements, like freeware, Open Access, Copyleft movement, and to a lesser extent, free online tools. All of these open information movements can be viewed through the principles of a free and open library. Salve and his coauthors note succinctly, “[b]oth libraries and open source have the same philosophy, i.e., ‘community first’.”

Federal Librarians and Open Access

This past summer I participated in a Federal Libraries Resource workshop. Each federal librarian spoke directly about how they serve the American public and the importance of making publicly-funded government documents available to the American public. Federal libraries can also face security (e.g., classified information) or even accessibility (e.g., grey sources) limitations to making information publicly available.

Across the government federal libraries are now assisted by the [Open Government Initiative](#) mandate and the [Office of Science and Technology Public Access Policy](#).

At the 2013 SLA conference, Michael Carroll updated attendees on public access to DoD-funded research. Federally-funded data creation, along with data mining, were trending issues with regards to open access and fair use. Additionally, Carroll raised the issue of ownership and who actually owns the rights. The status quo says the publishers own the rights, yet legal arguments can be made that the author retains those rights. A third and emerging viewpoint centers on the ownership role of funding institutions.

Open Source Integrated Library Systems (ILS)

During the spring semester I reviewed the state of open source ILS systems and weighed its pros and cons:

Advantages:

- Cost effective: the cost and use of the ILS software is free, but the cost of developing and maintaining an in-house program may be a significant financial difference
- Scalable: open source can more readily able meet different sized libraries and their content
- Customizable: rather than waiting for a vendor to create a module or enhancement, open source allows for creation to be dependent on the library's technical abilities
- Portability: even when switching from different support vendors, you do not need to replace and learn a whole new ILS system. Unlike with proprietary vendors, libraries have a choice of platforms and do not have to remain with one vendor or commercial support firm.

Disadvantages:

- Not all open source is created equal: quality is not guaranteed
- Most libraries must engage a commercial support firm to maintain and customize their open source ILS software

Websites of interest:

- [Lib-Web-Cats](#) — Database of which libraries use which ILS, including open source ILS systems.
- [Foss4Lib](#) — Library open source software portal.