

SYMPOSIUM ON THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF OPENNESS IN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

1. Introduction

A host of initiatives predicated on the notion of “openness” has flourished in recent years. Open Access, Open Educational Resources, Open Source, Open Data and Open Innovation are now familiar terms, and “openness” has been a central theme of the ELPUB conferences in recent years. Each of these activities occupy a distinct intellectual space, yet they appear to share a common set of principles and practices that are collectively transforming the ways knowledge is being produced, shared, consumed, and disseminated. While the effects of these open practices are increasingly observable in the university, the awareness of the opportunities and the consequences for both individuals and universities continues to be unevenly distributed across the institutional landscape. At the same time, these ideas and the initiatives associated with them have, for the most part, originated within the academy, and although universities continue to be a primary site of knowledge production, there is a growing tension between tradition academic values of sharing and institutional concerns about income generation and sustainability.

Collectively we face a challenge. The limited and uneven uptake both by individuals and by the institutions themselves is of concern. For example, despite the demonstrated advantages of Open Access for scholarly publishing, only a small percentage of faculty members make their publications openly accessible. Open Educational Resources remain a specialised pursuit despite the benefits to faculty and learners. Computer scientists have found it difficult to integrate Open Source into their curriculum, and contributing source code to Open Source projects is rarely recognized in formal academic evaluations for tenure and promotion. At the same time, universities are more interested in finding ways to commercialise intellectual property resulting from faculty research than in finding ways to maximize the potential of Open Innovation and developing new business models to generate

income and accelerate innovation. How do we move this diverse agenda forward in ways that engage faculty, students and staff as well as our institutional leaders?

We propose to begin a conversation on institutionalisation, to explore the possibilities and potential challenges of more formal processes, and to consider how our experiences in our own institutions might be shared and subsequently used to leverage action elsewhere. Universities as institutions regularly compare themselves with others using a variety of published data and indicators. How might access to evidence of successful institutionalisation of open practices and processes as well as the strategies employed in these cases support members of this community in our local efforts for change?

2. Goal

The goal of the Symposium is to explore the idea of the institutionalisation of openness both as a concept and strategically.

- Intellectually, we will explore the nature of openness and what constitutes it, asking if it is appropriate to describe openness in terms of “dimensions” – e.g., open access, etc., and how we might characterise the commonalities and differences across these practices;
- Strategically, we will explore ways in which to move the openness agenda forward as well as identify factors that might enhance or retard its adoption by faculty, students and staff and institutions.

3. Format

The Symposium will take the form of an “unconference”. By using an open participatory process that acknowledges and respects the different origins and traditions represented by the existing communities on the open landscape our goal is to provide a space for critical discussions in which we can map out both strategy and a research agenda to help move forward collectively. There will not be conventional presentations, rather opportunities to present short position statements, brief reports on ongoing projects, summaries of current research, etc. Contributions should focus on the theme of “openness”, while keeping in mind that the phenomenon of openness is itself subject to debate and interpretation. We suggest the following questions to start the conversation; they are not meant to be exhaustive:

- What constitutes openness?
- Can we use these practices to open up new spaces for social and institutional

change? In what ways do open practices call into question traditional notions of authority and power? Where is there support, why is there resistance?

- Can we leverage examples of successful institutionalisation by working collectively, developing “metrics” and encouraging comparative analysis?
- What are the key research questions for which we need answers?

4. Expectations/Outcomes

By the end of the Symposium we hope to have:

- developed a more nuanced understanding of the value of framing openness a multi-dimensional concept;
- generated a list of key research questions on the institutionalisation of openness;
- identified a group of people interested in exploring these ideas further;
- produced a list of possible themes for a future ELPUB conference.

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