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A Comparison of Research Sharing Tools: The Institutional Repository vs. Academic Social Networking Among University of Rhode Island Faculty

Julia Lovett  
*University of Rhode Island, jalovett@uri.edu*

Andrée Rathemacher  
*University of Rhode Island, andree@uri.edu*

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A Comparison of Research Sharing Tools: The Institutional Repository vs. Academic Social Networking Among University of Rhode Island Faculty

Julia Lovett & Andrée Rathemacher

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In recent years, academic social networking sites such as ResearchGate and Academia.edu have been gaining popularity as a way for scholars to share their work and make connections.

This indicates that scholars want to share their work, and that is good news for Open Access.

But for universities with OA policies, it is possible that academic social networks are competing with IRs for faculty content. At the very least, they are at odds with the mission of OA policies to provide researchers with a legal, non-commercial, and long-term method of sharing their work.

Today I’ll present the preliminary results of our study at the University of Rhode Island examining what motivates faculty authors to share their work through ResearchGate—in many cases violating their publishing contracts—versus complying with our permissions-based OA Policy.

Note: We decided to focus on ResearchGate instead of Academia.edu because it seemed to us that more URI faculty were using RG. Also, a review of the literature confirmed that RG is more heavily used by researchers and is a significant source of openly available scholarly content, second only to nih.gov.
ResearchGate logo source: https://www.researchgate.net/press
Academia.edu logo image source: https://commons.wikimedia.org
Open Access logo image source: https://commons.wikimedia.org
University of Rhode Island

Rhode Island’s public research university

Land-grant and sea-grant institution

Research strengths (per Web of Science):

● Engineering
● Environmental sciences
● Chemistry
● Oceanography
● Marine freshwater biology
● Pharmacology
● Psychology
URI Open Access Policy

Passed by unanimous vote of Faculty Senate in March 2013

Permissions-based policy (Harvard-style)

Applies to all faculty

Supported by manual workflow that relies on active faculty participation

Search alerts notify library staff of new articles by URI authors

Staff e-mail authors for manuscripts; deposit on authors’ behalf
As others have acknowledged, passing an OA policy takes a lot of work, but the really hard part is getting faculty to provide their articles for deposit.

The faculty response rate to our e-mail requests for known articles is only about 20%.

But yet, we had the impression that URI faculty were flocking to ResearchGate and uploading the full-text of their articles there.

We asked ourselves, “What, are URI faculty sitting around in their bunny slippers all weekend, uploading their articles to ResearchGate, when they won’t even respond to our emails to comply with the OA Policy?”

This question might be less relevant for an institution like MIT that harvests a large portion of faculty articles and only asks faculty to provide manuscripts as a last resort.

But for us, because we require active faculty participation for the success of our policy, comparing faculty engagement with ResearchGate versus the OA Policy seemed important.

We wanted to find out if URI faculty really were choosing ResearchGate over the IR, and, if so, why and to what extent?

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Image source: http://robhirschfeld.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/bunny-slippers.jpg
Our study

Population study of full-time URI faculty (September 2016)

- Which faculty members have uploaded full-text articles to ResearchGate?
- Which faculty members have contributed articles to the URI OA Policy?

Web-based survey of full-time URI faculty (October 2016)

- Familiarity with both the OA Policy and ResearchGate
- Level of participation in both the OA Policy and ResearchGate
- Motivations, benefits, concerns
- If not participated in OA Policy or ResearchGate, why?
- Understanding of legality of sharing articles
Goal of population study: To define the scope of the “problem.”

Obtained a list of all full-time faculty from the Office of Human Resources of all full-time faculty. Looked up each person’s department and rank, assigned them to a broad discipline: A&H, SOC, or STEM.

Removed faculty in lecturer rank (since they are not expected to publish), faculty who had retired or left the university, any administrators or non-faculty who appeared on the list in error, and visiting professors. Final population: 558 full-time faculty members [from 728, less 170].

For each faculty member:

- Number of articles submitted in compliance with OA Policy [from our internal OA Policy tracking statistics]
- Whether they had a profile on ResearchGate [from publicly-available RG profile]
- Total number of full-text articles uploaded to RG by author (When logged in, RG: “Contributions” => “Full-Texts” author as source)
- Total number of full-text articles uploaded to RG by author published since March 2013 (when OA Policy was passed).

Note: Count excluded any works on ResearchGate that would not be covered by the OA Policy, e.g. posters, book chapters, working papers, research & technical reports.
Population study results

- 47% of URI full-time faculty have profiles on ResearchGate.
- Of these profiles, 73% have full-text articles provided by author.

BUT FOR COMPARISON...

- **ResearchGate**: # of faculty who provided full-texts of articles published *after March 2013*

  vs.

- **Open Access Policy**: # of faculty who provided articles in compliance with policy
Note slide content: 20.3% articles to RG; 15.4% articles to OAP.

Here, I want to note some **SHORTCOMINGS** in our data:

- **OA Policy participation was underestimated**
  - Gold OA articles not counted (because uploaded under publisher CC license and not our more restrictive OA Policy TOU) -- our stats are based on license under which article was uploaded.
  - Each article only counted once, under author who submitted it; not counted again as compliance by any URI co-authors.

- **ResearchGate participation was overestimated**
  - ResearchGate has been reported to harvest full-texts from the open Web, so possible that full-texts in RG were not all there as the result of direct author intention
  - If multiple URI co-authors uploaded the same article to RG, it would be counted twice (unlike with OA Policy)

So, given that the data is skewed in favor of ResearchGate, and that the difference here is only 4.9 percent, maybe the situation is not as “bad” as we thought?
This is another way of looking at the data. Here we have a 30/70 breakdown.

Total faculty participating in RG, OAP, or doing both is 29.4%
Total faculty not participating in RG or OAP is 70.6%
A breakdown by DISCIPLINE seems to confirm reports in the literature that RG is preferred by those in the sciences.
A breakdown by RANK reveals much higher levels of participation in both RG and OAP by full professors.

This is interesting because some studies have shown that younger faculty are generally more likely to contribute to institutional repositories.
Survey results: Demographics

- 23 multiple-choice questions through SurveyMonkey
- Sent successfully to 710 full-time URI faculty (all ranks)
- 135 responses = 19% response rate
- Responses by College: relative to distribution of faculty,
  - Arts & Sciences under-represented by 11%
  - College of the Environment & Life Sciences over-represented by 12%
- Responses by Rank
  - Full professors over-represented by ~15%
  - Assistant Professors and Lecturers under-represented
First we wanted to gauge how much survey participants know about the Open Access Policy.

This chart shows respondents’ self-reported familiarity with the Policy. As you can see, just under half say “familiar”.

Right away this seems like a very high number based on our experience talking with faculty.

This appears to be because faculty who answered the survey were more likely to have complied with the Policy.
Survey results: Understanding of OA Policy

More objective assessment from True/False questions:

- 31% “Not Sure” which statements described policy
- Some good news:
  - Majority of respondents understand the policy applies to URI faculty, covers journal articles, is not under the purview of the administration, and that authors may opt out.
- Some bad news:
  - A significant minority think that the policy applies to URI grad students (i.e. ETDs)

To get a more objective assessment of faculty understanding, we also asked: “Which of the following statements describe the URI Open Access Policy?” Some were true statements, others weren’t.
We asked the same questions about ResearchGate.

Results show that in general the survey population believe themselves more familiar with RG than the OAP.

A higher proportion say they are “very familiar” with RG than with the OA Policy. Fewer are “neutral.”

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**Very familiar:** 8% OAP; 24%
**Neutral:** 25% OAP; 14%
Survey results: Understanding of ResearchGate

Q12 Which of the following statements describe ResearchGate?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ResearchGate is a social networking site for scientists and researchers</td>
<td>49.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ResearchGate allows researchers to share their research, ask and answer questions, and find collaborators</td>
<td>68.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ResearchGate is run by a non-profit organization</td>
<td>7.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ResearchGate provides Open Access to research</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ResearchGate only allows the sharing of journal articles (not books, data, etc.)</td>
<td>8.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is always legal to share your journal articles on ResearchGate</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is not necessary to consult journal policies before uploading articles</td>
<td>2.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>36.64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Respondents: 131

Again, we offered a series of true and false statements to more objectively gauge familiarity.

More faculty were “not sure” about RG (37%) than the OA Policy (32%),

But a majority of respondents answered the RG questions correctly; there were fewer misunderstandings than with the OA Policy.
Survey results: Rates of participation

**Open Access Policy**

51% have participated =>
Here we can really see how survey responses are skewed toward faculty who have participated (or believe they have), because we know from internal statistics that only around 13% of all faculty have complied with the OA Policy.

39% haven't participated
9% not sure

**ResearchGate**

42% have participated (lower than OA Policy!) =>
This is compared with our population study, which showed that only 34% of faculty had contributed full-texts to ResearchGate. This suggests survey respondents are more likely to have uploaded articles to ResearchGate.

45% have not participated
11% not sure
Survey results: Motivations for participating

**Open Access Policy**

72% “Sharing my work more broadly”
56% “Increasing the visibility and impact of my work”

**ResearchGate**

More motivating factors overall, including:
- Ease of participation
- Connecting with other researchers
- Tracking statistics on downloads of my work

Incidentally, when we asked faculty about the **benefits** of participating, they more or less matched the **motivations** listed here, though a number of faculty commented that participating in the OA Policy provided no benefit or they were unsure of the benefit.
Survey results: Motivations for participating

**OA Policy**

- Many commented that they were complying with requirements or participated because they were asked (“pressure to do so”; “thought i had to”; “urged to by library staff”; “i received an email from URI library asking for the articles”)
- A couple idealists (“social justice”, “supporting open access”)

**ResearchGate**

- Being asked was also a motivation for RG participation (“I was asked to”; “Requests for articles”)

Comments section.
Survey results: Concerns and barriers to participation

**OA Policy takeaways:**

- Biggest concern: the *author manuscript version*
- People also cited *lack of time* and *lack of awareness* as both barriers and concerns
- A fair number also said “no concerns”

**ResearchGate takeaways**

- Many had “no concerns”
- 31% cited *concern about the legality of participating*
- Comments: “don’t trust” or not into social media; several not having time / “haven’t gotten around to it”
Survey results: Legality of participation

Half correctly responded that the OA Policy is legal, though the comments on this question show a lot of misunderstanding.

The main misunderstanding is that authors believe that the legality of participation depends on publisher policies.

For ResearchGate, more people weren't sure. Most of the comments again indicate that they believe legality depends on publisher policies and the version posted.
“If you have contributed to ResearchGate but have not participated in the URI Open Access Policy, why?”

- Many cite ease of participation and that ResearchGate accepts the final published version
- Common misunderstanding: ResearchGate has a broader audience than IR
  - False: OA Policy articles reach entire internet; ResearchGate articles are in Google Scholar but can only be downloaded by those logged in to their RG account

Finally… this question gets at the heart of what we are trying to understand.
Main takeaways so far...

- Only a minority of faculty share articles through ResearchGate and/or OA Policy. Sharing is done disproportionately by full professors in the sciences.
- People really don’t like sharing the author manuscript version.
- Ease of participation is key.
- Actively asking people for their articles is key.
- Sharing work more broadly and increasing visibility are the two main motivations and perceived benefits for both OA Policy and ResearchGate (so we should emphasize how the OA Policy does this better)
- There are many misunderstandings about the legal aspects of the OA Policy.

Next steps: We’re working with an economics faculty member and his graduate student to conduct a statistical analysis that may yield additional insights.

We see these study results as evidence that we definitely need to do more outreach to faculty about the OA Policy.
Questions?

jalovett@uri.edu • andree@uri.edu