



University of  
Massachusetts  
Amherst

## Special Report of the Research Council concerning the Open Access Policy Review

Item Type	Other
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# UMass Amherst Open Access Policy Review

## Report to the Faculty Senate

### Executive Summary

The [UMass Amherst Open Access Policy](#) (UMA OAP) was passed by the Faculty Senate on April 7, 2016 and went into effect on July 1, 2016. It was [sponsored by the Research Council](#), and it stipulated: “The policy will be reviewed by the Provost (or designee) after three years and a report presented to the Faculty Senate.” The University Libraries have acted as the Provost’s designee to administer the UMA OAP and manage ScholarWorks, the institutional repository through which UMA faculty can share their author accepted manuscripts for articles and book chapters. The UMA OAP review was conducted by the Libraries over the 2024-25 academic year in consultation with the Research Council and Research Library Council.

The review team of librarians assessed faculty awareness of and compliance with the 2016 UMA OAP and sought insights on faculty understanding of the UMA OAP and its relationship to their scholarly publishing practices. This data was gathered through a survey, focus groups, and an analysis of UMA-authored journal articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings.

UMass faculty published 32,584 unique articles, book chapters, and conference papers between 2017 and 2024, and 51% of them were available OA through one means or another. However, only 15% used author rights retention to self-archive in an institutional or disciplinary repository with no cost to author, known as Green OA and the type afforded by the UMA OAP. Only 4% of UMass authored publications were uploaded to ScholarWorks, and a tiny fraction of faculty who used the author rights they could retain via the UMA OAP to make otherwise closed works available with Green OA. Faculty are missing opportunities to share their research without barriers to readers and cost to themselves.

Fifty-seven percent (57%) of the 246 faculty who responded to the survey did not know about the UMA OAP, and awareness of it dropped to 33% if the faculty was hired after 2016. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of respondents said author publishing charges (APCs) were a barrier to making their work open access to some extent (28%) or to great extent (50%). Qualitative data from the survey and focus groups underscored faculty misunderstanding of how to use the UMA OAP, and their concerns about costs associated with publishing OA and the acceptability of OA publications for their tenure and promotion evaluation.

Based on the findings in this report, the UMA OAP is clearly underutilized and not well understood. As the Provost’s designee, the Libraries will continue outreach and education about how UMA faculty and researchers can maximize their author rights using the UMA OAP. More broadly, the Libraries remain dedicated to fulfilling their role as the nexus of knowledge access, sharing and preservation for the campus and beyond.

## Introduction

The [UMass Amherst Open Access Policy](#) (UMA OAP) was passed by the Faculty Senate on April 7, 2016 and went into effect on July 1, 2016. It was [sponsored by the Research Council](#), and it stipulated: “The policy will be reviewed by the Provost (or designee) after three years and a report presented to the Faculty Senate.” The University Libraries have acted as the Provost’s designee to administer the UMA OAP and manage ScholarWorks, the institutional repository through which UMA faculty can share their author accepted manuscripts for articles and book chapters. The UMA OAP review was conducted by the Libraries over the 2024-25 academic year in consultation with the Research Council and Research Library Council.

The UMA OAP review was designed to:

- Assess faculty awareness of and compliance with the UMA OAP as written in 2016.
- Explore expanding the UMA OAP to include all UMass community members (students and staff) as well as additional research outputs (e.g. books, data sets, protocols, code, etc.).
- Assess faculty attitudes about open access publishing; and
- Inform recommendations to the Faculty Senate about potential revisions to the UMA OAP and its administration.

The review team of librarians also sought insights on faculty understanding of the UMA OAP and its relationship to their scholarly publishing practices. This data was gathered through a survey, focus groups, and an analysis of UMA-authored journal articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings.

This report covers the methodologies used for data collection, selected findings, and observations about those findings. Though much of the data could be parsed to reflect disciplinary differences by school/college, for the sake of general knowledge and brevity, we have not presented the data at this level in this report, with few exceptions.

## Methodology

University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMA) publications from 2017 (the first full year the policy was in effect) through 2024 were gathered and compared to the publications which had been uploaded to the institutional repository, ScholarWorks, from the same period. UMA author publication data was identified and downloaded from The Lens, OpenAlex, and Scopus databases, merged, de-duplicated and normalized. Data included:

- Author(s)
- Journal title
- Digital Object Identifier (DOI)
- Article title
- Publication type
- Publisher
- Publication Year
- Open access: yes/no
- Open access color/type

The ScholarWorks data included article title, DOI and date posted in the repository. The UMA author publication and ScholarWorks data were compared and matched based on Digital Object Identifier (DOI) or title if a DOI wasn't available.

A survey was distributed through Qualtrics to 1,812 faculty from a list generated by Assessment, Survey and Effectiveness Research (ASER). This survey included 16 multiple choice and three open-ended questions. Demographic data was collected through multiple choice questions asking respondents to identify themselves by pre- or post-2016 employment start date. Two librarians independently coded the open-ended survey responses, developed shared themes, and collaboratively assigned codes to each of the open-ended responses.

Survey respondents were invited to volunteer for focus groups to discuss their perspectives holistically. Forty-four faculty volunteered to participate, and ultimately 17 faculty joined one of four focus groups. Three of the focus groups were conducted in person and one via Zoom. Two facilitators in each session prompted discussion among the participants with questions about their understanding of the UMA OAP, how it could be improved or made more useful, how open access publishing could be better supported, and how librarians could best communicate with them to address their interests and concerns. The focus group participants agreed to have the sessions recorded. Librarians used PremierPro for recording transcription and NVIVO for transcription coding using themes determined from the open-ended survey questions and new themes unique to the focus group data. Nineteen different codes were applied to the focus group transcripts.

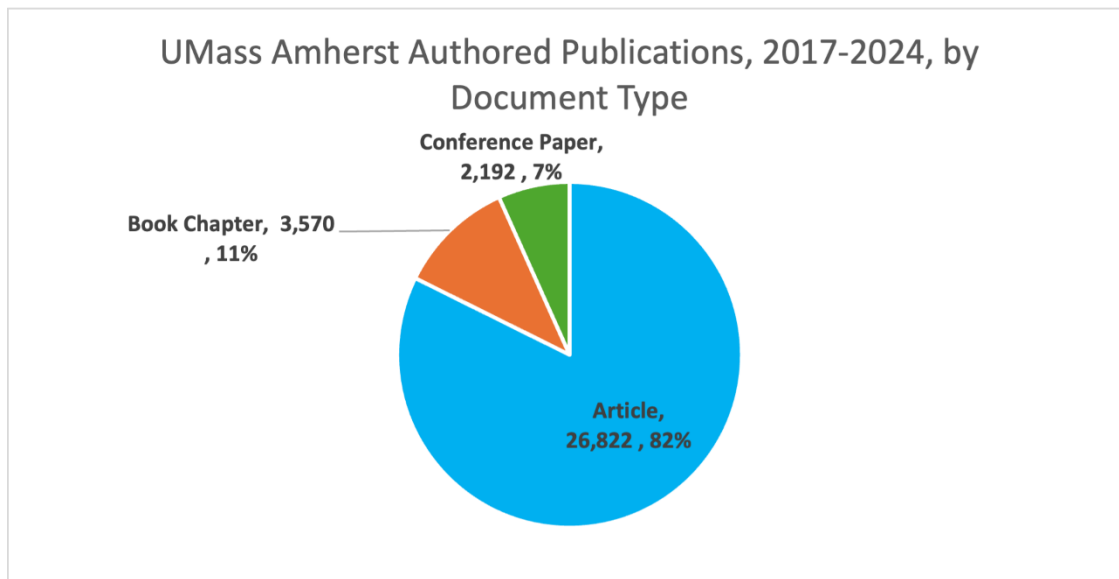
## Findings

### Institutional output

UMass faculty published 32,584 unique articles, book chapters, and conference papers between 2017 and 2024. Figure 1 shows total publications by type.

**Figure 1**

*2017-2024 UMass Amherst Authored Publications by Document Type*



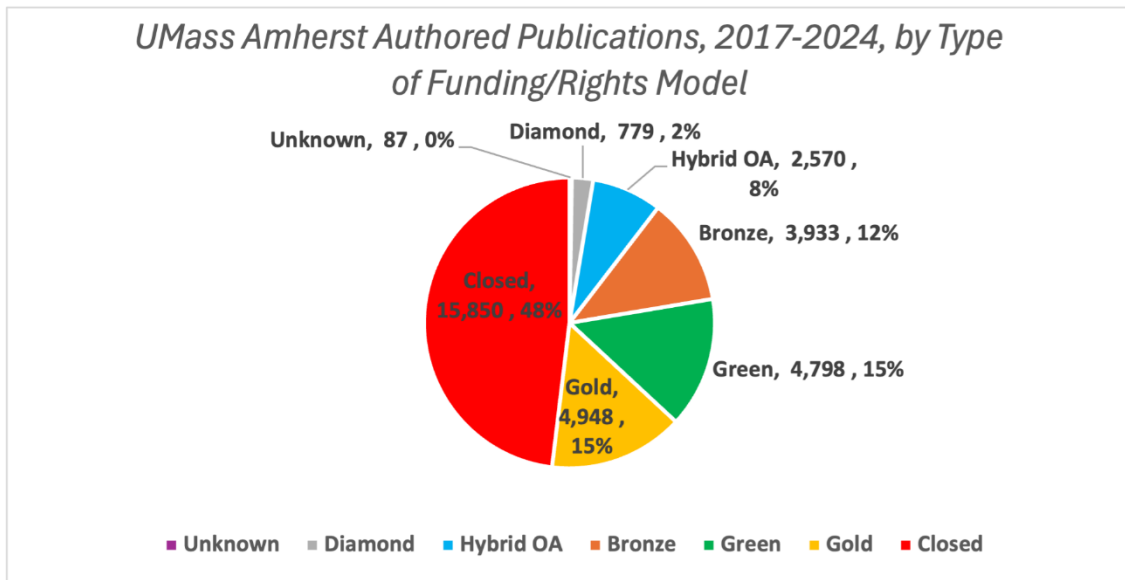
Fifty one percent (51%) of total UMA-authored publications between 2017 and 2024 were available OA through one means or another (see Figure 2). In addition to the traditional subscription model (closed) with author rights transferred to the publisher, our three data sources recognized five types of open access funding and author rights models:

- Green (15%) – author retains rights to self-archive in an institutional or disciplinary repository with no cost to author.
- Gold (15%) – funded by author processing charge (APC) to an OA journal publisher for immediate open access with open license.
- Bronze (12%) – publisher makes available without an author charge or open license guiding the use (these publications can go back behind a paywall at any time).
- Hybrid (8%) - funded by author processing charge (APC) to a journal publisher for immediate open access with open license in a journal that also publishes content behind a paywall and charges subscription fees.
- Diamond (2%) - no author charge and no charge to readers (often funded by a disciplinary association) and published with an open license.

Open access articles, book chapters and conference proceedings were mostly published via the Gold OA model (15%), with Green OA the second leading model.

**Figure 2**

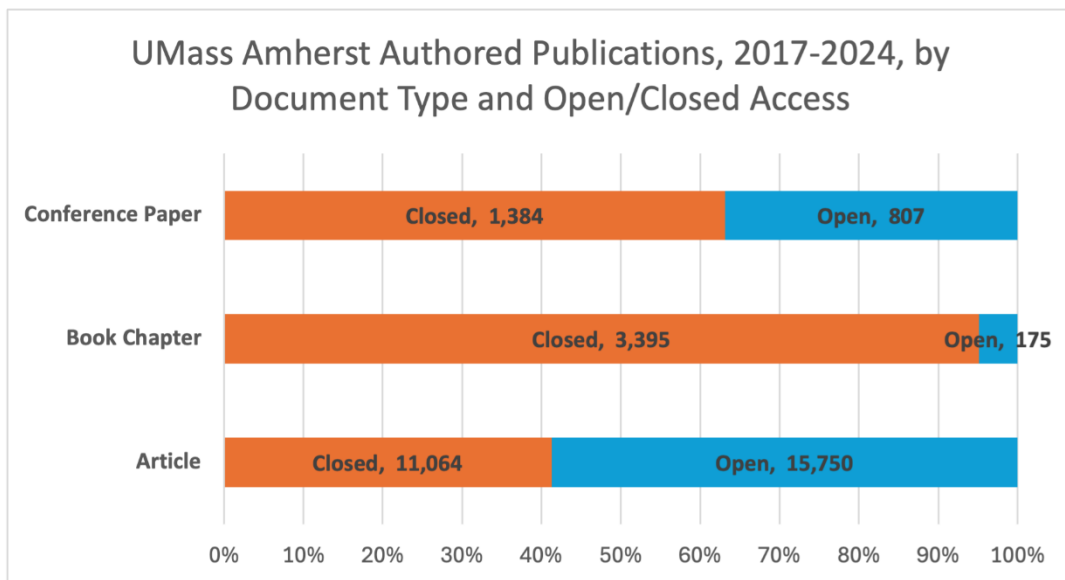
*2017-2024 UMass Amherst Authored Publications by Type of Funding/Rights Model*



Articles are most often made open access, followed by conference papers and book chapters. The Faculty Senate (Sen. Doc. No. 16-044) Open Access Policy Overview explains that book chapters are covered by the Policy, and yet only 5% of book chapters are open access under any model.

**Figure 3**

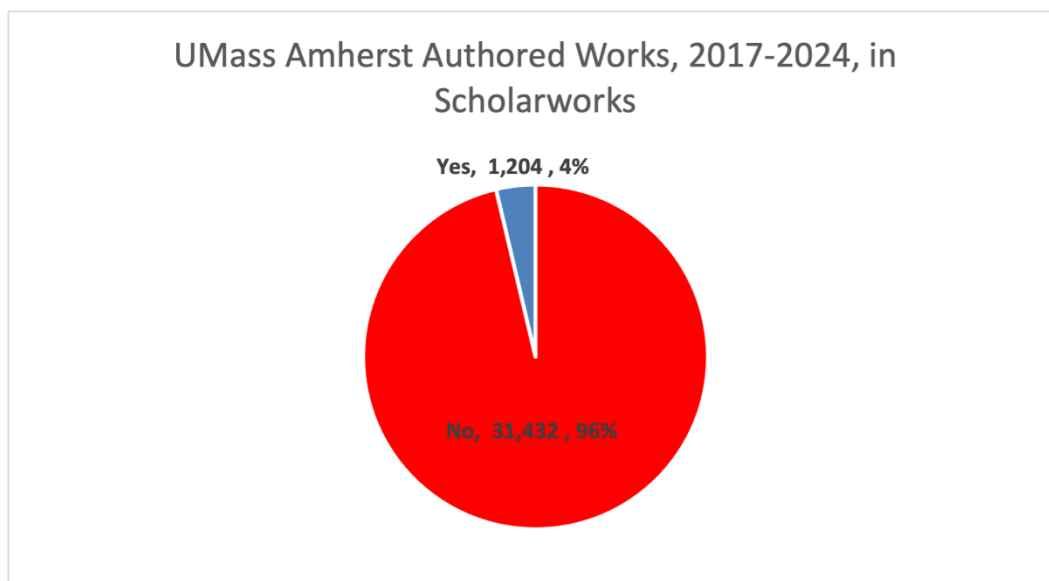
*2017-2024 UMass Amherst Authored Publications by Document Type and Open/Closed Access*



Only 4% of UMass authored publications between 2017 and 2024 were uploaded to ScholarWorks compared with 15% of publications that were available through Green OA. This indicates that faculty are using repositories other than ScholarWorks. They may have used author rights retained through the campus OAP or chosen an open license offered by a repository (e.g. a Creative Commons license.)

**Figure 4**

*2017-2024 UMass Amherst Authored Publications by Availability in ScholarWorks Institutional Repository*



Between 0.1% and 0.9% of UMass authored articles, book chapters and conference proceedings that are published with closed access (48% of all works) through the publisher are made OA in ScholarWorks. (This number is imprecise because we cannot differentiate Green OA papers that are available only from ScholarWorks from those that are available in other repositories from our data.) This translates to a tiny fraction of faculty who are using the author rights they could retain via the UMA OAP to make otherwise closed works available with Green OA. Faculty are missing opportunities to share their research without barriers to readers and cost to themselves.

**Survey**

Two hundred forty-six (246) faculty responded to the survey for a response rate of 14%. Forty-eight percent (48%) of respondents were from STEM fields (Engineering, CICS, Natural Sciences, Nursing, Public Health), 30% were from the social sciences (Education, SBS, Management, Libraries) and 19% were from humanities and fine arts (HFA). One hundred seven (107) respondents answered the three open-ended questions. Two open-ended questions were associated with multiple choice questions, and one open-ended question solicited faculty input on the UMA OAP and library services to support OA publishing more generally. Responses to the multiple-choice questions are presented in the quantitative section below beginning with faculty responses about the OAP and concluding with their responses about open access

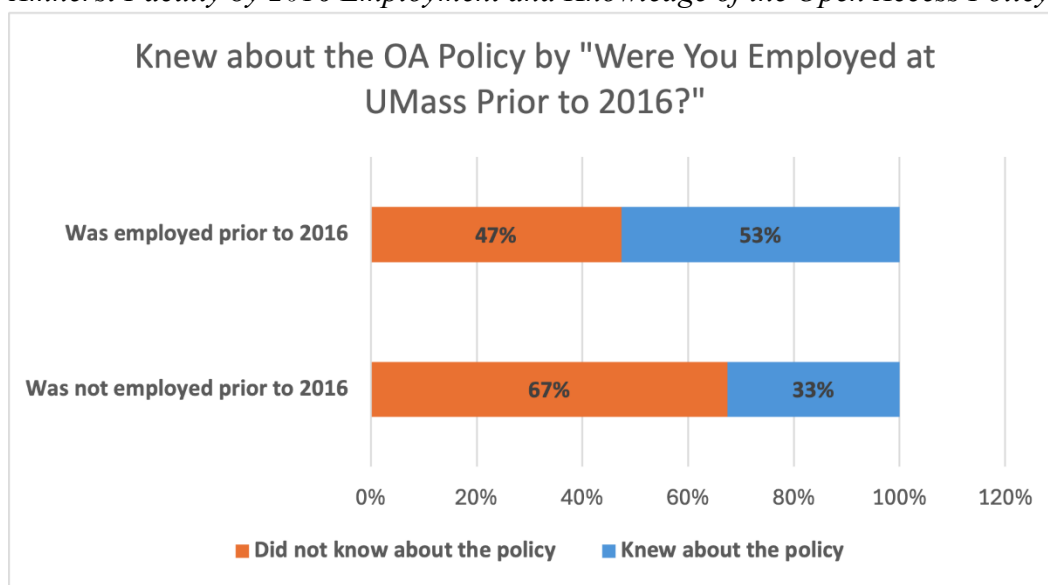
publishing more generally. Responses to the open-ended questions follow in the qualitative survey findings section.

### *Quantitative Survey Findings*

Fifty-seven percent (57%) of faculty did not know about the UMA OAP before the survey was administered. Figure 5 shows that more faculty reported knowing about the UMA OAP if they were employed at UMass Amherst prior to 2016 (53%) than if they weren't employed by the University in 2016 (33%). This is a significant swing in awareness (20%) based on year of hire and suggests a compelling need for ongoing and new methods of outreach and education for the UMA OAP to be a viable author rights and open access tool.

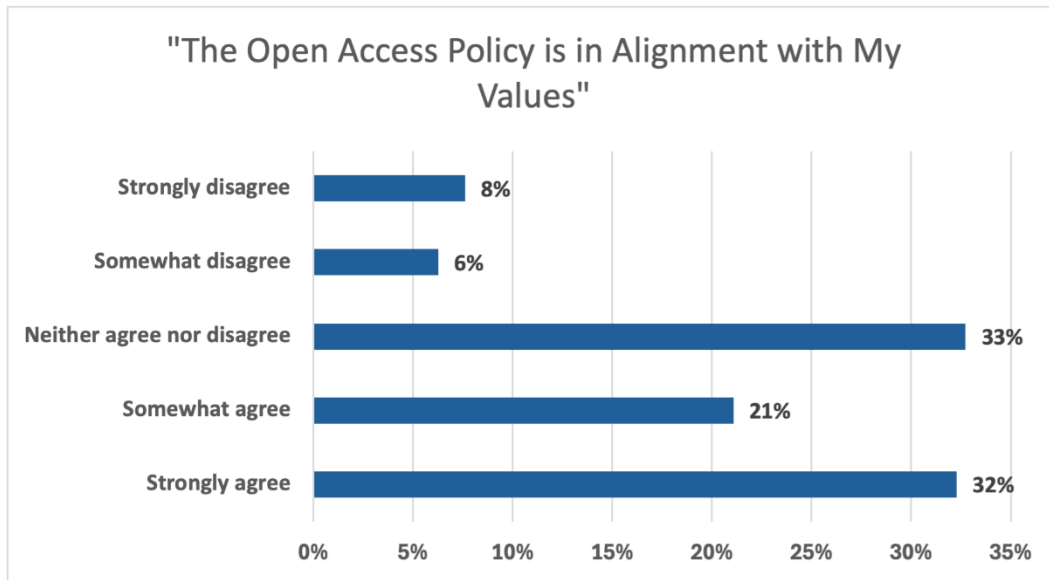
**Figure 5**

*UMass Amherst Faculty by 2016 Employment and Knowledge of the Open Access Policy*



The first line of the OAP is: “The Faculty of the University of Massachusetts Amherst (hereafter “the University”) is committed to disseminating the fruits of its research and scholarship as widely as possible,” and the first stated goal “is to improve and stand up for open access to scholarly articles published by academics...”. A slight majority of respondents (53%) somewhat agreed (21%) or strongly agreed (32%) that the UMA OAP aligns with their values (Figure 6). A notable proportion (33%) of respondents answered that they neither agreed nor disagreed that the UMA OAP aligns with their values. This may reflect the large number of respondents who reported that they did not know about the policy (57%), lacked understanding of the policy (57%), or were indifferent to the benefits of publishing OA. Only 14% of respondents said they strongly (8%) or somewhat (6%) disagreed that the policy was in alignment with their values.

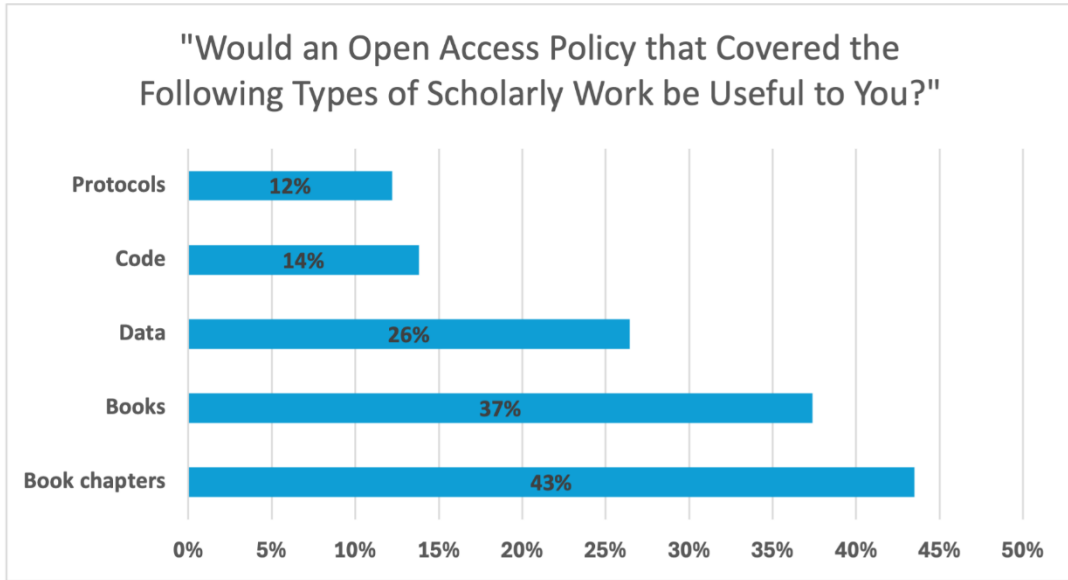
**Figure 6**  
*Alignment of Open Access Policy with Faculty Values*



To explore the current landscape of scholarly publication and understand how a policy might support open access to different types of scholarly works in the future, we asked “Would an Open Access Policy that Covered the Following Types of Scholarly Work be Useful to You?” The research outputs that survey respondents indicated would be most useful for the UMA OAP to cover were book chapters (43%), followed by books (37%) and data (26%) (Figure 7). Though survey respondents note the usefulness of book chapter inclusion in the UMA OAP, in practice they infrequently use their existing author rights under the current OAP to share their book chapters open access (5%, see Figure 3). This is another indicator of low adoption of the UMA OAP. Faculty are likely not aware that the OAP extends to book chapters as well as articles. The Faculty Senate Open Access Policy Proposal Overview (Sen. Doc. No. 16-044) also notes that the UMA OAP can help researchers “comply with mandates from funding agencies.” As of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026, recipients of grants from all federal agencies are required to make the underlying data to their research publicly available immediately, yet only 26% of respondents would find coverage of data by the UMA OAP useful. This apparent disconnect may be a result of low levels of federal funding received among the survey respondents, reliance on the Federal Purpose License to share data, lack of awareness of federal funding mandates for data sharing, or something else.

**Figure 7**

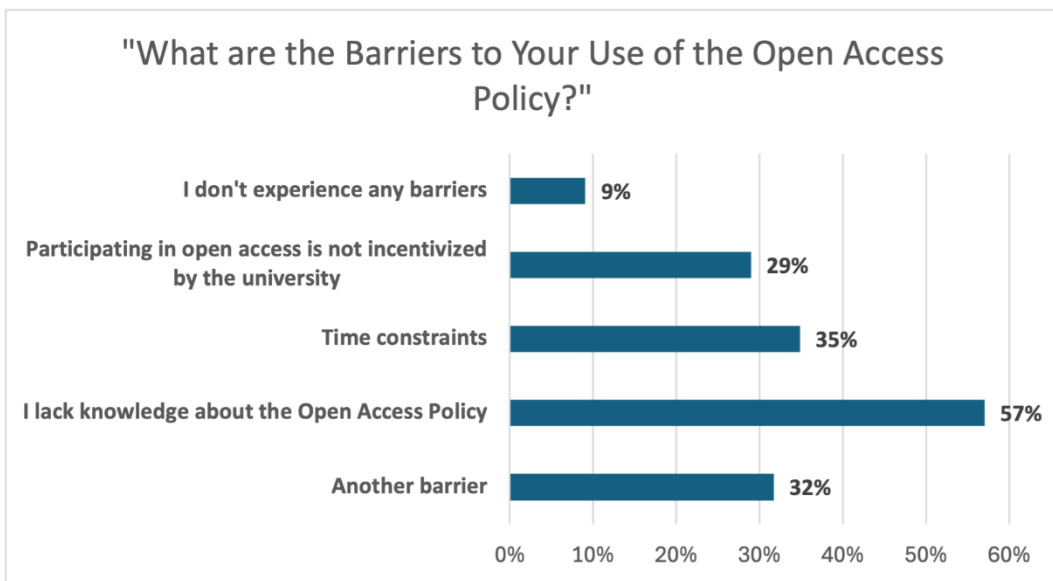
*Types of Scholarly Work that would be Useful to Include in the Open Access Policy*



We wanted to know why faculty are not using the UMA OAP, so we asked, “What are the barriers to your use of the Open Access Policy?” Figure 8 shows “A lack of knowledge of the UMA OAP” (57%) was reported as the most common barrier to its use. Time constraints (35%) were a less frequently reported barrier. Over a quarter of respondents (29%) selected “Participating in open access is not incentivized by the university.”

**Figure 8**

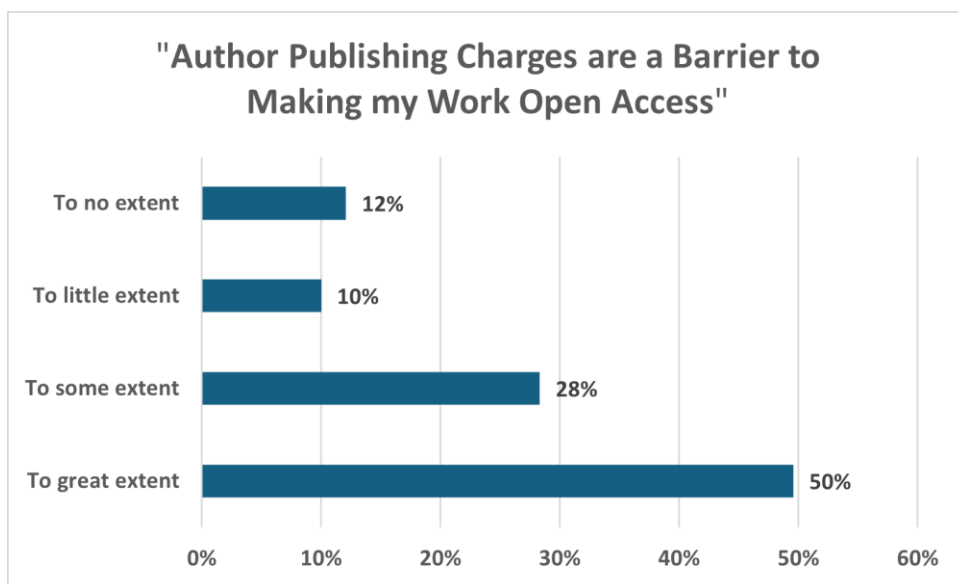
*Barriers to Use of the Open Access Policy*



Some of those who responded “another barrier” used the open response field to express their concern that using the UMA OAP would require payment of a publishing charge (9 respondents), that using the UMA OAP precluded submitting to a peer reviewed journal (6), or that a publisher-author agreement made after the Policy went into effect prevented their use of the UMA OAP (21). All these responses reflect misunderstandings and lost opportunities for openly sharing research.

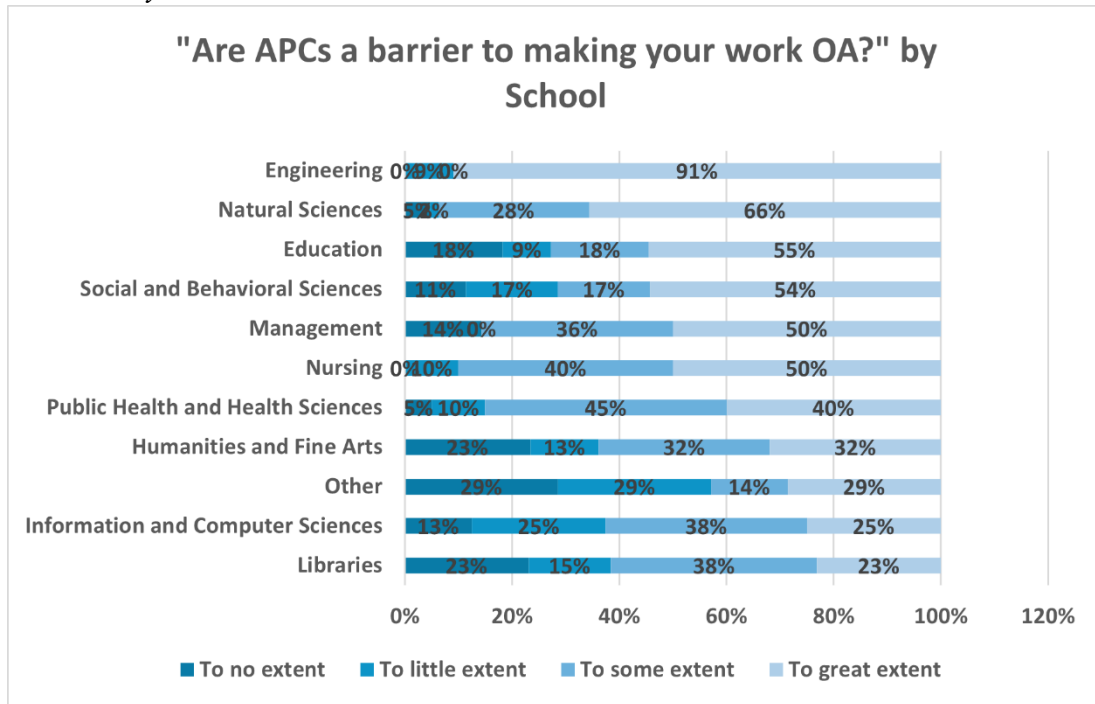
To gain more insight into faculty attitudes about open access publishing, we asked if APCs associated with the Gold and Hybrid OA rights and funding models pose a barrier to OA publication. The majority (78%) of respondents reported that APCs are a barrier to making their work OA to some or great extent. Many large academic and for-profit scholarly publishers employ a Gold or Hybrid OA model, and the costs to authors associated with scholarly publication are of increasing concern.

**Figure 9**  
*APCs as a Barrier to Open Access*



The extent to which faculty saw APCs as a barrier to making their work open access varied by school, with Engineering faculty most considering them a barrier and librarians least considering them a barrier to making their work OA.

**Figure 10**  
*APCs as Barrier by School*



*Qualitative Survey Findings*

Librarians from the review team coded responses from 107 respondents to two open-ended questions attached to multiple choice questions regarding 1.) use of the UMA OAP and ScholarWorks and 2.) barriers to using the UMA OAP to share works. The third open-ended question was more general: “Is there anything you'd like the Libraries to know about the Open Access Policy or library services to support open access publishing?” Faculty responses were grouped in the 9 themes shown in Figure 11.

**Figure 11**

*Themes from responses to question “Is there anything you’d like the Libraries to know about the Open Access Policy or library services to support open access policy? and number of occurrences*

<b>Theme</b>	<b># of Occurrences</b>
Expressing or demonstrating a lack of understanding of the OA policy	45
Challenges of funding OA publication	20
Needing education about options for funding OA publication	18
Needing instructions on how to upload work to ScholarWorks	14
Requesting periodic reminders of the OA Policy and how to use it	13
Expressing a preference for another OA repository than ScholarWorks	11
Expressing concern about the acceptability of OA publications for tenure and promotion evaluation	11
Demonstrating a lack of understanding of Green OA distribution	8
Expressing concern about negative use of their work	6

In response to the question about what the faculty would like the Libraries to know, one author provided insight into the effects of high OA publishing costs on their choices of where to publish:

“Almost all of the journals in my field have moved or are moving to fully open access, with publication costs ranging from \$3000-4000 for a typical article (this would be for a top tier disciplinary journal... last year my lab published ten papers - that's prohibitive if they were all open access and it now affects where I can publish (i.e. I can only afford traditional publishing). Grants in my field cannot cover these high publication costs - there's simply not enough budget. The net result is that I'm having to push more publications towards lower-tier journals [that] are not open access. It's exactly the opposite of what I'd like to be doing, and it lowers the perceived impact of UMass research.”

Another researcher expressed concern about the drain on humanities collections caused by funding OA in STEM fields:

“I am the editor of an OA journal in my field and have published on OA scholarship. Being in the humanities, I have never had to pay an APC. However, the hard sciences are destroying the library budget for humanities titles (books and journals), both at UMass and in universities around the world. Before you embark on plans to subsidize STEM publishing, *please* ensure that humanities subscriptions are not paying the cost (as is currently the case). My impression is that this is sadly the case at present.”

The qualitative responses to the survey provided more evidence of concern about open access for book publishing than we heard from focus group participants, perhaps because there were more respondents to the survey from the social sciences and humanities than in the focus groups.

These are some representative statements:

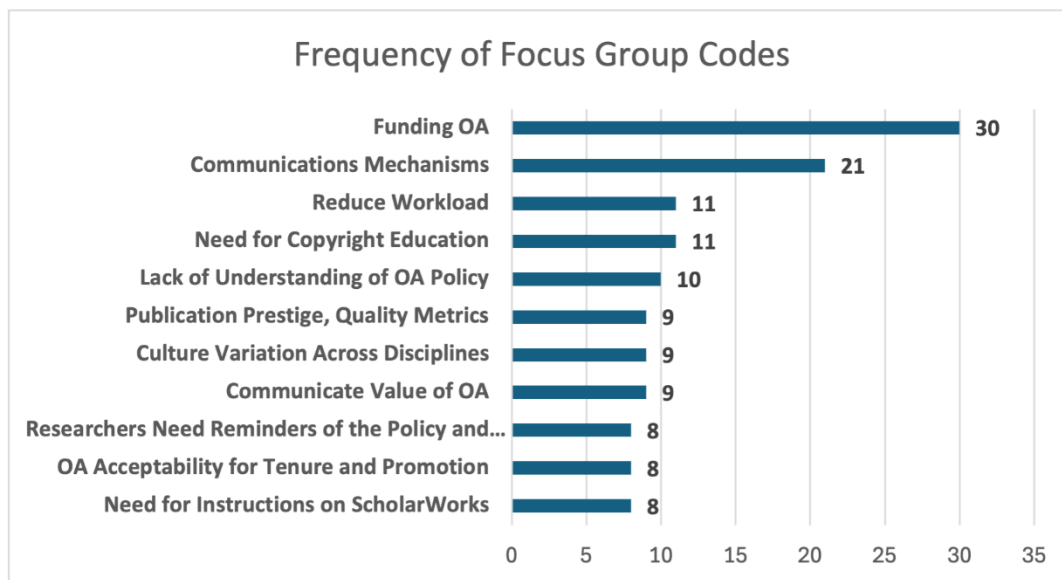
- “Monographs are central in my field, so funding faculty to enable them to publish their books open access would be especially helpful.”
- “I am always paid, often quite well, to publish books. This is important to me.”

#### *Focus groups*

Ten faculty from STEM fields, four from the Social Sciences and three from the Humanities participated in the focus groups. Figure 11 shows frequency of the 19 codes we used to describe themes covered in these conversations, 11 were mentioned 8 times or more. The theme referenced most (30) was “Funding OA.” It was used when participants spoke about:

- unhappiness with paying commercial publishers for OA;
- cost of publishing Gold OA;
- lack of funds available or restrictions on available funds to pay Gold OA APCs;
- damage to humanities or monograph purchasing by funds directed for STEM OA.

**Figure 11**  
*Frequency of Focus Group Codes*



Several people expressed frustration with existing publishing business models and how they extract resources from authors. One proposal:

“can we provide faculty with resources to say, like, here's what it would take to move your... journals... from Wiley to a university press publisher and doing... more of those kinds of resource building so... it's not just the library providing us with subvention for our open access charges, but actually can help us ... change the publishing ecosystem in all of the like, messy and distributed ways that we all interact with it.”

The second most highly coded theme was about communication mechanisms (21) for talking about the UMA OAP and OA publishing. Participants spoke of the value of multiple modes of communication (email, video, infographic) embedded where they go to find information, e.g. web pages on grant funding. Many agreed that reminders coming from their department chairs, directors, deans and library liaison would get their attention, and it would be okay if the same message came from each of these people. They prefer trusted, known senders over general population emails. They also recommended that library liaisons communicate with deans and department chairs or at department meetings to inform faculty of opportunities for OA publication, including the OA Policy and publisher agreements, and how to take advantage of them. For example, one faculty member said:

“My librarian, I saw in person and asked, and she very kindly sent a bunch of information my way, but I don't know how to interpret it. And I don't really have the time to sit for three hours and go around and try to interpret the data. So, maybe it would be good to receive a, I don't know, an infographic, like a one pager or some very simple to follow instructions.”

Many faculty were confused about copyright and “need for copyright education” was coded 11 times. Focus group participants suggested both faculty and graduate students need help with copyright. They were uncertain about what the UMA OAP meant for “ownership” of their intellectual property, the relationship between the UMA OAP and their author-publisher agreement, and which Creative Commons license to choose, for example. A survey respondent added context to an open-ended question: “Publishers sometimes have clauses limiting open-access sharing. I feel that I lack the knowledge of how these things work to know how to navigate such policies.” Similarly, “Lack of understanding of the UMA OAP” was applied to focus group dialog 10 times when people were ignorant of the UMA OAP or what it means.

Faculty were asked how they might be encouraged to share their work using the UMA OAP. The theme “reduce workload” appeared 11 times. Faculty suggested that their uploads to ScholarWorks should auto-populate on the Annual Faculty Report. They also wanted concurrent, automatic publication in multiple places, such as a publisher website, ScholarWorks and a disciplinary repository. They talked about how to “communicate the value of OA” on 10 occasions. They suggested that each department’s perspective on open access sharing should be mentioned in their department culture document, and they wanted more messaging on how they could benefit from changing their current practices to make more of their works OA. In nine different references, focus group participants talked about “culture variation across disciplines” vis-à-vis whether they published OA, and if so, where.

Publication prestige and quality metrics were mentioned nine times related to how authors choose where to publish. The correlations between name recognition and high cost to publish OA, and name recognition and assumed quality, were noted. People talked about how name recognition, journal impact factor and citation counts are used as proxies for research quality. In a related theme, “OA acceptability for tenure and promotion,” focus group participants noted that journal prestige takes precedence over OA publication. Three participants expressed skepticism about the quality of research published in OA journals. One faculty member said:

“You know, these are all great names. You know, you get your article in these publications, and it's valid. It's legitimate research. When the open journals first started it was like, oh, well, this research wasn't good enough to be, you know, accepted in these other journals. So therefore, this was your default to say you published something and it was like illegitimate or clearly not... great or there are errors in it or etc... So, I still kind of hold that bias in the back of my head because it's ingrained, even though I value the idea of open access.”

This faculty person acknowledges the persistence of an early-formed bias that research published in OA journals is of lesser quality, a bias that does not reflect the current reality of unethical and otherwise problematic practices by both established and innovative scholarly publishers that have created a research integrity crisis, regardless of whether the publisher/publication takes exclusive rights to the research and puts it behind a paywall or applies an open license and makes

the research open access. Faculty at various stages of their careers and across disciplines are beholden in different ways to the perceptions of their colleagues about open access. Faculty wanted more information about the benefits of using the OAP, including how posting to ScholarWorks is different than posting to academia.edu or ResearchGate. Some shared their own perspectives on why OA is valuable and should be rewarded. Following comments on the importance of open science for research reproducibility, another participant said:

“it's a matter of, it's a cultural change. And I envy those disciplines that have that open mind, because that is such a big breather and it allows you to do a lot more, than trying to publish one article in one top journal that could or could not happen if, even if you put ten years into it and thousands and thousands of dollars. So, in a way, we're wasting resources. We're wasting time, because there are findings that need to come out five years ago, but it's not because it's an exclusive club. And I honestly feel that we're shooting ourselves in the foot.”

The themes “need for instructions on ScholarWorks” and “researchers need reminders of the policy and how to use it” were each coded eight times but with some overlap. Faculty wanted a brief, simple explanation of the UMA OAP in plain language rather than legal terms, and they requested brief, simple instructions on how to post their work to ScholarWorks. They also wanted details on what to do in cases of co-authors, which versions to upload, and which license to choose.

## Conclusion

The UMA OAP has been in effect for nearly a decade, and the scholarly publishing landscape has changed significantly. At higher education institutions in the United States, most OAPs covering journal articles and book chapters were adopted between 2008 and 2020. Early in this decade, scholars shifted to the more comprehensive concepts of open science, inclusive of a wider range of scholarly outputs (e.g. protocols, publications, data, software, peer review, etc.), infrastructure (e.g. hardware, persistent identifiers, etc.) and community engagement (e.g. indigenous and traditional knowledge systems). This shift was expressed in policies such as the [UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science](#) (2021), the [White House Office of Science and Technology “Nelson Memo”](#) (2022) and the founding of the Higher Education Leadership Initiative for Open Scholarship ([HELIOS Open](#)) in 2021. Funder requirements are driving faster public access with data transparency. Publishers have been experimenting with different models for funding open access (author publication charges, institutional memberships, grants, community investments, “subscribe-to-open”, etc.) and yet the large for-profit scholarly publishers (Elsevier, Sage, Springer/Nature, Taylor & Francis/Routledge, and Wiley) control more of the market while undermining author rights and Green OA. Technical tools and infrastructures are disrupting scholarly publishing lifecycles in ways that enhance research integrity when used freely, transparently and with persistent identifiers, or undermine it when they lock in data to a particular commercial or non-standardized system. As scholarly publishing evolves and diversifies, an open access policy cannot solve all its challenges, though it can serve as a tool to make publicly funded research available for the common good.

Based on the findings in this report, the UMA OAP is clearly underutilized and not well understood. As the Provost's designee, the Libraries will continue outreach and education about how UMA faculty and researchers can maximize their author rights using the UMA OAP. We learned about how to do this better through focus group feedback. More broadly, the Libraries remain dedicated to fulfilling their role as the nexus of knowledge access, sharing and preservation for the campus and beyond.

## Project Team

- Christine Turner (Chair), Scholarly Communication Librarian
- Sarah Fitzgerald, Assessment and Planning Librarian
- Jennifer Chaput, Data Services Librarian
- Erin Jerome, Library Publishing and Institutional Repository Librarian
- Patrick Waite, Collections Analysis Librarian