



## Char Booth

OCLC Kilgour Auditorium  
Dublin, Ohio  
November 9, 2017

In this [presentation](#), Char Booth addressed the concept that open access has had a huge impact on publishing and scholarly communication, yet, who you are, what you earn, and how you research still create significant barriers to information availability. Booth examined open access through the perspective of information privilege, highlighting actions libraries and allied organizations can take to reduce access inequities in pursuit of social and economic justice.

Use this viewing guide to expand your learnings from the talk. Take notes, reflect, and use the guide to frame discussions you would like to have with colleagues and peers, and plan for your next steps.

Booth's transcription of the talk is available at:

<https://infomational.com/2018/08/17/for-the-greater-not-good-enough-open-access-and-information-privilege-transcript-oclc-disintinguished-seminar-series/>

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### Open access, information privilege, and library work

“Access to knowledge is a human right that is closely associated with the ability to defend, as well as advocate for, other rights.”

—John Willinsky, [The Access Principle](#) (2006)

“This is the reason we [who work in libraries] exist—to hold a mirror up to our communities and augment everything that they are and need. We should match the people we serve—we should see them, value them, and give them the things that they need to be successful, to thrive, and to be able to advocate.”

—Char Booth, [OCLC DSS presentation](#) (2017)

## REFLECTION

Booth presents Willinsky's statement as the guiding principle upon which library work is predicated. How do you and your institution support community members' right to access knowledge? What do your community members need to thrive and advocate? How do you know this? How might you better understand and support your community's needs?

**Information privilege** is the accumulation of special rights and advantages not available to others in the area of information access. Individuals with the resources to access the information they need, are affiliated with research or academic institutions and libraries, or live close to a public library with access to resources and services such as free interlibrary loan are examples of those with information privilege. Those who are unable to access the information they need are **information underprivileged or impoverished**; this includes people who are incarcerated, poor, unaffiliated with a university or research institution, or live in rural areas distant from a public library.

**Open access (OA)**, as defined by the [Budapest Open Access Initiative](#), is the right of users "to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts" of content.

## REFLECTION

It is helpful to think about concepts such as information privilege and open access in concrete and practical contexts. Consider how ideas about information privilege and OA manifest themselves in library policies and practices. What is the experience of users in your library; do they have access to the information resources they need? How equitable is the distribution of information access across the community that you serve? What structures exist to facilitate and/or prevent information access?

Consider the above definition of open access. Are your community members able to exercise the right "to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts" of the content they need? Do they *know how*? What are the barriers to users' access to information? How might you and your library work toward removing these barriers?

## Politics of imperfection and responsibility<sup>1</sup>

In striving toward information equity and open access, Booth encourages those who work in the library field to recognize what's broken, take responsibility for fixing it, and then highlight the work that's been done.<sup>2</sup>

Booth shares several examples of information underprivilege to call attention to some things that are broken:

- Incarcerated individuals face challenges in accessing the information they need—resources they could use to advance their learning and advocate for themselves. The number of prison libraries is shrinking, and programs that provide books to prisoners, such as the [Inside Books Project](#), find that the books they send get returned by prison staff with no clear rationale.
- As Associate Dean of the California State University at San Marcos (CSUSM) University Library, Booth sees firsthand the negative impact of the high cost of textbooks on students' educational experiences. They forgo basic necessities or they try to make do without buying textbooks, which negatively affects academic performance, making it harder to stay in school.

### REFLECTION

Many students face significant barriers to accessing the information resources they require for their education. What are some strategies to address this area of great need? How can your library be an institutional ally to students' academic success? Identify peers, administrators, and other stakeholders with whom you could discuss these issues and brainstorm possible solutions.

Although Booth shared examples from a university library context, learners face barriers to information access at all types of libraries and institutions. Think about the full range of students in your community—middle-schoolers and high-schoolers, non-traditional students, individuals who are in the process of inquiry at any point in their lives—how effectively are they supported by your library? Consider policy or service changes to implement to expand learner access to information beyond the current boundaries that exist.

Booth shared examples of policies and services implemented at the CSUSM University Library to better support and represent their students:

- Campus-wide wage structure revisions to make it easier to give merit raises and increased wages to student assistants (these changes resulted from lobbying by library administrators)
- Course textbooks available for checkout at the library, and the prioritization of open educational resources
- Elimination of library fines and fees
- Availability of a comfortable 24-hour area in library where food is provided (many students experience food and housing insecurity)
- Arts and culture programs at the library and common read books that are representative and celebratory of the cultures and experiences of minoritized identities
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## REFLECTION

What principles and values do the above policies, services, and programs express? How could you take these principles and integrate them into your library's offerings? Work to recognize the experiences of your community members and look for ways to ensure your services and facilities are inclusive and welcoming to all. Use the above list as a starting point; note any examples you would like to incorporate at your library and add your own ideas to the list.

Booth highlighted the example of Sandor Katz who, like many living in rural communities, had difficulty accessing the information he needed. He had to contact librarians across the country—many of whom lifted paywalls—to get the articles and resources he was seeking. He ended up writing several books, included the *New York Times* bestseller *The Art of Fermentation*.

Researchers like Katz, who are unaffiliated with a university or don't live close to one, are typically unable to access the reliable, scholarly articles and resources primarily available at academic and research libraries. Public libraries in smaller communities may not have these kinds of resources. Without the support of librarians who chose to include him in their service community, Katz wouldn't have been able to undertake the comprehensive research to produce his books.

## REFLECTION

What obligation do academic and research libraries have to the community beyond the institution? Consider lay and unaffiliated researchers who typically don't have access to academic and scholarly resources. They need articles, analyses, and specialized journals to understand their interest areas in the same ways affiliated researchers do. Should academic and research libraries support unaffiliated researchers' information needs? Why or why not? What are the barriers to connecting these individuals with the information they seek, and what can librarians do to remove them?

## Open access and information privilege

“Those with access to these resources—students, librarians, scientists—you have been given a privilege. You get to feed at the banquet of knowledge while the rest of the world is locked out. But you need not—indeed, really you cannot—keep this privilege for yourselves. You have a duty to share it with the world.”

—Aaron Swartz, [“Guerilla Open Access Manifesto,”](#) 2008

As with other types of privilege, those with information privilege often aren't aware of their own privilege and don't fully understand the impacts on those without it. Booth discussed that in their teaching experience, information literacy resonates most deeply with students when it is related to the concept of information privilege. When students learn that the library pays significant amounts of money for the resources they have access to—and that this access will end once they leave the school—then they start paying attention, because it becomes a structural and societal issue as well as a personal one.

## REFLECTION

Which factors decide who has access to information resources and who gets left out? How should this be different—what should change at a structural level? What policies and practices at your institution could be changed to expand access to information?

Do your colleagues, faculty, students, and community members who enjoy the benefits of information privilege see and understand the experiences of those unable to access the information they need? What can you do to raise awareness of the existence and impact of information impoverishment? Discuss these issues with colleagues, peers, and faculty at your institution. Engage students in conversations about the information access they currently have, how that will change once they're unaffiliated with the school, and what they can do while they have information privilege to level the playing field for those without it. Booth suggests engaging students in Wikipedia editing projects as a good way to educate them about information privilege while helping to dismantle it.

## How open is open access?

Booth highlights the significant progress of the open access movement, including policy and legislation ([FASTR](#)); discovery platforms and tools ([DOAJ](#), [Open Access Button](#), [Unpaywall](#)); open education resources ([Open Textbook Library](#)); and digitized collections ([HathiTrust](#), [DPLA](#)).

Despite this progress, the profit margins of the largest publishers continue to increase and [significant pirating activity](#) occurs at universities. Libraries and information professionals must tackle these challenges:

- **Discovery**  
Plenty of OA content is available, but discovery is still a problem. Legally licensed and OA content is not as easy to find and access as pirated material.
- **Collective Action Dilemma<sup>3</sup>**  
Who is going to pay for OA publishing, organize it, make it work, and make it sustainable?

Information equity requires creating a reliable and sustainable infrastructure for open access. K|N Consultants' [white paper](#) (2014) outlines ways to revitalize and change the entire structure of scholarly communication. Booth challenges libraries and information professionals to take up the charge, band together, and work toward solutions collectively.

## REFLECTION

Are your users aware of the full extent of available OA content and resources? How can you and your institution help users more easily access legal and open content? Think about the authors and content producers that you know—encourage and support their efforts to archive their work in OA repositories.

As you explore OA tools and resources, what are your ideas for tackling the problem of discovery? How can libraries work collectively on a sustainable infrastructure for OA? Engage colleagues and peers to brainstorm strategies for addressing these challenges.

## Combating information privilege

“We need to figure out as a collective how to tackle this problem: how to have a discovery tool; discovery layers, methods, and workflows; and funding infrastructures that allow us to represent easily and in readily available sources the entire universe of open access content. **This is the way to actually and actively combat information privilege.**”

—Char Booth, OCLC DSS presentation (2017)

“When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else.”

—Toni Morrison, [interview](#) in *The Oprah Magazine* (2003)

Tackling these challenges will take significant effort over the long term. There are practical steps to take now to work toward advancing open access and information equity.

## PRACTICAL STEPS

- Explore the resources provided at the end of this guide.
- Read the K|N Consultants [white paper](#). Write down the important takeaways and discuss these with peers and colleagues. Read about other models, strategies, or innovations that point to possible solutions and share these ideas with others.
- Identify what else you need to know or learn about these issues to work in support of open access and information equity.
- What are some of the most compelling aspects of Booth's talk? Raise awareness among colleagues and peers by engaging in thoughtful reflection and discussion around these topics. Schedule a viewing session and discussion with colleagues; read related articles and host a journal club discussion; organize conference sessions that provide opportunities to explore these issues.
- Educate users about OA resources and encourage their use. Learn more about OA publishing; encourage content producers to archive their scholarly articles in OA repositories and support infrastructures that incentivize and facilitate this.
- Brainstorm additional ways you and your institution could advance open access. Start with one or two ideas you could implement or make the case for to decisionmakers at your institution.
- Examine how your library defines the community it serves; be inclusive and recognize those at the margins. Question policies that limit access to information and apply your influence to effect change and advance information equity.

## Continuing the conversation

Char Booth's presentation sparked plenty of conversation—online via Twitter and in-person with some Q&A. Explore the questions and comments and consider these additional points to reflect on and discuss.

### TWITTER

Follow the Twitter thread:

<https://twitter.com/search?f=tweets&vertical=default&q=%23ocldss%20since%3A2017-11-08%20until%3A2017-11-16&src=typd>

## FROM THE Q&A

*(condensed and edited for clarity and length)*

**Q:** Libraries invest a lot of money in their electronic resources. Part of the reason is that they get metrics back; they can demonstrate the value. If there is a shift to using more OA materials—what about metrics? It would be really important for libraries to have metrics for OA materials.

**CB:** The OA tools that need to be built need to be able to show metrics and demonstrate the use of these materials. Libraries need to be able to show not just our stakeholders—but also the publishers we still buy content from—that the use of our OA stats are sky-rocketing and our paid content stats are not. Here's a fascinating statistic from my research: 25% of journal content is open but that number could be so much higher. If every single person who published a scholarly piece archived it in an open repository, that number could be up to 80%. Think about how powerful it would be to have a discovery layer with a robust analytical base that would allow us to prioritize open content, find the open copy (even if it's already subscribed to), and be able to demonstrate—to our stakeholders and the publishers—the metrics that the OA content is getting a lot more use. I want to see us do creative work toward forward-thinking things to sustain OA so that we can prevent one of our core functions becoming sustaining inflation prices.

**Q:** It almost sounds like attempting to fulfill the goals of OA might involve breaking the law?

**CB:** Many things about the current system don't work: publishers essentially get content for free, then it's peer-reviewed for free, then they sell it back to libraries who then use student tuition dollars to pay for it. But librarians cannot endorse illegal activity. It takes work, but we need to build tools that do this legally, are easy to use, and that leverage the good work of OA. And we need to continue to motivate creators of this content to archive their content in an open repository.

**Q:** Do OA champions have natural allies among authors, among the people who create the content?

**CB:** There are so many organizations and programs building connections between content creators and those committed to quality, non-profit OA publishing. A few examples:

- Open education resources that support creating textbooks, vetting them, and making them open and freely available
- [Open Library of Humanities](#)
- [Library Publishing Coalition](#), a library- and faculty-driven association publishing mostly OA content

**Q:** Tenure often has an impact on people's ability to publish openly. For examples, sometimes OA journals are not available or respected in their field. What are your thoughts on this?

**CB:** An increasing number of scholarly journals allow authors to pay article processing charges to have their articles be open. Having institutional structures in place to fund these processing fees would enable more academics to publish open articles. Mandatory green OA repository arrangements are essential; only about 25% of what could be published as green is—there have to be workflows to support this. The answers are structural and expensive; the Kennison and Norberg [white paper](#) lays out robust and realistic methods for how to do this. So, make sure faculty have the opportunity to learn what green OA is, and make sure that institutions have an infrastructure for funding article processing charges. Right now OA is so complicated and involves so much labor—I just want it to be easier! Publish. Deposit. Open discovery. OA publishing should make more sense and be more straightforward—perhaps we just haven't hit upon the solution yet.

## Resources

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## RESOURCES AND EXAMPLES REFERENCED IN THE PRESENTATION

[Budapest Open Access Initiative](#)

[Digital Public Library of America](#)

[Directory of Open Access Books](#)

[Directory of Open Access Journals](#)

[Fair Access to Science & Technology Research Act](#)

[HathiTrust Digital Library](#)

[Inside Books Project](#)

[Library Publishing Coalition](#)

[Open Access Button](#)

[Open Library of Humanities](#)

[Open Textbook Library](#)

[SPARC](#)

[Unpaywall](#)

## END NOTES

1. Sociologist Alexis Shotwell describes the concepts of a politics of imperfection and a politics of responsibility in a (2017) [blogpost](#).  
<https://alexisshotwell.com/2017/04/25/a-politics-of-imperfection-a-politics-of-responsibility/>
2. These ideas for an [ethics of activism](#) are outlined in an article by activist Frances Lee.  
<http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/why-ive-started-to-fear-my-fellow-social-justice-activists-20171013>
3. John Wenzler, dean of the libraries, University of California, East Bay, discusses how the collective action dilemma is a significant obstacle to developing a sustainable OA infrastructure in his 2017 article, "[Scholarly communication and the dilemma of collective action](#)."  
<https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.78.2.16581>

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