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# Insight into Faculty Open Access Perceptions: A Quantitative Analysis among UAE Faculty

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## ABSTRACT

Open access (OA) publishing presents university librarians, administrators, and faculty researchers with a paradox of both opportunities and challenges. For faculty researchers in particular, the decision of whether to pursue OA publication of their scholarship is driven by their perceptions of the credibility and quality of OA publishing. While there is a variety of extant literature broaching these perceptions, there are few quantitative analyses with an *n* greater than 100 respondents, and a notable lack of research in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This study mitigates this gap in scholarship regarding OA publishing, offering a quantitative analysis of a survey sample of 134 UAE faculty researchers. We find statistically significant findings regarding the relationship between one's position on OA and length of publishing career and professorial rank. Similarly, we find that those with favourable views of OA publishing are more likely to believe that OA journals are peer reviewed, increase likelihood of being cited, allow authors to repost content, and are a more principled alternative to traditional publishers. Those who believe that their research should be freely available to all readers or that OA publishing broadens their research impact were also highly likely to hold favourable views of OA publishing. Finally, our findings suggest that support for OA publishing at the departmental and institutional level remains ambiguous, with findings yielding contradicting results on the matter. The study contributes to content regarding scholarship, library science, and university administration.

## KEYWORDS

Academic publishing; faculty perceptions; library science; open access publishing; scholarship

## Introduction

Open access (OA) publishing includes a wide range of freely available academic scholarship, from more traditional publishers that give authors the option to pay a fee to make their research OA, to entire journals employing

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completely unrestricted access and reuse policies, (Laakso et al., 2011). While a variety of OA models exist, previous research distinguishes three main categories: gold OA (publishers make published papers available sans paywalls), green OA (publishers allow the author to self-archive their manuscripts), and hybrid OA (authors pay to make their published papers available beyond the normal confines of the journal's paywall) (Laakso et al., 2011). The increasing integration of technology and online access in the dissemination of scholarship means that understanding faculty researcher knowledge and perceptions of OA publishing is imperative to all stakeholders involved with the dissemination of scientific knowledge: from librarians to administrators to publishers to researchers themselves. Understanding the dynamics of publication provides a critical advantage.

Numerous studies explore faculty perceptions and attitudes towards OA publishing. These studies reflect the evolving scholarly communications landscape, showing that the OA movement continues to garner increasing support but also continues to underscore perennial concerns influencing scholars' decision-making (Roehrig, Soper, Cox, & Colvin, 2018; Warlick & Vaughan, 2007; Yang & Li, 2015).

Also impacting faculty decision making are factors such as perceived journal quality and editorial processes, including peer review and speed of review process (Wichert, 2016) but also discomfort with Creative Commons licencing and payment of author-side fees (Frass, Cross, & Gardner, 2013). In spite of their objections, some authors note they will continue to pay fees for journals they consider to be of high quality (Schroter, Tite, & Smith, 2005).

Studies vary in their depth of exploration and particular areas of research focus, with various participant populations and sample sizes. These range from single, research intensive institutions or smaller liberal arts settings (Gaines, 2015; Heaton, Burns, & Thoms, 2019; Rodriguez, 2014; Yang & Li, 2015), to wider national studies (Blankstein & Wolff-Eisenberg, 2019; Harley, Acord, Earl-Novell, Lawrence, & King, 2010), to larger-scale international reviews (Dallmeier-Tiessen et al., 2011), to meta-analyses of other studies (Togia & Korobili, 2014; Xia, 2010).

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in particular—the locale of this present research— there are few published studies focussed on OA publishing and perceptions. Boufars (2020) notes that the UAE's higher education and scholarship tenure is relatively young, and sets the basis for the prominence of OA via analysis of the quantity and content of OA journals produced in the nation . Likewise, Mavodza (2013) offers a review of the current status of OA in the UAE . And while Kaba and Said (2015) study of one UAE university's faculty provides a basic summary of scholars perceptions (limited to awareness, use, and opinions on OA resources), the *n* of 34 suggests that further research must be conducted.

Thus, this study offers further exploration of the impact of UAE faculty awareness of OA publishing options on their choices regarding where and how they publish, particularly regarding journal outputs. Analysis and discussion presented in this article are based on data gathered via an online survey conducted at the American University of Sharjah (AUS), an American-style liberal arts university in the UAE. Using Peter Suber's (2006) frequently paraphrased definition of OA as '*a set of principles and a range of practices through which research outputs are distributed 'online, free of cost or other access barriers'*' ("Open Access," 2021), participants were given a variety of questions measuring their awareness and perceptions of OA publishing.

## **Background**

### ***Awareness and support for OA publishing***

There is evidence that faculty researchers' self-reported awareness of OA across disciplines has grown over time. In a longitudinal study of changes in international scholars' attitudes and publishing behaviour from 1991 to 2008, Xia (2010) found an "obvious trend of decrease" in academics' unawareness of OA, from about 50% in 1997 to about 15% in 2007. The Study of Open Access Publishing (SOAP) survey found that 89% of researchers across the scholarly community believe that OA is beneficial for their disciplinary fields (Dallmeier-Tiessen et al., 2011). The Open Access Publishing in European Networks UK (OAPEN-UK) study found that academics are predominantly aware (54%) or familiar (39%) with the movement (2012). Likewise, a recent nation-wide study of faculty at American four-year institutions has found increasing acceptance of OA; when asked if they would be happy to see OA replace traditional publishing 64% said yes in 2018, compared to 57% only three years prior (Blankstein & Wolff-Eisenberg, 2019).

Studies provide evidence that faculty researchers who opt to publish OA do so for a number of reasons. Motivating factors include the desire to reach a wider reading audience (Heaton et al., 2019; Warlick & Vaughan, 2007), the speed of peer review and publication turnaround time (Harley et al., 2010), as well as benefits to the scientific community, such as fast dissemination and fostering social exchange among researchers (Dallmeier-Tiessen et al., 2011).

### ***Barriers to OA publishing***

Despite an increasing interest in OA, there is evidence of a gap between attitudes towards OA and real life publishing practises (Narayan et al., 2018; Rodriguez, 2014). As reported, many academics are reluctant to move

away from familiar and traditional publishing workflows and lack the time and motivation to do so (Gaines, 2015). Despite the fact that most faculty are aware of OA and its potential benefits, it seems the concept is poorly understood as a publishing model (Gaines, 2015; Laughtin-Dunker, 2014; McDonald, Gibson, Yates, & Stephenson, 2017; OAPEN-UK, 2012). This led Togia and Korobili (2014) to emphasise that the full potential of OA is yet to be realised. Many faculty researchers seem distrustful and express significant concerns regarding the value and reliability of OA publishing for their own work (Gaines, 2015; McDonald et al., 2017). Despite evidence that faculty possess altruistic motives to make their research outputs accessible, they continue to opt for traditional publishing models at high rates (Housewright, Schonfeld, & Wulfson, 2013; Narayan et al., 2018).

There are a number of concerns that impede decisions to publish OA: anxiety surrounding journal quality, reputation, prestige, as well as a perceived lack of peer review remains paramount. Findings indicate that faculty continue to prioritise traditional measures such as a journal's reputation and impact factor when deciding where to publish (McDonald et al., 2017; Togia & Korobili, 2014; Warlick & Vaughan, 2007). Another reported barrier relates to the costs associated with OA publishing, namely article processing charges (APCs). Early studies report faculty mistrust of journals that charge APCs, believing they signify lower quality (Harley et al., 2010; Mischo & Schlembach, 2011; Nicholas & Rowlands, 2005). APCs are also a listed disincentive for many with restricted funding options who might otherwise opt to publish OA (Dallmeier-Tiessen et al., 2011; Heaton et al., 2019; Sheikh, 2019).

A number of studies have explored the influence of researcher rank in publishing decision-making with inconsistent findings. One study found that tenured faculty are less likely to choose OA as a publishing option (Park & Qin, 2007), whereas later studies have shown that tenured faculty “seem to exercise significantly more freedom in the choice of publication outlet” (Harley et al., 2010, p. ii) and are “more engaged and interested in OA publishing topics in general” (Yang & Li, 2015, p. 18). Underscoring the complexities of this research space, recent study findings indicate that the pressures of tenure and promotion are not significant motivating factors in researchers' OA publication decision-making practice (Heaton et al., 2019). This finding aligns with Rodriguez, who found broader acceptance of OA publishing across age and rank and “less concern about tenure implications” (2014, p. 609).

### ***Predatory journals***

Predatory journals are a subset of OA journals. The term was coined by Jeffrey Beall in a 2010 paper where he describes the business model of

several publishers is to “exploit the author-pays, Open-Access model for their own profit” (2010, p. 15). Beall compiled a list of potentially predatory publishers, known as Beall’s List, that became a useful resource for researchers and information professionals. He maintained the list until 2017 (Richtig, Berger, Lange-Asschenfeldt, Aberer, & Richtig, 2018), but an archived version is still available online as of 2022. Richtig et al. (2018) enumerates criteria defined by the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) that could be used to identify which journals and publishers are predatory, including insufficient peer-review process, poor publishing ethics, aggressive email solicitations for submissions, and a lack of indexing.

Xia et al.’s study (2015) indicates that most authors who publish in predatory journals tend to be less experienced—presumably under more pressure to get published—and come from developing countries in India, Africa, or the Middle East. Conversely, Mertkan, Onurkan Aliusta, & Suphi’s (2021) literature review found that “geographical location and author experience fail to explain the author profile of ‘predatory’ articles,” rather research evaluation policies and pressure to publish are more important factors (Mertkan et al., 2021, p. 470).

Since the creation of Beall’s list, other tools and methods have arisen to spread awareness about predatory publishing practices. The Think. Check. Submit. site was launched 2015 as a tool to help researchers identify trustworthy publishers and journals (Think. Check. Submit., 2015). Cobey et al. (2019) recommends outreach and training on predatory publishing practices not only to researchers, but also to hiring, promotion, and tenure committees. AlRyalat et al. (2019) found an infographic to be an effective way to inform researchers about predatory journals and found it a successful tool.

### ***OA publishing in the UAE and the present study***

There are few published studies focussed on OA publishing and perceptions in the UAE, leaving a notable research gap. Mavodza explored the status of OA in the UAE, providing insight into initiatives to promote the use of OA resources (2013). This was followed by a study that explored faculty awareness, use, and perceptions of OA resources (not publishing) among a small sample of Al Ain University of Science and Technology faculty members (Kaba & Said, 2015). Other research comprises bibliometric reviews of differing focus (Al Marzouqi, Alameddine, Sharif, & Alsheikh-Ali, 2019). Interest has piqued recently with an unpublished bibliometric analysis of OA publications in the UAE from 2015 to 2019 by discipline showing a 190% growth (Al-Sheryani & Pasha, 2020). Boufarss (2020) analysed 534 scholarly, peer reviewed journals published in the UAE and

found 64% of these journals are OA, with 70% charging APCs, a landscape that is dominated by commercial, English-language publishers. Findings indicate a growing interest in OA publishing and an increasing number of venues for researchers to do so (Al Marzouqi et al., 2019; Al-Sheryani & Pasha, 2020; Boufarss & Laakso, 2020; Kaba & Said, 2015; Mavodza, 2013). While recent UAE higher education policies and practises surrounding open access publishing from a cross-organizational perspective have been explored, (Boufarss & Laakso, 2020), clearly lacking, however, is a detailed exploration of UAE faculty researchers' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviour surrounding OA.

Our study offers such an analysis of faculty researchers in the UAE. Operating from a single campus site in the emirate of Sharjah, the American University of Sharjah (AUS) is a comprehensive American liberal arts style university established in 1997. AUS has the highest percentage of international students of any ranked university in the world according to the Times Higher Education rankings (Times Higher Education, 2021) and is among the top 50 universities in the world under the age of 50 years according to QS World University Rankings (O'Callaghan, 2020). Our Fall 2020 enrolment of 5,198 students across undergraduate and graduate programs is supported by 327 full time faculty representing 47 different nationalities. The University has grown its research capacity in recent years with the development of faculty grant opportunities. Sampling the entire AUS faculty researcher population, we offer an exploration of the following research questions:

- Q1. To what extent are UAE faculty researchers aware of OA publishing, and how does this awareness impact their positions on OA publishing?
- Q2. What are UAE faculty researchers' positions on OA publishing opportunities and challenges, and how do these positions compare to those of other institutions?
- Q3. To what extent do rank and experience impact positions on OA publishing, and how do these positions compare to those of other institutions?

## **Methods and measures**

### **Methods**

This study employs a quantitative survey research methodology with the intent of assessing propensity towards pro-OA behaviours among the faculty members at AUS (Fowler, 2013). The population of AUS is quite demographically diverse, with its faculty representing nearly 50 different nationalities. Data was collected using an online survey research design; all faculty, researchers, and staff with an institutional email address received an invitation to participate. In order to participate in the study respondents



had to meet basic eligibility requirements: (1) have affiliation with AUS, (2) express their informed consent, and (3) be 18 years of age or older.

The online survey was distributed using the Qualtrics<sup>®</sup> Analytic Suite, and made available to the sample via distribution lists in March 2020. The survey remained in the field for nearly one month (between 15 March to 12 April), and was delivered to a sample of 457 AUS faculty (362) and staff (95). Of these, 134 responded and 114 fully completed the instrument (though we include partial data in our analysis). Thus, this study's response rate is 29.3% and the completion rate is 85.1%.

### **Measures**

The survey sample was presented with questions on their understanding of OA terminology (such as hybrid OA), perceived characteristics of journals that provide OA publishing options (such as quality of OA versus subscription/pay-per-view journals), and personal experience with OA publishing (such as funding sources, repositories, and copyright options). A review of the literature was undertaken to establish existing research on the topic and to help form survey questions. The instruments reported in Sheikh (2019) and Frass et al. (2013) were specifically helpful for forming survey questions on attitudes towards and reasons for publishing OA (or not). Factors influencing decisions to publish in particular journals also drew from the Wiley Author Survey on Open Access (2012).

Besides pertinent demographic and institutional affiliation items, the survey instrument included items concerning:

#### **Position on OA publishing overall**

Respondents were shown the paraphrased Suber (2006) definition of OA publishing ("*Open access publishing is a set of principles and a range of practices through which research outputs are distributed online, free of cost or other access barriers*" ("Open Access," 2021), and asked to selection the choice that represented their position on OA publishing from '*strongly in favour*', '*moderately in favour*', '*neutral*', '*moderately against*', '*strongly against*', and '*don't know/unsure*'.

Using a five-point Likert scale ('*always*', '*often*', '*sometimes*', '*never*', and '*don't know/unsure*') respondents stated to what extent twelve items described their opinions of OA publishing options: '*are peer reviewed*', '*charge fees for authors to publish in them*', '*have a good impact factor*', '*increase the likelihood of being cited*', '*allow authors more ability to reuse/post content without restrictions*', '*allow copyright to reside with authors*', '*are a more principled alternative to traditional publishers*', '*better target a general (non-professional audience)*', '*have a faster submission-to-publication*



*turnaround*, *'are rare in my field'*, *'are hard to publish in due to a lack of institutional funding'*, and *'are predatory or fake journals'*. (Sheikh, 2019; Togia & Korobili, 2014; Yang & Li, 2015).

### **Publishing behaviours and interests**

Respondents were asked to estimate the number of peer reviewed journal articles they had published at the time of the study. Faculty researchers were asked to use a five-point Likert scale ranging from *'strongly agree'* to *'strongly disagree'* to respond to six items about publishing in general: *'my research should be freely available to all readers'*, *'publishing in open access journals broadens the impact of my research'*, *'researchers should retain the copyright of their published articles'*, *'I don't want to spend my grant funds on publishing fees'*, *'my department encourages open access publishing'*, and *'my department discourages open access publishing'* (respondents randomly received one of the two latter statements).

### **Familiarity with OA publishing models**

To measure their awareness and experiences with OA publishing models, we offered a description of hybrid OA journal models (*'In open access publishing, hybrid journals are subscription journals that offer authors the option to make their individual articles open access for a fee. Other articles in the same journal issue are not freely available and can only be read by subscribers.'*), and a prompt to select the choice that described their familiarity with hybrid journals: *'yes, I've heard of this and know what it means'*, *'yes, I've heard of this, but didn't really know what it meant'*, *'no, I've never heard of this before'*, and *'I've heard of this model, but not the term "hybrid journal"'*. We repeated a similar process for gold OA journals, though referring to them as *'fully open access journals'*, stating that *'fully open access journals are completely funded by author fees, there is no subscription cost'*. We then asked that respondents choose which of the following statements about *'fully open access journals'* was true: *'they are of higher quality than subscription/pay-per-view journals'*, *'they are of similar quality than subscription/pay-per-view journals'*, *'they are of lower quality than subscription/pay-per-view journals'*, and *'don't know/unsure'*.

### **Experience with OA publishing**

To measure respondents' experience with OA publishing, we asked whether respondents had ever published an OA journal article, with answer choices of *'yes'*, *'no'*, and *'don't know/unsure'*. If respondents selected *'yes'* for the prior, we followed by asking *'which sources have you (or your coauthors) used to pay open access fees'*, allowing them to select all that applied from

the following choices: ‘external grant’, ‘internal grant’, ‘self-funded (out of pocket)’, ‘not applicable’ (excluded from the analysis), and ‘other source’ (with a text entry prompt). All respondents were asked if making their work OA was an important part of their “where to publish” decision, and given choices of ‘yes’, ‘yes, increasingly so’, ‘yes, but decreasingly so’, and ‘no’.

## **Data**

As a result of the exploratory nature of this study, descriptive frequencies and multivariate analyses were calculated via the Qualtrics<sup>©</sup> Analytic Suite. Because the analysis focuses on simply acknowledging relationships between variables, chi-squared tests of significance are used to report statistically significant results. All multivariate calculations adopted a  $p < .05$  level of significance and a confidence interval of 95%. Statistically significant responses were identified and are reported in the results section below.

## **Results**

### **Demographics**

As shown in Table 1, about one-third of the sample (34%) are recent degree-earners, having completed their highest degrees in 2010 or more recently. The majority of respondents (56.3%) represent the AUS College of Arts and Sciences (they also comprise 42.5% of the AUS faculty overall), followed by 24.4% from the College of Engineering, 10.1% from the School of Business Administration, and 4.2% from the College of Architecture, Art and Design (the second, third, and fourth largest proportions of the AUS faculty, respectively)

Senior faculty members comprise the majority (64.5%) of the sample, with 34.7% being full professors, 27.3% being associate professors, and another 2.5% who are senior instructors/lecturers. Table 2 reveals that nearly a third of respondents (31%) have been publishing their work for twenty years or more. One-fifth of respondents (19.9%) are newer scholars with a publishing career of five or less years. Looking at the number of publications, 41.7% of respondents have 10 or fewer peer reviewed publications, 45.6% have between 11 and 49, while another 12.9% have 50 or more.

### **Publishing behaviours and interests**

Focusing on one’s position on OA publishing, we ask respondents to reflect on a given definition of “open access publishing” and state whether they

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics.

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	70	66.00%
Female	29	27.40%
Prefer not to say	7	6.60%
Age		
Less than 25 years	0	0.00%
25–34	9	8.50%
35–44	32	30.20%
45–54	30	28.30%
55–64	21	19.80%
65 years+	7	6.60%
Prefer not to say	7	6.60%
Year of highest degree completion		
Between 2015 and 2020	17	16.50%
Between 2010 and 2014	18	17.50%
Between 2005 and 2009	22	21.40%
Between 2000 and 2004	17	16.50%
Prior to 1999	29	28.20%
Department		
Architecture	5	4.20%
Arts & Sciences	67	56.30%
Business	12	10.10%
Engineering	29	24.40%
Achievement/Bridge	1	0.80%
Library	2	1.70%
Other	3	2.50%
Rank		
Full professor	42	34.70%
Associate professor	33	27.30%
Assistant professor	26	21.50%
Professor of practice	1	0.80%
Senior instructor	2	1.70%
Instructor	1	0.80%
Senior lecturer	1	0.80%
Lecturer	1	0.80%
Laboratory instructor	2	1.70%
Adjunct faculty	0	0.00%
Librarian	2	1.70%
Other	10	8.30%

are “*strongly in favor*”, “*moderately in favor*”, “*neutral*”, “*moderately against*”, “*strongly against*”, or “*don’t know/unsure*.” Due to the smaller number of negative responses, we’ve combined the “*moderately against*” and “*strongly against*” categories in the statistical analysis. [Figure 1](#) shows that the majority of respondents favour the OA model, with 52.2% “*strongly in favor*” and 22.6% “*moderately in favor*”. Regardless of length of publishing career, the majority of respondents expressed being in favour of OA publishing to some extent ([Table 3](#)). These results reveal a statistically significant relationship between position on OA publishing and the length of one’s publishing career, where those who have been publishing between “*11 to 15 years*” being either “*strongly in favor*” (41.2%) or “*moderately in favor*” (47.1%). Those who have been publishing for “*6 to 10 years*” are more likely than others to report being “*neutral*” (35%) when it comes to OA publishing.

**Table 2.** Publishing behaviour.

	Frequency	Percentage
Length of publishing career		
Less than 1 year	4	3.20%
1–5 years	21	16.70%
6–10 years	20	15.90%
11–15 years	20	15.90%
16–19 years	20	15.90%
20 years +	39	31.00%
None	2	1.60%
Number of peer reviewed publications		
None	2	2.00%
1–5	25	24.80%
6–10	15	14.90%
11–15	6	5.90%
16–20	11	10.90%
21–25	9	8.90%
26–30	4	4.00%
31–35	4	4.00%
36–40	6	5.90%
41–45	5	5.00%
46–49	1	1.00%
50 or more	13	12.90%

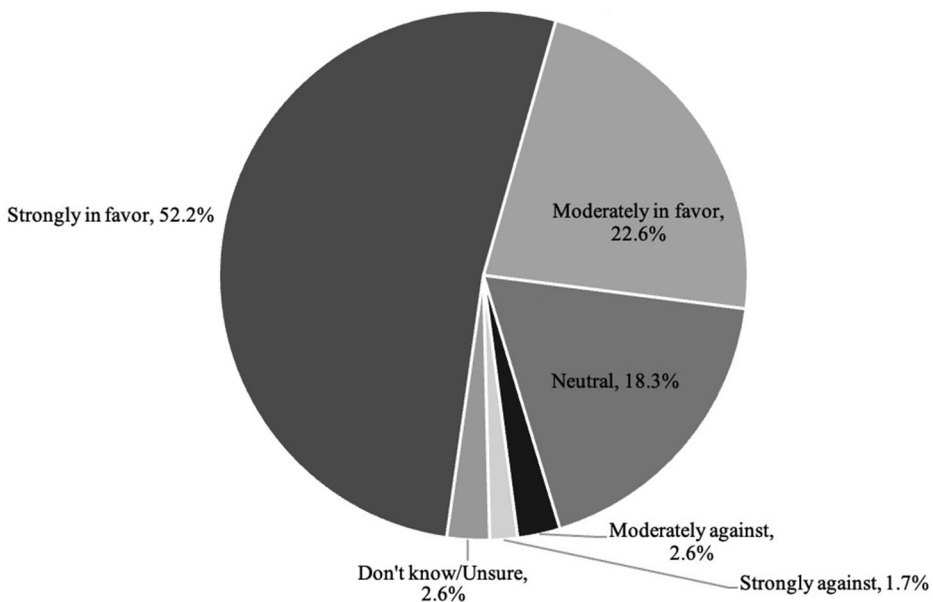
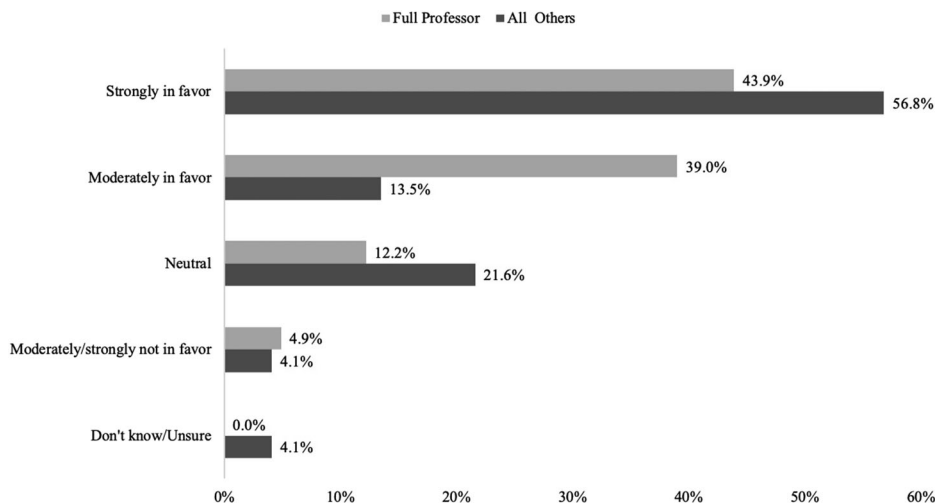
**Figure 1.** Position on OA Publishing (Q9) by percent.

Figure 2 compares full professors to all other respondents, revealing another statistically significant result, with fewer full professors (43.9%) being “*strongly in favor*” of OA publishing compared to their colleagues (56.8%). Instead, full professors report being “*moderately in favor*” (39%) more often than their colleagues (13.5%), or either “*strongly*” or “*moderately against*” (4.9% for full professors and 4.1% for others).

**Table 3.** Relationship between position on OA publishing (Q9) and length of publishing career (Q3) by percent.

	Less than 1 year	1–5	6–10	11–15	16–19	20 years+
Strongly in favor	33.30%	63.20%	55.00%	41.20%	44.40%	55.30%
Moderately in favor	33.30%	10.50%	5.00%	47.1%*	16.70%	28.9%*
Neutral	0.00%	15.80%	35%*	5.90%	22.20%	15.80%
Moderately/strongly not in favor	33.3%*	5.30%	5.00%	5.90%	5.60%	0.00%
Don't know/Unsure	0.00%	5.30%	0.00%	0.00%	11.1%*	0.00%

$p < 0.05^*$ ; chi-square 0.049.

**Figure 2.** Relationship between position on OA publishing and being a full professor or not by percent.

Comparing the relationship between OA publishing and specific OA perceptions, we find several statistically significant results. To measure these specific OA perceptions, respondents are asked how often “*journals that provide OA options*” fit a given characteristic. The results displayed in Table 4 represent those who chose “*always*” or “*often*” on each scale. Belief that OA journals are “*always/often peer reviewed*” coincides with 66.1% of those who are “*strongly in favor*” of OA publishing, and 69.6% of those who are “*moderately in favor*”, a stark difference between those who are “*neutral*” (30%) or “*strongly/moderately not in favor*” (0%).

There is also a significant difference in beliefs about the cost structure of OA journals: those who believe that these journals “*always/often charge fees for authors to publish in them*” are represented by 49.2% of those who are “*strongly in favor*” of OA publishing, 73.9% of those who are “*moderately in favor*”, 85% of those who are “*neutral*”, and 100% of those who are “*strongly/moderately not in favor*”.

While 66.1% of those who are “*strongly in favor*” of OA publishing agree that “*journals that provide OA options*” “*always/often increase [one’s] likelihood of being cited*”, a contrasting 86.4% of those who are “*moderately in*

**Table 4.** Relationship between OA perceptions (Q11) and position on OA publishing (Q9) by percent.

	Strongly in favour	Moderately in favour	Neutral	Strongly/Moderately not in favour	Don't know
Always/often peer reviewed**	66.10%	69.60%	30.00%	0.00%	33.30%
Always/often charge fees*	49.20%	73.90%	85.00%	100.00%	66.70%
Always/often have a good impact factor	40.70%	36.40%	15.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Always/often increase likelihood of being cited***	66.10%	86.40%	25.00%	0.00%	33.30%
Always/often allow authors more ability to use/repost content without restrictions*	64.40%	56.50%	30.00%	50.00%	33.30%
Always/often allow copyright to remain with authors	47.50%	65.20%	30.00%	50.00%	33.30%
Always/often a more principled alternative to traditional publishers****	60.70%	13.60%	5.00%	0.00%	33.30%
Always/often better target a more general (non-professional audience)	55.20%	39.10%	35.00%	66.70%	33.30%
Always/often have a faster submission to publication turn-around	62.70%	63.60%	45.00%	66.70%	66.70%
Always/often are rare in my field	22.40%	13.00%	45.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Always/often are hard to publish in due to a lack of institutional funding	39.70%	65.20%	55.00%	0.00%	50.00%
Always/often are predatory or fake journals**	8.80%	30.40%	35.00%	100.00%	0.00%

p < 0.05\*; p < 0.01\*\*; p < 0.001\*\*\*

**Table 5.** Relationship between hybrid OA journal familiarity (Q13) and position on OA publishing (Q9) by percent.

	All	Strongly in favour	Moderately in favour	Neutral	Strongly/Moderately Against
Yes, I've heard of this and know what it means	62.60%	70.20%	63.60%	55.00%	40.00%
Yes, I've heard of this but didn't really know what it meant	9.30%	8.80%	9.10%	5.00%	20.00%
No, I've never heard of this before	19.60%	14.00%	22.70%	30.00%	20.00%
I've heard of this model, but not the term "hybrid journal"	8.40%	7.00%	4.50%	10.00%	20.00%

p < 0.05\*; p < 0.01\*\*; p < 0.001\*\*\*

*favor*” state the same. Those who are “*strongly in favor*” of OA publishing also seem to view these journals as having more distribution flexibility, with 64% believing that they “*always/often allow authors more ability to use or repost content without restrictions*”, a significant difference from all other OA publishing positions.

There is a stark discrepancy concerning perceptions of the ethics of OA publishing among the respondents. Those who believe that OA journals are “*always/often a more principled alternative to traditional publishers*” are far more likely to also be “*strongly in favor*” of OA publishing (60.7%) rather than “*moderately in favor*” (13.6%) or “*neutral*” (5%). None of those who report being “*strongly/moderately not in favor*” (0%) of OA publishing agree with this belief.

The belief that OA journals are “*always/often predatory or fake journals*” resonates with only 8.8% of those who are “*strongly in favor*” of OA publishing, distinguishing them from those who are “*moderately in favor*” (30.4%), “*neutral*” (35%), or “*strong/moderately not in favor*” (100%).

Offered our conceptualization of hybrid journals<sup>1</sup>, 62.6% of the sample replied “*yes, I've heard of this and know what it means*”, as portrayed in Table 5. This response was higher (70.2%) among those “*strongly in favor*” of OA publishing, and lower for those who were “*neutral*” (55%) or “*strongly/moderately not in favor*” (40%), though these differences are not statistically significant.

Offering our conceptualization of fully OA journals, responses yield statistically significant differences reflected in Table 6. 44.6% of those “*strongly in favor*” of OA publishing agree that these journals “*are of similar quality to subscription/pay-per-view journals*”, compared to the “*neutral*” (65%) and “*strongly/moderately not in favor*” (80%) groups, who agree that these journals “*are of lower quality than subscription/pay-per-view journals*”.

<sup>1</sup>This prompt read: “*In open access publishing, hybrid journals are subscription journals that offer authors the option to make their individual articles open access for a fee. Other articles in the same journal issue are not freely available and can only be read by subscribers. Regarding hybrid journals...*”



**Table 6.** Relationship between fully OA journal perceptions (Q14) position on OA publishing (Q9) by percent.

	All	Strongly in favour	Moderately in favour	Neutral	Strongly/ Moderately Against
They are of <i>higher</i> quality than subscription/pay-per-view journals**	4.20%	5.40%	4.50%	0.00%	20.00%
They are of <i>similar</i> quality to subscription/pay-per-view journals**	32.10%	44.60%	31.80%	10.00%	0.00%
They are of <i>lower</i> quality than subscription/pay-per-view journals**	33%	17.90%	36.40%	65.00%	80.00%
Don't know/Unsure**	30.20%	32.10%	27.30%	25.00%	0.00%

p < 0.05\*; p < 0.01\*\*; p < 0.001\*\*\*

**Table 7.** Relationship between have published in OA journal previously (Q16) and fully OA journals perceptions (Q14) by percent.

	Published in OA	Has not published in OA	Don't know/Unsure
They are of <i>higher</i> quality than subscription/pay-per-view journals***	8.80%	0.00%	0.00%
They are of <i>similar</i> quality to subscription/pay-per-view journals***	45.60%	17.10%	12.50%
They are of <i>lower</i> quality than subscription/pay-per-view journals***	24.60%	48.80%	12.50%
Don't know/Unsure***	21.10%	34.10%	75.00%

p < 0.05\*; p < 0.01\*\*; p < 0.001\*\*\*

Table 7 shows that those who previously published in an OA journal tend to have a fonder view of fully OA journals<sup>2</sup> than those with no previous OA publishing experience. The majority of those with previous experience in OA suggest that fully OA journals “are of similar quality” (45.6%) or “higher quality” (8.8%) as “subscription/pay-per-view journals”. In contrast, a notable proportion (48.8%) of those who have no experience publishing in OA say that fully OA journals “are of lower quality”.

According to Table 8, a large majority of respondents (88.8%) “strongly agree or agree” that their research “should be freely available to all readers”. Of these, the majority are either “strongly in favor” (60%) or “moderately in favor” (22.1%) of OA publishing. Similarly, the majority (71%) of those who “strongly agree or agree” that “publishing in OA journals broadens the impact of [their] research”, tend to be either “strongly in favor” (67.1%) and “moderately in favor” (23.7%) of OA publishing.

As mentioned previously, when asking respondents to offer their level of agreement with a statement about their departments’ positions on OA publishing, we chose to randomly offer one of two variations of the statement, in an attempt to capture any potentially leading effects in diction. There are no significant differences among those who were given the positive

<sup>2</sup>This prompt read: “Fully open access journals are completely funded by author fees, there is no subscription cost. Which of the following is true of fully open access journals?”

**Table 8.** Relationship between opinions on publishing (Q15) and position on OA publishing (Q9) by percent.

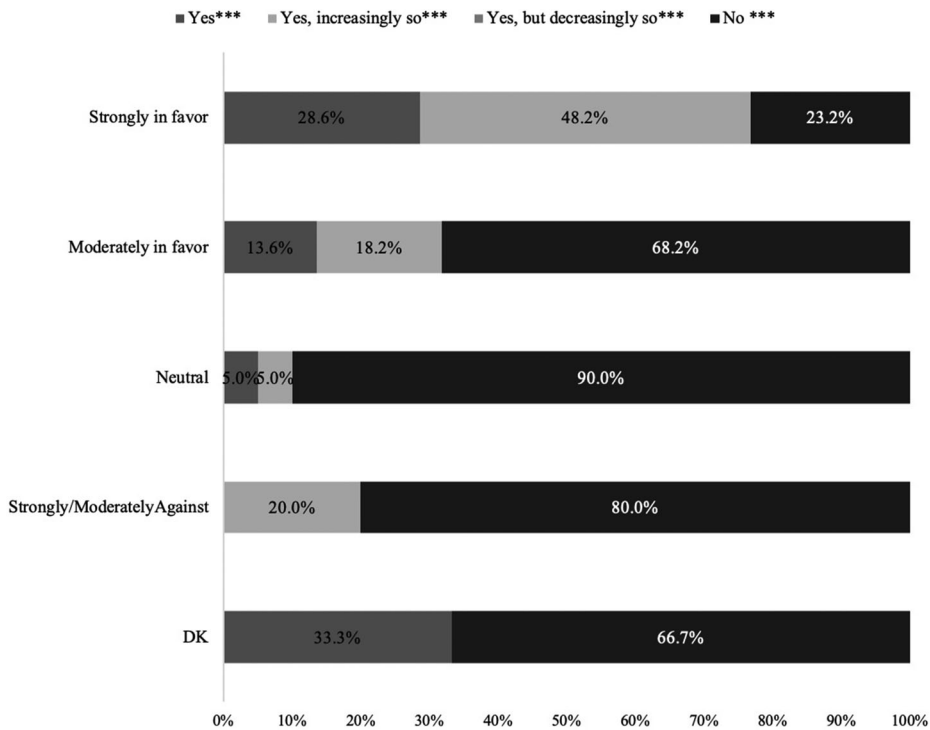
	All	Strongly in favour	Moderately in favour	Neutral	Strongly/ Moderately Against	Don't know
Strongly/agree my research should be freely available to all readers***	88.80%	60%	22.1%	13.7%	2.1%	2.1%
Strongly/agree publishing in open access journals broadens the impact of my research***	71%	67.1%	23.7%	7.9%	0.00%	1.3%
Strongly/agree researchers should retain the copyright to their published articles	75.8%	55%	22.5%	15%	3.8%	3.8%
Strongly/agree I do not want to spend my grant funds on publishing fees	57.9%	47.8%	21%	25.8%	4.8%	1.6%
Strongly/agree my department encourages open access publishing	12.7%	85.7%	14.3%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Strongly/agree my department discourages open access publishing**	21.6%	36.4%	36.4%	0.00%	27.3%	0.00%

p < 0.05\*; p < 0.01\*\*; p < 0.001\*\*\*

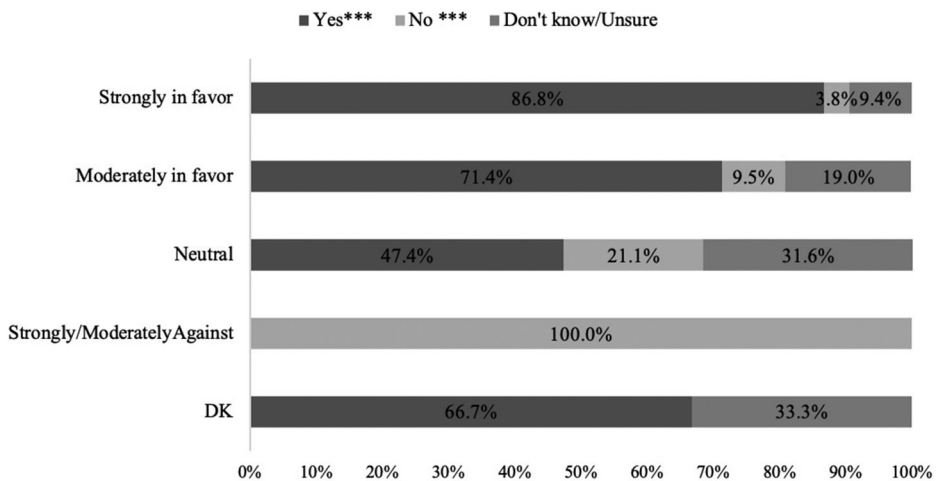
connotation; however, the negative connotation item was statistically significant. Among the 21.6% of respondents who “*strongly agree or agree*” that their department discourages OA publishing, they are split into rough thirds regarding their position on OA publishing (“*strongly in favor*” (36.4%), “*moderately in favor*” (36.4%), and “*strongly or moderately against*” (27.3%)).

Figure 3 suggests that while making one’s work OA doesn’t seem to have a major influence in decisions regarding where to publish for the overall sample (49.1% overall state that this is not a factor), investigation of the correlation between the aforementioned and one’s position on OA publishing does reveal some hidden nuance. The vast majority (76.8%) of those who are “*strongly in favour*” of OA publishing replied either “*yes*” (28.5%) or “*yes, increasingly so*” (48.2%) to “*Is making your work open access an important part of your “where to publish” decision?*”. Here, those who are “*strongly in favour*” of OA publishing are more likely than everyone else to say that making their work OA has either an impact/increasing impact on their “where to publish decision”.

However, more of those who are “*strongly in favour*” of OA publishing (43.9%) have a positive perception of the acceptability of OA for promotion or tenure decisions (replying “*yes*”) than those who are “*moderately in favour*” (27.3%), “*neutral*” (10%), or “*strongly/moderately not in favour*” (0%). Finally, while the majority of respondents overall (71.3%) report that they have used OA articles in their own research, the frequency in doing so is higher for those “*strongly in favour*” (86.8%) or “*moderately in favour*” (71.4%) of OA publishing, than those who are “*neutral*” (47.4%) or “*strongly/moderately not in favour*” (0%) (see Figure 4).



**Figure 3.** Relationship between position on OA publishing (Q9) and OA publishing decisions (Q18) by percent.



**Figure 4.** Relationship between position on OA publishing (Q9) and use of OA articles in own research (Q21) by percent.

## Discussion

An increasing awareness of OA is reported in the literature (Blankstein & Wolff-Eisenberg, 2019; Dallmeier-Tiessen et al., 2011; OAPEN-UK, 2012; Xia, 2010) and a number of survey elements indicate that AUS faculty are

in line with current levels, although there is mistrust and uncertainty of OA journals, particularly among those who have not published in OA journals previously.

When offered our conceptualization of hybrid journals<sup>3</sup>, nearly two-thirds (62.6%) of the sample replied “*yes, I’ve heard of this and know what it means*”. However, as nearly a third of respondents were not clear on the meaning of hybrid journals, including almost 20% that had not heard of it before, there remains faculty instruction work to be done. Faculty who were strongly or moderately in favour of OA were more aware of the concept of hybrid journals, as shown in [Table 5](#).

The perception of the quality of fully OA journals is integral to our findings. In the literature, these perceptions vary wildly amongst faculty (Gaines, 2015, p. 14). We found a strong relationship between faculty with neutral or negative views on OA publishing and their perception that fully OA journals are of lower quality than subscription/pay-per-view journals.

There is uncertainty over the quality of fully OA journals, supporting the view of Rodriguez that “even those who have knowledge of OA still are confused about what OA means” (2014, p. 609). Amongst faculty that are strongly or moderately in favour of OA publishing there is a consideration that fully OA journals are of similar quality to subscription/pay-per-view journals (44.6% and 31.8% respectively), there is still a perception of fully OA journals being lower quality (17.9% and 36.4%) than subscription/pay-per-view journals.

Those who have previously published in an OA journal have a fonder view of fully OA journals than those with no previous OA publishing experience. In contrast, a high proportion (48.8%) of those who have no experience with OA publication see them as lower quality than subscription/per-per-view journals. The influence of the broad characteristic of quality in OA journals is key to improving the perceptions of faculty.

As noted earlier, research on OA publishing and perceptions in the UAE is limited. A growing interest in OA publishing and increased options for publication has been noted (Al Marzouqi et al., 2019; Al-Sheryani & Pasha, 2020; Boufarss, 2020; Kaba & Said, 2015; Mavodza, 2013). Our survey results show expected perceptions of OA opportunities and challenges, however the continued strong belief that OA journals are fake or predatory, and the limited agreement on the principled approach against traditional publishing models may be strong indicators of why faculty have been slower to take up OA publishing.

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<sup>3</sup>This prompt read: “*In open access publishing, hybrid journals are subscription journals that offer authors the option to make their individual articles open access for a fee. Other articles in the same journal issue are not freely available and can only be read by subscribers. Regarding hybrid journals...*”

Concerns around fee payment and quality (peer review, impact factor) are not unusual and mirror those of faculty elsewhere (Gaines, 2015; McDonald et al., 2017; Togia & Korobili, 2014; Warlick & Vaughan, 2007). The situation reflects those uncovered by Xia (2010), whereby OA is widely recognised but there is a perceived lack of peer review in OA journals, with almost two-thirds of respondents noting there is ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’ peer review.

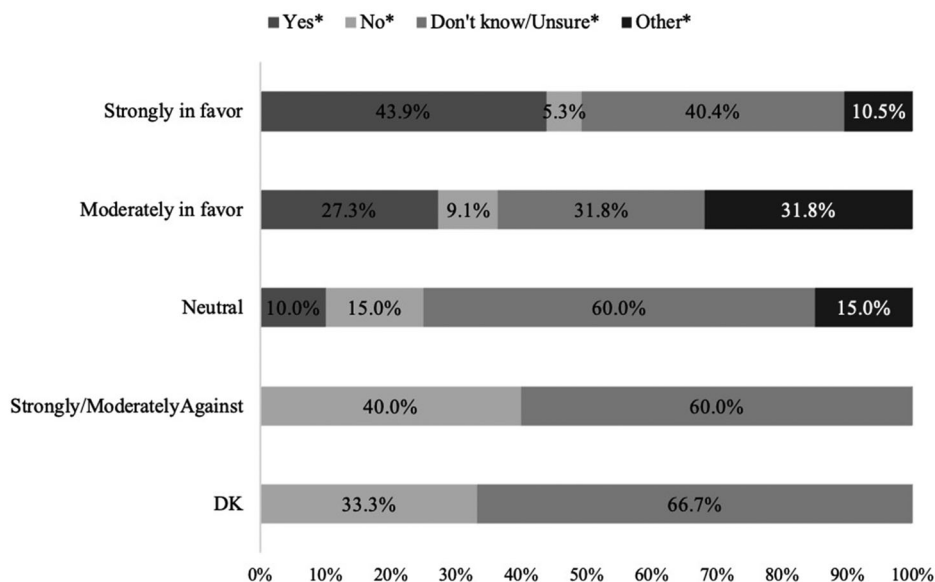
The opinion that journals providing OA options increase the likelihood of being cited appears to resonate with AUS faculty. This is a stronger, more positive response than that reported by McDonald et al. (2017), meaning this may be a motivating factor to encourage more engagement with OA in our faculty.

A key observation from results of this survey is that there exists a very strong perception that OA journals are predatory or fake journals. It is the overriding perception of those who are strongly or moderately not in favor of OA publishing (100%), and even a third of those moderately in favor or neutral positions on OA publishing report this perception. As per the literature, the concept of OA journals is poorly understood as a publishing model (Gaines, 2015; Laughtin-Dunker, 2014; McDonald et al., 2017; OAPEN-UK, 2012). This theme resonated strongly through the free-text comments.

Contrary to this perception, we see those with strong OA favouritism choosing OA as always/often a more principled alternative to traditional publishers, and strong support for the free availability and wide dissemination of outputs. This is consistent with the altruistic and socially responsible reasons for supporting OA found elsewhere in the literature (Heaton et al., 2019, p. 497). This principled approach against traditional publishers is only noted for those strongly in favor of OA; even those moderately in favor do not support this belief.

For faculty that don’t know their position on OA publishing, three beliefs are clear; that OA journals always/often charge fees, that they always/often have faster turnaround times, and they are always/often hard to publish in due to lack of institutional funding.

Our findings suggest that support for OA publishing at the departmental and institutional levels remains ambiguous, with findings yielding contradicting results on the matter. Overall, many respondents (43.9%) are uncertain of the acceptability of OA journal publications in regard to considerations for promotion or tenure. Even faculty who strongly favor OA express doubts (don’t know/unsure) about the perception of acceptance of OA journal publication for consideration of promotion/tenure, as displayed in Figure 5. This is a common issue for faculty, reported by Gaines who notes specifically that “a lack of departmental or institutional support for open access publishing in the tenure and promotion process is a major factor in the lack of acceptance



**Figure 5.** Relationship between position on OA publishing (Q9) and perception of acceptance of OA journal publication for consideration of promotion/tenure (Q19) by percent.

for open access” (2015, p. 2). This issue needs to be addressed before gains in acceptance for OA publishing can occur.

Finally, when conducting their own research, faculty will comfortably use OA articles (i.e., literature reviews, research design, referencing) for their own research, with the exception of those who have a strong or moderate position against OA who state categorically that they will not use OA materials. This is in line with Kaba & Said’s findings, that 90% of faculty “regard themselves as being familiar with OA resources and believe that OA resources are useful for academic activities” (2015, p. 98).

This study found several statistically significant findings regarding position on OA and length of publishing career and professorial rank. It is important to point out that length of publishing career does not necessarily indicate rank. The position on OA of faculty was compared to those at other universities as reported in the literature.

There is a linear progression in the literature demonstrating increased willingness to accept OA publication venues in the last ten years. This indicates a shift in attitude towards OA from less acceptance by tenured faculty (Park & Qin, 2007) to broader acceptance across all rank levels (Heaton et al., 2019; Rodriguez, 2014; Yang & Li, 2015).

Our survey results reveal that full professors are less likely to be strongly in favour of OA publishing (43%) than their colleagues (56.8%) and more likely to be moderately in favour (39% and 13.5% respectively). As Gaines notes this is ‘possibly because they have successfully used the current scholarly publishing model to achieve tenure’ (2015, p. 26). This suggests AUS

full professors may be more conservative in their position on OA publishing than their peers elsewhere.

Faculty that have published for between 11-15 years are strongly or moderately in favour of OA (41.2% and 47.1%). Aligning with the findings of Harley et al. (2010) and Yang and Li (2015), faculty that are still working towards promotion with between 6-10 years of publishing experience exhibit a neutral outlook (35%) being potentially more cautious with following traditional scholarly publication practises and waiting until tenure before favouring OA (Rodriguez, 2014).

In general, findings support those of Gaines (2015), that faculty have a reasonable awareness of OA, yet have significant reservations about the quality of fully OA journals and a dip in support for publishing OA at career points, even those with experience of OA publications.

## **Conclusions**

### ***Limitations***

Although survey responses came from a wide range of disciplines, the number of respondents precluded analysis by department. Additionally, two months prior to the survey launch, AUS started a pilot of institutional OA funding for publications. The availability of this funding and the criteria for use may have changed faculty perspectives on OA options. In the course of applying for funding, there were numerous queries indicating that faculty knowledge of OA was expanding. The pilot funding subsequently ended, and the authors do not consider there has been a widespread or systemic change to perceptions as a result.

The generalization of data to other populations may also be considered a limitation to this study.

### ***Contributions***

The primary contribution of this study is for librarians and information professionals who seek to communicate and provide outreach for ongoing scholarly communication programming efforts. Insight into the perceptions that inform choices helps to target training development and identifies potential groups to focus specific skills support.

## **Conclusions**

Findings highlight a complex, multifaceted landscape that provides both important contextual and international insight for a range of different stakeholders. These include librarians working closely with faculty in scholarly



communication support roles as OA advocates, who are often responsible for programming and outreach initiatives, as well administrators and staff responsible for institutional decision making and wider policy direction.

A number of survey elements indicate that AUS faculty are in line with the current perceptions and understanding of colleagues elsewhere. Conversations about OA in tenure and promotion cases need to be discussed and supported at Senior Administration level to address suspicion and mistrust.

The findings uncovered by this research will be used to inform programming practice at the case site. An approach of shoring up confidence amongst faculty for identifying quality journal outlets, both OA and traditional publication venues will be one of the primary focus areas for the AUS Library and Research Office teams. The divergent views across faculty suggests variation in approach is necessary, with point-of-need support and prepared LibGuides for general support to be developed.

The recent appointment of a Scholarly Communications Librarian is intended to strengthen the support from the Library for Faculty involved in publishing. In response to a direct faculty request, workshops and accompanying LibGuides on predatory publishing and predatory conferences have been delivered (*Wolf in Sheep's Clothing*, 2022).

Further research will be conducted with focus groups of faculty that have indicated a willingness to discuss their OA perceptions in more detail. Regular review of OA outputs in Scopus and our institutional repository, along with contact with the Research Office program for OA funding will help to assess requirements for advocacy.

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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## Appendix

Please follow the link given here\* for access to [Appendix: AUS Library Open Access Survey](#).

\* [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Bx-9m7U5fPO\\_KmJGfUet0HsSXTJegiL9/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=117141811091726265563&rtprof=true&sd=true](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Bx-9m7U5fPO_KmJGfUet0HsSXTJegiL9/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=117141811091726265563&rtprof=true&sd=true)