

# The Inclusion of Open Access Journals in Academic Libraries: A Case Study of Bioline International

*Jen Sweezie<sup>1</sup>; Nadia Caidi<sup>2</sup>; Leslie Chan<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Bioline International, University of Toronto at Scarborough, 1265 Military Trail, Scarborough, ON M1C 1A4  
e-mail: {sweezie; chan}@utsc.utoronto.ca

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Information Studies, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, M5S 3G6  
e-mail: caidi@fis.utoronto.ca

## Abstract

Specialized open access digital collections contain a wealth of valuable resources. However, major academic and research libraries do not always provide access to them, and thus do not benefit from these unique resources. This case study of one such digital collection, Bioline International, surveys 76 academic libraries in Canada and the United States to determine how often libraries are linking to the collection. A follow-up questionnaire was sent to librarians at the surveyed institutions to determine their opinions about the use of open access journals. The findings suggest issues of poor adoption rates of open access journals, as well as some reasons why such journals may not be actively adopted.

**Keywords:** open access; journal collection; developing countries; bioline international; digital library

## 1 Introduction

Librarians and information professionals continue to struggle with a growing number of available publications and limited budgets, making the selection of library resources difficult. Open access (OA), and in particular, specialized OA collections provide libraries with access to a broad range of high quality academic research and offer the possibility to help alleviate what is referred to as the serials crisis [1]. This study examines why such valuable resources are often not incorporated into library collections. A case study of Bioline International (BI) is used to illustrate this problem.

*Bioline International* (<http://www.bioline.org.br/>) is a specialized OA collection that offers open access to over 50 bioscience journals published in developing countries. The BI website provides free access to regional journals in environmental and agricultural sciences, health and medicine, that may be difficult to obtain elsewhere [2].

## 2 Methodology

Between October 2005 and April 2006, an exploratory study of Canadian and American academic libraries was carried out to determine how many BI journals were included in the libraries' collections. E-journal or e-resource sections of each library website were searched and a checklist was completed, indicating the presence of BI journal titles. 76 (46 Canadian and 30 American) libraries were surveyed for BI's journals. A list of all academic libraries in Canada was generated using Yahoo categories, resulting in the survey of 46 libraries. Due to the large number of academic universities in the United States, a sample of libraries was necessary. A ranking of health science libraries by number of total electronic materials from the Association of Research Libraries (ARL)[3] was obtained. 30 American libraries were selected from the table. Effort was made to select libraries from the top, middle, and bottom of the ranking list, in an effort to ensure that the libraries selected represent a variety of different institutions (both private and public) across the United States.

After the e-journal lists were surveyed, a questionnaire was e-mailed to librarians identified during the library investigation process. Efforts were made to send the questionnaire to librarians working in collection development or on electronic resources lists. Where such a contact was not available, the questionnaire was sent to the head librarian. 76 questionnaires were emailed and 17 responses were received. Librarians were asked about their opinions surrounding the use of open access journals in library collections, as well as about institutional policies and decision making surrounding open access journals.

### 3 Results

Preliminary findings indicate that in Canada only 33% of research libraries (15 /46 libraries examined) were linking to 50% or more of the titles available from BI (more than 29 out of the 59 available titles). In the United States, 56.7 % (17/30 libraries studied) of the research libraries surveyed were linking to 50% or more of BI's 59 journal titles. 89% (41/46 libraries studied) of Canadian libraries offered at least one BI journal title through their library collection. In the United States, 96.7% (29/30 of libraries studied) of libraries offered at least one BI journal title of the 59 available through their library collection.

Libraries were considered to be aware of the BI project if they linked to one or more Bioline journals, even if they linked to the publishers (or other website) directly, and not to BI. Journals participating in the BI project actively promote their inclusion in Bioline through their websites and on the covers of their printed journals, thus knowledge of the BI project is assumed. In both countries, most libraries were aware of BI titles, either through the BI website, through another project or the publisher's website. However, inclusion of all 59 BI journal titles was still relatively low (under 11%) for both countries.

The results of the questionnaire sent to collections development and electronic resource librarians indicated that a number of reasons may contribute to the low level of appearance of BI journals in the library collection. Lack of inclusion in major commercial or open access databases and indexes, the length of time a journal has been publishing, lack of librarian time to seek out and catalogue (or even keep up with) new titles, institutional policy and reputation or perceived credibility of OA journals were all cited as factors in why such OA journals are or are not included in library lists.

### 4 Conclusion

The results suggest that despite the open access nature of BI and the range of its offerings, librarians are not making effective use of the BI collection. Projects such as BI must address the concerns and needs of librarians in order to improve the rate at which journals are added into library collections. Though librarians are often aware of open access journals, time constraints may be considered one of the largest barriers to adopting these journals. The unique situation of open access journals is that they do not often have the large scale budgets of large, mainstream publications, making it difficult to develop compliance with a number of web standards being used by libraries today. Standards such as OpenURL and metadata linking protocols can greatly increase the ease of adoption of these journals in libraries, and improve the chances of having such journals eventually indexed in major databases. These protocols allow librarians to easily link new journal material into their catalogues, and in some cases, some commercial applications are already adding some OA journal titles as options in their databases – librarians merely have to toggle them on or off. Issues of sustainability and journal quality will likely improve gradually as more and more libraries link to and promote OA journals, and journals are included in more databases and indexes. Projects such as BI can provide a sustainable platform by working independently from their individual journals – ensuring web access that is reliable – while also working for the collection as a whole in developing protocols and linking systems that the journals may not be able to generate on their own.

Ongoing study into the trends of inclusion of OA journals in library collections lends itself to a number of conclusions about the barriers to open access publications, how they could be better promoted, and how librarians can be encouraged to make use of these valuable resources.

### References

- [1] OJALA, M. (2005) Open access: open sesame or opening Pandora's Box. *EContent* 28, 6, 31-32, 34-35.
- [2] BIOLINE INTERNATIONAL (BI). "About Bioline" Retrieved Jan 24, 2006 from <http://www.bioline.org.br/info?id=bioline&doc=about>
- [3] YOUNG, M.; KYRILLIDOU, M. (2005) ARL Academic Health Sciences Library Statistics 2003-2004. 29. Retrieved Jan 20, 2006 from <http://www.arl.org/stats/pubpdf/med04.pdf>