

Universities should actively support open scholarship

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Scientific information is locked behind paywalls. People all over the world are locked out, unable to access information due to high subscription costs. Credit:

John R. McKiernan and the 'Why Open Research?' project
(whyopenresearch.org)

Universities should take action to support the sharing of educational resources, argues a new perspective publishing 24 October in the open access journal *PLOS Biology*. Open scholarship not only benefits society at large, argues author Erin McKiernan from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, but also fulfils universities' core missions of knowledge dissemination, community engagement, and public good. It may also increase institutions' visibility, funding, and recruitment power, and lead to better learning outcomes.

The new article outlines problems with current evaluation systems and why researchers may feel intense pressure to lock up their work. Open scholarship practices, like sharing articles, computer code, data, and educational resources, are often at best overlooked, and at worse actively discouraged, when evaluating researchers for hiring, promotion, and tenure.

Universities can play a huge role in shaping academic culture. A university signals to academics what it values, and researchers are inclined to align their practices accordingly. McKiernan proposes several ways institutions could counter practices that inhibit the free flow of information and educational resources, including redirecting funds to support the creation of openly licensed textbooks and open publishing, rewriting promotion and tenure guidelines to recognize shared code and data as equal to publications, and supporting outreach by awarding faculty prizes for [community engagement](#).

"I hope this article will generate serious discussion within universities about how we can do better," McKiernan says. "It's about what we want

our universities to represent. Do we want them to be seen as isolated ivory towers disinterested in public needs or benefits? Or, do we want them to be pillars of our communities where researchers and educators work to make lives better? If the latter, we have to change the incentives to recognize and reward sharing."

More information: *PLOS Biology* (2017). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pbio.1002614](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.1002614)

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