International Open Access Week at the University of British Columbia

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The keynote speaker during UBC’s Open Access Week was Dr. Frits Pannekoek, President of Athabasca University. He spoke on the international and national context for the Open Access Movement as well as the Open Education Resource Movement and the Open University Movement of which Athabasca University is the only Canadian university involved.

Based on conservative figures, there are too few university places to fill the world’s demand. A solution to this problem lies in the Open Access movement. That is, to remove all barriers to learning and widely disseminate knowledge and learning. But the challenge lies in what Dr. Pannekoek calls the “massifying” of the Open Access movement and the misperception that removing barriers to learning would mean changing the value of knowledge.

The Open Access movement says knowledge should be given away but this raises issues such as the ownership, if any, of intellectual property. Although the Open Access movement was borne out of economic necessity from high serial costs, it has become greater than that. Open Access opponents fear freely accessible and abundant knowledge threatens the middle and upper classes because it reduces the revenue or profit from the commodification of knowledge.

Other issues facing the Open Access movement in education are:

- How to monetize the free flow of knowledge
- If money is made, to whom should it be accrued
- How to deal with quality assurance, such as overcoming the cultural imperialism that is inherent in much of Open Education materials
- The need to take into consideration the learner and the learner’s culture
- Fiscal capacity as OA education can be expensive
- The need to expand intellectual boundaries of one’s own institutional repository
- Many countries restricting funding to students who want to take distance education from foreign institutions (as in the U.S.) or demand students take the majority of classes in residence (as in Malaysia)
- Resistance based on laws, grant formulas, and perceived threats to knowledge base stability

Librarians and libraries are the foundation of Open Access in Dr. Pannekoek’s opinion. Librarians can position themselves as solutions to many Open Access issues. One way is for librarians to get out of the library and to embed themselves as team members with the researchers.