On 1 December 2016, a Joint Open Access seminar was held at Wits to celebrate International Open Access Week. This seminar was co-hosted by Wits Library, Wits Research Office, The Centre for Learning and Teaching Development (CLTD), eLearning, and the Wider Gauteng IR Forum. 93 people attended, many from Wits as well as from other institutions, organisations, libraries and some Government departments.

Mr. Paiki Muswazi, University Librarian, welcomed guests and Dr. Robin Drennan, Director of Wits Research Office, facilitated and closed the seminar. The keynote speaker was Prof. Sean Flynn, Associate Director of the Program on Information Justice and Intellectual Property (PIJIP) at the Washington College of Law, American University. His presentation entitled “Copyright Flexibility for the Public Interest” showed how income inequality is behind the high price of books in South Africa. To make good profits, publishers price their products to sell at the highest level of the market (i.e. the small percentage of consumers that can afford them). This excludes the majority of people who need reading material but cannot afford to buy it. He discussed the importance of ‘fair use’ and copyright flexibilities in accessing information and how these provisions facilitate access to information, encourage creativity and innovation. He highlighted some of the provisions in the SA Copyright Amendment Bill 2015, and some of the recommendations made by academic and library sectors in response to that Bill. He indicated that the Revised Copyright Amendment Bill 2016 will go before the Portfolio Committee on Trade and Industry in 2017, when we will all get a chance to make written submissions and/or make presentations at the public hearings in Cape Town, once they are advertised in the media.

Dr Leti Kleyn, Manager: Open Scholarship & Digitisation Programmes, University of Pretoria Library spoke on “Scholarly Communication – is it under attack? Her presentation was provocative and informative – a reality check on what is happening in the publishing arena. She discussed the current trends in scholarly publishing, excessive business models, article processing charges and the general monopoly enjoyed by the Big 5 publishers. She highlighted the bizarre publishing models that still persist today, and stressed how these need to change, particularly in developing countries. She questioned the dependence of South African tertiary institutions on international rankings heavily biased towards North American and European journals. She challenged institutions to find other publishing models and ranking systems for Africa. She stressed the importance of Open Access research and institutional repositories to enable access to information and knowledge, especially for the purposes of resolving socio-economic, health and other problems in Africa. See article by Wits Marketing at: https://www.wits.ac.za/news/latest-news/general-news/2016/2016-12/greedy-publishers-behind-knowledge-inequality.html

In his presentation, Mr. Lazarus Matizirofa, Team Leader, DCCM, Knowledge Management Corporate, National Research Foundation, spoke about the NRF’s Open Access Policy for Grantees. He explained the requirements of the policy, the importance of institutional repositories and why grantees need to be compliant.

Dr. Robin Drennan presented on the new Wits Research Outputs Capturing System (ROCS) and the relevance of ORCID in scholarly research. He explained how research publications will now be
submitted to ROCS and then a PDF copy with metadata will automatically be forwarded to Wits institutional repository, WIREDSPACE. The Library staff will then make the permitted version accessible on WIREDSPACE.

In her presentation, “WIREDSPACE and Scientific Research”, Ms. Salome Potgieter, Principal Librarian: Science Libraries, Wits, discussed a number of pilot Institutional Repository projects which she is coordinating in the Faculty of Science. She discussed some of the challenges and benefits of placing research material in WIREDSPACE.

Ms Fiona MacAlister, Specialist/Educational Developer, Wits CLTD: eLearning’s topic was “MOOCs and OERs on the Go at Wits”. She showcased some of the MOOCs compiled by Dominique Wooldridge and her team at CLTD. Fiona also discussed projects that she has been involved in with Open Educational Resources (OER) and explained the different types of Creative Commons licences that can apply to OER and the need for a formal policy for OER.

All in all, the event was very interesting, informative and educational. Feedback from attendees was very positive and supportive of Wits’ work in Open Access issues. It was good to host academics, librarians, librarians, students, Government officials and other guests from many institutions and organisations in the wider Gauteng region. The seminar ended with a finger lunch which gave guests time to chat and network with others.

D. Nicholson