

# Braindumps on things Mel Chua has found shiny lately.

<http://blog.melchua.com/2012/01/11/the-open-access-impact-lasts-for-17-years/>

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This morning was my first sprint on my [Olin Open Access Institutional Repository independent study](#). As a refresher, making content open access (OA) means...

*By open access, we mean its immediate, free availability on the public internet, permitting any users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search or link to the full text of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software or use them for any other lawful purpose.*

—from [Citation Advantage of Open Access Legal Scholarship](#)

I spent it (unexpectedly) engrossed in [Citation Advantage of Open Access Legal Scholarship](#) (by James M. Donovan and Carol A. Watson), which took articles from an 18-year span from each of 3 law journals published by the University of Georgia and checked for correlations between citations of an article and its open access status (having “open access” status here was defined by “we could find the full text by using Google” – regardless of having the full text out there was technically legal or not).

Short version: yes, there was a nontrivial impact; OA papers got cited 58% more than non-OA ones. No surprise here; [we've found this before](#). Two new things caught my attention, though.

First, how long does the “OA impact” last? 17 years. Donovan and Watson found the impact on citations trailed off over time, petering out at the 17 year mark. Why 17? No idea. (Would they have found different things if they'd looked at more than 18 years' worth of data? I don't know.) I wonder what you could do with a knowledge of that 17-year timeout – is that 17 years after publication, or 17 years after it first gets placed online? If it's the latter, could individual researchers use this as a strategy to revitalize interest in work they did over two decades ago?

Second, OA had *no* (significant) impact on *nonscholarly* use of the material. The paper was written about legal scholarship, so what this means in practice is that while OA increases the use of an individual article by legal *academics*, it did not increase its use by *courts*. I wonder if similar things hold true in engineering; does OA make research more likely to be used by practicing engineers building real products, or does it only have an impact on engineering researchers? (Yes, I realize most practicing engineers hardly ever read research papers.) If it doesn't, what strategies *would* facilitate the transfer of engineering research discoveries into the “real world” of “actual products” and the things that “working engineers” know?

Fascinating.

Next week I'll finish the reading portion – far more efficiently, because I plan on coming in with printed copies of pre-triaged papers. Boy, am I glad we budgeted some start-up time; this morning's biggest accomplishment was getting a basic [Zotero](#) workflow up and running (not the software so much as the habits I developed in order to use it effectively). I only managed to read one paper, mostly because I spent far too much time taking overly detailed notes on it; in the future, I'll reserve detailed note-taking for really important papers and write short summaries for the rest. (Next week I'll arrive with a printed stack of papers already triaged by importance and really try to blast through them.)

I also found the first reading for the open\* reading group Seb Benthall and I are going to do this term: selections from [The Access Principle](#), which (as its subtitle says) makes a “Case for Open Access to Research and Scholarship” – and an empirical one, too.