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Creating the ACRL research agenda for scholarly communication

A move towards more equitable, open systems

ACRL considers the transition to more open and equitable systems of scholarship to be a core part of its Plan for Excellence. To meet this ambitious goal, the association's Research and Scholarly Environment Committee (ReSEC) designs projects and work to meet a series of objectives. In the past, ACRL has seen the development of a research agenda as one way to successfully engage the community in its strategic efforts. Research agendas review an area of engagement, highlight work currently underway, and identify areas that require additional research to move the field forward.

For the past three years, ReSEC has been working on the development of a new research agenda for scholarly communication, which ACRL published in June 2019.[1] ReSEC previously helped craft a research agenda in this area in 2007.

In the subsequent 12 years, nearly all aspects of scholarly communication have undergone change. Technology continues to change at unpredictable rates, participation within the systems of scholarly communication has changed, the economic models of publishing have changed, and librarianship and its engagement with scholarly communication has changed.

In light of all this, ReSEC leadership—starting with Amy Buckland and Patricia Hswe—made the decision to launch a new research agenda. However, we wanted this agenda to be heavily informed by the community's engagement with the system, including those who historically have been excluded from participating.

At the 2017 ALA Midwinter Meeting, then-ReSEC Committee Chair Amy Buckland called for the committee to pursue a new research agenda. Her charge was that the process would be open, inclusive, and transparent, and that it would incorporate voices from communities that have been traditionally marginalized. A subcommittee was formed to create a project plan that would chart how to solicit a call for proposals, what criteria should be met by applicants, and a structure for how the research agenda would be created. The subcommittee, coordinated by Nathan Hall, included Kara Malenfant, MD Galvin, Lori Critz, Amy Nurnberger, and Paul Bracke.

This subcommittee began its work by identifying professional associations and caucuses associated with cultural and ethnic minorities in the profession to identify how they approach issues in scholarly communication in their communities, and what values and perspectives they feel had been missing from mainstream dialogues in scholarly communication, which had been historically dominated by white participants.

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The subcommittee interviewed 12 potential stakeholders from historically underrepresented groups. They synthesized these findings to demonstrate the benefit of exploring new areas of knowledge in scholarly communication, highlight the potential impact on the scholarly communication discussion in librarianship, and through increasing engagement with scholarly communication issues in other associations, expand the general discussion of scholarly communication to include these perspectives.

The subcommittee presented its report to the ReSEC leadership, which offered feedback that was incorporated into the report at the 2017 ALA Annual Conference. ACRL Executive Director Mary Ellen Davis made additional suggestions and approved the project to move forward, authorizing ReSEC to issue a call for proposals to hire researchers.

Building the structure

In late 2017, ACRL issued a call for proposals. After a competitive selection process, ACRL selected the team of Rebecca R. Kennison (principal, K|N Consultants Ltd.) and Nancy L. Maron (founder, BlueSky to BluePrint, LLC) to design, develop, and deliver the final document in close consultation with ReSEC. Kennison and Maron proposed interviews, a review of the scholarly literature, a review of advances in practice, and focus groups with diverse voices across the profession.

In order to reach across the profession, Kennison and Maron deployed a survey in spring 2018, which received more than 800 responses. They also conducted a series of focus groups at conferences and through a virtual meeting platform through the fall of 2018. They reviewed the literature and conducted interviews, forming questions informed by their literature research and the focus group interactions. Later in the process, a draft of the report was made available for public comment and additional voices had the opportunity to weigh in on the direction and content of the agenda. In the end, Kennison and Maron solicited the feedback and opinions of more than 1,000 individuals. The structure and main thematic areas of the research agenda were determined from this extensive and inclusive research process.

Months of information gathering and analysis enabled Kennison and Maron to arrive at community-informed definitions of *open, equitable,* and *inclusive*. These terms undergird the structure and content of the report. By allowing the community to help shape the meaning of these fundamental terms, the likelihood of shared understanding is increased. Developing the three sections of the report was no less iterative. The three sections were arrived at through conversation. Initially, Kennison and Maron had pulled out several narrower themes from their research, but weren't entirely satisfied with them. It was as if we were trying to put the themes into tidy boxes when they really were complex and interconnected.

At the Joint Conference for Librarians of Color, there was a conversation about how these myriad themes all were connected, but they generally fell out into these three large buckets—*People, Content,* and *Systems*. Everything is still connected, but the chunking helps with scoping and readability while still acknowledging the bigger picture. Together with a small working group from ReSEC (credited as contributors on the report), Maron and Kennison further developed and refined the structure and content of the agenda.

Reading the agenda

Within the *People* section, there are three main areas of focus:

Apply for research grants

Apply for a scholarly communication research grant of up to $5,000 for new research in areas suggested by ACRL's 2019 report "Open and Equitable Scholarly Communications: Creating a More Inclusive Future." Find details in the call for proposals at www.ala.org/acrl/awards/researchawards/scholcommgrants. Deadline: September 30.

Embracing Diversity and Inclusion addresses ways to better understand and improve upon the success of those who are hired and work in academic libraries and scholarly communication functions. It also calls for greater clarity and acknowledgment of the range of roles and skills of those who engage in scholarly communication work.

Improving the Working Lives of People Engaged in Scholarly Communications explores incentives necessary for people to change behavior and participate in new, open models of scholarly communication. This section also highlights the challenges presented when the labor required to produce new works is donated or informally compensated.

Increasing Awareness Concerning Creators' Rights brings to the fore the need to understand creators' rights and responsibilities, whether that means educating authors on managing their intellectual property or developing a more nuanced approach to "open" content that respects the privacy of those whose ideas, images, or culture are being discussed.[2]

Some areas of exploration identified in the report include:

- Researching what management practices and beliefs influence recruitment and retention of librarians of diverse backgrounds
- Researching whose work and labor are valued most within the library organization and why? Who defines "value"?
- Given any particular innovation—for example, adopting open textbooks for courses, creating a disciplinary culture of "preprints"—what are the underlying motives or barriers to participation? What incentives to participate would be effective for researchers, for institutions, for university administrators, and so on?

Under *Content,* topics fell into two areas:

Rethinking What "Counts" asks researchers to consider the ways in which value is assigned to scholarly materials, particularly as they relate to promotion, retention, and tenure decisions, and to consider the role librarians might play in influencing ongoing efforts to refine them. This section also suggests avenues of inquiry to better understand the implicit and explicit bias that can operate in evaluating scholars and their work, particularly when the scholars are from underrepresented communities or geographies.

Creating More Representative and Open Collections outlines the need for further examination of collection building to ensure diversity in the materials created and acquired and to revisit overly restrictive copyright provisions that limit access.

Some areas of exploration identified in the report include:

- What are effective strategies for addressing biases against the research being done or the work being produced in the Global South? How are these strategies being implemented, particularly within library and information science publications?
- How do consortia approach collection development decisions to diversify representation? Is this a consideration in collection development?
- What would a review of collection development policies across institutions reveal about collection priorities? How are openness, inclusion, equity, and social justice considered within those policies?

The *Systems* section identifies several areas of focus:

Supporting Technological Infrastructure That Is Sustainable explores the support needed to sustain core infrastructure and the increasing importance of data and data management in the scholarly communication workflow.

Creating Systems That Permit More Access to More People discusses the systems that encourage and facilitate greater access by users, whether through addressing specific disabilities or through a renewed and proactive focus on building a deep understanding of user and stakeholder needs into any new product creation.

Building Mission-Aligned Organizational and Financial Systems offers suggestions for new research on the financial models that support scholarly communication, specifically

highlighting the current interest in community- and academy-owned infrastructure.

Advancing Innovation in Academic Libraries acknowledges that in order for new ideas to take hold, organizations themselves will need to take active steps to understand the environments they create that can foster (or impede) innovation and change.

Some areas of exploration identified in the report include:

- How does institutional capacity to participate in new software/platform initiatives affect representation in development? How are equity and inclusion from an institutional, not a personal, standpoint affecting infrastructure development?
- What processes are in place for working with vendors to improve products that are not accessible or that need retrofitting? Under what circumstances is accessibility a deal-breaker in negotiations with vendors? When should it be, but isn't?
- How are library budgets adjusting to funding a range of OA-related initiatives, in addition to carrying ongoing subscription costs?
- How can libraries define and measure the success of innovative initiatives, or at least the success and value of their participation in them?

Within each of these sections, there are subsections with specific research questions, like the ones noted above, identified. Some areas have as few as two questions and others have as many as seven. Rather than standardize a specific number of questions, the report reflects the questions that are the most urgent, or least understood, across the profession.

What we learned

Throughout the process, the theme of interconnectedness was continually reinforced. Often, making significant inroads in one content area would require engagement with one or both of the others. In some ways, this affirms the view that scholarly communication is the connective tissue, or foundation, of the academic library.

In doing this work, it also became clear how much of the landscape is shaped and affected by factors outside of libraries. Promotion and tenure requirements, disciplinary culture, publishing priorities, economic trends, technological changes, legal requirements, and other considerations all exert unique and sometimes radical force on scholarly communication systems. While the study incorporated many new perspectives in the research agenda, there are sure to be other perspectives that were left out. Our attempt to establish and provide an inclusive process of participation revealed our own shortcomings and ignorance, but we are hopeful that we set a model that others can learn from —particularly other committees and working groups within ACRL.

What we hope for the future

The research agenda is a call to action, and this moment in time is opportune for change. Libraries are re-examining their contracts with publishers, for a variety of reasons, and the topic of community-owned infrastructure is current.[3] Equally current is the profession's focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion. It is important to critically examine the intentionality of those commitments to ensure the work goes beyond well-intentioned talking points. This research agenda can help frame dialogue and inquiry about how issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion are approached in scholarly communication, the broader research environment, and our own profession.

ACRL is invested in moving the work in this research agenda forward and recognizes that this will require significant investment of time by researchers. To incentivize work in this area, ACRL has allocated $30,000 for research grants funding. The call for proposals for the 2020 fiscal year went out in June 2019.[4] Applications are due at the end of September for grants of up to $5,000 each for new research in the areas described in the report.

Our goal with this project is to bring forward the core issues and areas in scholarly communication systems that require further study. We intend to situate this work in a broad, historical context and encourage participation across the

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• appearance expectations and discrimination in the workplace or professional settings—the extent to which characteristics such as physical looks, style/fashion, physical attributes (weight, height, eye color, etc.), religious dress, and grooming are promoted or curtailed, and may result in discrimination or incur favor.

• gendered roles and expectations (e.g., women who are not provided the opportunity to speak at conferences, who are expected to take minutes at meetings and organize the refreshments, etc.),

• labor mobility—assumptions or biased attitudes exist regarding women with families, or single women and their interest in or capacity for international or local job mobility,

• inaccessibility to education by girls in many parts of the world, and

• intersectionality which recognizes the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as gender, race, class, and age, and reveals the overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage, is essential in working collectively towards a shared vision of social transformation. For example, by standing together with women and girls in their daily struggles, we can eradicate patriarchal, sexist, and misogynist systems that limit gender inclusivity and equity.

We've raised our voices, now it is time to raise yours. Research/identify your local issues/challenges, your solutions, and join the global conversation and contribute to enhancing gender inclusivity and equity.

Notes

1. Australian Library and Information Association, "Future of the Library and Information Science Profession Report 2017," https://www.alia.org.au/futureoftheprofession (accessed July 22, 2019).

2. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and Council of Europe, "Handbook on European non-discrimination law – 2018 edition," https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2018/handbook-european-law-non-discrimination (accessed July 31, 2019).

3. Raymond Pun, Kenya S. Flash, Dennis Nangle, and Jonathan Hernandez Perez, "Libraries and Gender Neutral/Inclusive Bathrooms: Case Studies on Promoting Information, Inclusivity and Access in Open Spaces," paper presented at IFLA WLIC 2017, Wrocław, Poland Libraries, Solidarity. Society. in Session 113—Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) Users, http://library.ifla.org/1670/1/113-pun-en.pdf (accessed July 22, 2019).

4. Jonathan Hernández Pérez and Máximo Román Domínguez López, telephone interview (Colegio Nacional de Bibliotecarios, National Librarians Association), Mexico City, July 21, 2019.

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library workforce. In order to truly advance the goal of more open and equitable systems, we need the community to take up the research areas identified in the report and work towards impactful and effective solutions.

The landscape may be daunting and unwieldy, but we hope that the structure of the report will help those working in academic libraries identify where they can engage and move forward.

Notes

1. *Open and Equitable Scholarly Communications: Creating a More Inclusive Future,* prepared by Nancy Maron and Rebecca Kennison with Paul Bracke, Nathan Hall, Isaac Gilman, Kara Malenfant, Charlotte Roh, and Yasmeen Shorish (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2019), https://doi.org/10.5860/acrl.1.

2. Ibid.

3. Heather Joseph. "Securing community-controlled infrastructure: SPARC's plan of action," *C&RL News* 79(8), 426-429, https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.79.8.426.

4. www.ala.org/acrl/awards/researchawards/scholcommgrants.