Editorial

A Platform Publication for a Time of Accelerating Change

Editor's Note: Over the past year, the editorial board of *College & Research Libraries* has explored ways in which the transition to an open-access, digital-only publishing model might allow us to re-envision the role of the journal in the academic and research library community. To date, we have focused on establishing an infrastructure allowing for broader engagement with our readers and broader dissemination of the studies published in the journal, e.g., through the establishment of the social media program, the registration of digital object identifiers, and the launch of new programs such as the *C&RL* Online Forum. I have invited Lorcan Dempsey to join me in thinking even more creatively about the role that the journal might play in promoting greater awareness of scholarly research and data-informed discussion of issues of critical concern both to libraries and to the institutions of which we are a part.

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We habitually talk about change as a constant, but that is slightly misleading. Change is a constant, of course, but the real issue is acceleration. And, the rate at which change happens in libraries (and elsewhere) is increasing.

Consider a small example—citation management. In the past, people managed their citations in various 'manual' ways—on cards, on typed lists, in Word files, and so on. New software programs like EndNote and RefWorks automated some of this while adding additional features. Most recently, Web-based programs like Zotero and Mendeley extracted metadata from documents, allowed you to manage PDFs, and more.[1] As the process of citation management changed, the social dimension became more important, as citations are 'social objects' around which connections can be made. Today, citation management programs not only provide a repository in which you can store your work, but also allow you to share your work and to search the work of others. At the same time, Google Scholar has added "personal library" features allowing you to save and organize articles of interest directly from the search interface. In a relatively short time, a solitary and manual function has evolved into a workflow enacted in a social and digital environment. In addition to functional value, this change has added network value, as individual users benefit from the community of use. People can make connections and find new work, and the network generates analytics which may be used for recommendations or scholarly metrics. In this way, for some people, citation management has evolved from being a single function in a broader workflow into a workflow manager, discovery engine, and social network.

This is an interesting example of the broader trend. As research and learning practices are enacted in a digital environment, change accelerates. Scholarly and scientific communities support robust resources for network-level sharing of research results (Social Science Research Network, ResearchGate). STEM research is carried out in large-scale, collaborative digital formations (Galaxy Zoo). Teaching and learning practices are reshaped in online and blended contexts (Khan Academy, Coursera), and in the idea of the "flipped classroom." In the digital workflows of today, the process of creation generates models, research data, educational resources, working papers, and so on. As a result, our concept of the scholarly and cultural record is changing.

And technology is not the only driver for change. At the same time that the network is reshaping workflows and the interactions between institutions, people and resources, the pressure on public funding, concern about growing costs, and questions about the value of a four-year residential experience combine to drive further change. These forces are reshaping planning in higher education, as individual institutions consider what their distinctive contributions should be. Some institutions may focus on supporting students' career goals, for example, while others may concentrate on developing research expertise. Some institutions will sustain important roles as regional economic hubs, and others will focus on particular domain or affiliation niches. And, in the tradition of liberal education, each may continue "[to] educate people so that they can continue to learn through inquiry in their private and public lives" after completing their formal education.[2] In this environment, it is likely that we will see increasing differentiation among institutions, which in turn creates differing demands for their libraries. In this environment, academic libraries have to make difficult choices about priorities and resource allocation, or reallocation. They have to learn how best to position their capacities, and, more difficult perhaps, they have to unlearn some of what has seemed natural to them.

In a time of accelerating change, it is natural for libraries to look to each other to help reduce uncertainty, to achieve consensus, and to plan with confidence. This may be an important role for new and existing consortia, and we have already seen how this role might play out in the discussions and designs being made around the issue of shared print storage.[3]

It is also natural to look at the framework for professional communication within which these issues are discussed, especially as these may allow for communication beyond the boundaries of regional consortia. What do we see when we do look at the communications infrastructure of the academic library community in the U.S. or beyond? It is fragmented. Broad-based publications like *Library Journal* and *American Libraries* do not have the centrality they may once have had, and there are many academic and professional journals occupying particular niches. We have probably moved beyond peak blog impact, although they remain an important part of our communications fabric. There is a variety of news options, none of which is a must-read for everybody. At the very moment that an effective framework for shared communication regarding how academic libraries are evolving to address change in the technology, publishing, and higher education environments is essential, we lack a "platform publication" to which we all might contribute and which we all might share with campus colleagues.

What is a "platform publication"? It may be easier to define what we lack by pointing to examples found in communities that support such a publication. Members of the information technology community in higher education, for example, might point to *EDUCAUSE Review*, which presents a concise goal of documenting "why IT matters to higher education." Many librarians contribute to *EDUCAUSE Review* precisely because it is so widely read by librarians, IT professionals, online learning experts, and, perhaps most importantly, senior administrators in academic affairs. Think of an example. In 2012, Brad Wheeler and James Hilton published an article called "The Marketecture of Community."[4] This article is what might be called an "intervention." It contributes to an important debate about collaboration in higher education and deserves to be widely read by IT and library managers, but it is also relevant to financial planning and strategic discussions at the institutional level. To achieve its goals it needs to be published somewhere that aggregates the attention of a senior audience. *EDUCAUSE Review* is such a venue.

EDUCAUSE Review is a platform publication, in the way that, say, *Harvard Business Review*, *IEEE Spectrum*, *Communications of the ACM*, or *Nature* are. These publications

aggregate attention in their communities, and beyond. They provide a platform for their authors to reach a large part of the community of interest to them. Where is their counterpart in our field? Where would an IT professional, a faculty leader, or a Provost or President go to learn "why libraries matter to higher education"?

In a time of accelerating change, of reshaping, a platform publication has an important role. It is a professional reference point—a reflector, concentrator and maker of opinion. Should there be one for the academic library community?

We believe that our field would benefit from having a platform publication, and that *College & Research Libraries* is the most natural place to start. It is already at the center of the relevant library community, but its focus is academic rather than more professionally engaged in the way in which *EDUCAUSE Review* is. It has an honorable role in the scholarly life of our profession that it will wish to maintain, but to extend into the "platform" role, it would need to extend its editorial policy to include long-form opinion pieces and support discussion around those. It would also need to move to a platform which efficiently supports community engagement and flexible publishing, e.g., through blogging and other communication channels.

Of course, this expansion has a cost and would require study. However, we think that there would also be major benefit and that we should consider seriously how to build a platform publication in the academic library community.

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1. For a relatively recent review of citation management programs, see Merinda Kaye Hensley, "Citation Management Software: Features and Futures," *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (2011): 204-208.
2. Michael S. Roth, *Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 174.
3. See, for example, the listing of "Strategic Collaborative Initiatives" being pursued by the Greater Western Library Alliance (GWLA), available at <http://www.gwla.org/strategic2013>.
4. Bradley Wheeler and James L. Hilton, "The Marketecture of Community," *EDUCAUSE Review* 47, no. 6 (2012): 66-82, http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/marketecture-community.