Christine Walde

Catalyzing research, building capacity

Research grants and the academic library

In the days before the pandemic, when I attended and introduced myself as the grants and awards librarian from the University of Victoria (UVic) Libraries[1] at professional events and conferences, my title often evoked quizzical looks. Even now as this unprecedented time continues, as far as I know, I am still the only librarian with this professional designation in Canada, perhaps in all of North America—maybe even the world. Since 2012, I've helped UVic Libraries to attract and retain funding, collaborators, allies, and donors, while raising our research profile and demonstrating the value of the 21st-century academic library to university administrators.

It came as no surprise to anyone that I was going to be a librarian. Friends and mentors alike encouraged and supported my application to the Master's program—now, remarkably, almost ten years ago—in Library and Information Science at Western University. My pursuit of librarianship sprang out of a love for libraries, lifelong learning, and a commitment to community. Prior to my graduate degree, I had worked in the private and public sectors as a consultant in community development, and as an administrator for community arts organizations, and enjoyed a successful stint as a freelance grant writer, working with artists and arts organizations to help them build capacity and gain recognition. As a writer of fiction and poetry, I had also penned successful grants for myself at the regional, provincial, and national level, and served as a juror on grant competitions, in addition to adjudicating and administering internal grants and awards. I fully imagined that I was destined for work in a public library, applying my skills and experience in community development to work with a diverse community of users.

Yet when I graduated in 2012, and moved with my family to Victoria, British Columbia, the then recently hired university librarian at UVic, Jonathan Bengtson, saw an opportunity to create a new and innovative functional role for me at the Libraries. Accordingly, and in alignment with my expertise and experience, my position as grants and awards librarian was created. It was almost exactly what I imagined, except within an academic library.

Admittedly, I have to confess when I first started working as a librarian, I felt a little insecure about explaining my position. I was newly minted to the profession *and* breaking the mold, upending a traditional subject liaison role with a more functional approach. And while some progressive-thinking folks got it right away, I'd be lying if I said I didn't meet the occasional hardened skeptic who wasn't suspicious of what it was that I was doing or who I was supposed to be. Like I said at the beginning, I had to explain myself at conferences—*a lot.*

I had my first real opportunity to prove myself and my position to others when I attended a campus presentation on grants and knowledge mobilization delivered by Stephen Ross from the Department of English in 2012. As I listened to Ross explain to a roomful of humanities researchers how to effectively mobilize their research activities, it struck me that it would make a lot of sense for *all* researchers to have a librarian on their grant-funded research team. I approached him after the presentation ward and pitched him the idea. He agreed enthusiastically, following up with an invitation to join him in researching and creating a computational ontology of modernism called Linked Modernisms.[2]

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During library school, I had read quite a few articles about the advantages of embedded librarianship, but it still seemed a largely abstract concept, since I had never been directly involved or embedded in a faculty research project. Working with Ross changed that, and it allowed me to understand the vital impact the academic library and its librarians can have in working directly with researchers on a grant-funded research project. This theme emerged in a subsequent research paper I wrote with my UVic Libraries' colleague Shailoo Bedi, published in 2017 by *College & Research Libraries* and entitled "Transforming Roles: Canadian Academic Librarians Embedded in Faculty Research Projects."[3] In our research, Bedi and I discovered that a librarian's involvement with grants is not only a critical path to engagement with faculty, but it also acts as a catalyst to the development and advancement of an academic librarian's own research practise. This was certainly true for me, since my involvement in Ross's research has resulted in a fruitful scholarly output, recently culminating in a chapter-length article on ontology development in Doing More Digital Humanities[4] with my fellow collaborators, Jana Millar-Usiskin and Caroline Winter.

Following my involvement with the Linked Modernisms project, in 2013 I began working on a grant for a proposed conference on archives and transgender history with the Academic Director of the Transgender Archives, Aaron Devor, and UVic Libraries' Director of Special Collections and University Archivist Lara Wilson. Founded in 2007, UVIc's Transgender Archives is the largest collection of transgender archival material in the world. Its mission is to preserve the history of pioneering activists, community leaders, and researchers who have contributed to the betterment of trans, nonbinary, Two-Spirit, and other gender-diverse people. The three-day conference, called Moving Trans History Forward (MTHF)[5] was successfully funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities' Research Council (SSHRC) Connections program, and was hosted at UVic in March 2014, featuring panels, presentations, performances, and artworks, including the inaugural and immensely popular "Founders Panel," which featured leading and emerging historical trans pioneers and activists. The conference was enormously successful and generated subsequent biannual conferences in 2016 and 2018. MTHF 2020 was changed to a virtual online event held in March 2021.

While it is now a self-sustaining enterprise and I am no longer directly involved in its organization, it profoundly heartens me to know that as one of the primary organizers of that first conference, and as the grants and awards librarian, I helped to plant the seeds for its future growth and development. Participating in the granting process for the conference—from its inception to writing, developing, and presenting the conference program—was deeply meaningful to me as a librarian, and as an expression of allyship with the trans community to help bring those voices and lived experiences into the public sphere.

Building capacity is at the heart of my position, and one of its most rewarding components. This is especially true when I assist with generating revenue for library-led initiatives such as digitization, as has been the case for UVic Libraries' continuing success with the annual British Columbia Historical Digitization Grant, sponsored by the Ike Barber Learning Centre at the University of British Columbia. Funding from this program has helped us, among other projects, to digitize historical newspapers[6] from Vancouver Island, including the *British Colonist* and the *Daily Times,* as well as the despatches[7] from the British Colonial Office and the colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia—just two examples of digital initiatives that have not only helped to surface our local collections, but have provided important research tools for the community at large and provided access to other researchers around the world.

Another grant that helped UVic Libraries expand its' digital initiatives was the archive of former UVic Chancellor and well-known Canadian conservationist Ian McTaggart Cowan.[8] With funding from the Sitka Foundation, the library was able to build and expand its capabilities in 3-D scanning, modelling, and digitization. Growth and capacity in these evolving technologies, in tandem with a strategic commitment to digital scholarship, helped UVic Libraries set the stage for the launch of our Digital Scholarship Commons, an interdisciplinary space that assists the academic and wider Victoria community in learning digital tools and research methods through one-on-one training, workshops, and open curriculum development. A variety of additional grants from both provincial and federal funding programs have similarly allowed us to accomplish a wide range of strategic objectives.

One of the most important lessons I learned early on in my engagement with grant-funded research is that if the grant is conceptualized from the begin-

ning of the project in partnership between the researcher and the library, it not only ensures that researchers meet their scholarly objectives, but that the library gets to contribute meaningfully towards our objectives, too—whether it's generating open access content, creating dynamic metadata in virtual knowledge environments, or ensuring long-term digital preservation of research outputs funded by public and private entities.

To strategically achieve these aims and objectives within the research life cycle, UVic Libraries created our very own Grants Menu:[9] a discrete yet uniquely interchangeable suite of vital library services that can be personalized and custom-ordered to suit the researcher's needs, along with the accompanying value of their in-kind costs. The dollar value of these often-invisible library services has proved immensely beneficial to all, since it not only quickly and easily provides an exact itemization of dollar costs, but, more importantly, highlights the libraries' advanced research services in the co-creation of knowledge through meaningful relationships with scholars, students, researchers, and communities.

One of the most recently successful grant projects UVic Libraries is involved with is the Narrative Art & Visual Storytelling in Holocaust and Human Rights Education,[10] led by German and Slavic Studies Professor Charlotte Schaillé, along with our Digital Scholarship Librarian J. Matthew Huculak. As an international grant project team with multiyear funding, they work to bring together researchers, visual artists, Holocaust survivors, librarians and archivists, and students in order to create free, open-source educational resources. Artists work directly with survivors to co-create graphic novels based on their personal experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust with the help of historians and students, while developing a new dialogical-reflective pedagogy in Holocaust and Human Rights education. While Huculak might like to credit me [11] with being somehow responsible for his involvement, he is in fact modelling core competencies for the 21st-century Canadian academic librarian:[12] active, embedded, and engaged.

It is this process of engagement that is core to my position, and, what for me, has personally been the most fulfilling part of my job and what helps to define its title and the continuing evolution of my role. Not only can grants provide much-needed funding for core library operations, but they also demonstrate significant, quantifiable value to communities, and to the larger institutions that we are so intrinsically a part of, in addition to cultivating extraordinary donor relationships and energizing development strategies beyond the norm. In short, grants give back to the academic library more than just financially, but also by showcasing what we can contribute. I know that my work as grants and awards librarian has catalyzed research by building capacity between multiple partners and people by building communities of research *through* the academic library, not just around it.

In our current pandemic age, building and maintaining these relationships is more important than ever when it comes to grant-funded research. Whether that means revising an existing work or research plan to meet COVID-19 protocols or shifting the workplace spelled out in an existing grant to a virtual environment, as an academic library, we are evolving to meet those challenges and to connect with our researchers and facilitate their needs. This was clearly evidenced in our recent funding envelope from Young Canada Works, an annual granting program that allows us to hire both summer students and interns to gain valuable work experience in libraries and archives within the Canadian heritage sector. In previous years, we welcomed students from across the country to live in Victoria and work on site in the physical space of our libraries. Now they work socially distanced and asynchronously from the safety and comfort of their homes, while we supervise them virtually and conduct regular project check-ins on Zoom.

Like the generations before us who faced similar challenges, we adapt. We evolve. In the shift to working remotely, I suspect what we've learned in adapting to this current working model is what many of us in academic libraries have already been doing, digitally, for years and intrinsically understand: physical limitations are just that, physical. By contrast, the potential for virtual engagement is limitless. Academic libraries and librarians have the expertise, tools, and services that researchers need to succeed in their grant-funded research projects. We are more important now than ever before: for access, for collaboration, for creativity and connectivity,

Conclusion

The Poetry Center's five-year preservation campaign has enjoyed remarkable success due to a series of crucial partnerships and careful planning, beginning with the NEH-funded Preservation Assessment in 2014 and culminating with major improvements to infrastructure. The steps laid out in Randy Silverman's Preservation Planning Study have now been completed, having attracted funding totaling more than $1 million from public and private sources. The Poetry Center thanks NEH, the Southwestern Foundation for Education and Historical Preservation, Randy Silverman, our colleagues in the University of Arizona Libraries and Facilities Management, and our donors, for the support that has made these accomplishments possible.

Note: Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this article do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Notes

1. See the Northeast Document Conservation Center's excellent series of preservation leaflets for more information about the damaging potential of fluctuations in temperature and RH. Of particular interest: "2.1: Temperature, Relative Humidity, Light, and Air Quality: Basic Guidelines for Preservation," Northeast Document Conservation Center, accessed October 20, 2020, https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/2.-the-environment/2.1-temperature,-relative-humidity,-light,-and-air-quality-basic-guidelines-for-preservation.

2. Division of Preservation and Access, "Preservation Assistance Grants for Smaller Institutions," National Endowment for the Humanities, accessed October 1, 2020, https://www.neh.gov/grants/preservation/preservation-assistance-grants-smaller-institutions.

3. Ibid. ✌

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for the survival of communities of knowledge for generations to come.

Notes

1. "Christine Walde," University of Victoria Libraries, University of Victoria, 2020, accessed November 23, 2020, https://www.uvic.ca/library/research/librarians/cwalde/index.php.

2. "Linked Modernisms," University of Victoria, accessed November 23, 2020, http://linkedmods.uvic.ca/.

3. Shailoo Bedi, and Christine Walde, "Transforming Roles: Canadian Academic Librarians Embedded in Faculty Research Projects," *College & Research Libraries* 78, no. 3 (2017): 314, accessed November 23, 2020, https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.78.3.314.

4. Constance Crompton, Richard J. Lane 1966, and Raymond George Siemens 1966, *Doing More Digital Humanities* (London; New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2020).

5. "Moving Trans History Forward 2021," University of Victoria, 2020, accessed November 23, 2020, https://www.uvic.ca/mthf2021/.

6. "The British Colonist," University of Victoria Libraries, 2020, accessed November 23, 2020, http://www.britishcolonist.ca/.

7. "Colonial Despatches: The colonial despatches of Vancouver Island and British Columbia 1846-1871," University of Victoria, accessed November 23, 2020, https://bcgenesis.uvic.ca/.

8. "Ian McTaggart Cowan: Champion of Canadian Ecology," University of Victoria Libraries, accessed November 23, 2020, https://exhibits.library.uvic.ca/spotlight/ian-mctaggart-cowan.

9. "Library Services for Grant-funded Research Projects," University of Victoria Libraries, accessed November 23, 2020, https://www.uvic.ca/library/about/ul/grants/.

10. "Narrative Art and Visual Storytelling in Holocaust and Human Rights Education," University of Victoria, accessed November 23, 2020, http://holocaustgraphicnovels.org/.

11. Matt Huculak, "Ravensbrück Visual Storytelling Colloquium and Workshop," University of Victoria Libraries, 2020, accessed November 23, 2020, https://www.uvic.ca/library/home/home/news/current/embedded-librarianship.php.

12. "Competencies for Librarians in Canadian Research Libraries," Canadian Association of Research Libraries, 2020, accessed November 23, 2020, https://www.carl-abrc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Competencies-Final-EN-1-2.pdf. ✌