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From practice to publication

A path for academic library professionals

The requirement to publish is a central part of the careers of many academic librarians, especially in regard to promotion and tenure. Yet it remains an underexamined issue. In the past ten years, articles have discussed the importance of research to career development,[1] the impact of work environment on scholarship,[2] preparation to conduct research,[3] and publishing patterns among academic librarians.[4] While a reader could glean some sense of the publishing process from idea creation to submission to career-building, none of these articles directly address all of these issues. Rachel Singer Gordon offers a general overview of publication processes for library professionals, but it is nonspecific as it is intended as guidance for any type of librarian.[5] Based on several presentations we have given, we want to fill in the picture specifically for academic librarians and walk potential authors through the major steps of the publication process.

Benefits of engaging in research and publishing

Academic librarians facing the requirement to publish for promotion and tenure sometimes dwell on the negatives—it is hard to think of good ideas, find time to design and conduct original research, obtain grants to pay for associated expenses, and identify mentors and collaborators. Further, librarians may not have had formal training in research skills, and their supervisors and co-workers may not support their efforts. We will address some of these challenges, but we also recommend concentrating on the positives:

- earning recognition, respect, promotion, and, of course, building your résumé/curriculum vitae;
- sharing innovations and best practices and contributing to the knowledge base of the profession;
- staying current on new research and innovations;
- learning new skills and knowledge;
- enjoying the satisfaction of accomplishment—it is a wonderful feeling to see your name in print; and
- gaining intellectual stimulation and fresh challenges—research is fun.

Finding research and publication topics

The most common source of ideas for topics is the day-to-day practice of librarianship and daily library operations. The implementation of a new technology, system, or procedure for an important library function offers an opportunity to examine what worked and what did not, and to make comparisons to how other libraries have handled the situation. This type of research is called "action research," and the end results can be of great

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help to other libraries facing similar implementation issues. It can also be worthwhile to explore and analyze staff reactions to the implementation.

Ideas can also be found in the people in the library, both staff and patrons. For example, writing about changes in characteristics of communities served by the library—say, a greater number of older students returning to school or an increase in patrons' diversity, among many others—and the new services the library provides to these communities would provide valuable lessons to other libraries. Workplace issues and their solutions, such as making library technology more accessible to staff members with disabilities, can offer similar important lessons to others.

Potential topics can also be found in the interactions of a library with the broader world. New trends can be a particularly good source. An example is the growing trend of library partnerships with other libraries, nonprofits, and government agencies, as partnerships offer both the chance to provide new services and to save money in tight economic times. Additionally, how a library adapts to changes in the outside world—new technologies, changing political and economic climates, evolving ethical standards, new expectations of patrons—presents opportunities for publications that consider the nature of the library itself in society.

Research topics can also be identified through engagement with the discourse in the library community and beyond. Talking with library colleagues about trends and new developments can be helpful, as can talking with faculty and students at a nearby school of library and information science or iSchool. Reading the professional and scholarly library literature in journals that provide broad coverage of library topics and those that focus on your particular areas of interest, as well as attending library conferences, will keep you engaged with the topics receiving the most attention currently, and may reveal ways to contribute to the discourse.

Literature from areas closely related to libraries, such as education and politics, can also reveal new areas of interest that are being discussed elsewhere but that can be applied to libraries. Current events can even be an important source of research topics. In the past decade, library efforts in disaster response and recovery, library roles in relation to e-government, and library support of communities in the prolonged economic downturn all became important new foci in library scholarship.

Finding support for research

When you have an idea for a project, it is worthwhile to see if you can get some support to work on it. Your own library is a good first place to check, as it may offer release time, small amounts of funding, or student assistantship time to support staff members in their research and publishing pursuits. Collaborators may also be a source of support, both in terms of funding and sharing the workload of a project. If your collaborators have grant funding related to what you are researching, they may be able to provide these same types of support to you through the grant. If you have limited preparation to conduct research on your own, collaborators can also serve as mentors, and you can also take research courses at your school and read research methods texts to improve your skills.

You also can pursue your own grant funding for your research. Grants for library research are available from federal government agencies, such as the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the National Science Foundation, as well as from state government agencies, national and local private foundations, and even library professional organizations at the state and national levels. Where grant funding might be available will depend on where you are, what type of library you work in, and what type of project you are pursuing, but grant opportunities exist for anyone willing to spend the time looking. Every campus has an office of research that can help researchers identify potential funding sources.

Outlets for publication

Once you have completed your research and written it up, you will want to publish it. However, consideration of where to publish should not be left until you are done writing, as the intended outlet will shape the tone, length, audience, formatting, and focus of the piece. A very long manuscript—more than 100 pages—is really only going to work as a monograph, while a piece that is only a few paragraphs makes the most sense as a posting on a Web site or as a guest column in a professional magazine. The quality of an idea is not measured in its length; some ideas can be accomplished as books, while others are more appropriate as online user guides. In between those extremes, however, are many options to consider as outlets for publication.

The most important criterion in determining where to submit your articles is the audience you want to reach. For fellow professionals, you will want to focus on conferences and professional magazines, each of which offers several options for publication. At professional conferences, workshops, Webinars, and symposia, research can be shared through presentations, panels, or more interactive types of sessions. These are a great way to begin sharing research and to test out new ideas, as an audience can provide immediate feedback. Professional magazines and newsletters, published at state and national levels, are forums for sharing research through feature articles, editorials, columns, and letters to the editor. Each option involves a different tone and depth of interaction with the topic, but all provide chances to share your work.

If you want your work to reach scholars working in areas related to libraries, then you need to focus on scholarly journals, book chapters, and conferences. Scholarly outlets require the use of more citations, more formality in tone, and more direct engagement with the literature related to a topic; they also involve a more competitive and intense review process. While writing for a scholarly journal may require more effort, the benefits will include the ability to engage the topic at much greater length and a greater likelihood that your work will attract the attention of other researchers.

Scholarly-oriented journals	Practitioner-oriented journals	Professional magazines and newsletters
College & Research Libraries	*Information Technology and Libraries*	*American Libraries*
Journal of Academic Librarianship	*Journal of Library Administration*	*Bulletin of the American Society of Information Science and Technology*
Library Quarterly	*Journal of Web Librarianship*	*College & Research Libraries News*
portal	*Library Hi Tech*	*Library Journal*

Table 1: Selected potential scholarly and professional journal outlets for research on the implementation of a new technology for patrons in an academic library.

Some research journals also publish work of interest to practitioners, such as studies that can have immediate impact on services, policies, or practices. Other journals focus on scholarly impact—findings that will influence thinking about the field in a broader sense. While journals in both areas publish work of both types, Table 1 provides some general guidance for thinking about different types of journals and magazines and the potential audiences they reach.

When considering a potential outlet, it is important to look at its scope and recent

A	B	C	D
Highly Competitive Publications	**Less Competitive Publications**	**Unpublished Presentations**	**Support / Service / Recognition**
Book or monograph published by highly regarded publisher	Book or chapter in a book published by lesser regarded publisher	Paper presented at scholarly or professional meetings (not published in proceedings)	Award for a book, article, conference paper, dissertation
Article in refereed journal	Article in non-refereed journal, magazine, or newsletter	Keynote address, invited lecture, wrap-up speech, or panel presentation	Award for research accomplishments or theory development
Chapter in book published by highly regarded publisher	Report of contracted or grant-supported research project	Workshop presentation	Editor or co-editor of book or proceedings
Paper in refereed conference proceeding	Non-refereed paper in conference proceedings	TV, radio, or Webcast presentation	Journal editor, associate editor, or guest editor
Poster at a conference	Textbook or training manual		Editorial board member
Reprinted or translated article	Book review		Book review editor
	Grant proposal		Grant review panelist
	Column in a journal or magazine (permanent)		Reference book advisory board member
	Guest column		Column editor
	Guest editorial		Referee of manuscript for journal
	Original design, plan, invention, or patent		Conference program committee member
	Bibliography, published finding aid, or literature guide		Operations research that improves operations or services
	Pre-publication review of book or monograph		Publications committee member for a professional association
	Workshop handouts or lecture notes		Translator or re-writer of paper by another author
	Software, Web page, manual, online tutorial		Reader/advisor on draft manuscripts
	Exhibition, film, video		
	Blog		

Table 2: Categories of publications, presentations, and service that build a publication record.

articles published in it to get a sense of what it truly covers. If you are still unsure about whether your idea is a good fit, contacting the editor and sharing an abstract is perfectly appropriate. Additionally, e-mailing an editor and volunteering to serve as a reviewer is an excellent way to learn a lot about how to succeed in publishing in that particular journal. Many journals also offer the opportunity to review books. Book reviews are an excellent way to get started in publishing, and you get a free book, as well. Book review editors will be delighted to hear from you.

Levels of effort

Up until now, we have focused mainly on publications—the types of outlets that appear in Table 2 in columns A and B. Outlets in Column A are challenging for the new author to get accepted; generally one works up to them after publishing in the outlets in column B. Academic librarians who are just starting out should consider all the options available in column B. Additionally, a highly competitive outlet is not necessarily always the best fit for a project, and the desire to have materials published in a certain type of outlet should not be prioritized at the expense of the determining the most appropriate outlet and audience.

Column C in Table 2 are presentations that are not typically not preserved as part of the permanent record. However, these are certainly an outlet to consider as a way to air your ideas and be heard by fellow professionals or the general public. These sorts of presentations often lend themselves to publications later.

Column D has examples of service activity related to publishing that do not (directly) result in a publication, but they are great ways to build connections to people in the field who share your interests and learn about advances in the field and research that is needed. Your service in these activities will be noticed and appreciated, and will generate opportunities to engage in collaborative writing and publishing ventures.

Thus, publication outlets and activities in all four columns can be beneficial for academic librarians seeking to build a publication record.

Conclusion

Contributing to the profession through research, presentations, publication, and service is among the most challenging and intellectually stimulating activities that academic librarians do. While it may seem daunting to get started, following the steps of engaging with colleagues and literature to learn about interesting and significant new topics; seeking mentors, collaborators, and financial support; and considering carefully what sort of audience you want to reach, and then engaging in service activities that will connect you to people and ideas will go a long way to getting you launched.

Notes

1. Nicholas Joint, "Enhancing Professional Development by Writing for Publication in Library and Information Science," *Library Review* 55, no. 1 (2006): 5–7.

2. Pamela Palmer and Chris Matz, "Promoting Writing Among Nontenured Faculty; Seven Up, Seven Down," *C&RL News* 67, no. 6 (2006): 372–74. Cynthia Tysick and Nancy Babb, "Writing Support for Junior Faculty Librarians: A Case Study," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 32, no. 1 (2006): 94–100.

3. Marie R. Kennedy and Kristine R. Bancolini, "Academic Librarian Research: A Survey of Attitudes, Involvement, and Perceived Capabilities," *College & Research Libraries* 73, no. 5 (2012): 431–48.

4. Joseph Fennewald, "Perished or Published: The Fate of Presentations from the Ninth ACRL Conference," *College & Research Libraries* 66, no. 6 (2005): 517–25. Stephen E. Wiberley Jr., Julie M. Hurd, and Ann C. Weller, "Publication Patterns of U.S. Academic Librarians from 1998 to 2002," *College & Research Libraries* 67, no. 3 (2006): 205–16.

5. Rachel Singer Gordon, "Getting Started in Library Publishing," *American Libraries* 35, no. 1 (2004): 66, 68–69.