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# The Movement to Change Scholarly Communication Has Come a Long Way – How Far Might It Go?

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Librarians envision a future where they are firmly aligned with the health of scholarship and scholarly communications. To reflect the progress that is already being made—and to continue to move toward this future—it is especially appropriate and timely to welcome the *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication* to our profession's literature.

For decades librarians have engaged in what is essentially a social movement to enact radical change in scholarly communication (Ogburn, 2008). In recent years, with the sense of urgency growing more acute, librarians have accelerated their efforts and secured new partners, both within and outside higher education. Along with this urgency, technological advances and changing scholarly practices have prompted librarians to devote resources to the curation of digital assets, data management, publishing, intellectual property assistance, and digital scholarship. Institutional partners in these endeavors have come from academic programs and departments, offices for research and sponsored programs, central IT, and centers for high-performance computing. To advance their national agendas, librarians have enlisted their institution's government relations office and built alliances with external organizations. In support, library associations and consortia have created educational opportunities to equip those seeking change with the skills to spark discussions and instigate new practices.

The impact of these efforts is being felt. Institutional open access policies and resolutions are increasing, while federal policies are shifting to open models of research

dissemination with bipartisan support. Grant-funded opportunities and projects are growing, and the movement is continuing to attract a multifaceted and diverse list of allies. More publishers provide open access options to authors and librarianship is being shaped by openly available research reports and white papers. Both libraries and professional organizations are addressing open access and new forms of scholarship in their strategic plans.

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) offers an example of the latter. A key player in the scholarly communication movement, ACRL adopted a *Plan for Excellence* in 2011 that identifies one strategic area as “the research and scholarly environment.” The goal for this area states, “librarians accelerate the transition to a more open system of scholarship,” including one objective to “model new dissemination practices” (ACRL, 2011). Keeping with its long-standing principles and anticipating the adoption of its strategic plan, in April 2011 ACRL converted *College and Research Libraries* to full open access.

Many exciting new areas of growth and change within scholarly communication transcend the efforts of single institutions or individuals. New organizations foster and sustain change in scholarly behavior; witness the founding of the Coalition of Open Access Policy Institutions and of the Compact for Open-Access Equity. In a recent partnership, the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, the Max Planck Institute, and the Wellcome Trust announced plans to publish a new OA journal called *eLife*. Researchers come together in formal and ad hoc groups to push more



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content into the open, develop and deploy analytical tools, and promote new methodologies for measuring impact. Collaborative research illuminates the evolving scholarly environment, contributing guidance to libraries seeking to add catalytic energy.

As with any social movement, success cannot be taken for granted and issues can remain contentious for some time. Even with great progress, debate on economics, policies, and practices continues within Congress, associations and societies, laboratories, funding agencies, foundations, and beyond. In journal publishing, the convenience of click-through copyright transfer agreements discourages authors' negotiation of rights. Libraries' policy and practice documents hide behind intranet firewalls and librarians run to keep up with search engine indexing protocols. One would think that library budgets would have grown to keep pace with the cost of the resources and technologies required to meet institutional goals and the expectations of faculty and students, but that is not the case. Though many scholars lead the development of shared models and tools, little has changed in promotion and tenure standards to recognize their innovations. Moreover, formal modes of scholarly communication remain fairly closed systems, competing with an open flow of information on the Internet.

Despite the potential for setbacks, I can imagine exciting developments ahead. To start, as library and information science programs are convinced to add substantive content regarding intellectual property rights, publishing, data management, and related topics, their graduates will be prepared to offer relevant services, lead well-informed discussions, and conduct meaningful research. Librarians embedded in disciplinary practices will undoubtedly wield influence on the growing list of discipline-based informatics initiatives. I can see the growth of data management services encouraging the exposure and recombination of all kinds of primary sources across and among research domains. Currently, ACRL is exploring the connections between scholarly communication and information literacy to promote the teaching of a more integrated approach to information use and knowledge generation. This exploration could blossom into a project on data literacy that complements the expanding interest in data management.

How far might the movement go? Consider the upcoming generations of librarians and scholars who are accustomed to swapping information and ideas with anyone with a

shared interest; they may expect to pursue their careers in conditions that encourage their habits and convictions. Change may yet happen on the promotion and tenure front—both ACRL and SPARC are implementing strategies related to the promotion and tenure system. Their joint forum planned for the ALA Annual conference in Anaheim, June 2012, will focus on alternative metrics and the potential for reforming academic reward systems, expanding definitions of scholarship, and creating greater equity for scholars entering the academy.

What a marvelous gift it would be to provide these new scholars with an environment where conditions are conducive to experimentation, where publishing is an inclusive and nurturing process rather than one based in exclusion<sup>1</sup>, and where both the informal and the formal results of research and creativity are openly shared, spurring more competition on tool building. With new tools, research can reach into and across content containers to stimulate new discoveries and uncover unexpected and profitable interdisciplinary linkages. With so much information now digitized and offered online, scholars should be able to connect more deeply and broadly across time and geography without significant barriers. This kind of environment can accelerate new forms of creative expression and scholarship that will thrive on their own and entwine the traditional. And finally, rewards should follow success in identifying innovative, collaborative, and scalable approaches to overarching issues that confront the production and dissemination of knowledge.

Continued inquiry and discussion are essential to achieving this environment. The launch of the *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication* presents a keen opportunity to explore new thoughts and exploit the creativity that lives in the fertile intersection between librarianship and scholarly communication.

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<sup>1</sup> This idea arose at a CNI project briefing on *Fembot: Reinventing Scholarly Production and Communication* (<http://fembotcollective.org/>) given by Karen Estlund and Carol Stabile from the University of Oregon. Baltimore MD, April 3, 2012.

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