# Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

# Sources of Evidence to Inform Scholarly Communication Librarianship

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**B** **Evidence Based Library and Information Practice**

*Using Evidence in Practice*

## Sources of Evidence to Inform Scholarly Communication Librarianship

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### Setting

Like many scholarly communication librarians, I have worked towards the goal of free and open access to scholarly articles and books by establishing an advocacy program at the University of Utah, a public research university in Salt Lake City with approximately 2,000 faculty researchers. Advocacy efforts from 2008 to 2014 included organizing Open Access Week events, developing workshops about scholarly journal publishing, drafting a public access policy, promoting deposit in the institutional repository, and starting an open access article publishing fund.

### Problem

The advocacy program had mixed results. Attendance at Open Access Week events and publishing workshops, on average, was very low (the exceptions being the keynote lectures by John Willinsky in 2009 and by John Wilbanks in 2010). The public access policy failed because university administrators did not see the value of additional work time being dedicated to the deposit of articles since PubMed Central was coming on board at the time. Contributions to the institutional repository represented a small fraction of the institution's overall research output and open access publishing occurred very little amongst the most prolific authors at the institution, based on a study conducted by my colleagues and myself (Amos et al., 2012).

The open access article publishing fund was popular amongst graduate students and assistant professors during the 2013-2014 pilot phase, but it did not receive ongoing funding from university administrators in 2014 or 2015.

This range of experiences led me to reconsider at what level the goal of public and open access resonated with researchers at the institution and whether or not the expectations placed on them by their peers and the institution's leaders incentivized free and open distribution of research articles and books. Rather than continue with the advocacy program, I decided to take a step back and look for additional sources of evidence to determine the level of commitment to public and open access and to further inform a scholarly communication program.

**Evidence**

I started with the institution's history. I had read the founding charter and early employment policies for a previous research project and expanded that research by looking at the works written by employees and their distribution. This required that I develop a new research methodology called university bibliography, which I detail below. After compiling the historical data, I then analyzed current employment statements for retention, promotion, and tenure (RPT) to see what contemporary researchers expect of themselves, their peers and, by extension, what the institution supports in terms of scholarly communication.

These sources of evidence uncovered valuable information and provided a foundation from which to develop new scholarly communication services, also detailed below, that focus less on advocacy and more on meeting discipline-specific needs of researchers as detailed in faculty-led employment expectations.

For example, the university bibliography revealed that, historically, faculty at the institution utilized commercial distribution as the primary means of communication. One of the first books from an author at the university, titled *The School and Primary Songster*, was published by Coalter & Snelgrove in 1889, a commercial publisher in Salt Lake City, Utah. The examined variant of the book did not list a price (no records from Coalter & Snelgrove survive), but re-published copies of the book are currently for sale on Amazon for $22.95. The book was held by libraries (n=18) so a form of public access was realized, but on a small scale. Similarly, the first journal article from an author at the university was published in the commercial publication *Science: A Weekly Record of Scientific Progress* in 1892. At the time, the journal had 3,000 individual subscribers (subscription price unknown) and the individual article is still for sale as part of the *Science* platform offered by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (Mower, 2017). It is not known if libraries were amongst those 3,000 subscribers, but over 3,000 libraries currently subscribe to *Science*, according to WorldCat.

The bibliographic data also showed that historic faculty did not limit the audience of their communication to fellow scholars; they wrote for broad audiences and published when and where possible in order to make information from their areas of interest known to those inside and outside the classroom. Evan Stephens, who wrote *The School and Primary Songster*, did so to "awaken [people's] intellectual faculties" and to provide "practical reading of vocal music in public schools or classes" (Stephens, 1889).

Similar to findings from the historical data, current data from RPT statements revealed an incongruence between public access ideals and employment expectations in the area of research. Unlike historical faculty, however, currently employed researchers at the institution expect each other to only communicate findings to fellow scholars and not to those outside their disciplines. Like historical faculty, though,

current researchers do not expect each other to offer research output free of cost to the general public. On the point of free access to the public, both historical and modern faculty at the institution agreed.

These findings led me to more deeply consider what the best approach to a scholarly communication program on campus would be. It seems worth noting here that the unique feature of faculty employment is the ability to set the criteria and standards by which to judge each other's work performance. It is not administrators alone who determine work expectations and evaluate performance. Faculty share (alongside department chairs, deans, provosts, and presidents) in the drafting of criteria, standards, and guidelines utilized in the peer review process. The criteria for research, especially, can serve as an indicator of what a department or college faculty value when it comes to scholarly communication. It serves as the main source of evidence for scholarly communication librarianship, in my opinion. To take it one step further, helping faculty understand that they can update these criteria if or when their values change becomes a crucial component of scholarly communication librarianship. Knowing the institution's scholarly communication history greatly informs these conversations and, in my experience, brings clarity to a scholarly communication librarian's role within an academic institution.

### *University Bibliography*

To better understand the university's scholarly communication history, I researched what authors wrote, tracked how those works were distributed, and pinpointed when research, writing, and publishing become an employment expectation. In this process, I created a descriptive bibliography on an institutional level. Descriptive bibliography, in general, seeks to uncover the states and variants of printed books by any given writer (Yee, 2007). A university bibliography is somewhat different in

that it intends to show the distribution and ownership of books and articles by more than a single author. The organizing principle becomes the institution rather than the writer, but details about individual authors are included. The bibliography is descriptive because it covers basic information such as title of the work, author of the work, author's discipline, publication date, and, as much as possible, the historical distribution of the work, the rights holder, and the number of copies currently held by libraries or digital archives.

Compiling the university bibliography required several sources, starting with historical employment records and policies. These can be difficult to obtain, but I was able to find them by doing research at university archives. The purpose of consulting historical policies about employment was to obtain details on work requirements. It also contributed to a more accurate list of historical employees to search in bibliographic databases. If an employee was hired and listed as a faculty member, I included the name in the data set because the institution expected faculty to teach, at the outset, and later expected them to research, write, and publish.

With the data set of historical employment, I searched various sources to determine if an individual employee authored any books or journal articles. The bibliographic sources included library catalogs, institutional finding aids, and journal article indices. Starting with the library's catalog and finding aids, I searched the employee's name. If the catalog retrieved any works, I added those details to my data set. I also broadened my search to include cooperative and national catalogs such as WorldCat, HathiTrust, and Internet Archive to discover distribution and physical ownership of the work outside the university. To determine if the historical employee wrote either magazine or journal articles, I searched the name using Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar. The details of any written works found in these sources was added to the data set.

I used the data to also search for any historical copyright ownership records available from the U.S. Copyright Office through the Internet Archive or the book renewal records available from Stanford University Libraries. If the employee authored a journal article and not enough was known about the journal to search historical copyright records, I consulted University Microfilms International's (UMI) *American Periodicals 1741-1900: An Index to the Microfilm Collections* to find any publisher or editor names associated with the journal.

UMI's index provided valuable data on the history of journals in America, but discovering the distribution of a single journal article was difficult. It required web-based searching on the journal itself in the hope that someone else had studied or tracked the historical distribution of the journal. Such studies were only found on a couple of occasions, which I would then include in the online bibliographic entry.

Determining readership and impact of a scholarly article was equally difficult. I relied on Google Scholar to obtain basic citation statistics to help convey information about impact. Most historical articles had not been cited and I have yet to uncover any personal narratives detailing the readership of specific scholarly works. Researching article distribution presents many challenges, some of which cannot be fully resolved, but even the most cursory distribution data paints a more complete picture of the history of scholarly communication at the university.

### *Employment Statements for Retention, Promotion, and Tenure*

In addition to wanting a historical understanding of scholarly communication at the university, I also needed in-depth familiarity with existing scholarly communication requirements. To that end, I analyzed current employment statements in order to uncover what faculty in various departments at the institution expected of each other when it came to research and publishing. I saw it as a way to inform what type of scholarly communication services to provide.

I compiled a convenience sample through a web-based search. The sample consisted of six department level statements from five colleges. I read through each statement and looked more closely at what each department said regarding research. I found that all of them expected original, independent research to get communicated with peers in the discipline. None of them listed required journals and none of them expected the research to get shared free of cost to the general public. None of the employment statements required grant funding to progress in ranks, either. The focus remained on original, independent, and sustained research to get critiqued by those in the discipline. The most telling feature of the current statements was the fact that half of them included publishing quotas as a promotion and tenure requirement. This was not an original feature of the historical employment policies at the institution. Determining when it got introduced is research-in-progress and will be valuable information in my work as a scholarly communication librarian.

### Implementation

This type of analysis led to a greater realization of the importance of developing scholarly communication services that match what faculty authors expect of themselves and each other. I synthesized and re-interpreted the content of the RPT statements into a tailored reference interview, which I then incorporated into a new service called Researcher and Author Services:

### Scholarly Communication Reference Interview

1. What do you consider your research area to be?
2. Are there key historical moments that have influenced what your peers study today?

3. Are there big changes going on in your discipline right now?
4. What research outputs are common in your field?
5. What research outputs do your peers value?
6. What are the research expectations for your department or college?
7. What questions would you like to investigate?
8. What works could the library purchase to support your research?
9. Which library service would further your research?

The list of services that get discussed as part of question #9 represent a collaborative effort with several librarians at the university. Representing a range of librarianship, services include collection development, data visualization, copyright management, digital scholarship services, and data management.

**Outcome**

I have held several one-on-one consultations with faculty seeking to better define their research area, determine what has already been done in their fields, strategize on how to advance the field, and purchase the exact primary material the researcher needs to further her work. The consultations also focus on perceived hurdles such as copyright permission and management, how to find the right journal, and what to expect after submitting a manuscript.

**Reflection**

Conducting historical research and consulting employment statements provided valuable evidence to inform a scholarly communication program and incorporate additional elements that went beyond advocating for free and open access to scholarly articles and books. The research provided greater perspective and appreciation for the ways in which authors at a

university operate as employees. The most striking realization was that faculty influence the criteria and standards used to evaluate their performance and develop their own expectations regarding distribution and audience. The research led to more tailored scholarly communication services. If advocacy returns as a component of the scholarly communication program, perhaps it could focus on bringing awareness to the existence of publishing quotas in a department's RPT statement and utilized to initiate dialogue with the department faculty about what they deem essential for contributing to their discipline's scholarly communication.

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