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Publish, not Perish: Supporting Graduate Students as Aspiring Authors

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Abstract

BACKGROUND Students pursuing advanced degrees are increasingly expected to contribute to their discipline's scholarly discourse during their tenure in graduate school. However, they are often unsure of how or where to begin the publishing process, and do not always feel comfortable asking for help from their faculty advisors or fellow students. Scholars, including librarians, have attempted to address these concerns by developing tools and services to meet the needs of future faculty. In recent years, university presses and research libraries have recognized their shared mission in furthering scholarship, with libraries themselves offering publishing education and expertise. **PROJECT OVERVIEW** During the 2012-2013 academic year, subject librarians and publishing professionals at the University of Michigan Library crafted a program to address students' questions and concerns about the publishing lifecycle. This ongoing initiative includes a multi-semester workshop series developed in concert with faculty from departments throughout campus, as well as a supplementary online toolkit that takes into account the rapidly evolving nature of scholarly communication. **LESSONS LEARNED** Major takeaways from this program include: the value of student assessment in shaping publishing workshops; awareness of the discrepancies of registration numbers and actual attendance, highlighting the potential for enhanced promotion techniques; the importance of university press and faculty insight; and the benefits of collaboration among librarians, publishing professionals, and faculty members. **NEXT STEPS** Future iterations of this program will incorporate in-depth assessment of each program, a more interactive learning environment, and better scheduling and promotion of the workshop series.

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INTRODUCTION

The emblematic imperative “publish or perish” has long been associated with junior faculty members who are on the path to promotion and tenure. However, this very dilemma proves to be just as resonant and anxiety-provoking for graduate students who plan to pursue a career in academia. These students are conscious of the competition that exists among peers, the declining number of open tenure track positions, and the rapidly evolving nature of scholarly communication. Many believe that they should begin publishing as soon as possible but may not feel comfortable asking for advice from their advisors or colleagues. In addition, new modes of dissemination of scholarly work and open access publishing can pose challenges to translating the experiences of senior faculty into actionable advice for early-career authors.

As subject specialists, liaison librarians regularly encounter these concerns and questions from students at all stages of their graduate program. Given the burgeoning area of growth for academic libraries in the provision of publishing services (Mullins, 2012), this often fruitful, but sometimes fraught, situation presents an opportunity for librarians to provide valuable support to graduate students who make up the ranks of future faculty.

This paper will describe the collaborative process and resources used to launch a series of workshops aimed at helping graduate students navigate the challenges of scholarly publishing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The pressure to publish has changed the face of graduate education and drawn the attention of numerous authors in academe. In a 1998 issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Cassuto observed the pervasive expectation for graduate students to become professional researchers and published authors as a result of “the murderous academic job market” (p. B4). A variety of scholars have since worked to address the requisite skills that students need to build in order to succeed in this environment. Recurring themes in the literature have emphasized disciplinary issues and concerns, the need for research and writing pedagogy, and the role of librarians in providing publishing support and instruction.

Scholars addressing disciplinary concerns have not only acknowledged and lamented the growing pressure to

publish among graduate students (Rudacille, 2006), but also have attempted to demystify the publishing process for their early-career colleagues (Bender & Cambraia Windsor, 2010). Several authors have offered in-depth, practical guidance on how to publish in their fields (Brooks, 2008; Klingner, Scanlon, & Pressley, 2005; Nihalani & Mayrath, 2008), while others have encouraged students to consider both the opportunities and common pitfalls of publishing while in graduate school (Bengry, 2010). Lei and Chuang (2009) even conducted a cost/benefit analysis of co-authorship among students considering publishing with their faculty mentors, noting that the benefits clearly outweighed the costs.

Not surprisingly, graduate students themselves have come forward to contribute to this discussion. Garbati and Samuels (2013) investigated the coauthorship of articles in leading educational research journals and determined that despite the pressure, graduate student output was low, with less than 9% of articles co-authored by a student. In his dissertation on graduate student publishing in physics, Hess (2012) attempted to explain the perceived poor writing skills of graduate students as reflected in the quality and quantity of student-produced articles in physics journals. The results of his study suggested a need to create a series of specialized publishing courses, as well as discipline-specific writing programs. The call to address the dearth of academic writing instruction in specific disciplines has been echoed in the professional literature, where a wide spectrum of solutions has been offered. Suggestions have ranged from course integrated instruction (Mullen, 1999) to intensive writing workshops (Burgoine, Hopkins, Rech & Zapata, 2011; Walker and Tschanz, 2013) to a 10-week publishing course for graduate students and junior faculty (Belcher, 2009).

Academic libraries are at the heart of scholarly inquiry and communication. Thus, it is no surprise that library literature about publishing education has emerged in the context of discussions around scholarly communication issues. Librarians have undertaken new roles in this area, both in outreach to their campus communities as well as internal education to library staff (Malenfant, 2010). Initiatives such as *Scholarly Conversations* at Furman University have included facilitating an understanding of new trends in scholarly communication, copyright issues, author’s rights, and publishing choices around open access (Wright, 2013), as well as providing advice and formal instruction for aspiring authors (Duncan, Clement and Rozum, 2013). However, long before the discussion of

scholarly communication gained its current prominence, Luey (1996) recognized the potential role of librarians in teaching academic authors about the publishing process and pointed to the “serials librarian” as a perfect fit for such a task. More recently, in a survey of research library services for graduate students commissioned by the Association of Research Libraries, Covert-Vail and Collard (2012) noted the broadening role of the subject librarian, who either possesses strong domain expertise in the area of scholarly communication, technology, and information management, or partners with a domain specialist to meet the full spectrum of needs of the graduate student lifecycle. This spectrum of needs reflects those of a proto-author, who requires orienting towards publishing, copyright, and scholarly communication.

Many libraries have found creative ways to reach out to faculty and graduate students around these issues. For example, at the University of Kansas, librarians partnered with national programs such as “Preparing Future Faculty” and “Responsible Conduct of Research” to expose participants to issues of management and stewardship of intellectual property, alternative mechanisms for the dissemination of scholarly work, peer review, and preservation of digital media (Fyffe and Walter, 2005). Doyle and Harvey (2005) reported on the creation of a scholarly publishing course for a magnet hospital system, and Knievel (2008) described an online tutorial designed by librarians at the University of Colorado at Boulder to help graduate students and junior faculty understand the publishing process.

Although publishing education has been present in the literature for the past two decades, it has yet to be addressed in a systematic manner. Recent work on scholarly communication (cf. Wright, 2013) gets close to accomplishing this, but often describes programming targeted to broader themes beyond academic publishing. Current efforts to provide publishing support for graduate students seem sporadic and isolated even though research findings clearly indicate strong needs in this area. Our own program builds on much of this earlier work, using subject librarians to create and promote instructional offerings for graduate students in a range of disciplines. Where our work differs is in the involvement of library-based publishing professionals, who bring direct experience in the editorial and marketing activities of a university press operation to the valuable domain knowledge of teaching faculty and librarians. This program also serves

to provide opportunities across the library/press divide, allowing librarians, copyright specialists, and publishing professionals to work in unison to support the needs of graduate students.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Pilot Session

In the spring of 2012, two subject librarians and the publishing outreach librarian at the University of Michigan met to consider ways to augment services to graduate students in the realm of publishing support. They first surveyed graduate students in a humanities department to a) gauge their level of interest in a publishing workshop and b) get a sense of what students wished they knew more about the publishing process. Survey results indicated that students were not only in favor of this type of workshop, but that they were eager to share their questions and concerns related to the publishing enterprise. Their feedback led to the design of a 1.5 hour session that included the participation of subject librarians, the publishing outreach librarian, and a junior faculty member in the students’ department. The participating faculty member had experience publishing across many formats and themes; moreover, he could respond to the students’ questions and concerns with facility given that he was a recent graduate of a PhD program in their field. The session covered topics related to potential publishing venues for graduate students, the submission process (including the varying degrees of acceptance, rejection, and how to manage expectations), and emerging avenues for enhancing authorial visibility (e.g., blogs, social media, and personal websites). It was clear that a single workshop could not anticipate or answer all of the students’ concerns, so the librarians created a supplementary online guide (<http://guides.lib.umich.edu/gradspublishing>) to address overarching issues facing authors in today’s publishing environment as well as specific questions raised by workshop participants.

Workshop Series

Given the enthusiasm that this pilot workshop generated, the librarian team presumed there would be interest across campus for this type of instruction. Thus, a single one-shot session on publishing led to the creation of a workshop series titled, “Publish Not Perish: Tools for Success.” In the expansion to a series, the pilot workshop

was redesigned to move it away from the original departmental focus toward a more general introduction to publishing for students of any disciplinary stripe. Existing library workshops that fit with the theme of graduate publishing education were rebranded for inclusion in the series in order to make effective use of resources, such as instructor effort and time. Finally, the librarian team organized a panel presentation on academic publishing given by three faculty members who not only had a range of publishing experiences but also represented diverse disciplinary areas.

“Introduction to Publishing” Workshop

Building on their pilot experience, the team designed an introductory workshop meant to address publishing concerns shared by most graduate students. Major topics included:

- What is suitable for publication? This discussion included various types of publishing options, such as dissertation research, conference presentations, and seminar papers, as well as strategic planning for publication by a priori consideration of major course projects, conference posters, and presentations as publishable pieces.
- How should I publish my dissertation? This question led to conversations around publishing one’s dissertation research as a series of journal articles or as a monograph, and considering the balance required for a “both/and” approach (publishing *both* journal articles *and* eventually the book-length work).
- Where do I publish? This question prompted discussions of how to identify appropriate publication venues. Presenters and attendees suggested seeking advice from faculty, checking publishers’ active lists for current topics of interest, determining the journals in a specific disciplinary field with the help of various databases, and looking at one’s research bibliographies to see where scholars of interest were publishing their work.
- How do I determine the “best” journals for my work? This was not only a logistical question appropriate for librarians who can help students ferret out the top journals in their fields, but also an opening into conversations around open access publishing and new or experimental publishing options. Consideration of non-traditional publishing venues offers the flexibility of finding the journal

that best *fits* a research topic, a decision not solely based on what has been regarded as the top journal in a field.

- How do I respond to reviewers’ feedback? This part of the session covered the basics of most submission and review processes, gave an overview of editorial decision making, and offered tips for responding to mixed or contradictory reviews.
- What should I expect? A discussion of how to manage expectations included dialogue around the different timelines that publishers use depending on their review process, disciplinary norms, the inevitability of rejection, the importance of revisions, and excitement around eventual authorship.
- Do I need permission for that? Copyright and permissions issues were discussed in brief, but easily merit an entire session. Thus, attendees were directed to other library workshops that addressed permissions and images, the use and citation of archival materials, and the option to retain certain rights to a published article for the author’s use.

The online guide that accompanied the pilot workshop was revised and expanded to include more in-depth information as well as resources for a wide spectrum of disciplines.

Other Workshops in the Series

In addition to offering the introductory workshop twice per semester, the librarian team worked with colleagues in other units to brand and cross-promote existing library sessions that appeared to fit with the publishing theme. A number of sessions on copyright, academic blogging, finding funding for research projects, citation analysis and journal ranking, and turning a dissertation into a monograph were included in the series (see Table 1, following page). These sessions were taught by a diverse group of liaison librarians in many disciplines, instructional technology librarians, copyright specialists, and publishing professionals.

The team promoted the series as a whole via blog posts on both the publishing division’s website as well as a guest post on the graduate school’s blog. Additional publicity included targeted Twitter activity (see Figure 1, following page), and direct appeals to liaison librarians to advertise the workshop series in their academic departments. Each session was included in the University’s registration system

Table 1. “Publish, not Perish” Workshops Taught by Semester

Semester & Year	Title	Topic
Fall 2012	Copyright & Your Dissertation	Copyright concerns for dissertation writers.
	Extending Your Reach: New Tools for Sharing Your Research & Teaching	Introduction to open access and open educational materials.
	Beyond Blogging: WordPress for Professional Portfolios	Building professional online portfolios using WordPress.com.
	Graduate Student’s Guide to Publishing	Introduction to academic publishing in all disciplines.
Winter 2013	Finding Funding for Graduate Students	Tools and techniques for finding travel, research, and fellowship funds.
	Graduate Student’s Guide to Publishing	Introduction to academic publishing in all disciplines.
	Citation Analysis and Journal Ranking	Overview of bibliometric methods for journals, articles, and authors.
	Copyright & Your Dissertation	Copyright concerns for dissertation writers.
	Faculty Advice for New Academic Authors	Panel of faculty from a range of disciplines discussing their experience as authors, editors, and reviewers.
	Beyond Blogging: WordPress for Professional Portfolios	Building professional online portfolios using WordPress.com.
	Academic Publishing Untangled: From Dissertation to Book	Publishing professional discusses the transformation of a dissertation into a successful monograph.
	Copyright Nuts & Bolts for Using Images	Copyright concerns for using images in publications.
	Finding Funding for Graduate Students	Tools and techniques for finding travel, research, and fellowship funds.
	Fall 2013	Open Access Essentials
Introduction to Publishing in the Humanities		Introduction to academic publishing in humanities disciplines.
Introduction to Publishing in the Sciences		Introduction to academic publishing in scientific disciplines.
Introduction to Publishing in the Social Sciences		Introduction to academic publishing in social science disciplines.
Beyond Blogging: WordPress for Professional Portfolios		Building professional online portfolios using WordPress.com.
Copyright & Your Dissertation		Copyright concerns for dissertation writers.
Winter 2014	Tips on Publishing a Scholarly Book	Guidance from a university press editor and a university press marketing professional on finding a publisher and crafting a manuscript proposal.
	Open Access Essentials	Introduction to open access.
	Copyright & Your Dissertation	Copyright concerns for dissertation writers.
	Faculty Advice for New Academic Authors	Panel of faculty from a range of disciplines discussing their experience as authors, editors, and reviewers.

Figure 1. “Publish, not Perish” Publicity Tweets

(<http://ttc.iss.lsa.umich.edu/ttc/sessions/upcoming/>) for open workshops, which gathers all training opportunities for the campus community into a single access point.

Faculty Panel

The third component of the series involved the coordination of a faculty panel with participants from a variety of disciplines, publishing experiences, and roles in the publishing process. A primary objective of this effort was to engage both faculty and students in conversations around publishing. Panelists included a junior professor of molecular biology and a junior professor of psychology, both of whom shared their experiences as authors on the tenure track. They explained their steps in the research and writing process, strategies for producing successful publications, and tips for managing the time and pressure of research production, writing, and publication. The third and final panelist was a senior professor in the humanities who is a chief editor of an interdisciplinary journal and a frequent peer reviewer. She walked participants through the editorial process and explained the features of a successful journal article submission.

The 1.5 hour session started with remarks from panelists, while the remainder was intended to be conversational in tone and allowed ample time for students' questions and comments. Of all events in the series, the panel had the highest attendance and the most engaged question-and-answer session. The tone of the event was informative and collaborative, with panelists both answering questions from the audience and building upon and responding to one another's remarks.

LESSONS LEARNED

Assessment and Improvement

After each introductory workshop, attendees were encouraged to provide feedback, which the team used to inform subsequent workshops. Since the existing forms used for library instruction assessment did not fit with the goals of this newly developed series, the team created its own evaluation forms that specifically addressed the content of each publishing session.

In response to student feedback, the following changes were made throughout the year:

- Reordering session content to match the sequence of the writing and publishing process;
- Using a more conversational tone so that participants had greater opportunities to ask questions and share their experiences;
- Spending less time on copyright, author's rights, and open access given the availability of separate workshops and online guides dedicated to those topics; and
- Spending less time demonstrating how to find leading journals in a field in favor of more time for questions and dialogue among participants and instructors.

Thanks to regular assessment of the program, as well as the interactive nature of the sessions, the team also recognized the need to revise its general approach to introductory workshops and reinstate some discipline-specific content. Whereas students found value in the topics covered in the introductory sessions, there were recurring requests for sessions with a disciplinary focus. Thus, in the third iteration of the program (2013-2014), the team offered introductory workshops on publishing in each of the three major disciplinary areas: humanities, social sciences, and sciences. These new disciplinary-oriented sessions were team-taught by subject librarians well versed in publishing practices in their respective fields. While the content of the sessions did not substantially differ across the three separate offerings, branding them with a disciplinary focus presented additional opportunities for promotion, and attendance numbers rose compared to previous sessions.

Registration and Attendance

Promotional efforts were deemed a success when individual sessions in the series reached capacity (and beyond, with long waitlists for some sessions) soon after blog posts were published. However, large registration numbers did not always result in concomitant attendance figures. In fact, less than half of registrants typically attended most sessions. The team used the same registration system shared by all library-sponsored open workshops, and in discussions with colleagues they found that such disparate figures for registration and attendance were common to nearly all open workshops that were not traditional, course-integrated library instruction sessions.

In response, enrollment caps for individual sessions were raised, and students on the waitlist for future sessions were encouraged to attend regardless of registration status.

Importance of Faculty and University Press Voices

Although faculty panelists offered much of the same advice given by librarians regarding the mechanics of the peer review process and selecting a publication venue, they were able to provide something no librarian could—authoritative, first-hand knowledge deemed directly relevant to students' concerns. As much as librarians know about scholarly communication, are published academic authors themselves, and may even hold faculty status at many institutions, in the eyes of students, teaching faculty provide publishing guidance *par excellence*. The persuasiveness of faculty voices was impossible to miss while observing the faculty panel and could be seen in the attendance numbers, the quality and quantity of students' questions, and audience reactions to the panelists' remarks.

The team observed a similar phenomenon during the workshop taught by a university press acquiring editor and university press marketing professional. Though these publishing professionals gave very similar advice on the basics of publishing, their employment at a university press appeared to make their contributions more authoritative. Much like the faculty panelists, the persuasiveness of publishing industry professionals was reflected in higher attendance and overall engagement of the audience.

The team noted that bringing faculty and university press voices into the instructional program lent an aura of legitimacy and authority to the advice being given. The presence of faculty members and editors to confirm and reinforce messages about publishing could be used strategically and advantageously in the future to communicate with students about both the basics of publishing and about potentially complicated topics, such as open access journals or dissertation embargoes.

Collaboration

From the start, this program was a group effort, both within and outside the library. The creative team behind the series included librarians across units, which allowed the library to increase instructional offerings without putting too much burden on any one person or department.

Working with librarians and faculty in diverse fields of study allowed the library to leverage multiple areas of expertise in each iteration of the workshop series. This partnership even had unintended benefits for participants. For example, the faculty panel resulted in networking opportunities among the panelists who typically do not interface with each other on a large, decentralized campus. Moreover, the question-and-answer period during the panel discussion uncovered opportunities for the University's junior faculty to consider ways to mentor graduate students, who are considering their roles as authors and future faculty members.

Participation of staff from the university press resulted in a well-attended session, and an exciting opportunity to strengthen relationships between press staff and librarians. Although the university press has been an administrative unit of the library since 2009, its physical isolation from the main library branches has hampered collaboration across press/library boundaries. The team is hopeful that this small success can be leveraged to encourage further opportunities for teaching, outreach, and promotional activities that bring together librarians and press professionals.

NEXT STEPS

Going forward, the team aims to develop more formal and programmatic assessment methods for publishing education. Since the time that these sessions were offered, the University of Michigan Library has formed a taskforce to consider how the library supports and approaches instruction assessment and to make recommendations for changing current practice in light of developments both within and beyond the library. At the same time, ACRL is revising long-held standards for information literacy to accommodate research trends in the 21st century. To inform future assessments of this program and to frame this initiative around key educational benchmarks for student growth and development, there is potential in ACRL's forthcoming "threshold concepts" (ACRLa, 2014; ACRLb, 2014). In particular, concepts such as "Scholarship is a Conversation" and "Research as Inquiry" have direct relevance for teaching graduate students effective methods of participation in the scholarly communication ecosystem. The team looks forward to changes in assessment efforts in both our own library, and in the profession as a whole, that will support contemporary instructional offerings, including those related to publishing, copyright, and technology.

As noted above (“Assessment and Improvement”), student feedback was used to refine instructional design (e.g., reordering session content, moving from a general to disciplinary focus, etc.). The team will continue to use an iterative approach, using survey data from past attendees to inform future versions of the program. Questions to address include:

- Fulfillment of program goals over the longer term (e.g., a year after attending a session)—did students apply what they learned when publishing their own work?
- To date, sessions have focused on books and journal articles as the primary modes of publishing. Are there other forms of publishing students want to learn about (e.g., creative works)?
- Outside of library sessions, how are students on this campus learning about publishing? This could inform potential collaborations with other units on campus, and avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts.

For future iterations of the workshop series, the team plans to incorporate more active learning components into the instructional design, which has tended to rely heavily on a lecture-based approach. In addition, they will explore collaborations with colleagues in specialized fields, such as engineering and medicine, to develop publishing instruction programming to meet the unique needs of those communities.

Finally, the team will continue to experiment with changes to registration, scheduling, and promotion to increase the proportion of registrants who attend a given session. As this is a problem common to all library-sponsored open workshops at their institution, they will seek out the ideas of colleagues teaching in other areas who face the same challenge.

CONCLUSION

Publishing education is an opportunity to further develop the library’s role in shaping the landscape of scholarly communication and bolster the visibility of the library as a go-to resource for scholarly publishing expertise. This is particularly important in an era in which graduate students are increasingly expected to contribute to their discipline’s discourse, a prospect that often provokes

anxiety among early-career authors who tend to have little or no background in academic publishing. By offering publishing support, the library is able to prepare new authors to make informed choices about difficult issues surrounding their publishing activities, and draw students’ attention to new modes of sharing their work in an evolving landscape of scholarly communication.

There are distinct advantages to the library’s relationships with faculty and students that make publishing education a good fit for library instruction programming. As subject specialists, liaison librarians have the opportunity to work with students throughout all stages of their graduate programs and to shape their skills as scholars. Their engagement in publishing education is a natural extension of research instruction in the same manner that a published work is an expected result of the labor of the researcher. Librarians are able to offer a neutral space for students to share their concerns and questions about scholarly production, and consequently, can mitigate some of the publishing-related anxiety that students often experience. Librarians not only draw on their subject expertise and knowledge of the publishing industry when working with students, but often on their own experiences as published authors. Finally, given their outreach activity on campus, publishing and liaison librarians are able to facilitate connections to people and resources that aspiring scholars can leverage in preparation for authorship.

A program such as the one described here draws on the expertise and insights of multiple campus stakeholders: librarians, faculty members, and university press professionals. This collaboration around the research lifecycle creates a more holistic picture for graduate students of the various processes involved in the dissemination of scholarly work. It is also a natural fit with a growing trend in research libraries to hire instructional staff with expertise in scholarly communication (Bonn, 2014). As Bonn notes, one of the strengths of publishing specialists in the library is in “*educating* their colleagues about the changes in scholarly communication and *learning* from those same colleagues, who bring a valuable frontline perspective to defining library programs and services that respond to those changes” (p. 132). This movement presents opportunities for libraries to help address the disparate nature of publishing education on college campuses, and deepen liaison relationships with faculty and student colleagues.

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