



"Help Wanted!" as Library Publishers Search for Solutions

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A quiet revolution is happening in academic libraries across North America, in Australasia, and in certain parts of Europe (notably the United Kingdom). Librarians who mostly served the needs of faculty members as users of scholarly information are increasingly providing solutions to them as authors. In the same way that traditional publishers increasingly focus on services rather than content, librarians are moving from being stewards of collections to being partners in the research process. This is most clearly manifested in two new, interconnected, and growing areas of activity—the library as research data manager and the library as publisher.

In a 2012 survey published by SPARC, the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition, 55% of academic libraries in North America reported that they were developing or implementing a publishing program.¹ The responses came from institutions of all sizes, from liberal arts colleges to large research universities, with 79% of the largest (members of the Association of Research Libraries) reporting publishing activity. In July 2014 around 60 of the respondents banded together to form the Library Publishing Coalition (www.librarypublishing.org). The second edition of its freely available *Library Publishing Directory* provides detailed entries for 124 library publishing programs, including profiles and (usefully for freelancers) contact details.

Most of the publishing output consists of journals. Libraries included in the 2015 *Directory* published 432 faculty-led journals, 214 student-led journals, and 195 journals under contract for

an external entity (*e.g.*, a scholarly society). Some issued books, with 34% reporting the production of more than one monograph and 12% more than one textbook. They also provided support and hosting services for technical reports, conference proceedings, electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs), and an increasing diversity of “digital humanities” projects—rich, complex, electronic scholarly presentations that defy easy categorization.

Although this overall output is small compared to established publishing organizations, library publishers have several characteristics that might make them particularly worthy of study for editorial and production professionals, especially those involved in providing third-party services.

First, library publishers are almost all lightly staffed, with 1.8 full-time equivalents being the average. This means that they need freelance help to scale and are willing to pay for it. Copyeditors are particularly in demand and expert help in a range of fields is required, including STEM fields as well as the humanities and social sciences. This disciplinary spread reflects an important distinction between library publishers and other campus-based publishing entities. While university presses, for example, tend to be focused on a few key disciplines rather than on the scholarly output of their parent institutions, library publishers are primarily institution focused. Since the demand for their services may come from almost any department of the university, this requires that they flexibly operate in a wide range of editorial styles and formats.

Second, library publishers are highly focused on efficient digital workflows. Born in a digital age, they lack some of the baggage of the print publishing world and can experiment with new tools. While open-source systems such as Open Journal Systems (OJS; <https://pkp.sfu.ca/ojs/>) and

1 Library Publishing Services: Strategies for Success: Final Research Report (March 2012). Available at www.sparc.arl.org/resource/library-publishing-services-strategies-success-final-research-march-2012.

WordPress have been the most popular publishing workflow and platform tools, they do not offer the full functionality that faculty partners are increasingly demanding. Manuscript and peer-review management is particularly poorly served, especially when one of the ways that library publishers keep their staffing levels low is by sharing the burden of editorial labor. Systems that are intuitive enough for faculty Editors or their student assistants to manage are essential to such distributed workflows. Other areas of need include digital printing, XML conversion and workflow services, and tools for aggregating usage metrics.

Third, library publishers are interested in best practices. Educational opportunities are in high demand and organizations such as the Society for Scholarly Publishing are seeing increasing attendance at their meetings from members of the library publishing community. Sessions on applied topics are particularly attractive, and webinars are a useful complement to in-person meetings. Distributed widely across the country, in both the small communities favored by liberal arts colleges as well as major urban centers, library publishers are often constrained by their travel budgets and so online education is particularly attractive. At a time when a number of professional associations are seeing declining memberships, society outreach to this energetic new group of publishing specialists may well be a good strategy.

In a new book both available for sale and in an Open Access electronic format, *Getting the Word Out: Academic Libraries as Scholarly Publishers*, Editors Maria Bonn and Mike Furlough describe the rapid growth of library publishing in recent years and highlight some areas of particular promise in its continued evolution. These include support for niche journals, the publication of student scholarship, and increasing the visibility of "gray literature."

Niche journals are periodicals that generally lack adequate subscription bases to be attractive to traditional publishers. They exist in humanities and social science fields where little money exists for authors to pay publishing fees, the dominant economic model for sustaining Open Access dissemination. Library publishers have been able to support the continuance of niche journals through

distributed labor models, lightweight production workflows, and technological support from existing library infrastructure. Most library publishers only support a few journals, but several programs such as those at the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Michigan, and the University of California are now becoming quite large. Niche journals are intensely important to small communities and often bridge the gap between scholars in different disciplines or between academics and practitioners. Sample titles that give a flavor of this type of publication include the *Journal of Muslim Mental Health*, *Saksaba: A Journal of Manchu Studies*, or the *Trans Asia Photography Review*.

Conversations around the publication of student scholarship usually focus on graduate theses and dissertations (ETDs), and many library publishers are also responsible for maintaining collections of these, usually as part of institutional repositories. Deep Blue at the University of Michigan contains over 10,000 master's and doctoral ETDs, for example. However, there is also an increasing trend toward using publishing as a pedagogical tool at the undergraduate level, as universities and colleges require their students to become involved in real-world research and civic engagement projects early in their careers. Involvement in publications such as the *Journal of Purdue Undergraduate Research* opens opportunities for librarians to provide instruction in scholarly communication best practices (including reading one's author contract) and information literacy (how to cite other people's work, how to avoid plagiarism, etc.) to the scholars of tomorrow.

Gray literature is a term that libraries have traditionally used to describe informal publications such as working papers, technical reports, and conference proceedings. Exploring the website of a major research university generally reveals many of these series, with broken links and incomplete records all too common. Since publicly funded research is often first presented in these publication venues, usually as a condition of the grant, the lack of discoverability, citability, and preservation represents not only a waste of taxpayer money but also a lost opportunity for researchers to learn from each other. Library publishers bring both the skills and systems to pull

these gray materials out of the shadows and into a scholarly communication environment where authors can get credit and users can gain knowledge. Notable examples include the technical reports of the Joint Transportation Research Program at Purdue University.² Since many of the recent reports are linked to data, such series also show how library initiatives in the curation and management of research datasets are well aligned with the publication of the narratives that interpret them.

2 JTRP Technical Reports. Available at <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/jtrp/>.

As vendors and publishers continue to merge, library publishers may come to play an increasingly important role in maintaining the diversity of the scholarly communication ecosystem. They can ensure that important research without obvious commercial potential continues to be published and that authors who are unable to pay publication fees are not disenfranchised in an Open Access world. They can also be good partners, clients, and employers for publishing professionals who are looking for variety and challenges. Be sure to check out www.librarypublishing.org for resources, events, and opportunities to stay in touch with this developing community.

