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Article abstract

The quickly changing landscape of the scholarly communication ecosystem necessitates critical reflection on the preparedness of students entering this area of librarianship. A literature review of common roles, skills, and competencies of scholarly communication librarians followed by a personal reflection on learning and development as a Master of Library and Information Studies student reveals that collaboration and adaptability are required to succeed in this area.

Critical Adaptability and Collaboration: A Student Reflection on Preparing for Scholarly Communication Librarianship

Adaptabilité critique et collaboration : une réflexion étudiante sur la préparation à la bibliothéconomie en communication savante

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Abstract / Résumé

The quickly changing landscape of the scholarly communication ecosystem necessitates critical reflection on the preparedness of students entering this area of librarianship. A literature review of common roles, skills, and competencies of scholarly communication librarians followed by a personal reflection on learning and development as a Master of Library and Information Studies student reveals that collaboration and adaptability are required to succeed in this area.

L'évolution rapide de l'écosystème de la communication savante nécessite une réflexion critique sur la préparation des étudiants qui entrent dans ce domaine de la bibliothéconomie. Une revue de la littérature sur les rôles communs, les habiletés et les compétences des bibliothécaires responsables pour la communication savante, suivie d'une réflexion personnelle sur l'apprentissage et le développement d'une étudiante en bibliothéconomie et en sciences de l'information révèlent que la collaboration et l'adaptabilité sont requises pour réussir dans ce domaine.

Keywords / Mots-clés

scholarly communication, academic librarianship, student, professional development, collaboration, adaptability

communication savante, bibliothéconomie universitaire, étudiant, développement professionnel, collaboration, adaptabilité

Introduction

As a current Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS) student specifically interested in working in scholarly communication, I find entering and navigating this complex and quickly changing area of librarianship intimidating. The term *scholarly communication* refers to the ecosystem within which formal and informal scholarly writing and research are created, evaluated, shared, and preserved (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2003). Literature discussing the preparedness of MLIS students for the area of scholarly communication is lacking (Hollister, 2017). However, considering the perspectives and educational experiences of MLIS students should be paramount when discussing training and preparation because students actively attempt to apply their training and education to job searches and in the workplace (Goodsett & Koziura, 2016). A review of the common roles, skills, and competencies of scholarly communication librarians and a reflection on my personal learning and development in these areas as an MLIS student reveal that collaboration and adaptability are traits students need to succeed.

This paper is exploratory and reflective. It begins with a literature review on scholarly communication librarianship from my perspective as an MLIS student who is curious about and particularly interested in pursuing this profession. The literature review is followed by a critical reflection that explores my thoughts and feelings on entering scholarly communication librarianship and includes a discussion of what attracts me to and excites me about the profession but also considers sources of unease and hesitancy.

Literature Review

For over a decade, literature on scholarly communication in academic libraries has asserted that librarians have been dealing with constant and massive change in their work and environment. This is due to a consistent evolution of new technologies being required to "understand and stay on top of scholarly communication issues" (Promís, 2008, p. 24). Quick changes in the scholarly communication landscape have led to much being researched and written about the topic. Discussions surrounding possible focal points and the necessary skills and competencies required of scholarly communication librarians often arise from this research. Many authors and organizations have even organized their findings into lists that clearly outline the core roles and competencies they have found to be necessary for scholarly communication librarianship.

Calarco et al. (2016), for instance, described four major roles involved in scholarly communication library activities: scholarly publishing services, open access repository services, copyright and open access advice, and assessment of scholarly resources. They placed particular emphasis on the need for scholarly communication librarians to

have a foundational understanding of open access publishing models, intellectual property issues, and the economics of scholarly publishing (Calarco et al., 2016). The NASIG (2020) *Core Competencies for Scholarly Communication Librarians* report provided further specificity in a detailed list of strengths that scholarly communication librarians should have, including: collaboration (relationship and partnership building), communication skills (oral and written), enthusiasm and ambition, generalist knowledge, comfort with change and ambiguity, and a personable disposition (NASIG, 2020). The report listed institutional repository management, publishing services, copyright services, data management services, and assessment and impact metrics as important areas of focus in scholarly communication librarianship (NASIG, 2020). Providing some relief from their thorough lists, the authors provided a sort of caveat by stating that "variety is the only constant in the job duties of scholarly communication librarians and responsibility for the full suite of competencies is beyond the reach of even the most accomplished librarian" (NASIG, 2020, para. 1).

Ducas et al. (2020) surveyed librarians working in Canada's research-intensive universities and found that scholarly communication librarians most often provide services in the following areas, from most common to least common: consultation on alternative publishing models (including open access), copyright and intellectual property, consultation on funder policies, data management, development and delivery of educational programs, electronic publishing, digital rights management, and training in open educational resources (OER). The authors also found that scholarly communication librarians acquired their skills in the following ways, listed in order of most to least applicable: professional work experience, self-teaching, workshops or seminars within the library, external professional development, as a part of their information science program, other formal training, and training provided by vendors or suppliers (Ducas et al., 2020). These areas of focus and methods of learning provide insight into both the skills a scholarly communication librarian may need and how learning and training in these areas may come about. Interestingly, however, alongside these findings, Ducas et al. (2020) determined that scholarly communication librarians ranked lower than most academic librarians in their levels of confidence to perform their duties. Similarly, Owens (2021) found that on average, scholarly communication librarians experienced imposter syndrome more frequently and more intensely than other academic librarians. Presumably related to these lower levels of confidence and higher levels of imposter syndrome, much has also been written about the overwhelming variety and constant change that scholarly communication librarians face in their profession and the nuance, collaboration, and adaptability that must be considered when working in this area.

In their white paper "Supporting Scholarly Research: Current and New Opportunities for Academic Libraries," Tran and Chan (2020) described how libraries may not be adding new staff to account for the diverse and developing research and scholarly communication landscape. This can result in existing employees experiencing an increase in their position responsibilities (Tran & Chan, 2020). Tran and Chan found that collaborative relationships have the potential to provide relief from staffing and budget shortages in academic libraries because they may help to ensure that services remain

available and suitable. Burpee and Fernandez (2014) also highlighted the importance of collaboration. They began by outlining five main areas of librarian participation in the scholarly communication system: institutional repositories, literary publishing services, copyright, open access, and other emerging areas such as research data management (RDM). Burpee and Fernandez suggested that structuring and organizing these areas of scholarly communication on both the institutional and national levels through the development of strong communities of practice enhances scholarly communication activities in academic libraries. The authors explained how effective collaboration and communication are essential throughout these relationship-building processes and therefore in moving scholarly communication initiatives forward. They viewed successful collaboration and communication as facilitating more effective advocacy and successful services across the scholarly communication ecosystem (Burpee & Fernandez, 2014). Similarly, Craft and Harlow (2020) found that scholarly communication services often include open access publishing, institutional repository ingest and user support, RDM, and OER. Drawing from Harrison (2018) and Southall and Scutt (2017), the authors highlighted the importance of cross-departmental collaboration specifically in relation to outreach because it is crucial for a successful and sustainable model of scholarly communication programming that is impactful for library patrons and researchers (Craft & Harlow, 2020).

On a larger scale, Raju (2019) explained how scholarly communication has undergone intense change as a result of rapidly evolving digital technology. She described the ambivalence within the field of scholarly communication and exhibited how it requires adaptable professionals who embrace newness and change (Raju, 2019). Raju also explained how LIS curricula must mirror this rapid change and therefore undergo frequent and recurring review to ensure that competencies of such an evolving field are taught effectively by teachers and embraced by students. This is similar to Hollister's (2017) research that identified how the ongoing drastic shifts in the scholarly communication system necessitate mirrored adjustments in librarianship training such as MLIS curricula.

Drawing from Malenfant (2010), Hollister (2017) explored how LIS students understand scholarly communication from the perspective of their educational experience and professional pathways. Specifically, Hollister's research examined the perceptions of scholarly communication among LIS students. He highlighted the "highly collaborative nature of scholarly communication librarianship not only at the level of the practitioner's institution but inter-institutionally and inter-professionally" as well (Hollister, 2017, p. 4). The constantly evolving research cycle, including copyright applications, publishing models, and open access policies, necessitates the same evolving approach to the support and training librarians receive and the services they provide.

The following list features many of these scholarly communication skills and competencies and the sources they are mentioned in:

- Collaboration (Burpee & Fernandez, 2014; Craft & Harlow, 2020; Hollister 2017; NASIG, 2020; Tran & Chan, 2020)

- Research data management (Burpee & Fernandez, 2014; Cox et al., 2019; Craft & Harlow, 2020; Ducas et al., 2020; NASIG, 2020)
- Knowledge of copyright, intellectual property issues (Burpee & Fernandez, 2014; Calarco et al., 2016; Ducas et al., 2020; NASIG, 2020)
- Knowledge of open access (Burpee & Fernandez, 2014; Calarco et al., 2016; Craft & Harlow, 2020; Ducas et al., 2020)
- Repository management and services (Burpee & Fernandez, 2014; Calarco et al., 2016; Craft & Harlow, 2020; NASIG, 2020)
- Scholarly publishing services (Burpee & Fernandez, 2014; Calarco et al., 2016; Ducas et al., 2020; NASIG, 2020)
- Assessment of scholarly resources (Calarco et al., 2016; NASIG, 2020)
- Comfort with change and ambiguity (NASIG, 2020; Raju, 2019)
- Good communication (oral and written) (Burpee & Fernandez, 2014; NASIG, 2020)
- Knowledge of OER (Craft & Harlow, 2020; Ducas et al., 2020)
- Adaptability (Raju, 2019)
- Ambition (NASIG, 2020)
- Development and delivery of educational programs (Ducas et al., 2020)
- Enthusiasm (NASIG, 2020)
- Generalist knowledge (NASIG, 2020)
- Knowledge of funder policies (Ducas et al., 2020)
- Relationship building (Burpee & Fernandez, 2014)

Though all of the mentioned research on scholarly communication librarianship spans more than ten years, the broad theme of constant change and therefore the need for comprehensive skills of collaboration and adaptability remain consistent. The evolving field of scholarly communication librarianship and the roles and skills mentioned in the literature review provide the context for my reflection on navigating this field and my thoughts, feelings, and concerns about entering this area of academic librarianship.

Reflection

I am reflecting on and from my experience as an MLIS student particularly interested in the field of scholarly communication. This reflection aligns with Hollister's (2017) explanation that the literature around the preparedness of MLIS students in the area of scholarly communication is lacking, and Goodsett and Koziura's (2016) assertion that MLIS students should have a central voice in the discussion of library training and education.

Adaptability

Pertinent to this reflection is the skill of adaptability. My MLIS student experience has enabled me to practice adaptability through varying course assignments and work experiences. More than that, however, my undergraduate experience in an interdisciplinary degree program is what cultivated my knack for adaptability. Interdisciplinarity was a huge way for me to understand and practice adaptability and

understand what it can look and feel like. For example, given the requirement to participate in courses of many different disciplines, I needed to adapt my interpretation, reflection, and writing on topics according to the appropriate discipline. I am curious whether scholarly communication librarianship is like my student experiences in that it requires communicating across a variety of different disciplinary backgrounds and interacting with people with different levels of understanding of the broader scholarly communication system. However, even though I pride myself in being adaptable, that does not make the process of adapting any less scary or intimidating, because it is not easy to be constantly aware and up-to-date with the developments of the scholarly communication ecosystem.

Related to adaptability is the frequent mention of effective communication and collaboration as core skills required of scholarly communication librarians. One may have to change or adapt their communication style to be effective depending on the audience and circumstances. As Burpee and Fernandez (2014) suggested, being able to successfully organize and structure communication, for example through communities of practice, enables scholarly communication networks and services to grow and adapt more effectively. Further, considering the quickly changing field of scholarly communication, being able to identify, articulate, and communicate competencies in this area is an important skill in terms of advocating not only for oneself in the search for a librarian position but also advocating on a larger scale for the importance of scholarly communication initiatives such as institutional repositories or open access.

Questioning Advice

Throughout my journey as a MLIS student, I have often been given the advice to "fake it 'til you make it." Although I find this advice positive in that it reassures me that others may be confused about what is going on and we are all just trying to figure things out as we go, I am more inclined to find this advice discomforting because it implies that not knowing or not understanding should be hidden and is therefore shameful. I consider Raju's (2019) focus on embracing newness and openness to be helpful for confronting this issue. She stated that "the ambivalent nature of an evolving scholarly communications field with unclear definitions and boundaries necessitates professional practitioners who are adaptable and open to change" (p. 1). I consider this statement encouragement to welcome not knowing and newness because they will appear everywhere across the scholarly communication landscape. In line with Raju's (2019) sentiments, I hope to be a librarian who is honest, open, and vulnerable when I am unsure or do not know. I hope to model this behaviour during interactions with others in the library by being curious and asking questions because these practices may lead to more considerate and compassionate workplaces, learning environments, and communities.

Going Forward

The literature on the skills and competencies required of scholarly communication librarians is overwhelming, particularly from the perspective of someone who wishes to enter this field. I appreciate the recognition in the NASIG (2020) *Core Competencies for Scholarly Communication Librarians* that no one, not even the most distinguished librarian, will be able to master all of the skills mentioned. This acknowledgement is both reassuring and daunting, however. Of course, I aim to be tangibly prepared for a scholarly communication librarian position and the workflow involved. Still, to know that the quickly- and ever-changing landscape of this field will make it a challenge to be completely knowledgeable or entirely trained in scholarly communication is intimidating. For me, this manifests as a feeling of apprehension, which I believe relates to Owens's (2021) findings of instances of imposter syndrome and Ducas et al.'s (2020) findings of lower confidence among scholarly communication librarians.

However, the inevitable change and evolution involved in scholarly communication, and the continual learning and adapting that are therefore required, are also what excite me most about this area of librarianship. Even though scholarly communication can be intimidating and perplexing to navigate, these obstacles are an indication that this area of librarianship aligns with my values of lifelong learning and growing. This signifies to me that I will often be exposed to new knowledge and ideas, which can be exciting, rejuvenating, and motivating.

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