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# Increasing scholarly productivity: Developing an in-house academic librarian support network

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## Abstract:

Organizational and professional support structures can provide tools and resources to help academic librarians address the challenges of research and publishing. At the USF Libraries, a Research and Publishing committee was created by the faculty to develop tools and provide professional development support, with the aim of encouraging a community culture of research. The committee's work resulted in a series of workshops, discussion groups, guiding documents, and tools.

#### Introduction

Research and publishing are a common requirement for promotion at academic and research libraries. While MLIS programs and job experience help prepare the academic librarian for the challenges of research and publishing, additional organizational or professional support is often needed or desired. There are many opportunities for libraries to provide research and publishing support for any librarian, regardless of where they are in their career. At the University of South Florida (USF) Libraries, a Research and Publishing committee was created by the faculty to provide professional development information and opportunities for librarians and staff. The committee conducted workshops, created guidance documents, templates and tools, facilitated writing groups, and assisted in setting up peer writing partners. This paper will review the committee's analysis of the literature about how other organizations support their librarians in research and publishing, then it will outline how USF implemented the committee, including an analysis of what worked and what didn't. Future goals will also be addressed.

#### **Literature Review**

Over the past 10 years, researchers studying the culture of academic library scholarship have consistently documented identifiable barriers to librarians' publishing success. Dedicated time, lack of institutional support, nascent research skills, and personal confidence<sup>1</sup> are the most commonly cited factors impeding scholarly research and publication among faculty librarians.

Within the larger discussion of librarians' scholarly publishing activities, the literature tends to focus on two major themes: how and why librarians publish and how librarians develop and sustain scholarly research habits. Although recent literature illustrates the effectiveness of librarian research support, it is lacking when it comes to how this impacts mid-late career librarians; stronger emphasis is often placed on developing research habits and establishing institutional infrastructure for early career librarians.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, there are few articles that discuss how non-tenure track librarians can successfully achieve increased research outputs by creating environments in which new and established professionals contribute towards each other's professional development success. As such, a significant portion of the literature excluded mid-late career librarians in non-tenure earning positions.

Regardless of tenure or rank, what can be gleaned from the literature is that among the range of factors contributing to librarians' successfulness as researchers, all benefit from a combined emphasis on institutional and peer support. Crampsie, Neville, and Henry (2020) conclude that direct and indirect collaboration with other librarians can be one of the most viable practices for increasing research productivity.<sup>3</sup> Smigielski, Laning, and Daniels disagree on the impact of "grassroots" support among librarian colleagues and, instead, identify higher-level institutional support, such as funding and mentoring, as being more effective.<sup>4</sup> The RMIT University Library in Melbourne, Australia, exemplifies the successfulness of a combined approach, wherein senior library staff organized grassroots efforts backed by the institution as a whole. At RMIT, the need to create a culture of research and increase scholarly output among all librarians resulted in group meetings that encouraged participants to discuss research progress and receive constructive criticism "from peers or experts.<sup>5</sup> <sup>6</sup>, thus<sup>7</sup> there is strong evidence that

librarian-led research communities effectively contribute to librarians' scholarly <sup>89</sup>In all, librarians tend to achieve greater productivity success when they have the combined support of their colleagues and their institutions.

The USF Libraries Research and Publishing Committee has attempted to address these, and other, concerns by building community around the scholarly publication process. The committee has worked to build support, as well as help sustain librarians at all stages of research through workshops designed to support knowledge and skill development; discussions about navigating research, writing, and review as part of submission and publication; and group and one-on-one efforts to address the fears and concerns many librarians have around starting and finishing research projects. By supporting librarians throughout the research process, the committee has worked effectively to establish a community of researchers dedicated to the culture of academic library research. The committee's work mirrors the communities of practice established in other academic libraries that successfully support organizational change and professional development among librarians.<sup>10</sup>

#### Discussion

The University of South Florida is a high-impact global research university dedicated to student success. The USF Libraries have served the University community since 1956, providing USF students, faculty, and staff quality research materials, secure and comfortable study spaces, and exceptional subject expertise. The Library's mission statement includes "[i]increasing the impact of USF Librarians' contributions to scholarship and research." The current administration has been very supportive by increasing funding for librarian professional development and travel, increasing faculty research activity percentage of librarians in our annual assignments, and consistently encouraging and rewarding faculty research efforts with discretionary raises directly related to research/publishing output. In addition, the USF Academy for Teaching and Learning Excellence (ATLE) has offered workshops based on Wendy L. Belcher's (2019) *Writing Your Journal Article in 12 Weeks: A Guide to Academic Publishing Success*, <sup>11</sup> in which several librarians have participated. However, while there have been efforts in the past to facilitate library faculty scholarship activities. an organized effort to support faculty research has not been attempted in many years, if ever. This, therefore, was the issue the USF Libraries Research and Publishing Committee was charged to undertake.

One environmental variable that the Research and Publishing Committee needed to consider was the consolidation of the three separately accredited USF System institutions into one accredited institution by July 1, 2020 that was mandated by the Florida Legislature in 2017. Since the committee's ad hoc standing would end before consolidation, the committee determined that work would be limited to the Tampa campus library faculty group by which it was charged.

The Tampa campus library currently employs 25 non-tenured faculty of various ranks per Figure 1. As shown in Figure 2, publication output for those 25 librarians from 2015-2019 averaged

seven articles, book/encyclopedia sections, or books per year, except for 2017 when several librarians were preparing to apply for promotion and the publication count doubled. It can be inferred from these two figures that only one in three librarians published in most years.

Department	Assistant Librarian	Associate Librarian	University Librarian	Associate Research	Total
				Professor	
Library Student Success	2	4	1		7
Research Platform Teams		2			2
Collections & Discovery	7				7
Special Collections		1	1		2
Digital Scholarship Services	1	1			2
<b>Digital Heritage &amp; Humanities</b>				2	2
Collections					
Administration		2	1		3
Total	10	10	3	2	25

Figure 1: Tampa campus library faculty rank and department

Year	Peer-reviewed Articles	Book/Encyclopedia Sections	Books	Total
2015	5	2		7
2016	4	2	1	7
2017	9	4	1	14
2018	6	1	1	7
2019	6	2		8

Figure 2: Tampa campus library faculty publication output

From 2015-2019, annual research activity assignments ranged from 5-15%. This was increased to 10-20% for each faculty member in 2020 to facilitate the goal of increased librarian scholarship. Another change in the research assignment was an increased emphasis on publications rather than presentations, especially for promotion and discretionary raises. Library faculty are now expected to publish at least one peer-reviewed article per year. Both of these changes prompted the need to better support the publication activities of faculty at the USF Tampa Library.

#### **Description of Program**

The [USF] Libraries Research and Publishing Committee was initially charged with developing a strong and supportive culture of library research and scholarship among non-tenure earning faculty at an R1 university. For the better part of two years, the committee engaged all levels of library faculty in workshops, discussion groups, writing groups, writing partnerships, and journal article reading groups that foster exploration and understanding of academic publishing and how librarians can effectively and productively contribute to high-quality, high-impact scholarly discourse. The programming developed by the committee was supported by a suite of tools

created to support scholarly research and publishing activity, including a statement of expectations for research credit, a journal rankings list, a research agenda template and an outline of librarian research competencies. The committee was developed as an extension of a library-wide initiative to increase research productivity, advance scholarly output, and establish a culture of research and scholarship among both new and established librarians. But while the committee started at the behest of library administration, it was entirely faculty driven, and is geared towards the explicit professional development needs of faculty whose publishing experiences vary from beginner to expert.

The charge of the Research and Publishing Committee to support and promote research and publications activities among the faculty required the committee to identify ways to improve research and publication at the USF Libraries; contribute to the formulation of publishing best practices; organize development opportunities; and provide collegial support to USF Libraries faculty. Upon convening as a group of six faculty from various library departments, the committee focused first on organizing development opportunities by developing a program of workshops. Involving the greater faculty community in this way was deemed the most expedient method of supporting research and publishing activities at the Libraries. After surveying the faculty to determine what topics they were most interested in exploring, the committee developed a schedule of workshops and began reaching out to potential guest speakers inside and outside the library. Each workshop would be open to all faculty and staff, be advertised by email and in communal online library forums and be followed by an attendee feedback assessment. Eight workshops were arranged between March and August of 2019.

- Developing a Research Plan 3/8/19
- The Publishing Cycle 3/19/19
- Academic Writer 4/16/19
- Co-authoring Tools 5/21/19
- USF Policy & Faculty Ownership 5/30/19
- Generating Abstracts/proposals That Will Actually Get Accepted 6/4/19
- Creating Your Scholarly Profile 7/11/19
- Avoiding Predatory Publishers 8/20/19

"Developing a Research Plan" walked library faculty and staff through creating a research agenda. The session relied heavily on a template created by the Research & Publishing Committee to guide individuals who were unsure how to start crafting their research agendas. "The Publishing Cycle" provided insight into the entire process of scholarly publishing from two librarians with experience editing library and information science journals. "Academic Writer" gave an in-depth introduction to the Academic Writer product, with suggestions for how it could be put to use in research and publishing projects. The panel session, "Co-Authoring tools" presented insights from a group of professional authors on managing the co-author relationship. "USF Policy and Faculty Ownership" provided a detailed look at the USF invention and works policy as well as the processes of the Technology Transfer office in regard to faculty creations. Another panel session, "Generating Abstracts and Proposals that Will Actually Get Accepted" presented tips from a diverse collection of speakers on the importance of the abstract and manuscript cover letter. "Creating Your Scholarly Profile" reviewed the available tools scholarly authors could use to make their work more visible. Finally, "Avoiding Predatory Publishers" reviewed techniques for identifying reputable publishing venues and avoiding less desirable publishing solicitations.

Three of the workshops were presented by members of the Research & Publishing Committee or co-presented by committee members and other faculty in the library. Three workshops: "Coauthoring Tools," "USF Policy & Faculty Ownership," and "Generating Abstracts/Proposals That Will Actually Get Accepted" were presented, or co-presented, with faculty and experts from outside the library. The remaining workshops were delivered by library faculty who were not members of the committee. Fliers and promotional messages were created and disseminated by members of the committee, working in partnership with the Libraries' Director of Communication to ensure proper branding. All sessions were open to library and non-library faculty and staff, however only library personnel attended any of the sessions. Session attendance ranged from twelve to five attendees, with the highest attendance during the earliest workshop sessions. After each workshop, feedback was solicited from the participants via Qualtrics surveys to determine 1) whether the workshop met their expectations and, if no, what expectations were not met, 2) what were the most and least useful parts of the workshop, and 3) in some cases, their pre- and post-workshop knowledge about the topic. Overall, the workshops met the expectations of the participants (94.4%, n=18). The one dissenting vote was because the workshop "[c]overed more than I expected." For two workshop surveys, "Academic Writer" and "Creating Your Scholarly Profile," participants were asked to rate their pre- and post-workshop knowledge. For "Academic Writer," the results went from 20% to 80% "very knowledgeable." For "Creating Your Scholarly Profile," the survey asked participants about their knowledge of several scholar profile tools. As indicated in Figure 3, in all cases there was an increase in knowledge.

Tool	Pre-workshop Knowledge			Post-workshop Knowledge		
	Very	Somewhat	None	Very	Somewhat	None
ORCid	25%	50%	25%	50%	50%	0%
Google Scholar	50%	25%	25%	75%	25%	0%
Profile						
SelectedWorks	50%	25%	25%	50%	50%	0%
academia.edu	0%	50%	50%	25%	75%	0%
ResearchGate	0%	50%	50%	25%	75%	0%
Mendeley	25%	25%	50%	50%	50%	0%
Figshare	0%	0%	100%	0%	75%	25%
our-research.org	0%	0%	100%	0%	75%	25%

PlumX & Altmetrics	0%	75%	25%	0%	100%	0%

Figure 3: Creating Your Scholarly Profile survey results

Questions about the most and least useful aspects of the session were asked to help identify possible improvements that could be implemented in future workshops. In general, the results of these questions were highly positive regarding the usefulness of the workshops. Very few comments were made identifying least useful aspects of any session. However, one comment was made that there wasn't enough time to actually work with the scholarly profile tools.

At the end of 2019, the committee re-evaluated the workshop format. Committee members had observed that attendees most actively participated during time reserved for question and discussion during the workshops. This observation coupled with decreasing workshop attendance, led the committee to hypothesize that library faculty may not feel inclined to join a workshop on subjects they felt they already knew. To make future activities planned by the committee more successful, all remaining topics identified for workshops would be turned into open discussions. Three such discussion sessions were hosted between December 2019 and June 2020.

- Research & Publishing Journals List Discussion 12/4/2019
- What's Your Writing Process Discussion 5/14/2020
- Rewrites, Rejection, and Choosing the Next Journal Discussion 6/10/2020

The first discussion, "Research & Publishing Journals List," focused more specifically on a journals list tool developed by the Research and Publishing Committee. The following discussion sessions were more general and less guided. As expected, the discussion sessions resulted in improved attendance and participation with ten to twelve participants at every session. However, the committee did not follow these sessions with an attendee feedback assessment and qualitative data on the reception of these discussion sessions is lacking.

While workshops can provide ways to provide information about the writing and publishing landscape, the Research and Publishing Committee was committed to providing collaborative ways for faculty and staff to engage with each other. As such, the Research & Publishing Committee hosted a writing group discussion in July 2019 as an open forum where faculty and staff could discuss frustrations and successes in their research and publication process. Initial discussions of the writing group were informed by worksheets developed by Belcher (2019) as companions to her book *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks: A Guide to Academic Publishing Success.* Attendees at the writing group meeting voluntarily paired off into writing partners with the aim of meeting regularly to discuss and help each other keep on track. The writing group continued to meet monthly into the spring of 2020. During discussion at subsequent meetings, attendees reported on the benefits of writing partners:

"a writing partner is more than writing support, they are professional support. They are someone with which to talk about the whole picture and not feel judged. Even when other responsibilities get in the way of real progress on a research project, having regular meeting with a writing partner encourages even small movement towards goals and keeps the project foremost in the mind."

The writing group discussions continued to have good attendance with a dedicated group of eight participants representing both staff and faculty every meeting. The discussion during the meetings would often begin with updates on progress with their writing partners as well as any publications being worked on. After providing updates the conversation would be open ended, with participants either asking questions to their colleagues or providing anecdotes or stories about publishing that had happened recently.

While the majority of librarians did not participate, the attendance stayed consistent throughout their offerings. The people who did attend found value in the discussion and in the writing partnership.

During a writing group meeting in November 2019, a 'write-in' was proposed as a new method of research and writing support. The idea of the write-in was based on similar events scheduled by local coordinators of National Novel Writing Month, an international community novel writing challenge organized by a non-profit organization in support of writing fluency and education. The first write-in took place in a computer room in the library. Ground rules were established: no excessive discussions that may disturb others, participants were not expected to stay and participate for the entire write-in, and there would be periodic breaks where discussion could take place. After the first write-in arranged by the committee, a schedule of subsequent write-ins was developed to give the Libraries faculty and staff dedicated, distraction-free time to reach their research and publishing targets.

The initial goals of the Research & Publishing committee were split between developing programming and providing guiding documentation that faculty could use as to inform their research endeavors. Faculty at the Libraries had been asked by the Libraries' administration to develop research agendas near to the time that the committee was created by the Libraries Faculty. The Research Agenda Template created by the committee was offered to the faculty as an optional tool to use to create or revise their research agendas. The template prompted the faculty member to identify research foci with a rationale, statement of the question or problem, intended methodology for the research, and a selected bibliography of work in the research area.

A statement on Expectations for Research Credit was also developed in answer to questions and requests for guidance from faculty regarding credit when working with and supporting nonlibrarian faculty on research, presentations, and publications. To craft this statement the committee conducted a review of peer institutions who had publicly made available similar statements. The resulting statement included a table of circumstances and levels of librarian support followed by suggestions on how to best credit the assistance. The statement was approved by a vote of the Libraries Faculty and by the Libraries Administration.

The Research and Publishing Committee also sought to create a guiding document on research competencies for librarians to aid in the development of newly hired faculty and to help senior faculty refresh existing skills. After reviewing published LIS literature on the topic, the committee decided to base the competencies primarily on the Research Competency Guidelines for Literatures in English by the Association of College and Research Libraries (2007)<sup>12</sup>. The final document was presented as a helpful non-compulsory tool that library faculty could use to guide their own development of research skills.

A USF Libraries' Journal Rankings List was also created as a non-proscriptive tool to aid faculty in choosing the most impactful journal venue that fits their research. Journal rankings, gathered from SciMago and Scientific Journal Rankings (SJR), formed the genesis of the list. Knowing that journal rankings systems could leave out journals of good reputation in certain disciplines, the committee also analyzed the recent publishing habits of the Libraries' faculty, first by survey and then by citation analysis. Additionally, studies in LIS literature that offered new or complimentary methods/ideas of journal rankings were reviewed. Two articles provided ranking systems that were added to the committee's journal title evaluation.

Jingfeng Xia's 2012<sup>13</sup> study sought to integrate open access journals into a standard ranking of LIS journals. The resulting tables shared in the article were incorporated into the committee's combined list and marked with a value to highlight them during a planned deduping process. Additional tables were added to the committee's list from Judith Nixon's 2014<sup>14</sup> evaluation of journal rankings studies of a similar method conducted from 1985 to 2007, that asked the Deans of library and information schools and the Directors of academic libraries to rate their top ten preferred professional journals. After the various rankings were gathered, the journals list was sorted to find the top 20 journal titles by SciMago Rank, Impact Factor, SJR, H-Index, Dean/Director preference, and prevalence of use by USF Libraries' authors. Each top 20 was added to a combined list that was later deduped and evaluated to ascertain whether H-index and impact factor for any one title were increasing or decreasing.

Finally, the Research and Publishing Committee created a LibGuide to house the documentation created, a schedule of workshops, and an area to share calls for papers relevant to librarianship. A LibGuide was selected as a venue for this information primarily because the faculty intranet was completely closed to non-librarian faculty, and access to the committee work and documentation was deemed necessary for non-faculty and non-Libraries parties.

#### Future Goals

At the end of the Research & Publishing Committee's two-year pilot program, the committee delivered an activities report to the newly consolidated USF Libraries Faculty. The report captured the committee's activities and asked the faculty whether these activities should continue in the new organizational environment. The faculty were generally in support of continuing the type of research and developmental support that the committee had provided. Additionally, faculty identified several other developmental activities that may fall within a newly constructed committee that would support librarians at all affiliated locations.

New emphasis on a distributed and remote work environment had simultaneously led library faculty to create an article discussion group, wherein rotating discussion leaders would walk the group through an article they had presented to the group. Discussions that turned toward research in this group evolved into a separate research discussion group. Members of the Research and Publishing Committee were prominent in these initial discussions and the construction of the group on the institution's shared work platform. However, ownership of the group and discussion sessions was distributed and cooperative, like the article discussion group.

#### Conclusion

Academic librarianship often requires research and publishing activities as a portion of an individual librarian's labor. Supporting fellow librarians as they endeavor to successfully publish was a primary goal of the Research and Publishing Committee. The committee was able to fulfill its mission through the creation of tools and supportive documents, the use of workshops, writing groups, and providing accountability via writing partnerships. The activities of the Research and Publishing Committee helped to encourage and increase a community culture of research that was evidenced by the new cooperative and informal discussion groups.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Camielle Crampsie, Tina Neville, and Deborah B. Henry, "Academic Librarian Publishing Productivity: An Analysis of Skills and Behaviors Leading to Success," College & Research Libraries 81 no. 2 (2020), 248 – 271, doi: https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.81.2.248; Helen Fallon, "Using a Blended Group Learning Approach to Increase Librarians' Motivation and Skills to Publish," New Review of Academic Librarianship 18 (2012): 7-25, doi: 10.1080/13614533.2012.654673; Kristin Hoffmann, Selinda Berg, and Denise Koufogiannakis, "Understanding Factors that Encourage Research Productivity in Academic Librarians," Western Libraries Publications 67 (2017); Kennedy & Brancolini, "Academic Librarian Research," 2018; Catherine Sassen and Diane Wahl, "Fostering Research and Publication in Academic Libraries," College & Research Libraries 75 no. 4 (2014): 458-491, <u>https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.75.4.458</u>; Elizabeth M. Smigielski, Melissa A. Laning, and Caroline M. Daniels, "Funding, Time, and Mentoring: A Study of Research and Publication Support Practices of ARL Member Libraries." Journal of Library Administration 54 no. 4 (2014): 261–276, https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2014.924309.

<sup>2</sup> Erin Ackerman, Jennifer Hunter, and Zara T. Wilkinson, Z. T. (2018), "The Availability and Effectiveness of Research Supports for Early Career Academic Librarians," The Journal of Academic Librarianship 44 no. 5 (2018): 553–568, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2018.06.001; Jill Cirasella and Maura A. Smale, "Peers Don't Let Peers Perish: Encouraging Research and Scholarship Among Junior Library Faculty." Collaborative Librarianship 3 no. 2 (2011), 98-109. https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc\_pubs/11/; Emy Nelson Decker and Rosaline Y. Odom, "Publish or Perish: Librarians Collaborating to Support Junior Faculty to Publish within the Academic Environment," in Teacher Training and Professional Development: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications, ed. Mehdi Khosrow-Pour (Scopus, 2018): 193- 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Crampsie et al., 259.

<sup>4</sup> Smigielski et al., 267.

<sup>5</sup> Doreen Sullivan et al., "Getting Published: Group Support for Academic Librarians." Library Management 34 no. 8/9 (2013): 690-704, <u>https://doi.org/10.1108/LM-03-2013-0026</u>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., "Getting Published," 701.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., "Getting Published," 701.

<sup>9</sup> Marie R. Kennedy and Kristine R. Brancolini, "Academic Librarian Research: An Update to a Survey of Attitudes, Involvement, and Perceived Capabilities," College & Research Libraries 79 no. 6 (2018): 822–851, <u>https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.79.6.822</u>.

<sup>10</sup> Amanda Binder and Lareese Hall, "Creating Communities of Practice: A Shared Culture of Professional Development," Proceedings of the Conference for Entrepreneurial Librarians 1 (2014); Megan Fitzgibbons, Lorie Kloda, and Andrea Miller-Nesbitt, "Exploring the Value of Academic Librarians' Participation in Journal Clubs," College & Research Libraries 78 no. 6 (2017): 774-788 <u>https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.78.6.774</u>; Chelsea Heinbach, Charissa Powell, Hailley Fargo, and Nimisha Bhat, "The Librarian Parlor: Demystifying the Research Process through Community." In ACRL 2019: Recasting the Narrative, Cleveland, OH, April 10-13, 2019, https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/lib\_articles/645;

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<sup>11</sup> Wendy Laura Belcher, *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks: A Guide to Academic Publishing Success* (Thousand Oaks, CA: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

<sup>12</sup> Association of College and Research Libraries, *Research Competency Guidelines for Literatures in English*, Literatures in English Section (2007) <u>http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/researchcompetenciesles</u>.

<sup>13</sup> Jingfeng Xia, "Positioning Open Access Journals in a LIS Journal Ranking," College & Research Libraries 73 (2012), <u>https://doi.org/10.5860/crl-234</u>.

<sup>14</sup> Judith Nixon, "Core Journals in Library and Information Science: Developing a Methodology for Ranking LIS Journals," College & Research Libraries 75 no. 1 (2014): 66-90, https://doi.org/10.5860/crl12-387.