

## ACRL 2015: ScholCommCamp unconference recap

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Librarians from across the US and Canada attended the ACRL ScholCommCamp unconference on Wednesday, April 25, 2015. The session raised as many questions as it did answers about open access, altmetrics, and incentives in academia, chief among them being, “What exactly can librarians bring to the table in the fast-changing world of scholarly communication?”

Throughout the day, session moderators (Amy Buckland, Carmen Mitchell, and Char Booth) worked with participants to tease out pressing issues in scholarly communication that affect the work that librarians do (as well as areas we are not yet active in but could have an impact upon). Following a morning brainstorming session, twenty individual discussion groups<sup>1</sup> were convened, with topics ranging from library-based Open Access publishing to managing outreach on a shoestring budget to how to support faculty in the promotion and tenure process. Each topic was discussed in smaller groups for half an hour, then summarized for the larger body of attendees.

Much ground was covered during the daylong unconference, and while it’s not possible to address all points, several overarching themes did emerge.

The incentives system in academia is broken

While many in the room agreed that a move to a fully Open Access academic publishing system is both desirable and inevitable, several groups reported that “carrots” for researchers (namely, the tenure and promotion process) don’t encourage researchers to publish in Open Access journals. Nor do the carrots align with the increasing demand for researchers to demonstrate that their work has “broader impacts” (i.e. impact upon the public, policy makers, and so on).

These discrepancies affect librarians in several ways. First, faculty are incentivized to publish in high impact factor journals, and that has a bearing on which journals librarians are expected to subscribe to. In tying up our budgets with subscriptions to these journals, less funding is available to support Open Access publishing costs for those researchers who are interested in publishing in Open Access forums. That puts librarians between a rock and a hard place when faculty on either side push back against our funding priorities.

These misalignments also affect the programs librarians offer and services librarians support. Though faculty are expected to document the “broader impacts”

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<sup>1</sup> Session titles and notes can be found here: <http://bit.ly/ScholCommCamp>

of their research when applying for grants and, increasingly, for promotion and tenure, impact is still widely understood through citations and journal impact factors alone. Only a small number of faculty are currently using newer forms of impact data like altmetrics. As information experts, education on both citation-based metrics and altmetrics would naturally fall under the purview of librarians. However, given the lack of demand, some at ScholCommCamp were skeptical of offering such workshops.

Libraries have a lot to offer, but few people take us up on our expertise

Most attendees reported difficulty in getting traction for library-based initiatives related to open access publishing, bibliometrics education, and services that help faculty with preparing for promotion and tenure. One discussion group posited that librarians are not, by and large, describing their programs in a way that resonates with researchers. (The term “scholarly communication” itself was called out as being irrelevant to those outside of libraries.) Others pointed to faculty’s outdated understanding of the services we offer, illustrating the larger challenges librarians face in getting buy-in for our programs and services.

Challenges aside, from the conversations at ScholCommCamp, it’s clear that librarians are natural stewards for the services that aren’t adequately supported elsewhere on campus (metadata maintenance and enhancement, Open Access funds and publishing programs, and so on). Our expertise and the principles of our profession mean that we pay attention to the issues that few others can address. But as a whole, libraries are having to add new services (including scholarly communication services) without the proper resources, putting into question our ability to offer those services in a sustainable, long-lasting way.

Libraries have to make do with a lot less

Few among us would be surprised to hear that many libraries are under-staffed and under-funded. According to many at ScholCommCamp, it’s common for wide-ranging scholarly communication initiatives to be introduced at a library, only to have to operate with a single dedicated staff member and a shoestring budget.

One of the groups convened at ScholCommCamp tackled this problem head on, sharing their strategies for advocating for resources at their own institutions. The single biggest recommendation that the group offered was to pair with more politically powerful players on campus to get buy-in for your budgetary requests and programs. Some reported that it has been effective for them to ask their Associate Deans to handle requests for cross-campus partnerships or to get buy-in for increased resources within the library; others have found an important ally in their Deans, who work to make changes that “rank and file” librarians don’t have the political capital to do.

Campus politics are a barrier to making change

Nearly every table had its share of campus war stories: tales of territorial coworkers, Kafkaesque bureaucracies, and organizational apathy that make it difficult to create scholarly communication services that meet campus needs.

Other challenges identified included the lack of political capital granted to the average librarian (many of whom can't create new cross-campus partnerships without getting their superiors to vet the idea with other administrators first); institutional silos (several participants recounted how their campus's office of the vice provost for research, campus library, and media office each independently purchased very similar products instead of pooling resources and cooperating); and a dependence upon grant funding to create new library services or hire for new positions (support for which often disappears after the funding runs out).

Many smart librarians are working on challenges within scholarly communication

Despite the many challenges that were identified throughout the unconference, participants were optimistic. For every barrier discussed, many solutions were offered. Librarians shared stories of bootstrapping successful scholarly communication initiatives at their own institutions and finding faculty "champions" who partnered with the library to create popular campus events. While the solutions mentioned throughout the day are too numerous to list here, readers can find examples in the session notes that participants and moderators compiled<sup>2</sup>.

The ScholCommCamp provided a rare chance for librarians from many different backgrounds to come together to address Grand Challenges within scholarly communication. Hopefully, ScholCommCamp will be offered again at future ACRL conferences.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://bit.ly/ScholCommCamp>