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# Learning by doing

Highlighting the successful collaboration between an open access peer-reviewed journal, a scholarly communication class, and a supportive library

**A**s the “NASIG Core Competencies for Scholarly Communication Librarians” makes clear, the responsibilities associated with scholarly communication work in libraries are so “broad and amorphous” that the “full suite of competencies is beyond the reach of even the most accomplished librarian.”<sup>1</sup> It is, therefore, increasingly important for all academic librarians to have not just a theoretical understanding of scholarly communication topics, but also the ability to actively engage in and manage related projects. The question then is how are master of library and information science (MLIS) programs preparing aspiring academic librarians for these roles?

Scholarly communication themes, such as subscription publishing and copyright policies, may be addressed in required library and information science courses. Research methods courses can also help prepare MLIS students to conduct research and, potentially, publish their work. However, very few ALA-accredited MLIS programs regularly offer a course solely dedicated to scholarly communication.<sup>2</sup> This puts a significant burden on early career librarians with scholarly communication responsibilities, as they must extrapolate their limited theoretical knowledge of the scholarly communication ecosystem to roles that require them to serve as campus experts on these issues. Those who already hold another advanced degree or go on to

pursue one may be better positioned to take this work on, but even then their knowledge of scholarly communication processes will be highly dependent on disciplinary parameters as well as the degree and quality of faculty mentoring they receive.

This curricular gap in MLIS programs was the impetus for discussions about launching an open access, peer-reviewed, MLIS student-run journal at Western University’s Faculty of Information and Media Studies (FIMS). Above all, the project was envisioned as a valuable experiential learning opportunity that would benefit students as editorial team members, peer reviewers, and authors. It came to fruition in fall 2017, when *Emerging Library and Information Perspectives (ELIP)* was officially launched with a call for papers, and the journal has since published two volumes of MLIS student work.<sup>3</sup>

The remainder of this article will summarize the journal’s management model as well as the lessons we have learned in its first two years of operation. Chief among

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these is the importance of library support for student scholarly communication initiatives, which further underlines the need for better preparing MLIS students for such work.

Following an interest meeting in spring 2016, the work on what would become *ELIP* began in earnest in 2017 by investigating other MLIS student-run journals. These included the *Student Research Journal* at San José State University's School of Information; the University of Toronto iSchool's *iJournal*; *See Also* at the University of British Columbia's iSchool; and Dalhousie University's *Dalhousie Journal of Interdisciplinary Management*, which publishes student work in the fields of Business Administration, Environmental Studies, Information Management, and Public Administration. Our informal study of these journals certainly confirmed that there is interest among MLIS students in publishing scholarly work, but it also raised a number of questions.

The most pressing of these questions was how to structure the management of the journal in such a way that it would continue despite inevitable fluctuations in the level of student investment. While this is a common issue for student-run journals, it was especially significant in this case because MLIS students at Western University are able to complete their studies in just 12 months and may also partake in the popular co-op program, which results in high turnover from one term to the next.<sup>4</sup> Unlike student-run journals supported by undergraduate programs or more traditional graduate programs, this journal would not be able to rely on a multiyear training cycle for editorial team members.

Ultimately, we adapted a model used by a number of student-edited law reviews, particularly in Canadian law schools. This model grants academic credit to law review editors, and we saw this as an opportunity to both integrate experiential learning into the MLIS curriculum at Western University and provide continuity for the journal. Unlike student-edited law reviews, however, our journal was to be peer-reviewed, and this seemed to pose the most significant challenge in terms of both training and turnover. Therefore, we set

about developing a scholarly communication course that would provide academic credit and structured training for the journal's peer reviewers. The course, *Scholarly Communication and Open Access Publishing*, is offered as an online elective in the MLIS program, with a maximum enrollment of 25 students, and it was designed to be taught by a practicing academic librarian.

It is important here to note that the course is intended not just to teach students how to run a journal or contribute to other scholarly communication initiatives, but to situate this work within a critical library and information science framework. The course aims to prepare students to: 1) analyze LIS research with a more critical eye, informed by peer review expectations, 2) become involved in scholarly publishing initiatives and/or pursue their own research with greater clarity surrounding best practices in scholarly communication and publishing, and 3) articulate the global implications of open access publishing and the role of librarians at various stages of the scholarly communication process.

Melissa Seelye has taught the course twice thus far, and in its 2019 iteration, two assignments focused on peer review, with the first serving as a practice activity and the second being a full-fledged peer review report of an article-length submission to *ELIP*. The latter requires each student to first read five related articles, along with a built-in group component whereby students assigned to the same submission share their initial feedback with one another. Students in the course also support the journal by conducting fact/citation checking and copyediting, all overseen by the instructor.

Still, incorporating these tasks into the course did not address the editorial management of the journal, and in this *ELIP*'s success is a testament to the importance of library support for student scholarly communication initiatives. In addition to the faculty's FIMS Graduate Library being the official publisher of *ELIP*, FIMS Librarian Marni Harrington serves as editorial team advisor, as well as supervisor of the managing editor. The managing editor role is an eight-month paid position at 5-to-10

hours per week, and the library provides a designated office for this work. Madison Edgar served in this role during the 2017–18 academic year, and she was responsible for soliciting and managing submissions; communicating with authors, peer reviewers, editorial team advisors, and editorial advisory board members; and promoting *ELIP* via social media as well as outreach visits to MLIS classes. As of 2019, the managing editor role also encompasses recruiting and managing student volunteers who contribute to the production process as fact/citation checkers and copyeditors.

The editorial team advisors include the authors of this column as well as two other academic librarians who hold scholarly communication and publishing roles at their respective university libraries. They support the journal by vetting submissions prior to peer review and evaluating peer review feedback before it is sent to authors. By virtue of being published by the FIMS Graduate Library, the journal is also supported by other library staff members on an as-needed basis, particularly when it comes to production work and social media promotion. Moving forward, the advisors and editorial advisory board members will be more involved in mentoring student authors and volunteers, whether through workshoping manuscripts or providing guidance to the volunteer copyeditors.

From a more technical standpoint, *ELIP* has also been supported by Western Libraries, the central library system at Western University. Initially, our plan was to launch *ELIP* using the bepress Digital Commons software, which was already being used by dozens of journals at Western University. However, in the final stages of designing *ELIP*'s Digital Commons website, Elsevier's acquisition of bepress was announced, and we changed course. Rather than launching on a proprietary platform, we decided to use Open Journal Systems (OJS), the open source journal management and publishing platform developed by the Public Knowledge Project (PKP). Of course, in doing so, we lost the dedicated customer support available for Digital Commons and other proprietary platforms, but here, too, the journal

has benefited from the support of the library community. *ELIP* is hosted on the Western Libraries' instance of OJS, with technical support provided by the Ontario Council of University Libraries consortium.

Thus far, we have found OJS to be a very effective platform, and the free online training available through the PKP School has been especially helpful for the managing editors. As with other journal management systems, OJS streamlines the process of tracking works from submission to peer review, production, and publication. *ELIP*'s managing editor uses the OJS system to communicate with authors and peer reviewers and manage permissions. The platform can host a variety of multimedia content as well as both PDF and HTML versions of written work. OJS also provides more advanced functionality through plug-ins, including one for registering DOIs. Western Libraries assists journals with activating this plug-in and also pays DOI registration fees on behalf of the journals it hosts on OJS. The switch to OJS has had the added benefit of familiarizing MLIS students with open source publishing software, which can be a rather daunting notion for those accustomed to proprietary alternatives.

While the *ELIP* model may not be typical, we think it demonstrates solutions that could be implemented by any student-run journal concerned with issues of continuity and sustainability. It is common practice for student-run journals to have a designated faculty/librarian advisor, and some even have an associated credit-bearing course. However, we see many opportunities for the library community to be more involved in student publishing, and as we have detailed here, *ELIP* relies on significant support from librarians and faculty associated with various institutions and organizations. From the day-to-day management to peer review and technical infrastructure, *ELIP* is a community-run and community-owned endeavor. Although it is obviously situated within a library and information science context, our takeaways are just as applicable to student-run journals in other disciplines.

In terms of the journal's curricular value

to the MLIS program at Western University, its integration with the Scholarly Communication and Open Access Publishing course gives students real-world experience to inform critical discussions of topics such as anonymous versus open peer review and the political economy of scholarly communication work. Given that academic librarians are often perceived as those who support rather than actively participate in scholarly communication, the necessity of such experiential learning cannot be overstated. Crucially, students also learn firsthand that while open access publications are free to read, they are by no means free to produce.

Through their involvement with *ELIP*, MLIS students gain an appreciation for the work that goes into publishing, and, as a result, will be more effective advocates for more sustainable models as well as the open access movement as a whole. By learning to assess and transparently discuss the shortcomings of existing open access models, including their continued reliance on volunteer labor, students who complete the course will be armed with more than just open access talking points. Ultimately, we hope that *ELIP* and the associated course will empower them to confidently engage with researchers in other fields and collaborate on

community-driven solutions for the future of scholarly communication.

## Notes

1. NASIG Executive Board, "NASIG Core Competencies for Scholarly Communication Librarians," August 11, 2017, accessed June 24, 2019, [https://www.nasig.org/site\\_page.cfm?pk\\_association\\_webpage\\_menu=310&pk\\_association\\_webpage=9435](https://www.nasig.org/site_page.cfm?pk_association_webpage_menu=310&pk_association_webpage=9435).

2. Christopher Hollister, "Perceptions of Scholarly Communication Among Library and Information Studies Students," *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication* 5, General Issue (2017): eP2180, accessed June 24, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.7710/2162-3309.2180>. Maria Bonn, Josh Bolick, and William M. Cross, "Expanding Scholarly Communication Instruction for the Next Generation of LIS Leaders," presented at the Association for Library and Information Science Education Conference, Denver, Colorado, February 6, 2018, accessed June 25, 2019, <https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/handle/1808/25735>.

3. See *ELIP*'s website at <https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/elip/index>.

4. For more on the Western MLIS coop program see [https://www.fims.uwo.ca/programs/graduate\\_programs/master\\_of\\_library\\_and\\_information\\_science/coop.html](https://www.fims.uwo.ca/programs/graduate_programs/master_of_library_and_information_science/coop.html). ❧

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*("Once upon a time in streaming video," cont. from page 501)*

As we begin our second year subscribing to Kanopy, we enter into it with a little more trepidation. The pilot PPU model gives us an optimistic outlook toward our upcoming academic year's usage of the platform. We are hopeful that this new model will allow us to provide more resources to more users while remaining within a reasonable budget. If PPU had not been an option, we would have continued with PDA rather than fully adopt a mediated model. Overall, it worked for us. However, Kanopy's subscription models in general are uncharted streaming video territories. We will continue to take a chance on it since it supports our community's research needs, but we will do so with an eye on the quickly changing streaming video

landscape and the consequences that come with providing it to our campus.

## Notes

1. We Are Social, "Percentage of internet users in selected countries who watch online video content every day as of January 2018," <https://www.statista.com/statistics/319688/daily-online-video-usage/> (accessed May 2, 2019).

2. Nielsen, "Weekly time spent by U.S. adults watching video content via smartphone as of 1st quarter 2018, by age group (in minutes)," <https://www.statista.com/statistics/323922/us-weekly-minutes-smartphone-video-age/> (accessed May 2, 2019). ❧