



Scholarly communication and academic librarians



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ABSTRACT

It is generally accepted among library and information science scholars that academic librarians can potentially assist faculty members with formal and informal scholarly communication processes. However, it is not clear to what extent faculty members and academic librarians are indeed aware of this potential and materialize it in the field. Following interviews with 20 faculty members and 15 academic librarians employed by a university or an academic college in Israel, questionnaires were constructed and delivered to 191 faculty members and 50 librarians. Qualitative and quantitative analyses revealed that both the faculty members and librarians believed that academic librarians are potentially capable of contributing to scholarly communication processes. However, more faculty members than librarians expressed the expectation that librarians should be involved in scholarly communication, and were willing for this to be the case. Bridging this gap—for example by appointing designated “research librarians”—may contribute to the increased involvement of academic librarians in scholarly communication processes, which will benefit both the faculty members and the academic library.

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1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the 21st century, there have been discussions among librarians, faculty members, and heads of universities regarding the way by which academic libraries are expected to function in the technological era; many of these discussions call for a re-examination of the needs of library users. According to Barclay (2007), a world of digital information has the potential to make the library seem superfluous, especially in scientific and technological fields. Hence, modern libraries must contend with ever-shrinking budgets on one hand, and with increasingly higher technological demands on the other. It is, therefore, essential for librarians to understand that, as technology develops and changes, information searching practices and needs change as well, which alters the expectations of modern library users. For instance, one important demand from the modern library is to provide maximal accessibility to online materials, a function considered significantly more essential than the physical presence of the library or of printed material (Creaser & Spezi, 2012).

One of the main issues of academia is scholarly communication, namely, the connections among scholars, which increase the awareness of one scholar to the work and ideas of another, and which have always been considered a fundamental aspect of scholarly and scientific research (Price de Solla, 1965). Scholarly communication is understood as the system through which research and other scholarly writings are

created, evaluated for quality, disseminated to the scholarly community, and preserved for future use, and it promotes a shared system of research and scholarship (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2015). In its broader sense, scholarly communication refers to both the formal and informal connections among scholars and disciplines (Bhaskar, 2009). The study of scholarly communication regards the information needs of individual scholars and scholarly groups (Borgman, 2007). Menzel (1958) summarized the seven roles of scholarly communication in research: 1) providing answers to specific questions; 2) keeping scientists updated about new developments in their fields; 3) helping scientists to acquire an understanding of new fields; 4) verifying the reliability of a source of information by additional testimony; 5) providing scientists with a sense of the major trends in their fields; 6) providing scientists with feedback on their own work and its relative importance within the research field; and 7) redirecting or broadening the span of interest and attention of scientists. Roosendaal and Geurts (1997) describe scholarly communication in terms of five main forces and their interplay:

- Registration, which allows claims of priority for a scholarly finding.
- Certification, which enables the validity of a registered scholarly claim.
- Awareness, which allows scholars to remain aware of new claims and findings.
- Archiving, which preserves the scholarly record over time.
- Rewarding, which rewards actors for their performance, based on metrics derived from the scientific system.

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De Roure (2014), in his discussion of scholarly communication, describes articles as social objects which scholars share, cite, and discuss. These actions enable scholars to cross the boundaries of time, place, and discipline. More importantly, scholarly communication enables scholars to create a dialog in social and research networks, share information, and measure their own reputations. De Roure thus indicates that articles in the digital age are something more than a mere representation of knowledge; rather, they represent a social object, which forms social connections among scholars.

Significant and ongoing advances in information technologies which facilitate the preservation, organization, and distribution of information have expanded scholarly communication considerably in recent years (Bhaskar, 2009). In tandem with these advances, the traditional means of scholarly communication—both formal (e.g., publication of articles in peer-reviewed journals) and informal (e.g., personal and conference meetings, telephone calls, mail, and other informal channels)—have been supplemented with newer means of communication such as the use of e-mail and electronic databases; the publication of new conferences, journals and publications by way of the Internet; and the participation of individual scholars and scholarly groups in professional virtual communities, where Internet-based chats are conducted, blogs are shared, comments and suggestions are raised (e.g., on online-published research manuscripts), and forum discussions are held. This has facilitated scholarly communication that is easy, rapid, and global (Bhaskar, 2009), and transformed the process from private communication between individuals into a branched, developed, cooperative, and group-oriented form of communication (Borgman, 2007).

Such technological transformations pose new challenges for academic librarians because they have caused the demands of faculty members to be considerably changed, and faculty are a key population influencing the status of academic librarians. The attitudes of faculty members towards academic librarians are not uniform; rather, they are influenced by various factors, including the faculty members' field of research, relationship with librarians, awareness of the capabilities and the services provided by librarians, and assessment of the ability of librarians to assist them and attend to their needs. Because faculty members are the relatively permanent population of an academic institution, they are stakeholders in the library, and their perception of academic librarians can influence the library in many ways. Therefore, it is important for librarians to be continually aware of and to appropriately adjust and attend to the changing needs of faculty members (Searing & Greenlee, 2011).

In its Scholarly Communication Toolkit, the Association for College and Research Libraries (ACRL) recommends several actions for librarians to integrate scholarly communication into the library (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2015). The Toolkit is a summary of ideas first assembled in 2005 by what is now called the ACRL Research and Scholarly Environment Committee, with input from many librarians regarding the correct approach to educating the academic community about in the changes in scholarly communication; how to assimilate scholarly communication in other conversations and initiatives; canceling high-priced journals; including catalog records for open access (OA) journals and/or listing them via link resolvers; and integrating scholarly communication concepts into information literacy classes. For example, the Toolkit suggests

partnering with academic departments ... to host public events to proactively inform faculty, students, and university administrators of the latest development of key scholarly communication topics.... Identify allies among faculty and students and collaborate with them to create and adopt an open access policy at the institution.... Partner with different campus units ... promote the benefits of using and creating open educational resources. Collaborate with the graduate school.... Future Faculty, and similar programs concerned with scholarly authorship, publication,

and research data management. Host workshops.... Connect and collaborate with library schools to prepare future information professionals... (ACRL, 2011–2013).

2. Problem statement

It is clear that scholarly communication, both formal and informal, is changing dramatically. Although the assumption has been made that academic librarians may contribute to scholarly communication, the degree to which faculty members and academic librarians themselves understand and materialize this potential is still unclear. The literature does indicate that faculty members are receptive to collaborations with librarians, and that liaison visits to faculty productively increase faculty use of the library's resources and services. Faculty members thereby become more aware of the convergence between what they want, as teachers and researchers, and what the library has to offer (Wiegand, 2013).

There is a lack of qualitative and quantitative data describing how faculty members and librarians in academic institutions currently perceive the function of academic librarians and their integration into the process of scholarly communication. Understanding the reciprocal relationships between faculty members and academic librarians may highlight perceptual gaps with regard to scholarly communication and may assist in developing the means to better integrate librarians into contemporary scholarly communication processes. When it comes to human behavior, perceptions are important to consider, as they often direct actions; perception and action have been said to be intimately linked, and "basic perception–action links are crucial building blocks for social understanding and social interaction" (Knoblich & Sebanz, 2006, p. 103).

Research questions:

1. How do faculty members perceive the involvement of academic librarians in scholarly communication?
2. How do academic librarians perceive their abilities to be involved in scholarly communication?

3. Literature review

Traditional roles and tasks of librarians have included the acquisition of resources (i.e., review, selection, and purchase of resources for the library collection), cataloging and organization (i.e., describing resources and readying them for use), and serving library users (i.e., recommending books and materials to readers and answering users' questions). Such tasks were performed without the involvement of the users, while users passively received what librarians offered. Interaction between users and the library system, as well as users' contribution of ideas for the development of the library, was limited. New technologies—e-books, e-journals, and other electronic information resources—have enriched library collections and services and have extended and complicated the roles of both librarians and users. The relationship between librarians and users has changed, and users have become more independent in choosing and using library services. Today, users can access online library-supplied databases anytime and anywhere, register to receive e-mail notifications on topics of interest, or comment and provide feedback on usability of library websites. Library services have had to become flexible (Nguyen, Partridge, & Edwards, 2012).

Given the many changes in the academic world and the understanding that librarians cannot fully confront those changes, Saunders (2015) investigated what are, currently, the most important or most highly prioritized issues for academic libraries, according to their strategic plans. She performed a content analysis of 63 publicly available strategic plans of the institutions involved in ACRL's Value of Academic Libraries National Summits and examined the stated goals of academic libraries

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