



Librarians as Authors in Higher Education and Teaching and Learning Journals in the Twenty-First Century: An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

The future of academic libraries largely depends on our ability to be innovative, anticipate our users' needs, adapt to a changing landscape, and prove our value through evidence. However, if our higher education colleagues do not perceive the profession as being relevant, our ability to innovate, anticipate, and adapt will be moot. This study investigates the visibility of librarians as authors in scholarly higher education (HE) and teaching and learning (TL) journals between 2000 and 2012. Findings include that 1.38% of articles published in these journals were written by a librarian author or authors, most of who are employed at research institutions. Information literacy was the most common topic, and theoretical articles were the most popular article type.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2010, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) released Oakleaf's *The Value of Academic Libraries* report, which calls on academic librarians to "provide evidence of their value" to their institutions (p. 11). Oakleaf frames this call to action by noting that the landscape of higher education has changed, including the expectations for what a higher education should entail. In light of this, Oakleaf creates a research agenda for academic librarians and outlines a list of "next steps." The agenda and next steps should not only help academic libraries to prove their value to their institutions and provide opportunities for librarians to engage with their colleagues, but will also create a wealth of documentation.

While it is crucial for academic libraries to prove their value to their own institutions, this call to action should not be separated from the larger framework of higher education. As a doctoral student in a School of Education, I have noticed that academic libraries' contributions are largely absent from the academic study of higher education. Furthermore, I am often asked why I am pursuing a degree in higher education rather than library science. Questions like this have made me wonder if academic libraries are truly viewed as being a part of higher education, including the scholarship of higher education and postsecondary pedagogy. With this in mind, the documentation that could be compiled based on the next steps outlined in *The Value of Academic Libraries* report should not only be relevant to a local, institutional audience, but could also benefit the broader higher education audience. Publishing such documentation, in the form of empirical research or experiential narratives, in scholarly higher education or teaching and learning journals

seems to be a logical extension of Oakleaf's call to action, as it raises the visibility of academic libraries within the field and practice of higher education. In this study, visibility means that librarians are communicating core professional values, such as information literacy or intellectual freedom, providing evidence of librarians' impact on postsecondary education and scholarship, and demonstrating a commitment to the same values and priorities as our higher education colleagues. In addition to increased visibility, publication in these journals will also demonstrate that librarians, like teaching faculty, are scholars as well as practitioners. Furthermore, by publishing in these journals, librarians have the opportunity to engage in the development of the future of both higher education and academic libraries. Libraries must remain visible in order to remain a vital component of higher education as its landscape continues to change to meet stakeholders' expectations. Librarians should want to shape the way libraries are perceived by the field of higher education and publishing in these venues is one way to do this.

This study investigates the visibility of librarians in scholarly higher education (HE) and multidisciplinary teaching and learning (TL) journals focusing on postsecondary education for audiences in the United States between 2000 and 2012. This study will answer the following research questions:

- How often did librarians, as primary authors or co-authors, publish in scholarly HE and TL journals between 2000 and 2012? During this period, were librarians more likely to publish in one of these two journal types more than the other?
- When librarians published in these journals about which topics did they write?
- What kinds of articles were librarians publishing?
- At which kinds of higher education institutions were librarian authors

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employed? Were librarians at large, research universities more likely to publish in these journals than librarians at other kinds of institutions?

The *Value of Academic Libraries* report is not the only call to action for academic librarians to critically analyze their engagement with assessment and higher education. López (2002), the former associate director of the Higher Learning Commission, believes that librarians have been underrepresented in the nationwide movement to assess higher education learning outcomes. “Librarians rarely appear in assessment workshops, such as those sponsored by the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE)...nor do they appear to attend national and state assessment conferences” (p. 356). At the 10th Northumbria International Conference on Performance Measurement in Libraries and Information Services, Association of Research Libraries Executive Director Elliott Shore “proposed that libraries shift their assessment focus from description to prediction, from inputs to outputs, from quantity to quality” in order to demonstrate “how libraries contribute to [higher education’s] success” (Groves, 2013).

It is too soon to tell if the release and subsequent popularity of *The Value of Academic Libraries* report (Oakleaf, 2010), as well as the other calls to action within academic libraries, will have an effect on how often librarians share their research and assessment results with the broader higher education audience. This study aims to provide a baseline for future investigations of librarians’ visibility in the fields of higher education and teaching and learning, as well as highlighting potential opportunities for librarians to contribute more to the study of and scholarship about higher education and postsecondary pedagogy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Investigating the publication patterns of librarians is not a new idea; however, previous research has focused on the publication patterns of librarians in library and information science (LIS) literature. Several studies have examined the overall publication practices of academic librarians (Budd & Seavey, 1990; Krause & Sieburth, 1985; Weller, Hurd, & Wiberley, 1999; Wiberley, Hurd, & Weller, 2006; Zemon & Bahr, 1998), as well as at the state (Henry & Neville, 2004) and institution levels (Fennewald, 2008). Other studies have investigated the contributions of LIS faculty (Bates, 1998; Pettigrew & Nicholls, 1994) or both academic librarians and LIS faculty to LIS literature (Watson, 1985).

Likewise, investigating the visibility of certain groups of authors or types of research is not new to the field of education. Yettick (2009) examined which kinds of education-related research reports were being cited in the popular press, including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Education Week*. Yettick was concerned about the quality of the research being published in the popular press, because she believed that research published in these venues would be more visible to the general public. This visibility could have a role in shaping public opinion and policymakers’ views on education-related topics. Creamer (1994) investigated how often female authors were published in core HE journals between 1987 and 1991. Creamer believes that “the extent that women contribute to these journals provides a measure of women’s visibility and leadership within a profession” (p. 35).

Librarians have studied the visibility of libraries and library-related topics in literature outside the library profession. Rice and Paster (1990) looked at how much coverage academic libraries received in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* between 1966 and 1988. Although librarians viewed the *Chronicle* as one of the best publications for higher education news, they did not find the coverage of academic libraries to be impressive. Rice and Paster found that 661 library-related articles were published in the *Chronicle* between 1966 and 1988, and the frequency of coverage increased over that 22-year timeframe. Rice and Paster also found that no single library-related topic dominated the

coverage, meaning that a wide range of library-related topics received some kind of coverage in the *Chronicle*.

Several studies have examined the visibility of library-related themes in disciplinary journals. Still (1998) investigated how often libraries or librarians were mentioned in discipline-specific pedagogical journals between 1984 and 1997, with a more in-depth look at a subset of journals between 1990 and 1996. Still writes, “If teaching faculty consider librarians to be a part of higher education, to some degree, and include library instruction into their course work, then surely this would be demonstrated by descriptions or mentions of library resources and personnel in discipline specific teaching journals” (p. 225). After doing a search for “librar\$” in ERIC, Still found that “only 53 citations included some form of the word library in the ERIC record,” which is less than 0.05% of citations (p. 226).

Building on Still’s (1998) study, Stevens (2007) examined whether or not librarians use discipline-specific pedagogical journals, as well as general higher education journals, “as a vehicle for reaching out to faculty and promoting information literacy and library instruction” (p. 256). The publication of ACRL’s Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education in 2000 was the impetus for Stevens’ study. Using four ProQuest databases, Stevens searched for articles published between 2000 and 2005 in fifty-four relevant journals using “librar*” or “information literacy.” Stevens found that “eighty records contained some form of the stem librar* and twenty-one contained the phrase information literacy” (p. 258). Stevens reports that despite the publication of the ACRL Standards in 2000, librarians were not using discipline-specific pedagogical journals to promote information literacy more than they had in the past.

Using a slightly different approach, O’Connor (2008) used diffusion of innovations theory to study the “presence of the information literacy concept in academic business literature published and indexed between 1986 and 2006” (p. 106). Diffusion of innovations theory identifies five stages of transmission or adoption, which could help librarians understand at what stage business faculty had adopted information literacy. O’Connor found forty-four relevant articles in eleven academic business journals. O’Connor categorized fourteen of these articles as having information literacy as a major topic, but only three were authored or “co-authored by individuals who are clearly described as librarians” (p. 113). O’Connor concludes that information literacy “is still in the earliest phases of adoption within this field” (p. 120).

METHODS

SCOPE

This study examines articles from scholarly HE and multidisciplinary, postsecondary TL journals intended for audiences in the United States published between 2000 and 2012 (Table 1). For the purposes of this study, scholarly journals primarily publish original research, substantive literature reviews or meta-analyses, or new contributions to theory and practice. TL journals have a primary focus on teaching, classroom, or curricular issues. Preference was given to peer-reviewed journals; however serial monographs, such as *New Directions for Higher Education*, were included. Trade and news publications, including magazines, were not included. Several sources were used to identify potential journals for inclusion. Beach (n.d.), Associate Professor of Higher Education Leadership at Western Michigan University, provides a list of higher education journals and publications. The School of Graduate Studies & Continuing Education at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater (n.d.) offers a similar list for teaching and learning scholarship. The use of impact factors as a criterion for inclusion was also explored, but many respected TL journals, such as *College Teaching*, are not given impact factors.

Based on the goals of this study, only journals that provided substantial author information were included. *Research in Higher Education*, a relevant higher education journal, was not included because adequate

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