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Steven Weiland
Michigan State University, weiland@msu.edu

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Teaching the Library to Students of Higher Education

Steven Weiland, Professor of Higher Education, Michigan State University

Abstract

The academic library and its digital transformation are ignored in graduate programs of higher education administration, which train a significant number of postsecondary professionals. A course in scholarly communications in the digital age recently introduced at one such program includes an invitation to aspiring administrators to study the contributions of the library to the ways that faculty members are coming to understand and capitalize on new technologies in teaching, research, and career development. The library is represented in the course in its traditional and new roles. It is an essential campus location for attention to what technological change means for faculty work.

Introduction: A Gap In Graduate Study of Higher Education

Sociologist Wendy Griswold refers to the academic library as a “sacred space.” Its “aura” and the pleasures of reading, she suggests, should be conveyed by the faculty to all students (Cull, 2011). Nevertheless, the campus library can be poorly understood or underestimated even by PhD students in higher education administration. With many of our students dedicated to the academic “success” of undergraduates we might expect that they would be knowledgeable about the need for education in “information literacy” and the library’s role in it. But few are. And writing and publishing, with all they can signify across the disciplines, including what libraries do to maintain and advance the communications system, are rarely the subjects of deliberate attention, even by those aspiring to faculty positions.

Of course, that is not unusual among PhD students in many fields. Still, to the degree that higher education administration claims a comprehensive view of academic work, it should make a place in its programs for attention to scholarly communications. In what follows there is first a brief account of higher education administration as a field of graduate study. There is then a report on a course that introduces PhD students at Michigan State University to current developments in scholarly communications. The course is presented in the context of the need to assert the significance of technology’s impact on academic communications in relation to the

preoccupation among many postsecondary administrators and faculty with online teaching and learning.

The premise was simple: some of our students anticipate faculty careers in higher education programs and thus can benefit from knowledge of what they will encounter as they seek to build publishing records. But the course reflected the belief that whatever postsecondary plans our students have—for most it will be academic middle management—knowledge of scholarly communications and the role of the library is important in understanding faculty work, an essential professional obligation in higher education administration. Examples of such work appear following the description of the course, as does a brief conclusion identifying the unruly and unpredictable nature of scholarly communications today.

Higher Education as a Field of Study

Michigan State University is one of about 100 PhD programs in higher education administration (ranked #4 in the field by *U.S. News and World Report*). Of the 14 members of the Big Ten athletic conference and the Committee on Interinstitutional Collaboration (CIC, which also includes the University of Chicago), 11 offer such programs. And so too do leading private universities like Stanford, USC, Vanderbilt, and NYU. There are over 200 institutions, including most of those offering PhDs, who offer MA programs in higher education, many featuring the

specialized field of student affairs administration (e.g., managing residence halls). Faculty and students associated with both levels of graduate education participate in the activities of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA). And the field supports a sizeable group of journals and allied publications, but only rarely do these include an article or report on scholarly communications or libraries (Bray and Major, 2011; Lincoln, 2010).

Why are there so many programs? Because whatever the state of the economy, and the budget difficulties facing many colleges and universities, managerial opportunities on campus continue to grow. While faculty hiring—to full-time tenure track positions—has declined, administrative work continues to expand (Ginsberg, 2011; Marcus, 2014). Campus jobs are available and appealing. Graduate students in higher education administration report that they benefited greatly from undergraduate experience and wish to contribute to the education of succeeding generations. Or, they are dedicated to the reform of the system, particularly in matters of social justice, like access to higher education for underserved minorities.

Many students enrolled in PhD programs are actually working part-time or full-time in institutional positions (where they are enrolled or elsewhere), typically in non-academic units like admissions and financial aid, or in advising and career development roles in academic units. It is not so uncommon to find a college or university president or provost with a PhD in higher education administration. But it is much less so to find a dean or department head with such a degree. In those positions, affiliation with a traditional academic discipline or field matters more.

Moreover, while there are fewer PhD programs in higher education administration than there are in English or economics, or even criminal justice or social work, the field graduates hundreds of students every year. And, as postsecondary management grows, graduates of such programs claim increasing influence on campus. So, from institutional and scholarly perspectives the study

of higher education is a sizeable field, worth the attention of academic librarians as a place to make the library's role better known at a time of the digital transformation of teaching and research.

The Other Digital Revolution on Campus

When students of higher education (and faculty and administrators) are invited to think about the impact of digital technologies on higher education it is typically in relation to teaching and learning. And there is national and international attention in the media to MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), including what they suggest about leadership roles welcomed by leading American institutions like Stanford, Harvard, and MIT in the founding and management of Coursera and edX. When University of Virginia President Teresa Sullivan ran into conflict with the institution's governing board it was largely because, in their view, she was not responding quickly enough, given what the competition was doing, to apparent opportunities in online education, in credit courses and degree programs as well as MOOCs.

The new course described below addresses another technological transformation. Librarians hardly need to be reminded about the scale and significance of change now underway in scholarly communications (Marcum, Schonfeld, and Thomas, 2015). But their campus colleagues do, faculty and graduate students alike. That is what prompted Middlebury College media studies scholar Jason Mittell (2013) to urge the redirection of academic interest toward the Open Access (OA) movement, an effort that shares the goal of MOOCs in offering direct access to scholarly work. He puts aside the instructional utopian talk of Coursera and edX in favor of a realistic view of what might be accomplished with OA: "Access to the average journal article might do little to change the world. But making the bulk of scholarly research freely available could transform the possibilities of educational uplift, scientific discovery, and public engagement with academic work."

Mittell shares the perspective of the research library that OA has a role in "undercutting the

exclusive rights and restrictive access of commercial publishers.” As leading publishers themselves devise OA strategies, including what can be gained in fees from authors, change will not come easily. But it is Mittell’s goal to convince academic colleagues that MOOCs are over-hyped by high prestige institutions while OA, and allied innovations, are “creating modest but long-lasting change beneath the surface, [altering] traditional practices without proclaiming their own grandeur.” Thus, in the spirit of library organization and action, systems of scholarly communication are changing with incremental steps and measured reforms.

Recent efforts in this direction have gained only a fraction of the media attention that has gone to MOOCs. Before Harvard, in collaboration with MIT, put edX in place, the University’s esteemed (as a scholar as well as an organizational leader) librarian Robert Darnton had organized Digital Access to Scholarship at Harvard (DASH). Downloads from the pioneering repository have now passed 5.3 million, and Darnton claims it as his primary achievement as a librarian (Ireland, 2015). Indeed, the growth of such repositories, whether aimed at archiving many kinds of digital resources or showcasing faculty work, is one of the most visible features of the OA movement (Marsh, 2015). By now the Directory of Open Access Repositories (OpenDOAR) lists over 2,600 institutional and departmental locations for posting articles and other forms of research. The Coalition of Open Access Policy Institutions (COAPI; housed at SPARC), where OA publishing in some form is mandated, now has almost 70 members. That is in addition to pathmaking disciplinary repositories, particularly, arXiv which has served physicists since 1991 in mathematics, computer science, and other fields in recent years.

Professors and graduate students in these disciplines recognize the opportunities in communications represented by arXiv. Yet, despite a steady increase in the number of institutions mandating OA, and the popularity of unaffiliated and extensive sites like academia.edu and ResearchGate, campus knowledge of the full range of change in scholarly communications—in experiments in peer review, new formats for

tracing the impact of publications, and prospects for “enhanced” online texts—is limited. And research libraries themselves vary in ways to incorporate scholarly communications into their operations, including efforts to promote information literacy (ACRL, 2013). A timely information literacy strategy represented in the new course is to recognize relations between the impact of technology on teaching *and* research via interest in “open” as a new framework for thinking about the “political economy” of higher education (Wellen, 2013).

A Course In an e-Book

Open access and repositories are two of many subjects in scholarly communications in the digital age.” And the course is organized in a form that reflects its subject, or new publishing formats and their role in teaching and learning. Thus, an e-book I have written is the primary instructional resource. Actually the digital text is titled an *e-Primer* to indicate my intention to introduce the subject to graduate students. It follows from my work as an experienced online teacher, and the course design reflects my pedagogical preferences, representing as they do a heresy according to “best practices” of distance learning (Major, 2015). Thus, my self-paced courses are fully composed online, each with about 60,000 words and hundreds of hyperlinks to allied resources in text, audio, and video, or what is now sometimes called digitally “enhanced” scholarship (Wright, 2014).

A foundational problem for the course is visible in a series of images. A cartoon from *PhD Comics* (phdcomics.com) reduces academic inquiry to “Read . . . Write . . . Rinse [with coffee] . . . Repeat.” But in 2009 an OCLC project specified, in more complex fashion, the sequence of steps that shape “Core Scholarly Activities,” or searching, collecting, reading, writing, and collaborating (with activities specified for each; Palmer, et al., 2009). Finally, Oxford Internet Institute scholars have plotted the digital work of science and scholarship with a dense graphical display of its intensely networked configuration representing an evolving “e-research ecosystem” (Meyer and Schroeder, 2009). A goal of the course is to maintain the simplicity of the cartoon, or what it

can feel like to do the work, while probing the temporal and spatial dimensions of academic inquiry as it is studied and represented in the information sciences and in explorations of the impact of technology on research and communications.

After a brief introduction explaining the origin and goals of the *e-Primer*, including a guide to accessing its linked online resources, the text is organized into six chapters:

1. Our Digital Age
2. Scholars, Scientists, and Information Practices
3. How We Read
4. Writing and Publishing in Electronic Spaces
5. Recognition, Reputation, and Academic Rewards
6. What's Ahead?

A *Glossary* defines essential terms, displaying the subject's vocabulary drawn from several disciplines. In effect, the course design observes the case made by advocates of enhanced digital texts, particularly what they can offer in hypermedia resources. And the course reflects the "long view" of the subject (Mabe, 2010). Such an approach was named too as essential to how we see the scientific and scholarly "threshold" to the future:

[It] is made up of interlocking components: changes in the nature and status of the document and the book; changes in practices of reading, research, note-taking, and information sharing; changes in the architectural and institutional containers in which such practices are carried out and by means of which they are supported. It was arrived at not suddenly, not with the wave of a digital magic wand, but thanks to a century-long transformation in the culture of communication. (Schnapp and Battles, 2014, pp. 14–15)

Faculty Work In the Digital Age

The *e-Primer* features scientific and scholarly communications, woven as they are into library practices and resources supporting faculty and graduate student research (and, increasingly, support for institutional efforts to promote research by undergraduates). But the course displays too how inventive teaching brings the library's digital resources into the classroom. Thus, Stephen Nichols (2008), an influential medievalist, has explained how he capitalizes on digital versions of French manuscripts to guide his students toward understanding of textual production and literary meaning. Using "digital surrogates" prepared with academic librarians he sees himself as "co-teaching" with the library from easily accessible resources taking the place of modern print versions of work that, in Nichols' view, require the visual experience that only manuscript study can provide. The library supports a novel combination of research and teaching.

Other faculty work shows the differences between disciplines. Thus, chemist Henry Rzepa (2013) reviews his long career in science from the perspective of the steady introduction of new technologies. They reveal to him the distinction between "data" and "discourse." The place of reusable data in scientific communications is crucial and the reason, according to Rzepa, why in one form or another online publications—with their graphical representations—must be as interactive as possible. Still, any progress in data sharing and use will depend on making the most of metadata. In fact, Rzepa displays the scientific origins of the idea of "distant" (or machine) reading that has made the digital humanities appear, to advocates and critics alike, more like science than the conventional activities of literary studies. But Rzepa understands enough about the significance of "discourse" to have made himself an active and widely read blogger in chemistry. It helps to complete what Rzepa calls the "scientific cycle of sharing." Thus, he is a spokesman for "open" science as an indispensable feature of the digital age.

Plainly, Rzepa learned to manage his career in accord with technological innovations in research and publishing. But he worked within the traditional expectation of patient identification of citations for measuring the impact of his work. We can see now, however, signs of how faculty work in the digital age can include very deliberate or even “real-time” attention to the impact of scholarship, often with the aid of the campus library. The University of Toronto urges scholars and scientists—from graduate students to senior faculty—to “get noticed.” The UT Library offers this directive: “Success as a scientist is not simply a function of the quality of ideas we hold in our heads ‘Publish or perish’ is about surviving, not succeeding. You don’t succeed as a scientist by getting papers *published*. You succeed as a scientist by getting them *cited*.” Media studies scholar Melissa Terras (2012) demonstrates how she utilized the repository at University College, London, and her knowledge of “altmetrics,” the new techniques (then at an early stage) for measuring the circulation of scholarly work, to build her reputation and advance her career.

Higher education students in the new course are also invited to see how scholars manage their loyalty to the traditional library even while they capitalize on technology. Historian Anthony Grafton (2009) tells the new story of publishing without paper as anything but a replacement for print: “Sitting at your local coffee shop on your laptop will tell you a lot, especially if you wield your search terms adeptly. But if you want deeper, more local knowledge, you will still have to take the narrower path [at the New York Public Library] that leads between the lions and up the stone stairs. There—as in great libraries around the world—you will use all the new sources, all the time. . . . But these streams of data, rich as they are, will illuminate rather than eliminate the unique books and prints and manuscripts that only the library can put in front of you.”

By the end Grafton is happy to recognize what is gained from technology, but he registers too the durability of scholarly habits:

For now, and for the foreseeable future, if you want to piece together the richest possible mosaic of documents and texts and images, you will have to do it in those crowded public rooms where sunlight gleams on varnished tables, as it has for more than a century, and knowledge is still embodied in millions of dusty, crumbling, smelly, irreplaceable manuscripts and books. (pp. 323–324)

Conclusion: The Wild West?

Like most graduate students in colleges of education, those studying higher education are relentlessly future-minded. They want change and reform. The library can appear to them to be the most conservative of academic locations, and especially so if they believe that printed books are no longer important. Darnton sees the library as the “heart and soul” of the research university, a pervasive force that needs to be understood by anyone with a stake in postsecondary education: “The library still pumps intellectual energy into every corner of campus” (Ireland, 2015).

Teaching the library means representing its vitality in meeting old and new goals, particularly in its contributions to innovation in academic research (e.g., in data curation and the digital humanities) and in scholarly communications, including its own publishing (Okerson and Holzman, 2015). A course must reflect steady change and also how unpredictable or even unruly is the current scene. *Harvard Magazine* recently declared the “Wild West” a suitable metaphor for describing our situation (Lambert, 2015). Accounts abound of the future of the academic library (e.g., CLIR, 2008; *portal: Jaggars*, 2014). They recognize the conditions making necessary a new order of relations in scholarly communications. The Wild West was a place of initiative and anxiety. Students of higher education can be assured that the library is a rich resource for the first, and that it is a place that is not only sacred but serene.

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