The Young and the Restless: Young Eyes Scan the Scholarly Communications Landscape

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Mara Blake, Hannah Scates Kettler, Jen Maurer, Dan Valen, and Mark Sandler, "The Young and the Restless: Young Eyes Scan the Scholarly Communications Landscape" (2015). *Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference*.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284316236>

The Young and the Restless: Young Eyes Scan the Scholarly Communications Landscape

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The following is a transcript of a live presentation at the 2015 Charleston Library Conference.

Mark Sandler: Okay, I'm jumping in. 45 minutes goes by pretty fast, so I'm just going to kick this off. I'll say good morning, everyone. I know there's stiff competition here among programs, not to mention the many delights of Charleston itself, so thanks for coming and we're going to try to put on a good show for you.

So, I'm Mark Sandler. I'm director of the CIC, Center for Library Initiatives, and I don't want to waste time trying to explain to you what that is, so someday you can look that up, but I'll say on a personal note I'm 69 years old. I'm the oldest person at the Fun Run on Thursday morning at 6:30 a.m., and I actually have a retirement date in sight now on Leap Day coming up in February, and once you get to that point in life, you start to think about how libraries could possibly survive without me going forward and how will Charleston Conference ever draw a crowd or manage to put on all these programs if I'm not there to babble on through them, so for all of you out there who have been sharing my angst about whether this is the end of time, I guess I really am delighted for the opportunity that Katina gave me to pull together this program and reassure everyone that we're in good hands and there are bright days ahead for our library and publishing space.

So, I'm very thankful for some of my younger professional friends here who have agreed to come and talk about how the present-day workplace feels for them as some of our younger

colleagues and how their scope and their very long futures in this scholarly information space. So, I'll just call out names here, to my left, Mara Blake who is a spatial and numeric data librarian at the University of Michigan, Jen Maurer, who is a library sales rep at Cambridge University Press, Hannah Scates Kettler, who is a digital humanities librarian at University of Iowa, and Dan Valen who is a product specialist at Figshare. So, I asked these folks to avoid PowerPoint and just approach this as a conversation, but first I'm going to ask each of you folks to just take a few minutes to introduce yourselves and sort of tell us about your current positions and how it is that you sort of got to the—how it is that you came to this industry and space and kinds of work that you're doing now, and in what ways the roles that you've played to date have and haven't lived up to your expectations. So, with that, let me ask Mara to come up first and do a little intro. Thanks.

Mara Blake: Thanks, Mark. Good morning, everybody. As Mark said, I am Mara and I came to this scholarly information space through an interest and love for research. I always loved doing research in the library, and after completing my bachelor's degree I kind of didn't know what I wanted to do with my life, and I ended up in an office job in the public sector, and I found it mind numbingly boring, and so I really knew I needed something that was going to be more intellectually engaging and something that would have a lot of variety and excitement and change. So I ended up in library school and I expected this kind of profession in this area to be something

that would have a lot of change and something that would really keep me engaged. As a researcher, I had already seen databases go from command online searching to graphical user interface searching, so I saw some of that already from the outside, and I've had kind of two main trajectories in my career so far. The first is a move to increasingly larger research institutions and the second is a move from social science librarianship to data librarianship. So, my first job out of library school was at a small liberal arts college as a social science librarian, and I would say that that job to a "T" met my expectations about what a library job would be in terms of instruction and research consultations and title by title selection for collection development. I liked that job, and there was a lot of embeddedness with the campus and one-on-one contact with students and faculty. But, after doing that for a while, I really wanted to move to an institution where they would be heavier duty research and media research. I also had some responsibilities for data in that role and really liked them and wanted to have more of that. I wanted to do more of that, so I made a move to a smaller ARL library to a role that had both liaison responsibilities to the social sciences as well as a defined data role as part of that job. I also was assigned to learn geographical information systems and support geospatial data from the library, and as part of that work it really expanded what I thought library work could and should be in this new area that was really exciting, and so it changed my assumptions a little bit.

And after doing that for a while I wanted, I liked everything I was doing, but, I wanted a more narrow focus where I could really develop a deeper expertise in some of the areas I was working in, which is how I ended up in my current role at the University of Michigan as a spatial and numeric data librarian. It feels like a pretty good fit in terms of I'm busy, just like I wanted to be, but I have a narrow enough focus but I have a chance to be good at what I'm doing. And I would say that I always wanted to work in a big research institution. I thought it would be the most exciting collections, the most interesting research on campus that you'd get to work with and the most resources to do projects through the library, and I would say that has definitely met my expectations

in my role so far, but I did along the way find a lot of valuable things about working at smaller institutions that I didn't necessarily expect in terms of engagement that doesn't scale as well to a larger institution. It's harder to replicate there. But I am so fortunate where I am now, both in terms of financial resources, but also of resources in my colleagues and things that are available to me on campus, and I really value those things. Naïvely what I didn't expect would come with that would be the larger bureaucracy that goes with a larger library at a larger institution, and so I've had to adjust my skills in terms of navigating those types of structures as something that I just consider a part of my job, and that's something that I didn't expect but have learned along the way. So, that's kind of the rough outline of how I got here and I would say that I wanted was to not be bored and I'm definitely not bored and I do not expect to be bored going forward, so I really love that. Thank you.

Jennifer Maurer: My name is Jennifer Maurer. I am a library sales rep at Cambridge University Press. I wish that my entrance into the publishing world were quite as rich as Mara's, but I came in via Craigslist. I took a year off after I graduated, did some retail for a year, and thought, "It's probably time for a 9-to-5 job." I went to Craigslist and thought, "A Spanish and music degree, how about administrative assistant?" Editorial assistant sounded kind of interesting. I sent my résumé to Springer, and that is kind of how I started. I've done a few different things. I've worked at a few different places. I've been in this world about almost seven years now, but as I mentioned I started out at Springer in editorial and then moved to an account development role at Springer which was—I think it is—still evolving, but the best way I'll describe it is a little bit of marketing, a little bit of sales, some post-sales support, some training support, but after that I think how I've made my changes through the different roles that I've had has been somewhat influenced by life personal choices and not necessarily not feeling fulfilled in the roles that I've had. After Springer I moved to Columbus, Ohio, for a year and worked at OCLC, which was really interesting and then just simply missed home, which is New York, so I started at

Cambridge in sales. I think one of the things that I really appreciate about this industry is the ability to try new things and to move around pretty seamlessly. The fact that things are changing so rapidly really presents a lot of opportunity that to just try something and if you don't like it try something else, and I think that's been one of the most exciting things to be a part of this field. What keeps me here and still trying new things within publishing is simply the people. Everyone I meet is very interesting and pretty willing to talk and share their story and that's probably why I've sort of evolved into a sales role. I think it really affords the opportunity to listen and make some good connections, and I'd say I think that is sort of what's guided my path thus far. So, I'm really happy to be here today and I am excited and a little surprised to see how many people are in the room but it's great. Thanks so much for being here.

Hannah Scates Kettler: Hello, everyone. My name is Hannah Scates Kettler. I am the digital humanities research and instruction librarian at the University of Iowa Libraries, a DH librarian for much shorter. I'm a part of the digital studio or, excuse me, we just recently changed our name, the digital scholarship and publishing studio, which was recently formed in the libraries. Previously it was two different departments, one within the library called digital research and publishing for which I worked for, and another group called the—let me look it up—the digital studio for public arts and humanities, which was supported outside the library by the provost, and those two merged quite recently and I did work for that one as well so a little bit of outside/inside of the library. Previously to that actually I was an archaeologist for a few years so there's kind of a nontraditional background there.

So, my day-to-day actually includes consulting and research on various different methodologies and platforms, active development as a partner in digital projects that come from our students and faculty. We are building out resources for projects instigated by other librarians, so a little internal/external work there. Sometimes we publish those projects as part of our digital library in our institutional repository or as part of our

digital editions, which are kind of standalone digital monographs, if you will. In addition to the resource development and publishing role, I kind of hold, I act as one of the touchpoints for the different departments on campus that work with digital scholarship such as ITS, informatics advanced technology and research groups, student organizations, and academic departments as well as a conduit for internal library resources, including our special collections, preservation conservation, and our subject librarians. So, there's a lot of talking, which I actually enjoy and a lot of meeting new people as they come in.

So, the reason I got into this work was I was quite interested in differentiated learning and teaching. I'm very much a visual learner and a lot of archaeology is text-based, and I didn't actually get a lot out of that so I started creating 3-D reconstructions so I could learn, and so one of the those—the idea was then how is this supported within my library resource as an archaeologist? How can I use the library to access these different types of information? And that's where I started my interest there and I submitted some 3-D reconstructions I did as an undergrad in my institutional repository, and at that time I actually didn't know anything about proprietary format so I submitted something that no one else could open or use, and the librarians at the time didn't know anything about 3-D and so they took it and thought it was fine. They did realize after I left that you couldn't open it and that was a problem. Thankfully after I got my master's degree from Kings College in digital humanities I did come back and started working for the same library, and I got a chance to redo that and now it's in a PDF format, which makes way more sense.

So, I've been working in the library now for about three years. In my position I'm actually allowed a fair amount of latitude. In the past three years I wrote the job description, so it's kind of nice; it lived up to my expectations, as you might imagine, but there were some things that did catch my attention, which was I felt that I wanted to be a part of this new cutting-edge proactive development for digital resources and there were structures in place like Mara mentioned, structures, conditions, bureaucracy that kind of

retarded that development a little bit. At the same time, these structures did provide a comfort, a thoughtfulness in how we develop our resources so that we can reach the largest group possible. So, I guess there's a checking of my idealism in free technology and were going to move this in two weeks crumbs, if you know what that is, "at job" development, that kind of stuff, so there's a little bit of checking that at the same time it hasn't really been hampered too much. There is a lot of openness that I found within the library that has been uplifting, so that's kind of my background and how I got into this. I really like it, actually.

Dan Valen: Hello, my name is Dan Valen. I am the product specialist at Figshare, and product specialist is vague by design because I'm also the only full-time North American employee for Figshare. I actually got started in publishing about seven and a half years ago at Springer, and similar to Jen, I graduated with a degree in English and economics and didn't really know what I was going to do with that and Springer was actually the first place that called me back. I had an interview and a job offer out of college about a month after I graduated, so I moved up to New York City and I spent a few years in editorial and then moved into the trade side of things, which is working with print, and then finished out my time working in licensing, so licensing out electronic content to university librarians, which is how I really got exposed to this space. And Mark actually held a similar session when I was at Springer where he brought a bunch of early career professionals from the CIC and a bunch of folks from Springer and put them in a room and said, "Alright, let's talk things out." When I was actually working at Springer at that time I was in, I was working with what we call the "college market," which is kind of your nontraditional customers for a huge STEM publisher, and I was excited to be able to go and talk to all these Big 10 schools and see what do they have to say about all these huge publishers and see what their feedback was, and everyone was just talking about open access. I was like, "Whoa, there is a pretty big disconnect here," to what I was coming at this from and what the younger librarians are thinking about, and so I started looking at alternate business models and different ways to think about this. I actually was

an advisor for a company called ReadCube and sat on their advisory board, and that's kind of how I found my way into the digital science world. One of the founders of ReadCube asked me to pull together a business plan and I was just like, "I've never been asked to do that. I have no idea how to do that." So about two years ago, November, I met with somebody from Digital Science at a coffee shop and it also was at the end of November, and it was full on "Movember" mode and I had a giant mustache and it was really embarrassing, but I was there to talk with him about ReadCube and this idea of like a new business model, and how do we fix things, and all he could do was talk about FigShare and I'm like, "What is a FigShare?" So, we actually spent about three and half hours chatting and I really wanted to get involved, and that's kind of where I landed now and it's great. I truly believe that in your professional life you should do business with people who believe what you believe, and now when I go and talk to universities and talk about open access and open science and how to facilitate that, there are a lot of nodding heads and ways to change this and take it forward, so it's super exciting. Yeah. That's pretty much it, so.

Mark Sandler: Okay, so you feeling optimistic now like I promised? So, some of the things these folks have in common is that they're young and smart and articulate, by my reckoning incredibly poised and dressed up, full-functioning information professionals. But I wanted to just as a first question to you all, drill down and look at some of the differences between you. So, Dan and Jen, for lack of a better word, are working on the quote/unquote "vendor side" of our space, and Hannah and Mara are working on the library side, and I wondered if you guys could talk a little bit about how you think your workplaces are doing at assimilating younger workers and bringing them along?

Dan Valen: I guess I'll start. It's pretty good from a FigShare perspective. It's interesting because no one at FigShare right now is over the age of 40, so it really does foster to a younger group of individuals and we also have pretty much a flat structure so everyone's input is really valued, which is something that I really, really appreciate

coming from a much larger, entrenched industry. The fact that we all can share these ideas and they're all heard, I mean, we do have one ultimate decider if we hit a blocker but, for the most part, it's really accommodating to the younger crowd for sure.

Mark Sandler: Some of you at more venerable institutions, want to take a crack?

Hannah Scates Kettler: I guess I would say working with a large institution where there's a much more mixed demographic age-wise than FigShare, there's a tradition I think of fostering kind of young voices, if you will, early career, I guess, voices and trying to get their input especially I think they're energizing, say, and kind of a new influx to the gene pool and they do listen. Whether or not things get acted upon I think has less to do with a hindrance because of the age difference; I think it is more either your traditions, well mostly the bureaucracy, right? They get heard but they also need the top brass, the typically older generation to kind of root for those things as well, so it's not that their voices aren't heard, there just has to be a few more voices added to it I think to help kind of creditate that kind of input.

Mara Blake: I want to echo a little bit what Hannah said where in all of my roles I felt very empowered with my own time and things that only involved me, but that when it went beyond that and involved other people or other resources that was a different thing to navigate. It depends on the institution a lot, and a little bit that I alluded to before in bureaucracy it's really, "Can you figure that out? Can you make it work for what you're doing?" But I would say that that is in some ways equal opportunity for all ages, but it does require kind of a bigger buy-in from a bigger group of people.

Jen Maurer: To piggyback off of that just a little bit, I think that one of the challenges in, and I'm speaking across sort of all three organizations that I've been part of, which have all been pretty big, well-established across the age demographic, I think that one of the challenges is finding those opportunities for empowerment and making sure that when you are in your own space, when you

do have the opportunity to grow, that you're really seizing upon the opportunity even if it might not appear that it's immediately an opportunity to do that. I think that also it's not—we're sort of talking around this like "young versus more seasoned" thing, and I truly believe that is something that young people, or at least myself, I feel like I have learned, and continue to learn, is there is something to learn from everybody that you meet, so whether it's your more seasoned colleague, who is a little bit harder to work with, there is a learning opportunity there. Your younger colleague who was really excited to hear your ideas and is willing to let you fly and do what they see you can, they're ready to give you the space to do that, but it's just making sure that we are kind of listening across the spectrum and not cutting ourselves off too soon too. I hope that makes sense.

Mark Sandler: Back to the more seasoned moderator. I will, just to drill down just one more layer on this theme, Dan and Jen, or actually all of you, do you have like start-up envy, Silicon Valley envy, Google envy, I mean, do you have a sense about the difference between sort of working in these younger, freer organizations, you know, where you just see people hanging around ping-pong tables and playing beach volleyball as compared to a much more established organization with some of the street cred that comes with a venerable imprint or, you know, a 200-year tradition and a football team at a university. Do you want to just comment on that about you know as you are sort of walking around Brooklyn or walking around Iowa City, do folks look and go, "Oh yeah, you should be out there working on the West Coast," or do you feel pretty good about how these, I guess, what these other, more established organizations offer younger folks?

Dan Valen: Well, even when I was at Springer people said that I looked like I should be working at a start-up and they had a nickname for me there. But, I saw a panel a couple of months ago where people are kind of talking about innovation, and why innovation isn't happening as much as it should in this space. In my time spent at Springer there was this idea that this is the way

that we do things, we can be a little bit flexible in either way, but this is the way that it's kind of always been done. We can introduce new models but it still—this is where we're at and with the whole idea of the start-up it does allow you to be more nimble and to have a little bit more mobility and change directions on what you're focus is, build new tools faster. I think the analogy that was used that really stuck with me was there's not a lot of innovation in publishing because that's like asking Hilton to create Air B&B. If the business model is working, why would they change? So, from that standpoint, I think it really enables you to grow faster and make different changes to kind of disrupt what is happening, what is the status quo, so you have the big thing that works really well, a well-oiled machine, and then you have the "crazy kids" who have all of these ideas that are seen as radical, and you kind of have to wedge yourself in there and show through your hard work that you can actually change things.

Mark Sandler: Jen, I hope I'm not putting you on the spot here, but you worked with a 500-year-old Cambridge University Press. I think they say they accomplished the books that Adam and Eve were reading so, you know, say something nice about what it means to go into an office like that that has that kind of history?

Jen Maurer: I think that being around people who have been around is actually a really good learning experience. There are challenges. I think one of the hurdles that I think that I've had to go through in each place I've been, I won't just limit it Cambridge, but getting over the perception that as a young person I think that I know it all and I don't feel that way. I don't approach my job that way, but I know that there is a period of adjustment, and it's about building trust and helping your colleagues around you get to know who you are and helping them feel comfortable with the level of experience that you do have. You know, sometimes there are things that I might have just a better handle on because I've done it differently but it takes time. I don't think that I'm at a disadvantage by being where I am. I think it is actually a pretty interesting challenge trying to navigate the space I'm in, and you know if I were so miserable that I think you have to find the good

in experiences that you're in regardless of whether it's the glamorous job that you think you should have or the one that you find yourself in, so I guess I'm sort of touching on the, "Am I jealous of cool start-up companies?" Not really. It would be cool. Maybe someday. I don't think that I'm at any disadvantage to be where I am right now. It's all a growth opportunity.

Mark Sandler: Do you want this one, Mara?

Mara Blake: Sure. I just had a quick thought. One is that I'm not jealous of the volleyball because I'm terrible at it, but the second is that in the library what I envy a little bit about those companies, especially some larger technology companies, is that they have a little bit of leeway to fail in projects that we don't necessarily feel like we have in the library where I feel like we feel like we're trying new things, but there is a lot of pressure for them all to succeed and that is kind of a lot to take on as a librarian, as an individual, in the library.

Mark Sandler: Interesting. So, here's an unhappy thought for you but you know probably 2045, 2050, or 35 years from now you're still going to be dragging your sorry selves to Charleston and this conference, so what do you think those programs are going to look like then? What is the space going to look like? Are librarians and publishers still going to be jabbing at each other about price and terms? Is Silicon Valley just going to be all over that exhibit space and a whole lot of these much more established conceptions of libraries and publishing houses will have pretty much receded into a past memory? What is your sense of Charleston 2050?

Hannah Scates Kettler: Okay. Well, I was just going to speak a little bit toward 2050. I will probably have a cane or something, but I think that the Charleston Conference itself will still be relevant and useful. In terms of like library spaces, I'm drawing off of my experience at the University of Iowa Libraries, where we're actually in the process of renovating quite a bit of the space to reflect what the students have been asking for, which is collaborative spaces, access to digital material, which may or may not link back to our physical collections, more openness with special

collections, group study space, that kind of stuff. So I think libraries will kind of continue to evolve to reflect this kind of knowledge creation that I think is being called for as opposed to just a place to find the knowledge. It's actually going to be a place to generate and collaborate and come together, so I think it's happening now and I think it will continue to happen as we know it takes a little while not only because of what the expectations of what a library is and how that changes and how quickly that might change, but also you have to have the funds for it, the space for it, etc. I think it will kind of continue to evolve in those, kind of, what I see as a very positive kind of space where people can come together and talk about hard issues, can create projects or exposés, if you will, installations, that speak to these harder issues that bring different types of people together in the same space, because I think the library is seen as a meeting place of a lot of different diverse kinds of disciplines just naturally because we house books and things that are from different disciplines, but now it's becoming this place with those disciplines can actually meet and I think it will continue to evolve that way.

Dan Valen: Yeah, I think one thing that Hannah said that really resonated with me is the idea of the library to help foster creation of content. And so not necessarily the library as publisher, I'm not going to go down that road, but the idea that I had the benefit of being able to visit the Hunt Library at NCSU, and if you don't know what that is you should look it up. It's one of the most inspiring spaces that you can go to if you are super into libraries, but it's the whole idea of helping foster creation amongst the researchers and having librarians kind of move into a nontraditional role of capturing this content and moving it along. You still have those parts of the library, the archiving, the preservation, being the voice of record, but libraries have the benefit of, in almost every campus that I visit, of being located smack dab in the center of campus, so it's always the whole idea of the open-door policy, this is where knowledge should be generated, how you use technology to leverage that? How do you empower libraries and librarians to kind of shift their focus and really engage with

their faculty, with their staff, with the researchers? So, I kind of see a future where I can throw out open access and go down that road as well, but it is this whole idea of open knowledge because the Internet has really democratized pretty much everything except for academia, and it's ironic because it came out of academia, so how do you use tools to create efficiencies, make content openly available, and collaborate across universities, across countries?

Mark Sandler: Interesting. So, I definitely want to leave a few minutes for you all, although there weren't too many minutes to divvy up. Let me toss out one last question and that is if your bosses were to toss you the keys on Monday morning and say, "Here, you drive," what do you think would make your respective institution stronger and more vital in the lives of students, researchers, authors, scholars—what is on your mind that you would like to take the reins and do sooner rather than later?

Hannah Scates Kettler: I guess I'll start. The thing that is really occupying my mind right now, well, it's still 3-D, we're still trying to figure that out but by extension, just how do we preserve, present, and publish different types of data that don't fall within the norm, non-textual, visual data, experiential data, that kind of stuff.

Mara Blake: So, I'm so excited to answer this question because I am working on that project currently, and it's happening and that is across the CIC a collaborative discovery portal for geospatial data and scanned maps, and we have nine institutions working on it right now. I just came from that meeting and when I started this job that I have, it was my hope that something like this would happen and it is happening and it's what I would've done if I could and I can so it's really amazing.

Jen Maurer: I think I would love to see some better mechanisms for feeding some of these great projects that are going on in our libraries back into an organization like Cambridge, and I will even say it's just Cambridge-specific, but I think the dangers at big established organizations is that we think we know and there's just one of the good things about coming to this conference is

having conversations with folks like the people to my right and left and seeing that there are some really cool things happening out there. How can we figure out how to partner, partner differently, partner better, and I think that there is real opportunity for us to facilitate those conversations differently, facilitate them better, facilitate them at all, so I think that is something that I would be really interested in pursuing Monday morning at 9:30.

Dan Valen: And something that Mara said earlier, the whole idea of being willing to try things and fail, it's something that I've really had to get used to doing because our founders pretty much said I can run and do what I need to do, so that aren't really that many restrictions. It's this whole idea of figuring out how to pursue our mission and so the scariest thing for me is failing, I guess. But, yeah, I like that I'm able to kind of take this idea forward and run with it. It's pretty liberating and equally scary.