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ATG Special Report: Establishing a State-Level Open-Access Journal: The Case of South Carolina Libraries

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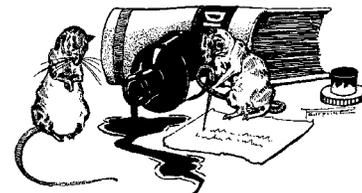
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*Author's Note: Rachael Elrod is the Head of the Education Library at the **University of Florida**, and Brent Appling is a Reference and Instruction Librarian at the **University of South Carolina's Thomas Cooper Library**. This article provides information on the benefits and challenges faced during the creation of a state-level, open-access journal including getting approval from the state agency, finding a host, forming a committee, developing policies and procedures, finding peer-reviewers, and learning to use **bePress**, our publishing service.*

Foundations of a State-Level Library Journal: South Carolina and Beyond

In response to dismal conditions of library services and a lack of advocacy for libraries, the **South Carolina Library Association** (**SCLA**) was established in October of 1915 by several librarians and library supporters (Hux, 1990). The association was built for the purpose of increasing public interest for libraries, advocating for public spending on libraries, and to promote professional development. Within three decades, the association established a publication, *The South Carolina Library Bulletin*, as a dispersible vehicle to communicate news and issues that supported the mission of **SCLA**. This publication began in 1945 and ran until 1956 when it was then transformed into *The South Carolina Librarian*. Like the *Bulletin*, this publication continued to report library related news from around the state, but also served as a medium for practitioner oriented articles which helped with communicating best practices within the librarian profession. This more comprehensive publication ran until 1988 when rising costs halted production (*The South Carolina Librarian*, 1988). There was no publication between 1988 until 2003, when **SCLA** began publishing a quarterly newsletter called *News From the South Carolina Library Association*. This publication was published online with an annual print issue until 2007. There was no publication from 2007 until several members of **SCLA** embarked on establishing a new, online, open-access, association journal entitled *South Carolina Libraries*, which launched in October of 2014.

In establishing *South Carolina Libraries*, the intention was to continue the mission of communication and professional development, but was expanded to also serve as an opportunity to publish peer-reviewed articles that pertain to the librarian profession. To ensure the development of a useful publication, literature on state-level library publications was reviewed. During this literature review, several functions and benefits of state-level library publications were identified.

According to **Scherlen** (2008), some of the most prominent functions of state-level library journals include providing information for state library association members about association news, elections, and minutes from executive board meetings, documenting state library conferences, professional networking, section reporting, historical documentation, sharing best local practices, publishing first time authors, as well as other beneficial functions. Throughout the literature, first time publishing and practitioner publishing emerged as two of the more recognizable values of state-level library publications. **Scherlen** describes first time publishing as a shared value for several state-level library journal editors, and is used widely as a solicitation tactic.

Several different authors have identified practitioner written articles as being the heavier valued form of research and communication of best practices among LIS professionals (Clapton 2010, Schlögl and Stock 2008, Haddow 2010). Practitioner written articles, as opposed to traditional peer-reviewed articles, consist largely of the communication of practical implementations of proven practices, recommendations for other LIS professionals, and often include a reduced use of technical terminology and are not overly concerned with the development of theory (Haddow, 2010). These types of articles make up a large percentage of the contents of association journals.

According to studies by **Schlögl** and **Stock** (2008) and **Haddow** (2010), LIS professionals in Germany and Australia clearly placed more importance on practitioner oriented articles and publications than on peer-reviewed research articles in their field. **Haddow** also points out that "publications of library associations reach a wider practitioner audience than any of the scholarly titles in the LIS field." Thus, association journals, which within the LIS field often are highly concerned with communication and straight-forward best practice research over peer-reviewed theoretical research, are among the more highly read publications for the intention of professional development within the LIS field.

Furthermore, an analysis of a twenty-year run of the *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* by **Harter** and **Hooten** (1992) showed a decrease in the communication of practitioner research and an increase of more traditional scholarly publications by authors from academic units at universities. This study concluded that as information science developed as an academic discipline, much of the communicated research was moving away from "practice-oriented roots" and toward the development of theoretical foundations. In the more recent studies though (the aforementioned papers by Schlögl and Stock, and Haddow), it appears that the trend has started to reverse, with LIS professionals preferring the communication of practical research findings to those of the more theoretical persuasion. Reviewing this literature points to the contention that association journals play a large role in buoying the efforts of practitioner communication, both on the part of authors and readers within the LIS profession.

In an effort to continue this trend of practitioner communication, it is the intention of *South Carolina Libraries* to pick up where *The South Carolina Librarian* left off as far as a platform for news communication, but also as a vehicle for the communication of best local and professional practices for the South Carolina LIS professional. According to **Haddow**, "it is the professional associations responsible for these publications that encourage, and are the primary sources of, professional development activities for their members" (2010). As a representative publication of **SCLA**, a professional association that is dedicated to the development of outstanding LIS professionals in South Carolina, *South Carolina Libraries* has been established to extend that same dedication to professional development by communicating useful ideas, practices, news, activities, and other items of importance to the library community of South Carolina.

Survey

A survey on state-level library journal usage was sent to the state library organizations of all 50 states for distribution with responses from 30 states. The majority of respondents were from academic libraries (43.8%) with over 20 years' experience. When asked what article types were most likely to be read in their state's journal, the top response was peer-reviewed articles at 85%, followed by columns at 81.7%, non peer-reviewed articles at 79.6%, and lastly state/regional book reviews at 71%.

Thus, a high impetus has been placed on publishing practitioner research articles that can be adapted to multiple LIS environments, rather than just research conducted by authors in an academic setting who are motivated by things such as tenure and promotion. This is an important

aspect for *South Carolina Libraries*, because **SCLA** is an association for all types of librarians and library professionals in South Carolina. Therefore, the publication should foster the authorship of all different librarians and library professionals, which is why the publication accepts peer-review as well as non peer-review article submissions.

Creating South Carolina Libraries

Seeking SCLA Approval

The first step in the process was to officially present the idea of creating the journal to the **SCLA's** Executive Board. The proposal was made in August of 2013 and immediately approved. *South Carolina Libraries* was added as a subgroup under the Editorial Committee.

Seeking a Host

The next step involved finding a place to host our journal. We knew, with the cost of printing and the small size of the organization, that printing was not an option. We needed something online, easy to use, and most importantly, free. The possibility was considered that if we could not find something free, we may be able to advertise to afford the publication, but that would add another layer of complexity we did not want to deal with if we didn't have to.

Fortunately, a perfect opportunity presented itself in the form of Scholar Commons, the institutional repository of the **University of South Carolina**. This platform had already been established as a repository for work completed by **University of South Carolina** affiliates, and was already hosting several academic journals. The manager of Scholar Commons, **Chris Hare**, was approached with the proposal for *South Carolina Libraries* and was enthusiastic about helping to establish the journal.

Seeking Editorial Board Members

With approval from **SCLA** and a place to host the journal, we then needed to find people to help with the legwork of launching the journal. An email message was sent to the **SCLA** listserv asking for people to serve in various capacities: Copy Editors, Peer-Reviewers, Book Review Editor, Column Writers, and people to help in general with the creation of the journal's policies and procedures.

Producing Policies and Procedures

Once we had our Editorial Board created we set about with the creation of the policies and procedures. We used the various policies and procedures of other state library journals to guide us. Three state-level journals that were a big help to us were the *Georgia Library Quarterly, Tennessee Libraries,* and *Kentucky Libraries*. In addition, a regional publication, the *Southeastern Librarian*, served as a great mentor on our journey and provided us with examples of many of their policies to edit for ourselves. Each of these journals had Editors that were enthusiastic about providing any tidbit of knowledge they could to help us out.

One of the points of debate was whether or not to make the journal a peer-reviewed journal, a non-peer-reviewed journal, or a combination of both. Ultimately, it was decided that we would make our first issue a trial and include a call for both peer-reviewed articles and non-peer-reviewed articles so long as we were able to find enough volunteers willing to serve as peer-reviewers.

SCLA's current membership is 344. With a small number of members, the Editorial Board decided it best to open the possibility of publishing to "anyone with a vested interest in libraries in South Carolina." This would allow all types of Librarians — academic, public, K-12, special, etc. — to have a voice in the journal. This would also allow other people with an interest in libraries such as library staff, library students, and even vendors and patrons to publish as long as their manuscript revolved around libraries in the state of South Carolina.

Naming the journal *South Carolina Libraries* came after a lengthy discussion with the Editorial Board. It was decided that naming it the *South Carolina Librarian* would alienate those in the library field that are not librarians. A name such as *Palmetto Libraries* would be overkill since many, many things in South Carolina are called Palmetto this or Palmetto that. Since a majority of other states named their journal "State Name Libraries," as seen in Appendix A, we decided to go with that format to have some consistency with other journals and to be inclusive to all working in the library field in the state.

Seeking Peer-Reviewers

The most difficult part of gathering volunteers at first was finding people to serve as peer-reviewers. Initially, we decided against having a peer-review section of the journal because of the lack of volunteers. After a conversation at **SCLA's** annual conference it was determined that we simply didn't get the word out well enough. Our first call for volunteers was a broad request for volunteers of any kind, not specifically peer-reviewers. Another call was sent out specifically asking for peer-reviewers, and this time we received almost 40 volunteers!

Pros and Cons of Open-Access

There are some pros and cons to offering open-access to journals for organizations. A journal that requires a password could potentially encourage some people to join the organization in order to read the material. However, an open-access journal provides information freely to anyone interested in the organization.

In addition, we were able to collaborate with the **South Carolina State Library** to digitize the past issues mentioned previously to add to the history of libraries in South Carolina. By choosing an open-access option, this historic knowledge will be available to all. This was very exciting, especially since these journals were housed only in a few locations, many only available in microfiche format.

Working with Scholar Commons

The platform utilized by Scholar Commons is provided through a subscription to **bePress**, an online publisher that helps establish institutional repositories throughout the U.S. **bePress** also supplies excellent support in the form of a journal support professional who helped immensely in learning how to utilize the **bePress** editorial management software. Uploading articles turned out to be very much a trial-and-error process, and the support from **bePress** was tremendous and active all the way up to the launch of the first issue.

Marketing

The opportunity to publish was posted in several modes of communication including **SCLA** listservs, the **SCLA** Webpage, Facebook, and word of mouth. There was also a direct solicitation effort for articles from specific library professionals which eventually turned into the library "spotlight" articles that were published in the first issue. These methods were successful as we eventually received several articles in all different categories.

Conclusion

The initial vision of *South Carolina Libraries* was formed in July 2013 with the first online, open-access publication realized in October 2014. Based on past publishing traditions and to keep in line with current LIS literature on state-level and professional development oriented publications, *South Carolina Libraries* seeks to place itself firmly within the **SCLA** organization as a vehicle to promote issues pertinent to LIS professionals in South Carolina and to provide early publication opportunities for said professionals. In establishing the journal, several obstacles were presented which included finding an online host, setting policies and procedures, finding willing volunteers to help with the journal, soliciting articles, and learning to use the editorial management system provided by the journal's online platform. With continued diligence from volunteers within **SCLA** and continued support from professionals at **bePress**, *South Carolina Libraries* is positioned to become a truly valuable asset to LIS professionals within the state of South Carolina.

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Appendix A:

State Library Association journals (* indicates peer-reviewed)

Research was conducted to find out what other states offer a state-level library journal. The research found that as of July 2013, there were 21 **State Library Associations** that currently publish a state-level journal in some format; 11 include peer-reviewed articles, and 2 are password protected for members only. There were 34 State Library Associations that publish a newsletter in some format, 3 of which are password protected for members only.

The following is a list of **State Library Association** journals found online including the state, the name of the publication, and the URL for the journal. 🐾

State	Name of publication	URL
Arkansas	Arkansas Libraries	*www.arlib.org/arkansas-libraries*
Colorado	Colorado Libraries	*www.coloradolibraries.org/about*
Florida	*Florida Libraries	*www.flalib.org/pub_Guidlines.php*
Georgia	*Georgia Library Quarterly	*www.gla.georgialibraries.org/glq.htm*
Idaho	*The Idaho Librarian	*www.idaholibraries.org*
Illinois	ILA Reporter	*http://www.ila.org/store/ila-reporter*
Indiana	*Indiana Libraries	*http://journals.iupui.edu/index.php/IndianaLibraries*
Kentucky	*Kentucky Libraries	*www.klaonline.org/478.cfm*
Louisiana	*Louisiana Libraries	*www.llaonline.org/fp/bulletin.php*
Michigan	MLA Forum	*www.mlaforum.org*
Mississippi	*Mississippi Libraries	*http://epubs.library.msstate.edu/index.php/MSLib/about*
Nebraska	NLA Quarterly	*http://nebraskalibraries.org/communications/nebraska-libraries-journal/*
North Carolina	*North Carolina Libraries	*www.ncl.ecu.edu/index.php/NCL*
Oklahoma	Oklahoma Librarian	*www.oklibrarian.org/index.php/oklibrarian/index*
Oregon	OLA Quarterly	*http://commons.pacificu.edu/olaq/*
Pennsylvania	PaLRap	*www.palibraries.org?page=PaLRaP*
Tennessee	*Tennessee Libraries	*www.tnla.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=17*
Texas	TLA Cast	*www.txla.org/tlacast*
Vermont	VLA News	*www.vermontlibraries.org/publications/vlanewsissues*
Virginia	VLA Libraries	*http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/VALib/index.html*
Washington	Alki WLA Journal	*www.wla.org/alki-wla-journal*

to join forces with our long-time partner **Pro-Quest**, a true industry leader that believes in and supports our vision to provide users with content quickly, easily and cost-effectively," said **Franny Lee**, **Co-founder of SIPX**. "In joining **ProQuest's** ranks, **SIPX** is better positioned to continue working with valued partners and customers to deliver unparalleled service, both now and as new developments in higher education arise in this ever-changing digital and global era."

Effective immediately, **Ms. Lee** will lead **SIPX**, reporting to **Ben Lewis, ProQuest's Senior Vice President for Strategy & Business Development**. Watch for **Nancy Herther's** report on the merger online. *ATG* is in the process of interviewing **Franny** and **Ben**. Watch for our interview in the print June *ATG* and online as well.

http://www.proquest.com/about/news/2015/ProQuest-Acquires-SIPX.html

The *Chronicle of Higher Education* and *The Wall Street Journal* report that "LinkedIn announced Thursday it has agreed to acquire the online-learning company **lynda.com** for $1.5 billion. It is the social-networking giant's largest acquisition to date, and signals its continued expansion into the education realm. *lynda.com* offers more than 2,900 courses online, which include video tutorials for various skills…" See also "A Higher Profile" by **Paul Fain** in *Inside Higher Ed.*

http://chronicle.com