

2016

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Recommended Citation

Holley, Bob (2018) "Random Ramblings--Why I'm Glad I Do Humanities Research," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 28: Iss. 3, Article 37.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.7383>

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Random Ramblings — Why I'm Glad I Do Humanities Research

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Yes, I write about library science topics, especially collection development; but I do so mostly with the methodology and perspective of a Humanities professor. I received my French Language and Literature doctorate from **Yale University** in 1971 so that my scholarly training prepared me to deal with texts. While historical research and statistical analysis are also valid areas for literature researchers, my preferred specialty was analyzing works to look for aspects that were not obvious but that would increase the enjoyment and understanding of the literary text. Perhaps my best discovery ever was about the novel *Corinne* by **Madame de Staël**. I managed to prove successfully to my professor that the basic structure was mostly likely a conscious reworking of **Vergil's Aeneid**. I heard that he added this insight to his subsequent teaching of the course.

I have basically continued the same strategy for many of my current publications as those of you who follow this column know. I look for insights of potential interest to readers that come from a broad familiarity with the literature of collection development and scholarly communication. Some of these from the past have included the decreased importance of the journal as a container for the article, the lack of any discussion on how libraries provide materials for copyright violation, the complicity of university administrators in the scholarly communication crisis, and how retirement might affect scholarly production. I explicitly look for contrarian ideas that challenge the conventional wisdom. My bibliography includes many traditional research papers; but I much prefer, for better or worse, writing opinion pieces. For the column that follows, I will compare my experiences as a researcher with what I believe to be true about the life of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and medicine) faculty.

The Need for Expensive Research Facilities

Most though not all STEM researchers require expensive laboratories. To give an example from a random search: "The start-up hiring incentive provides up to 20% of start-up costs for faculty in STEM fields if the total start-up costs exceed \$400K, with a cap of \$200K per hire. The total start-up funds that may be awarded to any individual campus are limited to \$400K per year. All disciplines are eligible for the start-up incentive, as long as a fellow's research is in a STEM field" (http://apo.ucsc.edu/news-events/campus_memos/8-21-15_EVC_Memo.html). That's a lot of money. Any university will expect return on this substantial investment. A newly minted STEM researcher or one who wishes to move to a new institution will need to provide signif-

icant justification if the research area requires a new laboratory or a retrofit of an existing one. In fact, I would assume that the first step for many beginning researchers is to join an existing team in their research specialization. I would also expect high continuing costs for new equipment, lab maintenance, supplies, animal care, etc.

Hiring a Humanities researcher is cheap. If I had moved to a new institution, I would have expected an office with a computer (\$750 would provide enough computing power) though this would even be less important if I were teaching online from home and brought my preferred computing device to work. As long as the university subscribed to *Library Literature Online*, I might not need any additional library resources if my requests for new books were honored or if the demand driven acquisitions choices included the more important library science resources.

Need for Outside Funding

Most STEM researchers must obtain outside funding to support their expensive research. In fact, almost all universities anticipate using the indirect costs from grants to support other parts of the institution. Senior researchers bear the heaviest responsibility to keep their laboratories afloat by obtaining a continuous stream of grants through their own efforts or from getting other members of the team to write winning proposals. Tenured faculty members are thus not be able to slow down because doing so would threaten the financial stability of their area's research efforts. In fact, I know from sitting on my university's tenure and promotion committee that some STEM researchers do not have tenure support for their full salaries so that a portion disappears if they don't bring in enough outside money. For this reason, some universities offer bridge support during dry spells; but this transitional funding doesn't last forever. Furthermore, faculty employment contracts may require submitting grant proposals or winning grants as a condition of employment so that not doing so could lead to detenuing though I suspect that this happens rarely. At the very least, administrators and colleagues can make life unpleasant for unproductive researchers. On the plus side, successful research can lead to patents that reward both the researcher and the university, a near impossibility for a Humanities scholar.

I was an excellent grant proposal writer when I was a library administrator and wrote or directed grants totaling over \$1 million. As a Humanities oriented library science professor, I

consider myself successful for having obtained miniscule funding of around \$10,000 from three outside sources. From publicity releases and talking to colleagues, other LIS researchers, especially in IT but also in Social Science type research, require outside funding to support their laboratories, expensive computer equipment, costs of survey distribution and analysis, and support staff for these tasks; but these costs are probably less than in many STEM disciplines.

I'm quite pleased that I don't have to shoulder the burden of being responsible for a large team. I pick research topics of sufficient interest that can easily get published in respectable journals but that depend upon my individual analysis and ability to reason about the issues. Even my serious research studies employed methodologies that I could implement myself or call upon a colleague as a second author in areas where I'm weak. For example, to the surprise of some, I've never taken a course in statistics even with a doctorate from Yale University; but I've always found a co-author willing to do the statistical analysis. I also have never worried about losing a portion of my salary or being detenued for not obtaining grants. Getting published in reputable journals, having my research frequently cited, and producing evidence of my reputation in the field was quite enough for my university to be pleased with my research efforts.

Scholarly Communication, Subject Focus, and Academic Life

The evidence suggests that scholarly communication is more critical for STEM researchers because of the importance of publishing success for obtaining grant funding in a highly competitive environment. STEM researchers must have excellent knowledge of the published literature plus, in some fields, the more informal communications that report recent developments. Preparing a duplicate grant proposal for a project that has already been funded would be a colossal waste of time. I also expect that proposal reviewers expect to see a firm grasp of current research in the proposal's subject area. STEM researchers also need to publish results in the highest quality journals possible since this factor is also part of the review process for future grants. The number of publications from a research project also counts so that results are divided up into smaller publishable units even if some are placed in journals of lesser quality. Other factors include the possibility of page charges or fees for publication both

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in commercial and open access journals and the requirement by some journals to make data files available.

The economic importance of STEM fields can be seen in the number of vendors and publishers at the **Charleston Conference** who market to these disciplines. They are making the rational decision that universities, libraries, and researchers are willing to spend much more in STEM areas for the potential economic rewards. On the other side, the number of vendors who specialize in products in support of Humanities research could probably be counted on one hand. This emphasis extends to evaluation tools such as the various citation and productivity rankings. The definition of the h-index, for example, clearly shows that it was developed for scientists with only a passing reference to scholars in other fields (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H-index>).

The factors above also have an effect upon the academic life of STEM researchers. Changing the research area is much harder when doing so requires an expensive new lab and bringing together a new research team. From hearing about strategies at my own university, I would expect this happens mostly when funding focuses on a new area with less competition; but even here the university would most likely bring in researchers

from other institutions. Having to work in a large group can potentially cause stress. Team leaders must be good managers as well as good researchers. I suspect some research projects flounder because of internal group dissension. From having a friend who was a biostatistician, I learned about the concerted efforts to get the highest possible placement in the author list. She would brag as if it were a great accomplishment about going from 16th to 12th in the author rankings. Next, any research with a need for lab facilities limits the researchers' ability to be absent from the university for an extended period or to continue working in the field after retirement so that these researchers have less flexibility in their professional lives. Finally, being a "public intellectual" may be more difficult since the general populace may be less interested in complex research areas that are hard for researchers to explain to people with little to no background in the subject. On the other hand, doing so isn't completely impossible and may result in wide-spread fame (*The Role of the Public Intellectual* by **Alan Lightman** <http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/papers/lightman.html>).

My life as a researcher is much simpler. I have a fast Internet connection at home so that I can search my library's databases/holdings and other Internet resources in my pajamas. Some of my original research has focused on issues that require holdings information, but WorldCat is also available from home. For several of my most important papers, I've had to travel

to consult historical sources; but doing so is still less costly than having an expensive lab. Retirement will not end my research efforts because I retain library access as an emeritus professor. My opinion pieces like this one are even easier to write since I have more time to think deeply with fewer distractions. While many Humanities scholars have collaborators, I had a bad experience early in my career so that I normally work with others only where I have some control as is the case with a paper co-authored by tenure track faculty or students. With mostly single author publications, I don't worry about author placement and am quite willing to be the second author on the others. The library science journals that I submit to realize that scholars like me don't have the resources to pay page charges. I don't even have to consider making extensive data files available. What may be more important for me than for STEM researchers is to organize my ideas well and to write clearly enough to make it easy for the reader to understand what I'm trying to "prove." With no hope of grant funding, placing my publications in the best journals is also less important as long as my articles are indexed and read. The public isn't much interested in library issues or many Humanities subjects where research has tended to become so specialized as to be of interest only to fellow experts. Exceptions might be research on the most popular highbrow authors such as **Shakespeare** or areas of cultural

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Optimizing Library Services — Enhancing the Competitive Advantage of Libraries through Social Media Marketing

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Simply put, social media is the media humans use to be social. Thus social media embodies how humans use emerging technologies to effectively reach out and connect to other human beings, create relationships, build trust, and be there for one another. The social media phenomenon represents a major shift in communication as it flattens the world and brings people together to be friends, interact or transact. The strength of the social media lies in the fact that social conversation is one of the most powerful communications in this generation. This explains why social media tools and techniques are remarkably and permanently changing the way information is created and passed across societies and around the world. Statistics indicate that people now spend more time on social media than any other media category; the overall time spent on social media continues to increase exponentially; social media has overtaken pornography as the prominent activity on the Internet; one of eight spouses in the United States first met on social media, and one of every five divorce cases have been blamed on social media. These scenarios demonstrate that social media continues to have an outstanding impact on personal and professional relationships, and in some cases has raised ethical and legal issues relating to information management and use.

One sphere of life where social media has had a remarkable impact is marketing, giving

rise to the concept of social media marketing, which is a form of marketing which utilizes social networking sites. Social media marketing works by drawing the attention of the interested publics to conversations which discuss the services or products being marketed. Social media marketing largely works in a subtle way and does not overtly promote services or products. It is also important to note that organizations or individuals marketing services or products promoted through social media are ordinarily members of the social communities they are promoting to. Membership of target social communities enhances acceptance and increases the chances of the promotional messages being received positively. Social media marketing takes time and is not a one-shot activity because social media is not just about marketing; it is about conversations. Social media marketing is powerful because most consumers trust peer recommendations; not advertisers. This shift in the decision making approach is more founded on the desire by people to benefit from the experience or competence of others, whom they view as trustworthy, than on mere marketers interested in making profits.

Social media marketing enables organizations to learn from their customers; target their marketing initiatives to specific potential clients in specific places using context-specific information and offers; increase traffic to their

online outlets; improve their search ratings; reduce overall marketing costs; develop new or strengthen existing business networks and partnerships; and enhance brand popularity. Social media marketing can also create brand awareness; generate a positive buzz; stimulate brand engagement; shift consumer expectations; influence opinion leaders; build a customer base; stimulate conversations and the formation of relationships with interest groups; facilitate social mobilisation; develop customer loyalty; enhance customer service; and educate customers.

Libraries can benefit greatly from social media marketing by creating awareness of their services and products, encouraging readership and attracting fleeing users back to the library. Libraries can use social media marketing to augment their user education programs by using the platforms and messages to create user support groups; facilitate collaboration between the users and between them and librarians to work together, communicate and share documents; provide platforms for user education demos and practice; and act as customer support channels. Through the emerging concept of infodemiology and infoveillance, librarians are able to detect and pick out patterns in conversations which indicate needs or failures and respond directly or in kind by creating a supportive environment which would address the implied need. Libraries can also use social media marketing to expand their reach beyond their walls as well as reduce barriers to the delivery of their services. Such barriers currently include limited opening hours, inappropriate physical spaces, inadequate collections, constrained human resources, the inadequate number of libraries, and inappropriate attitudes of librarians. Social media marketing can also enable libraries to deliver services on portable devices which are generally owned by individual library users. This reduces the need to come to the physical library or use its inadequate information technology infrastructure. Another associated benefit of library services on portable digital devices is enhanced accessibility. Libraries can also use social media marketing to create compelling brands with a clear, meaningful, unique message; an attention-grabbing visual identity; consistent use of identity cues; and an ongoing effort to keep the brand honest. An effective brand can have an immediate and emotional impact on the customer. The goal of library

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interest such as film studies and social issues in literature.

Concluding Remarks

What I have written above may not apply to all STEM subject areas since research and scholarly communication take many forms according to the culture of the discipline. Serving on a university-wide tenure and promotion committee provides a quick education on the dangers of judging a file based on your own discipline. Nonetheless, I hope that I've been reasonably accurate in broad terms. Email me to tell me where I need to modify my perceptions.

Overall, I'm content with my academic career. According to Google Scholar, as of

today, I have 158 papers with 426 citations. My articles get assigned to library science students. I've even had a few librarians tell me that they've made practical decisions based upon my publications. I know that my work is less respected by quantitative researchers and by those who are doing important fundamental theoretical research, but I made the conscious decision to be a columnist and popularizer. I do try to write at least one serious research piece annually. To return to the comparison with STEM researchers, I'm not going to have the glory of curing cancer, explaining why the dinosaurs disappeared, or finding conclusive evidence for the existence of some mysterious sub-atomic particle. Nonetheless, I'm happy enough with my life as a Humanities researcher. I plan to continue to write as long as I have something to say. 🌱