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Scholarship as conversation
Using book reviews to think about scholarly communication

In the ACRL white paper "Intersections of Scholarly Communication and Information Literacy: Creating Strategic Collaborations for a Changing Academic Environment," the authors suggested librarians should reach out to "formal undergraduate research programs where faculty are paired one-on-one with undergraduate students."[1] By partnering with research groups, librarians could introduce the concepts behind scholarly communication and the information cycle, thereby enhancing the undergraduate research experience.

Since that paper was written in 2013, academic librarians have continued to invest in supporting undergraduate research, evidenced by articles and the recent publication of *Undergraduate Research and the Academic Librarian: Case Studies and Best Practices.*[2] This book includes case studies of librarians who are integrating information literacy skills and scholarly communication ideas into undergraduate research experiences.

Librarians have acknowledged that not all undergraduates understand what scholarly communication is or how they are becoming creators in the information cycle through undergraduate research.[3] Some of this misunderstanding could be due to undergraduates who are only involved with one part of a larger, long-term, faculty-led research project. By focusing on just one element, these students therefore miss the opportunity to experience and understand the larger cycle of creating new knowledge within a discipline. If we value undergraduates becoming scholars themselves, we must seize opportunities to embed both information literacy skills and scholarly communication ideas into regular discussion and reflection.

With these ideas in mind, we are proposing a new way to introduce students to the scholarly communication process through an undergraduate research experience. This article will explore the intersection of scholarly communication and information literacy when undergraduate students coauthor disciplinary book reviews. This type of research experience, we contend, works best when librarians collaborate with disciplinary faculty and undergraduate researchers.

The setup

Book reviews are not exactly sought-out publication citations. In LIS, we see a variety of book review types, everything from short and sweet to more extensive, critical reviews. Some of us use reviews for collection development, while others write

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them for our colleagues. During reference conversations, the academic book review might be a new format to undergraduates. The newness often requires an explanation. The seemingly relevant online article they found is actually a review of a book, usually a book relevant to the student's research. Informally, some colleagues feel that it is better to filter out book reviews from the discovery layer in order to avoid confusion from the student searching for "other" information.

Beyond LIS, higher education has debated the usefulness of book reviews. For example, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* writers Rachael Toor and Lynn Worsham debate the merits of this scholarship. While both Toor and Worsham are critical of the book review, both also concede that there is a purpose for this type of scholarship. Toor mentions that "we [as scholars] are invested in our fields and want to be involved in a conversation about where they should go."[4] Worsham agrees, stating, "[d]espite the doubts of some of my colleagues, . . . the book review, done properly, is still a viable and important contribution to intellectual life."[5]

If we think about the purpose of a book review, the goal is to explain the book's contribution to the field and how it fits within the discipline. This nicely aligns within the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, specifically, the "Scholarship as Conversation" frame. In this frame, students are tasked with understanding that disciplines are always in the midst of ongoing conversations. The student's role, as an information consumer and producer, is to find a way to join this conversation and add their own knowledge to the voices speaking.

In exploring this frame, the student is also asked to understand how information is created and whose voices are privileged and allowed to be published in these conversations, offering a bridge to the "Authority is Constructed and Contextual" frame. These conversations unfold naturally when writing collaborative book reviews because students experience the scholarly communication process firsthand. Not only are students part of the writing process, they get to experience the actual cycle of publication and dissemination. In being an integral part of this publication process, we are also able to disrupt traditional academic publishing models by helping to create a space where an undergraduate student can assert his or her own authority.[6]

Book reviews in action

Nicholas Rowland, sociologist at Penn State, began coauthoring book reviews with students in 2009. The first few reviews were time-intensive for Rowland because they required considerable back-and-forth edits with student coauthors throughout the entire writing process. After a few reviews, Rowland enlisted the help of Jeff Knapp, a librarian at Penn State, to also work with students on the reviews. Knapp was involved in different intensities—from one-shot consultation about citation styles to a more sustained set of meetings wherein scholarly conversation was discussed.

In analyzing the characteristics of his book reviews over time, we observed an increase in the number of citations in the reviews, in general, and an increase in references to the author's previous work, in particular. Later reviews even included students citing other reviewers who have written about the same book, showing a clear indication of their role in this scholarly conversation and understanding another scholar's intellectual contribution. Throughout the writing process, Rowland and Knapp had conversations with the students to discuss the value and significance of adding these citations and nods to previous work.

These conversations allowed them, as Stephanie Davis-Kahl previously wrote, to "[ask] students to consider if and how they want their own work to be shared and used by others . . ." This "shifts the nature of discussions from cautionary and reactive to reflective and proactive, and explicitly

acknowledges that the students' work is valued enough to be shared if they choose."[7]

Hailley Fargo, student engagement librarian, joined the team in fall 2017 and began to see the connections between the undergraduate research experience, information literacy, and scholarly communication. In naming the connections, Fargo was able to develop training for the student research team. Rowland had the students read the book reviews from 2009 to the present to see how the coauthoring process changed over time. A few of the students on the team took on the analysis of the book reviews as their research project. They created a rubric to determine the quality of each book review based on citation/reference counts, organization, conciseness, mechanics, quotations, and critique of the book.

In creating this rubric, the faculty, librarians, and students were able to engage in conversation around the scholarly communication process. We were able to discuss how a book is published as well as the book's place within the discipline and within the author's own work. The rubric allows us to ask the students questions about why a higher citation count or analyzing another book review creates authority in the book reviewer, and how that authority is meaningful in scholarly communication. For undergraduate students to have this knowledge of the scholarly communication process, along with a meaningful undergraduate research experience, sets them up for future success, especially for students pursuing graduate school.

As the "Intersections of Scholarly Communication and Information Literacy" paper recommends, this collaborative process allows faculty, librarians, and students to explore the economics behind scholarship. They are able to understand how their book review is published and who is able to access and read the review, and they become a creator in new knowledge for the discipline.

All the authors are interested in how this sort of undergraduate experience could be used in other settings, at other institutions, and with other undergraduates, faculty, and librarians. From the rubric the students created, we have created a table of discussion and assessment questions that are mapped to the Scholarship as Conversation frame, which could be used by others wanting to do this work. This table is in our forthcoming article in the Council of Undergraduate Research's journal, *Scholarship and Practice of Undergraduate Research (SPUR)*. In both the training of student researchers and throughout the book review writing process, we have seen how students are able to grapple with the scholarly communication cycle. They ask more thoughtful questions about the peer review process, open access publications, and begin to find their scholarly voice.

Next steps

A new research team has formed for the new school year. Training is underway for these students, and we have been thoughtful about including elements of scholarly communication, information literacy, and the information cycle in the on-boarding training sessions. A new development for us this year is that we have connected with *SPUR,* and we hope to see coauthored book reviews possibly become a norm in this journal. This means that our team will be able to put our training into action and see how the revision, publication, and dissemination process works at a journal dedicated to undergraduate research.

We believe that putting together an undergraduate research team composed of students, faculty, and librarians is a dynamic combination. We also feel strongly that collaborating and coauthoring book reviews provides a valuable experience and gives students a nontrivial writing experience in which they can join the scholarly conversation. We encourage you to think about what faculty, students, and journals you know of that could benefit from a coauthored book review experience. Reach out to your potential collaborators and see if this experience could happen at your institution. Having

a team and a journal that is interested in book reviews is a great first step. We are excited about where this experience will go in the future and hope that other colleagues will give this try. Together, we can continue find new, innovative ways to have scholarly communication and information literacy intersect.

Notes

1. "Intersections of Scholarly Communication and Information Literacy: Creating Strategic Collaborations for a Changing Academic Environment," working group on Intersections of Scholarly Communication and Information Literacy (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2013), www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/publications/whitepapers/Intersections.pdf.

2. Merinda Kaye Hensley and Stephanie Davis-Kahl, *Undergraduate Research and the Academic Librarian: Case Studies and Best Practices* (Chicago: ACRL, 2017).

3. Catherine Fraser Riehler and Merinda Kaye Hensley, "What do undergraduate students know about scholarly communication: A mixed methods study," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 17, no. 1 (January 2017): 145–78, https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2017.0009.

4. Rachael Toor, "Why bother writing book reviews?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* April 2, 2012, https://www.chronicle.com/article/Why-Bother-Writing-Book/131360.

5. Lynn Worsham, "The endangered scholarly book review," *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* April 1, 2012, https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Endangered-Scholarly-Book/131361.

6. Char Miller and Char Booth, "Open Access as Undergraduate Pedagogy," *Library Journal* (March 26, 2014), accessed November 9, 2018, https://www.libraryjournal.com/?detailStory=open-access-as-undergraduate-pedagogy-backtalk.

7. Stephanie Davis-Kahl, "Engaging Undergraduates in Scholarly Communication: Outreach, Education, and Advocacy," *College & Research Libraries News* 73, 4 (2012): 212–22. ✍