Bridging the Gaps: Finding Creative Solutions to Unmet Needs in a Growing Library Publishing Program

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[Total time: 15 minutes]

JULIA & ANDREE

Julia Lovett - Digital Initiatives Librarian
Manages our digital collections and institutional repository as well as our publishing program

Andrée Rathemacher - Head of Acquisitions
Open Access Advocate
Partnered with Julia on this study
Our Project

- Conduct an assessment of the University of Rhode Island Libraries journal publishing program, supported by the Libraries through our Bepress repository
- Opportunity to get feedback and streamline program
- Particularly interested in where editors are finding “creative solutions” to keep their journals going
  - Provide ideas for other OA journal publishing programs on tight budgets
  - Indicate where more support is needed

ANDREE

At the URI Libraries, we publish five journals that are all very different and were set up at various times over the past 6 years.

Since our publishing services have grown incrementally, it seemed like a good time to get people together and hear what’s working and what’s not, so that we can streamline and improve the program.

Also, besides the support offered by the libraries, we knew that editors were finding other resources to support their journals, and we wanted to hear about that. Not only would their strategies be interesting for us to know, but they might be useful for other OA journal editors and librarians working in this area.

We conducted a series of focus groups with editors and assistants who were very enthusiastic about the chance to speak with us and with each other.
Background - Publishing @ URI

- One librarian and one staff involved in publishing services (small piece of all of our jobs)
- Maintain contract with Bepress
- Coordinate the journal setup
- Assist (often extensively) with migrating content and metadata from other systems
- Apply for DOAJ listing
- Apply for ISSN
- Maintain Crossref contract and train editors in creating DOI's
- Respond quickly to questions and problems

ANDREE

As mentioned, library publishing at URI has grown organically and incrementally. On the whole, it is more of a bottom-up than top-down approach. With only one librarian and one staff member, our services are limited.

We: [read slide]

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[[[We obtained the Bepress Digital Commons system in 2005. When Julia started as Digital Initiatives Librarian in 2012, there was one journal already established, and periodically she would receive a new request to start a journal. At that point, it was just her; then a few years ago, Erin (our digital initiatives staff member) came on board. Overall, our support is still rather limited but we have been able to incrementally add and improve services.]]]
ANDREE

Now, I'll speak a little bit about each of our journals, to give a better idea of our publishing program.
ANDREE

This is a new journal, just established in fall 2018. Its predecessor journal, the Online Journal of Global Engineering Education, which went defunct, was actually the first journal on our platform back in 2006.

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[The journal grew out of a colloquium on International Engineering Education, as URI is a leader in this area, and it is a growing model at other institutions.

JIEE has two URI editors and one from Purdue, as well as volunteer assistant editors who are all "early career" engineering faculty from various institutions.]
Journal of Media Literacy Education is the journal of the National Association for Media Literacy Education. It has been in existence for 10 years and migrated to our platform from OJS 5½ years ago, with the arrival at URI of founding editor Renee Hobbs.

During our focus group interviews, we learned that the editors discovered an “organic media literacy movement” in the Philippines that they were unaware of... They found this out due to the “hundreds and hundreds” of downloads coming from that part of the world. They have also received submissions from Nigeria, Brazil, and China, as the media literacy movement grows around the globe.

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[[[Renee Hobbs, the founding editor, is a Professor of Communication Studies at URI. JMLE has published 253 articles with 235,000 total downloads.]]]
ANDREE

Dignity was established as a brand new journal 2½ years ago. The founding editor Donna Hughes is a well-known expert in human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

Donna perceived that people on the ground working on these issues often knew more than academic researchers, and there was a need for a forum to disseminate that knowledge. She also experienced a “gatekeeper bias” in existing journals. Frustrated, she decided to start her own journal, at our suggestion.

Donna has become a knowledgeable OA advocate and has gotten creative with using an “acknowledged peer review system” and creating a “frontline reports” section to highlight updates from non-academics.

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[[[Donna Hughes is a Professor of Gender & Women's Studies at URI.

Dignity has taken off, with 104 articles and 81,000 downloads.]]]
ANDREE

Markets, Globalization & Development Review was established in July 2016, after years of planning dating back to 2009. At that time, the founding editor wrote:

“One of my academic societies is starting [a journal], and I will be the first editor….Our journal is global, with strong interest from developing nations, where budgets are much lower than here. What should we do? Getting a Sage or Elsevier might be the only quick solution... and yet, the issue of cost and access (especially by developing world faculty) is serious…”

Fortunately, MGDR chose DigitalCommons@URI.

MGDR editors say they are doing well, but their biggest issue is not yet being indexed in Scopus or Web of Science in terms of attracting authors in a competitive field.

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[[In addition to Nik Dholakia, the founding editor and a Professor Emeritus at URI, the co-editor is Deniz Atik from UT Rio Grande Valley.]]

Published 71 articles so far with 34,000.]]]
ANDREE

The Journal of Feminist Scholarship very recently migrated to DigitalCommons@URI from its own web platform after one of the editors, Jen Riley, became a dean at URI.

She is interested in integrating the journal with URI’s Gender and Women’s Studies program and in getting students involved in its production. The editors consider OA a “feminist issue”. They want to be able to connect with those making important contributions to the feminist movement who aren’t in academia.

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[[[Jeanette Riley is URI’s Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences

JFS was previously based at UMass Dartmouth and still receives some support from them as three editors are faculty there.

The journal has an active Facebook presence.]]]
Project Design

- Sent out requests for interviews to all editors and other individuals identified as having a significant role in the journal
- Conducted 3 focus groups with 9 total interviewees (representing all 5 journals)
- Asked questions including:
  - What is your role in the journals?
  - What services do you value? What services are lacking?
  - What resources have you used, outside of the Libraries, to support the journal?
  - How has editing an OA journal influenced you?
Common Themes - what’s working?

- Library support during setup and a “point of crisis” is highly valuable
- Bepress tech support is responsive and accommodating
- The platform is generally viewed favorably
  - Journal metrics; shareable dashboard
  - Flexible
  - Easy to use

JULIA

In terms of the library’s support for publishing there seemed to be a general consensus on what is working well. Primarily, everyone said that the availability of librarians/staff to help with setup and deal with problems was highly valued. Everyone had positive views of Bepress support as well.

The Bepress platform was viewed favorably, particularly the availability of journal metrics which editors have used to promote the journal; the flexibility of the platform; and the fact that it is fairly intuitive and easy to use once you learn.
Common Themes - what’s not working?

- Copy editing is burdensome - this was the #1 complaint
- Templating and layout is onerous (done outside of the platform)
- Lack of time and energy to keep things going, too much work and too few people (“our editor is headed for a nervous breakdown”)
- Lack of indexing (e.g. in Scopus)
- Creating DOI's and complying with Crossref’s requirements can be difficult, even though DOI's are valued
- One-time resources to establish the journal, but no resources to keep updating and adding new features

JULIA

Almost every single person interviewed complained about copy-editing. It’s time-consuming, stressful, and not everyone is good at it; inaccuracies threaten to undermine the credibility of the journal.

On Bullet #6- some of the specific issues mentioned were, the need to update the template and not knowing how to do it (they paid someone the first time). The desire to incorporate ORCID numbers, linked citations, and other more ‘cutting edge’ features but not having the resources and not knowing where to turn for guidance.
What other resources have bridged the gaps?

- **Funding:**
  - Small institutional grants or startup money
  - Funding from other institution (JFS)
  - Editors paying out of pocket

- **Labor:**
  - Volunteers from the scholarly community or parent organizations
  - Freelance or volunteer help, e.g. for design and templates
  - Student workers (paid, either hourly or wrapped into TAship)
  - Students doing unpaid internships or independent studies for credit

JULIA

We asked about what resources, outside of the services offered by the Libraries and Bepress, editors have found to support the journals. Things like funding, volunteers, student workers, tools, and so forth.

What we found is our editors are being quite creative and using resources we weren’t even aware of.

[go through all bullet points and give examples]
What other resources have bridged the gaps?

- Tools:
  - Constant Contact (email and marketing) - paid for out of pocket
  - Grammarly Pro - paid for out of pocket
  - Recite Works - free

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Recite Works checks for errors and citation mismatches.
Editor wish list - What additional services do they want?

- Help with copy editing (#1 complaint), designing templates, other “editorial assistant” types of tasks
  - Freeing up the editors to work on content
- Guidance on indexing in Scopus, Web of Science, and perhaps others
- Creating a pipeline for students to be involved in journal production and marketing
  - Note: editors had conflicting experiences with student workers
- Promoting the journal; reaching out to readers, reviewers, and potential authors

JULIA

Many editors wanted guidance and further information on being indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, and other indexes to make their journal more appealing to potential authors. We know that the library can’t necessarily make this happen, but perhaps we can provide more information on the requirements.

Many saw an opportunity for students to become involved in journal production and marketing. The library doesn’t have the student budget to support this on our own, but perhaps we could join together with editors to make a case to the administration. Some editors had conflicting experiences with using student workers, so we’d have to be careful about doing this in the right way.

Promoting the journal: This one was somewhat unexpected and we heard it from multiple people. Editors are already doing promotions through social media, email lists, and sharing the Digital Commons dashboard with metrics about the journal. But many expressed that this is an area of difficulty and they need help with outreach, both to readers and to potential authors and reviewers.
How has editing an OA journal informed your career as a scholar?

- Making connections with other scholars and communities, often on a global scale
- Opportunity to mentor new authors
- Learning from new content and improving their own writing

Screenshot of JMLE global download map. 4-25-19

JULIA

OA is not just an abstract concept, it means real tangible connections with other scholars and communities.

Give the examples of Dignity and JMLE (Renee, became aware of other media literacy communities they weren’t aware of 10 years ago and getting paper submissions from all over the world)
Unexpected takeaways

- Even though we “only” have five journals, they are all serving a real need of creating new knowledge and fostering connections.
- Lively cross-pollination of ideas and questions; do we need an “editor coffee hour”??
- Interviewees were passionate about their journals and enthusiastic participants. “This was better than therapy!”

**JULIA**

From these interviews, there were some points that we expected to hear, but there were also a lot of unexpected positive takeaways. The fact that editors are making so many connections through their OA journals was a nice surprise and very rewarding to hear. And that even though we only have five journals, many are in emerging areas of scholarship and are all serving a real need to create new knowledge and build their research communities.

Having the focus groups created such a lively cross-pollination of ideas and questions, we have been wondering if we should keep the conversations going with an “editor coffee hour”! Overall, interviewees were so passionate about their journals and one editor declared, “This was better than therapy!” For any other institutions in a similar situation with their library publishing programs, we would really recommend doing this kind of a project to get people together and stimulate new ideas.
Next steps

- Provide more opportunities for editors to communicate with each other and the library
- Improve journal documentation and training based on feedback
- Look into creating a pipeline for URI students to participate in journal production
- Explore feasibility of assisting with specific requests (indexing, DOI help, copy editing, etc.)
- Better demonstrate the value of the library publishing program to administrators

JULIA

Final bullet: The value of the program to the institution is obvious to us, and probably to everyone who works in library publishing. But it might not be as obvious to administrators working with tight budgets. Doing this project and seeing how passionate the editors are about each of their journals really underscored that we need to keep fighting for the library publishing program.
Questions?

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