Libraries as publishing partners: promoting best practices in open access journals

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Abstract

Publishing by academic libraries is burgeoning as an alternative means to create open access to scholarly research. The emerging field of library publishing offers new opportunities for academic libraries to achieve their mission. From my experience working with the University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries journal publishing program for the past four years, I identify three best practices for libraries as publishing partners working with open access journals: listen to user needs, use opportunities to educate, and work together to promote ethical publishing practices. I also share how we support, promote, and evaluate our library journal publishing program. As the scholarly publishing landscape continues to change, it is exciting to participate in the evolution of academic library publishing programs. Academic libraries are increasingly incorporating open access scholarly publishing as a means to fulfill their mission, and contributing to research and education of scholars at their own institutions and abroad, for those who are active today and for those who will be active in the future.

Keywords: Library publishing; Publishing partners; Best practice; Open access journals.

Introduction

Publishing by academic libraries is developing as an alternative means to create open access to scholarly research. Library publishing contributes to open access compliance of federal funding agencies, provides a venue for leading-edge publication formats, offers a niche for institutional research outputs, and can serve as an affordable home for small scholarly society publishing projects. Libraries at public universities like the University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries (UF) have a responsibility to share their scholars’ research and help their patrons access relevant information. Academic libraries are also participants in student education and professional development, and library publishing programs can provide experiential learning opportunities for student scholars. Libraries are exploring ways to meet their mission within their budgets and increasingly academic publishing is recognised as an important component.

Publications are a critical product of research. Academic libraries strive to make research output freely available to all. This charge is supported by the U.S. federal public access mandate that requires researchers funded by federal agencies to make their research findings (i.e., publications) available to the public within 12 months of publication (Obama, 2013). Codifying the Executive Order of President Obama from May 9, 2013, the Trump administration signed the OPEN Government Data Act on
January 14, 2019, making machine-readable open data the default for U.S. government research (Joseph, 2019). Open access to publicly funded research continues to be of high importance for compliance with federal mandates, to support new knowledge creation, and as tools for educating the next generation of scholars.

The vision of the UF Libraries is to “ignite curiosity, serve as the locus of knowledge management and promote intellectual exchange within our diverse global learning community” (George A. Smathers Libraries Strategic Directions, 2018). Libraries today are using technology to expand the concept of knowledge management beyond content organisation to provide greater support of the entire publishing lifecycle. This expanded role is evident, for instance, in UF Libraries’ mission statement to collaborate with our constituents “to facilitate knowledge creation” (George A. Smathers Libraries Strategic Directions, 2018).

Similar to other library publishing programs, the UF journal publishing program evolved out of hosting digital content in our institutional repository, the IR@UF. In 2012, a statewide installation of the Public Knowledge Project’s Open Journal Systems was launched at the Florida Academic Library Services Cooperative (FALSC), with UF support, and named Florida Online Journals (nicknamed Florida OJ). UF scholars use this platform to publish institutional serials such as the Journal of Undergraduate Research and the new Source: The Magazine of the University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries. The Journal of Undergraduate Research provides a good example of the evolution from hosting digital content in the IR@UF to full use of peer-review publishing with Florida OJ. The Open Journal Systems software provides enhanced discoverability through optimisation of records for automated harvesting by search engines such as Google and Google Scholar. The IR@UF is still a recommended site, especially for archival preservation workflows and for grey literature.

In Florida we have a long history of small societies proactively publishing online. The UF Libraries have several publishing partnerships with scholarly societies, for example working with Arakat, Florida Entomological Society, the American Society of Engineering Education’s Chemical Engineering Education, and the Society of Tropical Lepidoptera. In these partnerships, the quality of each publication’s content is managed by editors that are UF scholars. The libraries provide guidance, training, and expertise to the publishing workflow, discoverability through indexing and aggregation, and advice on scholarly communication issues such as selection of appropriate copyright permission statements. Librarians manage International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) applications and Digital Object Identifier (DOI) assignments to articles.
Status of program

In the past four years I have worked with nearly 15 journals including seven that transitioned to a publishing partnership with the library, six start-up journals, and two publications that left our service.

There are a growing number of publications partnering with the library to produce journals. Some feature student research and use the publishing project as experiential learning for student scholars (e.g., International Journal of Student Scholarship in Physical Therapy). Some feature research presented at conferences and annual meetings (e.g., Florida Linguistic Papers and the forthcoming Journal of Assessment in Higher Education). For others, library publishing provides a venue to explore publications that address new fields of study (e.g., Journal of Public Interest Communication). Common factors can be identified to better understand why these editorial partnerships exist and succeed or fail.

Best practices

Listen to unique user needs

Although we find similar motivations among the various publishing partnerships, each journal bears unique needs. Often, these needs are made clear during initial meetings with journal editorial staff, although sometimes needs are revealed as the partnership develops. We find it important to listen carefully to stated needs and take note of our publishing partners’ priorities. We are then able to tailor our publishing support to best meet the needs of our partners.

Common needs of our publishing partners are to improve the professional look of their existing online journal, employ software to handle online submissions and review, and increase readership and journal usage. Specific needs and priorities vary from one publication to the next.

The editors of Tropical Lepidoptera Research approached the library with the stated intent of gaining a more professional design and layout for their existing online journal as well as the ability to accept and handle online submissions from authors. The editors were publishing PDFs on a website and handling submissions and peer review through emails externally. As we met to review the library’s journal publishing program, the editors became interested in our archiving service. Their concern for long-term
preservation of their publication emerged and led to greater interest in working with the library program. Every interaction with the library publishing program is an opportunity to learn from each other.

The journal Chemical Engineering Education (CEE) needs flexible software to link out to its parent organisation, the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) and conform to ASEE policies, such as use of registered article identifiers (DOIs). This journal is subscription-based, so subscription management software is a key publishing consideration too. Although the libraries favor open access content, we are willing to work with a variety of funding models. The libraries will support subscription management software plug-ins, but do not handle funds nor member databases for our publishing partners.

The library’s publishing program also appeals to scholars launching new journals. In these partnerships, editors seek an affordable publishing platform and guidance in establishing legitimacy of the new publication. We are working with a couple of journals that have been created to publish research in an emerging discipline, such as the Journal of Public Interest Communication that publishes peer-reviewed articles “to help communicators working on social, political and environmental issues impacting society” (‘Journal of Public Interest Communication Focus and Scope’, no date) and the Journal of Civic Information, that will publish work of researchers in the field of accessibility of public information (College of Journalism and Communications, University of Florida, 2019).

Two publications left our service during the past four years. For one departing journal, Interamerican Journal of Psychology/Revista Interamericana de Psicología, the editor relocated to a new institution and we facilitated transfer of journal content to a new digital publishing platform, while honoring our commitment to preserve archival issues in our repository and back-up locations. Another journal, Delos: A journal of translation and world literature, transferred publication from the library to our university press in order to gain greater assistance in management and marketing of the journal. Consequently, the editors chose to forego open access in order to generate income for this service, as required by the press. When the library publishing team conducted an “exit interview” to better understand this failed partnership, it became clear that the journal’s editorial team were unaware of the separation of the two entities, the library and the press. The editorial team was also unprepared for responses received at the decision to forego open access. Similar to other academic library publishers, we also have a few student journals that are no longer active. It is unclear yet whether these inactive publications represent our “graveyard” or will become “zombie” journals that will publish anew (Hall, 2019).
In summary, it is important to customise the library publishing service to meet the needs of each publishing partner in their order of priority. Ongoing communication with each content provider is key to maintaining satisfaction with the publishing service. In this manner, publishing partnerships become mutually beneficial. For the libraries, new scholarly work becomes accessible and preserved. For the content providers, their publications develop more professionally and reach broader audiences. In the process, these partnerships provide opportunities to educate scholars to promote best practices in open access scholarly communication.

Use opportunities to educate

Successful publishing is complex. Library publishers have great opportunities to educate scholars on publishing issues. Relevant topics include the merits of open access, importance of consistent metadata for easier discoverability, and the use of identifiers for improved metrics.

At the UF Libraries, we have employed a variety of methods to educate our publishing partners. In fall 2016, I developed the Florida OJ Publishers Round Table as an outreach and professional networking venue for the library journal publishing program. The Round Table meets twice a year and features presentations about a scholarly communication topic relevant to journal publishing and publishing experiences shared by one or two of our partner journals. The focus is on two-way communication to further strengthen the professional network of UF scholars working with librarians to make publishing decisions. Topics have ranged from tips on how to make workflows more efficient with Open Journal Systems to an introduction of Web of Science’s Emerging Sources Citation Index. We created and maintain Publishing with Florida OJ, a LibGuide for UF scholars publishing journals with the UF Libraries (https://guides.uflib.ufl.edu/floridaoj). The guide includes links to resources such as the Committee on Publishing Ethics (COPE) and Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) as well as contact information for librarians and training materials for working in Florida OJ. Every consultation with our publishing service team is viewed as an opportunity to inform as well as learn. As we assist in indexing for greater OA journal usage, for instance, we can review DOAJ policies on transparent peer review and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Educational aspects of the library journal publishing program expanded in 2018 to include a graduate student internship. This intern developed deeper knowledge and skills in open access academic publishing through work with the library publishing team. The intern conducted our first satisfaction survey of UF scholars using Florida OJ. “Understanding what this field is like and all the pieces that go into publishing is super important to me as a scholar…This internship has opened a lot of doors for me and given me a lot of new
skills, so, it’s been a really valuable experience” the student concluded (Stapleton, 2018).

**Promote ethical standards in scholarly publishing**

Scholarly publishing within an academic library is infused with a unique library perspective. In contrast to commercial publishers, libraries aim for free and broad information dissemination, perpetual preservation, and ongoing reuse of quality information to create new knowledge. Establishing and implementing ethical standards in scholarly publishing, therefore, is a high priority for academic library publishers.

Library publishers, for example, may lobby for authors’ rights retention using Creative Commons’ licenses, promote transparent peer-review policies, and address diversity of editorial boards. Due to their existing relationships with scholars serving as editorial board members, librarians may see better success in promoting implementation of improved ethical practices in journals they publish. With institutional or grant financial support, library publishing may be more flexible to develop an ideal publishing model, relatively free from cost recovery and profit motivations.

Library publishers are strengthened in these endeavors by national and international organisations that provide inspirational guidance. COPE consolidated its code of conduct and guidelines into ten Core Practices that serves as a summary of ethical publishing standards (COPE, 2019). In 2018, the Library Publishing Coalition published An Ethical Framework for Library Publishing as a synthesis of resources for those implementing ethical standards in library publishing (Library Publishing Coalition Ethical Framework Task Force, 2018).

Academic library publishers by their nature, mission, and member organisations, are emerging as beacons of an alternative publishing practice for academic scholars.

**How we do what we do: supporting the library journal publishing program**

A publishing service requires funding as in-kind contributions of personnel time and direct payments for software, memberships, and services. The UF Libraries provide in-kind support to the library publishing program through dedicated faculty and staff time. The UF Libraries developed and launched SobekCM, host of the IR@UF, where journal archives are retained. Through participation in statewide library services with FALSC, the UF Libraries share catalog and circulation software. In 2012, UF Libraries worked closely with FALSC to initiate statewide access to PKP Open Journal Systems.
The UF Libraries have provided financial support to the Public Knowledge Project since its inception. Although UF does not have a dedicated open access policy, UF supports the UF Libraries’ efforts to encourage open access publishing, for instance with contributions to the UF Open Access Publishing Fund (UFOAP). The UFOAP Fund provides funding to offset Article Processing Charges (APCs) to UF scholars who elect to publish their research in open access or hybrid journals. The UFOAP Fund is so popular that initially funds were exhausted within a few months; revised criteria for eligibility help target the funds to early career scholars who do not have alternative sources for publication costs. An impact assessment of the pilot project of this fund indicated that one-third of the participants were unaware or unfamiliar with open access previously (Bruna et al., 2016).

Since 2012, UF Libraries have supported a journal publishing service team. The team was originally composed of the Digital Humanities Librarian, Scholarly Communications Librarian and the Director of the UF Digital Collections (UFDC). The team grew to include the manager of the IR@UF, the Digital Initiatives Librarian, and a Liaison Librarian for each journal. The Liaison Librarian brings discipline-specific expertise to the team and often long-standing relationships with scholars who serve as journal editors. Team members work across the UF Libraries in a variety of units and mainly communicate on publishing through quarterly service team meetings, emails, and a shared document drive.

Training sessions are offered by the service team to Liaison Librarians to better equip them to respond to inquiries about the library publishing program. A one-hour session includes an overview of the motivation for library publishing, the preference for open access, an introduction to the IR@UF, and a hands-on exploration of the publishing software, Florida OJ. A flowchart is reviewed to provide context and publicity for the workflow involved for Liaison Librarians. Resources such as the Publishing with Florida OJ LibGuide and brochures about PKP Open Journal Systems are provided. Although these sessions were designed to “train the trainer” it became evident that Liaison Librarians work best in concert with the journal publishing service team and that most are unlikely to dedicate the time to become comfortable responding to publishing inquiries alone.

Outreach events are another means of supporting the library journal publishing program. These events may be initiated by team members or colleagues. They serve to raise awareness of the library publishing activities and educate scholars about some of the publishing issues that can be addressed through the library publishing service. Examples of outreach events include presentations of an Open Access Mythbusters slide set (Hines and Fruin, 2017) and a panel presentation during National Peer Review Week of UF scholars active in Publons, software created to recognize contributions of peer reviewers and facilitate peer review solicitation.
The library journal publishing program is further promoted through UF Academic Research & Consulting Services (ARCS; https://arcs.uflib.ufl.edu/), formed in 2017. ARCS offers a “one-stop shop” for UF scholars seeking library services for their academic research. ARCS provides expertise in eight areas addressing the complete research lifecycle, including Publishing & Archiving. In this manner, researchers who approach the library for assistance in geospatial data management, for example, learn about the breadth of library services on other aspects of the research lifecycle. ARCS provides a cohesive structure to UF Libraries’ research support services. It should be noted that library functional specialists (e.g., Informatics Librarian, Statistical Consultant) encourage Liaison Librarians to remain involved in interactions with UF scholars in their disciplines.

**Next steps**

The UF Libraries publishing program continues to evolve. In 2019, a new department was formed to consolidate library publishing personnel. This new department, Digital Partnerships & Strategies, includes the Chair, Scholarly Communications Librarian, Scholarly Repository Librarian, and LibraryPress@UF Designer. Responsibilities of the LibraryPress@UF Designer were expanded to include part-time assistance with graphic design for journal publishing partners. Another goal is to increase visibility of the library publishing program through consistent branding across journals.

Collaboration with the University of Florida Press continues to grow as well. A formal partnership, LibraryPress@UF, was launched in 2016 between the University of Florida Press and the UF Libraries. Although the initial focus of this partnership was to publish unique out-of-print monographs by UF scholars, today journal publishing is also a topic for collaboration.

Through these consolidations and collaborations, UF Library publishing standards continue to be refined, guided by our mission. Revisions to documentation, workflows, and training materials are underway with a goal of highlighting the unique aspects of publishing partnerships with an academic library.

**Summary**

In summary, academic libraries that are publishing partners can infuse these publishing relationships with unique library expertise, creating an aspirational model for open access, ethically aspiring, cutting-edge methods for sharing research products. From my experience, I identify three best practices for libraries as publishing partners working with open access journals: listen to user needs, use opportunities to educate, and promote ethical publishing practices. To be successful in this niche,
academic library publishers need to customise their publishing service to meet users at their point of need. Conducting annual assessments will generate user feedback to help improve and further tailor the publishing service. We view this process as an iterative evolution at the UF Libraries, where library publishing services adjust in anticipation and response to users. In 2018, for example, UF Libraries became a registered member of Crossref and launched new services for DOI assignment in response to publishing partner needs. This year, UF Libraries initiated discussion of diversity, equity, and inclusion practices and are preparing guidelines to encourage publishing partners to implement ethical policies in these areas. Building on successful publishing partnerships that are now well-established, the UF Libraries publishing program is working to better define its role as a viable alternative venue for ethical, open access scholarly publishing. Future growth of academic library publishing is anticipated, especially as programs serve as a beacon of possibilities in the changing landscape of scholarly communications.

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