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Article

Taking Research Services to the Next Level: A Case Study of Implementing a Scholarly Impact Outreach Program for Faculty and Graduate Students

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Abstract

In academic institutions today, there are greater expectations of accountability requiring tenure-track faculty to substantively demonstrate scholarly impact for annual reporting, benchmarking, and promotion and tenure. Database vendors and other content providers are creating robust, yet user-friendly, scholarly impact tools within current products. In response, institutional libraries are offering workshops, individual assistance, research guides, and other activities to promote the value and usage of these tools. However, there is no dedicated scholarly impact outreach program yet documented in the library literature. This article will discuss developing, implementing, and assessing an innovative scholarly impact outreach program based on the author's experience as a librarian at Georgia State University.

Today, faculty experience greater obstacles towards the achievement of promotion and tenure than in years past (Gardner and Veliz, 2014). Grants have become a major indicator of research productivity and institutional visibility, and publication criteria require substantial evidence of scholarly impact in order to present a stronger case. It has also become increasingly essential for institutions of higher education to provide meaningful data in regards to retention, enrollment, and other benchmarks for continued funding, and for individual academic departments to demonstrate value in the programs and degrees offered. To match this activity, graduate students are increasingly seeking high-quality research with notable impact to effectively support master and doctoral-level projects. Students pursuing the professorial route need to develop knowledge about establishing themselves in their respective field in order to show scholarly impact at the time of the promotion and tenure review.

Optimal tools for data discerning scholarly impact continue to be developed as technology and research needs evolve. As an invested partner in faculty and student research, the academic library is in a prime position to offer services including workshops, individual assistance, marketing, and online research guides (i.e., LibGuides). This suite of services forms a formalized program that is termed Scholarly impact Outreach (SIO) by the author. SIO is defined as the partnership of librarians with fellow researchers on campus in providing the aforementioned services regarding data tools that show evidence of scholarly impact.

Implementing a scholarly impact outreach program holds many advantages for faculty, graduate students, and in turn, the library. For faculty, application of the scholarly impact tools presented within the program offers a substantial case for faculty promotion and/or tenure, stronger evidence for demonstrating the value of individual researchers and/or the department, and a greater sense of librarians as partners in research beyond the traditional role. Graduate students will benefit from this content by more easily identifying top journals, authors, and articles, as well as awareness of tools as they prepare for eventual tenure-track faculty status and promotion and tenure. Librarians will benefit from participating in scholarly impact activity with faculty and graduate students as it advances their support of faculty research, demonstrates library value in a new way, and adds innovative programming to their evolving areas of responsibility. Integration into existing faculty and student outreach without the need for funding is another advantage in these budget-conscious times. Lastly, establishing this outreach as a formalized program will enhance the campus research environment.

Establishing a Scholarly Impact Outreach Program at Georgia State University

Georgia State University is an urban research university in Atlanta, Georgia with an enrollment of 32,500 students; 6,131 of these are graduate students. There are a total of 1,144 faculty, 67% of which are tenure-track or tenured. Georgia State University Library has over 1.5 million volumes, and there are 15 subject librarians offering collection development, reference, instruction, and outreach to academic departments within the eight colleges and schools on campus.

The development of a formalized Scholarly Impact Outreach Program by the author evolved from her work as an education subject librarian. She conducted presentations on promotion and tenure tools via faculty meetings and workshops, and offered individual assistance for faculty within the College of Education. This activity inspired a targeted research guide for faculty, with a link to this guide added to the faculty information page of the library website.

Later, the author trained fellow subject librarians in offering individual assistance to the faculty in their departments, and presented general promotion and tenure workshops for GSU's Center for Instructional Innovation, as well as workshops in the library. After the author was promoted to Team Leader of Library Services for Health and Sciences, and designated as the point person for Faculty Services, the plan to pilot a formal promotion and tenure tools program targeting tenure-track faculty was realized.

Because of the success of the informal program, the author developed a proposal to establish a pilot for a formal program in the Spring 2013 semester. The proposal (see Appendix) included the following elements:

- a background and rationale for integrating the program into current services;
- aligning the program with the strategic plans of the university and the library to show relevance and correlation;
- a timeline to articulate activity and dates;
- assessment activity during and post implementation;
- post-implementation activity, such as compilation of assessment data into a report; and
- next steps for implementation in future semesters, pending success of pilot.

Once the initial draft of the proposal was complete, it was reviewed by fellow team leaders and the author's supervisor before submission to the Dean of Libraries for review and approval. Upon approval, the proposal was presented to the subject librarians, with information added to the library's internal wiki. An internal LibGuide on scholarly impact outreach was also developed for subject librarians.

Training was conducted for the subject librarians to ensure understanding of and ease with the scholarly impact tools for presentations and consultations with faculty. This involved not only a demonstration of each scholarly impact tool and information about upcoming workshops for faculty, but reiterating the concepts behind the program itself and the benefits of faculty participation. Beyond the training, librarians could contact the author with any questions or assistance with specific faculty queries.

To promote the newly formalized program, the author executed various marketing strategies to motivate faculty participation. The best way to market services to faculty is through the subject librarians, who have the most direct connection to the faculty and are familiar with the promotion guidelines customized to their departments. Subject librarians were asked to refer faculty to the Promotion and Tenure Tools LibGuide and

communicate their availability for consults. They also communicated the workshop date and included the link to register, which was set up via Eventbrite (<http://www.eventbrite.com>), an event promotion website. A useful feature of Eventbrite includes an organizer email notification of the name and email of each registrant. The information was then used to create a list of attendees with department designations before each workshop.

Three workshops were offered, one each by subject cluster: Arts and Humanities, Sciences, Social Sciences. There were 21 total attendees: seven from Arts and Humanities, five from Sciences, and nine from Social Sciences, with most of the attendees on track to apply for promotion to Associate Professor within one to two years. A large number of attendees (81%) learned about the workshop from their subject librarian. The percentage of those that would recommend the workshop to colleagues was 86.7%; and significantly, 90% reported that the workshop and other promotion and tenure activity comprising the program should be a standard library service. Based on the positive results of the survey and subsequent approval by library administration, the program continued.

In the 2014-2015 academic year, the program's name was changed from Promotion and Tenure Outreach to Scholarly Impact Outreach in order to incorporate all campus researchers, including graduate students, and to include usage of the tools beyond promotion and tenure review. This change was also based on the increase in the faculty use of impact data beyond promotion and tenure, and because more impact tools became available or were acquired by Georgia State. Graduate students were added into this program based on an increase in graduate student consults regarding the application of scholarly impact data in identifying top researchers, articles, or journals for their research. It was also realized that graduate students pursuing academia as a career would benefit from early knowledge of these tools for application with their own promotion and tenure in the future. The LibGuide was revised to reflect the new scope. Workshops by subject cluster were offered in sets of three over the semester as a plan to increase campus interest and attendance, and to allow for frequent promotion. A general workshop date for all disciplines was also offered in the summer.

Scholarly Impact Tools LibGuide

The LibGuide (<http://research.library.gsu.edu/si>) created by the author is organized by type of metric and includes source links with descriptions and help guide URLs. The metric categories consist of:

- article citation counts (e.g., PsycINFO, PubMed, Google Scholar), which give a basic number of how many times an article has been cited and the ability to click to view those citations;
- article-level metrics (e.g., Social Science Research Network (SSRN), Public Library of Science (PLOS), and BioMed Central), which provide citation counts and other information, such as highly accessed, downloaded, or cited;

- author-level metrics (e.g., Web of Science, Publish or Perish), which offers in a few clicks a comprehensive report of an author's work, such as the h-index (a formula based on author works with the most citations) and much more, which is ideal for promotion and tenure review;
- journal-level metrics (e.g., Journal Citation Reports, Google Scholar Metrics), which offer data by journal; and
- altmetrics (e.g., ResearchGate, Academia.edu, Figshare, social media outlets), which are an emerging form of data focusing on impact from social media and not from traditional publications.

This guide is used as a template for the workshops to demonstrate and discuss the tools, emphasizing their one-stop location.

Current Reach

The Scholarly Impact Outreach Program has a presence in various locations of the Library's website (<http://library.gsu.edu/>) and strategic planning endeavors:

- The Scholarly Impact Tools research guide (<http://research.library.gsu.edu/si>) is listed on the Information for You: Faculty page of the University Library website. This guide had 3,000 views in the 2014-2015 academic year.
- The Scholarly Impact workshops are listed in the Workshops section on the Library Instruction page of the Library website.
- Working with academic departments in the area of scholarly impact is a 2015 research and engagement department goal option in the research engagement category for subject librarians.

Challenges

As programming is established and expanded, there are inevitable hits and misses, with a need to adjust and evaluate accordingly. There were both internal (library) and external (community) challenges experienced by the Scholarly Impact Outreach Program in the last two years. Internally, there were some issues with subject librarian buy-in, probably exacerbated by the fact that this type of assistance and programming was not mandated or specifically built into job descriptions and annual goals. Although this was becoming a growing standard service evidenced by faculty interest and consults, it was generally not recognized by the library as such. Despite the overall interest in the workshops, the number of registrants did not yield the same number of attendees, perhaps due to their own buy-in issues with how this information is relevant individually, within their department, and within their discipline. Time and workload constraints are other possible prohibitive factors. The low numbers may also have been caused by the unusual inclement weather which occurred in the winter months that created scheduling backlogs and time constraints. Additionally, aforementioned internal buy-in issues may have impacted the external buy-in. All of these issues will inform strategies for future programming, along with the need for ongoing review and adjustment.

Next Steps for 2015-2016 Scholarly Impact Programming

The author is in the process of exploring new strategies and activities to enhance the Scholarly Impact Outreach Program visibility and participation in the 2015-2016 academic year:

- Record modules or clips discussing the components of the bibliometric and altmetric tools, as well as scholarly impact concepts. The modules or clips would then be added to the Scholarly Impact Tools LibGuide, and promoted through the University Library blog and through social media. Tracking will be conducted by the author to assess usage.
- Conduct a scholarly impact needs assessment of faculty and graduate students. The assessment survey would be housed on the Scholarly Impact Tools LibGuide and promoted by the subject librarians to their respective departments. Questions will focus on knowledge and usage of the library's programming to date with feedback as to additional ways in which the library may support scholarly impact endeavors in the future. Doing so will offer an effective analysis of the program's reach and yield significant indicators for progression of the program.
- Partner with faculty-based offices on campus to build a campus presence regarding the library's role in faculty scholarly impact to increase reach and participation.
- Promote the program directly to college/school deans and department chairs, offering to conduct workshops at locations within the academic departments.

Conclusion

Developing and implementing a Scholarly Impact Outreach Program is essential for the 21st century academic library to effectively support faculty and graduate student research. As with any program that continues past the pilot year, it is important to regularly evaluate its components, conduct participant assessment, and continue researching scholarly impact tool-based products, library and information science literature, and social media discussions in order to consistently meet evolving researcher needs and to effectively build it into a recognized campus program. Also, integrating scholarly impact programming activity into librarian responsibilities will facilitate new roles and opportunities and raise the library's research engagement profile within the campus community.

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Suggested Readings

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Appendix

Proposal for Promotion and Tenure Outreach (PTO) Program

Rationale

Teaching faculty currently face great expectations as they work towards promotion and tenure achievement. As part of their portfolio presentation, faculty must show significant evidence of scholarly impact beyond the traditional publication numbers and citation counts, both of which are now considered to be of lesser impact in the current bibliometric literature. Thanks to the increase in subscription database and software application tools featuring multiple indices and other statistical data, faculty have the opportunity to create a comprehensive evidence of scholarly impact within the narrative statement of their portfolios.

Subject librarians are in a prime position as experts of research databases and software to promote, present, and guide faculty in the use of these tools. This activity is termed as promotion and tenure outreach (PTO) and defined as the act of librarians partnering with tenure-track teaching faculty to provide evidence of scholarly impact for tenure and/or promotion review. By extracting and manipulating data from these tools, faculty will yield a more substantial case for promotion and/or tenure, and subject librarians will advance their support of faculty research and demonstrate value. Another significant advantage is that PTO can be incorporated into existing faculty outreach with no additional resources. The coordinator of this program (the author) will oversee subject librarian training and activity, offer regular discussion, and conduct a program assessment at the end of the academic year.

Implementing PTO also speaks to the following components of the Library and GSU Strategic Plans, as well as the Library's values:

From the [GSU Library Strategic Initiatives](#)

- The University Library will use new, emerging, and established technologies to support the research, teaching, and learning of faculty and students.
- The University Library will enhance its research culture to support the University's distinctive, campus, city-based and global programs and initiatives.

From the [GSU Strategic Plan](#)

- **Goal 3: Become a leading public research university addressing the most challenging issues of the 21st century.**
-INITIATIVE 1: Enhance a research culture.
...recognize the importance of...supporting productive scholars across all ranks and disciplines, pre- and post-tenure.

From the [GSU Library Values](#)

- Collaboration. We establish partnerships and promote open communication.
- Innovation. We are innovative, flexible and creative.

Thus far, PTO activity at GSU Library has consisted of the creation of two LibGuides which are regularly updated (Promotion and Tenure Tools, available on the Faculty section of the library's website; and Promotion and Tenure Outreach, an internal guide for librarians) and subject librarian promotion, as well as some individual assistance. A few workshops have been presented at the department, library, and campus level. However, positive feedback from GSU faculty along with current trends in higher education suggests that it should be expanded and formalized to reach all faculty as a regular, ongoing service. Doing so strongly supports the overarching goals of GSU Library to become a true research library, and GSU, a true research institution.

-Developed September 2012.

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