Widespread academic efforts address the scholarly communication crisis

The results of a survey of academic institutions

by Randall Ward, David Michaelis, Robert Murdoch, Brian Roberts, and Julia Blixrud

I n the fall of 2002, librarians at Brigham Young University's (BYU) Harold B. Lee Library were examining how to breathe life back into a scholarly communication crisis symposium that had been postponed. A research project was proposed and funded to explore what other academic institutions across the country have done by way of hosting similar events. The project would examine the format of formal gatherings and their intended audiences and determine the outcomes of such events.

The library, in collaboration with the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC), conducted a survey to determine what efforts (specifically forums, symposia, and events) have been held across the country to advance awareness and action relative to the scholarly communication crisis. Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and will be reported at the ALA Annual Conference in Toronto and at other venues.

Julia Blixrud, SPARC assistant director of public programs, provided the names and contact information for SPARC member institutions in the United States and Canada. SPARC's aim is to assist in making scholarly communication more affordable and accessible as well as to provide alternative avenues for the publication of scholarly communication.

Randall Ward, new science librarian faculty at BYU, led this project with assistance from several colleagues and Julia Blixrud. A survey was developed to assess the success of scholarly communication events and programs sponsored by the 200 SPARC member institutions. Over the next five months, 170 telephone interviews were held, mostly with head university librarians or their associate librarians (receiving a response rate of 85 percent). The survey also identified characteristics and best practices among the survey group. The interviews averaged about 15 minutes each.

The questionnaire was structured in a flowchart format, with the first question asking whether an event had been held at the institution. If the answer was yes, a set of questions was asked to determine the characteristics and subsequent effects of the event. If the answer was no, a short set of questions was asked to determine whether an event or other activities were planned for the future.

Efforts were made to ask questions that required a quantitative answer (usually on a scale of one to seven). Those being surveyed

About the authors

Randall K. Ward is science librarian, David Michaelis is research associate, Robert Murdoch is assistant university librarian, and Brian Roberts is process improvement specialist at Brigham Young University, e-mail: randy_ward@byu.edu, djm69@email.byu.edu, robert_murdoch@byu.edu, brian_roberts@byu.edu, and Julia Blixrud is assistant director of public programs for SPARC, e-mail: jblix@arl.org

were also asked a series of questions that were more qualitative in nature, resulting in answers that were in the form of comments, suggestions, and observations.

Survey results

The data will be analyzed with two aims: to be reported as "progress to date" in efforts to solve the crisis and to identify the best practices that have led to the greatest perception of success as judged by those being surveyed. A summary of the findings will be presented at the ACRL/SPARC Forum at the ALA Annual Conference, Saturday, June 21, 4:30 to 6:00 p.m. There will be extensive analysis of the data with the results and observations being published subsequently.

Some of the preliminary findings suggest that the scholarly communication crisis has been addressed by libraries so far with limited success. Early on there were questions of where to even start, but now, several years later, there are a number of common feelings regarding educating the faculty to the issues. Some of these common perceptions are listed below.

• Many libraries report that one-time events without follow-up are not the best approach. Not only is extensive follow-up needed, but a focused effort at various department levels and with department "leaders" is needed. Because each department's faculty publishes differently, involvement at the grassroots level is most effective.

• Smaller institutions look to the larger ones to address the problem, yet there are some larger institutions that have large enough budgets that the scholarly communication crisis does not affect them. However, many large schools are making great efforts in this area. Perhaps this small-versus-large-institution perspective needs to be examined more.

• The more the library and faculty work together, the more the faculty become aware of the issues and their role in the solution. Some institutions have had success with significant collaboration among the library, faculty, university press, and even the museum.

• There is a wide variation in the levels at which the crisis has been addressed at the different institutions, ranging from little or no effort to major efforts, including ongoing faculty/library/administration collaboration and solutions such as D-Space. Likewise, interviewees reported varying levels of suc-

cess for the efforts that were made. A few report changes in the tenure-granting process (with regards to what publications are accepted), in being able to set up alternative journals, and in getting support for institutional repository initiatives. Some report that faculty editors have approached journals, complaining about the high costs and inflation. One reported, "If I would have suggested to the faculty senate three years ago [dropping] all the paper subscriptions and just go digital, they would have gone nuts and laughed and rejected the idea. Now, since the faculty have seen and used the electronic, and haven't even used a paper copy for the last year and a half, I brought up the idea, and it went through and all went to electronic."

• Others have not begun to raise the issue because they feel overwhelmed by its scope, lack of time and resources, or absence of support from the administration and faculty.

• Participation in scholarly communication events is greater when high-ranking administrators and department leaders extend invitations to the intended audience. Support from the provost is essential.

• It appears in many instances that the institutional administration expects the library to take a stance and lead the efforts. The library needs the administration's support but has to take a lead role in addressing the issue.

• What is done on each campus should be specific to the needs of that particular campus. For instance, one interviewee suggested that a large research institution should approach its faculty about publishing habits, but that this strategy would be much different from how a smaller (or more liberal arts) institution might approach the issue.

• Among some of those surveyed, there is a view that little has changed so far in faculty publishing habits; however, they are more aware of scholarly communication crisis issues. There is a difference in perception among junior and senior faculty. Due to concerns over obtaining tenure, junior faculty are understandably more concerned than senior faculty with publishing in the more traditional and prestigious journals, which are often more expensive. Also, some faculty hold various misconceptions, such as substantial numbers believing that going to electronic journals will solve the problem. Some senior faculty have reported that they realize the need to

E-journal management: clear & simple

pers are individually priced, and pricing is available in their online catalog. Custom-written papers are priced based on the difficulty of the subject matter. Prices range from $19.95 to $35.00 per page. *Access:* http://a1-termpaper.com/.

• **Cheathouse.com.** This subscription-based service requires customers to pay annual subscription fee. Cheathouse claims to have over 12,500 essays of varying qualities, and charges $49.95 for one full year of access, $14.95 for a month, and $3.95 for a week. The site warns students about the dangers of turning in essays exactly the way they get it from the paper mills. Students are being advised to wise up to the dangers of being caught for plagiarism. *Access:* http://www.cheathouse.com/.

• **Genius Papers for Sale.** This is a subscription service for free papers that professes to have in store over 100,000 papers. The site also provides custom service. A custom paper requiring rush delivery costs about $34 per page and a standard delivery, taking between seven and ten days, costs $20 per page. *Access:* http://www.geniuspapers.com/.

• **Term Paper Highways.** This service provides professional technical custom services and charges as much as $6.66 per page. *Access:* http://www.papershighway.com/aboutus.htm.

Links to bibliographies

• **Plagiarism: Exploring the Issues.** Compiled by Cindy Harrigan from the Patrick Power Library at St. Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. This is a great bibliography, but it has not been updated since August 2001. *Access:* http://www.stmarys.ca/administration/library/plagbiblio.html.

• **Plagiarism: Keeping Up with the Cheats.** This great bibliography, prepared by John Royce, library director at Robert College in Istanbul, Turkey, includes articles and plagiarism detection and prevention resources. It alerts users to sites that are no longer active by leaving them in the bibliography, but shading them gray. *Access:* http://vm.robcol.k12.tr/~jroyce/plagbibl2.html#papers at d Prevention.

• **Plagiarism in Cyberspace.** This Web site, titled "Plagiarism in Cyberspace: Sources, Prevention, Detection, and Other Information," was prepared in April 2002 by Laura M. Boyer at the California State University Stanislaus Library. It includes articles, book, links to articles on the Web, and news for faculty about plagiarism. *Access:// *http://wwwlibrary.csustan.edu/lboyer/plagiarism/plagiarism3bibliog.htm.

Notes

1. Oxford English Dictionary. Ed. J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989. OED Online. Oxford University Press. 8 May 2003. http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/00181778. ■

---

publish in alternative or electronic venues, but can't "in good conscience" recommend the junior faculty they mentor to do so.

• Many librarians view their position to be much less influential than faculty in solving the problem. It was reported that there is a widespread lack of understanding among the faculty as to how the library works, is affected by the crisis, and has to deal with the problems it creates.

• One interviewee mentioned significant success and enthusiasm when graduate students were approached and informed of the issues. This seems to be a more future-oriented strategy, with the library hoping at some point down the road the education will pay off.

• Institutional repositories may offer hope. However, a number of misperceptions and uncertainties remain regarding their value and implementation. For instance, some believe repositories will make valuable proprietary information available to the public.

• An interesting observation made by those being interviewed is that institutions will likely need to subscribe to both the traditional prestigious (more expensive) publications as well as the alternative venues for some time. The likelihood of doing a quantum switch is small, unless the alternative venues become robust and numerous enough that a punctual change can be made. This puts an extra financial burden on libraries to carry both the traditional and the alternative indefinitely.

• As might be expected, a number of those being surveyed expressed concern over the amount of publishing power held in the hands of so few publishers. Monopolistic practices seem to be common and appear to be increasing.

Although many of the observations reported above were derived from the qualitative responses, it is hoped that more quantitative responses will be presented in Toronto. ■