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SCIG

University of Colorado Libraries' Scholarly Communication Interest Group

In summer 2019, the University of Colorado Libraries created a Scholarly Communication Interest Group (SCIG) to exchange knowledge about and promote services for scholarly communication. This interest group replaced a group that had created and managed an online tutorial titled "Publish, Not Perish," which was being discontinued. The libraries' deans and directors called for a new University of Colorado (CU) System–level Scholarly Communication Interest Group that would coordinate cross-campus efforts. The interest group would

- consist of one member per library in the CU System;
- meet regularly beginning at the start of fiscal year 2020 (July 1, 2020);
- assess current needs across campus and set its own goals and agenda; and
- serve as a continuous group that can meet changing needs rather than providing a single output.

The five libraries in the CU System are the University Libraries at the University of Colorado-Boulder (CU-Boulder), Kraemer Family Library at the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs (UCCS), Auraria Library for the University of Colorado-Denver (CU-Denver), Wise Law Library, and Strauss Health Sciences Library (CU-Anschutz). Representatives for the group either volunteered or were nominated by their dean or director. In 2019, only one representative had official responsibilities for scholarly communication, hence the group consisted mainly of librarians with a small responsibility for scholarly communication or merely an interest in it. Other group members had responsibilities in electronic resources, research services, acquisitions, instruction, and/or faculty services. This made for a group with diverse backgrounds, interests, experiences, and responsibilities.

Establishing the group

During our first meetings, the group developed a charge, defined scholarly communication, and developed goals and objectives.

We established our charge as assessing scholarly communication needs; sharing interests, goals, and knowledge; and working together to streamline, minimize duplication, and collaborate on scholarly communication projects across CU system campuses and libraries. Our goals included identifying scholarly communication needs on the four campuses; building toolkits, media, and web content about scholarly communication; and creating workshops around past "Publish, Not Perish" content and authors' rights.

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Projects

SCIG worked on four major projects: a literature review of needs assessments other libraries had conducted, a *CU Connections* (a cross-campus news publication for faculty and staff) article about the profits of the publishing industry, International Open Access (OA) Week projects, and authors' rights workshops.

One of the first projects we undertook was to develop an assessment plan to uncover scholarly communication needs on each campus. First, we conducted a literature review in 2019–2020. We compiled research on how other institutions had assessed their scholarly communication needs and any previous assessments done on our campuses. Then, after discussions about the scan within SCIG, individual members started to create or created an assessment plan based on the interests and needs of their campus while also factoring in their library's ability to implement a plan. These assessment plans included identifying groups and individuals on the campuses that we wanted to assess, developing survey and focus-group questions, and outlining a timeline for the assessments. The original goal was to implement all assessments in 2020 or 2021; however, with the COVID-19 pandemic starting in early 2020, most of the plans, or at least the full plans, were not carried out until much later, if at all.

In March 2020, Christopher Bell, then a faculty member at UCCS, wrote an article in *CU Connections* in which he decried for-profit journals and their reliance on faculty's free labor writing and reviewing articles.[1] SCIG seized the opportunity to respond with an article supporting his view and promoting resources and services the CU Libraries provide to support OA.[2] We highlighted financial resources to pay APCs, workshops and consultations to learn about authors' rights and publishing options, transformative agreements, and institutional repositories that host and disseminate OA articles and other creative and scholarly works. Bell's article provided an unexpected and welcome opening for SCIG to promote OA and scholarly communication services at the system level. The article's impact was a little muted because of the pandemic. With global interruptions to research and publishing, the demand for OA support was low across the campuses. However, as research is returning to normal, SCIG members have seen increased questions regarding OA funding and transformative agreements.

For International Open Access Week 2020, the group focused on developing media content to educate faculty and students on the cost of paywalls and the benefits of OA. A shared file was used to pool the resources we created: a quiz comparing the costs of luxury goods and real estate to database subscriptions, interactive maps showing countries in which an OA article from a university had been cited, a library blog post on how OA supports equity and inclusion, and a video explaining the price a researcher would have had to pay to access research articles without access to the university library. The group was able to exchange tips on acquiring the data needed to make some of these visualizations, demonstrate techniques for visualizing citation data, and give and receive feedback on social media strategies.

In early 2021, we decided to pursue a cross-campus workshop focusing on author's rights. CU-Boulder already offered a form of this workshop, but the group decided that creating a shared workshop would help us all build our expertise around copyright and authors' rights and promote that knowledge across the four campuses without duplicating our efforts. Each librarian was responsible for developing and leading a section of the workshop: copyright law basics, the importance of retaining authors' rights, publication contract negotiations, OA

alternatives, and an activity examining contracts from common journals. The first workshop offered in Spring 2021 attracted 11 attendees from multiple campuses. However, SCIG felt the workshop did not flow well, and we ran out of time at the end. We also learned that we needed to shorten some sections, like copyright, and incorporate more participant discussion. We revised the workshop and offered it again in Fall 2021 to an audience of 25 attendees. The second workshop flowed better. Offering the workshop increased all SCIG members' confidence around authors' rights, and the workshop helped us market our expertise and authority to our campuses.

Benefits of the group

As Erin Elizabeth Owens found in her 2021 study, the frequency of experiencing impostor phenomenon among scholarly communication librarians was "much higher than among college librarians more broadly."[3] Respondents to Owens's survey indicated the leading reason for this lack of confidence was having too many responsibilities made worse by a constantly changing publishing landscape, with one participant remarking, "No one can maintain top skills in all of the areas. Even maintaining top expertise in one of the areas is difficult in the faster evolving areas."[4] The difficulty in achieving and maintaining knowledge in the many areas of scholarly communication can feel overwhelming. Only one of the librarians in SCIG is exclusively a scholarly communication librarian, with the rest of us balancing multiple other roles within our libraries, amplifying the sense of having too many areas to develop expertise in without enough time. However, SCIG ameliorates that feeling by providing a venue for asking questions and sharing knowledge. No one in the group is expected to be an expert in everything related to scholarly communication. SCIG functions as a form of informal mentorship, especially for those of us who are new to scholarly communication or new hires generally.

Another benefit we found was that when starting a new scholarly communication initiative, it was helpful to learn about others' perspectives, experiences, and successes so as not to reinvent the wheel. Discussing our experiences also developed a sense of accountability, especially for those of us who often have to backburner our scholarly communication work in favor of other job duties. Meetings begin by checking in with each librarian to hear what they're doing on their campus, which serves as a monthly reminder to move initiatives along on our campuses and not let scholarly communication get left behind other priorities.

Challenges

The main challenge for the group has been agreeing on projects and approaches with the different scholarly communication resources and needs on each campus. As mentioned earlier, scholarly communication makes up a different percentage of each librarian's job, and what is possible for one library, with a librarian whose role is primarily scholarly communication and can form a committee to support International Open Access Week, looks very different than what might be achievable for another library, where scholarly communication makes up only 10% of a single librarian's job. Some of this also stems from the differences between the campuses we serve. As a Research 1 (R1),[5] CU-Boulder has greater needs around scholarly communication, both in type and amount of services required. UCCS is a recent R2,[6] CU-Anschutz is primarily a medical school, Auraria Library on the Denver campus serves three schools (CU-Denver, Metropolitan State University of Denver,

and Community College of Denver) and needs to balance the needs of all three, and the Wise Law Library exclusively supports the law school. For these campuses both the needs around scholarly communication and the infrastructure to support them are still emerging, and this means some shared projects and initiatives the group has considered have been unrealistic or unnecessary for one or more campuses.

Group changes and the future

Another, more recent challenge has been keeping the group together. For the first two years, membership stayed the same, even through the COVID-19 pandemic when priorities shifted at the individual and library levels. We started discussing an expansion of the group in summer 2021 to include one or two additional members at each library; however, not every library had someone in a position that would "make sense" to join the group. Then in fall 2021 a founding member of SCIG left for a position at another institution. Another member announced their retirement. Then two members announced they would be going on extended leave. With these changes, the group went on hiatus from late 2021 to early summer 2022. Joining together again in summer 2022, with two fewer members, we took the time to reevaluate who may be interested in serving in the group, including expansion ideas (e.g., more than one member from each library). Additionally, with reorganizations and strategic planning processes occurring at several of the remaining members' libraries, it is unclear how jobs will change as well as the support for scholarly communication from each library. However, we look forward to welcoming new members in 2023 and offering them the support, collaboration, resource sharing, and collegiality we have enjoyed from this group so far.

Lessons learned

Reuniting this year has provided the group with a chance to reflect on lessons learned. Group projects are difficult given the differing resources, librarian time, and needs of each campus. For example, our plans for cross-campus needs assessments fell through because of the pandemic and the struggle to create assessments that were feasible and useful for all campuses. What has been most successful, however, is the group's more informal work of sharing resources, knowledge, and community. We have reduced the need to duplicate work already happening on other campuses, increased our own familiarity and comfort with several scholarly communication issues, and built a systemwide support group for raising questions, exploring ideas, and offering feedback.

Groups like SCIG could be useful for other libraries looking to support scholarly communication, or even to support other services like instruction or collection development. Informal, on-the-ground groups like this one allow members to share day-to-day knowledge of their positions and create informal networks and mentoring that more formal, high-level groups can lack. Without broad concept- and advocacy-driven goals, SCIG was able to focus on the minutiae of the work itself in a way that allowed all members with differing expertise and experience to contribute and grow their skills in practical ways. As we have been writing this piece, we have often reflected on simply how helpful it was to hear from someone else about how they did their job. We encourage other library communities, consortia, or multi-campus universities to create these smaller, more informal groups that will benefit the individuals, libraries, and institutions in addressing scholarly communication issues. ✄

Notes

1. Christopher Bell, "The Time has Come to Stop Supporting For-Profit Journals," CU Faculty Voices, *CUConnections,* March 19, 2020, https://connections.cu.edu/stories/cu-faculty-voices-time-has-come-stop-supporting-profit-journals.

2. Danielle Ostendorf, Melissa Cantrell, Jane Thompson, Rhonda Glazier, Susan Vandagriff, Kelly McCusker, Sommer Browning and Katy DiVittorio, "CU System Libraries Support Open Access," CU Faculty Voices, *CUConnections,* April 23, 2020, https://connections.cu.edu/stories/cu-faculty-voices-cu-system-libraries-support-open-access.

3. Erin Elizabeth Owens, "Impostor Phenomenon and Skills Confidence among Scholarly Communications Librarians in the United States," *College & Research Libraries* 82, no. 4 (2021): 506.

4. Owens, "Imposter Phenomenon," 508.

5. "Basic Classification Description," Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, accessed September 2, 2022, https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu/classification_descriptions/basic.php.

6. "Basic Classification Description," Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education.