Leveraging Librarian Liaison Expertise in a New Consultancy Role

Mark A. Eddy [a,*], Daniela Solomon [b]

[a] Research Services Librarian, Kelvin Smith Library, Room 201-J, 11055 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44106-7151, Case Western Reserve University, United States
[b] Research Services Librarian, Kelvin Smith Library, Room 201-L, 11055 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44106-7151, Case Western Reserve University, United States

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a case study of an advisory role that librarians successfully developed with faculty editors to increase the visibility and readership of an open access scholarly publication. The study represents an example of how expertise among liaison librarians and other library service professionals can be leveraged in new consultancy roles in support of evolving library service models. It also depicts local application of a hybrid model for librarianship that combines the functional specialist and subject librarian liaison roles in implementing advisory activities and recommendations. The liaison librarians successfully used their knowledge of scholarly communications and applied innovative bibliometric analysis to help enhance the discoverability and user experience of an online journal publication. The librarians made specific recommendations for optimizing journal website content organization, search functionality, metadata standards and marketing opportunities that were subsequently implemented by the editors and platform managers. The faculty editor places a high value on these recommendations, and the librarian advisory role continues to develop. Our study also outlines many of the essential considerations that scholar-editors and librarian advisors can use to help implement open access scholarly publishing projects successfully.

INTRODUCTION/LITERATURE REVIEW

The prevalence of electronic scholarly content provided by traditional publishing vendors and, increasingly, by open access content providers, continues to be among the main factors driving transformative changes in academic library spaces, services and overall institutional presence (Council on Library and Information Resources, 2008). These and other trends have had a dramatic effect in incentivizing libraries to continually assess and modify their collection and service offerings, scan for new partnership opportunities, optimize their internal organizational structures and workflows, and craft strategic goals that fit well with those of the parent institution. Among the strategies for reinventing and diversifying library service capabilities for teaching and research, librarians increasingly are leveraging their expert knowledge of trends in scholarly communication, journal performance analytics, and management of the research lifecycle in order to create new and highly valued advisory roles and services (Bruxvoort & Fruin, 2014; Partnerships and New Roles in 21st-Century Academic Libraries: Collaborating, Embedding, and Cross-Training for the Future, 2015; Kenney, 2014).

The modern environment in academic libraries is in fact replete with opportunities to expand service, demonstrate institutional relevance, and successfully navigate the ongoing transition to the academic library of the 21st century. The scholarly communication crisis, for example, has provided libraries with the opportunity to offer critical guidance on open access and other alternative publication venues, and to develop new support services around the many inherent and unique considerations for copyright, licensing, digitization, and content curation in these venues. Libraries also now partner directly with scholars in the process of content creation and library-based publication (Case, 2008). The capacity of libraries to offer such services is nevertheless governed by local campus priorities, library budgets and staffing, and expertise among functional specialists that may or may not be available in-house. As a result, liaison librarians who provide direct research support to academic departments and programs play an increasingly expanded role in facilitating the scholarly communication and publication process (Hansson & Johannesson, 2013).

To support new and unique user needs, library professionals are moving beyond their traditional roles, responsibilities, and subject specialties to the extent that the "liaison subject specialist" and "functional specialist" service models are increasingly being merged (Jaguszewski & Williams, 2013; Miller & Pressley, 2015). Strategic planning initiatives now may call for liaison librarians to serve as functional specialists themselves in a particular area of expertise, and also to marshal additional specialized expertise among colleagues, through professional networks, across subject specializations, and within the confines of current library staffing and budgets, in order to meet new service goals (Karasmanis & Murphy, 2014). The present case study describes how two librarian colleagues applied this hybrid library liaison service

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: mark.eddy@case.edu (M.A. Eddy), dxs594@case.edu (D. Solomon).

model to support the scholar-editors of a locally published open access journal. Liaison librarians at the main campus library had previously been tasked with becoming in-house experts on topics of interest in the campus community, collaborating more thoroughly within and across library service teams, and leveraging expertise in and outside the library in order to provide support for newly identified user needs.

The librarians in this case created a new and unique advisory role for a Sociology faculty member and his scholar-editor associates that was also in keeping with library-wide strategic initiatives. The development of this role stemmed in part from each librarian's professional background and interests, as well as from previously established service relationships with faculty at the home institution. The liaison librarian to the Department of Sociology utilized graduate training in social science and the humanities, years of experience with supporting several other social and behavioral sciences programs, and an established network of faculty and graduate student relationships in the department, to effectively support curriculum, research, and grant writing projects. The liaison librarian had also previously helped the Sociology faculty-editor with these department-wide initiatives, and with vetting journal publications for his own research article submissions. The liaison librarian co-author in the present study served as the library's resident expert in bibliometrics and open access scholarly communication trends. For the advisory collaboration, this librarian also drew from professional experience in engineering librarianship, a longstanding passion for bibliometrics and scholarship metrics as applied to faculty promotion and tenure activities, as well as direct experience with significant differences in access to scholarly resources across several world regions, both before and after the advent of open access journal publishing in 2002.

Together the two librarians applied and successfully leveraged their combined knowledge of local publishing initiatives, broad trends in scholarly communication, user experience research, and bibliometrics, to help advance the discoverability, usability, quality and overall prestige of a locally published academic journal edited and managed by the Sociology Department faculty member. Recommendations for optimizing website content organization, search functionality, metadata standards and marketing opportunities were subsequently implemented by the editors and platform managers who came to place a high value on librarian expertise and knowledge. The librarians also conducted analyses of journal content data in order to explore new and innovative strategies for marketing this open access publication. Data visualizations and a description of the new advisory role were also presented in a poster session at a state-wide library professional conference [*names redacted].

This study extends the discussion presented in the conference poster session and demonstrates how professional expertise and collaboration among library staff can be leveraged effectively to forge the kind of new consultancy roles now vital for success in the modern academic library environment. Our experience suggests that scholar-publishers who are new to journal platform and content management may not be fully aware of best practices for successfully launching and marketing an open access journal publication. Librarians can provide critical support in helping scholar-publishers navigate the process, and in implementing changes that contribute significantly to the fulfillment of publication mission and goals. This was especially important in the present case where the scholar-editors aspire not only to establish the journal publication as a venue for high quality research, but also to extend the core function of a scholarly publication in becoming a genuine vehicle for public good.

STUDY CASE

In early 2014 the subject librarian liaison to the Department of Sociology was contacted by a faculty member in the department regarding an open access academic society publication. The faculty member indicated that he would soon begin co-editing the publication according to newly revised goals and mission that entailed a significant expansion in scholarly communication and international outreach capabilities to engage new and diverse research communities, many of which lacked sufficient online access to published research. *Societies Without Borders* (herein referred to as SWB), the international journal of the Sociologists Without Borders association, had previously been hosted by an academic publisher using an electronic journal platform with standard features. Although the publisher had provided highly valued service to the association, the need for greater flexibility in journal content access, marketing and distribution required a fundamental change in the journal's online platform and venue, the editors decided to discontinue their relationship with the publisher after the first two years and migrate the journal content to a blog platform, because they were not yet familiar with other options. In the ensuing years, the blog format proved to be inadequate as a publication venue for an academic journal. Therefore, the faculty member sought guidance from the librarian on how best to migrate journal content data to an open source journal management platform, one that would host the journal website and streamline article submission workflows. The faculty member and his managing editors had no prior experience with online journal management platforms and also faced limited options for securing an open access platform provider. After consulting with the liaison librarian, it was determined that a third party journal management platform provided for the research community by the home institution (but not directly by the library) was the best venue for faculty editor needs.

In August of 2014 the editors began the journal content migration and website redesign process with the help of platform provider representatives and librarian advisors. The subject liaison librarian had by this time enlisted a librarian colleague with considerable knowledge of open access publication practices and bibliometrics to join the process and contribute recommendations. In reviewing possible strategies for increasing journal readership, the librarians agreed that the success of an open access journal depends foremost on raising content discoverability, increasing article quality, and adopting best practices in journal publication and management. Recognizing the vital connection between readership and quality of authorship in a journal publication, the librarians expanded the "journal as a service provider to authors" model outlined by Björk & Oorni (Björk & Öörni, 2009) to include readers as well. The librarians used the four categories in the model - infrastructure, readership, prestige, and performance – to identify actionable elements within each category that could be added or improved to increase reader interest in the journal. The expanded model has been effective in determining how the librarians' knowledge and expertise can best be applied in advising the editors and supporting the shared goal of maximizing reader interest in the publication. The diagram below (Fig. 1) represents the librarians' application of the expanded service provider model to their advisory planning process.

Drawing in particular upon their combined knowledge of scholarly communication, user experience, and bibliometrics, the librarians determined that they could advise the editors effectively in all four categories of the service provider model. First, they addressed the readership category with recommendations for website layout and appearance, content discoverability and marketing opportunities. Second, with regard to the importance of solid journal infrastructure in attracting contributors, the librarians suggested modifications to further streamline the author/contributor submission workflow and match the level of service considered standard in the industry. Third, they introduced the editors to several publication management practices that support the quality, prestige and overall performance of a journal. Fourth, the librarians have begun to plan strategies for performance analysis that will be conducted in the coming months. The current lack of a Journal Impact Factor (JIF) for SWB could present a challenge, as journals not indexed in the *Web of Science*, the database that provides and has proprietary ownership of JIFs, may face a competitive disadvantage in attracting prestigious author/contributors. Alternative performance indicators and metrics sources are currently being assessed by the librarians for their effectiveness in demonstrating SWB impact.
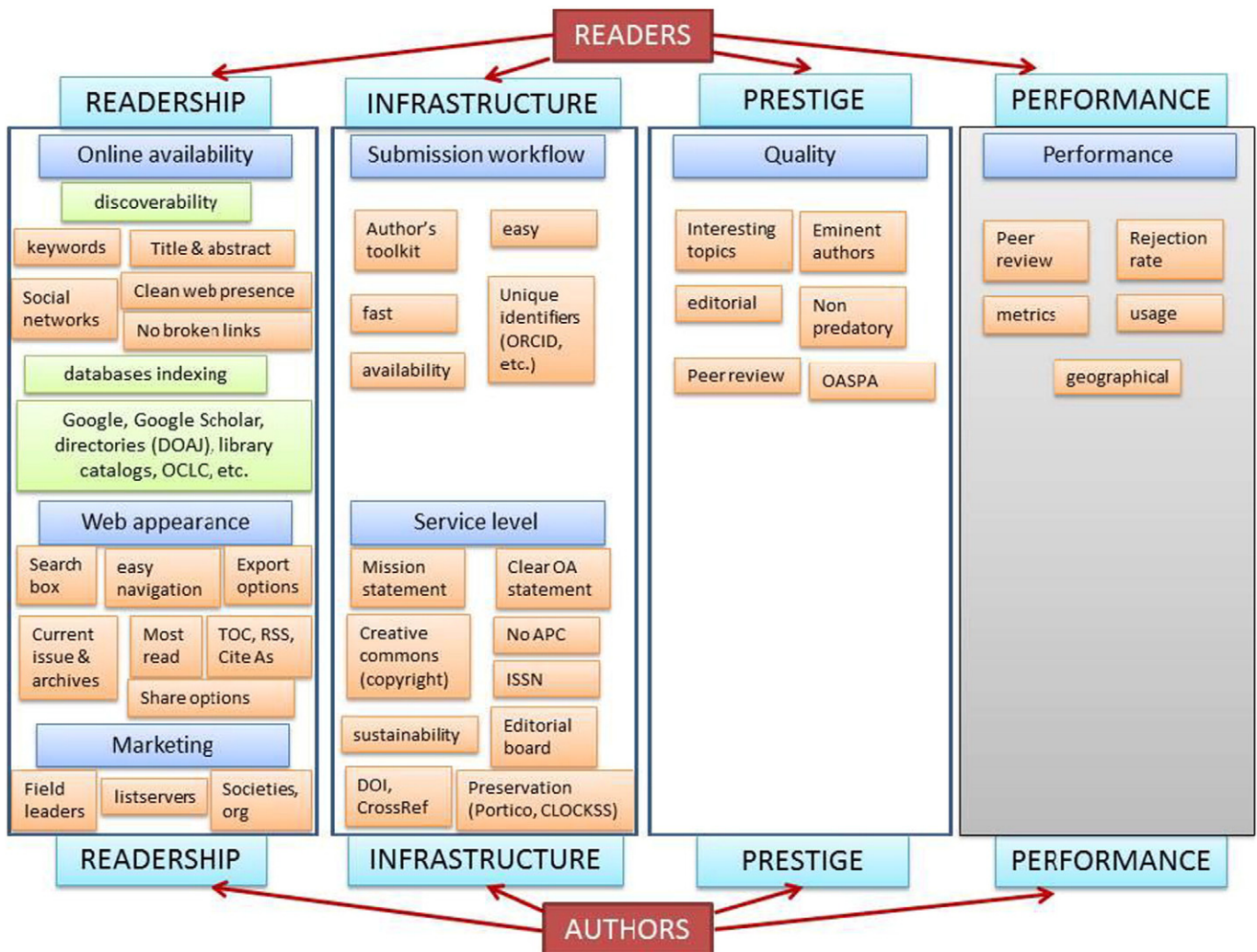
Fig. 1. Expanded "journal as a service provider" model to include readers.

METHODOLOGY & RESULTS

The librarians met periodically with the senior co-editor and two managing editors to review and explain their recommendations. They also facilitated planning meetings for the editors and platform managers to review suggested changes and web design mockups, and were also given editor-level access to the journal management platform in order to observe content and workflow revisions.

READERSHIP

In the first series of consultations the librarians advised editors on critical website design features that would improve the reader's experience. On the journal home page, for example, they recommended that the content search box, current issue table of contents, and the journal archive browse/search features, be repositioned and optimized according to established precedents from website usability research studies. For individual article record displays, the librarians recommended adding standard features such as an abstract preview, topic keyword list, formatted citation, standard author ID, RSS feed and other alerts, and content sharing capabilities via email, Google+, Twitter, and Facebook. Other suggested reader enhancements included prominent display of article view/download counts, as well as a regularly updated list of the most popular papers.

The librarians next introduced the editors to various techniques for expanding the overall discoverability of journal content on the web,

and thereby improve the readership of the publication. Discoverability depends on content availability in places where interested readers are most likely to search for information. The omnipresence of Google as a research and communication venue thus makes top ranking in a Google search essential. The librarians thus made recommendations for raising the rank of SWB content in Google search results by establishing author/contributor guidelines for well-designed titles, abstracts, and quality keywords. They also recommended that editors secure inclusion for SWB in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) as well as membership in the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA), in order to assure potential readers and contributors about the publication's non-predatory status.

To explore other potential strategies for expanding readership and discoverability, the librarians also conducted a journal co-citation bibliometric analysis on a sample of 134 SWB articles to identify the most relevant and important index databases for SWB content ingest. Co-citation analysis examines textual associations in research paper citation data, and it can be used to examine author, journal, and keyword co-citation relationships. As Small originally stated, this type of analysis tracks "the frequency with which two items of earlier literature are cited together by the later literature" (Small, 1973). Journal co-citation analysis, for example, reveals the most commonly co-cited journals in a sample of articles, which in turn indicates topical similarities that potentially may be of interest to the same readers (Fig. 2). In the present case, determining where co-cited journals appeared most frequently in abstract/citation indexes helped the librarians identify the most relevant
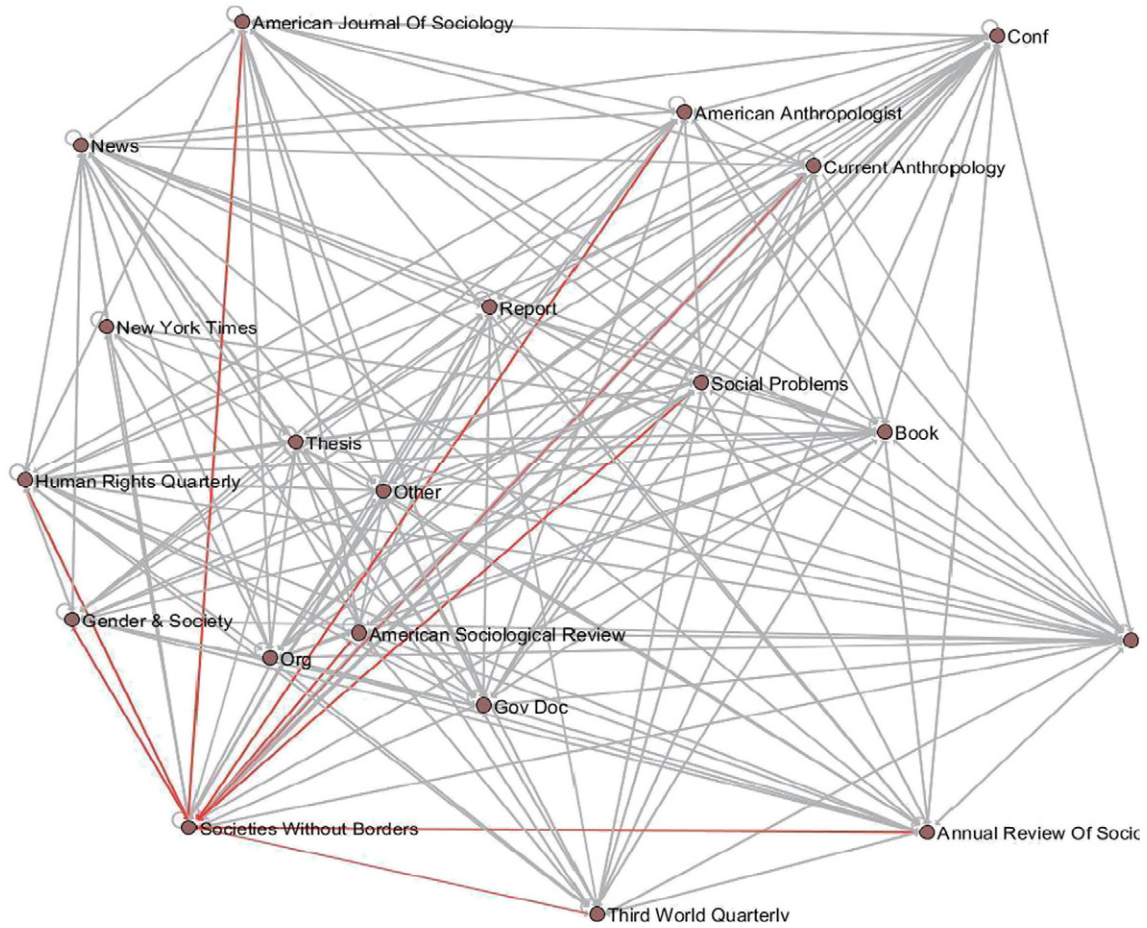
Fig. 2. Top twenty publications and source types co-cited with SWB journal Journals co-citation analysis of SWB articles was carried out using Sci2 Tool (Sci2 Team, 2009) and visualized with GUESS tool (Third World Quarterly, American Sociological Review, Current Anthropology, Annual Review of Sociology, Gender & Society, Social Problems, American Journal of Sociology, American Anthropologist, Human Rights Quarterly).

Fig. 3. Worldwide coverage of SWB authors (Google Maps, 2015).

databases to prioritize for SWB content ingest. According to the analysis, these were *SocINDEX, Web of Science, SCOPUS*, and *Gender Studies*.

The librarians also used the article sample dataset to examine the institutional affiliations and geographic location of SWB contributors (See Figs. 3 and 4). This analysis revealed that the vast majority of contributing authors was affiliated with well-established academic institutions (85 institutions in all). Only five contributing authors had non-institutional professional affiliations. U.S.-based author/contributors also far outnumbered other contributors from nineteen different countries. Taken together, these findings suggested that alternative strategies for marketing journal content to an international research community would be needed if the new journal mission was to be fulfilled. The librarians and editors together are now exploring new strategies to target specific geographic regions, research programs, research communities (institutionally based or otherwise), and individual researchers, in the effort to build a multidisciplinary global audience and research network. Pursuant to this goal, the librarians have also encouraged the editors to begin making full use of academic social networking sites such as ResearchGate (sciences) and Academia.edu (humanities) in order to advertise journal content, and encourage article contributors to do the same.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The librarians provided several recommendations for optimizing journal infrastructure. Some standard capabilities were previously provided by the academic publisher, but the editors had not yet considered them in migrating content to the new open access incarnation of the journal. The librarians therefore recommended several enhancements. They included standardizing the subject index metadata, providing a DOI number, permalink, and author unique identifier (ex. - ORCID) for each article, and exploring options for securing a preservation service such as Portico and CLOCKSS in order to ensure the long term availability of journal content. The librarians also suggested adding specific guidelines on contributor-provided metadata and citation formatting to the "author's toolkit" section of the website to help streamline the article submission process. Editors were also advised to include specific statements on the website about journal mission and research scope, Creative Commons' licensing and open access status, prominent display of the ISSN number on the website home page, and a statement that there is no article processing fee.

PRESTIGE

The librarians advised editors on resources that contribute positively to the overall prestige of online journals. Librarians explained, for example, that inclusion in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) and membership in the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA), would provide important assurances to potential readers and contributors of the journal's status as a legitimate, non-predatory venue of academic research and scholarship that follows publishing standards for scientific research. Editors were also advised to include
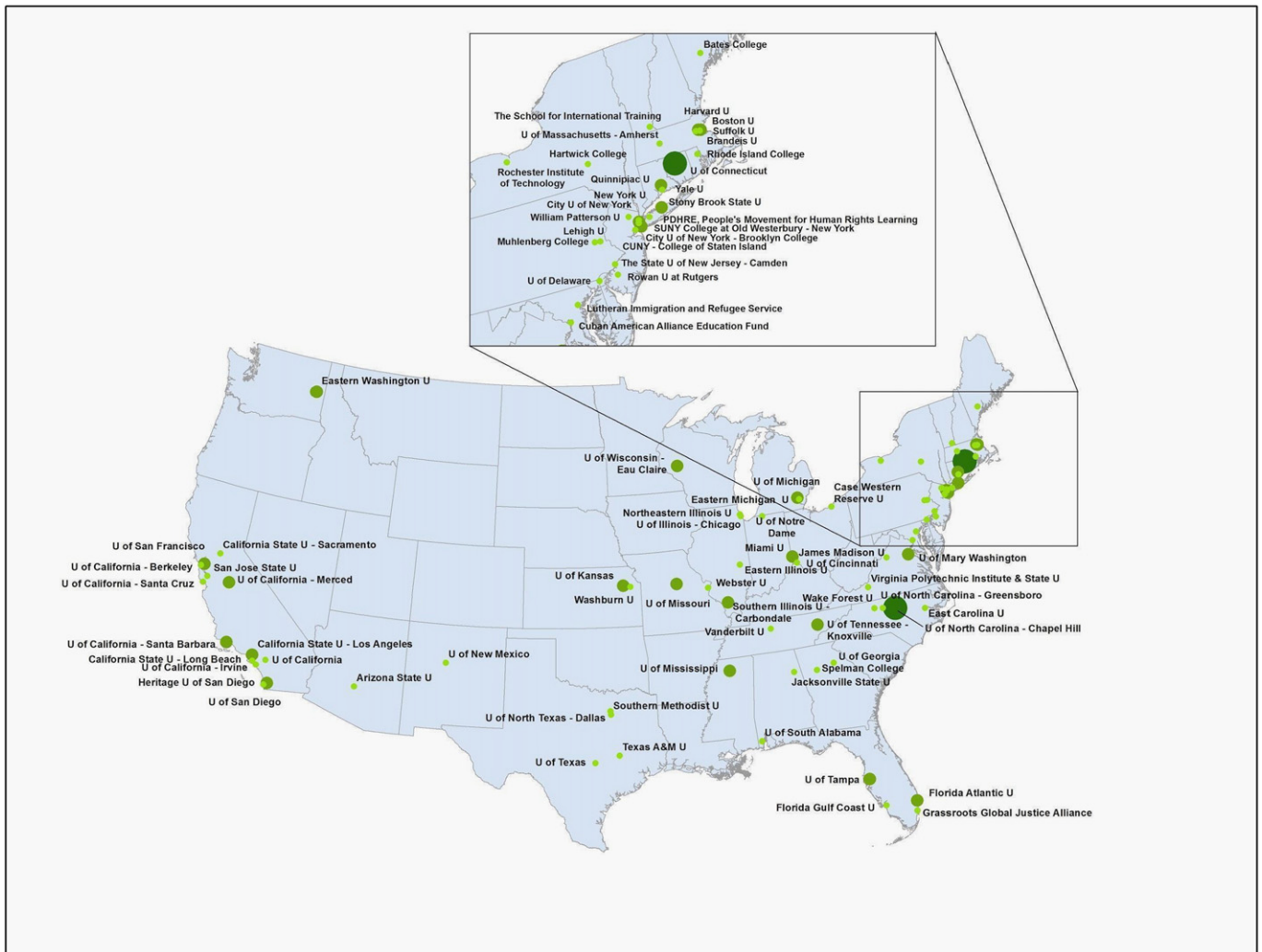

Fig. 4. United States coverage of SWB authors. US authors' affiliation was mapped using arcGIS software (ESRI, 2011) for visual representation of the geographical coverage.

links to pages with biographies for the core editorial staff on the journal homepage, and to consider inviting prominent scholars in the research community to serve as guest editors, or as contributors to thematic special issues of the journal.

Since journal success also inherently depends on reader/contributor interest in the topics addressed, the librarians also investigated the intellectual structure of SWB articles by using a variant of the co-citation technique called "co-word analysis". Co-word analysis tracks instances of co-occurrence among terms in textual data to reveal concept/topic relationships and patterns (He, 1999)

The SWB concept network of article keywords, represented above in Fig. 5, helped the librarians determine whether or not journal content conformed well to the official scope and mission of the publication. The concept network indicated that SWB articles typically touch on four main topics in the social sciences: gender, race, globalization and social movements. Studies of social movements in SWB thus far, however, have focused primarily on the United States context. Most importantly, the concept map also revealed significant inadequacies in article subject indexing. Although SWB articles generally fit well within the stated journal scope, author-contributed keywords do not adequately represent the full breadth of topics covered in the publication. Authority controlled subject indexing, combined with solid metadata creation standards, are essential for marketing open access journal publications effectively to potential contributors and readers, and for facilitating the diverse, global community of social sciences researchers that the scholar-editors hope to create. The librarians therefore recommended that scholar-editors standardize the guidelines for author-contributed keywords, as well as the assignment of subject keywords by editors

and manuscript reviewers. The scholar-editors will look to the librarians for important guidance in this process.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

Our case study demonstrates that current expertise among academic librarians and library staff can be applied effectively to a new kind of advisory role in support of faculty research and open access journal publication. Librarians collaborating as functional specialists can address knowledge gaps among researchers and scholar-editors who increasingly work and communicate in an evolving, and sometimes unfamiliar, user-driven digital environment. Our study also illustrates the profound importance of raising awareness among scholar-editors about best practices in journal management and marketing. A solid commitment to these practices is essential for success in the open access publishing environment. As the faculty-editor in this case has observed, *Societies Without Borders* aspires to encourage and promote social science research that contributes directly to social justice in ways not yet explored by other prominent journal publication venues. Sound journal platform management, innovative analyses of content and community, and effective marketing will all be critical in meeting this goal. Our study provides clear indication that librarians have the unique opportunity to play a key advisory role in advancing open access scholarly publishing as a central part of the future in scholarly communication.

In the present case, professional collaboration between the librarians resulted in significantly enhanced library support capabilities for scholar-editors working to meet new challenges in the digital environment and realize professional research goals. The editors credit the librarians'

Fig. 5. Co-word analysis of keywords of SWB articles. Analyzed with Sci2 Tool software and mapped with GUESS.

support as essential in transitioning the publication to the current journal management platform, as well as customizing and improving the journal website. The senior and managing editors had been without direction on these decisions for quite some time prior to engaging the librarians. Had the librarians not been involved, the initial transition process would have been what the senior co-editor described as a "shot in the dark". Librarian recommendations for journal infrastructure improvements proved effective, for example, in enhancing the author/contributor submission experience. The editors were able to make informed decisions about how to customize the article submission process and workflows in ways that would appeal to a wider community of potential contributors. The senior co-editor also has acknowledged that librarian recommendations for the article submission process, standards for high quality metadata, descriptive subject keyword standards, and author support features will prove very valuable in advertising the journal to new potential contributors.

The editors also embraced librarian recommendations for pursuing inclusion of SWB both in traditional database subject indexes and newer open access scholarly publication directories, as well as the strategic use of new and emerging online scholarly communication venues. Bibliometric analysis of journal content by the librarians also proved valuable in crafting additional recommendations for improving the overall prestige and performance of the journal. Insights into the geographic location, institutional affiliation, topical emphasis and research areas of past contributors enabled the librarians to help editors explore and represent new, untapped research topics and communities in the publication. Editors and platform managers are currently planning to implement several other librarian recommendations based on these findings that together will extend and solidify the online identity of the publication as a legitimate and modernized open access venue of research and scholarship. The editors also now plan to offer customized reports for author/contributors to help them track article usage and download metrics, as well as assess the scholarly communication about their research.

The librarians continue to provide what the senior editor has characterized as critical leadership and guidance in the effort to craft a new and innovative mission and vision for the publication. This guidance will play an influential role in an upcoming strategic planning process involving members of the journal editorial board and board of directors who now possess documentation outlining librarian recommendations and journal content analysis results. The senior editor has indicated that librarian support and contributions will have a powerful and positive influence on the strategic planning process, and on a new and innovative vision and mission for the publication. With these and future analyses of

SWB content and metrics, the librarians are well positioned to support the journal editors effectively in their efforts to vet and publish article content that best reflects the revised goals and mission of the publication.

Going forward, the librarians plan to investigate a variety of metrics for assessing the impact of the SWB beyond the standard Journal Impact Factor. Alternative metrics sources are currently being analyzed to assess their value in showcasing SWB impact, and the results will be published in the near future.

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