Leveraging Library Expertise for Student Journal Success:

A project to increase the impact and value of student journals

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Hello and welcome to Leveraging Library Expertise for Student Journal Success: A project to increase the impact and value of undergraduate student journals at the University of British Columbia. In this brief presentation, my colleague and I will introduce you to a small, grant-funded project we undertook to identify, engage and support student journals on our campus.

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Introductions

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To begin, we will briefly introduce ourselves. My name is Stephanie Savage and I am a Scholarly Communications and Copyright Services librarian at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. I have been in this role for two and a half years and during that time my role has expanded to include oversight of our locally-hosted installation of Open Journal Systems, or OJS for short, a open source journal hosting platform that is used by over 40 UBC-affiliated journals.

I'm Gavin Hayes, and I'm an MLIS student at the University of British Columbia's School of Information. I worked on this project as a Graduate Research Assistant.

Background

Previous anecdotal evidence that student journals were not being well supported in areas including publication platform, dissemination, copyright, preservation, etc.

In late 2018 I was asked to take over administration for our locally-hosted instance of OJS. This allowed me to familiarize myself with publishing workflows and concerns and introduced me to the UBC publishing landscape

In 2019 a grant opportunity arose via the Alma Mater Society Innovative Projects Fund Grant (for students, faculty and staff working on projects that benefit a significant number of students and further develop campus community)
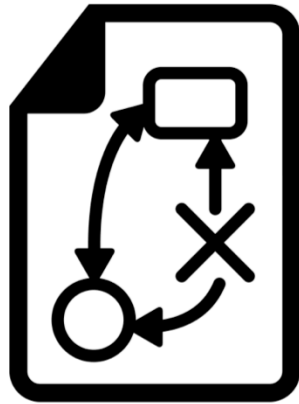
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"Aerials Summer 2016" by UBC Brand and Marketing on Flickr available for the non-commercial use of UBC faculties and units only.

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To begin I will offer a brief background on the project.

In my role as scholarly communications and copyright librarian, I would occasionally be approached by student journal teams looking for information on things like author rights agreements for their student contributors to sign, or better ways to disseminate their journal online. Through these informal conversations I learned that many student journals were offered little to no support from their home departments and as such had few resources at their disposal. They often struggled to keep the journal afloat from one year to the next and had little time to consider how their journal could improve in quality or reach.

In late 2018 I was asked to take over administration for our locally-hosted instance of Open Journal Systems. After some exposure to the platform and how our journal users were leveraging it to streamline their editorial processes, I felt confident that this was a tool that student journals could use as well and I wanted to find a way to offer them more support both in using OJS but also in other areas of library expertise

Grant Proposal

3 Main Elements

1) Obtain a better understanding of the student journal landscape at UBC
2) Connect with student journals and foster a community of practice
3) Create services and support for student journals to increase the quality and value of their publications

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Speaking in a little more depth about what was in the original grant proposal, it consisted of three primary elements

Firstly, I wanted to get a better understanding of the student journal landscape. For those unfamiliar with the University of British Columbia, it is a large institution with over 50 000 students. Having done a cursory search I already knew that there was no student journal directory or other intuitive place to search for a list of active journals, so I needed to begin with a broad environmental scan to better capture the breadth of student journal creation on campus.

Given the lack of student journal list or directory, I imagined that the journals themselves were unaware of the broader journal landscape on campus and as a second objective I wanted to think of ways to bring the journal teams together in hopes that they would be able to share their experience and offer support to one another. This community of practice would hopefully also address ongoing concerns that student journals typically have around continuity and legacy planning, as they would have a broader pool of colleagues to consult.

Environmental Scan - Process

Journals found through:

- Department websites
- Contacting faculty
- UBC Library's Open Access Journal hosting

Information gathered from the journals' websites and by contacting the journals' editors:

- Title, scholarly level, department affiliation
- Status (active/inactive), date of last publication
- Publishing platforms used
- Website and contact information

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As Stephanie mentioned, our first step was to conduct an environmental scan and learn more about the existing student journals. When I joined project, Stephanie had already done some work on gathering information, and had created a spreadsheet of the journals she had found. Using this as a starting point, I began more locating journals and gathering information about them. I found journals through their department websites, by contacting faculty in various departments, and through a list of journals using UBC Library's Open Access Journal hosting. Once a journal had been found, I discovered what I could from their online presence (this was usually a website, an OJS site, or a page on their department's website), then contacted the journal's editors through the contact information they provided.

The information I collected at this stage included the journal's title, scholarly level (undergraduate or graduate), department affiliation, whether the journal was currently active or not, the date of its last publication, any publishing platforms used, and its website and contact information. When the information was available I also made note of the copyright status of the journal, whether it was open access, and subscription cost.

Environmental Scan - Results

We found:

- 17 active student journals
- Seven more inactive or unresponsive
- 16 undergraduate journals
- All journals published online, some also in print
- Four using Open Journal systems
- Varying disciplines represented, with an emphasis on social sciences
- Several journals used some form of open access

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Through the environmental scan we located 17 active student journals at UBC and seven more which were either inactive or did not respond to our emails. Of the active journals, 16 were at the undergraduate level. All of the journals published online, with a few also publishing in print. A variety of platforms were used for publication, including PDFs, Issuu, and Open Journal Systems. The journals came from a variety of of disciplines, with the largest number coming from the social sciences.

Several of the journals used some form of open access publishing, including the Creative Commons Non-Commercial, Non-Commercial No-Derivatives, and Non-Commercial Share Alike licenses. Many of the journals did not have copyright information readily available, and others were copyright protected but accessible for free online. Only one charged a subscription fee for their journal.

Assessing Needs

We sent a survey to journal editors with questions about:

- Publication process
- Editorial board
- Resources and funding
- Challenges they face
- Areas of interest for assistance

We received responses from 10 journals

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Once we had found these active journals, we created a survey to gather more detailed information about their operations. The questions dealt with their publication process (including their peer review process), publishing formats and workflow; the organization of their editorial board; the resources they had available, including how they funded their journal and the resources from the university that they used; the challenges they face; and areas where we might be able to assist them. We also asked about their availability in preparation for hosting an in-person meeting.

We sent the survey to 21 journals, and received 10 responses.

Assessing Needs

Survey Responses

- Common publishing platforms: Wordpress, department websites, Squarespace,
- Funding: 8/10 received funding from their department or student association
- Submissions collected through in-class announcements, social media ads, department emails, newsletters
- Many of the journals used some form of blind review
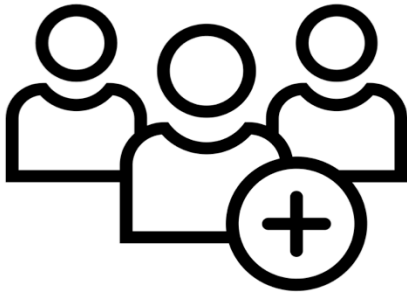- Challenges: Continuity, awareness/engagement, funding, the editorial process

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Our survey found a few common trends among the journal editors who responded. The most common platforms that journals used to publish were Wordpress, their department's website, and Squarespace. Other publishing platforms mentioned were Open Journal Systems, cIRcle (UBC's open access repository), and Wix. Eight of the ten journals were received funding from their department or student association, though five of those had other funding sources as well.

Journals collected submissions through a variety of means: in-class announcements, social media ads, department emails, and newsletters. Many of the journals conducted some form of blind review, though their processes varied. Some journals anonymized submissions, and one specified that they use a double-blind review.

The challenges the editors mentioned included continuity between editors given high turnover as students graduate, difficulty in raising awareness and engagement with the journal's publications, finding funding, and improving and streamlining their editorial process.

Building Community

- Created a listserv for easy communication among journals
- Organized an in-person meeting for journal editors
- Introduced journals to other support on campus (ie writing support)
- Referred some questions to other journals

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Building community proved the more difficult objective to meet, as it required active participation from the journals themselves.

Initially we considered a listserv as a method of communication among the journals, but this proved to be something that was difficult to maintain and neither Gavin nor myself could put in the time and energy it would take to establish this as a valuable communication channel.

We also hosted an in-person event for journal editors, and while we didn't see huge attendance, the participants who were able to make it clearly benefited from being able to seek advice from their colleagues. Questions around funding and printing costs, for example were better answered by other editors than me.

Leading from some of this foundational work, I was also able to build greater relationships with several journals and this resulted in them seeking me out when they had questions. While the listserv didn't really pan out, I was able to act as a connector between journals, referring questions to appropriate contacts at other

Support and Resources

Operating a Student Academic Journal LibGuide

Ongoing one-on-one consultations with journals

Services built up around other library tools/ expertise

- Open Journal Systems
- cIRcle (UBC's Institutional Repository)
- Centre for Writing and Scholarly Communication

Image Credit:

Screenshot from Operating a Student Academic Journal by Gavin Hayes available under a CC-BY license

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From this project the support offered to student journal editors has continues and been expanded. Based on the challenges mentioned by journal editors in the survey and on my background research, I created a libguide on the process of publishing an academic journal. The libguide is directed at student journal editors. It provides an introduction to various elements of the publication process, raises issues for consideration, and connects to further resources, including guides and tutorials and services offered by the University of British Columbia.

Stephanie has continued to conduct one-on-one consultations with journal editors, and offers services relating to UBC library's Open Journal Systems hosting, cIRcle (UBC's institutional repository), and the Centre for Writing and Scholarly Communication.

Challenges

Getting journals to respond to emails and requests for information

Accommodating student schedules and editorial timelines

Fostering a community of practice when turnover is so high

Providing even support for journals with varying interests and needs

Image Credit:

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With any project there will invariably be some challenges, and this project was no different.

Upon completing our initial environmental scan, we wanted to establish communication with the journals we had identified and we later relied on these communication channels to send out a follow up survey to extract additional information. At times it could be difficult to get journal teams to respond to emails and we had to contend with different contact methods as some journals had centralized emails and others relied on personal emails to field journal-related inquiries.

Related to communicating with the student journals, we also had to accommodate student schedules and varying editorial timelines. Obviously, participation in student journals is on a volunteer basis and is secondary to classes and other obligations. We could not expect much flexibility when working with student schedules and this made it difficult to plan in-person events. Additionally, because all of the journals operated on different timelines, it was hard to correctly time events and outreach effectively.

Next Steps

Continue to build and reinforce relationships with journal teams

Continued support for OJS

Planning a joint event with student journals from other schools in our area

ABLF (always be looking for funding)

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With the grant-funded portion of this project complete, I have transitioned my thinking to possible next steps and considering what ongoing level of support I can offer.

Firstly, having developed relationships with many journals, I plan to reinforce these connections by continuing to reach out with strategic communications aligned to the student publishing lifecycle So, for example, I will send an introductory email to new journal editorial staff in the Fall and make a plug for our LibGuide. Later in the year, as journals are beginning to turn their attention to publishing, I will make mention of OJS and our institutional repository as possible online distribution methods.

Related to this, as OJS continues to be a part of my portfolio, I have promised to provide an enhanced service to student journals who do not have the resources or time to develop a sophisticated understanding of the platform.

Also, having learned that it can be difficult to find a time when a majority of journal members can meet in person, I have broached the idea of co-hosting a joint event
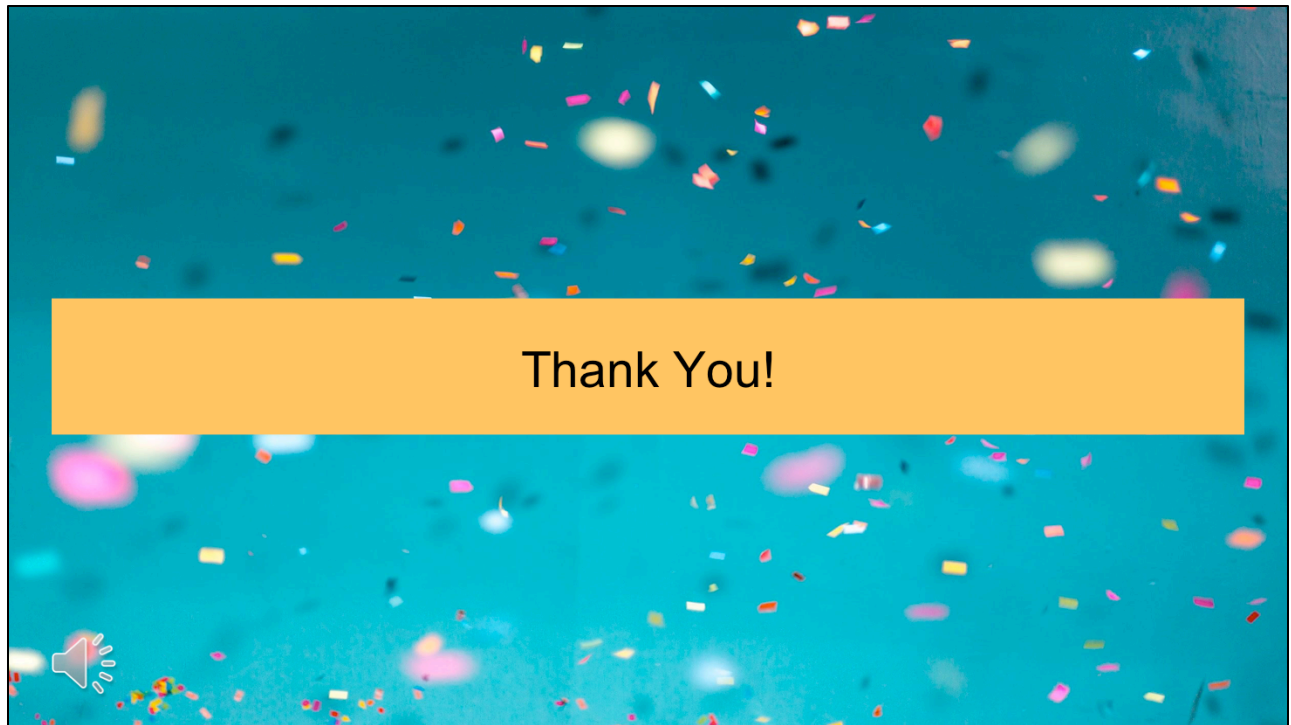
Thank You!

Image Credit:

"Colorful confetti falling down with a teal background" by Jason Leung on Unsplash available under an Unsplash License

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This brings us to the end of our presentation. Please feel free to follow up by email if you have further questions. You can also refer to our student journal libguide, licensed under a creative commons license and available for reuse.