Expanding the librarian role: integration into the faculty narrative

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Abstract

Current academic expectations for evaluation, promotion, and even tenure, have created an environment that places more emphasis on the ability of faculty to demonstrate their impacts on a scholarly level. Although many faculty would agree on specific indicators of impact such as publications and citations, those two gauges may not necessarily be exhaustive, and the increasing multitude of tools potentially used to locate and identify them may be unknown to the faculty. This paper will provide information on the needs of academic faculty in reporting the scope and breadth of their scholarly activities, and how leveraging the knowledge, practices, and skill-sets of librarians helps to achieve the desired outcomes.

Key words: library services; medical libraries; nursing faculty; bibliometrics; nursing research.

Introduction

Current academic expectations for evaluation, promotion, and even tenure, have created an environment that places even more emphasis on the ability of faculty to demonstrate their impacts on a scholarly level. Although many faculty historically agree on specific indicators of impact such as number of publications and citations, those two gauges may not be exhaustive and can be limiting because of the increasing multitude of tools for discovering scholarly works and collecting their corresponding impacts. The stresses that accompany the identification of these impacts are heightened by the potential discrepancies external to an academic institution when comparing to industry norms and internal to the institution when presented with other academic units. As the librarian skill-sets of searching, providing access, and translating information correspond with the needs of faculty on showing impact, libraries have begun partnering with academic departments to improve on the reporting of faculty scholarly activities, and in some cases redefine the importance and weighting of typical impacts so that the faculty narrative can be presented in realistic terms. The integration of a librarian into the tenure and promotion processes of faculty in other campus departments can be delivered as a model for a new service to those user groups with the charge of developing faculty's scholarly profiles based on their publication and teaching metrics. This paper will describe a case study of how the Medical Sciences Library at TAMU chose to take on a role of leadership and education in meeting the needs of the College of Nursing faculty regarding the scholarly metrics and tenure and promotion requirements.

Local context

Although some universities can have some small variations in the process, in most academic institutions in the United States, faculty have six years to get tenure, and if not awarded tenure, their position at the university is terminated. Regardless of how it works, the Tenure and Promotion (T&P) processes and experience can be extremely stressful for faculty. In general, three areas of their work are evaluated: research or scholarship, teaching, and service. The emphasis is usually placed on their research, and faculty typically experience frustration due to the difficulty in finding the evidence to demonstrate success. Some of the most common measures of research impact include the number of publications that have been accepted, the quality of journals those publications have been published in,

and the number of times those publications are cited by others. Our focus on the promotion and tenure process for this use case is because that is generally the most rigorous, stressful, and high-level context for a scholarly metrics service. As one of the premier academic institutions in the United States, Texas A&M University (TAMU) faculty are strongly encouraged to show evidence that their work has impact on the research and educational practices in their respective disciplines. The Medical Sciences Library at Texas A&M University serves the Health Science Center, made up of Colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, and the School of Public Health along with a College of Veterinary Medicine, and a College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

Needs assessment

The first approach taken by the liaison for College of Nursing was to perform a very informal and conversational needs assessment. The feedback of, "Help me with my CV and my dossier", and "I need to figure out my metrics" were commonly heard reinforcing the service need in this area just as it has been seen at other universities (1). It was also found out that the college did not have any formal or established promotion and tenure guidelines. On one hand this added to some of the faculty confusion and stress level, but it also provided a certain amount of flexibility in presenting the narrative of those faculty without some of the constraints that might have been there otherwise. Due to the absence of these guidelines, the liaison started out with several meetings and presentations. The result of these meetings led to the identification of five faculty who were in need of establishing profiles and scholarly identities, with two of the faculty in immediate need of assistance due to an upcoming review.

Training for librarians

From the needs assessment, it was quickly ascertained that there were skills and knowledge gaps that needed to be addressed within our own library ranks in order to better serve the needs of our nursing faculty clientele. This is not an unusual occurrence as training gaps have been found to be an issue for consideration at other institutions as well (2). As this was a new service that we were going to plan and implement for all our client groups, we all needed to learn more about the process of helping faculty using a variety of tools. The TAMU Libraries has an Office of Scholarly Communication (OSC) which serves the research and scholarly support by focusing on scholarly impact, open access, digital publishing, and a digital repository called Scholars at TAMU, based on the VIVO platform. The OSC points to three main strategies to tell the story of scholarly impact: make your online identity visible, make your scholarly work accessible, and track your scholarly impact metrics. These three strategies form a comprehensive method to do what we call "reclaiming your narrative." After the training, we realized that our model for integrating liaisons into the promotion and tenure process would need to be flexible as each college and/or department and the faculty therein would have different wants and needs. In fact, we realized that in their own way, some client groups had already approached their liaisons than the librarians reaching out to the departments as had happened with the College of Nursing.

Service model

Taking a broad snapshot of this new service model and using the College of Nursing as the primary focus reveals an outlined program of providing an initial, broad scope, informational meeting to the decision-makers of the college. This meeting is devoted to revealing the need in the college and how librarians could serve as an asset to the faculty to bridge the gap of confusion currently in the system. This meeting is then followed up by more formal presentations of exactly how the librarian is integrated into the process and a brief overview of how the tools at our disposal and in our knowledge warehouse could be used to benefit the clients. Then finally appointments are set with each individual faculty for more specific and customized consultations. More in-depth discussion at the individual faculty consultation level involved providing both basic and advanced information and demonstration using the tools available for reporting the scope and breadth of their personal scholarly activities. Additionally, the libraries had developed a custom-made tool that calculates metrics from a

variety of sources including Web of Science and GoogleScholar which provided aid when discussing the several vehicles for building a faculty profile. One of the most appreciated results of this service was the library liaison involvement with developing a presentation for faculty to be used when presenting the case for tenure and promotion which differs from some of the other initial attempts to promote a service (3).

Contents of presentation

The primary focus of the presentation were the three C's: Completeness, Correctness, and Clarity.

Completeness

It was important to cover what should be included in the faculty curriculum vitae (CV) emphasizing its role as the master record for every scholarly activity. Since the College of Nursing had not yet developed their own promotion and tenure guidelines, the University's general guidelines which all colleges must follow were presented as a starting point. Since the Texas A&M Health Science Center as a whole had only been integrated into the University within the last four years, several of the College of Nursing personnel were unaware that these university guidelines even existed or where to find the documents. The University guidelines detailed all of the items required to be included in the dossier, only a few of which are to actually be prepared by the candidate.

Correctness

The CV has to be arranged into proper categories, compliant with the university guidelines, in proper sequence, and formatted properly. To assist with many of these, the template used was one already in use by the University Libraries, and the example used contained the content of the liaison's personal CV. Finally, a personal statement regarding intention and focus of research was created along with bibliometric data. This was done with GoogleScholar, due to the ease with which profiles can be set up and the instant gratification of the metrics being retrieved and calculated automatically. Following GoogleScholar came a Scopus demonstration, and finally the most complex tool of these three, Web of Science.

Clarity

The liaison taught the nursing faculty how to create e-portfolios. This was really a process of information management, and it helped them again by following the template that was already in use by the library faculty.

Custom tool to help with scholarly metrics

Scholarly metrics can often be quite confusing. To simplify things, the liaison distinguished between journal level and author level metrics, and brought in the further qualitative aspects, such as how faculty research had been used in other works and other disciplines, how long of a period it has been cited, and whether international reach could be identified. To collect all these metrics in one place, a tool created by Jenni Simonsen, former Agriculture librarian at TAMU Libraries, was utilized. This tool made it so that all the faculty have to do is find the citation counts in the various databases and plug them into specific fields. Built-in formulas in the spreadsheet then produce the metrics information needed automatically (*Figure 1*).
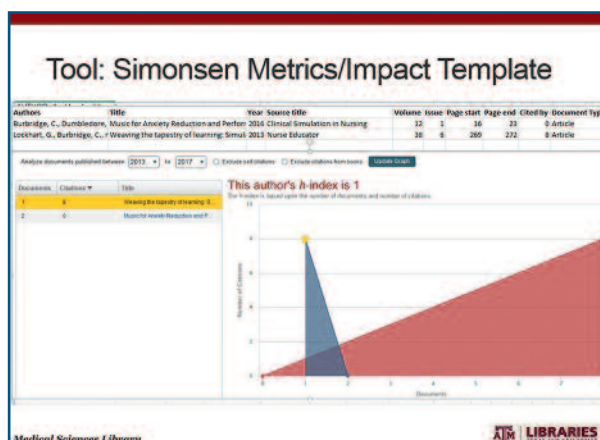

Fig. 1. *A sample worksheet from the Excel spreadsheet created by Jenni Simonsen, former Agriculture Librarian at MSL. The spreadsheet has built-in formulas to calculate manually entered counts of citations retrieved from databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science.*

Tool- e-portfolio template

To create the e-portfolio for each faculty member's tenure or promotion package, Adobe Pro's portfolio option was leveraged. This allowed all information to be efficiently captured, presented, and transferred

as a single pdf object that could be easily navigated by the reader.

Suggested steps and activities

In reviewing the entire process from beginning to end, all the library liaisons were able to create the parameters to a basic service with a recommended sequence of steps to follow. Underlying all of these steps, important values are captured and considered to interpret and create a narrative that best positions the faculty candidate for success. First, understand the needs of the audience and where they are experiencing challenges. Be mindful of the extreme stress that tenure-track faculty are facing during the entire process. The faculty may need help with formatting their CV and have limited knowledge about metrics. Faculty are confronted with a wide array of products that are supposed to help them tell their story, build their professional profile, and show the impact of their work on the world. Some of these seem very similar to each other, and many are left asking several questions such as: Which of these is most useful? How many profiles should one create? What tool will tell my whole story, and how many people will it reach? What are altmetrics? Secondly, make sure the right people are involved so that any assistance is coming from a place of authority and support. Engage multiple levels of colleges and/or departments by meeting with their Promotion & Tenure Committee, the College's Executive Committee members, and/or Research/Department Chairs. Thirdly, build awareness and demonstrate leadership and expertise. Librarians are perfectly poised to guide faculty, scholars, and researchers in gathering and reporting scholarly metrics. It was noticed that often faculty or department administrators did not think of librarians as ones who can help them capture, document, and describe their impact for preparing for going up for tenure or for promotion. This was addressed for the College of Nursing by designing a reasonable and persuasive approach and needs assessment for department heads and faculty. Create a presentation on library scholarly communications services to customize for particular audiences. Compare and contrast various sources and types of scholarly metrics, including GoogleScholar, Web of Science, Scopus, journal impact factor, h-index, altmetrics, etc. Create scholarly profiles in VIVO, ORCID, and GoogleScholar and explain their different purposes and benefits. Revise CVs to showcase faculty scholarly activity. Calculate and create visualizations of metrics of research/scholarly impact. Having a clear, straightforward process and help from their liaison with each of these greatly reduced the faculty anxiety level typically associated with the process. These steps and methods, crafted by trial and error, will help any librarians interested in partnering with faculty, researchers, and departments to document their publications, teaching activities, and other scholarly outputs for promotion, tenure, and career advancement.

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