

ITHAKA S+R Local Report

Asian Studies Scholars and Their Research at the University of Maryland
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Abstract

This local report summarizes the findings of scholarly research practices and needs of faculty members specializing in Asian Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park (hereafter UMD). UMD Libraries were invited to participate in ITHAKA S+R's Research Support Services Project, which is a series of investigative studies regarding the research support needs of scholars by their discipline, specifically underrepresented in the existing literature, such as Asian Studies. Two UMD librarians conducted the project's protocol through in-depth qualitative analyses of the research practices of academics in Asian Studies at UMD. This project allowed participants the opportunity to voice their opinions on support and services along with the juxtaposition of their field to other disciplines on campus and in academe, in general.

Objectives of the study included: 1) understanding the resources and services that the interviewed faculty members required to be successful in their research; 2) recognizing challenges faced within their research approaches and practices; 3) comparing and contrasting choice of publication venues and use of open access; 4) documenting interviewees' opinions on what would simplify and/or promote their research; and 5) conveying opinions on the current and future state of this field of study. The time between our training with ITHAKA S+R personnel and scheduling interviews with those campus faculty members who agreed to participate in an interview session was limited. Another challenge encountered was in persuading faculty to devote approximately 60 minutes to an interview in light of their other demands as Spring Semester, 2017 was ending and graduation was approaching for the campus.

The interviews provided much insight into ways to improve the academic experiences of scholars and their research.

The University of Maryland and Its East Asian Studies Program

Founded in 1856, the UMD is a public institution with close proximity to Washington, D.C., the nation's seat of government. Its location allows a plethora of research opportunities. Businesses specializing in technology, analytical think tanks; embassies; and a host of offices for major organizations provide faculty and students with rewarding experiences. There is great potential in deepening national as well as global knowledge and understanding of the contributions from the world's diverse populace, including Asian countries.

As one of the major research universities on the east coast offering degrees in Asian Studies, UMD plays a strategic role in its faculty's accretion of scholarly peer-reviewed publications that concentrate in such disciplines as history, government and politics, literature, the arts, history, languages, and the cultures of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese people. According to a 2017 report on the best East Asian Studies Colleges in Maryland, UMD ranked second in this particular field of study.¹ With a student population totaling over 32,000, the University boasts significant statistics in eight distinct ethnicities on

¹ <https://www.universities.com/find/maryland/best/east-asian-studies-degrees>

campus with its growing Asian population at 17%.²

UMD offers majors and minors in the study of Korea, China, and Japan. A Korean Studies Minor "...combines Korean Program courses with Korea-related courses offered by departments across campus... a Chinese major provides the training and cultural background needed for entering East Asia-related careers in such fields as higher education, the arts, business, government, international relations, agriculture, and the media. Students may also consider a double major in Chinese and another discipline, such as business, international relations, economics, or journalism. Our two Chinese minors provide more skeletal training in Chinese language or culture... The Japanese major and minor provide essential training in language, literature, linguistics, and culture in preparation for entering East Asia-related careers in such fields as higher education, the arts, business, government, international relations, or the media..."³ These courses of study are positioned within the College of Arts and Humanities, the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences, as well as the College of Education.

Methodology:

Thirteen UMD faculty members volunteered to participate in one-on-one semi-structured interviews with one of the two co-investigators, who are librarians at UMD. Each interview was approximately 45 to 60 minutes in length and occurred within the participant's primary workspace on campus. As is the practice in semi-structured interviews, the sessions were audiotaped and subsequently transcribed. After careful scrutiny of the transcriptions, the co-investigators identified salient themes that emerged from the qualitative data. All participants were agreeable to the audiotaping of their sessions, and approved sharing the resulting final report with a wider audience on and beyond the UMD campus.

The collected data was analyzed using grounded theory methodology. There were no pre-existing codes; however, the coding structure was developed by thoroughly studying the transcribed data. We interpreted and developed recurring concepts. Attention during coding and analysis focused upon what the participating faculty identified as their research processes, choice of publication outlets, and their viewpoints on Asian studies.

The co-investigators assured all participants that their anonymity would be protected, and that we would maintain the confidentiality of all data collected during the interviews. While subjects could experience benefits in terms of increased insight and awareness of their research practices and needs, no compensation was offered for their participation.

Summary of Scholars' Interviews

One of the participants noted transformations occurring in the library, as place. Since 2011, there have been noticeable changes in the East Asia department. Several issues mentioned included 1) a reduction in the East Asia print collection, 2) the physical move of the collection from its decades-long location on the main library's 4th floor, and 3) a retired Asian Studies librarian's position has remained vacant. Thus, these decisions had significantly impeded her discovery of new research resources. She stated, "One of my best ways to locate books needed but [I] didn't know existed was [to consult with the East Asian librarian at the desk and then] go through related books on the [library] shelves,

² https://www.collegedata.com/cs/data/college/college_pg01_tmpl.jhtml?schoolId=1526

³ <https://sllc.umd.edu>

physically; that's when you find something you were not looking for, by accident, and that leads to new discoveries and you can't do that with online searching..."⁴ This particular scholar's method of discovery differed from the conclusion in a 2010 article that stated: "... Library buildings seem to be the most disintermediated part of the library offering, with only a fraction of respondents relying on it to initiate research..."⁵ While many scholars in today's institutions appreciate searching online resources at their desktops, there are researchers, especially in the humanities, who rely heavily upon this "research discovery" alternative as was discussed by the interviewee. It has become a diminishing factor in the repurposing and reconfiguration plans for academic libraries in the future.

Our participants' ongoing scholarly research projects and interests demonstrated the interdisciplinary nature of Asian Studies, and the extensive collaborative experiences involved in their research output. These thirteen participants' investigations focus on culture and media, legal history and print culture, the Asian American and the Korean diaspora, along with Chinese religion, philosophy, culture, environment and peace education. Thus their resultant scholarly works are situated within a wide range of cross-disciplinary fields, including art, history, sociology, cultural anthropology, political science, international relations, literary studies, and linguistics. Concurrently, UMD faculty's research in Asian Studies shows a transnational phenomenon. While China and Japan are the major geographic foci of UMD faculty members, there are scholars who pursue transnational research. For example, one faculty member mentioned investigating the intersection and interaction of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Taiwanese literary works;⁶ while another participant revealed that her research focused more on Asia and its global impact.

Based on the interview results, UMD faculty members adopt a variety of methodologies for gathering their scholarly data. Faculty whom we interviewed targeted three main modes of data collection for use in their publications: Documents, Human Subjects, and Artifacts/objects. They relied heavily on primary source materials, archival materials, and government-generated documents. Their interactions with human subjects included interviews and/or simply observing participants. Scrutinizing the actual paintings and three-dimensional statues allowed a far deeper interpretation and attention to eventual research outcomes. Of course, in-depth historical research of these artifacts was a major part of the process. During one of the interviews, an art historian stated that it would be next to impossible to experience and capture the true value of a work of art by simply utilizing digital surrogates.⁷

Additionally, our participants emphasized extensive collaboration with their fellow scholars in a variety of ways. While some of them enjoyed a cooperative enterprise with colleagues on publication projects, such as writing a book chapter or exhibition catalogs, others mentioned conference panels for co-presentation purposes. They have international collaborative opportunities with scholars who are involved in mutually interesting research foci. International collaborations occur with fellow scholars in publishing necessary translations of their works and/or providing support as consultants for their publications in English. One UMD participant explored the research of Japanese survivors' experiences of atomic bombing with her colleagues specializing in the history of Germany with the common theme of nuclear issues in both nations.

⁴ East Asian UMD Faculty Participant #13-Local Report Transcript for ITHAKA S+R Asian Studies

⁵<https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2010/04/15/one-report-two-findings-library-roles-changing-open-access-not-compelling-on-its-own/>

⁶ East Asian UMD Faculty Participant #3-Local Report Transcript for ITHAKA S+R Asian Studies.

⁷ East Asian UMD Faculty Participant #13-Local Report Transcript for ITHAKA S+R Asian Studies.

On the other hand, one of the greater challenges discussed was locating primary source materials in the vernacular of their research interest. While scholars are well aware of an increasing number of digitized primary source materials, they realized that not all of these materials are accessible online due to imposed restrictions in the place of origin of the primary source materials. The quality of digital surrogates was also an adverse factor that they encountered in their research. Accordingly, they had to resort to visiting a variety of transnational institutions in order to locate the materials required for their research. However, their visits to physical sites in Asian nations did not necessarily mean “carte blanche” to readily accessing such materials. Some institutions limited access to these documents only to scholars with domestic institutional affiliation and not those individuals from international institutions. Access constraints to vernacular language materials was not only an issue with holding sites of the resources but also at many of the international institutions. For example, the National Diet Library of Japan provides Interlibrary Loan (ILL) services to patrons affiliated with overseas institutions. However, these patrons are required to access the loaned materials only under supervision of library staff members and cannot check out, photocopy, or take picture of the materials. This system demoralizes patrons, thus making them feel policed and untrustworthy as professionals.

Beyond visiting international locations to accomplish research, several participants mentioned an alternative -- trolling through bookstores in Asian nations to locate primary resources as well as secondary materials.

Once located, UMD scholars organize primary information mainly by using basic computer applications. They also photograph or scan hard copies of the materials and store digital versions on computers for future use. Converting print copies into digital format is necessary, especially in instances where materials are received through (ILL). Certain Asian materials that focus on unique research interests may only be available via ILL. Unfortunately, there may not be sufficient time to adequately research borrowed materials due to short loan periods. Some of the faculty experienced difficulties in locating and accessing materials on unique research topics, such as images of African-Americans in Japanese Art or specific events or activism; i.e. anti-nuclear movement in local communities. While ILL is a useful service, the researchers took the opportunity to express their frustration regarding a broader availability of certain databases. The scarcity of Chinese databases for journal articles issued after the 1990s along with the absence of online Chinese dissertations and theses was mentioned as another challenge that they experienced in their research.

Making use of one’s departmental repository system for filing and retrieving data was discussed. For instance, the availability of this system creates a digital space where scholars across collaborative institutions upload images. Scholars find their “intra-repository” system a useful collaborative tool that could be considered as a form of open access since any scholar of an affiliated institution can easily participate. Scholars use the departmental repository to upload images; however, it was mentioned again that photographs and /or scanned images could not capture, in digital pixels, the image or artifact for thorough scrutiny. The scholars truly preferred a visual “on-site” assessment of such materials.

The scholars’ next step after extensive research is publication. They concurred unanimously on the use of conventional methods to publish their research work. The standard options included established peer-reviewed scholarly journals and renowned university presses for their monographs, exhibition catalogs, anthologies, a collection of essays, etc. Their publications were submitted within the scope of scholarly audiences and scarcely transcended that successful procedure. Some published their works with academic social networking sites, such as Academia.edu or ResearchGate.net, but this method was not the norm. Publication practices focused on scholarly venues that were

consistent with the institutional tenure-track requirements. There is an urgency to adhere to the policies and practices with respect to the fundamental requirements of publishing in scholarly venues and receiving recognition as an expert in one's field of study. Thus, participants did not make use of nor were they aware of the basic objectives of open access beyond their departmental repository system that stored shared resources with a select group of colleagues. Therefore, the majority of the interviewed faculty had not engaged in depositing their publications in an open access digital repository such as the Digital Repository at the University of Maryland (DRUM). Reasons included 1) submitting in open access could denote a lower perception of the research versus high standards associated with peer-reviewed publications; 2) potential ramifications of using open access could negatively influence the prestige of their publications; 3) no information was known about financial costs, if any, associated with open access; and finally, 4) there might be the possible elimination of a publisher's sales opportunities regarding the scholar's publications. We concluded that the use of Open Access was generally not an option for the participants at this time.

The UMD participants hoped for advancements in online discoverability and accessibility of resources relevant to their research. On the other hand, most simply desired realistic access to materials. Specifically, Interlibrary Loan (ILL) materials from institutions overseas were unlikely to arrive in a timely manner. There was emphasis on accessibility of digital resources, especially when there is a scarcity of scholars abroad whose research is in the same or in an overlapping discipline. UMD researchers were always travelling to the nations of their research foci and had to obtain access to the materials themselves. Some faced obstacles surrounding copyright issues. Powerful search engines, with extensive keywords search capabilities, would enable faculty to discover the needed resources in archival collections. Foreign copyright restrictions would need to be revised or minimized in order to allow visiting scholars the right to include needed images in their scholarly publications.

Participants reflected on additional challenges for Asian Studies, which could possibly stem from the institutional contexts vis-à-vis Asian Studies. In spite of the UMD's mission statement that emphasizes the significance of educating global citizens, the university faces the challenge of providing adequate resources for faculty members and departments in many academic disciplines, including Asian Studies. Indeed, many of these faculty members think that they have been marginalized due to a lack of the university's financial support in offering more graduate programs in their departments. This institutional trend is apparent nationwide. Across the nation, institutions of higher education show dwindling funds and resources for Asian Studies. There seems to be the belief that it is becoming more of a challenge to pursue Asian Studies due to diminishing human resources as well as valuable scholarly resources. A reduction in Asian Studies programs, the low number of practicing scholars, and access to critical research materials likely accelerate the dominance of Euro-centric viewpoints and fail to construct and enhance a balanced view of our diverse world. Indeed, even today, faculty members are faced with Orientalism perspectives on the notion on Asia and Asian Studies. The predominant discourse of Asia in the fields of Asian Studies is still shaped with the Orientalists' traditional assumptions of Asia rather than emerging social and cultural phenomena of transnational innovations in Asia and beyond.

In conclusion, our participants consider many untapped future research opportunities in their discipline in comparison to other area studies, such as European studies. There is still a need to grow since there are a limited number of scholars in Asian Studies. One faculty emphasized that Asian Studies is a progressive field, and thus, provides a wide variety of opportunities for challenging the existing scholarly frameworks and constructing new ways of thinking. Asian Studies can be affected negatively as well as positively with

respect to international relations between China and the United States.⁸ While one participant expressed this statement with boldness, there are undoubtedly many nations within the Asian diaspora and throughout the world that would agree with this sentiment in today's political climate.

Findings and Recommendations:

Extensive analysis of the participants' interviews yielded the following findings:

1) there needs to be a greater appreciation for Asian Studies in today's world and on university campuses; 2) enhancement of this campus' Asian Studies center would significantly augment communication and collaboration among its Asian Studies faculty; 3) an increase of online language-specific primary sources in the library would dramatically expand research outputs; 4) re-evaluating and thus improving copyright policies, with respect to educational use of foreign materials, should be a priority; and 5) faculty would consider UMD's Open Access service if they had a better understanding of its service in sharing their research publications.

In light of the findings, we submit the following recommendations for consideration:

- A. Consideration of an ongoing commitment in the strategic mission of higher education to provide more funding for all disciplines, including Asian Studies, to attract and support exceptional faculty and their research who in turn attract, teach, and prepare exceptional students for today's globally diverse society;
- B. Continue to develop the collaborative Asian Studies Center on UMD's campus;
- C. Invest in a more robust discovery tool in the library for searching and accessing online research resources;
- D. Emphasize the positive advantages of publication submissions in UMD's Open Access service -- DRUM (Digital Repository at the University of Maryland); and
- E. Increase library funding for the purchase of digital resources in foreign languages, especially for Asian Studies' scholars, students, and staff.

⁸ East Asian UMD Faculty Participant #11-Local Report Transcript for ITHAKA S+R Asian Studies.