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Interdisciplinary librarians: self-reported non-LIS scholarship and creative work

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to interpret and discuss survey results of a study of academic librarians' scholarship and creative work outside of library and information science in order to reveal some librarians' motivations to perform such work as well as their perceptions of administrators' attitudes toward it.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors published a link to a qualitative survey instrument on COLLIB-L and ULS-L, the e-mail lists for the college libraries section and the university libraries section of American Library Association, asking that only academic librarians engaged in scholarship and creative work outside of library and information science participate. This paper is an exploratory analysis of the survey results.

Findings – Librarians reported that they produce such work for many reasons, including personal satisfaction, dynamic and successful liaison work, and ongoing commitment to scholarship and creative work. Academic librarians who produce non-LIS work do so with varying levels of support, and the recognition of such work is inconsistent among institutions.

Originality/value – The authors are the first to query American academic librarians specifically about their scholarship or creative work outside of library and information science. Managers and administrators will glean much about academic librarians' attitudes toward such work and how it adds value to the library operation and institution. Findings could affect criteria for reappointment, promotion, and tenure.

Keywords Academic librarians, Faculty librarians, Librarian attitudes, Librarian research, Librarian scholarship and creative work, Qualitative survey

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In many academic libraries it is necessary or desirable to have an additional graduate degree in order to be hired or retained as a full-time, permanent librarian. Clearly the profession values additional education, so there is a need to learn about the scholarship as well as the professional and creative work of academic librarians in fields outside of library science. Also, consider that, arguably, librarianship is a professional degree with the terminal MLS degree, not a scholarly field. What does this dialectical relationship between professional practice and academic discipline mean for practicing academic librarians? For the purposes of this discussion, non-LIS work refers to academic librarians' scholarly or creative activity outside of librarianship or library science. The survey instrument included questions about professional work, but no such work was reported.

The authors sought to reveal details about librarians' publication and presentation activities outside of LIS, their contributions to the performing and visual arts, and their work in other professions. Are academic librarians presenting at conferences such as

College Art Association (CAA) and Modern Language Association (MLA)? Are they publishing in non-LIS journals such as *Journal of Web Semantics* or *Nursing Education Perspectives*? What are academic librarians' attitudes toward such publishing?

The authors are interested in generating discussion about the myriad scholarly, creative, and professional activities that academic librarians are engaged in outside of the library science discipline, work that is, in fact, part of the profession of librarianship. Certainly the applications and benefits of additional education beyond the MLS are of interest to academic librarians and administrators. In order to begin to find answers to various questions and to learn more about what academic librarians are producing applying all of their interests, skills, and knowledge, the authors decided to survey librarians engaged in work outside of library science. This paper is an exploratory analysis of those survey results.

Definitions of scholarship among practicing academic librarians
Applied library science is work that takes place in the library: for example, cataloging, reference work, library instruction, and collection development and management. Such work is clearly librarian work. A narrow definition of library scholarship limits academic librarians' scholarly activity to explicitly library science topics. Examples include bibliometrics, information literacy pedagogy, and evidence-based management research. Such work is published and indexed in LIS periodicals for a librarian audience. An expanded definition of library scholarship includes scholarship and creative and professional activity outside of library and information science, for the library serves the entire college or university. Here librarians may be publishing in non-LIS journals or other periodicals, producing culture rather than documenting it, collaborating with other departments in grant writing or teaching of non-LIS topics, and performing professional work. Part of expanding the definition of library scholarship and work is about meeting the needs of the institution rather than just the library system. Higher education is changing, and librarians have much to offer. It seems reasonable to expect librarians with additional advanced degrees to utilize them to advance knowledge in those fields as well as to improve their job performances as librarians.

Early findings
Before the authors determined a population to query or created a survey, they asked librarian colleagues across North America to report via e-mail any scholarly, creative, or professional activity they were engaged in outside of library science. Here are some early findings:

- Serve on MLA Committee on Information Technology, which initiates projects, publications, and other activities relating to the use of computers and other technologies for teaching and research in the language and literature fields, and advises on matters relating to technology.

- Published the book *Watching What We Eat: The Evolution of Television Cooking Shows.*

- Was invited to speak at the Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights at Rutgers University, fall 2009.

- Co-teach "Interdisciplinary collaboration in the performing and visual arts through improvisation and research."

- Co-edited a book on same-sex marriage, gave a presentation at EduCause Midwest in 2009 on a textbook database we developed to help students control costs (A Faculty Senate project), and will be presenting on our university's LGBT student orientation at the Midwest Bisexual Lesbian Gay Transgender Ally College Conference.
- Published an essay on McSweeney's internet tendency web site.
- Presented at conferences (e.g. Humanities Technology Association) on Chicago's public spaces and Braque's paintings.

The authors established from these early findings that the subject warranted further investigation.

Literature review

The ideal literature review would locate academic librarians' published scholarship, and creative work outside of library literature. There is no effective, systematic way to locate such work, even in a particular discipline. In a subject-specific database like PsycARTICLES, for example, there is no way to limit search results to articles published by librarians. Institutional affiliation may be found, but departmental affiliation and job title of authors is not consistently an indexed, searchable field in commercial databases. Also, nothing about author attitudes is revealed in database records. In addition, there is no effective way to uncover librarian membership in the many societies and associations in which an academic librarian might participate.

Because there is no systematic way to determine academic librarians' publications outside of library science, the authors chose to focus on library literature that specified and interpreted the types of scholarship and creative work produced by academic librarians. Several articles are notable as they at least briefly discuss the issue of librarians publishing in non-LIS publications. It is unclear whether or not there is a trend in regards to such publishing.

Lindquist and Gilman (2010) report that academic librarians with subject doctorates who publish do so in LIS (51 percent) as well as in the subject areas in which they earned their doctorates (42.7 percent). Another 6.3 percent published in another subject area altogether (p. 405). In Joseph Fennewald's (2008) paper about Penn State librarians' publishing activities, he reports that some librarians surveyed "described discussing ideas and concepts in their subject area with [other] scholars who may not be librarians," ultimately publishing outside the field of library and information science (pp. 108-109). David Fox (2007) studied Canadian librarians' scholarship and found that "participants reported a wide range of scholarly interests" and made no distinction between scholarship in librarianship and other subjects. In fact, 30 percent of respondents indicated "Other" as area of their scholarship (p. 5). Fox provided only library science subjects from which to choose.

Christy Stevens (2007), who searched 54 non-library journals in search of information literacy subjects, found that some librarians are reaching out to faculty by publishing in journals from various disciplines devoted to pedagogy, including higher education and nursing. In this case, Stevens (2007) concludes, librarians are publishing in discipline journals as a method of information literacy outreach (pp. 261-262). Henry and Neville (2004) studied the research and publication patterns of academic librarians in Florida, and their survey included a question about publishing "books outside library science" and (book) "chapters outside library science." Only 4 percent of librarians surveyed published such books and 10 percent published such chapters.

The survey included a question about publishing in journals but did not indicate whether or not such articles were LIS or non-LIS (p. 442).

Recently published authors limit the definition of librarian research. Kennedy and Brancolini (2012) limit librarian research to "theoretical research, designed to advance knowledge in the field of library and information science, and operations research, planned to inform decision making (often called evidence-based management)" (p. 432). Perkins and Slowik (2013) surveyed academic library administrators about perceived value of research in their libraries but did not specify the type of research.

Findings from the 1990s suggest that during that time there was a move away from publishing in non-LIS journals although authors used different methodologies and studied different populations: Richard L. Hart's (1999) study of the scholarship of Penn State University librarians contains a brief discussion of publication "inside" vs "outside" of the library literature, and he found a shift away from publishing outside of LIS (p. 460). Kathleen E. Joswick's case study from 1999 employed an atypical methodology, analyzing citations in selected databases of articles published by librarians employed by colleges and universities in Illinois. This study reported that publication outside of LIS was 9 percent (p. 344), less than reported by Paula De Simone Watson (1977) (26 percent of journal publications outside the library field in her study) (quoted in Joswick, 1999, p. 344) and Yerkey, who in (1993) identified 25 percent of journal publications by librarians as outside the field of library science (quoted in Hart, 1999, p. 455).

The authors found no substantive articles in the library literature about academic librarians' creative or professional activities. Concluding that there is a need to learn more about academic librarians' scholarship as well as professional and creative work outside of library science, the authors decided that the best way to learn about such publication and activity was to survey academic librarians.

Methodology

The authors initially chose a qualitative, journalistic method: working from the authors' known contacts known to produce non-LIS work. Those contacts would be asked to forward the survey to their contacts, and so on. This snowball sampling method is recommended for surveying small, unique populations. While the method ensured that only qualified librarians would respond to the survey, it proved too exclusive. In order to locate other qualified participants, the authors chose to publish the survey on COLLIB-L, the e-mail list for the college libraries section of the American Library Association (ALA) and on ULS-L, the e-mail list of the university libraries section of ALA. The survey consisted of 36 questions with multiple opportunities for respondents to write free-text responses. Survey questions were created in response to the authors' early findings to elicit desired data. In total, 136 academic librarians took the survey, which ran from June to August 2011. The survey did not require an answer to every question. Survey respondents were asked to participate only if they were, in fact, producing work outside of library science. The authors hoped to capture frank, personal commentary about why academic librarians produce non-LIS work and to what outcome. The authors independently analyzed free-text responses for information and attitudes, applying an inter-rater reliability check of two readers. The authors coded the respondents' written answers, looking for meaningful patterns. Although the sample was small, the data are valuable since the respondents represent every type of academic library, and the survey results included a great amount of free-text response that was best analyzed by author coding. A large sample would have been impractical. Future research could survey a particular group of academic librarians.

Results
### Survey respondent demographics (Figure 1)
Regarding faculty status of the entire sample, 66 percent have faculty status, 29 percent do not; 4 percent did not answer the question (Figure 2).

Of the respondents, 36 percent indicated their primary work is reference/public service, 14 percent indicated instruction/information literacy, and 24 percent are administrators. The remainder indicated that their primary areas of responsibility are technical services (8 percent), archives/special collections (4 percent), library systems (4 percent), and electronic resources (1 percent). Totally, 9 percent selected "other" (Table I).

Nearly 60 percent of respondents work in a library with a tenure system, whether or not they are tenured or on the tenure track. Of 128 respondents, 94 percent have advanced degrees as well as an MLS; 63 percent received their MLS first; 37 percent received the other degree first.

Publishing and presenting
Less than half (42 percent) of all respondents answered yes to the question, "Have you ever published an article about non-library science subjects in a non-library science
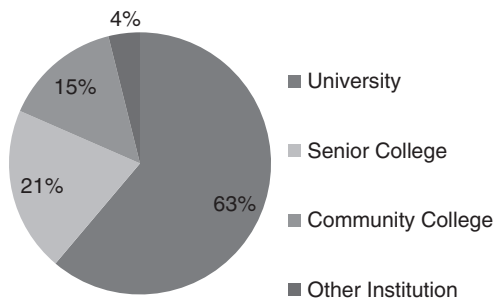
Figure 1.
All respondents:
institution type
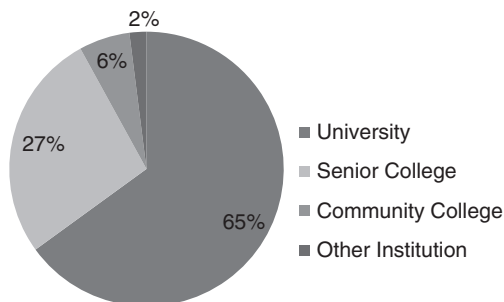
Figure 2.
Faculty respondents:
institution type

Yes, I have tenure	35%
There has never been a tenure system in my library	33%
I am on a tenure track, but I am not yet tenured	15%
There is a tenure system in my library, but I am not on it. (I am an administrator, lecturer, officer, etc.)	9%
A tenure system in my library once existed but has been eliminated	7%
No response	1%

Table I.
Tenure system in
respondents' libraries

periodical?" This question captures the gist of the authors' investigation, and it might seem that the percentage should be higher, given the fact that respondents self-selected to participate as librarians who produce work outside of LIS. However, not all respondents reported publishing in non-LIS journals as their non-LIS work. 18 percent reported publishing non-LIS subject books for any audience. However, when those respondents described their book publications, most were revealed to be chapters or encyclopedia entries. Others expressed intent to publish in non-LIS journals about non-LIS topics. Most respondents, 82 percent, have not published books on a non-LIS subject. Just 18 percent answered yes to the question "Have you ever published an article about non-library science subjects in a library science periodical?" Respondents described publishing articles about online portfolios, teaching personal voice through library instruction, application of politeness theory to reference transactions, and Cave knowledge management.

Totally, 50 percent of the 90 respondents who have faculty status reported publishing one or more non-LIS articles in non-LIS periodicals. Only 20 percent, eight of the 40 respondents who reported not having faculty status, had done so. When asked to describe, three of these respondents had published creative works or book reviews and one had not yet published at all. Thus, only 10 percent of respondents without faculty status had published scholarship in journals outside of LIS. There appears to be a correlation between faculty status and publishing non-LIS articles in non-LIS periodicals.

Regarding having published fiction, poetry, or creative non-fiction, 21 percent indicated having done so, 79 percent had not. More reported having published poetry than any other genre, and several indicated having published in more than one genre. The majority of respondents (86 percent) had not exhibited visual art in galleries or museums; only 10 percent had done so. A few respondents from that group reported that they had curated exhibitions but most reported being an exhibited artist. Totally, 15 percent reported having choreographed or performed work in professional venues. Just over half of that group indicated they had performed instrumental or vocal music. Clearly, librarians are more active in other academic disciplines than they are in creative fields.

Regarding presentations, 44 percent have made presentations within their college or university system about non-library science subjects to a non-librarian audience while 56 percent have not. Totally, 43 percent (56) have made presentations in an academic setting outside of their college or university system about non-library subjects to a non-librarian audience while 57 percent have not. About half of those who made such presentations provided details about the academic conferences or symposia of various associations and groups: Contemporary Artists' Book Conference; International Conference on the Book; Midwest Political Science Association Conference; American Democracy Project; Karst Management Symposium; Conference of Historic Aviation Writers; Popular Culture Association; Humanities and Technology Association; Children's Literature Association; Higher Learning Commission; College Book Art Association; New England Historical Association; Technology, Knowledge, and Society; Midwest American Society for 18th Century Studies; American Institute of Conservation; Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology; Modern Language Association; American Counseling Association; Bibliotherapy Education Project; and Australian & New Zealand Association for Medieval & Early Modern Studies.

Work flow and support
Survey respondents were asked whether they had spent time on scholarship or creative work outside the field of librarianship during the time since they began full-time work

as academic librarians. Totally, 79 percent answered "yes" and 19 percent answered "no." Totally, 54 percent of respondents indicated that they had administrative support to do so. Totally, 40 percent said they did not have support to do so. The majority of library administrators, then, are perceived by this sample of librarians as supporting research and scholarship outside of LIS. At the same time, 79 percent of the sample is engaged in such work regardless. Quite a few respondents described the number of professional development days or amount of release time they have for scholarship:

- I have received research time to work on my current project, including a sabbatical.

- My library granted me a six-month leave to complete my dissertation (outside of library science).

- I have spent research leave time pre-planning and grant writing for my digital oral history project.

- I very often take research days to write articles […] although they are outside the scope of library science, because I publish them in library journals, this is acceptable to administration.

Totally, 21 percent (15 out of 73) of the respondents who spent time on non-LIS work indicated that they did so during the workday because they did not have research leave, sabbatical, or other release time. The narrative responses of 30 percent (22 out of 73) of those who spent time on non-LIS work expressed satisfaction with their supervisors' or administrations' support. One indicated that administrative support was offered on the condition that work lead to a peer-reviewed publication. Representative comments described supportive work environments:

- the chief librarian and the college itself have a fairly liberal attitude toward publication […] given our additional master's degree, publishing in other areas is valued and supported;

- my chief librarian is a scholar, and supports scholarship among library faculty; and

- our library administration is very supportive of collaboration with faculty in research projects.

The authors asked respondents to comment on financial support for non-LIS work. Only 16 percent (22) reported receiving grant money for research outside of LIS. Of these 22 respondents, 78 percent (17) have faculty status. It thus appears that there is a correlation between faculty status and likelihood of receiving grant money for research outside of LIS.

Requirements and encouragement
In addition to being asked about administrative support to pursue non-LIS work, respondents were asked whether or not they are required or strongly encouraged to pursue non-LIS work. A minority, 23 percent (31), answered yes; 74 percent (100) answered no. Among the "yes" respondents who provided descriptions, none reported being required to do so. One respondent wrote that scholarship or creative work is required generally and that it can be either in library science or in a subject discipline. Another responded that non-LIS work is optional, and considered on par with library science work. A "yes" respondent reported encouragement to publish in any discipline, "as long as it's peer-reviewed." This sample of librarians perceives that academic library administrators are fairly supportive of non-LIS work but that most do not require or strongly encourage it.

Survey respondents were asked whether they were required or strongly encouraged to pursue scholarship in LIS publications, and 60 percent (82) answered affirmatively while 38 percent (51) answered negatively. Among the affirmative responses, encouragement (rather than requirement) to publish is the norm, with about 74 percent of those respondents (61 out of 82) indicating that publication within library science is encouraged, while only 26 percent (21 out of 82) indicated that publication in the field is required. The majority of all respondents reported a lack of clear requirement: "We are not given specific guidance around these issues," and "as far as I've been aware, any scholarship is fine," characterize some of these answers. This lack of clarity reported by several respondents suggests that vague publication requirements are a common situation in the professional lives of academic librarians. Some may pursue non-LIS publication to distribute the risks by publishing in both library science and non-LIS.

Motivation
Respondents were asked to answer the following question about motivation: If scholarly, professional, or creative work outside of library science is not explicitly written in to your job description, why do you do it?

A positive finding is that 20 percent (18 out of 90) of respondents with faculty status described the favorable effect that non-LIS scholarship has on their practices as librarians. One motivation is improved librarian performance. A related motivation is more positive reception by discipline faculty and students. One respondent wrote:

> I believe that [non-LIS scholarship] contributes to my success as a professional academic librarian by allowing me to relate to teaching faculty and students within my institution more effectively through showing that I understand their issues at a disciplinary level and by increasing my stature as a recognized practitioner/scholar of the discipline.

Another wrote, "My research enhances my own understanding of LIS service, potentially helping to improve […] library services." Others remarked on how non-LIS research benefits the institution: "[My research] addresses immediate needs and concerns on my campus and responds to events and issues that are being addressed by the campus community and to which I bring some expertise."

Non-LIS activity improving librarian performance and reception: selected responses by respondents with faculty status:

· Increases my reputation at the college. That is, faculty in English and Art respect such work.

· The interdisciplinary nature of my research […] has helped me to fill the gap between researchers and libraries.

· I take pride in having a faculty position and I want to bring to my work all relevant fields of knowledge.

· My creative interests make me a better librarian.

· To bridge art with librarianship, creative practice with process, archives with counter narrative.

· Contributes to my success as a professional academic librarian by allowing me to relate to teaching faculty and students within my institution more effectively through showing that I understand their issues at a disciplinary level and by increasing my stature as a recognized practitioner/scholar of the discipline.

- It is important to show teaching faculty that you are a full faculty member.

- It addresses immediate needs and concerns on my campus and responds to events and issues that are being addressed by the campus community and to which I bring some expertise.

- I enjoy that my scholarly work has the potential to inform my practice as a librarian. I also enjoy the opportunity to participate more fully in the workings of the college that my research projects provide (which also helps my librarianship).

- It is my field of interest and links with some of my disciplines that I act as librarian for.

- My research enhances my own understanding of LIS service, potentially helping to improve our own library services.

- It helps me understand the lives and experiences of faculty and graduate students better.

- [Historical scholarship] really does support my work as a librarian. The ways in which a historian has to think critically and analyze are useful to catalogers also, and certainly to special collections librarians.

- I never know when something I learn may be used to make me a better librarian or to enhance a bond with someone at the university.

- I believe it makes me a much more well-rounded person and overall a better employee and manager.

- Brings value and recognition to the library that yes we are real faculty that engage in research.

- I am bringing the same analytic mind and skill set to scholarship in textile history that I bring to my area of librarianship [database management and improving access]. What you learn in one area can help you build on what you do in the other.

- Continuing to do [history] research keeps me connected to the research process, which is what my faculty most want my instruction to focus on.

Other respondents expressed that library science is a multidisciplinary field and should be regarded as such: "It is absurd to think of librarianship as a world unto itself, a hermetically sealed discipline."

Only 11 percent (ten out of 90) of respondents with faculty status and one (one out of 40) respondent without faculty status criticized library science scholarship in their comments about their motivation to do non-LIS work. Comments from this group included these: "I published in library science because it was so easy to do;" "The type of topic I'm most interested in is not necessarily 'applied,' which I think dominates the library science literature;" and "I find research done outside of library science more engaging/interesting to me personally and typically more rigorous."

Beyond adding value to the library or institution, non-LIS work is interesting and fulfilling to many respondents. The majority of respondents expressed determination to produce such work regardless of administrative support, out of love and persistent interest, and for their own enjoyment, both personal and professional. The respondents with faculty status were the only ones who described their motivation using positive, emotional language, words such as love, enjoyment, happy, and joy.

Disciplines and fields
An analysis of responses to the question "List the disciplines or fields of your scholarly, professional, or creative work" revealed prominent words and phrases: *History, Music, Art History, Photography, Fiction, Creative Writing, Poetry,* and *Anthropology.* This disproportionate representation suggests that librarians producing non-LIS work are more likely to pursue work in the humanities. The sample was too small to generalize, however. It is worth noting that 25 percent (14) of the 56 respondents who reported publishing about non-LIS subjects in non-LIS journals do not have an additional advanced degree, suggesting that librarians need not have an additional advanced degree to contribute to a field. Likewise, some respondents are publishing in non-LIS fields that do not match their non-MLS advanced degree.

Many respondents listed two or more disciplines or fields of their non-LIS work. This true multidisciplinary (or possibly interdisciplinary) orientation is worth noting. A selection of answers includes the following: "rhetoric, digital culture, and psychology;" "German linguistics, foreign language pedagogy, communication studies, and fantasy literature;" "steampunk, history, women's studies, and transsexuals;" "urban history, sports history, and criminal justice history;" "dance, archival studies, and memory studies;" and "political science, neighborhood reconstruction, public records management, and educational technology."

Conclusion
Academic librarians' comments and thoughts regarding non-LIS work reveal much about their motivations, interests, and workflow. The authors' findings could contribute to wider validation of non-LIS activity, particularly in regards to hiring, reappointment, promotion, and tenure decisions. In addition, library administrators might consider librarian job satisfaction valuable enough to the library operation to warrant greater support for non-LIS work. Importantly, these findings begin to illuminate some of the hidden yet important non-LIS work of academic librarians who pursue their allied scholarly and creative interests. Future research could conduct a similar survey of a particular group such as ARL librarians, tenured librarians, academic librarians with additional graduate degrees in professions rather than academic disciplines, or library administrators.

Respondents reported that personal reward is one of the main reasons for pursuing non-LIS work. The survey results show that many academic librarians enjoy producing scholarship, presenting at conferences, and creating visual and performing art and will do so regardless of whether or not the library values such work or if it "counts" for reappointment, promotion, or tenure. Evidence that librarians pursue non-LIS work "for the love of it" is indicative of their deep commitment to applying their intellectualism and creativity. At worst, academic librarians spend their own time on projects that they care about with no recognition from the library or institution. At best, academic librarians receive release time for study and scholarship and, importantly, earn recognition from the library, the institution, and the profession.

The academic library is a vital part of a larger organization, the university, or college that it serves, and librarians' non-LIS scholarship and creative work can enhance the effectiveness of the library's services and resources. Positive outcomes such as informed collection development, mutually beneficial subject liaison work, and effective outreach to students all strengthen the library's contribution to the institution. Librarians are increasingly expected to pioneer new technologies, take on leadership roles at their institutions, and implement new practices in higher education.

At the same time, librarians must continue to be knowledgeable about library collections and information resources of value to their constituents, and librarians must continue to develop services that meet the needs of their patrons. Surely the non-LIS work of academic librarians can help them develop these collections, resources, and services. More library administrators should support the non-LIS work of the librarians they supervise, especially those with faculty status, because non-LIS work not only fosters job satisfaction but also has a positive effect on the library's relationships with other academic departments. Fostering these relationships further strengthens the library's role at the institution. Support of all forms of high-quality scholarship or creative work is very likely to pay dividends that build the library's intellectual capital, thus adding value to institutions of higher education.

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