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Recommended Citation

Rawson, K., Cobine, C. J., & Kirk, S. (2019). Supporting Changing Research Practices of Language and Literature Scholars at the University of Pennsylvania. Retrieved from https://repository.upenn.edu/library_papers/116

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Supporting Changing Research Practices of Language and Literature Scholars at the University of Pennsylvania

Katie Rawson, Sam Kirk, and Charles Cobine
University of Pennsylvania Libraries

Intro

The Penn Libraries participated in a national study of the research practices of professors of literature, language, and writing. The aim of this study is to analyze research practices and challenges, surfacing actions that the library and others in research support at the University may take up to help faculty do their scholarly work better and more seamlessly. We collaborated with Ithaka S+R in this project along with fourteen other institutions: Brown University, Columbia University, Haverford College, Georgetown University, Indiana University-Bloomington, Johns Hopkins University, New York University, Rutgers University, Swarthmore College, University of Illinois at Chicago, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of Utah as well as the Modern Language Association.

Methods

This study was a small, interview-based analysis of working scholars. We interviewed fourteen standing faculty members from six departments. Half of the scholars interviewed were from the English department, which reflects the size of that department in proportion to the number of literary scholars in Romance Languages, Near Eastern Languages, East Asian Languages, Germanic Languages, and Russian and East European Studies at Penn. The faculty members were chosen to represent a wide range of work that is being done in literary study at the University of Pennsylvania. The semi-structured interviews were approximately an hour long and included questions about their research and their experience with archives and special collections, secondary materials, scholarly communications and impact, and research training (see appendix A). After being transcribed, the interviews were coded and analyzed by the research team. We have used gender-neutral pronouns and removed identifying information within quotes in order to de-identify the scholars who took part in this study.

Findings

We have divided our findings into four major areas around access, publishing, research practices, and human relationships. Many of the issues that emerged have been part of the research experience for a while: books are central for tenure; the information landscape is constantly changing and tough to navigate; fields surface through citation networks. However,

the interviews also pointed us to new opportunities, challenges, and solutions. Faculty members saw a shift toward public humanities. They recognized impediments to access – from institutional affiliations to insufficient data. In particular, they exposed the complications of accessing non-English material and the importance of this in a landscape of increasingly transnational literary study. They also helped us see how we could improve research experiences in a variety of ways, from using technology to map fields to developing new forms of training.

Access

Inaccessible materials

Nearly all scholars interviewed related anecdotes about unavailable materials—work that exists, but which is inaccessible for one reason or another. Lack of access was attributed to structural issues in libraries as well as institutional and social inequity.

A common concern was about the lack of access to materials published abroad, especially in areas of the world that are less widely collected in research libraries in the United States (East Africa, South Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, East Asia, Eastern Europe). One scholar recalled their attempt to get an article from a book review magazine published in India, which was not available from any research library in the United States. Periodicals with smaller circulations, especially in literary studies, were especially difficult to access.

Scholars also connected issues of access to materials, particularly primary source materials, to cultural heritage power structures. Like smaller foreign publications, cultural productions by marginalized groups have been historically undervalued by the suppliers or curators who were more likely to build collections with an eye toward (often white) prestige, so they are less likely to be in libraries. The diversity of collections remains a problem despite increased scholarly interest in works of marginalized people. As one faculty member said,

The idea is to be critical but critical in the sense of critical thinking, not criticism. How these archives are formed? What are the structures, the powers that made them like this? Questions of access: Who gets in and out? who makes those decisions? Why? “Oh, let’s pay £6,000 for a single manuscript by E.M Forster, but let’s pay \$500.00 for an African American writer’s entire collection.”

Scholars also found that the structures of libraries made it difficult to access materials for archival research. Faculty members described the complicated nature of planning trips to archives and the difficulty to determining what would be available or how long it would take to request and receive the particular materials that were of interest. They often had a limited travel schedule, and some noted experiences where the facilities’ hours did not allow them enough time to retrieve and review the materials and note discoveries. In one case, a scholar had arranged to see an item held in storage, but only received a notification that the material was available after they were already returning home. Another scholar told us about the challenges of access to materials, saying “in the [country] National Library, the librarians can tell

you that the book is inaccessible with this crazy word, *zastabilizirovan*, stabilized, meaning that it's at the bottom of a huge stack of books that they can't move right now."

There was also system-based inaccessibility in digitized and digital collections, where people found themselves unable to get to material that was theoretically available because of issues of permission, failures in infrastructure, or the simple decay of digital objects. They spoke about digitized archival collections that were missing essential functions such as search. The remnants of early digitization efforts that did not take sustainable approaches to digital design into account made their research onerous and inconvenient. At times, they would surface important digitized materials only to find them missing later.

Scholars also noted the variation from one institution to another in access to scholarly materials as well as the lack of access for people without or between institutional affiliations. For example, one faculty member described their transition from a graduate student at a poorly resourced institution where many books were missing due to loss to Penn with substantial research collections, security and loss prevention, and established collection management processes. Others pointed out the challenges of scholarship students who graduated and were either without institutional affiliations or were at places with considerably smaller collections.

[Access to non-English materials](#)

Interviewees raised questions of access, and lack of access, to non-English materials. For nearly all literary scholars who we interviewed, there was great interest in literature in languages other than English and support for deeper research in the original language. Researchers argued for the importance of production and collection of translated work. Scholars felt strong language skills were vital to good work, and some had begun to study new languages even well into their careers in order to do better work. They were critical that tenure and promotion committees did not value translations, making it so that these works simply aren't available. As one scholar said, "The language gap is just so wide, and there's so much interesting scholarship that just never gets known because it's not in English."

Scholars were also adamant about having both translations and the original works accessible.

Sometimes I think it's useful for the students to be able to consult the translation. Sometimes even I consult the translation if it's a really difficult text or I'm curious about the translation. But in general, for me it doesn't count, unless they're reading it in the original. I don't feel like I've read it, unless I'm reading in the original within my field.

Additionally, scholars were invested in how libraries build collections in non-English languages. While many of them praised the Penn librarians who collect in foreign languages, they were also attentive to the complicated and competing processes of building these collections. For example, one scholar was critical of collaborative collection development policies that split up the acquisition of foreign materials based on geography, which left them wondering what their role and limitations were in requests and collection development.

Faculty also saw real problems in digital preservation and in cataloging for non-English materials. While all faculty struggled with finding the right terms for their searches, for faculty working in foreign languages this was amplified (which we discuss later in Research Practices). They also expressed concern about the arrangement and description of materials in the archive. For example, one scholar described how archives staff at another institution had mishandled collections of original manuscripts, reorganizing the materials in a way that they saw reflected a lack of linguistic knowledge.

Open Data

While most of the scholars we talked to were most interested in reading access, a few discussed their desire for access to the data within databases and catalogs. They wanted to be able to directly manipulate the material. Two scholars envisioned very different ways of interacting with catalog records and scholarly content that the libraries don't widely facilitate: access to open, structured data, and the ability to tag and add metadata to existing content.

One faculty member expressly denounced having to rely on tools from the vendors themselves, like Google Scholar's snippet view, or HathiTrust's text analysis tool, as database providers can't anticipate the various needs of scholars. As the interviewee noted, "it's tormenting not to be able to access and manipulate the data in ways that you want to."

What you often want as a researcher is to be able to get the data out and play with it. And that's hard to do. Having data that can be played with in the black box and you can say, "Will you please play with it this way for me and then show me what you get?" That's a half measure that in general, I would disapprove of. It's not giving us what we need. So, to the extent that libraries can provide raw data to scholars – including raw data of journals, databases – and then leave it to the scholars and others to provide the tools that will enable us to manipulate that data in ways that are helpful.

Another scholar wanted the ability to append their own content to existing data. They described a vision to add custom tags to items in our collection and create lists curated by classes, an idea which expanded upon the capabilities of a now-retired tool called PennTags. Both ideas underscore the need to create open and highly interactive systems in which faculty and students can use scholarly materials in emerging ways.

Publishing

Where to Publish

The scholars we interviewed expressed tension about where to publish their research. There was a clear consensus that the scholarly monograph printed in a reputable press continues to hold the highest status among publishing venues. Yet the same scholars spoke of a desire to reach wider audiences with editorial and feature articles in magazines, digital editions, and emerging forms of scholarship.

Nearly all of the scholars we interviewed acknowledged the importance of the book in the tenure and promotion process. “Books are what really count,” one faculty member explained. Another characterized the tenure committee’s attitude as, “We want a book. We want progress towards a second book. And we want to see that you publish in a bunch of peer-reviewed places within your field.” One scholar spoke of a dedicated colleague undertaking rigorous and original scholarship that wasn’t in the form of a book. They recounted how the colleague was not yet at an opportunity for promotion with the restrictive, formal nature of the system: “But it’s that fetish of the book, you know.”

Outside of book projects, scholars expressed the need to publish in prestigious journals, but offered no clear criteria for what would constitute a high-status journal. Scholars drew a clear distinction between journal ranking methods in the sciences versus in the humanities, with a general distrust for bibliometrics. Scholars recognized some journals as more reputable or prestigious than others; however, they also found that scales of discipline, where the published topics are “not as concentrated,” and “narrower” fields made it unclear what one would say is “top ranked.” This also led to uncertainty when dipping into other humanities fields. One scholar, when working on an interdisciplinary project, envisioned a tool or service that might make it easier to detect the relative significance of journals in a given domain, helping them “know what the flagship journals are in a field” with less work.

Scholars also weighed the value of publishing exclusively in academic presses against diverting some energy into writing for more public forums. One scholar wrestled with a choice between publishing in a “rather conservative journal with a rather smaller distribution” and publishing in a large, non-academic periodical. After their colleagues favored the small journal because it was an established publication and would “make a good impression,” the scholar wondered:

I thought but on whom? You're my colleagues for a small department. Wouldn't you be more excited if I put this out in a really big journal? I feel like the deans or Penn at large would probably be most excited if I published it in *The Atlantic* or something or someplace that would really have a broader reach. And that's a balance that I'm not real sure how to navigate...

Public Writing

Many scholars consider contributions to public venues to have value, while not knowing exactly how this activity factors into tenure and promotion. The advantages of inclusion or publication in mainstream publications are clear. Scholars receive wider recognition for their work. Institutions use this kind of recognition to praise the work of a faculty member and share with its entire community or with alumni. It can have an indirect impact on fundraising, enrollment in courses, and ultimately, the entire image of an institution.

Many faculty members discussed their contributions and the contributions of their colleagues and students to popular journals, newspapers, and news programs. They are writing reviews and cultural criticism as well as serving as experts when journalists want contextual framing for contemporary incidents. Most the scholars referenced well-known magazines—*The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *Harper's*, the *Los Angeles Review of Books*—recognizing that it is significant to receive coverage for one's work or a byline in one of these publications. Some scholars posited that colleagues and administrators would consider such public-facing work even to be of greater prestige or importance than publishing in narrowly focused academic publications that would have been common two decades ago.

I think that there's definitely a trend toward more popular genres or more popular venues. I think that at least in the kinds of people that I see get interviews or the kinds of people who seem very exciting, they'll be publishing in sort of sexier places and in smaller formats, maybe in less scholarly formats where we'll be doing review articles or something that's got a sort of broader appeal. I wonder sometimes though how many publications would equal a publication in *The New Yorker*.

While one faculty member discussed how their work as a public intellectual directly led to their book project, people expressed concern that too much public-facing writing without also working on book projects or contributing to traditional scholarly journals could come across negatively, especially to more conservative colleagues, imperiling their tenure.

Academic Journal Special Issues

The academic journal special issue emerged as a surprising highlight among academic publishing options. Faculty described the special issue as an increasingly valued work of scholarship, comparable to the edited volume but with a simpler path to publication. Several noted that special issues are easier and quicker to put together than an edited volume, developing organically from the work of conference panels or from coterie of scholars with shared methodological frameworks and interests.

Several different interviewees specifically highlighted the increased impact of articles from a special issue as compared to an edited volume. As one scholar explained, due to increased readership, "The special issue of a journal will resonate more, will get cited more, just have more impact than almost anything else you can do."

Another scholar reflected on the value of emerging researchers editing special issues, especially in highly ranked journals. In such cases, when graduate students or tenure-track faculty edit special issues, "It shows that they're connecting to other people in the field and know what's going on."

Quality and New Forms

Several scholars brought up the question of whether the tenure process weighs quantity or quality. Faculty believed that reviews of their work would consider quantitative measures, but

they were adamant (though sometimes skeptical) that the quality of work should be paramount. As we have discussed, beyond the traditional high-prestige books and articles, there wasn't consensus about how other kinds of activities, from public intellectual work to digital scholarship, would be considered. One faculty member described it this way:

At the very least, they're going to want to see the quantity of output. Regardless of whether they're sitting down and reading every page of my articles, they're looking at where I'm publishing them and looking for that to be a prestigious, well-respected place with a rigorous peer-review process. I've heard through the grapevine that there are people testing the limits of that. And digital humanities is a big thing, so there are people who, instead of books, are trying to get full professor based on a webpage or a hypertext. I think those trends are on the horizon, that what counts as scholarly publication will change.

Research Practices

Situating in the Scholarship

The research practice that had the most consistent, emphatic place in our study was using others' bibliographies. The way that scholars did much of their work, even finding primary sources, was through reading and following the citations in the works of others. Despite the transformation in searching, which we will discuss later, the practice of locating and putting oneself into conversation with others was central. This isn't surprising for a field that is built on analysis of works; however, it is important for understanding how these researchers operate and where they see challenges and opportunities.

One of the significant and difficult tasks that faculty members identified was situating oneself in a field. They discussed this in two areas – when they themselves were trying to work in a new field and when they were trying to teach their students how to be good scholars. Engaging in a new field was something that faculty were excited and daunted by. Many saw this as a common experience in literary study with the rise of new methods, transnational turns, and increasing interdisciplinary scholarship. The main trouble of moving into a new field was figuring out the lay of the land. One professor described it this way:

I think if I could wave my magic wand I would have a tool that was able to visually or descriptively map that field, especially a new field. It's one thing when you've been in a field for a long time, and you have a kind of a feel for its parameters – has become kind of second nature, but when you're trying to learn like what's the relationship between the energy humanities and the environmental humanities, and those fields are still emergent in the sense that they're too young to have historians of that discipline.

They described strategies they had for self-teaching new fields, the key ones being learning from colleagues and bibliographies. However, they also expressed their anxiety that especially in a new field there was the risk of missing significant scholarship without even knowing it. They

discussed their concerns about their students developing knowledge of the field in similar ways.

Search Sources

Most of our findings around how faculty discover materials were unsurprising; however, they point to important work to be done by libraries and ways we might be able to better support researchers. Faculty move between three main online spaces as they conduct research: databases, the institution's library site, and the Google environment. Each of these spaces presents different assets and difficulties.

Faculty who study literature heavily rely on the MLA International Bibliography database, JSTOR, Project Muse, and WorldCat. Many also use field-specific databases. Not surprisingly, MLA is the place where most started their research and where they go to reliably find the literature in a field. Still, they were clear about the boundaries of what MLA indexes. Some scholars' research behaviors changed with the advent of federated search (services like Articles+ that draw together the data on many publications and databases into a single interface – in this case, within Franklin, the library's discovery interface). Some said that, for them, this functionality was comparable to MLA, EBSCO, or other aggregators of articles that they used to go to. Google Scholar was framed in a context like MLA or other library-based search tools; it simply searches a different set of resources. One faculty member summed up this feeling:

None of it is great, but it's all better than not knowing what's out there or waiting for the hard-copy bibliography to come out for sure.

Faculty research behaviors when they use Google's general search are not like when they use research databases and catalogs. Instead, regular Google is part of a practice of chasing things down. When faculty can't remember the name of a book, they Google. When they want to know what they are not finding, where the interstices or underground resources are, they Google. They don't use Google to find the academic lay of the land or the scholarly conversation. Instead, they use it to surface the existence of obscure plays and to find off-the-grid archives that are outside the realm of major entities like WorldCat.

For all of these sources, it was important to faculty to know what was included in different databases and search tools. They expressed their own misgivings about knowing exactly what they are searching. For example, one faculty member described:

You don't know how wide or how narrow a search you're really doing. This is true of a lot of the databases that the library subscribes to, and you'll have five or six similar looking databases that have slightly different names. And you have names like one or mega or big or universal or whatever that make it sound like it's everything.

They know it is not everything, but the ambiguity leads to concern about and the development of strategies for finding a comprehensive view of a subject.

Search Strategies

Navigating the information landscape using these research tools means that faculty have to be able to: 1. Find the right place to look, 2. Use the right keywords, and 3. Figure out how to manipulate the interface (aspects like filters as well as simply the arrangement of information).

It is of note that faculty said that *they* have a hard time coming up with the right keywords. Faculty as well as librarians who teach often watch students struggle to figure out which terms to use in a given place to find the body of literature they need. Our interviews revealed that faculty face this same dilemma. Sometimes they could articulate the problem precisely and demonstrated its relationship to information architecture and metadata choices:

In terms of searching for articles let's say on MLA Bibliography or JSTOR, the difficulty there is that you have to try a lot of different options, especially when you use foreign languages to try and get what you're looking for. More specifically, especially when you're dealing with something like a collection of tales like the [name of work] then it becomes even more difficult to find...There are some who just call them – in English – tales. Some insist on calling them novellas. Some publications that I have worked with have insisted you use the French *nouvelle*. There are people that use the shorthand *N* plus the number. It could be any of those.

Most faculty, like this one, only do keyword searches after engaging seriously with the known literature, following citations; then, they use keyword searches to make sure they were not missing pieces, to discover the work at the edges of the conversation, or when they “hit a dead end.”

Clearly, some discovery issues are about information structures. Faculty researchers make use of and appreciate the metadata that allows them to discover materials and narrow searches. They praised more detailed finding aids and lamented when things are uncataloged or cataloged with errors. They also praised good indexing, whether it was physical or online. They talked about how digital collections make items and individual essays, especially when table of contents are recorded, so much easier to find. Some even suggested that this was informing their publishing habits. One scholar that a few years ago they had decided not to publish in edited volumes because they were “black holes” that “disappear onto the shelves of libraries.” Then they published in an electronic edited volume, which “comes up in all the searches.” The difference transformed them: “The way that these things work, the electronic edition is much more important than the print edition, so why are we bothering with all these print editions, I don't know.”

Many scholars discussed their interest in how materials were arranged and processed. In particular, they held preferences about how archives and finding aids could be more helpfully constructed. One scholar described how important chronological arrangement is to understanding creators and work: “If you can have all the letters or all the materials that are in,

say, 1956 to 1960, then you can just dabble into that whole phase and you're kind of feeling your way through that moment of life."

The scholars' curiosity and depth of thought on archival organization was an interesting contrast to the relative lack of attention to the back-end organization and systems of database structures. Many scholars felt that they should or wanted to learn more about relevance ranking mechanisms, filters, and selection processes, but most had much less to say about the organization, structure, and systems of digital tools than archives. In general, they wanted to be able to search better and often felt themselves to not have the strategies they needed to best find materials. Faculty discussed the continuous learning that the current research landscape requires. They often felt that they were not able to do things as effectively as they wished because the systems are complex and constantly changing.

Time and Discovery

Several scholars described how ideas for what they considered their most meaningful work came from unexpected places. Sometimes a clear vision for a research project would emerge after a "long-gestating" period or as a scholar repackaged, clarified, and built upon prior work. Interviewees spoke about discovery inspiring research. Often those were encounters in the archives, but scholars also found their projects within their personal lives (place-based experience) and through reading others' work in the course of what might be considered service work (reviewing grants). Other study participants reported that their teaching activities often led them to new areas of research.

Researchers were often following their intellectual curiosity. One scholar described intentionally building in the time to make unexpected discoveries, which were to them inevitable. They excitedly described this during an interview. This also increases the mystery surrounding the research process and the intensity of making a discovery.

Sometimes the gold is in the maybes, but you don't know yet. I also like to do a thing that I call *dérive*, drifting. It's based on Guy Debord, the situationist. There are too many experiences I've had where something I wasn't expecting to look at ends up being directly relevant. Something that ends up a core part of my work, you know? [...] I try to manufacture that serendipity or the accidental. So, I drift away. So, I incorporate some time to request a box that's just a maybe – a hunch, maybe. Or I look at the other folders in the same box that I requested even if they seem completely irrelevant, just to see what happens.

The discovery stories that featured libraries and archives appeared to support the value of making collections able to be browsed, with an arrangement and presentation that draws researchers into the collections, whether physically, in-person, or through systems that allow for an online immersion. Their descriptions also demonstrated the important of work structures that allow time for all kinds of encounter in research, service, teaching, and everyday life.

Library Services

Some library services are indispensable for the faculty we interviewed. Scholars frequently praised systems that reduced friction in gaining quick access to materials, including remote access to online resources and our scholarship retrieval services: Interlibrary Loan, Scan and Deliver, and FacultyExpress.

Of Scan and Deliver, our on-site scanning service, one scholar said, “I don’t want to go back to before that existed.” The interlibrary loan systems used at Penn were nearly universally lauded, with one faculty member calling it “manna from heaven.” On FacultyExpress, for example, one scholar expressed an almost guilty gratitude:

...the fact that I can order books that show up in my office here, it makes me lazy but it is extraordinary. Sometimes, and I know this is a lot of money being spent, I need to look at one paragraph in a critical book. In the past I might have been lazy about asking for it, but I don’t any longer because it’s there and then I return it two days later if I’ve looked at it and copied that paragraph.

A few scholars did note some roadblocks in interlibrary loan, in the instances where they or someone they knew were unable to get a scan from special collections, or were given a scan without front matter.

In our interviews, scholars offered ideas for new services as well as alterations to services which already exist. They praised library orientations and classes, but saw room for more robust, for-credit instruction in library-based research as well as faculty-focused training. Another envisioned a service in which a library staff member could help scholars get organized for upcoming research trips, to best prepare them to navigate the archives and collections they planned to visit.

Research Training

Our study surfaced that there is a dearth of training for many research skills. Very few of the faculty interviewed had formal training. Most of them learned how to research by gleaning practices from faculty and colleagues or by just doing the work of scholarship. That said, they were critical of this form of learning, pushing for more formalized ways to teach research skills to graduates and undergraduates.

For graduate training, they wanted the students be able to find and identify relevant materials, be experts at search strategies, be fluent in various pieces of the information landscape vital to their work (databases, archives, etc.), be knowledgeable about methods their work requires (be they archival training or computational approaches), and be able to contextualize the scholarship and primary sources in their field.

They were skeptical that the degree of training that graduate students needed could be done within current courses because of the range of other material which needed to be covered.

Instead they offered a variety of solutions including mandatory research methods courses, co-curricular training in the first semester, intensive area-specific bootcamps, and apprenticeship models.

For undergraduates, there was a greater focus on their ability to locate and assess sources and to deeply engage with the materials of literary study and their contexts. Faculty were more likely to discuss the role of library and research training for undergraduates as possible and even wildly successful within the curriculum. When it came to their students' abilities to assess and find sources, the faculty was often despairing. They worried about their students' lack of knowledge about different sources and their tendency to choose the first materials they see without context. However, they also saw a role for the library in helping improve their assignments and their students' outcomes. Working with collections and archives was a particularly fruitful engagement for faculty. Even those who had not conducted classes like this discussed the outstanding work of their colleagues who did introduce students to work in primary sources (including classes in special collections as well as classes that used other physical and digital collections in the Penn Libraries and beyond).

Outside of in-class training, faculty also discussed the role of mentorship and having students work with faculty as important learning opportunities. They particularly saw research assistantships as valuable to students as well as themselves. They found the labor of finding, selecting, training, and managing students was something they were not always equipped to do. However, in the cases where they had good assistants, they describe mutually beneficial experiences.

Relationships

Communities of Practice

Our interviews revealed that the social networks of language and literature faculty are instrumental to the development of both collaborative and individual projects. Scholars meet in communities of practice at Penn to workshop their own ideas and to hear from others. Several faculty members talked about the value they gained from attending discussion and reading groups. One scholar said these group meetings are “the lifeblood of the life of the intellect amongst academics.”

Scholars identified many other benefits of collaborating with colleagues, from sharing, reviewing, and suggesting edits for drafts to forming paleography learning groups to scanning things for each other when at a nearby archive. Two scholars described a nearly identical scenario of reciprocal assistance: they had colleagues who were in the libraries and archives in other countries to provide scans and references for them, and they “do the same thing” for their colleagues.

Others discussed more formal partnerships, including collaborations across institutions and across disciplines. Three scholars described collaborations in areas outside of language and literature, including in the social sciences. One faculty member described a long-standing

collaboration with a faculty member from another department which grew out of a co-teaching experience. One scholar also spoke of the risk of not collaborating – missing out on key conversations in the field:

It is a shame, actually, because I feel I'm not in on conversations that I find out about after the fact when I see the publication, and I think, "Ah, it's my - I didn't check in with these people when I was writing this. I didn't collaborate."

Conferences played an important role in scholarly communities as well, and most interviewees cited them as crucial and relevant to professional development and social networking. Scholars attended and organized conferences and events at them, adding value to their fields. Conferences were a crucial for keeping up with developments in their field, mentoring junior colleagues, and developing relationships with faculty and academic staff. They found this was particularly important for students and younger scholars and recognized with some societies that there was “even more of a push for established faculty to meet younger faculty and graduate students from across the organization.”

Social Media and Online Presence

While scholars recognized the importance of their social networks, their feeling around social media and an online presence were more complicated. Every single scholar interviewed spoke about social media with an awareness of its importance and potential to affect scholarly debate, as helpful for dissemination of ideas and professional networking, but there was also a healthy skepticism of the extent of its value, with recognition that it could be a distracting or unproductive.

Scholars mentioned Twitter most often. Faculty praised the speed of Twitter for sharing and disseminating their work, though they also expressed ambivalence about self-promotion and about the toxic possibilities of Twitter. While they recognized Twitter’s potential for networking and getting to know other scholars and their work, most didn’t engage due to the time it would take. At the same time, faculty said they saw Twitter as an significant platform for new scholars.

Interviewees also mentioned Academia.edu, the social networking site for academics. Most were wary of its data-gathering practices, commercial motives, and constant email communication. One scholar described Academia.edu as “predatory” and “poisonous.” Another scholar rejected Academia.edu’s citation counts as dubious and intended to drive subscriptions, rather than as any meaningful measure of influence. Another professor criticized the peer-to-peer sharing of work on Academia.edu as disrespectful and harmful to smaller journal publishers, comparing it to Napster. They felt it was a matter of time before larger publishers would accuse Academia.edu for cutting into their revenues.

When they discussed other spaces where conversations around their work is happening (e.g., Facebook, listservs), their responses were similar. Interestingly, despite their own ambivalence, faculty often said that they thought that young scholars, like their graduate students, had to

have an online presence.

Working with Librarians

Many faculty mentioned specific close relationships with librarians at our institution or at institutional archives that they frequently visit. They expressed gratitude for librarians in a range of services, from scanning books to procuring obscure sources. Scholars described experiences where they were guided by subject expert librarians to unexpected materials for their own research, and they discussed the training, troubleshooting, and research support that librarians provide them and their students.

Whether scholars were visiting libraries and archives in the Middle East, around the United States, or in the Penn Libraries itself, faculty described how they made unexpected connections as a result of a consultation with a librarian. One scholar referred extensively to an archivist who had been responsible for organizing an author's papers. "He was instrumental in guiding me," the scholar declared. Others described librarians they'd kept in contact with in libraries around the world; with each return visit, they would go to the librarians because "nothing can replace that human knowledge."

In some cases, there was also unease about the necessity of forming relationships with librarians when visiting an archive. One scholar spoke of a "gatekeeper mentality," where the resident librarian assesses a scholar's status to determine who can and cannot gain access to a collection. At some archives, faculty felt that cultivating a relationship with curators was one of the only true ways to see the collection:

...there are still many levels of other things that you could be seeing there that you just do not know about until you strike up a relationship with another researcher who is there or the curators there start to take pity on you.

Cultivating working relationships with librarians helped faculty to feel more confident to make purchase requests. Faculty were particularly grateful for librarians who acquired rare or difficult to procure material on their behalf.

Over the course of our interviews, there were many exchanges where faculty engaged the librarian-interviewers as people who could help them better understand the information landscape and make changes they wanted to see in their teaching, in their research organization, in the institution, and in the field. The recommendations below reflect this sense of collaboration and shared investment in research in languages and literatures.

Recommendations

After reviewing all of the interviews transcripts and emerging themes, we identified ten recommendations that the Penn Libraries could follow to meet the needs of language and literature researchers.

1. Invest in diverse general and special collections. Our conversations with scholars revealed that they think critically about the collections choices that libraries make. Collections representing a diverse range of cultures are important for reflecting the wide cultural and transnational focus of today's language and literary scholars. One simple action would be to consider purchasing both original and translated texts when applicable.

2. Create structures that allow more equitable access to resources for all scholars. While the Penn Libraries is lucky to have a healthy collections budget, scholars recognized that the field of language and literature as a whole would be improved by more equitable access within and between institutions. They particularly noted the moments in researchers' lives when they are institution-less or moving between higher and lower-resourced institutions. Penn Libraries create more equitable access to scholarship by supporting and even crafting open access initiatives, which would in turn improve the information ecosystem globally.

3. Invest in robust metadata and description practices. Scholars described instances where they felt skeptical of search results because of poor indexing, often on the part of databases to which the Penn Libraries subscribes. The Penn Libraries should advocate for better and more consistent indexing from our vendors, while at the same time adopting detailed description practices for our own catalogs and finding aids. Even creating a placeholder finding aid for collections which have not yet been fully described would help to surface otherwise hidden works.

4. Empower scholars to access data in catalogs and databases that they can directly manipulate in their own work and teaching. Several scholars professed a desire to work with the underlying structured data behind journals, articles, records, and other content indexed by libraries. We could facilitate new possibilities for scholars to pull from that data, or build structures on top of that data. The Penn Libraries can also serve as an advocate for scholars in discussions with database vendors for more access to open data.

5. Develop tools to aid scholars in identifying the key publications in a field and their relative importance. While humanities researchers clearly distrusted bibliometrics and journal rankings derived from formulas, they sought out a more nuanced approach to determining which publications were central to a field, especially a field with which they were unfamiliar. The Penn

Libraries could explore field-mapping technologies that would better meet the needs of humanities scholars.

6. Celebrate the public writing achievements of faculty. Researchers saw value in writing editorials and feature articles in non-scholarly periodicals, but were less sure about the value of those writing projects in the tenure and promotion process. The Penn Libraries could better support this work by collecting, preserving, and promoting the many different outputs of Penn faculty.

7. Work with language and literature departments to develop research training for graduate students and faculty. Faculty spoke of the need for a more formal training program to prepare graduate students for their work. While library liaisons often provide optional training sessions, we envision a program co-developed between the Penn Libraries and the language and literature departments with shared goals. There may also be interest in field-targeted, highly-specialized training for faculty.

8. Provide research training for undergraduate research assistants, and serve a greater role in connecting faculty to those assistants. A number of the scholars interviewed spoke highly of their best-trained research assistants, but also lamented the amount of effort it required to train them, and the difficulty in finding both interested and well-prepared students. The Penn Libraries could develop a training program specifically for language and literature research assistants, open to newly hired assistants as well as those looking for positions.

9. Expand opportunities to host communities of practice at the Penn Libraries. Given how deeply faculty value discussion groups, learning groups, and networking opportunities with colleagues, the Penn Libraries should be transparent in marketing, convening, and facilitating our spaces for faculty and our investment in helping them network and learn.

Acknowledgements. Thanks to Ithaka S&R for the training and framework for this research and to Vickie Marre Karasic for her work planning and conducting interviews as a member of our research team.

