Research Forum: Creating and Sustaining an Intra-library Venue to Share Library Research

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INTRODUCTION Research and evidence-based practices are vital to library work, but we are often unaware of the research conducted by colleagues within our own institutions. This article describes an informal venue for library faculty and staff to discuss current research projects—including logistical considerations that are crucial to a research project's success but are rarely discussed—and receive peer advice and support.

LITERATURE REVIEW Previous studies have shown that research is a challenge for librarians, largely from lack of training. While journal clubs and writing groups are common, there is a gap in the literature on librarians discussing and receiving feedback on current research projects in an informal setting.

DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM A research forum (RF) series was hosted during the 2018-2019 academic year, open to all library faculty and staff. RF was hosted monthly, featuring one to three volunteers presenting their current research at any stage of the research lifecycle. Eight total presentations were given from September to March and mini-update presentations from previous presenters in April. Overall, in summative assessment, RF received very positive feedback, with respondents reporting they attended due to interest in the presented topics and to support colleagues. They also appreciated the value of RF in sharing current research projects in the library.

NEXT STEPS After a successful pilot year, RF has become an important part of our libraries' professional development offerings. RF provides a sustainable solution for research support, encouraging the sharing of research successes and challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Librarians conduct research for a variety of reasons: to achieve promotion or tenure, inform their practices, guide decision making, satisfy their own curiosity, and many others. While there is a well-established precedent of sharing research results at professional conferences and in journals, there are few informal venues for sharing research conducted or in progress within our profession.

Oakland University is a comprehensive, doctoral-granting institution in Rochester, Michigan with an enrollment of 20,000. Oakland University includes Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine, an allopathic medical school with a community-centered mission and 500 medical students. The Oakland University Libraries system includes two on-campus libraries, Kresge Library and the Medical Library with thirteen University library faculty and four medical library faculty, respectively. On the tenure-track, library faculty are required to develop, conduct, and publish original research in order to achieve promotion and tenure. Research deliverables can include, but are not limited to, refereed or professional journal articles, book chapters, conference presentations, poster sessions, and proceedings, reviews, bibliographies, grant proposals, and abstracts and indexes. While vaguely aware of our colleagues' published articles and conference presentations, we were unfamiliar with their current research projects, as well as the evidence-based practices of staff across the library. Specifically, we wanted to know more about the logistical issues related to research, such as finding collaborators, selecting a methodology, and deploying project management techniques—aspects crucial to a project's success, but seldom discussed.

This shared interest was the topic of conversation among three untenured library faculty members during the summer of 2018: two from Kresge Library and one from the Medical Library. We realized that our libraries have little support for research; as such, we felt that more structured support could positively impact the libraries' research. From this conversation, we designed and hosted a research forum (RF) series in academic year 2018-2019. This monthly series provided an informal means for our colleagues and ourselves to share progress and receive feedback on research projects from colleagues across library departments. It also gave presenters an opportunity to practice presentation skills and for attendees to discuss general library and institutional trends.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The benefits of librarians engaging in research are numerous. At the individual level, academic librarians enjoy a sense of accomplishment by contributing to the profession; increase their understanding of and ability to participate in the research of the faculty and students

they serve; advance their careers; and enjoy greater awareness of the latest library research (Finlay, Ni, Tsou, & Sugimoto, 2013; Hall & McBain, 2014; Kennedy & Brancolini, 2012; Luo, 2011; Pickton, 2016; Walters, 2016). At an organizational level, librarians' research can help justify staffing, space, and budget; apply best practices to services for patrons; and raise the library's profile among the campus community (Kennedy & Brancolini, 2012; Luo, 2011; Pickton, 2016). For librarianship as a whole, research advances the profession and raises the profile of the library and information science (LIS) discipline within academia (Pickton, 2016).

However, prior literature has demonstrated that many librarians find conducting research challenging (Ackerman, Hunter, & Wilkinson, 2018; Kennedy & Brancolini, 2012; Tysick & Babb, 2006). One major contributor is the lack of educational training in research. As noted in Kennedy and Brancolini's 2012 survey of academic librarians, "only 26 percent [of respondents] believe that their LIS master's degrees adequately prepared them to conduct original research" (p. 437). Therefore, the need for academic libraries to provide support (such as mentoring, time, and funding) for librarians to successfully conduct research is essential and has been written about extensively (Fox, 2007; Hall & McBain, 2014; Perkins & Slowik, 2013; Pickton, 2016; Smiglielski, Laning, & Daniels, 2014; Stephens, Sare, Kimball, Foster, & Kitchens, 2011).

Within the LIS profession, the venues for discussing research in a more informal manner are limited. Case studies have focused on two main venues: journal clubs and writing groups. In journal clubs, attendees discuss and critique published literature (Fitzgibbons, Kloda, & Miller-Nesbitt, 2017; Kraemer, 2007; Young & Vilelle, 2011). Benefits of participating in a journal club can include "networking, personal growth, increasing awareness of library research and keeping up with the literature, the desire to practice and improve critical appraisal skills, promoting the value of professional scholarship, engaging in reflective practice and inspiring the application of research to practice" (Fitzgibbons, Kloda, & Miller-Nesbitt, 2017; p. 775-776). Journal clubs in libraries are relatively recent phenomenon, most forming in the last 15 years. However, the sustainability of these groups is often limited by the number of volunteers willing to lead the discussion (Young & Vilelle, 2011). In writing groups, participants focus on a selected piece of writing. Depending on the structure, a writing group can take many formats, from simply providing dedicated writing time (as an individual or a group), to receiving constructive criticism on a writing sample (Campbell, Ellis, & Adebonojo, 2012; Exner & Houk, 2010; Tysick & Babb, 2006); some writing groups expand their scope to discussions of tenure, academia, and professional development more generally (Tysick & Babb, 2006). Writing group participants report that accountability, emotional support, and collegial feedback were the most important features of these groups (Ackerman, Hunter, & Wilkinson, 2018; Exner & Houk, 2010; Tysick &

Babb, 2006). However, only 38% of early career librarians had access to a writing group at their library or university (Ackerman, Hunter, & Wilkinson, 2018). A significant drawback of many writing groups is they often only meet for a short time, such as a single semester, and are not ongoing (Ackerman, Hunt, & Wilkinson, 2018).

The website of many academic describe formal, annual venues for presenting library research projects, such as Concordia University Library ("Concordia University Library Research Forum," 2019), Stony Brook University Library ("Stony Brook University Library Research Forum," n.d.), and University of Maryland Libraries ("University of Maryland Libraries Research and Innovation Practice Forum," 2019). However, these are only offered once a year as formal events. Few examples of ongoing, intra-library venues to present library-related research have been reported in the literature. Stephens et al. (2011) report on Texas A&M University's semi-annual, half-day Library Research Forum, in which librarians present a formal oral presentation or poster. This gave librarians the opportunity to share their research, practice presentation skills, and receive feedback from colleagues (Stephens et al., 2011). Fox (2007) discusses a similar venue, called Librarians' Research Forum, at the University of Saskatchewan, which took the form of bi-monthly meetings to discuss research, share ideas, and report on sabbatical projects. This series also had guest speakers on topics germane to research, such as selecting a methodology (Fox, 2007). Carson et al. (2014) describe the creation of a cross-institutional Librarians' Research Partnership (LRP) between two Canadian universities, whose purpose is to provide a guided venue for librarians to learn how to conduct research. The program is meant "to be practical and supportive to those in the early years of their research career, focusing on giving new tenure-track librarians opportunities to connect with each other and with those librarians having more established research portfolios" (Carson et al., 2014). Though the LRP program was not formally evaluated, the informal discussions of the research process and challenges of research were reported as the most valuable aspect. The LRP grew out of a nationwide Canadian research institute, which offered a four-day program for academic librarians across Canada to meet and plan how to better support librarian research at their own institutions (Jacobs & Berg, 2013).

Our RF series fills a gap in the literature by discussing the creation, evaluation, and sustainability of an informal, intra-library venue to share current research projects, generate ideas, and discuss the logistics of conducting said research. For our libraries' Research Forum, we sought to build on the examples in Carson et al. (2014), Stephens et al. (2011), and Fox (2007). Like Stephens et al., we made RF open to all library faculty and staff as presenters and attendees. However, unlike Stephens et al. (2011) and Fox (2007), our RF was intentionally informal, foregrounding the myriad of logistical issues of research that contribute to the success of a project, while receiving emotional support from colleagues, which was

reported as the most valued aspect in Carson et al. (2014) program. Other studies have reported that peer support and advice are important aspects to encouraging research (Carson et al., 2014; Hall & McBain, 2014; Klobas & Clyde, 2010; Tysick & Babb, 2006). We also encouraged colleagues to discuss research projects that failed, significantly shifted focus, or which did not result in a deliverable. Our RF combined the research presentations reported in Carson et al. (2014), Stephens et al. (2011), and Fox (2007) and supplemented with the beneficial aspects of a journal club and a writing group.

DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM

Research Forum (RF) was held for one hour each month on a Friday morning during the 2018-2019 academic year. Sessions were open for all library faculty and staff to participate as presenters or attendees. Over the academic year, approximately half of library faculty and staff attended at least one session, and eight library faculty presented their current research. To encourage attendance for this pilot year, library administration approved funding for coffee and light refreshments.

An email announcing this new series was sent out in mid-September 2018, including a call for presenters and all RFs dates for the year. After this initial call, presenters were recruited via email and in person. We emphasized that RF was an informal venue for talking about research, and helped presenters brainstorm which aspects of their current research were ideal for sharing: projects did not need approval from the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), be considered "research" per IRB's definition, nor funded by the library or university. We defined "current research" as any project at any stage of the research life cycle, from a report of the final results to a nascent idea. With this definition, we hoped that staff would consider some of their projects as "current research" and be willing to present. Presenters could also practice upcoming oral presentations or receive feedback on drafts of articles. Most importantly, we emphasized that we wanted presenters to talk about the "nuts and bolts" of their research—we wanted to hear their successes, mishaps and roadblocks, feedback loops, and the logistical issues that accompany all research, but are seldom discussed, much less represented in deliverables.

Invitations to each RF were sent via Google Calendar to all library faculty and staff of the University Libraries, which includes 16 faculty librarians, 4 part-time lecturer librarians, 4 administrators, and 30 staff. Libraries faculty and staff were also emailed the day before the event to encourage attendance. Each RF was held in a library instructional lab, which contains one presenter's computer with projection and multimedia capabilities at the front of the classroom; the rest of the lab consists of long tables organized into rows capable of holding 30 people. RF was scheduled based on conversations with intra-library departments so

as to not conflict with other regularly-occurring Friday morning meetings. Also, because few library instruction sessions are scheduled on Friday mornings, and because there are two other instructional labs, there was little concern that RF would interfere with library instructional activities.

We used approximately 20 minutes of the first RF in September to reiterate our goals for the series and allow time for attendees' questions. As this series asked our colleagues to present their research in a new way, we presented our own current research projects during the first three months of RF as models. From there, one or two presenters discussed a current research project at each RF. Initially, we asked presenters to sign up for 15, 30, or 45-minute slots, allowing for flexibility in presentation times and time for questions and discussion. Most presenters found they could easily fill the entire hour; on average, there were 15 minutes of questions and discussion during and after the presentations. Even our colleagues who were most reluctant to present were surprised by how much discussion was generated by their presentations. The presentations spanned the entire spectrum of library-related research, as shown in Table 1. During the last RF in April, past presenters gave 5-minute mini-updates on how their projects have progressed since their initial RF presentation and their future plans for the project.

Date	Presentation Title(s)
Sept. 2018	Engaging with Research and Publication as an Early Career Librarian: A Survey of Confidence and Contributing Factors
Oct. 2018	Faculty Knowledge and Attitudes toward Predatory Open Access Journals
Nov. 2018	1. Recovering Provincial Readership: Mary Morgan's Lost Occasional Poem 2. Everything Online is a Website: Information Format Confusion in Student Citation Behaviors
Jan. 2019	The History of the Libraries of the United Automobile Workers
Feb. 2019	1. Educational Background of ARL Directors 2. Collaborative Research Fails and Finding Success through Workplace Opportunities
Mar. 2019	Using Deductive Thematic Analysis to Examine Data Librarian Job Postings from 2013-8
Apr. 2019	Mini-updates from all past presenters

Table 1. Titles of RF presentations, which show the variety of library-related research conducted by Oakland University and Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine faculty librarians.

During each RF, we recorded observations of the presenters' and attendees' interactions in a shared Google document, capturing the questions and comments raised by the audience or the presenter, as well as informal social cues, such as nodding, laughter, etc. At the end of the year, these observation notes were evaluated for general themes to help assess these interactions, including their emergence and evolution over the year.

Feedback and Assessment

Our colleagues' responses to RF were overwhelmingly positive. Unprompted, two colleagues sent us feedback via email after the first RF, saying, "I thought the forum was great, and I look forward to future presentations. Thank you for organizing this, Colleagues!" The other email read, "I recently began the [Master's of Arts in Liberal Studies] graduate program and all the research advice I can get is appreciated!" Additionally, attendance was consistent over all seven sessions with a range of 11-18 attendees per session (mean of 13 attendees or 26.5% of library faculty and staff).

After the last session, all library faculty and staff were asked to provide feedback on the series through an online evaluation, whether they had attended or not (see Appendix A for survey instrument). The 13 respondents who attended at least one RF reported their top reasons for attending as: interest in the research and topics presented ($n = 8$), worked well with their schedule ($n = 7$), and supporting colleagues ($n = 4$). Most attendees ($n = 9$) agreed or strongly agreed that RF was a valuable way to share research at Oakland University Libraries, and they also agreed or strongly agreed that RF increased their own awareness of research being done at Oakland University Libraries ($n = 11$). Finally, attendees ($n = 11$) said they were likely or very likely to attend RF next year. When asked how future RFs might be improved, seven respondents said no improvements were needed, and two said a different time would be better for their schedule. The three respondents who did not attend cited scheduling conflicts or lack of interest.

While the responses were largely positive, some respondents disagreed regarding the value of including staff in this series. One respondent commented, "I understand the goal of including everyone in this but I go back and forth about whether it's useful/not useful, or even respectful/disrespectful of staff and their time, work responsibilities, etc." But another respondent disagreed, saying that RF was valuable as an "opportunity for staff/faculty to come together and help[s] break down the silos of what we do here." While staff at our libraries are not required to conduct research as part of their job requirements, they do make evidence-based decisions that are essential to all library services and, therefore, we thought that it was appropriate to invite staff to participate, both as attendees and presenters.

The responses to the series evaluation mirrored the observational notes that were documented for each RF. Two of the authors independently reviewed all observational notes for general themes before meeting to compare and discuss the major themes and takeaways. We noted not only verbal utterances, but nonverbal cues, including laughter, murmurs of agreement, head nods, and other evidence of audience response and interaction. One of the major takeaways from observing these interactions was the level of emotional support from colleagues generated through RF. For example, during the second RF, several tenured faculty vigorously nodded approval at the research methodology being described by two untenured faculty, serving as informal encouragement to the younger scholars. In addition, during the third RF, the audience laughed and empathized when the presenter shared that students tend to cite everything like a website, despite our ongoing instructional efforts. Ultimately, RF served as a safe venue to share personal experiences or anecdotes; gather suggestions and ideas from colleagues on how to deal with the challenges of research; and discuss greater trends in the field of librarianship and at our institution.

Practical Tips for Hosting Research Forum at Your Library

The following tips will help other libraries host a similar series.

- **Frame RF as a valuable opportunity even to librarians and staff who are not tenure-track or required to conduct research.** For many librarians, the word "research" may be fraught with anxiety, but many routine projects within academic libraries are research. Encourage your colleagues to think broadly about research; even commonplace activities such as evidence-based deaccessioning could be considered research.

- **Integrate RF into existing professional development opportunities at your library, such as journal club or writing groups.**

- **Articulate the benefits for presenters and attendees.** The benefits to presenters include: receiving colleague feedback, practicing presentation skills, and discussing library-based research, all in a friendly and collegial environment. Attendees at our RF thought it was a valuable way to share research and increase their own awareness of research being done at Oakland University Libraries.

- **Meet colleagues' skepticism with vulnerability and encouragement.** Presenting unfinished or failed research constituted a culture shift at our libraries. Library faculty were only accustomed to sharing research that was finished or successful. Anticipating this skepticism, we presented our own research projects during the first three RF meetings, including mishaps and roadblocks.

- **Encourage presentations on research projects at all stages of the research life cycle, especially those in the early stages.** The authors presented research projects that were largely completed. In future series, we will present nascent research projects/ideas and encourage our colleagues to do the same.

- **Emphasize that RF is a safe space where people can talk about the good, the bad, and the ugly of their research.** In fact, based on our thematic observations of each RF session, attendees appreciated hearing about the mistakes, mishaps, and setbacks that occurred during these research projects. Presenting these mistakes can be therapeutic and give everyone the opportunity for a good laugh.

- **Create RF at local, consortial, or state levels if RF at your library isn't feasible or practical (similar to the venue discussed in Carson et al. (2014)).** RF could be done virtually if a physical meeting is not feasible. However, you may need to emphasize the "no judgment" aspect (to both presenters and attendees) so that presenters feel comfortable sharing mistakes or failures with people they might not know.

NEXT STEPS & CONCLUSION

As stated by Hall and McBain (2014), "the importance of practitioners undertaking research is increasingly being recognized as a core value in academic libraries" (p. 129). However, libraries need to offer support around research, including "opportunities for librarians to learn from each other" (Ackerman, Hunter, & Wilkinson, 2018, p. 561). Informal, low-stakes opportunities such as an internal or intra-library RF provide a viable solution.

After successfully completing the first series, we have continued RF during the 2019-2020 academic year. To promote further collaboration, this year, we are encouraging the following: presentations by library staff, presentations on projects in the early stages of the research lifecycle, updates on previously presented projects, and presentations on challenging or even failed projects, in order to continue creating an open, safe community for discussing research. We have found that our colleagues are still willing to participate in RF during its second year, even though the administration is not able to provide funding for refreshments. Attendance has remained steady during its second year and recruiting presenters has become easier now that our colleagues are familiar with the format of RF. With continued interest from colleagues and our own dedication as organizers, we expect RF to be a sustainable professional development program with our Libraries. In sharing our experiences in designing and sustaining RF, other libraries may be inspired to pursue similar professional development opportunities. In facilitating informal spaces to present our in-progress research ideas and projects, we can foster a culture of open conversation about research as it unfolds.

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APPENDIX A
Post Research Forum Evaluation Instrument

1. Did you attend at least one Research Forum this year?
   - Yes
   - No

   If answer is No, skip to question 10

2. Did you present at Research Forum this year?
   - Yes
   - No

   If answer is Yes, include question 6

3. Which Research Forum(s) did you attend this year? (select all that apply)
   - September - Introduction to Research Forum; Engaging with Research and Publication as an Early Career Librarian: A Survey of Confidence and Contributing Factors
   - October - Faculty Knowledge & Attitudes of Predatory Open Access Journals
   - November - Recovering Provincial Readership: Mary Morgan's Lost Occasional Poem; Everything Online is a Website: Information Format Confusion in Student Citation Behaviors
   - January - The History of the Libraries of the United Automobile Workers
   - February - Educational Backgrounds of ARL Directors; Collaborative Research Fails and Finding Success through Workplace Opportunities
   - March - Using Deductive Thematic Analysis to Examine Data Librarian Job Postings from 2013-8
   - April - Lightning Round Update Talks & Research Forum Wrap-up

4. Why did you attend Research Forum this year? (select all that apply)
   - Worked well with my schedule
   - Interested in the research and topics presented
   - Applicable to my work
   - Gathered ideas for my own research projects and research methodology
   - Other. Please specify: _____

5. On a scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree, please rate the following statements.

Attending Research Forum:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Gave me ideas for my own research	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Provided a valuable way to share the research conducted at OU Libraries	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Increased my awareness of the research conducted at OU Libraries	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Increased my knowledge of student engagement with library services	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Increased my knowledge of library operations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6. On a scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree, please rate the following statements.

Presenting at Research Forum:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Benefited my professional development	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Increased my colleagues' awareness of my research	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Provided valuable feedback about my research	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

7. On a scale of extremely unlikely to extremely likely, how likely are you to attend another session of Research Forum next year?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Extremely Unlikely	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Extremely Likely

8. How could Research Forum be improved? (select all that apply)

- Different day
- Different time
- Frequency - more often
- Frequency - less often

- Session Format: more discussion-based
- Session Format: presentation and/or talking points provided ahead of time for review
- Shorter presentations
- Longer presentations
- Other. Please specify: _____
- No improvements needed

9. Would you be willing to present at a future Research Forum?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

10. Why did you not attend Research Forum this year? (select all that apply)
- Scheduling conflicts
- Not interested
- Not applicable to my work
- Other. Please specify: _____

11. Other comments or questions? _____