Column: A New Generation in Librarianship

How Do We Publish When Our Work Is Collaborative and Everyone's Too Busy?

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ABSTRACT

In the current world of academic librarianship, where collaboration is mainstream and high workloads are commonplace, publishing about collaborative initiatives with colleagues, though ideal, is not always feasible. Sometimes, publishing alone is the only way to meet scholarship expectations, but how do we talk about our work on these platforms when our work is collaborative in nature? This column addresses how to move forward with ethical and practical considerations and gives suggestions for modifying one's original idea in order to transform it into something feasible for solo publishing.

KEYWORDS

publishing, academic libraries, collaboration

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Introduction

The current world of academic librarianship values a high level of collaboration for many of us, especially those who work in outward-facing roles (such as with instruction, events, or student services) and those whose libraries are powered by committee work. In a space where publishing is valued and sometimes necessary for advancement, tremendous workloads and other projects can hinder discussions about formulating collaborative proposals, much less writing the works themselves. Sometimes, publishing without collaborators may be the only option, but this poses ethical and practical concerns. How do we publish about our work when it is collaborative in nature and when publishing collaboratively isn't feasible? How do you as a solo author ethically move forward with discussing something you worked on with others and still give credit to collaborators? How can you shift your ideas to avoid those pitfalls entirely?

Attempting to Publish Collaboratively

When publishing about collaborative initiatives, it is certainly best to involve those collaborators and publish with them. The works speak more authentically to the initiatives, publishing with collaborators can make the process less arduous, and collaborators can hold each other accountable for completing the work. This sounds ideal but does not always work.

Many barriers exist. Librarians are not only busy with their regular jobs, but are constantly orchestrating new initiatives, supporting students, working for efficiency and improvement, attempting self-care, constantly adapting, and more. Especially in understaffed areas, workloads can pose a huge barrier to publishing collaboratively. Schedules do not always line up and colleagues can be too busy or may already be involved in other publications. Sometimes, a publication addressing multiple collaborations could prevent the inclusion of every collaborator, such as when an instruction librarian discusses classes from a range of instructors or when the main planners of an event collaborate with many other groups and individuals. Other times, a collaborator is not interested in publishing about it at all. Although these obstacles seem insurmountable, moving forward can still be an option.

Proceed Wisely

Consider the following when deciding to move forward without your collaborator. First, when discussing initiatives or content created by or with others, ensure that you give appropriate credit. Mention their names or positions, outline how collaborations took place, or even refer to works others previously published or have made public.

For example, in a previous publication, I discussed many activities implemented during instruction sessions in the library's innovation spaces. Though I am the common denominator, it would have been cumbersome to include each activity's collaborator as a co-author. In lieu of this feat, when introducing the activity discussion section, I included this footnote: "These activities are developed and implemented by Area 49 librarians and staff, in collaboration with

the discipline-specific subject librarian and the course instructor" (Caruso, 2019, p. 94). This ensured the collaborations were evident. Second, consider when to have a conversation. This may need to occur when your work could overlap with what colleagues could potentially publish or when you need to agree on how to include mentions of the collaboration or their contributions. Third, determine if it is possible to have your colleague as a second author for a specific component, rather than an even distribution (Wahl & Kew, 2022). If this is both feasible and an acceptable tradeoff for you, this is certainly still an option.

Strategies for Modifying Your Idea

After reflecting on these considerations, if you are still interested in publishing in that area but need to veer away from your original approach, consider some of the following strategies.

Adding a new lens or focus will help you identify granular areas of your idea. Here, you can bring in other works, a theory, or even a different discipline as a lens through which to see your work, give your own additional perspective based on your unique experiences, or talk about "the state of things," based on your perspective. Combining strategies can help you pinpoint a specific section of the idea to talk about in more detail.

Alternatively, broaden your idea. Here, instead of recounting initiatives or detailing what you and your colleagues did, you can discuss conceptual practices related to what you did, ideas that arose from action, alternative approaches you may have employed, or how single initiatives fit into larger goals. Also consider discussing other elements you engaged in, such as teamwork, collaboration, project management, self-care, and other popular topics. To determine popular topics, scan current publications, presentations, and librarian blog posts. Using some of these strategies could help you add to theoretical conversations—an element often missing from library publications, due to the professional, rather than academic nature of the degree.

Implementing the Strategies

Here are two examples of practical uses of these strategies. First, I planned to publish with a colleague on the diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) activities in our innovation spaces, but competing schedules put this on hold. To continue to publish, I broadened the idea and applied a particular perspective (in this case, other DEIA work I recently engaged with) to offer suggestions on how innovation spaces can better support DEIA initiatives.

Second, this column stemmed from "the state of things" from my perspective—that publishing, workloads, and collaboration are sometimes at odds with one another—and from my background as a university writing instructor. Some of the suggestions given are extrapolated from those I have given students, and tailored to fit the variety of situations writers may encounter.

Applying these strategies is just a matter of considering the many ways in which your idea could evolve. Many people do not always consider these strategies and may even scrap their ideas altogether when they could develop them into substantial works.

Conclusion

This is not all to suggest that we should not publish with collaborators, but we need to consider recourse for when it is not as feasible or when we have to postpone the collaboration. These strategies provide some useful ways to transform the ideas you have into something workable for a current endeavor where a collaboration may not be possible.

References

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