Knowledge exchange: Intentional partnering between the research administration office and the academic library

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Abstract

In this column the authors describe a conscious partnership between the university research administration office and the academic library, laying out the rationale for such cooperation and describing the benefits to their respective departments and to their stakeholders more broadly.

Introduction

Libraries, within academic institutional settings, have historically worked effectively at certain places in the research cycle; we have deep expertise in the selection, acquisition, dissemination, and preservation of scholarly work, but have at times struggled with engaging researchers, securing research funding, and effectively getting our expertise and services into the hands of those who can benefit from them.   Similarly, the university research administration office has done very well in areas challenging to libraries, but has struggled with issues of materiality, post-grant support for research, and the long tail dissemination and preservation of research outputs (Seely, 2008).

With increasing external pressure for research administration offices and libraries to participate in the entirety of the research cycle, from the initial idea, to dissemination, Research Western and Western Libraries have partnered to integrate our individual areas of expertise to build capacity and innovate our services in this area. Working together, Research Western and Western Libraries are undertaking a holistic approach to account for the entirety of the research cycle and to improve the knowledge exchange, preservation, and dissemination of our researchers' outputs, defining knowledge stewardship for our institution.

What are Knowledge Exchange and Knowledge Stewardship?

First, let's define our concepts. The authors define knowledge exchange (KE) as the purposeful and deliberate communication of identified knowledge between research partners. The practice of knowledge exchange takes into account the various material processes and outputs (transactional or infrastructural) by which that exchange transpires. Similarly, knowledge stewardship (KS) is ensuring equitable access to not only knowledge created, but the practice of knowledge production and co-production itself.

Knowledge exchange and knowledge stewardship are active practices that are responsive to

internal and external forces, and which evolve with research. Successful knowledge exchange and

knowledge stewardship practice requires working with a stakeholder external to the library at the

beginning of the research question, identifying their need, expertise, and contributions to the research

endeavor, welcoming them, and subsequently engaging in research that takes those inputs into

account, makes respectful use of them, and produces material outputs in a format that is accessible

and useful to the stakeholder.

Knowledge exchange and knowledge stewardship sit in the interstitial range between scholarly

communication and knowledge translation. It invites the scholar to see more than research topics,

objects, or subjects, and instead asks her to seek participants, partners, and contributors. And

recognizing that since knowledge is essentially and necessarily material, to understand and develop

outputs that are usable and comprehensible to those with whom they are exchanging knowledge.

Beginning a Practice of KE and KS

Like so many successful partnerships, our work at Western is based on a combination of

informal practices and structural expectations and agreements. The authors met each other while

doing independent work on their areas of focus in the research cycle, and began talking about what

they did and how they did it. By engaging with each other, the authors realized that they had

complimentary skillsets and an identical interest in developing their individual practice, and taking

opportunities to improve. So the first ingredient is a willingness to engage in partnerships, to take

professional risks, and to identify the value in the perspective of others. It's no accident that a practice

like knowledge exchange and knowledge stewardship is concurrent with an open and welcoming

attitude toward valuing new expertise. But in order to be successful, this relationship has to be more

than a partnership between two professionals. At Western we have formalized the relationship

through a variety of means. So, step one in conscious partnering is to find a partner, in this case at the research office, with whom you can work.

Step two involves making this partnership useful to stakeholders on campus. We did this by identifying individuals, departments, labs, administrators, etc., who we believed might be interested in these practices, and we "pitched" them on the concept. Using the feedback from the pitches, we began to strategically plan how we would implement knowledge exchange and knowledge stewardship as a practice at our institution. We identified and began to pursue scholarly activities together: securing grant money, publishing papers, columns, and conference presentations, and creating novel programs and other tools in support of our practice, and the larger institutional practice of knowledge exchange and stewardship.

Finally, step three involved actively engaging in knowledge exchange and knowledge stewardship, both as a partnered practice together and in partnership with faculty and other university and external stakeholders. Some initial projects have involved a proposed campus research committee on faculty attitudes towards, and needs around, research data management, active engagement with the research office's review of faculty grants with an eye towards using our jointly created principles of knowledge exchange and knowledge stewardship to enhance and strengthen Knowledge Exchange, Translation and Mobilization plans within these large external funding opportunities. As well, we have created a joint library and research office participation in national bodies such as Research Impact Canada (Impact Canada, 2017).

Conclusion

By practicing, as an institution, what we have defined as Knowledge Exchange & Knowledge Stewardship (KES), we aim to measurably increase the impact, accessibility, and equity of knowledge created and co-created by Western University researchers and their partners. Furthermore, we seek to

investigate, evaluate, and iterate our services and expertise, in order to keep pace with future changes to the academy, and meaningfully contribute to the national conversation regarding modern research practice. Ultimately the overarching goal of this partnership is to help define Western's strategic Knowledge Exchange & Knowledge Stewardship mandate.

In order to meet this overarching goal, the following three identified objectives have been created:

1) Services: improve our services related to Knowledge Exchange and Stewardship;

2) Communication: create a dynamic network of Knowledge Exchange & Stewardship practitioners on campus;

3) Evaluation: create evaluation frameworks that meaningfully measure the impact of knowledge created and co-created by Western University researchers and their partners; create evaluation frameworks that meaningfully measure the impact of our improved KES services; and create evaluation frameworks that meaningfully measure the function of the KES network.

The authors believe that by intentionally investigating and building upon our complimentary services and expertise, we will be able to meaningfully embrace and support future changes to the research mission of our university, and meaningfully contribute to modern research practice. We are excited by this opportunity to help contribute full to the research mission of our institution, and we hope that this theoretical overview can be of use to other institutions moving forward.

References:

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