Issuing Scholarship: Library Involvement and the Realities of Publishing Five Years Into the Game

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Abstract

Many libraries are now taking a role as publishers of content to meet the needs of the scholarly publishing community. This is increasingly important because of issues related to collection development, as libraries look to non-profit options to make peer reviewed information available with open access. The McGill University Library has been actively supporting scholarly publishing since 2009 by showcasing the research done by the McGill community to the world via publishing initiatives such as electronic theses and dissertations, open access journals and monographs, and by custom digital projects to disseminate research.

In this presentation we will reflect on our five years of experience publishing the McGill Journal of Education as a model for many of the lessons learned about library publishing. We will start in 2009 with our publishing pilot that included digitization and print publication alongside the electronic publishing options. We will then talk about how we moved exclusively to the Open Journal System to focus our energies on electronic publishing, incorporating digitizing past issues for inclusive open access and the ongoing challenges of supporting open source software as a technological platform.

Keywords: Publishing, Open Access, McGill University, Open Journal Systems.

INTRODUCTION

Libraries are taking on a role as publishers to meet the needs of the scholarly publishing community, as libraries look to non-profit options to make reliable peer-reviewed information available. Since 2009 the McGill Library has been actively supporting scholarly publishing, showcasing the research done by the McGill community via publishing various initiatives such as our electronic theses and dissertations, custom digital projects and open access journals and monographs.

THE CANADIAN CONTEXT

McGill is not alone in this move to support open access scholarship. In a 2010 report for the University of British Columbia, Kathleen Shearer noted that university libraries are noted for adopting some of the most innovative approaches to scholarly publishing in Canada. These include everything from on demand print services to electronic journal hosting platforms and institutional repositories. Shearer notes that the common theme in all of these initiatives was an active and robust communities of collaboration.

The report showed that even five years ago there were many case studies for open access. Case studies for libraries in Canada who were active in open access publishing included Simon Fraser University, York University and McGill University.

By acting as publishers, libraries can contribute to the growth of Open Access resources by ensuring quality publications through rigorous review and can leverage their brand recognition to give these publications weight. Being active as a publisher is also a way to avoid predatory publishing models with higher than inflation price increases.

It's important that we as libraries be involved because of the compelling issues with collection development in trying to find ways to support these activities and to continue to add to the growing body of open access peer reviewed subscriptions, which don't have the same financial issues as the for-profit companies.

MCGILL LIBRARY AS PUBLISHER

To support a sustainable model for scholarship and academic communication based on open access, the McGill University Library has engaged in the production and publication of journals in digital and print format. Starting in 2009, a proposal was brought forward to expand our publishing offerings beyond theses and dissertations and digital projects to include open access eJournals and print on demand service for digitized material. The year-long pilot allowed us to test and evaluate workflows and the technological aspects of e-journal publishing, including technical aspects of Open Journal Systems (OJS) for editors, and the overall feasibility of providing this service. The successful eJournal pilot led to a sustained investment in OJS in 2010.

Our publishing policy is the Library will only publish open access peer-reviewed journals, and will recommend that all articles be licensed under Creative Commons to ensure the widest use and distribution. We accept the publication of academic journals from McGill University without any restriction to the journal's disciplinary profile.

We ask that each new journal be sponsored by someone with a faculty affiliation with McGill University. The first step for a group interested is to contact the Scholarly Publication department and make a meeting to fill out a questionnaire/application. The questionnaire ensures that the editorial team has sufficiently considered all of the editorial and production aspects of running a journal, with a view to the Library supporting only those that are sustainable editorially. Both parties sign a

Memorandum of Understanding that outlines the role and responsibilities of the journal and the Library. In the spirit of collaboration both questionnaire and Memorandum of Understanding were adapted from documents authored by York University and the University of Alberta.

As publisher, the Library provides the domain and the software platform and covers all server and software expenses. In addition, we provide guidance to the editorial team on setting up a journal. However, the Library does not provide editorial services. Next is a short training in how to use OJS and information about publishing agreements such as using a creative commons license. The final step is that all journals are archived at the McGill Institutional Repository - eScholarship@mcgill.ca.

Currently McGill Library supports eight journals on the Open Journal Systems platform (OJS) which includes a mixture of brand new journals dedicated to emerging areas of study such as Bruce Springsteen studies and established journals such as the McGill Journal of Education. This summer we have two new journals starting up. Additionally, we will be branching out and publishing two sets of conference proceedings.

McGill Journal of Education

As a case study we will look at one of longest running journals, the McGill Journal of Education (MJE), which was founded in 1966. In 2010 the editor of the journal approached us about moving the journal online and into the Open Journal System. Anthony Paré, the managing editor at the time, considered several options when moving the journal to an online format. One concern was that MJE would end up bundled with other journals, and that it might lose its French language component, which has been with the journal since its inception. He spoke with John Willinsky from the Public Knowledge Project and that helped direct him to OJS.

The editorial board saw advantages in moving to OJS, which included quickly moving the journal archives into new system and retaining the journal's bilingual aspect. 113 back issues were digitized by the library and uploaded to the system.

With the transition to open access and electronic format the major focus of recent years for the journal has been more of a reflection on what it means for the journal to have a digital interface. One recent example is a recent special issue on multimedia in scholarship. This has led, naturally, to technical questions html/pdf, embedded videos, etc., which can enhance the experience of the journal in this online environment and taking the journal to a new level that is more than a traditional paper journal online, but a hotlinked, multimedia journal that allows for new and creative approaches to scholarship and research.

Since going online and open access, the McGill Journal of Education has noted more submissions for each issue, including more international submissions. This has led to an increased number of articles in each issue. The number of issues per year has stayed the same but the number of articles has doubled.

Questions and concerns remain for McGill Journal of Education, namely, sustainability. While the McGill Library provides the basic infrastructure and the server resources, MJE also has regular income from database royalties, from the Quebec reproduction rights organisation (Copibec), as well as support from the McGill Faculty of Education and an Aid to Scholarly Journals grant from Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. At one point, MJE considered and tested Google ads but found them to be too cluttered, distracting and not academic enough in nature.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, what have we learned by through our five years of experience as publishers? For us at McGill the successes have come when the Library is working together with members of our McGill

community who are committed to the project and collaborating to make it happen. We know it costs us staff time and infrastructure support to make these accomplishments happen, but for us it is worth it to support these areas of research and study, making them available for the wider community. Our successes have included: providing support and training in the publication process from how to wrangle authors in the review process, to setting up email templates and changing notification settings.

As mentioned earlier, having an online journal allows for creativity with the experience with links to other resources, embedded audio or videos or social media aspects. It can also allow for faster turnarounds for publishing, sharing new content, more frequent releases, which can be more flexible in an online environment where you don't have to worry about printing deadlines, the size of the issue (either too small or large) and postage for mailing out issues.

How do we measure the success of the journals? We watch for the number of times an article is cited, and how many articles have been published. In the long term we will watch the overall impact of not only these journals, but the progress of open access journals in general and their acceptance as part of the peer reviewed scholarship processes at our Universities.

We also regularly examine why some titles have failed. In most cases, the group responsible for the journal did not enough in-house support with editorial process and had poor expectations of how much work it is to keep a journal up and running. Whether it is print or virtual, paid or free, in the end you need to have content and a standardized process to get an issue out from the initial call to publication.

We believe it is worth the time and efforts of the Library to engage in publishing. In this age of high costs of for-profit academic journals with annual increases that are far above the rise in inflation rates, we need a new response to this environment and libraries are positioned to support scholarship in an open access environment. Working together with the OSJ community and reaching out to other libraries who have tried this, you can find a path that will work for your library. Being able to reach out to the faculty and researchers and offer a much needed service has been great for community building.

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