
How Could I Be Missing So Many?

A Quality Control Study of Campus Publications

Stephen K. Johnson, Guest Columnist

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In recent years, as services offered by academic libraries have continued to evolve, public services librarians in many institutions have been carving out new roles in their work with and for faculty. Liaison relationships are nothing new, but innovative and interesting approaches to those responsibilities continue to be devised. In this column, Stephen Johnson describes a collaborative outreach effort undertaken by librarians at the University of South Dakota to identify the outputs of campus scholars. The goal of this project is to create new information that would be of benefit to the library, the faculty, and the campus.—*Editor*

The focus of this column is a project that a colleague¹ and I have been involved with for the past four years. Specifically, we have made a concerted effort to track and collect published articles and other material by faculty members, graduate students, and others on our campus and then to share that information with the rest of our university. Both of us are public service librarians who are heavily involved in liaison work to our assigned academic departments. Our overarching motivation for doing this is the belief that it's vital for us to be aware of scholarly activity taking place in our departments and throughout the entire institution—in other words, to be good students of the organization. A major benefit of this work is that we can better support the research interests of our faculty, and potentially contribute more broadly to the accreditation process as well as to some of the annual surveys that departments and the university participate in. The quality control study that is described here also presents some challenges that will require future reflection on our part.

THE ENVIRONMENT

My university identifies itself as being the comprehensive liberal arts institution for the state of South Dakota. Our enrollment is approximately 10,000 students. In addition to our undergraduate programs, The University of South Dakota (USD) offers graduate degrees in approximately 65 different areas, a dozen of which are doctoral granting.² USD also has a medical school with an emphasis on rural health and primary medical care, a law school, a business school, a school of education, and a school of health sciences (for nursing, social work, physical and occupational therapy, medical laboratory sciences, alcohol & drug studies, and physician assistant training). As with most universities and colleges, the research expectations for our faculty have become more stringent during the past decade.

THE PROJECT

Against this backdrop, a colleague and I co-manage a monthly project for the USD libraries. Over the last four years, the two of us have devoted time and energy to tracking the academic journal articles and other publications that USD faculty members, graduate students, and other researchers on campus have had published stemming from the research they conduct. We want to monitor the university's research environment as well as showcase the material being published from across our campus. Doing this also helps to more effectively position our library in its collection development and other marketing endeavors.

This project is very detail-oriented, not to mention labor-intensive, work. We first have to sort out which authors are actually affiliated with USD. Often I look up individuals in an online campus directory to ascertain who meets this criterion. This is a daunting task, though less so than it would be on a larger campus. Next, we need to confirm that an article did not appear in a previous month which can easily happen when using two different database vendors (in this case, Thomson-Reuter's "Web of Knowledge" and the EbscoHost databases).

Again, an intangible reward for doing this is that it enables us to have an increased awareness of the active scholars on our campus and what their interests are, all of which affects our ability to perform more effectively as public services librarians and academic liaisons. Colleges and universities, like many other types of institutions, seem to operate in a silo-like environment in which individuals know and work primarily with those who are part of the same silo. Getting to know people in other silos can often be difficult. This project helps us break down some barriers.

Truth be told, I often find myself tapping the same tendencies in this project that I did with my baseball card collection which was started in third grade and maintained for the next 20 years. In addition to benefiting from it financially—it covered my library school expenses—that baseball card collection was a tremendous asset for me to know almost everyone in major league baseball during that 20 year span and beyond. Because of those cards, following baseball was far more meaningful. In much the same way, tracking USD-published articles serves a similar purpose for me.

My responsibility involves doing the "front end" work every month. By that, I seek to discover and capture all new articles or other publications that USD faculty and students have published. That process generates roughly 25 to 35 articles monthly which I then manage using EndNote software. The information I gather each month is then forwarded to my colleague who does the computer graphics work. She places the citation and the abstract, along with pictures of the author(s), on a monitor in the kiosk in the entrance to our library. Coupled with this, she maintains a blog devoted to USD publications on our library homepage at <http://facultypublications.wordpress.com>. Anyone can set up a subscription to follow this blog every time it is updated.

Two years ago, USD instituted an online software package

called "Digital Measures" for the self-evaluation process that faculty members undergo each year. Based on what a faculty member inputs, the Digital Measures software generates faculty webpages which can list faculty vitas in a standard framework for their publications and conference presentations. For any number of reasons, not all of USD's departments opt to make these vitas available for their faculty members. Nonetheless, this "quality control" study would not have been feasible had USD not instituted the "Digital Measures" software package.

My intention for this quality control study is to examine the vitas from 11 academic departments on campus. These are departments in which every faculty member makes their vitas accessible online. The publications shown on the vitas will be compared with the articles that I forward to my colleague. Articles used for this project must have been published in either 2010 or 2011.

To capture the articles that I forward on each month, I engage in two strategies. The first involves establishing monthly alerts from 11 different EBSCOHOST databases to which USD subscribes. Our library is heavily weighted toward EbscoHost as a vendor for our databases which is outstanding at producing and disseminating monthly alerts. These alerts trigger monthly email messages to me from any of the databases if anything new has been published with phrases such as "University of South Dakota" or "South Dakota," or with terms such as "USD," "Vermillion" (the city which USD is located in South Dakota), or "Sioux Falls" (where USD offers some programs) using the "author affiliation" field. Additionally, I have each phrase and term set up as a full-text search from the entire article. Besides finding out about the university, what is interesting is how these alerts enable me to find out what's transpiring throughout the state, including at the other colleges and universities in South Dakota. My second strategy is to tap our Thomson-Reuters "Web of Knowledge" database, which contains all three broad disciplinary areas (the social sciences, sciences, and fine arts). Each database vendor covers some material that the other does not. Hindsight being 20/20, I wish I had captured the number of articles that came from each individual database as well as the number of articles appearing in both.

Specifically, I am interested in knowing the articles listed on the faculty vitas that I missed and why it happened that I missed them. If I haven't been sloppy, what accounts for the gaps? Are the EbscoHost databases, in particular, not covering the journals for the articles I didn't know about? It of course is possible that a journal may list the institution for only the lead author, or maybe list no institution at all. Regardless, when attempting to showcase articles being published by the faculty and others at a university, one does not want to neglect anyone's work.

THE FINDINGS

Based on a review of the 11 departments on campus in which every faculty member had vitas available on their webpages, I selected all articles published in either 2010 or 2011. This

MANAGEMENT

Table 1. Faculty Publications

Department Name	Total Number Articles Appearing on Faculty Vitas	Number Articles USD Library Aware of	Number Articles USD Library Not Aware of
Psychology	13	9	4
Contemporary Media	4	1	3
School of Education	38	24	14
Communication Studies	2	1	1
Earth Sciences	3	3	0
School of Business	25	8	17
Biology	51	35	16
Basic Biomedical Science	94	69	25
Philosophy	4	2	2
Chemistry	47	24	23
School of Health Sciences*	15	9	6
Totals	296	185	111

* Includes social work, alcohol & drug studies, nursing, physical and occupational therapy, physician assistant studies and medical laboratory sciences

resulted in 296 articles being identified. Table 1 presents the data listed by academic department.

This data indicates that a significant number of articles (111 of 296, or 38 percent of total articles) fell through the cracks. What I need to do next is examine a portion of these 111 articles by conducting global searches in all of our Ebsco-Host databases as well as in the “Web of Knowledge” database. I need to ascertain whether the articles are even listed in these databases, as well as whether USD is listed as the institution.

What I discovered with regard to the 111 articles is as follows:

- No mention exists for 73 (66 percent) of the 111 missing articles via either database vendor;
- 20 (18 percent) of the 111 missing articles showed up in at least one database vendor without any variation of USD in the database’s unit record; and finally
- 18 (16 percent) of the 111 missing articles were articles that were in the database with USD being identified that I missed.

A significant number of the 73 articles (from the first bullet point) are relatively “young” publications, in that the volume in which they appear is less than or equal to 10 years old. That may provide a partial explanation. But what is particularly mystifying is why our school of business had such a high number of articles that are not indexed or abstracted by either database vendor. Thirteen of the 17 missing articles for the school of business fall into that category. As USD’s business librarian, I find this particularly troubling. A colleague

at another institution, with access to Proquest’s ABI/Inform database, executed queries for each of the 13 articles and found that ABI/Inform only had three (3) of the 13 articles. This seems to indicate that the problem is not uniquely related to the two databases I utilize.

In conclusion, I believe it is well worth doing what we can to track USD published articles for marketing and strategic purposes. The difficult question that has to be addressed is whether or not we should continue to do the same kind of work in this area that we’ve been doing for the last four years. What one learns about their campus makes this well worth the effort, and since no other office or department on any of our campuses showcases this work, it is a great opportunity for the academic library. One has to understand and accept the limitations, however, and not expect to be able to have everything at hand, like I did with my baseball card collection. At the very least, we must acknowledge that what we present will probably never be complete. Finally, the investment of time must be weighed against the return and the overall value of the project assessed. Whether or not to continue is perhaps a management decision for library administration.

Notes

1. My colleague in this endeavor is Danielle Loftus, Technology and Fine Arts Librarian, who has also been a health sciences librarian for USD. She can be reached at danielle.loftus@usd.edu.
2. Additional information on the University of South Dakota is available at www.usd.edu; full information on the library is at www.usd.edu/library/index.cfm.