

# THE FUTURE OF LIBRARIAN PUBLISHING: AN ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

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## Introduction

Librarianship is a highly collaborative profession, and librarians are constantly exchanging knowledge about user behaviors, best practices, and technological change through many communication channels, including listservs, blogs, social media, webinars and conferences. However, some of the most valuable research about library practice remains inaccessible to many librarians whose libraries cannot afford to subscribe to large journal packages that include library and information science (LIS) journals from prominent scholarly publishers. Given this reality, this environmental scan will survey the current landscape for sharing librarian produced research through the formal channel of the journal article. This environmental scan will also propose how Library Pipeline can increase the accessibility of the LIS literature, which is often but certainly not always produced by academic librarians.

## I. Librarian readiness to conduct and publish scholarly research

Librarianship is at its core a service-oriented profession. After all, one of Ranganathan's [Five Laws of Library Science](#) is to "save the time of the reader." The individual responsible for saving that time, through effective organization and retrieval of useful resources, is the librarian.

Given that foundation, should academic librarians even attempt to conduct formal research studies? Or is this a responsibility best left to others? The historical view has been that librarians should leave the research to others, because the librarian's own contribution to the research literature would be slight. For example, in 1979 Mortimer and Beck [opined](#), "Interminable reader use surveys may be of considerable local interest, but do we really need to publish quite so many of them?...Such pieces do little to enhance our general academic standing."

Other strikes against the librarian as researcher: the fact that librarians generally [do not enjoy the same time allowances](#) for conducting research as do scholars in other fields, as well as the reality that a significant proportion of LIS programs [do not require students to take a research methods course](#).

There is hope. For one thing, the "practitioner-researcher divide" [may be a false dichotomy](#). Rather than dividing one's conception into doing "library work" and then moving on to "research

projects,” it may be more productive to think of this as a continuum in which operational challenges inform research questions and vice versa.

Another sign of hope: efforts such as the [Institute for Research Design in Librarianship](#). This nine day immersive experience grounds librarians in research methods, and empowers them to conduct a formal research study. The Institute is always [bursting at the seams](#) with participants.

The conclusion: librarian research efforts have every potential to increase in substance, reach and power.

## II. Current accessibility of librarian research

Presumably librarians are adept at finding LIS literature, but how about accessing it? One major LIS index, LISTA, is available to libraries that already subscribe to an EBSCOhost database, and a [free version](#) is also available on the web. Of the 901 journals indexed in LISTA, 779 of which are indexed as core or priority journals, only [60](#) are open access. LISTA with Full Text includes 330 journals, yet this is still not even half of the total core or priority journals indexed.

Some other potential sources of LIS research are Google Scholar, DOAJ, and Academia.edu. Each of these takes advantage of different features of the open access landscape. Google Scholar pulls from institutional repositories and other green OA sources (articles published in toll access journals that are later archived on Open Access repositories), while DOAJ contains gold OA sources (articles published in Open Access journals). Academia.edu allows users to post their own Green OA research to a centralized, interdisciplinary, multi-institution platform which also serves as a networking platform for connecting directly with other researchers.

The open access landscape for LIS journals includes at least 149 peer-reviewed journals in many subtopics of library literature that do not charge article processing fees (according to [DOAJ](#)), as well as a few ALA journals – ACRL’s *College & Research Libraries* and *College & Research Libraries News*, LITA’s *Information Technology and Libraries*, and LLAMA’s *Library Leadership & Management*. Walt Crawford also [provides a list](#) of 77 open access journals and their level of publishing activity, some of which charge article processing fees. However, it is notable that many of the most prestigious journals in our field (*portal*, *JASIST*, *Journal of Documentation*, and many more) are not Open Access journals. While some do offer an OA publication option for individual articles, these often come with a hefty price tag.

Even LIS authors with strong commitments to open access may want the freedom to publish in a journal whose scope most meets their need, open access or not. Academic librarians may feel they are in a catch 22 – although committed to open access, as tenure track practitioners they must publish in particular toll-access journals that are the best regarded in their discipline. This may account for the sad fact that [less than 1/3 of LIS literature is OA](#). Those with the imperative to publish the most, and [whose contributions account for most of the practice-oriented literature](#), are encouraged to publish primarily in toll-access venues.

Publication in subscription journals does not necessarily present a barrier to access. Deposits in institutional repositories, for example, would bridge this gap. Unfortunately, studies have shown that [practicing librarians demonstrate low participation rates in green OA](#) through depositing their own work in open access institutional repositories, and the potential for self-archiving is relatively [low on the radar](#) for librarians when it comes to choosing publication venues in the first place. We must take more proactive efforts to open up LIS literature, for the benefit of both practitioners and the public at large.

### **III. Toward greater openness of librarian research**

Increasing access to LIS research can be addressed by addressing both subscription-based and awareness-based barriers. The first set of barriers has to do with the lack of financial resources that many libraries--and individual librarians--have at their disposal to purchase access to the LIS literature, which as noted above is still mostly only available through costly subscriptions. The second set of barriers has to do with the limits that many librarians have on their time, which makes it difficult for many to stay up-to-date with high-quality LIS literature.

#### **Overcoming subscription-based barriers to the LIS literature**

Library professionals can address subscription-based barriers on two fronts: as authors, who can choose to publish their research in Open Access journals or to self-archive their published articles in Open Access repositories; and as editorial board members, upon whose volunteer labor many commercial publishers rely, and who can choose to “flip” their publications to an Open Access model. Below, we’ve summarized resources for breaking down such barriers.

#### **Publishing OA**

- [Directory of Open Access Journals \(DOAJ\)](#): Authors can use this directory to find OA journals in which to publish. Includes 149 LIS journals.
- Consulting your network: Among [librarians interviewed on their OA publishing and discovery practices](#), most tend to find places to publish based upon word of mouth.

### Archiving OA

- [Sherpa/Romeo](#): a one-stop-shop for researching the author's rights policies of most LIS journals. By knowing your rights as an author (and [negotiating for increased rights to archive and share your research](#)), you can confidently share your research within the bounds of copyright.
- [E-LIS repository](#): an international subject repository for LIS research. All deposits are vetted for suitability by LIS experts.
- Institutional repositories: for academic librarians whose universities host an IR, those repositories can be an excellent place to archive one's work.
- [Figshare](#) & [Zenodo](#) repositories: for any LIS professional who doesn't have access to an IR (or who doesn't want to use an IR), these discipline-agnostic, free-to-deposit, Open Access repositories are excellent places to deposit one's work.

### Making LIS journals OA

- [Harvard University Library's Journal-Flipping Project](#): This project will eventually gather the best resources and workflows for moving subscription journals into Open Access journals. It is being prepared by preeminent scholars on the topic of OA publishing, and is expected to be completed in January 2016. [Update May 2016: the journal flipping report is [now available for review](#).]
- "[Journal declarations of independence](#)," Open Access Directory: Documents specific journal boards who resigned over issues related to Open Access, including the board of the *Journal of Library Administration*.
- "[York Digital Journals](#)": A LibGuide with good documentation on supporting OJS journals. Many academic libraries already actively support OJS publications, thereby making it an excellent platform for hosting LIS-related journals.

### Overcoming awareness-based barriers to the OA LIS literature

Many LIS professionals simply do not know that relevant, high-quality, often peer reviewed open access research exists in their areas of interest, often for two main reasons: popular indexing services like Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar do not adequately include LIS research, and the proliferation of platforms for sharing content over the past ten years has made it difficult to sort the signal from the noise when searching for LIS research.

A solution to finding and discovering relevant OA LIS literature might be found in the [PressForward](#) project. This Wordpress plugin has allowed academics to aggregate, curate, and

share in a single website many articles, presentations, and other links related to a particular area of research, often suggested to the website's editors via crowdsourcing. Popular subject-specific sites that use PressForward include [DH+Lib](#) and [Microbe.net](#), and a similar project for LIS literature is in the offing.

#### **IV. Where do we go from here?**

Our focus in this environmental scan has been on academic librarians, who are often required to develop and publish research in order to advance within their institutions. That said, all librarians have a stake in benefiting from high quality and accessible research. **For this reason we invite public librarians and special librarians among the Library Pipeline community to extend and improve this scan by offering feedback about the current challenges and potential solutions pertaining to research within their spheres of influence.**

In the meanwhile, we offer several projects for the Library Pipeline Board's consideration. These projects are aimed at improving the quality, discoverability, and openness of librarian research.

##### **Improving Quality**

Library Pipeline could sponsor a "Researcher of the Year" award. This annual award would honor outstanding research published by any librarian. The award jury panel would include librarians from various fields, and the award would include a modest honorarium and link to the awarded project from the Library Pipeline web site. Eligible articles must be open access.

##### **Improving Discoverability**

One of the authors of this report has interviewed librarians working in academia on the issue of finding and publishing OA research, and the responses overwhelmingly indicate a desire for a aggregator similar to PressForward to be created to serve the needs of the LIS community. More information on that project can be found on [this Google Doc](#). We propose that Library Pipeline consider supporting this or a similar project to ensure open access to high-quality LIS literature.

##### **Improving Openness**

We propose that Library Pipeline provide consultation to LIS journals considering "flipping" from a subscription base to open access, along with seed money to those journals that are

currently making this transition. This would send an affirmative signal that the default position for LIS research is open.

Green OA (self-archiving) is another tactic to improve access to the literature that is sadly underpracticed. We propose that a Working Group be formed to determine strategies for Green OA advocacy to LIS practitioners, in the hopes that increased awareness of authors' rights and existing repositories will lead to increased self-deposit rates. This working group might also investigate tactics like depositing manuscripts and preprints on behalf of LIS authors by gaining rights to deposit all past and future scholarship from individuals.

### **Improving Awareness**

Library Pipeline might consider raising awareness of LIS Open Access publishing options via coordinating "OA LIS publishing" conference appearances (exhibits) at meetings like ACRL, ALA Annual, and any other meeting where commercial publishers are present.

Library Pipeline might also consider exploring mutually beneficial partnerships with advocacy organizations like SPARC and OASPA, or OA aggregation services like Paperity and ScienceOpen.

### **Creating new funding models**

There are new models for funding Open Access publishing that are emerging beyond the "green vs gold" dichotomy that currently exists. Notably, the Open Library of the Humanities is finding success with [Library Publishing Subsidies](#), making publishing Open Access free for authors.

Library Pipeline might consider the role it can play in applying a similar funding model to existing and future LIS journals. Library Pipeline is also well-positioned to advocate for the founding of other funding and publishing models based upon the many library publishers that now exist, perhaps in partnership with the Library Publishing Coalition.

### **References**

\* If a reference or resource is fully described in the body of the text, it is not included here. This list points to the sources that substantiate various claims in the environmental scan, but which are not fully described in the text.

\*\* This reference list is not alphabetical. Instead it is arranged in the order in which these sources first appear in the scan. On occasion the same source is referenced more than once in the scan; its location in the reference list reflects its first appearance.

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