The Southeastern Librarian

Volume 61 | Issue 1 Article 3

4-1-2013

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Recommended Citation
Wood, Susan E. and Park, Betsy (2013) "The Journal-Based Publishing Activity of Tennessee Academic Librarians: 2007-2011," *The Southeastern Librarian*: Vol. 61: Iss. 1, Article 3.
Available at: http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seln/vol61/iss1/3

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The Journal-Based Publishing Activity of Tennessee Academic Librarians: 2007-2011

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Introduction

Analysis of scholarly production and communication is of widespread interest in higher education. In the field of Library and Information Sciences (LIS), authorship studies provide insight into the range of the professional activities of librarians, describe characteristics of the landscape of librarians' scholarly output, and identify factors that affect research and publication activities. As Sassen (2011) has noted, authorship studies document "the sociological characteristics of the literature of a discipline" (p. 73). These studies describe a profile of who publishes in the discipline, their gender, occupation, place of employment, and whether these authors publish singly or with others. This information is useful for developing a complete picture of academic librarianship as a profession, as well as for identifying norms of scholarly output. Librarians who are evaluated by non-library faculty and administrators on the basis of scholarly output need to be able to communicate the standards in the field across the institution.

This study provides a detailed view of the journal publication activities of academic librarians in Tennessee for the five-year period from 2007 through 2011. The authors are interested in developing a picture of the journal-based publication activities of this group of people in order to benchmark against previous studies and to contribute to an understanding of the publication activity of academic librarians. The trends identified will be useful for new professionals entering the field in positions that require publication for continued employment, as well as for those who are interested in a snapshot of recent journal publication activity of Tennessee academic librarians. Findings include: women are publishing in the journal literature in proportion to their overall numbers in the field, *Tennessee Libraries* is the most popular publication outlet for academic librarians in the state, and the authors in the sample, representing approximately 23% of the state's academic librarians, published on average 1.21 articles each during this period.

Literature Review

The research and publication activities of librarians have been studied from a variety of perspectives. Nisonger (1996) identified a useful typology of authorship study methods. The first approach is that of database- and journal-based studies in which researchers examine a selection of citations over a period of time or the contents of specific journals in order to identify characteristics of contributors. The second approach is that of individual-based studies in which researchers use questionnaires or similar tools to elicit information about publication activities from a particular group of people, such as librarians in a specific region or at selected institutions. This study combines these two approaches.

Although it is not possible to make direct comparisons among authorship studies because of different methods, populations and timeframes, common themes emerge. Looking at author productivity, several researchers have found that most authors have written approximately one article over a typical five-year period (Best & Kneip, 2010; Davarpanah & Aslekia, 2008; Joswick, 1999; Weller, Hurd, & Wiberley, 1999; Wiberley, Hurd, & Weller, 2006; Zemon & Bahr, 1998). Fennenwald (2008) gathered data from the curricula vitae of Penn State librarians and reported that the average librarian wrote 1.9 articles during time spent at the institution. Weller, Hurd, and Wiberley (1999) analyzed 32 peer-reviewed LIS journals between 1993 and 1997 and found that 43.6% of the articles had an academic librarian author. However, when they repeated their study for 1998 to 2002, they reported a decline of almost 4% of such articles (Wiberley, Hurd, & Weller, 2006). On the other hand, a 2010 study of librarians at Oregon State University reported a general upward trend in peer-reviewed articles over a ten-year period (Wirth, Kelly, & Webster, 2010). Hildreth and Aytac (2007) examined articles published in 23 LIS journals between 2003 and 2005 and found that 43.2% were written by practicing librarians alone and another 9.71% by a combination of practicing librarians and faculty in LIS programs. Recent research has indicated that "almost 77% of…USAL [U.S. academic librarians] published one article in the 9-year period" from 2003-2011 (Blecic et al., 2012, June). Kennedy and Brancolini (2012) surveyed the research activity of academic librarians since finishing their Master of Library Science (MLS) degrees. These investigators reported that 62% of the respondents had performed research, but only 77% of these researchers had

disseminated the results of their research as a published article, conference presentation, or the like.

Several investigators have examined the role of collaboration in research and publishing. Terry (1996) reported a dramatic increase in co-authorship in *College & Research Libraries* from less than 5% in 1939 to almost 60% in 1994. Bahr and Zemon (2000) noted that between 1986 and 1996 40% of the articles in *College & Research Libraries* and 29% of those in the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* were co-authored. When Hart (1999; 2007) gathered information from librarians at Penn State, he found that almost 88% had co-authored at least one article. Weller, Hurd, and Wiberley (1999) found that 55.03% of the articles published from 1993 to 1997 in their sample of 32 peer-reviewed LIS journals were co-authored, but when they repeated their study only 41.09% of those published from 1998 to 2002 were written collaboratively (Wiberley, Hurd, & Weller, 2006). They suggested that future research would need to be done to determine if this was a temporary decline or representative of a trend.

Other variables that have been widely studied are job title and institutional size. One study of authorship in sixteen LIS journals described the most prolific writers as faculty teaching in LIS programs, followed by reference and public service librarians, and by library (Buttlar, 1991). Subsequent research has shown that among academic librarians, public service librarians and administrators have been the most productive (Fennewald, 2008; Joswick, 1999; Zemon & Bahr, 1998). With relation to institutional size, studies have found that most authors work at large research institutions (Hardin & Stankus, 2011; 2012; Seaman, 2008; Weller, Hurd, & Wiberley, 1999; Wiberley, Hurd, & Weller, 2006).

The gender of authors is another demographic factor frequently investigated. Taking a journal-based approach in their landmark study, Olsgaard and Olsgaard (1980) developed what has come to be known as the Olsgaard Profile of librarian authors, finding that males affiliated with institutions located in the Northeast and Midwest regions of the United States were over-represented as authors in the top LIS journals compared to their relative numbers in the field. Adamson and Zamora (1981) and Buttlar (1991) had similar findings, and Terry's (1996) study of authors in *College & Research Libraries* from 1989 to 1994 showed females made up 51.7% of total contributors, which, while an increase in overall numbers, still pointed to an over-representation of male authors. Zemon and Bahr's (1998) analysis of articles by college librarians in *College & Research Libraries* and *Journal of Academic Librarianship* from 1986 to 1996 showed an almost equal number written by females as by males. As women dominate the field of librarianship in numbers, these studies again point to an over-representation of male authors. Joswick (1999) studied the scholarly output of academic librarians in Illinois and determined that the gender gap in publishing was closing. Goedeken (2006) studied authorship in the *Serials Librarian* and Sassen (2009) in the *Indexer* and both reported a steady increase in the percentage of articles written by females.

The impact of institutional requirements and work cultures on the publication activities of librarians has also been a factor of interest in authorship studies, though the current study does not investigate them. Rayman and Goudy (1980) examined the research and publication requirements for the then 94 Association of Research Libraries (ARL) members and found that just 15% of them required librarians to publish as a condition of continued employment, while 60% encouraged publication. A decade later, Budd and Seavey (1990) surveyed the affiliations of the most productive authors in 36 LIS journals and reported that 82.3% of their institutions required publication for tenure and 88.2% required publication for promotion. Park and Riggs (1991) found that of the 304 academic libraries they surveyed, 74% indicated that librarians were evaluated at least in part on the basis of research and publication output. Blessinger and Costello (2011) surveyed 25 ARL libraries and reported that in the current recession, monetary support for professional activities had largely decreased, while expectations for tenure and promotion, including research and publication, had not changed. Black and Leysen (1994) identified factors that promoted librarians' publication activities, such as a daily schedule in which librarians were relieved from routine service responsibilities and the importance of mentoring, and Cirasella and Smale (2011) also pointed to the importance of peer-mentoring in encouraging research activities. In a qualitative study of Penn State librarians, Fennewald (2008) identified a number of factors related to institutional culture that promoted research and publication including mentoring, the availability of release time, and an overall culture that placed high value on publication as a professional activity.

One article deserves a closer look because it spurred the writers' interest and formed the basis for the research reported here. In 1999, Joswick reported a survey of journal articles written by practicing academic librarians in Illinois between 1995 and January 1999. The average number of articles published per author was 1.26. Women were publishing in proportion to their numbers in the profession, more articles were written collaboratively than had previously been reported, and women were more likely than men to collaborate. She also found that the most prolific authors were library administrators, reference librarians, and branch or department librarians. These productive authors were also more likely to work in large research universities than in colleges. The current study replicates Joswick's study for librarians in Tennessee. It contributes to the literature of authorship and provides a publication benchmark for librarians practicing in Tennessee.

Method

This research describes author characteristics of practicing academic librarians in Tennessee who published in the journal literature from 2007 through 2011. Citations for this sample were collected by searching ISI's Web of Science database for authors identified as working in an academic library in Tennessee. Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts (EBSCO) and Wilson's

OmniFile Full Text Mega (which includes Library Literature Full Text) were also searched for variations of "library" or "librarian" and "Tennessee." In order to compile as comprehensive a sample as possible, a request was also sent to the Tennessee Library Association's listserv, TLA-L, to identify additional article references meeting the criteria.

The scope of this study is limited to practicing librarians at public and private colleges and universities in Tennessee. Library deans and directors at Tennessee libraries were included, but faculty in LIS programs, non-MLS authors, and authors living outside Tennessee were excluded. For each article the following information was gathered: author(s), institution, position, sex, and journal title. Only substantive research articles were included in the count; book reviews, columns, letters to the editors, and the like were excluded. While each practicing librarian author in co-authored articles was counted, articles were counted only once. Information on faculty status was not gathered and therefore not considered in this analysis. The information was entered into a spreadsheet for analysis.

Findings

Using the methods described above, 139 articles written by 115 individual authors were identified. Approximately 23% of the 509 academic librarians in Tennessee (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011) wrote at least one article during the five-year period covered by the study. The number of articles per author ranged from one to 10, with an average of 1.21 articles per author. A majority of librarians who published in this time period wrote one article (67 or 58%), 28 (2%) wrote two articles, and 14 (17%) wrote three to four articles. The remaining six librarians, the most prolific, wrote from five to 10 articles each (See Table 1).

These numbers compare with Joswick's (1999) five-year study of Illinois librarians (average of 1.27 articles) and Best and Kneip's (2010) survey of five years of *College & Research Libraries* and the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* (average of 1.256 articles). Tennessee librarians publish slightly fewer articles than reported by these researchers. Additional research with other populations is needed to discover if the lower average is particular to Tennessee or typical of other groups.

Sixty-six (47%) of the 139 articles were written by only one author; 32 (23%) had two authors; 28 (20%) had three authors, with the remaining 13 (>0.1%) articles having four to six authors. Slightly more than half of all articles in this sample were co-authored, with an average of 1.96 authors each. Other studies (Bahr & Zemon, 2000; Hart, 2007) identify a trend toward collaboration in a variety of disciplines, including LIS. Recently published Tennessee authors appear to embrace this trend.

The sex of the authors was determined by examining the authors' first names. In the case of ambiguous names, the web was searched to locate biographical information, a picture, a pronoun used in correspondence, or some other information to aid in determination. Ninety-three (81%) of the 115 authors were female and 22 (19%) were male, indicating that females in this study published about four times more than their male counterparts, which is in proportion to the overall make-up of the profession. Although there is no known data on the ratio of female to male academic librarians in Tennessee specifically, women comprise approximately 81% of the overall population of librarians (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Economic and Statistics, Bureau of the Census, 2011). Echoing these findings, a recent American Library Association (ALA) demographic report identified 80.7% of ALA members as female (March 2012). Previous studies have shown that men have been over-represented as authors in the LIS literature (Burlingame & Repp, 1982; Olsgaard & Olsgaard, 1980), but over the last 10-15 years, the trend is clearly shifting toward parity in representation. Again Tennessee librarian authors appear to follow this trend.

Occupational title is another characteristic that is of interest in authorship studies. Do librarians in certain positions publish more than others? The author's job title was collected as identified in the article byline. If no job title was included, the institution's website was checked to determine the author's position. Using this process the title of all but one librarian was identified. There is little similarity among librarians' job titles, making it difficult to compare titles across institutions. In addition, the current job title as found on the institutions' websites is not necessarily the position held by the author at the time of publication. With these limitations in mind, titles were standardized and coded accordingly. For example, a music librarian was coded as a branch librarian, although at another institution, a music librarian might be identified as a collection development librarian or cataloger specializing in music. As shown in Table 2, by far the most active groups are librarians who work in reference/public service positions (23%). It is surprising that only 6% of the authors in this study hold administrative positions, since administrators in other studies were more active (Burlingame & Repp, 1982; Joswick, 1999; Zemon & Bahr, 1998). Further research might investigate these differences.

Are librarians at certain institutions more productive than those at other institutions? Does institutional size and classification matter? The authors' home institutions were recorded and analyzed according to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's *A Classification of Institutions of Higher Education* (2010). The authors worked at 25 different colleges and universities, mostly at publically-funded state institutions. As can be seen in Table 3, the majority of the authors worked at large research universities with high or very high research activity (University of Tennessee--Knoxville, Vanderbilt University, and University of Memphis). The next largest groups were employed by doctoral and large master's degree granting institutions. These findings support other studies' conclusions that "publication in the professional literature is considered primarily an accomplishment of university, not college, librarians" (Zemon & Bahr, 1998 p. 421). Because the current study

did not investigate faculty status or other factors that might contribute to research productivity, the authors can only speculate on why this occurs. Librarians at the University of Tennessee and the University of Memphis are tenure-track with a research and publication requirement. Although librarians at Vanderbilt are not tenure-track, in a recent report they ranked within the top 15 of most productive libraries (Blecic, et al., 2012, June). Larger institutions may have more staff and resources than smaller institutions, presumably making it easier for librarians who want to write to do so. However, librarians at these large institutions serve a large clientele and may have additional job responsibilities. It might be that there are other factors, such as mentoring and release time, that engender a climate encouraging librarians to publish, as Hart (1999) has suggested at Penn State.

Librarians in this study published in 47 journals. Although the research was not limited to LIS titles, only five were non-LIS titles. The non-LIS titles included one from an osteopathic association, one from a publisher's association, one from consumer health, and two from education. As might be expected, the most frequent outlet was *Tennessee Libraries*, the peer-reviewed professional journal of the Tennessee Library Association. Forty-seven articles (34%) were published in this one journal. An earlier study of authorship in *Tennessee Libraries* found that the majority of authors in the journal were academic librarians (Park, 2001). This title, plus the *Journal of the Medical Library Association* (with 14 articles) and *Library Journal* (with seven articles) account for approximately half of the articles published by Tennessee librarians.

The latter two of these three journals are included in the most recent Social Sciences Edition (2011) of ISI's Journal Citation Reports (JCR) for that database's subject category of information science and library science. Journals included in JCR are considered the leading journals in their fields, and metrics related to the impact and influence of these journals as calculated by JCR are used as a measure of a given journal's importance as a venue for scholarly communication. The 2011 Social Sciences Edition includes 83 journals in the subject category for information science and library science, many of which represent the field of management information systems (MIS). Though there is certainly overlap in the research agendas in MIS and LIS, these are nevertheless separate fields. Thus combining these fields into one subject category in JCR for the purpose of ranking and comparison of journals lessens JCR's utility.

The remaining 50% of the 115 articles were published in journals covering a variety of subjects. Twenty-six of the remaining 44 journals contained a single article, while 18 included from two to four articles. Via (1996) has noted "a veritable explosion of new [LIS] periodicals devoted to ever-narrower subtopics of library and information science" (p. 365). Via attributes this development, at least in part, to a perceived need of tenure-track librarians to publish. Several of the journals in this study had a fairly narrow focus. Examples of journals representing specialized subtopics of LIS include *The Journal of Electronic Resources in Medical Libraries* (founded in 2004*), The Journal of Map and Geography Libraries* (founded in 2004), and *The Journal of Interlibrary Loan, Document Delivery and Electronic Reserves* (original title founded in 1993). The wide range of journals in our sample shows that these subject-specific journals are viable publication outlets for many librarians. Librarians have a range of publication opportunities available to them and choose to take advantage of this diversity rather than to concentrate on a few select, high-impact journals.

Of the LIS journals in which representation from Tennessee librarians was fewer than four articles each, twelve were included in the 83 journals in JCR's most recent Social Sciences Edition (2011). Five were ranked in the top 50% of these 83 journals by 5-Year Impact Factor (see Table 5). Of the 47 journals identified in this author sample, 40 are peer-reviewed publications. Peer review status was determined by searching The Serials Directory (EBSCO) and Ulrich's Periodical Directory (2012 edition), or the journals' websites. When at least one of these sources listed the titles as peer-reviewed, refereed, or juried, the titles were counted as peer-reviewed publications. In this study, the peer-reviewed designation pertains to the journal itself, not necessarily to the articles in the sample that were published in that journal. Though non-substantive, non-research-based articles were excluded from the sample, it is still possible that some pieces were published in sections of the journal that are not peer-reviewed. For example, *Tennessee Libraries* contains both peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed article content.

Limitations

Several factors affect the development of a thorough understanding of the publication activity of academic librarians in Tennessee. The sample of publications on which this study is based includes and does not differentiate between librarians at institutions that grant faculty status to librarians and at those that do not. In addition, the relative weight of research and publication activities as one of many criteria for tenure and promotion at the various institutions represented in the sample is not known. The number of librarians in the sample who may have been seeking tenure during the period under study compared with the number who had already achieved tenure is not known, and the various stages of librarians in the tenure and promotion process might have an effect on publication output. In addition, this study did not address institutional factors such as release time, writing support, professional development, and the like. This makes it difficult to draw conclusions about factors that motivate librarians to publish.

Conclusions and Areas for Future Research

This research contributes to the continuing conversation regarding the scholarly contributions of practicing academic librarians. It supports and compares favorably with recent studies in other areas of the country. It is reassuring that librarians in Tennessee actively contribute to the knowledge base of the profession. Approximately

one-quarter of Tennessee academic librarians, often in collaboration with others, published at least one journal article between 2007 and 2011. The majority of these authors practiced in the large research or master's level universities in the state and worked in public or reference service, and women authors were represented in accordance with their overall numbers in the profession. Over the past twenty to thirty years, the average number of publications per author and the dominance of authors from large institutions and working in public service positions have remained approximately the same, while the proportion of female to male authors and of co-authored articles has increased significantly.

There are many areas for future research suggested by this study. This article presents evidence of productivity and authorship for Tennessee academic librarians. Additional state- and regional-level studies would provide comparisons of librarians' scholarly output for benchmarking. Such information would be useful in identifying changing national trends in LIS scholarship. Additional research is needed to document and understand changes in the relative number of women and men contributing to the scholarly output of LIS and to the role of collaborative efforts.

Further research on what motivates librarians to publish would also be useful in understanding trends in scholarly output. How do socio-cultural factors such as racial or sexual discrimination and the underlying attitudes and beliefs that support systems of discrimination affect scholarly behaviors? What is the influence of faculty status on publication? Do librarians who need to meet requirements for tenure and/or promotion publish more articles than those who do not? Do they continue to write articles after tenure and/or promotion? What support structures can or should an institution provide to encourage faculty publication (e.g., the availability of release time, an adequate level of support staffing, and funding for professional development)? What levels of productivity might be expected of new and experienced librarians? Are there specific factors that contribute to a culture of research within an institution? Scholarly contributions to the field are important for all professions and should be an ongoing responsibility for academic librarians. Please continue the conversation.

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TABLE 1: Publications per Author

Number of Publications per Author	Number of Authors (n=115)	% of Authors in Study	Percent of Women Authors in Study
1	67	58%	72%
2	28	24%	30%
3	6	5%	6%
4	8	3%	9%
5	1	1%	1%
6	2	2%	2%
7	1	1%	1%
8	1	1%	1%
9	0	--	--
10	1	1%	1%

TABLE 2: Author Job Positions

Position	Number of Authors (n=115)	Percent of Authors
Administration	7	6%
Archives/Preservation/ Special Collections	3	3%
Bibliographic Instruction	9	8%
Branch/Department	25	2%
Cataloging	10	9%
Circulation/Access	8	7%
Collection Development/Bibliography	4	3%
Government Publications	2	2%
Reference/Public Service	26	23%
Serials	3	3%
Systems	3	3%
Technical Services/Media/Internet	10	9%
Other	5	4%
Undetermined	1	>1%

TABLE 3: Institutional Type

Carnegie Classification	Number of Authors	Percent of Authors
Research Universities (very high/high research activity)	40	35%
Doctoral/Research Universities	23	20%
Master's Colleges and Universities (large)	23	20%
Master's Colleges and Universities (medium)	4	3%
Baccalaureate Colleges—Arts and Sciences	1	1%
Associate's Public-Rural-serving large	2	2%
Associate's Public-Rural-serving medium	3	3%
Medical Schools	19	17%

TABLE 4: Top Journals for Tennessee Librarian Authors

Journal	Number of Articles (n= 115)	Percent of Articles	JCR's 2011 Social Science Edition, Ranking by 5-Year Impact Factor Rank in JCR's 2011 Social Science Edition's Subject Category for Information Science and Library Science
Tennessee Libraries	47	34%	Not in subject category
Journal of the Medical Library Association	14	10%	30th of 83
Library Journal	7	5%	61st of 83
College and Research Libraries News	4	3%	Not in subject category
Journal of Consumer Health on the Internet	4	3%	Not in subject category
Journal of Electronic Resources in Medical Libraries	4	3%	Not in subject category
Bottom Line: Managing Library Finances	4	3%	Not in subject category

TABLE 5
Journals with Fewer than Four Articles Represented in JCR's 2011 Social Sciences Edition, Subject Category: Information Science and Library Science (83 total journals)

Title	5-Year Impact Factor Rank	In top 50% of Subject Category
Information Processing and Management	25th	Yes
Journal of Documentation	26th	Yes
Portal: Libraries and the Academy	34th	Yes
College and Research Libraries	36th	Yes
Journal of Librarianship and Information Science	39th	Yes
Learned Publishing	42nd	No
Library resources and Technical Services	45th	No
Library Hi Tech	46th	No
Program-Electronic Library and Information Systems	50th	No
Reference Services Review	54th	No
Interlending and Document Supply	57th	No
Library Journal	61st	No