



# BEYOND RESEARCH

## The Library's Role in Graduate Student Professionalization

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A graduate program curriculum often relies heavily on research. This makes the library a graduate student's best friend. But oftentimes, programs are so focused on research and on producing researchers that they fail to prepare their students to enter both academic and nonacademic workforce.<sup>1</sup> A common failing of many graduate programs has been the lack of professionalization courses within their curriculums. These courses prepare students to enter the job market or develop a career within academia. Without them, students are many times unsure of how to navigate life outside of or on a different side of academia and struggle to promote their work. Building and maintaining a scholarly or professional identity helps students connect with potential colleagues and employers as well as promote themselves and their work.

Being a graduate student can be hard, and at times it can be difficult to define oneself. The same person can be a student, a researcher, and an instructor at the same time. A study conducted of doctoral students at Kent State university revealed that most of them struggled to manage their different personal, academic, and professional identities, and in certain cases they did not feel deserving of labels such as researcher, even though a big part of a doctoral program is conducting research.<sup>2</sup> If graduate students are wrestling with their identity in real life, it is likely that their online identities reflect this confusion or, worse, are nonexistent.

But not having an online identity is not really an option. As online searches are now the first step in finding information, a noncurated or nonexistent online identity may very well harm the prospects of a student or recent graduate when it comes to the job market.<sup>3</sup>

Public libraries have been offering job-hunting-related programming for a long time, but academic libraries have not been actively doing so. While university placement services maybe a good place for undergraduates to find work, they do not necessarily have the tools to aid the more research-oriented graduate student. Many of them focus on traditional methods of job-hunting and networking and do not offer help on managing one's online identity.

While it may not be anyone's first thought, academic librarians are ideal instructors for this type of content. Given the nature of the work they do, academic librarians themselves are constantly straddling the line between the academic and the professional. Therefore, they can speak about this topic not only from the theoretical angle but also from a personal one. They are able to combine research and trends in scholarly communications with those in the nonacademic world.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, this content allows librarians to incorporate elements of information literacy as well as promote library services and collections. This chapter details the development and content of a stand-alone online identity workshop offered by the library at a large research university.

## Development

The workshop was first developed as part of a graduate seminar in kinesiology after the librarian offered the option to the department faculty. Upon receiving positive feedback, the librarian adapted the workshop to engage a larger audience and offered it as a stand-alone workshop for the entire university. While there were no restrictions in terms of attendance, the workshop was truly targeted to graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and early career academics. The workshop was branded as "*Tell Your Own Story: Building a Professional and Scholarly Identity Online.*"

The first iteration of the workshop took place in 2016 during Open Access Week. In fall 2017, a new librarian joined the team, bringing her expertise in search engine optimization and scholarly communication. It was then that the content was updated to cover more topics. The workshop was offered again in two different campuses and is expected to take place every semester from now on.

## Content

### *Who Am I?*

The workshop begins with an assessment of the participants' current online identity. They are asked to search for their name using a private or incognito

browser window. This exercise serves multiple purposes. Firstly, it gives students a clear picture of what potential employers, admissions officials, and grant offices see when they search their names. Secondly, it gives students an opportunity to start thinking about how they want to brand themselves. For example, someone with a very common name may want to start thinking about ways in which they can differentiate themselves from people with a similar name by using a middle initial, middle name, their maiden or spouse's name, and so on. Finally, it introduces the concept of filter bubbles, the fact that search engines learn from user behavior and will show users results they are more likely to be interested in.

What students usually find when doing these searches is a series of links that do not necessarily reflect their story. Sometimes it includes things from their past or their personal life; other times it omits important information about their academic or professional lives. This is why the workshop was named "Tell Your Own Story," because it empowers students to curate their own identity rather than leaving it at the mercy of a search engine.

## *Scholarly or Professional Profiles*

Academic or professional profiles are the cornerstone of building an online identity. They allow users to control the narrative and tell their story all in one place. Furthermore, they can increase discoverability, offer networking opportunities, allow users to share information, and help users distinguish themselves from others.<sup>5</sup> They are generally free and do not require a lot of time, maintenance, or high technical skills.

In terms of academic profiles, the librarians chose to recommend the open researcher and contributor identification infrastructure known as ORCID iD. ORCID (<http://orcid.org>) is a nonprofit organization supported by universities, government, professional associations, publishers, and so on that allows researchers to create academic profiles.<sup>6</sup> Each profile is given a unique identifier, solving the problem of common names, complex names, transliteration, omission of middle names or initials, name changes, and so on.<sup>7</sup> It also allows users to link to other profiles and include aliases. Furthermore, it supports a wide range of over thirty-five work types, not just the traditional ones like books, journal articles, and conferences.<sup>8</sup> This gives researchers the opportunity to showcase all their work. ORCID is compatible with repositories and journal digital platforms, which allows it auto-populate profiles. Perhaps the most important reason to create an ORCID profile is the fact that many funding agencies and journals are now requiring applicants and authors to submit an ORCID iD number.

For those interested in joining the workforce or having a more popular profile, the librarians present the famous job-hunting social media platform

LinkedIn. While most students are familiar with the platform, they are not necessarily aware of how to curate their profiles to maximize exposure and interaction. The librarians cover choosing a picture (headshot, facing the text), how to list the person's name (no credentials), changing headlines to include keywords, creating a compelling and search-engine-optimized summary that shows personality, and listing research activities as jobs. They also provide information about changing the URL to the user's name (making it easier for people to find the profile on a search engine), adding links and media to their work, and joining groups to improve position in the search results.

This section also addresses websites like Academia.edu and ResearchGate.net. The librarians particularly focus on explaining some of the potential pitfalls of these websites—from the deceptive .edu domain even though Academia.edu is not affiliated with a higher learning institution<sup>9</sup> to copyright concerns when uploading content, and most importantly, the lack of transparency on the business models of these sites and questions regarding how they will monetize these platforms.<sup>10</sup> Discussing them also allows librarians to introduce topics such as open access, scholarly communications, and the availability of institutional repositories.

## *Social Media*

Social media participation makes up a large component of one's online identity. It allows users to generate content and interact with a larger audience without requiring too large a commitment. Researchers can use social media to track metrics, follow discussions, find job postings, find their peers, discover interesting literature, discuss and comment on research, and so on.<sup>11</sup> But with such a large array of options and so many different ways of engaging with them, how does one know what to do?

This section of the workshops focuses on creating a social media strategy that works for each individual person. The librarians start by encouraging students to define their goals regarding social media interaction.

If they wish to interact solely with other researchers in their field, they must first find which platforms are popular with their academic communities. While this may seem obvious to some, each discipline has its own communication channels. In the workshops, the librarians have heard of communities that interact on Facebook, Twitter, Slack, LinkedIn, and Google+. Finding which platform is most appropriate is not necessarily straightforward; there is no guide. Students are encouraged to consult with their professors, look at conference websites, and talk to other experts in their fields. If, on the other hand, researchers would like to reach to a wider audience, other platforms should be considered as well.

Once platforms (where) have been chosen, students are instructed to think about what and how often they will post. In terms of content (what), real-life examples are shown to explore the different kinds of post possibilities. New and original content is not always necessary, and just sharing relevant articles might be enough to maintain a good presence. Frequency (how often) will depend on the platform: Twitter moves at a faster pace than Instagram, for example.

There are a few other considerations as well, include managing different identities online. This means choosing which accounts will be professional, which ones will be personal, and adjusting privacy settings accordingly. Students are reminded that there is no such thing as privacy on the internet. Furthermore, depending on the platform, they may not even own the content they post. This a good opportunity to talk to students about social media archiving practices and terms of service. A visit to the website Terms of Service; Didn't Read (<https://tosdr.org/>) is recommended for finding summaries of the terms of service for different platforms.

## *Ongoing Research Publication*

Ongoing research publication refers to the dissemination of information outside of the traditional channels of publication such as academic journals, books, and so on. It allows researchers to share their research before it is completed, as a work in progress, or in easily consumable amounts. It is also a good opportunity to be creative and reach out to a larger audience that is not likely to read theses and dissertations or journal articles.

Blogs are perhaps the best-known medium for this type of information dissemination. Blogging has gained traction among academics as a way to express their scholarly identity as well as create and disseminate knowledge.<sup>12</sup> There are different levels of engagement when it comes to blogs: researchers can either have their own blog or contribute to an already established one. There are advantages and disadvantages to both options. While having one's own blog gives authors full editorial control, it can be time-consuming and labor-intensive. The onus of publishing on a timely basis relies solely on the researcher. On the other hand, while contributing to another blog means adhering to someone else's standard, it also involves a review process that might make content more authoritative and give the blog a better reputation.

Platforms like Instagram and Snapchat offer the opportunity of sharing images and videos with the audience. While the humanities and arts may feel like shoo-ins for this kind of platforms, Instagram accounts are quite popular with the sciences as well. Anything that has a visually compelling component can be turned into a successful account.

Podcasting and videos are another way sharing one's research. While they are more time-consuming than most of the other options, they may also have a wider reach as they offer a blend of information and entertainment. Technological skills are definitely needed, but nowadays most of the work can be accomplished with a phone, a computer, and a camera (items that students may already own). A lot of the animations can be done using free websites like Prezi and PowToon.

Discussing middle-state research publication can make students aware of the existence of available equipment at the library (iPads, microphones, one-button studio, etc.) and software (Camtasia, iMovie, Audacity, etc.). It is also a good opportunity to discuss copyright issues both as content creators and users. During "Tell Your Own Story," we direct students to many Creative Commons repositories where they can either obtain or deposit content.

Because ongoing research publication reaches a wider audience than a journal article, thesis or dissertation, and so on, and that audience might not be as familiar with the field, it is a good opportunity for students to practice relaying their research in an accessible language. This is a useful transferrable skill that can help students navigate the job- and funding-hunting process, where those making the decisions are not necessarily experts in the student's field.

## *Personal Websites*

The final part of the workshop discusses personal websites, which are good for centralizing all the different dissemination channels mentioned in this chapter. The librarians begin by explaining the difference between a blog (dynamic content) and a website (static content) and outline different options available to students. These include digital business card websites like About.Me, drag-and-drop website builders like Squarespace and Wix, and build-from-scratch options like WordPress. About.Me is the easiest and fastest option, but it is also very basic. While drag-and-drop website builders offer good-looking websites and are easy to use, content cannot be easily exported should the user decide to move his or her website elsewhere. Many institutions provide students with a personal website, but they may restrict the way in which the sites are used, and the website may become defunct once the student graduates.

After examining different platforms, the librarians cover content and structure to ensure search engine optimization. In terms of content, students are encouraged to include information about themselves, their research interests, current and past projects, publications, collaboration opportunities, contact information and links to identifiers like ORCID iD, and social media feeds. Students are introduced to microdata (metadata nested in a website's code that allows browsers to identify pertinent information) and the importance of main-

taining proper structure when writing headings, subheadings, text, and so on to ensure information is easily findable during a search.

## Future Considerations

Online identity curating is a valuable skill for graduate students to have, but many institutions fail to provide this content within their graduate programs. Given their personal and professional experience, academic librarians are perfectly poised to deliver this content. Besides covering the online profiles, social media, ongoing research publication, and personal websites, this type of instruction allows librarians to talk about information literacy, copyright, open access, and many other library- and information-related topics.

As of the writing of this chapter, the librarians have not yet done any formal assessment on the workshop content and usefulness. In the coming semesters, it would be interesting to look into assessment methodologies to better understand the impact of these workshops on graduate students and early career academics. In the meantime, the librarians continue to perform informal evaluations of the workshop, as the subject matter is dynamic and prone to change. Whichever platforms and systems are popular at any given time may no longer be by the time the next workshop comes along. Constant evaluation and adjustment ensure that students are getting the most useful information at the time.

The librarians are also considering expanding our offerings to soon-to-be graduates by creating a companion workshop to “Tell Your Own Story.” This workshop would focus finding and accessing academic information (books, journals, databases, etc.) after losing student library privileges. Finally, introducing a module on grant applications is also being considered.

## Notes

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