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## Stories and Statistics from Library-led Publishing

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*Abstract: Library-led publishing is one of the new approaches to journal publishing and open access that has grown tremendously in the last few years. A 2010 MLIS-funded survey found that 55% of respondents—from U.S. academic libraries of all different types and sizes—were already implementing or developing a publishing program. Library-led publishing has garnered such momentum because, by offering low- or no-cost publishing to university scholars, it addresses needs that traditional publishing has not been able to meet. This article presents a series of small case studies to illustrate different journals that have benefited from the library-publishing model: a journal that struggled to find an affordable publisher in its emerging field; a small society journal that could no longer afford to support itself in print; society publications that go beyond the traditional journal format; a student journal with a revolving editorial board.*

Over the past several years, an ever-growing number of journals have found a home with a new type of ‘publisher’: the academic library. Libraries are taking on a new role as the hub of university-based publishing services, and a new model termed ‘library-led publishing’ is making a significant impact in the publishing ecosystem. In this model, academic libraries host and publish online peer-reviewed journals on behalf of faculty and student editors on campus. The university or library itself provides the infrastructure for library-led publishing—it is seen as part of the library’s mission to support research and visibility for its scholars. As a result, library-led publishing is a low- or no-cost model for journals. Library-published journals are nearly always open access, and they maintain that model without charging author fees.

In 2010, an [IMLS-funded survey](#)<sup>3</sup> in the United States found that 55% of respondents—from U.S. academic libraries of all different types and sizes—were already implementing or developing a library-led publishing program. There are already over a thousand journals published under this model in the United States, and that number is growing fast. With such momentum behind library-led publishing, interesting questions arise: how many journals are these libraries publishing, and how are they measuring their success? What types of journals are published by libraries, and how does this microcosm compare to the overall journal ecosystem?

As a new field, library-led publishing has only recently begun to ask itself these questions. The [Digital Commons](#)<sup>2</sup> platform (from [bepress](#)<sup>1</sup>, based in Berkeley, CA) is the leading hosted publishing service for library-led publishing in North America. As a result, we are fortunate to have access to data from the hundreds of journals we host. We recently analyzed this data and published *Library-led Publishing with bepress Digital*

*Commons: Data and Benchmarks Report*<sup>2</sup> to provide aggregate statistics about the trends in library-led publishing. Libraries published nearly 700 journals using Digital Commons in 2013, and that number is now [almost 900](#)<sup>3</sup>. Other library-led publishing programs use in-house open source software (generally Open Journal Systems from the Public Knowledge Project) or general web publishing tools such as WordPress. The Digital Commons data is a piece of a larger picture, but we believe these statistics and stories are indicative of the success of all library-led publishing programs.

So what does the library-led publishing landscape look like? For one thing, it primarily comprises open access journals: out of nearly 700 journals using Digital Commons in 2013, 94% were open access, and none relied on article-processing fees. The library has been more than willing to support these journals with software, hosting, infrastructure, and often more hands-on editorial services. The investment has proven worthwhile: libraries have been able to expand their publishing programs even while other library budgets are shrinking. By the end of 2013, the majority of library-led publishing programs published two to four journals, and fifteen of them published ten or more journals. As of October 2014, the number of libraries publishing more than ten journals had grown to 23. Many libraries have expanded their publishing programs to the full spectrum of scholarly publishing: [monographs](#)<sup>6</sup>, [textbooks](#)<sup>7</sup>, [digital humanities](#)<sup>8</sup>, [conference proceedings](#)<sup>9</sup>, and [technical reports](#)<sup>10</sup>.

And what about the journals themselves? Library-published journals using Digital Commons are publishing an average of seventeen articles per year, which shows that library-led publishing is not only popular; it produces healthy and thriving journals. Judging from the data published in our [report](#)<sup>2</sup>, library-published journals are often faculty-edited journals in niche or emerging fields, or small society journals that can no longer afford to support themselves in print. Many of them are student-edited journals with a revolving editorial board, or innovative publications that go beyond the traditional journal format. Some are subscription-based, some are fully open access, some have been published by societies in print for years, and others are born digital. They are nearly all peer-reviewed, and use the built-in submission management and blind peer review tools included in the Digital Commons platform. The majority of these journals publish online-only, and use the platform's built-in production capabilities to publish into formatted PDFs; some journals hire staff or students for extra design and layout work, and some continue to produce a print (or print-on-demand) version.

Going beyond the statistics to further illustrate the role of library-led publishing in the journal publishing ecosystem, this article tells the stories of a few specific journals that have found a home in a library-led publishing program. These stories illustrate the reasons that specific journals chose to publish through their library, the paths they took, and the benefits they found. As the statistics and stories together make clear, library-led publishing is one of the most successful new forces in journal publishing because it fills significant gaps left by traditional publishing, because it gives new life to the academic library, and because it allows faculty and student editors to accomplish things they could not otherwise accomplish.

## New and Niche

Journals in emerging or niche fields have been especially poorly served by traditional commercial publishers, and these are the journals that readily find a better fit in the more flexible, lower-cost publishing model offered by libraries. [\*The Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education, and Leadership\*<sup>11</sup>](#) (JOREL) is the only peer-reviewed journal in the United States that focuses on issues of education in the great outdoors. The Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education (AORE) first planned to publish the journal during its 2001 conference, but experienced so much difficulty finding a traditional publisher that JOREL didn't publish its first issue until 2009, when it launched on the [library-led publishing platform](#)<sup>12</sup> at Western Kentucky University.

When AORE began looking for a publication venue in preparation for a 2001 launch, its members created a committee to research publication costs, revenue streams, sponsorship, access, distribution, and publishing formats. Raymond Poff, President of AORE at the time and a member of the newly founded AORE Research and Publications Committee, contacted a well-regarded publisher with their plan—in response, he received a proposal that the board determined to be prohibitively expensive. The next year, Poff and fellow board member Tammie Stenger-Ramsey contacted another respected publisher in the field, which also quoted publishing fees that were too high. Seeing the lack of success AORE was having in the publishing market on its own, Stenger-Ramsey suggested reaching out to the Wilderness Education Association for partnership, and the two organizations created a joint steering committee to continue the search for a sustainable publishing plan.

With the joint committee in place, Poff reached out to one of the publishers he'd contacted previously, but the resulting quote was still too high. Poff finally started to gain traction when he reached out to the Western Kentucky University Research Foundation at his home institution. Western Kentucky University already had a relationship in place with bepress and the Digital Commons platform, so the Foundation and the WKU library worked together to finally launch and publish JOREL. This included journal hosting, web publishing, site design, training, peer-review tools and other editorial management resources, and the excellent discoverability available to all content hosted on the Digital Commons platform—in this case, [TopSCHOLAR](#)<sup>12</sup>, WKU's scholarly repository.

After close to a decade of searching for a publisher, the editors were finally able to launch the *Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education, and Leadership* the following year. Although much of WKU's repository, which houses the journal, is open access, JOREL uses the platform's flexibility with access controls to its advantage—the journal's content is available only to paying subscribers, thus allowing JOREL to generate revenue and cover the expenses from its editorial office. In 2014, JOREL published its sixth volume, and works with bepress to include its content in Gale databases, CLOCKSS and Portico, as well as to assign DOIs through CrossRef.

## Sustainable Open Access

Many smaller subscription-based journals, after weighing the benefits of increased readership compared to their dwindling subscription revenue, decide to rethink their journal's access model. These journals use Digital Commons to experiment with a moving wall or even full open access. [Tipiti<sup>13</sup>](#), the official *Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America (SALSA)*, began as a print-only, subscription-based publication in 2003. The journal moved to online publication through the library-led publishing program at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas ([Digital Commons @ Trinity<sup>14</sup>](#)) in 2011, and used a 'moving wall' with only the most recent issues under subscription control. Its readership began to grow dramatically: though it had fewer than 300 print subscriptions, the online journal generated over 27,000 downloads in 2012. Richard Reed, Professor of Anthropology at Trinity University and former president of SALSA, found that the decision to open up the back issues not only helped build readership, but also furthered the society's goals of fostering international dialogue and action on issues relating to lowland South America, especially with researchers at institutions in South America without the funds for an institutional subscription.

As *Tipiti* editors began receiving direct feedback from readers in South America, they took a closer look at their download numbers and found that their open-access back content was generating up to ten times the number of downloads as their most recent, subscription-controlled articles during the same period. Weighing the benefits of a fully open-access model versus the revenue generated by subscriptions, the editors decided to lift the subscription controls and make the journal entirely open access in the spring of 2013.

'The move to digital publication through Trinity's repository reduced the expense of producing the journal so drastically that it was no longer necessary to rely on subscription revenue in order to keep the journal going,' said Reed. 'And that allows the editors to focus on publishing great research and increasing the journal's international impact in its field.'

From a small, niche journal serving primarily the membership of the society, *Tipiti* has grown into a fully open access international resource and a forum for authors from all over the Americas as well as Europe.

## The Full Spectrum of Society Scholarship

Society publishers need to publish valuable content that goes beyond just journals: working papers, technical reports, video and multimedia, research data, conference proceedings, and archival materials. The [Association for Information Systems<sup>15</sup>](#), the professional association for organizations and individuals who work with research information systems, publishes ten journals and produces myriad forms of research and resources. After searching for a way to organize the full spectrum of their output, they found a home directly on Digital Commons and created the [AIS Electronic Library<sup>16</sup>](#) as the publishing platform for all their varied content.

Among the different types of scholarship that AIS needed to manage, conferences were particularly important. AIS uses the AIS Electronic Library to manage conference proceedings from 1994 to 2014, which gives members a way to view the archives at a glance. The conference-management system features the same peer-review tools available to journals, allowing societies to manage conference submissions from the call for proposals all the way through to archiving presentations after the event.

AIS has also created discrete spaces to archive working papers as well as materials produced from its regional chapters, special interest groups, and affiliated conferences, so that members can quickly find content. Finally, AIS catalogues its webinars on the same publications site, including streaming video and audio.

Because AIS has a digital publishing platform that supports the full spectrum of digital material, the society can assemble all its various forms of publications in one place, rather than having them scattered across different websites and publisher platforms.

## **Opening the Door for Students**

Student-edited journals have found a long-term home with library-led publishers who are able to offer a consistent, hosted platform with unlimited training and support for a revolving editorial board. Entrusting students to manage and edit their own research publications has been shown to improve student learning outcomes and can teach essential skills about scholarly communication, collaboration, and the publishing field. But publishing can be daunting under the best of circumstances, and editors of student-led journals shift frequently—often annually—as students graduate.

At Illinois Wesleyan University, undergraduate research is integral to the university's mission. The [Undergraduate Economic Review<sup>17</sup>](#), published jointly by the Economics Department and the university library, needed a way to successfully pass the responsibilities and knowledge between student editors each year. By publishing through [Digital Commons @ IWU<sup>18</sup>](#), the *UER* is able to benefit from unlimited support and training for each new student editor.

The ability to transition smoothly between frequently changing editorial boards has allowed the *UER* to focus on recruiting quality content: the journal has a competitive acceptance rate of 20% and receives submissions from around the world, including Great Britain, Asia, and Europe.

The journal also has proven to be an integral curricular tool. Stephanie Davis-Kahl, Scholarly Communication Librarian at Illinois Wesleyan University, and *UER* co-advisor, emphasizes that learning about scholarly publishing furthers key skills and information literacy in undergraduate learning, while providing faculty a powerful pedagogical tool. Both she and co-advisor and economics professor Michael Seeborg recognize the importance of having a good publishing system in effect—the double-blind peer-review workflow, publishing platform, and editor training in particular—which reduce the workload and allow students and faculty to focus on learning goals. The

benefits for the student editors are dramatic. Student Sijia Song, former Editor-in-Chief of UER, speaks of his work on the journal as 'an invaluable learning experience,' citing a dramatic improvement in critical thinking, communication, writing, and leadership skills.

## **A Publisher's Story**

We'd like to share one more story by way of conclusion, this one from the point of view of a publisher itself: namely, bepress. We began as a commercial journal publisher in 1999; [founded by professors<sup>19</sup>](#) from University of California, Berkeley, the bepress publishing portfolio grew to over 60 journals. In parallel, bepress also built the Digital Commons platform as an institutional repository and publishing platform licensed directly to universities for their own publishing activities. As the years went on, we couldn't help but notice that the universities using Digital Commons were publishing far more journals on their own than we ourselves as commercial publishers were able to take on. In fact, our commercial journal acquisitions team would turn away proposed new journals because they were too niche, too small, or wanted to try open access. Many of these same journals later found a home with a university using the Digital Commons platform for its library-led publishing program. In fact, by 2011 so many libraries were launching journals on their institutions' Digital Commons sites that Berkeley Electronic Press moved away from commercial journal publishing altogether, and now we only focus on Digital Commons and the care and support of our library-led publishing customers.

We have been very fortunate to see this transition unfold right before our eyes, and to have been on both sides of it. The peer-review tools and editorial-management software that bepress developed in its early years for commercial journal publishing are now in the hands of libraries, giving universities and academic societies a venue to publish journals of all shapes and sizes, to offer sustainable no-cost open access options, and to expand beyond the journal into the full spectrum of scholarly publishing.

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Purdue University Joint Transportation Research Program Technical Reports:  
<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/jtrp/>

<sup>11</sup> [\*The Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education, and Leadership\*](#)

12 [TopSCHOLAR The Research & Creative Activity Database of WKU](#)

13 [\*Tipiti, the official Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America \(SALSA\)\*](#): <http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti/>

14 Digital Commons @ Trinity <http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu>

15 Association for Information Systems: <http://aisnet.org/>

16 Association for Information Systems Electronic Library: <http://aisel.aisnet.org/>

17 Undergraduate Economic Review: <http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/uer/>

18 [Digital Commons @ IWU](#): <http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/>

<sup>19</sup> [bepress's story](#): <http://www.bepress.com/aboutbepress.html>