Campus Outreach to Scholarly Society Leaders, Editors, and Members: Promoting positive change and a continuing role for scholarly societies

Audience:

This talking points document has been developed to assist library leaders and other library staff who work closely with faculty in conducting outreach to the scholars and researchers at their institution who serve their discipline-based scholarly societies in leadership roles.

General Background:

The research library community supports scholarly societies and recognizes that they provide valuable services that advance scholarship and research, teaching and learning, and service to society. Libraries and scholarly societies share concerns for identifying high quality research and ensuring that the products of the research process are made available as quickly and widely as possible to advance further research and scholarship. Societies traditionally have been both effective and economical producers of scholarly works, especially journals. As scholars and researchers increasingly engage in sharing data as well, many societies are, like libraries, acting to increase the value and accessibility of these key outputs of scholarship and research. The library community would like to see scholarly societies continue to be successful contributors to the sharing and creation of new knowledge.

However, societies face many challenges in today’s technological, cultural, and economic climate. They confront a profound paradigm shift in communication practices – one sweeping away traditional practices. We must acknowledge the difficulty of finding ways to ensure the continuing value and success of scholarly societies. We face the same challenges in research libraries.

Member leaders and editors of scholarly societies are responsible for determining their organizations’ responses to change. Their understanding of the issues, the environments, and the opportunities involved in changing research and scholarly communication practices is influenced by their experiences at their home institutions, often through contacts with librarians. Campus conversations with society leaders and editors provide key opportunities to promote positive change.
Talking points: The Environment, Challenges and Opportunities Scholarly Societies Face in Adapting to New Communication Practices

• Wait and see is not longer an option. Action is required now.
  o Scholarly societies need to be redeveloping their services to function effectively in a radically transformed research and communication environment. Technologies and norms are changing rapidly – and increasingly amidst deteriorating economic conditions. The longer societies wait to engage, the more difficult it will be to respond effectively.
  o Society members’ and member leaders’ engagement and leadership is necessary to ensure a bright future for the society so that members benefit from the rapid advances in the environment that are occurring. They are the ones who best understand the changes in research as well as the value and effects of new communication technologies. Increasing, they already understand that the emerging network environment for research will be most effective when as much scholarly content, primary source materials, and research data are as openly available as possible. The growing opportunity to advance research through new kinds of services built on top of data and computer readable content must be seized.

• New strategies are needed for new times.
  o To succeed, societies need to develop new services and also to diversify sources of support for key activities. A major dilemma facing many societies now is their reliance on essentially a single revenue source – the sale of content. The emerging world of communication dictates that value-added services will be more valuable than content distribution. Some large commercial publishers are rapidly positioning themselves to succeed in this new regime, societies need to seize these opportunities as well.
  o Flexibility needs to be a priority. We are in the midst of an ongoing transition process - key trends are becoming apparent but the future stable communication system is not yet fully visible to us. Therefore, societies’ planning practices will need to evolve continuously over an extended and indefinite period, requiring more risk-taking and experimentation than is currently part of many societies’ culture. Waiting may be tempting, but it rapidly becomes falling behind.

• Supporters of research and scholarship have new expectations.
  o The institutions supporting research and scholarship are rapidly developing policies that place research and scholarly content and data into publicly accessible repositories. Nearly all research and scholarship draws on support beyond the researcher’s own hands and brain. The NIH Public Access Policy and the policies adopted by Harvard, Kansas, and MIT presage this trend. While much attention is going to publication deposit at the moment, it is clear
that deposit of research data is on the horizon as well. If societies believe they can ensure a future by collecting and limiting access to research data they are unlikely to succeed; however, these developments offer new opportunities for developing a new generation of society services.

• Members need their societies to advance new norms for emerging research and scholarship.
  
o Members increasingly need their societies to support new and emerging forms of scholarship and scholars’ and researchers’ efforts to obtain recognition for new kinds of contributions. The Modern Language Association is one pioneer in this area with its public statements on the importance of valuing new forms of scholarship for tenure and promotion processes.
  
o Societies need to support members who are adopting more effective communication modes through practices like generous policies on author rights retention for works the society publishes, open access to society publications with at most a minimal embargo, and opportunities to pay a reasonable fee for immediate open access and deposit in digital repositories if society publications are not yet openly accessible.

How Libraries Can Help:

While the list of challenges is daunting and the path to a successful future for any given scholarly society will be difficult to discover, research libraries do have resources they can offer to scholars and researchers seeking to help their societies.

• Librarians are leaders in educating themselves and others on campus on key issues such as new kinds of scholarly works, new dissemination models, open and public access, and author rights management. E-research and research data management are also areas where libraries are developing expertise and educational capabilities. For instance: MIT’s guide on Data Management and Publishing.
• Librarians understand a range of communication practices and know where to look for models as new expectations and capabilities for sharing scholarship and research evolve. It can be difficult for members of one society to develop a sense of broader trends and innovative practices that may have been tested by other organizations. Resources like ARL’s study of Current Models of Digital Scholarly Communication identify the range of new kinds of works being used by scholars and researchers.
• It is vital that scholarly societies work from accurate understandings of copyright law. Librarians usually have access to expertise within their organizations or on their campuses and can educate and advise society leaders, editors, and members on important issues like author rights
management, fair use, and orphan works. Significantly, their perspective is nuanced to the values of higher education and the dynamics of changes in communication technologies.

- Libraries are offering a variety of local publishing and repository services. Libraries can be publishing partners (the Synergies project provides an example), but even for leaders of societies pursuing other strategies, managers of library publishing services can offer valuable advice.
- Many institutions and organizations will need effective partnerships to leverage resources and manage risk in dynamic times. Libraries have exceptional facility with partnering and promoting collaborations. They can function as partners in collaborations or convene a variety of stakeholders. These are skills library leaders exercise regularly on campus and beyond.
- Library leaders are employed in engineering radical transformations in their own organizations in the face of emerging communication and content management technologies. There may well be important lessons learned that can be shared.
- Libraries are engaged in systematic studies of researchers (and students), their behaviors, and their needs as part of their own change management processes. This information can be valuable to scholarly societies, too, as they try to assess possible service needs they can fulfill. Staying in touch with the rapid changes in norms and practices affecting societies can be a significant challenge facing leaders in scholarly societies.

Goals for Outreach

Encourage positive change by:

- Educating association leaders and members on key issues and ongoing developments in e-research and scholarly communication
- Improving understanding of library roles in and potential contributions to the ongoing transformations of scholarly communication practices and e-research
- Providing resources that assist the transformation of scholarly society roles
- Partnering with scholarly societies as they shift to new strategies for fulfilling their missions