UIUC Library Ithaka Report

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Introduction

Beginning in the fall of 2018, faculty librarians from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) Library joined members of Ithaka S+R, the Modern Languages Association (MLA), and 12 American university libraries to examine the research needs, practices, and challenges of tenure-track faculty who specialize in literature, culture, and writing studies. This report documents the research findings specific to the work conducted at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. While it will inform Ithaka S+R's comprehensive report, it specifically details the research needs, interests, priorities, and challenges of faculty at UIUC.

Ithaka S+R is a research and publishing non-for-profit organization that "works with leaders in higher education, academic libraries, museums, foundations, and publishers to research, evaluate, and provide strategic guidance in a range of areas." Members of Ithaka S+R frequently collaborate with cohorts of libraries to collect and qualitatively study the research practices of academics in specific disciplines. Consequently, Ithaka S+R documents the changing landscape of scholarly activities, and helps academic and university libraries respond to new and emerging scholarly trends. MLA is the primary professional organization for teachers and scholars of language and literature and an important advocate for teaching and research in these fields. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has a long and rich tradition of literary and cultural studies. Examining the changing practices of scholars in these fields greatly benefits the campus and University Library.

For our study, faculty librarians at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign recruited and interviewed fifteen tenure-track faculty. The departments represented in our study included English, Comparative Literature, French and Italian, Germanic Languages and Literatures, Spanish and Portuguese, Slavic Languages and Literatures, and other various programs in the School of Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics. We recruited participants through in-person and email invitations, and set formal email invitations to participants who informally agreed to participate in our study. To ensure a diverse sampling of participants, we selected faculty working in a wide range of periods and geographical locations and at different stages in their careers. The languages studied by faculty participants include: Arabic, English,

French, Italian, German, Portuguese (Brazilan), Russian, and Spanish. The breakdown of rank is: 3 assistant professors; 7 associate professors; and 5 full professors.

Ithaka S+R and MLA developed the semi-structured interview questionnaire, which included 5 areas of focus that informed the interview process. These areas include: Research Focus and Methods; Working with Archives and Other Special Collections; Working with Secondary Content; Scholarly Communications and Evaluating Impact and Research Training. In November 2018, members of Ithaka S+R trained the report's authors and other librarians involved in the survey. This training, which took place at Georgetown University, included teaching librarian researchers about the qualitative research method that would determine the project. During the training process, members from Ithaka S+R led workshops that addressed best practices for conducting interviews, coding interview transcripts, and analyzing data.

This report is divided into the five areas represented in the interview questionnaire guide. These areas are as follows: research focus and methodology; working with archives and special collections; working with secondary content; scholarly communication and impact; and research training. Broadly speaking, the take away from each section is as follows:

1. Faculty employ a variety of methods/methodologies to analyze primary and secondary source material, thereby representing the increasingly multi- and/or inter-disciplinary nature of research in departments associated with literature, culture, and writing studies;
2. Faculty consistently require access to printed primary source materials (e.g. literary texts or manuscripts); however, as libraries and other cultural heritage institutions continue to digitize their holdings, researchers have greater access to such material and can integrate these resources into their scholarship and teaching. This development is not universal, as many archives, libraries, etc., that are not in the United Kingdom, the European Union, or the United States do not have the resources or ability to digitize their material;
3. Faculty typically rely on a variety of tools (both developed by the library and available to them on the internet or electronically) to discover non-specialized primary sources and secondary scholarship, but they find that the library's decentralized structure can produce inefficiencies that are compounded by factors such as off-site storage and other such measures;
4. Faculty identify peer-reviewed scholarship published by university presses as the gold standard for determining tenure and promotion, but they note that it can be difficult for them to represent the significance of their work to campus level administrators. Furthermore, while many faculty believe that open-access publishing could yield favorable results, respondents typically had a limited understanding of open access publishing;
5. All faculty possess doctorates, which require extensive course work, comprehensive exams, competency in at least one non-English language, and dissertation completion; however, the majority of faculty never completed any formal research methods training while in graduate school and typically learned how to conduct research in their field from their dissertation directors or other faculty advisors.

Research Focus and Methods

Participants rely on primary sources to conduct their research. In general, the primary sources that researchers identified could be organized according to four distinct categories, including: text based, stationary images, moving images, and other. For text based primary sources, handwritten and printed texts on traditional supports (paper, parchment and papyri), in analog or digital form, are by far the most consulted. Such texts include literary works (handwritten manuscripts, galley proofs and printed editions), memoirs, diaries, author's letters, first-person testimonies, medical texts, legal texts, spiritual works, auction catalogs, recipes, and newspapers. If available, researchers prefer printed scholarly editions of primary texts, rather than originals. Several respondents use visual images, such as wall paintings and artists' sketchbooks, as well as moving pictures, such as film, television, and media, either as their primary research focus or as supporting evidence. A few respondents expand their research materials beyond the texts and images to incorporate archeological evidence.

Researchers use a range of methods to conduct their research. A timeworn approach is careful textual reading, whereby the researcher focuses on a text's language, plot, character, and setting. Some researchers employ comparative literary analysis to study works that represent literature from across a wide variety of languages and historical periods. Several researchers expand the contours of their domains and study the literary work of marginal, traditionally under-represented, or explicitly excluded groups or individuals, thus calling into question accepted notions of canonicity and genre. In some cases, the research is the first attempt to define the literary output of a collective.

Critical theory and literary criticism are important to the work done by faculty With regards to literary criticism, some scholars contextualize a literary work or collection of works historically—a practice often associated with New Historicism—in order to explain how societal and cultural factors give rise to and influence a work's production, consumption, and reception. A related methodology, at least as represent among relevant faculty, is memory studies, which seeks to understand how cultural production—whether in the form literary texts, films, photography and art—responds and memorializes historical events, particularly traumatic ones. On the matter of critical theory, feminism and gender studies are vibrant and fruitful methodologies that inform much of the work done among faculty. Moreover, inter-disciplinary research continues to play an important role with regards to the ever-expanding purview of humanistic inquiry. On this matter, ecological and environmental criticism, medical humanities, and legal humanities appear as significant areas of scholarly growth and innovation.

While numerous methodologies inform how scholars interpret a particular text, some researchers focus their attention on the material composition of texts themselves. For instance, scholars compare the texts in manuscripts to those in print editions to gauge authorial changes, scribal interventions (both intended and unintended), and reader reception. Marginal notes in manuscripts and printed books, particularly those that comment on an adjacent word or passage,

can provide insight into a particular reader's reflections on a fictional work (Reception Theory). Scholars may even use analytical bibliography and focus on the actual form of the book containing a literary work. Textual exegesis—the study of the origin and history of a particular text—is also common for medieval and renaissance scholars, since they analyze texts that often lack an author's name, title (a modern convention), and date. In some cases, this information may be applied to later editions of the work or works in question.

Researchers investigating contemporary fiction and poetry use a wide variety of print and digital popular resources to learn about new works and book reviews on them. For instance, they consult authors' webpages, literary magazines (print and online), literary blogs, and prize listings. Keeping up with new works requires intimate knowledge of publishers and publishing trends, including notification streams, pertinent publications and, in some cases, networking with actual authors, all of which takes time and knowledge.

Overall, respondents do not apply digital methods to studying literary texts. In fact, when the topic was broached, respondents either could not see the unique outcome that such methods could produce, or only saw such methods as a means to obtain funding for their research. On this latter point, those interested in digital humanities discussed it as an area where the university invests resources, which could potentially support one's research in a time of perceived austerity in the Humanities. In other words, respondents did not necessarily identify the integration or use of digital tools in their research as a priority in and of itself, but rather as a means to accomplish an end that might otherwise be unavailable to them.

Working with Archives and Special Collections

Participants in this study rely on archival and special collections materials. They do so for two reasons: to discover new (at least to the scholarly community) and unique items for scholarly examination and to find contextual materials, usually historical, to ground and/or expand their literary research. The repositories vary from large institutions, such as national libraries, to small, independent foundations, usually dedicated to a particular theme or literary figure. In one case, a participant visited private homes to view wall frescos of literary stories. None of the participants make a distinction between archives and special collections and, instead, treat them the same. They use both physical and digital collections. Typically, the participants visit the physical locations in the summer when not teaching or during sabbaticals and, to make the most of their time and funding, spend long hours consulting materials and taking notes, which they might later use in raw or edited form. The frequency and duration of these of these visits have diminished as institutions make digital copies available online.

Some scholars do not travel to the physical archives, libraries, etc., that possess the primary source material that they study and instead rely on digital analogues. This is particularly true for the scholars using institutions in the US and Europe, which often have active digitization programs. Perhaps the most positive development with the increased availability of online materials (and thus the lack of need to travel) is the cost reduction to the researcher and his or her

institution. However, scholars working outside of the United States, the European Union, and the United Kingdom still frequently need to travel to archives to access materials. Most participants express that securing adequate financial support for travel is a challenge and that the availability or non-availability of monies greatly drives their research. To find research materials, the respondents use a variety of sources: references in a secondary source, tips from other scholars, on-site catalog, institutional website, and assistance of a librarian or archivist.

Working with Secondary Content

Participants in this study turn to more traditionally accepted scholarly secondary sources, including monographs, book chapters, and journal articles from peer-reviewed scholarship and scholarly book reviews. They tend to prefer print monographs and electronic reference works, articles, and book chapters. Three factors deter widespread adoption of electronic books: reading an entire volume online taxes the eyes; navigating between sections is difficult; and information seems to be less readily retained as the platforms do not facilitate the type of textual engagement that scholars typically employ when engaged with a print text.

Scholars use a variety of tools to find additional primary sources and secondary literature. Most tend to use the UIUC Library catalog and believe that the library's vast holdings are sufficient for their needs. Many still shelf browse to discover otherwise hidden (not easily found in the catalog) titles, while others frequent bookstores. However, several respondents favor Worldcat, as it gives a broader snapshot than the local or shared catalog. This method enables faculty to access books and other materials through Inter-Library Loan. Those working on non-US topics cast their net even broader and turn to national library catalogs. Some stated that they look at Google Books to access bibliographical material or quotes from a known text. Few respondents said they use article and citation databases; however, if they do use such tools, they prefer the MLA International Biography or a subject-specific database. Less traditional, but growing in popularity, are online social media sites such as Facebook and Academia.edu. These are extremely important for scholars whose research is on countries in political and social turmoil, since books and journals published in these areas often do not circulate abroad and local scholars cannot readily get access to them.

No obvious pattern of use regarding secondary source research emerged from this study. The reason for this might be that the respondents are deeply embedded in research for a number of years (either as doctoral candidates or faculty) and create extensive personal libraries, bibliographies, and connections from which to take inspiration or begin a new project. Consequently, faculty employ a vast scope of sources in no set order, tracing down citations as they find them with whatever tool is easiest and most fruitful. However, they do endeavor to consult all possible tools to gather the largest collection possible. One scholar revealed that her process was "chaos" because she pulled randomly from various places. Another scholar aptly described research as a "conversation" wherein participants hold a dialogue, whether through actual speech or in written text, on a shared topic. Through this conversation, they share citations

and leads, which in turn will be distributed to others. Another respondent likened the research process to archeology, for researchers must dig deep into resources to extract treasures.

Researchers face a number of issues when engaging with, or identifying, secondary sources. The most cited is that over the past decade, the UIUC Library moved books to offsite storage. As a result, many titles are not directly accessible for browsing and getting copies takes time, which can slow down the research process and cause frustration. In addition, the distribution of physical books in various locations (Main Stacks, departmental libraries, or remote storage) makes finding material rather cumbersome. Library systems and research tools, such as the online catalog, databases, and guides can be hard to locate on the library's website. Furthermore, once faculty identify such tools, they often are unsure how to use them effectively and efficiently. In the case of electronic books and journal articles, scanned pages can be illegible or missing. More than one respondent revealed that they have trouble navigating today's scholarly landscape, which they believe is saturated with work as the result of inflated tenure and promotion demands. Lastly, some respondents lament that they do not have a good relationship with a librarian who can help them, or do not know how to cultivate a relationship with one.

Scholarly Communications and Impact

All interviewed faculty identify more traditional forms of academic publishing as the preferred method for disseminating research. More precisely, all tenure track faculty aspire to complete a scholarly monograph, which the university and their respective department still value as the single most important form of scholarship. Additionally, faculty state that peer-reviewed journal articles are an additionally viable research outcome.

Broadly speaking, participants describe university presses as the gold standard of the academic publishing world, and vital to the publication of scholarly monographs and journals. Furthermore, faculty discuss the particular university presses that published research specific to their interests. Interviewees note that they are the most eager to publish with a university press that has an established reputation for publishing quality work in their field. Participants state that it is necessary to publish research with prestigious university presses because it serves as the most straight forward way to demonstrate their work's perceived "impact" to university administrators—many, if not all, of whom will never have read one's scholarship. This is all the more important since faculty discuss how the nature of their research may not correspond with the methodologies used by university administrators to evaluate scholarship. Hence, university presses play a crucial role in the tenure and promotion process, as they serve as a mechanism for faculty to demonstrate the quality of their scholarship to those not familiar with it.

However, many faculty observe how university presses frequently operate under austere conditions. On this matter, respondents address a number of concerns. For instance, faculty mention how university presses have become more selective with what they decide to publish. Furthermore, the attention to the landscape of academic publishing informs how faculty perceive library collection development strategies. On this matter, titles published by academic presses used to have a much larger sales run than they currently do, leading faculty to perceive that university libraries are no longer purchasing scholarship published by university presses.

Concomitantly, faculty observed a shift in publishing opportunities as they correspond with book sales, meaning that faculty perceive that university presses are more likely to publish scholarship that they can market easily and sale readily.

While faculty represent the significance of university presses, many of them did address problems when working with these publishers. For example, many faculty do not find that university presses have transparent editorial procedures. While some faculty had positive experiences with their editor, others did not. In cases when a faculty member did not trust a university press's editorial process, they would hire an outside editor to review their work prior to publication. Finally, some faculty noted that university presses struggle to market scholarship effectively, a task that they viewed as paramount given that they perceive a decline in the sales of academic titles.

Faculty seem unclear about the full scope of open-access publishing. Participants typically understand the importance of open access publication practices, particularly given how expensive it is for libraries to subscribe to academic journals and given the growth of for-profit publishers. However, this understanding of open-access scholarship is limited to non-peer review publications, such as more antiquated examples of open-access work that is more akin to blogs, editorial content, or the like. Some participants understand that open access can also include a peer-review mechanism on par with the review process typical of publishing with a university press. Nevertheless, the consensus view is that open access publishing does not carry the intellectual caché of a peer-reviewed publication, even if it may be more compelling, innovative, or groundbreaking than more traditional forms of peer-reviewed scholarship. However, none of our respondents address how many peer-reviewed journals that are published by academic presses and university presses now provide authors with the ability to pay a fee to make their scholarship open-access. It is in this regard that faculty did not speak to the more common ways that scholarly presses have attempted to address the issue of open access.

The matter of scholarly communications and publishing generated discussion on other difficulties that faculty face more generally. Some respondents underscore how the nature of academic publishing can make it difficult to advance from associate to full professor. In other words, given the operating pace of university presses, and the reduced number of titles that these presses are willing to publish, faculty expressed some concern about how publishing trends could potentially impact their promotion beyond tenure. Moreover, the steady reduction of tenure track faculty in literature and language departments means that preexisting faculty devote more time to service than faculty did in previous generations. Given the time commitments of such activity, some faculty mentioned that it is difficult to maintain the research agenda that they had earlier in their academic careers.

Finally, faculty conducting research in non-English language literature that has not been translated into English, or is not part of any recognizable curriculum, articulate a challenge that is rather unique. Specifically, while faculty conducting this research note the importance of university presses, they frequently state how such presses would either not publish their work, or

were not as conducive to facilitating the intellectual discourse that the faculty member engaged and wanted to cultivate. Contrarily, such faculty underscore the importance of very specific journals and presses with a history of publishing research related to the faculty member's field. However, if such faculty published work that was either written in a non-English language or about a text that had not yet been translated into English, they often felt it difficult to represent the significance of their work. The implication of this challenge is two-fold. First, scholarship written in the language of such a primary source can be difficult to publish and is often not published by so-called prestigious journals or presses. Second, it becomes difficult to represent the impact of this scholarship to those situated in positions of institutional authority.

Research Training

All participants earned a PhD in a field associated with literature or another Humanities based discipline. The conventions of this training include numerous years of advanced coursework, followed by a PhD qualifying exam(s), and dissertation completion. In addition, graduate programs typically require students to demonstrate competency in a language other than English. Not only did faculty complete this work, but they, collectively, demonstrated a great knowledge of non-English languages. Moreover, scholars whose research is exclusively related to English language literature spoke to the significance of non-English language work and knowledge on their research. In other words, even in cases when a faculty member worked in English-language literature exclusively, they still articulate the importance of non-English language training to their education and scholarly acumen, and underscore the importance of non-English language theory, criticism, philosophy, etc., on their work.

Though the faculty participants demonstrate how graduate programs teach the content related to a particular discipline, nearly all of the faculty interviewed state that they did not complete any formal research methodology training while pursuing their doctorate. Rather, faculty learn to conduct research by following the existing practices of their mentors or advisors. In some cases, faculty did enroll in more formal research methods courses after having earned their academic appointment. In cases such as these, faculty typically attend book history or archival methods courses such as those offered by the Rare Book School. Many faculty articulate that this lack of formal training meant that they had to learn on the job. The impact of this lack of formal training can be quite profound. In the first instance, it typically corresponds, though does not cause, faculty to view the library as institutions that collect scholarly materials, but not necessarily as containing human resources that can support their own pedagogy and research. Moreover, while some faculty mention that they do facilitate their seminars to encourage research and outside reading, many faculty note that they do not integrate any formal research methods training into the courses that they teach.

Conclusion

Overall, faculty represent many of the important advancements that continue to affect the Humanities and how academic libraries can support research in fields associated with literature,

languages, and writing studies. On this matter, respondents spoke to some of the positive outcomes made by academic libraries in general, and the UIUC Library in particular. For instance, as libraries, archives, and other cultural memory institutions continue to digitize their holdings, they enable faculty and students to engage with content that was previously unavailable or incredibly difficult to consult. While the ability to use these resources requires a certain amount of privilege, namely access to the internet and the knowledge to navigate discovery tools, faculty perceive these efforts as a means to democratize primary source material. Faculty mirror this enthusiasm when discussing the UIUC Library's holdings. In many cases, faculty accepted positions at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign because of the Main Library's print collection and strong commitment to digital collections. Finally, on the matter of monographs, edited collections, secondary scholarship, and the like, faculty universally prefer the print edition of such material to their electronic equivalent, with the exception of journal articles or book chapters that may be needed quickly and accessibly.

Faculty also address some pain points that require more careful consideration. For instance, faculty perceive a reduction in print resources specific to their areas of research, note the difficulty that they have using the online catalog even if it serves as their primary point of access to the Main Library's holdings, and identify off-site storage as factors that breed inefficiencies and make for cumbersome research experiences. Many faculty note that while ebooks may provide one with quick access to a needed text, ebook platforms are incredibly difficult to use and do not facilitate reading practices that reflect a scholar's preferred research method. Additionally, more senior faculty can find it difficult to use many of the tools— including the MLA International Bibliography, JSTOR, and other databases—required to find scholarship in their field and can be overwhelmed by the sheer volume of scholarship currently available. Finally, some respondents note that they feel somewhat alienated from the Main Library. On this matter, faculty perceive a lack of transparency when it comes to collection development decision making and find it somewhat challenging to maintain a relationship with their respective subject librarian.

While faculty across the board use a variety of techniques and employ numerous methodologies to complete their research, they usually never complete any formal research methods training and do not typically look to the Main Library as a resource for such training. However, there are numerous areas where the research and publishing needs of faculty intersect with the strengths of the Main Library's faculty and staff. By identifying these areas, it may be possible to develop education programs to support faculty. For example, while faculty represent many of the issues related to publishing their scholarship, they articulate a rather constrained understanding of open-access publishing and other, potentially more sustainable, publishing models. To respond to this challenge, members of the Main Library could intervene to host workshops or information sessions that are tailored to the options that faculty have when attempting to publish.

Finally, faculty whose research specifically concerns non-English or untranslated literature express some challenges and practices that are unique. Scholars working outside of the

United States, the European Union, and the United Kingdom still need to travel to archives to access materials. In these cases, the material that the scholar needs to consult have not been digitized or are restricted for any number of reasons. Moreover, these faculty members can find it difficult to publish their scholarship since its potential market is smaller than the market for scholarship that is published in English and/or related to Anglophone literature and culture. Such faculty typically rely on their professional networks, colleagues, and specialized presses in order to navigate these challenges.

Recommendations

Given the analysis of the data that faculty librarians collected as part of their participation in the Ithaka S+R/MLA study, the following recommendations represent the 5 most pressing opportunities for members of the Main Library/Literatures and Languages Library to address the current and emerging research needs of faculty whose research concerns literature, culture, and writing studies:

1. Faculty and librarians should collaborate to develop and implement research methods training for students, as well as educational programming as it pertains to scholarly communications, open-access, and other such forms of academic publishing;
2. Libraries should continue to steward the scholarly record by developing robust print collections, while providing access to electronic content when appropriate and in a mode that facilitates scholarship and teaching; furthermore, collection development practices need to be transparent and demystified;
3. Given current collection development trends, including shared print models and consortia based lending, it is imperative to design and implement discovery tools (e.g. online library catalog) that are user-friendly and that do not cause unnecessary challenges or inefficiencies;
4. As more and more faculty look to social media outlets (Academia.edu, Facebook, etc.) to share research and to form intellectual communities, it is important for librarians to follow such outlets so that they can become more informed about the research interests and trends of faculty in the departments to which they liaise;
5. Librarians need to understand that research in the fields of literature, culture, and writing studies is often inter/multi-disciplinary; consequently, they should collaborate with colleagues throughout the UIUC Libraries in order to represent all available resources to faculty.