

Scholarly Communication Education in ALA-Accredited Library & Information Science Programs: A Brief Communication of Results

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The increasingly common addition of the scholarly communication librarian to academic library faculty requires that library schools adjust their curricula to reflect present demands of the job market. Finlay, Tsou and Sugimoto¹ surveyed every posting to the American Library Association job list and found that the percentage of scholarly communication jobs in academic libraries more than doubled between 2006 and 2014. In 2015, 11% of all academic library jobs contained a reference to scholarly communication, either as a job responsibility or, at least, asking for a good working knowledge of the field. Given that the number of scholarly communication librarian jobs has likely increased since, library schools that do not currently offer scholarly communication courses are doing a disservice to students seeking entry into academic librarianship.

To understand the current extent of scholarly communication education in library schools, we examined the course catalogs of every ALA-accredited library and information science program in North America. Through this examination, we sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How widespread is scholarly communication education in library schools?
2. What aspects of scholarly communication are most commonly taught?
3. How well are library schools preparing the current generation of library school students for a job market that increasingly demands knowledge of scholarly communication issues.

Methods

The course titles and descriptions were examined for the presence of six categories of scholarly communication keywords. These keywords were drawn from the literature review work of Finlay, Tsou and Sugimoto² and, collectively, embody the most commonly agreed-upon responsibilities of the scholarly communication librarian:

- Scholarly Communication
- Copyright/Intellectual property
- Data management/curation/science

¹ Finlay, Craig, Andrew Tsou, and Cassidy Sugimoto. "Scholarly communication as a core competency: prevalence, activities, and concepts of scholarly communication librarianship as shown through job advertisements." *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication* 3, no. 1 (2015).

² Ibid.

- Institutional repositories
- Open Access
- Scientometrics/Bibliometrics/altmetrics

In total, we examined 52 of 57 ALA accredited LIS programs. Course descriptions for three programs could not be located online and requests for catalogs went unanswered. Two others, the University of Montreal and University of Puerto Rico, were not coded due to language difficulties. We inductively developed a simple coding strategy with the aim of developing a broad understanding of the current state of scholarly communication education in library schools. This strategy was designed to give an overall impression of what percentage of schools offered courses in each category and two what extent. For each topic, a program was coded as “2” if it contained a course primarily focused on that topic, as a “1” if it contained a course focusing partially on the topic and a “0” if it contained neither. For example, the following course from Dominican University was coded as a “2” in the scholarly communication column because of its title and numerous keyword usage:

LIS 812 – **Scholarly Communication** in the Sciences

This seminar explores the processes behind **scholarly communication**, largely in the sciences, and the growing roles of libraries, scholars and the Internet in altering the dynamics of **scholarly communication**. Traditional, formal methods of communication will be investigated as well as emerging models.

This course from Simmons College was coded as a “1” because the focus was only partially on scholarly communication issues.

LIS 451 - Academic Libraries

This course surveys the history, staffing, organization, development, and future of college and university libraries. Common issues—including managing change, **scholarly communication**, **publishing**, information technology, advocacy, evaluation and assessment, planning, budgeting, and higher education—will be addressed within a context that connects academic libraries, and their infrastructure, with their parent institutions.

Other courses warranted a “1” coding in multiple areas due to breadth of scope, most commonly in “topics in scholarly communication” type courses. Several courses turned out to be false positives – such as a course with a focus on repositories but which was strictly interested in them in an archival context. Added together, a higher score indicates a program with attention to more scholarly communication topics. By subject, the percentage of programs offering courses focusing on or mentioning the topic is shown below in Figure 1.

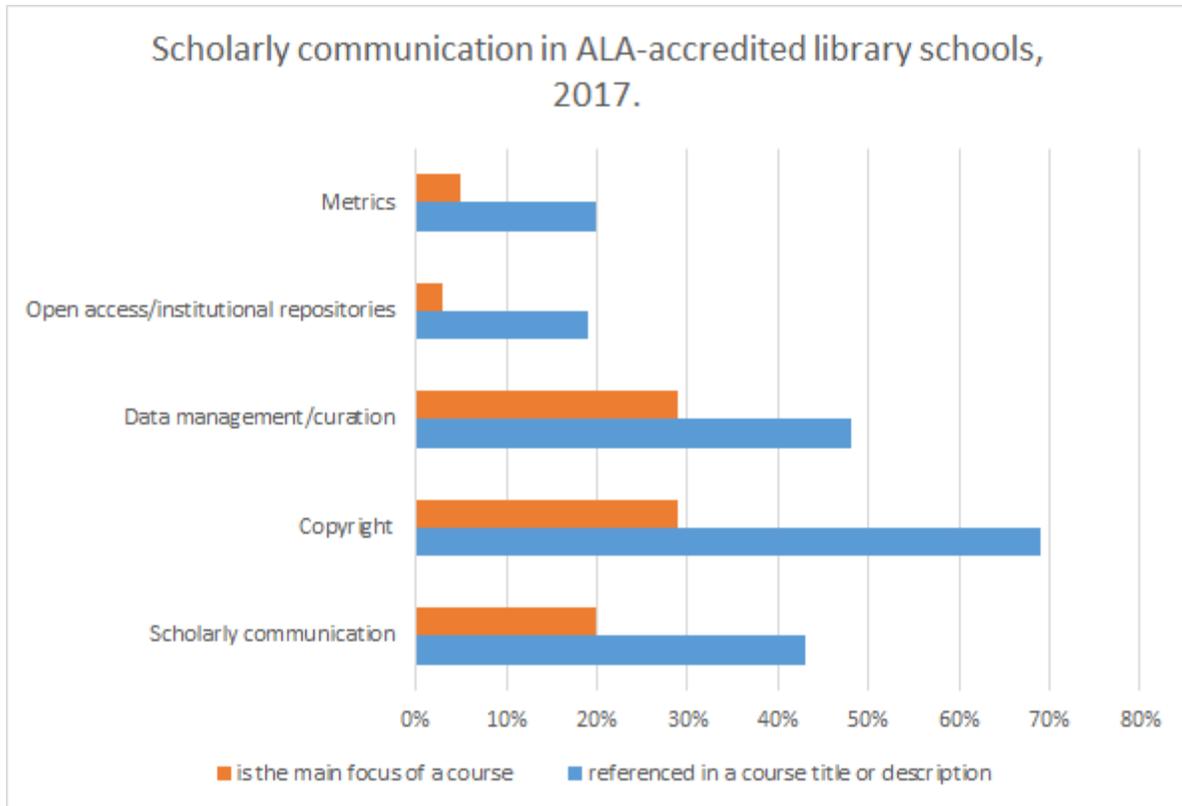


Figure 1: Percentage of Programs Offering Courses in Scholarly Communication

Copyright was the most commonly addressed subject in LIS programs, with nearly 30% of all programs offering a course specifically focused on copyright and nearly 70% offering a course or courses that at least mention copyright as one of the focuses of instruction. Data management and curation was second, at just under 30% and 47%, respectively, followed by scholarly communication (20% and 43%). Courses on metrics, open access, and institutional repositories were uncommon. The results indicate uneven adoption of scholarly communication topics by ALA accredited library schools. For the distribution of schools by total score, see Figure 2. The most common overall scores were four and two, followed by five and zero. There were several high-performing schools, with one apiece scoring between eight and 11.

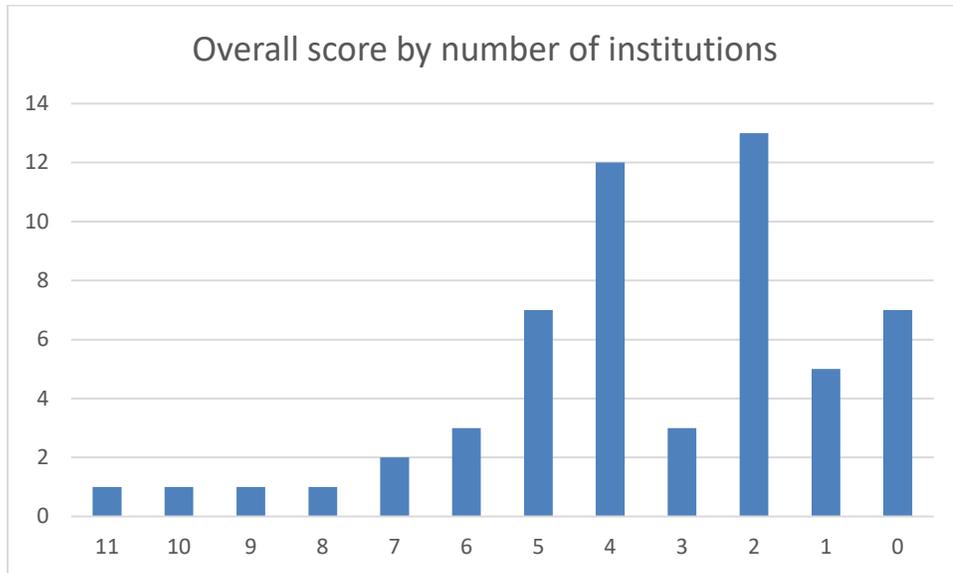


Figure 2: Distribution of Scores by Total Score

If the percentage of scholarly communication jobs continues to increase then library schools must also increase the focus on scholarly communication in their library school courses. If they do not, their students will be at a disadvantage when competing for positions against graduates from programs with a greater emphasis on these topics. If scholarly communication is not already a core competency of academic librarianship, it is likely to be within the next decade as libraries increasingly implement scholarly communication programs. Moreover, any program training new professionals to enter a field, which ignores a core competency of that profession, might be risking their own relevancy.

This paper is currently under review with the *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication*. If you are interested in reading the full results, please keep an eye out for it next year.