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Publishers: Applying Altmetrics

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Thanks, Phil.

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Michigan Publishing is the hub of scholarly publishing at the University of Michigan, and is a part of its dynamic and innovative University Library. We publish scholarly and educational materials in a range of formats for wide dissemination and permanent preservation, we provide publishing services to the University of Michigan community and beyond, and we advocate for the broadest possible access to scholarship everywhere. It includes the University of Michigan Press, Michigan Publishing Services, and Deep Blue, our institutional repository, about which I'll say more shortly.

As journals coordinator, my role is to bring new journals projects on board and, just as important, to tend to our current journals by working closely with our production department and with our editors, who are faculty at Michigan and elsewhere. I was one of several people here at Michigan Publishing involved in the decision to apply altmetrics to our open online publications, so I'm really speaking on behalf of our group today.

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In contrast with the other panelists we've just heard from, Michigan Publishing *just* started using Altmetric last month.

So, why did we decide to try Altmetric?

- For 2-3 years, we've been talking about how to offer altmetrics to our editors. Several of them, likewise, have been asking for this. As I mentioned, Michigan Publishing is a division of the University of Michigan Library. We waited through a couple of rounds of



visits, demos, and trials that the library was doing with various web analytics firms, hoping we'd be able to piggyback on an institutional contract, but ultimately nothing useful for us came of these, and it was time to take steps on our own.

- This fall we had a new director, Charles Watkinson, who had the chance to meet with Altmetric and see the badges on other publishers at the OASPA meeting in the fall. The stars had finally aligned!
- It took several months to get everything in place. We started conversations with Altmetric in October 2014. We didn't launch the badges on our journals and OA books until April 2015. To reiterate how new this is, at this point we've spent more time on the business negotiations and technical details of making everything work, than we have on observing or analysing the results and impact. We have a lot yet to do and to discover, but already some interesting stories have emerged.

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So, Michigan Publishing puts out a lot of stuff. Where are we using altmetric?

We have three major channels of products:

- **The University of Michigan Press**, publishes rigorously peer reviewed scholarly monographs in a variety of humanities and social science disciplines.
- **Michigan Publishing Services** encompasses a number of journal and monograph publishing services aimed primarily (but not exclusively) at serving the needs of our campus. The focus is on providing swift, digital first publishing, with an OA component, and open to a wider range of approaches to review.



- **Deep Blue** is our institutional repository. It currently contains over 117,000 items, about $\frac{1}{3}$ of which have never been published anywhere else besides the Deep Blue platform.

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So far, Altmetric is fully implemented—that is **all** materials are being counted and **all** materials have badges displayed—in our Michigan Publishing Services channel, so most of my talk will be focused there

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However, we are also gradually implementing Altmetric for Deep Blue and for some University Press titles that are available online—I'll return to these at the end of my talk.

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The aim of the Michigan Journals program is to “provide an affordable, efficient, integrated, born-digital publishing solution for important journals in niche areas which may have no other home. Through adherence to external standards, we will help them demonstrate editorial excellence and meaningful impact.”

These journals, close to 40 of them now, are mainly in the humanities and social sciences, and mainly run by volunteers, or virtual volunteers: one or a few faculty doing this along with their teaching and research. Some have a bit of paid help in the form of student assistants. The application of Altmetric for Michigan Journals is in line with our mission to demonstrate scholarly impact, using recognizable, measurable evidence.

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So how will Altmetric specifically benefit the kind of journals that we publish here?



Here I've outlined three opportunities that we've recognized--though this list is by no means comprehensive:

- Journals in quite specific, niche subject areas, that are perhaps unknown, or wouldn't be an obvious topic to look for--and yet are of interest to an audience around the globe.
- Journals that won't qualify for (or won't benefit from) traditional measures of impact/success, like Journal Impact Factor
- Journals where looking at a general, public audience provides new texture to the story.

And for all of our journals, we hope Altmetric will provide them with additional power in demonstrating value to their home institutions.

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Here's an example from the Trans-Asia Photography Review. This is an open-access journal run by a single editor based at Hampshire college. The journal, launched in 2010, is so far showing the most interesting Altmetric scores of any of our publications. Of our top 10 articles, 3 of them come from this journal. This screenshot shows the impact of one article, an English translation an article originally published in Bengali in the late 1980s, about the role of women photographers in early 20th-century Bengal. Of particular interest to us here, is that $\frac{1}{3}$ of the conversation around this article is happening on social media (mainly Twitter) among users based in India, which is really exciting to us.

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Another example comes from the Journal of our International Institute. This is a publication that comes out of the University of Michigan's International Institute. Unfortunately, it has been published on an irregular schedule for many years (and indeed, we understand that they've now decided to cease publishing this journal). The journal was run by staff at the



International Institute, who would recruit faculty authors to write on their work. So: irregular publication schedule, non-typical peer review, no faculty authors, University of Michigan focus--this journal would frankly never be considered qualified for an Impact Factor. Nor did it care to seek one: its purpose was to communicate the work of UM's International Institute to readers. And yet, some of the older articles published in this journal continue to have traction, years later. How can we capture that, and communicate it? In this case, an article published in 2005 about genocide perpetrated against the people of Namibia between 1904-1907.

Altmetric shows us that this article has been tweeted and retweeted occasionally from January 2014 to the present, with a burst of activity in April 2015. This coincides with the centennial of the Armenian genocide, which many (including Pope Francis) spoke of as the first genocide of the 20th century. This article appears to have circulated in conversations rejecting this claim. I found that there were lots of news articles also responding to the pope's comment, but it doesn't seem that any of them cited this article, alas!

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A third example comes from the Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association. We discovered that this article on Lincoln's Suspension of Habeas Corpus was picked up by several news outlets in articles about perceived attacks on the Constitution, and the notion of a "post constitutional" America.

This illustrates the potential of open scholarship in history to inform political discourse, and adds texture to what we know about the value of this journal to the public--it's not just for Lincoln enthusiasts (though we hear from plenty of those, too)--its themes are more broadly applicable than that.

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Finally, for journal that fall into any or all of the categories I just described (and certainly there's overlap among them), we hope that Altmetric will help them understand their own impact, and communicate it back to their supporters and contributors. Michigan Publishing currently hosts close to 40 serials. Of these, just under half are being run by an individual or a very small group of volunteer editors, for no compensation and with very little support--financial or any other kind. We've previously worked with another four journals in a similar boat, but these unfortunately have ceased to publish.

This sounds fuzzy wuzzy, but I am hopeful that access to Altmetric data and scores will help to bolster this individuals, providing a morale boost as they come to understand who is using their work and how, and can see the importance of continuing the labor of making their scholarship openly available online. Moreover, I hope that they'll be able to turn this data to their advantage at their home institutions, whether in arguing for servers, space, students, or credit for academic service. (the four 's's!)

In short: we're really excited about this, and see a lot of opportunity here.

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So, I'm running short on time, and we've focused heavily on journals, but I do want to briefly show you where else we're experimenting with altmetric.

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The University of Michigan Press is not by definition open access--many of our books are not--but we do have a small number of open access imprints, and we have deployed the Altmetric badges on these. Here's an example from our digitalculturebooks imprint. This book



just went online this month, and the chatter so far is pretty much all announcing its publication--not yet reflecting use or citation. This information, though, will still be of interest for marketing purposes, since Altmetric allows us to see how far word has spread about this book--in this case, 27 tweets from 27 accounts with an upper bound of 36,381 combined followers. You'll also see we opted for a different style of badge on these books.

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Deep Blue

The last area where we are using Altmetric is on our institutional repository, Deep Blue. This is a screenshot from the Altmetric Explorer, where a few of us at Michigan Publishing are able to log in and see the scores for all of our material. So far, Deep Blue objects are being captured and counted in this space. We have not yet got badges displaying on Deep Blue objects, but that is one of our next steps.

[Slide 16] Speaking of which: where are we headed?

Well, we want to get those badges displaying on Deep Blue, which will take a little bit of tweaking on our end.

We need to do some education, outreach, and training for our authors, editors, and even internally. When the badges appeared, we made a big announcement to our journal editors and, sadly, got very little response, even though several of them had been asking for awhile for this very feature. However, we're hopeful that as we offer opportunities to teach them how to take advantage of this new wealth of information, and as we share with them data and reports that they can use to help themselves and their journals, we hope enthusiasm will grow.

And, finally, we're starting with a two-year pilot, so for ourselves, we'll be watching, gathering and analysing data, and ultimately making a decision about how to proceed in the future.

5/14/2015



Many thanks for your time today, and I look forward to the discussion and questions.