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Compliance and Defiance: Michigan Publishing's Early Encounters with Research Impact Metrics

[Slide 1]

Good afternoon--my name is Rebecca Welzenbach and, as you heard, I am the research impact librarian at the University of Michigan Library. My presentation today focuses on Michigan Publishing, the primary scholarly publishing unit at the University of Michigan, and how we are adapting to better meet the needs of authors, readers, funders, and our home institutions as the pressure to report continues to grow.

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So to begin, what is Michigan Publishing? It is a top-level division of the U-M Library. Michigan Publishing consists of three major initiatives, The University of Michigan Press, Michigan Publishing Services and Deep Blue Repositories and Research Data Services.

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The University of Michigan Press, founded in 1930, began reporting to the U-M Library in 2009. Today, the press publishes 80-100 books per year, with particular strengths in Classical studies, political science, performance studies, Asian and African Studies, and more. The press has been exploring open access monograph publishing since 2006, and particularly since the launch of Knowledge Unlatched and other similar efforts to defray the costs of OA, has published more and more of these titles each year. Outside of our OA initiatives, though, the press mainly relies on sales.

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Michigan Publishing Services was first created as a library unit around the year 2000, under the name, the Scholarly Publishing Office. Today, this team of librarians, project managers, workflow wranglers and XML manipulators supports about 30 OA/online only journals and other serials, as well as publishing ~35 books of various stripes, including conference proceedings, institutional histories, edited volumes, and even occasional monographs. MPS focuses on meeting the publishing needs of campus units, but also sustains itself by offering hosting and production services to external clients such as Lever Press and Humanities EBook. MPS depends mostly on a chargeback model, where the creators of content pay for the costs of production.

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Finally, our repository, Deep Blue, launched in 2006. Today, the document repository, built in DSpace, contains more than 124,000 items, while our data repository, launched around 2014, contains 237 data sets. About one third of the items in the document repository have not been published anywhere else, so Deep Blue is the only place to find and access them--and expose them to indexes like Google Scholar. "The Deep Blues" are sustained by the University Library

as a core service--there is no cost to content creators or users to contribute to or access Deep Blue.

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So, across all three of these channels, what does Michigan Publishing *do*? We publish, of course! Beyond publishing, though, a great deal of our work focuses on preparing for and driving change in the field of HSS Scholarly publishing. This entails responding to the requirement of new business models, investing in community developed and owned technical infrastructure, and modeling leadership and collaboration to build on the shared strengths, resources, and needs of our peers and colleagues.

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OK, this is all well and good. But what does this have to do with research impact metrics? Well, truth be told, for many years, very little indeed. However, demand and expectations are increasing, from authors, funders, and our own institution. The rest of this talk will focus on the efforts we've made to respond to this demand. Essentially, we see two approaches:

- First, we can work to ensure that our publications are consistently recognized by and included in the systems and datasets upon which existing metrics are calculated. Throughout this presentation I'll refer to this as "compliance."
- Second, we can articulate new (alternative) metrics that are meaningful for us and our stakeholders, and which we *are* able to consistently capture and report. This path allows us to focus on the data points that are meaningful to us, and to develop an appropriate metrics strategy from the start. I'll refer to this type of response as "defiance."

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So, let's turn first to the University of Michigan Press monograph program, thinking first about our efforts toward *compliance* For those who are used to thinking in terms of citation counts and similar bibliometrics, I don't think it's possible to overstate how very, very far removed university presses are from this world. Even though it seems like counting citations, and potentially using these to calculate measures of impact, should work basically the same way for books as it does for journal articles, it....doesn't.

The key problem is representation. Many of the indexes that track journal articles do now also include books--but what's present or absent is a lot more unpredictable than for journals. Scopus, for example, now has 916 University of Michigan Press books in its index--because we've proactively sent the data to them. In contrast, Clarivate's Book Citation Index for the Humanities and Social Sciences has indexed only 194 U-M Press books, less than 5% of our entire catalog--because that index selects a limited number of very recent titles, on a title-by-title basis. There is no comprehensive representation of a press. Of course this variation across indexes isn't a new issue, nor is it unique to books. But it's particularly stark with books--and we've found that it's particularly jarring for press authors and editors, who are new to understanding this world, to feel like they can't understand or trust the few sources of citation metrics we do have.

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Two newer indexes have brought some major changes to this space: first, of course, is Google Scholar, which captures most book metadata from Google Books, and then, more recently,

Dimensions Plus. Both accommodate books, and UM Press displays the Dimensions badge -- which includes a citation count--on the details page for each book on our press website. However, while these new tools make it possible for us to find and share some data, where before we had none, much of what we're turning up is, in fact, gaps and then questions and concerns from our authors and others, about what's missing and why.

We're actively working to ensure that books and book chapters are well represented in the systems used to calculate research impact--but when the coverage is spotty, we're apt to run into more questions than answers. That's a problem!

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If "the usual" citation indexes don't work for university presses right now, what other options do we have? Well, first of all, as *publisher* we're often interested in different questions--different ways of thinking about impact--than an individual author would be.

We are looking at the overall financial health of our press--that is, sales across all books, not just individual ones. We're also interested in disciplinary prestige, a more qualitative measure suggested by indicators like reviews in prominent outlets, and awards from disciplinary societies.

And we're interested in long-term persistent usage. Today, in the world of ebooks, we have news ways of exploring what we can know about usage of and engagement with our books.

Quickly show Altmetric badge on [SLIDE 11] then go back to [SLIDE 10]

In 2016 and 2017, we partnered with Open Book Publishers and Unglue.it on a research project called "Mapping the Free eBook Supply Chain." We gathered as much data as we could about the usage of our open access ebooks. We hoped to learn whether we could back up claims that OA helps books to reach a global audience, and a non-academic audience. In fact, the two most important things we learned were:

- Just like book sales, ebook usage is best characterized as "spiky." Some books do really well. Others don't. Special events or triggers like conferences, author events, or course adoptions trigger spikes in both usage and sales. But these events are not always predictable.
- The second thing we learned was: while we were able to gather a huge amount of data from many different sources. The data weren't captured consistently and it was really hard to clean, normalize, and make any kind of meaningful report out of it. The sheer difficulty--near impossibility--of compiling all the information we had about usage for any given title and comparing was actually pretty shocking.

In short: there's a lot of data out there. But for books, we're not confident that 1) the right data is in all the right places, organized in the right way and 2) that we have any meaningful, effective, accurate way of communicating that data--for any given book, but also at scale across all of them.

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Let's shift gears and talk about our journals. For journals, of course, there are well established practices for measuring citations and, out of these, making claims about impact. But again:

participation in these measures requires that the journal actually be indexed. And that's far from given. For many of our journals in, say, philosophy, or medieval asian studies, measures like the JIF have never really been important. Some have been largely unaware of this whole culture; others have actively rejected it. But as potential authors--especially from Europe, the UK, Australia, and China--demand that journals have an impact factor in order for them to not miss out on credit--and funding--from their home institutions, these journal editors face a steep learning curve. Likewise, as we expand our reach into journals in new fields--especially the health sciences--we find that, of course, expectations are quite different. Student journals also pose their own unique challenges. In most of these cases, the work of editing and producing the journal is meant to be a pedagogical, engaged learning exercise in and of itself. Other measures of prestige may not really be the goal.

In all of these cases, our role at Michigan Publishing typically consists of educating, guiding, advising, and facilitating. Editors are often surprised to learn about how much indexing is in their court--namely, publishing regularly and on time. And of course, learning, ourselves.

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Now, we've been publishing journals for close to 20 years, and along the way we've found other ways to respond to the need for information about impact. Just like with our books, we deployed Altmetric on our journals a few years ago. This went from being a cool feature to a really meaningful reporting tool when Altmetric launched their sharable reports in 2017. Finally, we could summarize information at the level of the journal in a clear, attractive way, and share it with others outside our institution who did not have direct access to the Altmetric Explorer themselves.

But the most valuable tool for us in terms of reporting on the impact of our journals has actually been Google Analytics but, again, this rose from an interesting pile of data to a meaningful reporting tool when we were able to connect our GA information to customized reports built in Google Data Studio.

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Here is an example from one of our journals, the JOURNAL of Electronic Publishing.

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Finally, we come to Deep Blue. This repository, again, is a mix of open access copies--such as preprints or similar alternative versions--of published journal articles along with other, less traditional/formal forms of scholarship, such as workshop materials, conference presentations, reports, and other gray literature. The challenge we face with Deep Blue is raising the profile of this material--does it appear where other scholarship appears, so that it's part of a whole picture of a researcher's work and may be counted? That's what compliance means for us.

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To do this, we're working to integrate Deep Blue with our Research Information System, Symplectic Elements. This will allow items in Deep Blue to be harvested into Elements and appear as part of someone's profile, even if they're not captured through other data sources like Scopus. Our aim is to pull Deep Blue materials out of the silo. (integration also goes the other way--folks will be able to deposit from within Elements)

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Like our other publishing channels, we're using Altmetrics as well as download counts to capture information about engagement with items in Deep Blue. A key takeaway for Deep Blue is that simply the variety of types and formats of material even within that system changes what metrics we're interested in, and how we might want to apply them.

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For example, are we making a case for the importance of a particular article, no matter where it happens to be made available--that is, about the scholarship?-- or are we making a case for the importance and impact of it being made available via an OA platform like Deep Blue? Can we even differentiate?

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WHEW--ok. I've talked a lot about our types of publications and how we've made inroads with various form of research impact metrics. Now I'll discuss the ways that these issues intersect with the strategic activity that Michigan Publishing is engaged in. Along with our peer presses, we're experimenting with a range of Open Access Business models, as well as new sales models for non-OA texts, such as our new UMP comprehensive ebook package. For both, we need to provide evidence for the continuing importance and impact of the works we publish in a scenario where sales are not an adequate (or complete!) representation.

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As I mentioned before, one of the biggest challenges facing book publishers right now is the way that data is scattered all around. Every platform has its own usage data, tracked in different ways. Some platforms are more open about sharing data back than others, but even those that are often do this in inconsistent ways. The desire to manage one's own platform--and one's own comprehensive view of usage--is one of many reasons we've launched the Fulcrum platform for our own publications. Reporting usage via an administrative dashboard will be a key feature that we hope will allow us to work more efficiently--and also interest others in using our platform.

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Finally, as we recognize how complicated and hard this all is, we're eager to collaborate with like-minded colleagues to work on these problems together, and taking steps to do so. The Exploring Open Access Ebook Usage project was a collaborative effort to bring together stakeholders about the idea of establishing norms, shared practices, and even shared infrastructure, for collecting and dealing with ebook usage data that would help bring all scholarly book publishers forward.

All of this activity has raised a lot of questions for me, to which I don't necessarily have good answers:

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Which is worse: to be represented inadequately, or not at all?

[Slide 24]

Which is better? To show up where we know others are counting? Or to count what matters to us?

Like most things in scholarly publishing, the answers are probably “Yes.” and “Both/and.” Nevertheless, we have to prioritize concrete steps if we want to make progress. Here’s where we are right now:

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We know there are steps we can take to make our publications more visible and more identifiable in the systems around them--starting with DOIs for every book --and soon, every book chapter. We’re also working on ensuring that all of our authors register for an ORCID. And we’re actively working on strategic projects to more systematically and consistently gather and share data about ebook usage.

More broadly, we know that simply dealing more efficiently with the data we already have is not enough--we need to be reflecting on--and speaking out about--the ways that existing measures don’t reflect the formats of scholarship, or in many cases the scholarly values, of researchers in the humanities. Engaging with efforts like the HuMetricsHSS project--based at our neighbor across the state, Michigan State University. We’re also beginning to consider what we have to learn from the responsible metrics movement, and how a responsible metrics policy might bring some thoughtful direction to this--thus far--rather sprawling work.

Thanks very much.