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Getting Started with Research Impact Metrics (Especially when you feel 'Clueless')

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[Slide 1]

Hi everyone, thanks for this invitation, and I'm really pleased to be here. I just want to note that in a sort of late breaking change, I've added a small edit to the title of my talk – this is an introduction to Research Impact Metrics especially for those of who may feel particularly Clueless. I've been in this specialization for several years now and I *still* find myself feeling Clueless from time to time, as the landscape is changing rapidly. Approaching a topic with an open mind and a willingness to learn can always be a useful thing, so I'd like to sort of take this idea of embracing Cluelessness as our starting point for today.

In the first half of our session, I'm hoping we can share some of our existing ideas, assumptions, and impressions. I'll also share with you some of my perspectives on the particular challenges of engaging with research impact metrics, with a few examples. This is the part of the workshop that will lead us into the woods.

Then in the second half, I'd to pivot toward some practical steps and points of entry for gaining a foothold in this space. To continue to mix metaphors, I hope to provide some breadcrumbs, or perhaps just a flash light, to help as we continue to navigate through.

[Slide 2] I do want to say just a little about my role and my experience, because it very much informs my perspective and approach.

In my role as a Research Impact Librarian, my most important work is to talk to researchers about what matters most to them,

what they want others to know and understand about their work. My vision, on the best day, is that I'll be able to empower scholars to create the conditions under which they can establish a strong public identity (more about this later), an account of their contributions to the scholarly enterprise, and a persuasive body of evidence for the impact of their work.

[slide 3]

This isn't yet a common role in academic libraries, though it is one I'm seeing more and more often. Frequently I see this research impact work happening in health sciences libraries—but that's not been my journey. So, how did I get here? My background is in where libraries intersect with publishing, particularly open access and digital publishing, as well as humanities and social sciences monographs in the University Press space. I spent many years in the Publishing Division of the U-M Library, called Michigan Publishing, and worked on all kinds of initiatives there, including coordinating our OA journals program (mostly small, independent humanities and social science journals) and launching an experimental open access monograph press for liberal arts colleges, called Lever Press. I've worked on questions to do with the quality and visibility of OA journals, on the effect of OA on print sales for monographs, on tracking online attention to print books, and on understanding why it's so very difficult to measure use of monographs as compared to journal articles. All of this has led me to supporting research impact work in the library, but with a particular emphasis on work and on research that doesn't fit neatly into boxes, that is not well represented with existing metrics, and that really calls for a different approach. I bring plenty of frustration and skepticism, as well as curiosity and experience,

to this topic. I have lots of feelings! And I suspect you might as well.

[Slide 4]

So, I'm wondering now how you got here. I want to throw out a couple of questions, just to get us all thinking, in a common headspace, and to help me get a sense of where you all are. Please feel free to just think in your head, or to throw some suggestions into the chat.

[Slide 5]

Next question –

[Slide 6]

And a third question : *when*

[slide 7]

OK, thanks for being game to participate in that – we're clearly bringing a range of experiences and ideas, as well as feelings which, let's be clear, deeply matter when it comes to how we execute our work! We all want to feel confident that our work is seen, understood, and valued. But do the tools, systems, and indicators we have accomplish this? If you take one thing from today's session, let it be this:

[Slide 8]

I've now been a research impact librarian for 4 years, with lots of past experience with journals, indexing, etc. prior to that. And I have to say that – the more I learn, the messier the picture looks to me. Numbers that at first blush may seem useful, simple, even

“neutral” once better understood, get a lot messier and a lot murkier. What do I mean? Let’s look at a couple of sort of “classic” examples:

[SLIDE 9]

The Journal Impact Factor – this is sort of the classic “traditional, bibliographic metric” that people love to talk about. The Journal Impact Factor, or JIF, is a score assigned to a select list of academic journals by the company Clarivate Analytics (formerly Thomson Reuters) each year.

The formula for the JIF is as follows: the numerator is the number of citations in the whole index in the current year to items published in that journal in the past two years. The denominator is the sum of the number of “citable” items published in the prior 2 years.

In this example we’re looking at the 2019 JIF for the New England Journal of Medicine

[slide 10]

A few other things to know about the JIF

[slide 11]

What issues do you see?

[slide 12]

The issues are

Doesn't exist/doesn't apply for anything that's not a journal article published in a journal indexed by Web of Science. We kind of know this already – but even

[slide 13]

Examples of other ways to consider and count the “impact” of a given journal

[slide 14]

Let's take another example – the h-index

The h-index is represented by a number of papers (h) with a citation number greater than or equal to h. SO in the case of this researcher (actually the dean of libraries at the university of michigan)

[slide 15]

Other things to know about the h-index

[slide 16]

What issues do you see with the h-index?

[slide 17]

Summary of issues

[slide 18]

What other ways exist to talk about and think about research impact metrics that describe researchers

[slide 19]

In case you're now thinking....everything I think and everything I do is wrong!

[slide 20]

You are not alone. There is no "right" answer.

[slide 21]

In fact, not only is there no single right way to use research impact metrics (though there are lots of wrong ways), there is not even a single agreed upon definition of what research impact even *is*.

[slide 22]

Indeed, many articles that use the term do not even define it, and those that do tend to draw their definitions from external entities looking to evaluate them, like funding agencies.

[slide 23]

This article identified the following groupings of research impact definitions:

In other words: Research impact is...whatever someone asks you for?

[slide 24]

Where does this leave us?

[slide 25]

So, what are we to do?

[slide 26]

I want to help.

[slide 27]

OK, I've led us into the woods – in the back half of this session, I'd like to attempt to lead us out again– or at least throw down some breadcrumbs in that direction.

[Slide 28]

Ideally, in the best case scenario? Speaking to research impact is **not** a thing that happens to you, or is imposed upon you, but is a story you create.

[slide 29]

To try to break into this messy space in some practical, concrete ways, I'll be drawing on a resource I use frequently on my own campus, the research impact challenge. This is a 10-day challenge that I run as virtual event every couple of years. The materials also remain online for anyone to use whenever they like. While constructed to work for U-M affiliates, it's publicly available to everyone, and anyone is welcome to explore it and adapt it for their work. We don't have time to go through all ten of the activities here, but I'll be pointing to a few of them from here on out.

[slide 30]

ORCID

[slide 31]

Claim your Google Scholar profile

[slide 32]

Consider your social media use

[slide 33]

Start with what you value

[slide 34]

This is hard and complex work – as it should be!

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Luckily many folks are working on it. Interest in and support for the Responsible metrics research metrics movement has been growing.