

## CHAPTER 9 \*

# Engaging Our Student Partners:

## Student Leadership in a Library-Initiated Experiential Learning Project

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### Introduction

This chapter discusses aspects of Undergraduates Speak: Our Rights and Access, a library-initiated and student-led pilot project aimed at advancing educational initiatives in the realm of scholarly communication. The project provided undergraduate students with opportunities to engage in experiential learning. Experiential learning, commonly defined as “learning by doing,” emphasizes the role that experience and self-reflection play in the learning process. In recent years, universities across the country have increasingly committed to providing such opportunities for undergraduate students. One reason for this emphasis is because experiential activities have a demonstrated impact on student retention and engagement.<sup>1</sup> Among these high-impact practices are undergraduate research, internship, and service-learning opportunities. This chapter examines all three via Undergraduates Speak, where

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undergraduate students actively participated in exploratory research at multiple stages along the research continuum.

## Background

The University of Kansas Libraries have a long history of leadership and innovation in scholarly communication and, more specifically, in Open Access (OA), a movement aimed at making peer-reviewed published scholarship available free of charge to the public and to the global scholarly community. The University of Kansas (KU) was the first public institution in the United States to adopt a faculty-led OA policy. Additionally, the KU Libraries were a signatory of the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities and a founding member of the Coalition of Open Access Policy Institutions (COAPI). Outreach and engagement with undergraduate students on these issues, however, are limited.

In 2012, KU initiated Bold Aspirations, a strategic plan for 2012–2017 that adopted enhanced experiential learning opportunities as a strategy to “strengthen recruitment, teaching, and mentoring to prepare undergraduate students for lifelong learning, leadership, and success.”<sup>2</sup> KU Libraries likewise issued a strategic plan in 2012 that mirrored the time frame and aligned closely with the principles of Bold Aspirations, though experiential learning was not listed as an explicit outcome.<sup>3</sup> Relevant key goals and strategies unique to the libraries’ plan included:

- collaborate with campus partners to develop online, reusable teaching modules, digital learning objects, tutorials, and assignments;
- assess campus needs for expanding scholarly communication services to KU faculty and students; and
- collaborate with campus partners to expand the libraries’ scholarly communications outreach, education, and advocacy program.

The grant-funded pilot Undergraduates Speak was created to achieve the goals above through undergraduate-centered experiential learning.<sup>4</sup> The project was divided into two phases that spanned the fall and spring semesters of the 2015/16 academic year. The first phase actively involved undergraduate students in exploratory research about scholarly communication and OA. This was accomplished by offering an internship to an undergraduate student, whose primary responsibility was to lead focus group discussions with other undergraduates about these topics. The second phase relied on data collected during the first phase to inform the production of an open educational resource (OER) that could be integrated into KU’s undergraduate curriculum as an introduction to copyright and OA. Design and production of this resource was accomplished by the libraries’ participation in a service-learning course, Digital Sto-

rytelling, offered by campus partners. Undergraduates Speak thus presented an opportunity to increase the libraries' understanding of undergraduate perspectives on scholarly communication issues concerning copyright and openness, in addition to advancing other goals of building collaborative partnerships and growing the libraries' collection of sustainable learning objects.

## Partnerships

### *Internship Partners*

For the first phase of the project, KU Libraries hired two student research assistants to serve as interns. One graduate student with experience in human subjects research and qualitative methods partnered with an undergraduate student with no experience in research methodology or design. The principal investigator (PI), a librarian, adopted a challenge-and-support approach to the project's development. The student team was charged with designing and conducting exploratory research using focus group discussions and were provided the following four research questions to guide their work:

1. To what extent are undergraduate students aware of the rights and restrictions of copyright law?
2. What rights associated with copyright do undergraduate students value most, and is there a correlation between these values and students' online behaviors?
3. To what extent are undergraduate students aware of OA publishing?
4. To what extent do undergraduate students support "open" models of scholarly publishing?

The PI communicated the major objective of the pilot: to begin addressing the gap in student engagement on key issues related to scholarly communication. The PI also provided a timeline and introductory reading materials and facilitated connection with a support system for the students, consisting of subject experts, faculty mentors, and librarians.<sup>5</sup>

The student team took immediate ownership of the project and expanded the scope to collect survey data in addition to the focus group discussions. They created a protocol that received approval from KU's Institutional Review Board (IRB); they developed a recruitment strategy and designed recruitment flyers and social media posts; they created and implemented three surveys, a focus group discussion guide, and additional focus group activities; they drafted informed consent documents; and they managed all communication with study participants. At the conclusion of the project, the students wrote reflectively about their experiences using a prompt that asked them to describe their role in the project, discuss what they gained from the experience, and apply what they learned to future work.

The overall project design was divided between the two members of the student team based on their interests and expertise, with the onus for developing protocol and managing participant communication placed on the graduate student. Both students designed materials for use in the focus groups and actively contributed to the creation of the moderator guide. The undergraduate student, who had experience moderating debates in high school, designed participant recruitment materials and led all focus group discussions. The PI arranged two mock focus group discussions, one with library staff and another with other student employees, so that the undergraduate intern could practice before engaging with study participants. Guided by published reflections on undergraduate partnerships, the PI regularly stressed the importance of adhering to the moderator guide for consistency among groups.<sup>6</sup> In addition, both students were tasked with coordinating with KU's Media Production Studio to capture audio and video of the focus group discussions for review by the PI, and for potential use in the second phase of the project.<sup>7</sup>

The student team conducted a total of five videotaped focus group discussions involving twenty-seven participants (twenty-four female, three male), all of whom were traditional undergraduates. Each class level was represented, though the participants were overwhelmingly sophomores ( $n = \text{fifteen}$ ), as were eighteen different majors from within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Days prior to the focus groups, the graduate research assistant prompted each participant to complete an online survey aimed at collecting information on awareness, experience, and attitudes related to copyright and OA. The goal in this survey was to elicit responses that might illuminate both students' knowledge and behaviors, which could be explored in greater depth during the focus groups. Additionally, participants filled out a short exit survey at the close of each session, which addressed opinions regarding who should benefit from and be able to access scholarly work. It also probed student interest in further learning opportunities about copyright and OA.

Though the sample size of participants in the pilot was small, the data points to significant gaps in undergraduates' knowledge of copyright and its implications for access to information. Students' self-reported understanding of copyright was much higher than that of OA (virtually none reported familiarity with OA), yet students demonstrated little engagement with particulars about copyright. This was borne out in both the surveys and the focus groups. For example, when asked in a survey, "Are you a copyright owner?" only one respondent indicated "Yes," another "I don't know," and all others selected "No." This suggests that students are unaware that copyright automatically applies to their created works. One of the focus group activities explored the notion of copyright as a "bundle" of rights (reproduce, distribute, derive, perform, display). The team presented students with a concise definition of the rights associated with copyright and asked them to rate each in terms

of importance to themselves and, separately, importance to researchers. One point of interest was that nearly all students acknowledged that they were uninformed about the bundle of rights to begin with. This is potentially surprising in light of the fact that several of our participants had received explicit instruction on copyright previously, such as through a course at KU.

Another interesting theme that consistently emerged from the focus groups pertained to the process of scholarly publishing. This again showcased crucial knowledge gaps, but here an interesting intersection between copyright and OA centered on the role of researchers and how the work they produce relates to rights and access. Nearly all participants assumed that researchers are paid for the articles they publish, much like artists might be paid for songs produced. Students were also typically unaware that authors in traditional publishing models are asked to transfer copyright to publishers prior to publication.

Although precise knowledge of copyright and OA was limited and highly variable among participants, the pilot data reveals students demonstrating a nuanced sensitivity to and robust support for core principles that underlie them. For example, students strongly associated copyright with ownership and creatorship, and they saw copyright as a means of protection against improper use.

At this phase, Undergraduates Speak achieved the objective of narrowing a gap in undergraduate engagement with scholarly communication in two ways: by providing an opportunity to engage a new student in undergraduate research as well as creating space for meaningful dialog and reflection among undergraduates.

### *Service-learning Partners*

In the second phase of the project, KU Libraries partnered with undergraduate students in a Digital Storytelling class on the creation of an OER informed by focus group and survey data collected during phase one. Digital Storytelling is a service-learning course offered by KU's Film and Media Studies (FMS) Department. The partnership between the libraries' staff and FMS faculty originated the previous year at a university event intended to foster interdisciplinary collaboration and resulted in the libraries' integration into two consecutive Digital Storytelling classes. The course, established in spring 2015, incorporates the study and production of interactive storytelling in order to critically analyze and create stories with digital media.<sup>8</sup> Over the course of the semester, students produce research papers and digital stories based in the theories and histories discussed in class as well as a capstone assignment where small groups of students are paired with community partners to create digital projects addressing the partner's needs and mission. Students work

collaboratively with peers, course faculty, community partners, and content experts to create a sustainable, publicly shared digital project that responds to their partner's goals. The course employs an experiential, service-learning approach to enrich students' creative practice by blending theory with the practice of producing work for a client.

In spring 2016, the libraries, represented by the PI, presented data from the pilot study to the Digital Storytelling students, along with an overview of the Undergraduates Speak project background and a brief history of open initiatives. The students assigned to the libraries' project were asked to create an OER responding to two key findings in the data: (1) undergraduate students' lack of awareness of their status as copyright owners and (2) undergraduate students' high level of interest in OA. They were provided draft learning outcomes for the resource and given access to some of the audio, video, and transcripts captured the previous semester.<sup>9</sup> However, the team was also encouraged to follow their own curiosities in determining the outcomes and shape of the OER. Additionally, the PI arranged for a Skype meeting between the students and Nick Shockey, Director of Programs & Engagement for SPARC (Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition).

Students in the course assumed leadership roles in managing client communications and ownership of the narrative, themes, interactive elements, and other parameters of the project. The libraries' student team created an online resource using Moodle to educate their peers and general public about the meaning of OA, the goals of OA movements, open source resources, and alternative copyright and creative work licensing systems. Though given the option to create an original resource using audio-visual materials collected at KU during the first phase of the project, the students elected instead to reuse openly licensed materials created by other agencies, including one of the recommendations provided by Shockey.<sup>10</sup> The students chose to focus on a narrative about OA that encouraged others to recognize the access to information enjoyed as a college student at a major research university, the role of the libraries in securing and providing access to that information, and the boundaries of this access. All students in the course publically presented their work at a reception hosted by the libraries at the end of the semester.

## Reflection and Assessment

At the conclusion of the first phase of the pilot project, both students were asked to write reflectively about their experiences working on the project. Both the formal self-reflection and informal conversations with the undergraduate intern suggest that the hands-on approach to learning was challenging though highly rewarding. Challenges of educators venturing into

experiential learning include combating the student experience of feeling underprepared or inadequate and identifying a healthy balance between guiding students and allowing them to lead. Learning how to conduct research can be a difficult process for anyone, which was confounded in this situation by an accelerated timeline and the undergraduate's lack of experience or formal education in research methodology. Add to that the effect that this type of learning experience has on students, capturing their interest, bolstering their curiosity, and linking emotion and intellect in a "wholehearted affair."<sup>11</sup> Run-ins with concerns of failure, confusion, or disappointment are not surprising, though they can be countered effectively by developing mutual trust through authentic communication, regular feedback, flexibility, and emotional support. Ultimately, the student voiced gratitude for the experience and its practical value for her personal growth and development, a value that she expressed difficulty recognizing in her coursework—a refrain that is not uncommon among college students.

The student's reflection also demonstrated a shift in her perception of research: "Before doing this project, I didn't realize how much room for research there is in the social sciences. The image of research that I always had was people in lab coats trying to cure cancer but now I realize that research doesn't always look like that. I now appreciate that there is a lot of research, including internal projects like this one, that doesn't always get published, but it still matters." Following the undergraduate intern's involvement in Undergraduates Speak, she applied for and received an Undergraduate Research Award (UGRA) from KU's Center for Undergraduate Research for her own research project, "American Themes in Russian Rap Music: A Cultural Content Analysis." The involvement of freshmen in the UGRAs is rare; of the forty-nine students who received an award in spring 2016, she was the only freshman.

The self-reflection completed by the graduate student on the project team demonstrated positive outcomes in two exciting areas: "The knowledge that I gained about open access initiatives and open educational resources will, I believe, have a lasting effect on how I approach research and publishing, as well as teaching/mentoring undergraduates."

The second phase of the project appeared similarly rewarding for the libraries' student partners, though there seems to be a disconnect between the team's self-assessment and their actions. Completing the research, meetings, and production required for the project in Digital Storytelling changed the way students enrolled in the course understood the role of the library within the university and as a steward of information and proponent of OA to information. In final papers, students reflected on the corporatization of copyright and "copyright culture" as potential obstacles to creative production, publication, and circulation of creative and scholarly work, as well as



an obstacle to accessing this work. In the spirit of service and experiential learning, the student collaborators reflected on their “hands-on” learning experience as having “real world” implications and effects on the way their peers see themselves as public citizens as well as pupils. As one student paper noted: “Students should care about open access because it could change the way we share and cultivate knowledge at a collegiate, and even universal level.... We want students to know that they are creators, that knowledge is a public good, and that they are agents of change.” During their public presentation at the conclusion of the semester, the student team spoke with ease and impressive fluency on the value and importance of OA and other open initiatives.

Despite display of this deep appreciation and understanding, student production of the resource was not without hurdles. When presenting their initial idea for the OER to the PI, the student team recommended using Blackboard—proprietary (closed source) software—to host their content. The students investigated multiple alternate platforms before deciding to use Moodle, an open source course management system. However, the final product presented to their community partner was not openly licensed and therefore did not meet the criteria for an OER; it has since been removed from Moodle, restricting the libraries’ ability to review, adapt, or otherwise distribute the resource. Attempts to contact the student team about removal of the resource were unsuccessful.

## Recommendations/Best Practices

The student interns hired to complete phase one of the Undergraduates Speak pilot project excelled at completing the necessary tasks for the project without requiring a significant amount of oversight or intervention from the PI. This is attributed to four factors: (1) the undergraduate-graduate student combination, which allowed each student to take responsibility for project components that reflected their interests, experience, and capabilities; (2) active recruitment of high-performing students with transferable skills relevant to the project work; (3) a competitive salary to attract and retain the university’s strongest talent; and (4) facilitating intentional connections with faculty and staff that will benefit the students’ future work in the academy.

In spring 2016, the FMS class working on phase two of the Undergraduates Speak project was awarded a Service Learning Mini-Grant from KU’s Center for Civic and Social Responsibility in order to offset student costs of creating and maintaining their service-learning projects. The Center hosted a luncheon for grant recipients and their partners to discuss course projects, which resulted in others in attendance expressing a desire to partner with



the libraries. Opportunities for mutually beneficial partnerships abound in higher education, and academic libraries, which are interdisciplinary by nature, make natural partners. Catalyzing this, however, requires that librarians actively seek out the spaces where these conversations are occurring and conscientiously prepare themselves for communicating the libraries' goals and needs to potential partners with resonance and clear, complementary outcomes. The benefits of a proactive approach to developing experiential learning partnerships is well articulated in other library literature.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, the value of engaging with undergraduate students as the subjects of research should not be overlooked. In addition to learning about scholarly publishing during focus group activities, student participants were exposed to the principle of informed consent, confidentiality requirements, and the rights and responsibilities of researchers and their subjects. Additionally, their engagement with an undergraduate peer serving on the research team demonstrates not only that undergraduate students can be involved in research activity on campus, but also that they can serve in important leadership roles.

## Conclusion

Despite efforts to involve undergraduate students in conversations about scholarly communication, as evidenced by projects led by Stephanie Davis-Kahl, Nick Shockey, and others, some of which are described in *Common Ground at the Nexus of Information Literacy and Scholarly Communication*, students frequently remain outside the scope of scholarly communication initiatives on college campuses.<sup>13</sup> The project discussed in this chapter demonstrates that undergraduates are interested in topics of scholarly communication and have the capacity to become conversant change agents in this area. One opportunity for engaging undergraduates in these discussions is via experiential learning. As more universities incorporate experiential learning into their strategic initiatives, service learning opportunities will continue to increase on campuses. Librarians should be aware of the roles that they can play in service learning courses and be ready to connect library needs and initiatives to university efforts in this area. Additionally, librarians are encouraged to allow undergraduate students to take ownership and play leadership roles in internal library research by providing internships. Internal research projects provide low-stakes opportunities for libraries to collaborate with students while providing students with a meaningful way to learn about the research process and about avenues for communicating research activities to other scholars.

## Notes

1. George Kuh, *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter* (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008).
2. *Bold Aspirations*, University of Kansas, accessed October 14, 2016, <http://provost.ku.edu/strategic-plan>.
3. *KU Libraries Strategic Directions 2012–2017*, University of Kansas Libraries, accessed October 21, 2016, <https://lib.ku.edu/strategic-plan>.
4. The project received financial support from the KU General Research Fund, the KU Libraries Research Fund, and the David Shulenburg Fund to Improve Public Access.
5. Two faculty members in KU’s School of Journalism and Mass Communications volunteered to serve as mentors for the student team. They provided reading materials, met with students to discuss the project, and opened their classrooms for observation when relevant course content was presented. The undergraduate intern expressed gratitude for this opportunity to form personal relationships with faculty in her field of study.
6. Suzanne Mangrum and Kristen West, “Partnering with Undergraduate Students to Consult Library Focus Groups,” *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 19 (2012): 22, doi: 10.1080/10691316.2012.652553.
7. “Media Production Studio,” University of Kansas Information Technology, accessed October 14, 2016, <http://technology.ku.edu/media-production-studio>. The Studio “provides equipment, workspace and software for students and faculty to shoot, edit and produce digital projects.”
8. KU Libraries also served as a community partner in 2015, the first year the course was offered. Information about the digital story designed by the 2015 student team is available via KU ScholarWorks at <http://hdl.handle.net/1808/21508>.
9. The following outcomes were provided to the student team: “After completion of this assignment, students will describe themselves as copyright owners; differentiate between rights associated with copyright ownership; identify a mechanism for articulating the freedoms/restrictions they could apply to their own work; list factors that affect how research and scholarship are or can be shared and communicated; and discuss the benefits of open movements.”
10. “How Open Access Empowered a 16-Year-Old to Make Cancer Breakthrough,” The Right to Research Coalition, published June 11, 2013, <https://youtu.be/G55hlnSD-1Ys>.
11. Janet Eyler and Dwight E. Giles, Jr., *Where’s the Learning in Service-Learning?* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 8.
12. Amy York, Christy Groves, and William Black, “Enriching the Academic Experience: The Library and Experiential Learning,” *Collaborative Librarianship* 2, no. 4 (2010), 193–203, <http://digitalcommons.du.edu/collaborativelibrarianship/vol2/iss4/4/>.
13. Stephanie Davis-Kahl and Merinda Kaye Hensley, eds., *Common Ground of the Nexus of Information Literacy and Scholarly Communication* (Chicago: Association of College & Research Libraries, 2013).

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