Revealing the Hidden Humanities: Strategies for Academic Libraries to Improve Access and Awareness

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Revealing the Hidden Humanities: Strategies for Academic Libraries to Improve Access and Awareness

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Abstract

While research in the sciences and social sciences has become increasingly visible to search engines, research in the humanities has remained relatively hidden. There are discipline-specific challenges to scholarly communication in the humanities. Visualizations from two studies illustrate how humanities scholarship currently has limited discoverability and access. These results suggest that academic libraries are well-positioned to increase the visibility of humanities scholarship if they can leverage relationships. This poster presents opportunities for collaboration across library areas and strategies for revealing research in the humanities. Ideas for further exploration are identified and attendees will be invited to share their insights.
Background
While there has been much research about the visibility of science and social science scholarship, there have been few similar investigations concerning the humanities (Fagan 2017). As a book-driven field with a culture of independent study, there are discipline-specific challenges to the visibility of research in the humanities. The prevalence of sources in diverse formats defies the emphasis large publishers are placing on journal article metadata.

Undergrad History Papers
Our first study (Fagan and Willey 2018) examines 15 award-winning student papers since 2010. These papers were awarded by either the American Historical Association or jointly by the World History Association and the honor society Phi Alpha Theta.

Methodology
We searched the public search engines Google, Google Scholar, Microsoft Academic, and the authors’ institutional repositories. We also searched the library databases America: History & Life and Historical Abstracts. We used a first and second try approach to search for papers. First, we searched for the papers by their titles. If we did not locate the paper, we made a second attempt to find the paper using keywords. The first 10 results were only reviewed to mimic typical user search behavior. A hit was considered either a record with the structured metadata for the paper or the full text of the paper.

Another sample was 14 undergraduate history journals. This included the journals of the award-winning articles and other active history journals on the Council on Undergraduate Research website.

Results
Undergraduate Papers Found

Papers Found in Google

Altogether we found eight of the 15 papers, and Google found all eight. These are the best papers... And we could only find eight of them!
Other than Google, the journals appeared most often on Facebook. Nine of the 14 journals had Facebook pages or posts.

Overall undergraduate history research is most discoverable on the public web. Regular Google was most effective at locating these known citations. Institutional repositories only held two of the 15 papers and three of the 14 journals. Undergraduate history journals had more of a presence on social media.

Black Athena Debate

The *Black Athena* debate emerged when scholar Martin Bernal asserted Ancient Greek civilization and language are Egyptian in origin. The ensuing academic conversations crossed multiple disciplines, including anthropology, archaeology, classics, and history, and included scholarly works as well as popular news and magazine articles.

Methodology

The literature from the debate comprised the sample for our second study (2002-2017).
The sample was mostly books, book reviews, and book chapters, which is not uncommon in the humanities. The sample wasn’t dominated by publications from any part of the decade covered.

There were 14 book chapters, 11 books, 10 book reviews in journals, six book reviews in periodicals, four periodical articles, and journal articles in our sample.

Searching Steps
We searched for these items in Google, Google Scholar, Google Books, Microsoft Academic, and the library databases Academic Search Complete and L’Année Philologique.

We clicked on results to look for either structured records or full text.

We did a second try if we didn’t find the publication.

Results
Google and Google Scholar were the most successful tools at finding these items.
Google Books almost doesn’t belong in this chart because it’s only designed to search books – and it did find 20 of the 25 books and book chapters.

Seventeen of the 20 books and book chapters had a Google Book Preview.

*L’Année* did offer links to three book reviews from the associated book results – not included on this chart since they didn’t have their own records.

We did a second try search if the first failed. We ended up having to do a second try search 15 times.

We also recorded whether full-text was available, without using link resolvers and without being set up as affiliated with a library.

Although we found no full text in Google Books, we found several Google Book Previews.
Each full text item found appeared on different hosts, two of which were library repositories (blue arrows).

Eighty-three percent of the items were found by multiple search tools; six of these were found by five of six search tools. There were two items not found by any of the search tools – a book chapter and a book review.

Google found the most items, but Google Scholar did find five items that Google did not, including three book chapters, one journal article, and one book review.

Next Steps
We plan to expand the search sample to include citations before 2002, which will add more article coverage.

Future Research
Potential topics for further research include:

- How effective are public search engines for topic searching in the humanities?
- Are there variations by discipline or format?
- How far back does coverage extend?
- Are there major gaps related to publisher, topic, or language?
- How well represented are humanities scholars in academic social networking sites (e.g. ResearchGate) and identifier systems (e.g. ORCiD)?

Partners/ Opportunities
Partners
Potential collaborators for improving the discoverability of humanities scholarship include:
- Librarians with expertise in scholarly communications, metadata, liaison or subject specialization, information literacy, and/or outreach
- Institutional repositories
- Groups that support faculty or student research
- Publishers
- Researchers

**Opportunities**

Strategies for improving the discoverability of humanities scholarship include:

- Creating awareness of author rights
- Advocating for scholarly identifiers
- Developing and implementing emerging metadata standards
- Promoting institutional repositories
- Partnering with publishers
- Working with aggregators

**Examples from JMU Libraries [slide show]**
Guide for ORCiD Created by Librarians

39th Annual Undergraduate Research Conference

Browse the contents of SCOM Undergraduate Research Conference:
- 2014 SCOM Undergraduate Research Conference
- 2017 SCOM Undergraduate Research Conference
- 2016 SCOM Undergraduate Research Conference

Reader from: Frankfort, Kentucky, United States
Beyond Promotional: Michelle Obama and the Let Girls Learn Initiative
Isabella Bauer

Undergrad Research Hosted in Repository

Literature & Arts Magazine Hosted in Repository
Discussion

- What ways do you support the visibility of humanities research at your institution?
- Who are your partners?
- What is your experience with the effectiveness of public search engines?
- How could academic libraries further support these efforts?
- What research questions do you have?

Author Info

Jody Condit Fagan is co-director of James Madison University Libraries’ Technology Department. She has an MLS, an MA in history, and a PhD in strategic leadership. Her background includes public services, technical services, library technologies, and project management. Her research interests include the visibility of scholarship in public search engines, leadership, perceptions of librarians, and academic identities.

Malia Willey is a Humanities Librarian at James Madison University. She has an MLS and an MA in history. She offers research expertise as the liaison to History, Philosophy & Religion, and the School of Art, Design, & Art History. Her scholarly interests have included humanities research, instructor development for librarians, and universal design for learning.

References


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Da Qing er shi san sheng yu di quan tu; fu Chaoxian zhou dao yu di tu. [China: s.n. ; after, 1885] Map. https://www.loc.gov/item/gm71005068/.

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