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## Academic Librarians as Successful Researchers: Discussion with Kristin Hoffmann

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This year, APLA's General Activities fund has impacted more than just the 90-minute event it helped to sponsor. The event prompted the founding of an exciting library research support group in Nova Scotia whose eventual impact we can only await.

As part of my OLA Superconference experience this year, I volunteered to be a mock interviewer. A yearly initiative of the OLA Career Centre, the mock interview exercise is designed to allow MLIS/MI students the experience of a job interview. I was paired with Kristin Hoffmann, Head of Research and Instructional Services at the D.B. Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario. As we bid our interviewee good luck and prepared to return to the conference, Kristin mentioned an upcoming family trip to Halifax and wondered whether any librarians or librarian groups would be interested in hearing about her research. She described her research, which focuses heavily on the role of academic librarians as researchers, and asks questions such as *how have librarians successfully embraced the role of researcher? How can we best support and encourage each other to develop as researchers?* I found myself nodding furiously – almost too furiously. We're interested, I said. We are so interested.

As librarians, we support research. Whether we are helping researchers to locate vital information to inform decisions or change the course of their research area, helping students make connections between their own ideas and the published literature, or assisting scholars in managing their research output, we feel confident supporting others in their work. But when it comes time to produce our own research (whether for professional interest, career advancement, or both), some of that confidence can wane. Much of the literature on librarians as researchers focuses on the barriers. Some of the key inhibitors include lack of time, insecurity about our perceived lack of training, lack of support from our administrators and/or peers, and lack of confidence (the famous imposter syndrome) – Brian Detlor and Vivian Lewis from McMaster actually summarized some of this research in a 2015 presentation at the OLA Superconference. The barriers, which come from both internal and external places, can seem numerous and prohibitive. They can be particularly tough obstacles for those of us who are new to the profession, and who have only begun to navigate the complexities of being a professional librarian.

Kristin Hoffmann's research takes a different approach. Instead of focusing on the barriers to librarians' research success, she investigates the factors affecting research *success*. By first analyzing the literature, Hoffmann and her research partners Selinda Adelle Berg and Denise Koufogiannakis are working toward developing an instrument to measure the impact of these identified factors.

The Dalhousie colleagues I spoke to were all enthusiastic about the possibility of an event with Kristin (Robin Parker, in particular, was a great help with the event planning). We all agreed that librarians beyond Dalhousie would be interested in hearing what Kristin had to say, so we decided on a central location. With sponsorship from APLA's General Activities Fund, as well as additional support from the Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians (CAPAL) Dalhousie Student Chapter, the Halifax Library Association (HLA), and the School of Information Management Student Association (SIMSA), we were able to hold the event at the Central Library and provide sandwiches, coffee/tea, cookies, and a lovely speaker gift from a local bookbinder. I am grateful to each of the above organizations as well for helping to promote the event.

We had an excellent and diverse turnout – academic librarians from a number of the Novanet libraries, Capital Health librarians, government librarians, as well as MLIS students and recent graduates (approximately 30 attendees in total). The topic clearly resonated with people from a number of sectors. Intent on facilitating a collaborative discussion, Kristin asked us each to talk for a moment about our research interests. As many of us were meeting for the first time, this was a great opportunity to hear about some of the research librarians at other institutions and in other contexts were working on (or thinking about working on). Prior to the event, participants were asked to read Kristin’s article, “Examining success: Identifying factors that contribute to research productivity across librarianship and other disciplines” (Hoffman, Berg, & Koufogiannakis, 2015). The article, which analysed existing literature on the subject, describes these success factors as grouped under three broad umbrellas: individual attributes (such as academic rank, personality traits, experience, and commitment to research), peers and community (opportunities for support, collaborating, and mentoring), and institutional structures and supports (such as access to resources, institution quality, and workload). As a group, we discussed some of these attributes, and how they are or are not represented in our specific institutional and personal contexts.

Participants found the discussion with Kristin to be productive and refreshing. The discussion seemed emblematic of a desire to work together and to support one another. Some attendees saw within the room a latent opportunity, and were not ready to leave until some “next steps” had been established. Given the great turnout and the sense of possibility generated by the event, Lou Duggan from Saint Mary’s University asked if there was any interest in establishing a librarian research support group in Halifax. Following enthusiastic consensus, Lou began the process of gathering interested names and investigating possibilities for online hosting. Lou eventually applied to Libraries Nova Scotia for hosting support and his application was ultimately successful. While the LibrariesNS Research Support Group (RSG) is the subject of another article, I wanted to note its origins at this APLA-sponsored event.

Clearly there is an interest in producing and supporting new research among Nova Scotia information professionals. The event with Kristin Hoffmann helped to open the discussion, and the new Research Support Group will hopefully inspire new projects and partnerships that might not have happened otherwise. I am very grateful to APLA and our other sponsors for supporting this event.

#### References

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