Two Years in the Making: Library Resources for Transgender Topics

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Journal of eScience Librarianship
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Commentary

Two Years in the Making:
Library Resources for Transgender Topics

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Abstract

Inspired by Reid Boehm's presentation "Beyond Pronouns: Caring for Transgender Medical Research Data to Benefit All People," at the Research Data Access and Preservation Summit (RDAP) in March 2018, four librarians from the University of Minnesota (UMN) set out to create a LibGuide to support research on transgender topics as a response to Boehm's identification of insufficient traditional mechanisms for describing, securing, and accessing data on transgender people and topics. This commentary describes the process used to craft the LibGuide, "Library Resources for Transgender Topics," including assembling a team of interested library staff, defining the scope of the project, interacting with stakeholders and community partners, establishing a workflow, and designing an ongoing process to incorporate user feedback.

Introduction

In March 2018, four librarians from the University of Minnesota (UMN) attended the Research Data Access and Preservation Summit (RDAP) where they were inspired by a presentation by Reid Boehm called "Beyond Pronouns: Caring for Transgender Medical Research Data to Benefit All People." Boehm highlighted that data focusing on transgender populations and issues are often limited at best, and traditional mechanisms for describing, securing, and accessing these data are insufficient. These insights, coupled with The National Center for Transgender Equality's statement about the need for "unemployment rates, income and poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, suicide, and all other data [about the transgender population] that are regularly measured in the general population," felt like a call to action. How could we—as information and data specialists at an R1 institution, known for its Program in Human Sexuality Transgender Health Services and the Jean-Nickolaus Tretter Collection in Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Studies archival collection—encourage sharing, exploration, and discovery of data about transgender people? The purpose of this commentary is to share our process and workflow in developing this resource in the form of a LibGuide.

Assembling a Team

The four librarians who attended RDAP that year quickly agreed to address this gap by creating a LibGuide. We recruited additional librarians to distribute the workload as well as to broaden the team's capacity and expertise. The work was not formalized as a component of job duties which allowed us to remain agile throughout the project. The voluntary nature of the team highlights the commitment of the individuals involved. One librarian took a lead role and reached out to a number of librarians at UMN as well as Reid Boehm. Originally, 18 liaison librarians, data specialists, an archivist, and a web designer—with heavy representation from the health and social sciences—agreed to work on the project. Initial meetings focused on assessing how other academic libraries were tackling the topic, brainstorming potential collaborators, envisioning content, and selecting a medium for distribution. Most importantly, we needed to define the scope of the project. This process is detailed below.

Leadership and Workflow

Such a large team required careful organization. The lead librarian scheduled meetings, created agendas, and organized work groups. The team averaged one meeting per month, none of which were mandatory. At the first meeting in May of 2018, all 18 librarians were present, but meeting attendance varied over the year and half that we met. There were always a minimum of five team members present, which speaks to the dedication of the volunteers. By the end of the project, five team members had stepped away for various reasons, ending with a team of 13 in October 2019.

The agendas were built with a focus on task generation and assignment. The lead would outline basic next steps for the start of a meeting, and with input from the team, those tasks would be expanded upon, eliminated, or morphed to better achieve the desired end goal. Each meeting ended with team members volunteering responsibility for a particular task or set of tasks. Once the team had defined the project scope, we split into four working groups based on interests and needs. Those working groups met to complete their tasks outside of the monthly meetings and had the autonomy to work at their own pace. Working groups reported progress and asked for assistance from other team members at the monthly check-ins.

The authors acknowledge the unusual dedication and devotion of this project team, especially considering the flexibility in duties and deadlines. We contribute this to the passion felt by the team to meet this topical gap.

Outreach and Stakeholder Input

We viewed stakeholder input as critical to the development of a useful and effective LibGuide for researchers of transgender topics, and opted to invest significant time in engaging community stakeholders and partners in the development process. Input and feedback was solicited at several strategic points to guide the development of the LibGuide: 1) previous to any LibGuide development, 2) during LibGuide usability testing, and 3) at completion of the LibGuide. At the inaugural meeting, we compiled a list of key researchers and organizations primarily at the UMN engaged in serving and researching transgender and gender nonconforming people. The wide range of disciplines and expertise represented by the librarians contributed significantly to the identification of key stakeholders across the University and in the community.

Prior to LibGuide development, key stakeholder interviews with researchers and organizations were conducted in summer 2018 with the aim of understanding researcher information-seeking behaviors, needs, and challenges of working on transgender topics. Interviews with researchers focused on the resources they access, seek out, wish they had, and use to make the research process easier. Organizations were asked what resources they provide for researchers, what types of resources they use in their advocacy work, and what gaps exist in the resources available on transgender topics.

The value of the feedback from this initial outreach to key stakeholders highlighted the need to engage the broader research community in the development of the library resource for transgender topics. We compiled a larger list of researchers at the UMN and other institutions, community organizations, and librarians who could provide a variety of perspectives on the needs of researchers of transgender topics. These 30 individuals and five groups represented a wide range of disciplines and research interests, including health and medicine, public health, law and criminal justice, history and archival research, psychology, gender and sexuality studies, and LGBTQIA+ advocacy groups. Survey respondents were

invited to comment on the following topics: commonly used search terms and terminology/glossary resources, appropriate terminology for denoting transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals, their general understanding of information-seeking jargon, helpful databases for transgender topics, existing datasets, historical and archival materials, ethical considerations for studying the lives of transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals and ethics resources for researchers, teaching curricula and materials, gaps or omissions in the proposed resource outline, and referrals to other key stakeholders. The information gathered in the interviews and survey responses codified the need for a curated resource for researchers of transgender topics and guided future feedback collection and community engagement.

Defining the Scope

With this feedback we started to develop the LibGuide content. Teams were created to work on defined sections: transgender research resources, literature search hedges, funding opportunities, and researcher networking opportunities. Each team was responsible for bringing life to their section. This work was done in both scheduled working meetings as well as on each team member's discretionary time. Once each team felt that their section was at a point for review, we all came together to share feedback at monthly meetings. Section content was added to the LibGuide as it crystallized.

Next, we returned to stakeholders and asked them to complete usability testing of the LibGuide. We used a Google form with specific instructions in order to collect their feedback. Four respondents recommended providing context by adding a welcome page with introduction to the LibGuide, including specific resources related to ethics and the ethical conduct of research, and removing library jargon. We incorporated those changes, and then moved on to the third round of stakeholder feedback. One student and one librarian made very minor suggestions, with a more substantial suggestion to enhance the ethics section with UMN resources. The LibGuide went "live" October 2019, and we actively promoted it among UMN affiliates, community groups, and librarians across the United States.

Iterative Design

As highlighted above, stakeholder feedback collected at strategic points informed the LibGuide's scope, content, and usability. We also recognized the need for users to provide ongoing feedback to ensure that the LibGuide remains current and valuable. After evaluating options for ongoing feedback collection, we decided that a direct link to the University Libraries' contact form was sufficient, and instructions for users to write in with their input were provided.

After wide promotion of the LibGuide, feedback poured in from users, much of it complimentary. Two suggestions had the potential to be very impactful: 1) consideration for how users research transgender peoples' names pre- and

post-transition and 2) inclusion of research resources for those in the humanities. The decision was made to continue to meet to address these gaps, first tackling the lack of humanities information in the LibGuide. We asked the UMN humanities librarians for their input, and one ended up joining our team permanently. We continue to meet as a team every four-five months, assigning specific tasks to individual team members, and working independently.

Conclusion

Recognizing the gap in data sources on transgender people was just the first step into what eventually became the Library Resources for Transgender Topics guide. The project expanded to include research resources, literature search hedges, funding information, and networking opportunities. By utilizing organizational expertise and crucial feedback from institutional and external partners, we launched the guide after 18 months of collaborative work. In the first seven months, the guide had over 2700 views. We recognize that the guide will always be incomplete with respect to the evolution of terminology and identities. The ongoing reception and integration of feedback will be critical to the guide's longevity and relevance. We invite our colleagues to review the guide, share or re-use if desired, and contact us with comments and suggestions.

Acknowledgments

Disclosures

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