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Passing the Torch: Continuation of the South Carolina Libraries Journal

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Abstract

In this article, The South Carolina Libraries Editorial Board discusses the history and rebuilding of the South Carolina Libraries journal, the official publication of the South Carolina Library Association (SCLA). As the journal adjusted in response to community needs, changes in the Editorial Board, the publication cycle, and peer review process were made to expand and enhance the functionality, appearance, and content of the journal. The Editorial Board reviews strategies for library community members – including practitioners, research faculty, and LIS students – to become involved as a part of the publication through authoring, book reviewing, peer reviewing, or artwork for future issues.

Keywords

Authors

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Passing the Torch: Continuation of the *South Carolina Libraries* Journal

South Carolina Libraries is the official journal of the South Carolina Library Association (SCLA).

Established in 2014 by Brent Appling and Rachael Elrod, *South Carolina Libraries* features content of

interest to libraries in South Carolina. This includes peer reviewed research articles, news articles, book

reviews, conference proceedings, and library and program spotlights.

While *South Carolina Libraries* is less than a decade old, it has undergone a vast transformation

from its earliest iteration to its current form. In this article, the authors will expand on the origins of

South Carolina Libraries, discuss the transition from the original editors to the current editorial board,

describe new structures and workflows, examine editorial roles, and finally, describe new ways that

library professionals and students in South Carolina can become involved with the journal.

History of the Journal

In the Fall of 2013, then chair of the College and University section of SCLA, Brent Appling, was

approached by colleague Rachel Elrod of the Citadel with the idea of establishing a journal for SCLA.

Appling and Elrod worked together to create goals and aims for the journal and recruited editors,

designers, authors, and others willing to help with developing the journal. Appling also worked with the

former manager of the University of South Carolina's (UofSC) institutional repository, Scholar Commons,

to secure a home for the publication on the repository's journal hosting platform.

Appling and Elrod then researched past iterations of South Carolina statewide library journals,

state-level library journals across the U.S., and publishing open access materials in general. Appling also

took the lead in learning how the journal would be published in Scholar Commons. The Scholar

Commons work required the bulk of the time and attention in getting the journal started. It was around

this time in the process that Elrod accepted a new job outside of South Carolina, leaving Appling as the

sole editor. Before Elrod's departure, Appling and the rest of the original editorial team were able to

determine what types of articles the journal should publish. The group decided to publish peer reviewed articles, op-ed columns, feature articles, library spotlights, and book reviews. The group tried to be as inclusive as possible when deciding upon the different article types, intending to offer as many opportunities as reasonably possible to publish in the journal. This way all librarians, library workers, and library students in South Carolina would be encouraged to submit articles for publication.

After months of preparation, soliciting articles, and establishing a stable group of editors and peer reviewers, the first issue of *South Carolina Libraries* was published in the fall of 2014. Within the first year, Appling also reached out to Amanda Stone at the State Library, who helped organize and carry out a large digitization project of the two past iterations of South Carolina library journals. Digital files for the *South Carolina Library Bulletin* (1945-1956) and *South Carolina Librarian* (1956-1988) are also hosted on the *South Carolina Libraries* journal site.

Appling served as the primary editor of the journal from 2014 until 2019, though it was in 2018 when the duties became too time consuming to publish issues on a consistent basis. In 2019, Appling put out calls via SCLA to recruit a fresh group of volunteers to help re-establish formal processes and to eventually re-launch the journal. This new group of South Carolina colleagues were enthused to pick up the torch and continue publishing *South Carolina Libraries*.

Co-Editors

After 5 years as the primary editor of *South Carolina Libraries*, it was time for Appling to devote his expertise to other areas. In 2019, he approached colleagues within UofSC Libraries to see if there were others interested in becoming an editor to allow him to rotate off the journal. Megan Palmer, then the Assessment Librarian at the University of South Carolina, volunteered to serve as an Editor and to oversee the responsibility of editorial recruitment. Another colleague, Amie Freeman, the administrator of Scholar Commons, the host of the journal, was happy to contribute technical expertise. Through

recruiting, they were soon joined by April Akins at Lander University, who became a Co-Editor, Edward

Blessing at UofSC's South Caroliniana Library, who took on the responsibility of leading the peer review

process, and Stacy Winchester at UofSC Libraries, who quickly became lead of the book review process.

In October 2021, the editorial board lost a valuable member, Stacy Winchester, who needed to step

away due to shifts in responsibilities within her institution. The Editorial Board welcomed McKenzie

Lemhouse from UofSC Lancaster as the new Book Review Editor.

During initial meetings, the Board discussed adding a UofSC School of Library and Information

Science (SLIS) student representative to the board to provide a connection to the library school students

in the state. Blessing reached out to the UofSC Library and Information Science Student Association

(LISSA) at SLIS to make a connection between the journal and the library school. Through this

connection, the Editorial Board invited Laura Carter to join as a SLIS student representative.

With a full Editorial Board in place, the Co-Editors began assessing current practices, policies,

and guidelines of the journal and chose to implement a number of changes. These changes included

altering the layout of the journal to a single column format, introducing a conference issue, and setting

up the journal to receive and publish rolling submissions in the non-conference issue. The publication

cycle has been restructured to produce two issues per year. The conference issue provides proceedings

from the annual conference that is held each fall. Presenters are encouraged to share their work within

the journal. Conference proceedings can be peer-reviewed or submitted as a conference proceeding.

The non-conference issue highlights book review submissions, news from around the state, and peer-

reviewed research articles. The Co-Editors also created a Gmail and Google Drive account for the journal

to have a single communication point for journal business.

To build a team to support journal publication, the Co-Editors put out an initial call for peer

reviewers, book reviewers, and cover art creators. The Editorial Board provided training opportunities to

these volunteers and future authors through a number of webinars that covered the publishing process,

including an overview of the [peer review process](#) and how to complete a [book review](#). These webinars

can be found on SCLA's [YouTube channel](#) (SCLA, N.D.).

Technical Perspectives

Managing the technical processes and understanding the workflow of a journal can be an

onerous task for those without significant experience in this area. Fortunately, the librarian who

manages the hosting institutional repository was available to serve as the Technical Editor of the journal

to offset some of the logistical and technical issues associated with the management of a journal.

As the new Editorial Board assumed its roles, the editors realized the necessity of streamlining

the peer review process. Previously, email had been used for conducting peer review, but because a

primary goal was to increase the amount of content published, it was necessary to incorporate the peer

review process directly into the system. The Technical and Peer Review Editors worked together to

ensure that a double-blind peer review process was enabled within the system. The templates used for

requesting peer review were updated to send automated reminders for reviewers and authors and to

send rejections and acceptances. After experimenting with the structure and content of the automated

emails, the peer review system is now functioning in a way that allows the Editorial Board to be efficient

and respectful of the time of the editors, reviewers, and authors. Processes, next steps, and deadlines

are detailed in their entirety for all stakeholders, removing uncertainties and the need for editor

interventions.

Beyond the creation of a streamlined peer-review process, the editors added new publication

types and metadata fields to the structure of the journal, and policies were updated to reflect current

scholarly communication best practices. The addition of a metadata field that allows multimedia, such

as recordings of conference presentations, to be added directly to the metadata page of articles is one

example of an innovative technical change that was made. Now, with the permission of authors who

have submitted a conference proceeding, a video recording of a presentation can be attached to the

written document to provide readers with additional context. Another new feature that has improved

the overall performance and discoverability of the journal was the addition of Digital Object Identifiers

[DOIs] to scholarly content publishing within the journal. In 2020, the host of the journal, University of

South Carolina, became a member of Crossref, a DOI registration agency. The editors added a DOI

metadata field and developed a process to assign and register DOIs. Now, articles published in *South

Carolina Libraries* receive a unique DOI to ensure that they will be permanently discoverable.

The Editorial Board made the previously mentioned changes in the first year of the re-launch

and continues to make technical adjustments to the appearance, functionalities, and workflows to

improve the performance of the journal. While it is unlikely that all changes are complete, the journal is

capable of delivering a high-quality publishing experience to reviewers and authors.

Peer Review

Through peer review, *South Carolina Libraries* offers authors the opportunity to receive detailed

feedback on their professional work, as well as the ability for anybody interested in libraries to

participate in the peer review process. Writing and submitting an article for peer review on a completed

library or research project allows authors to reflect on experiences through the helpful comments of

peers. Reviewers provide anonymous feedback to help authors improve submissions, with focus on the

research process, writing skills, and written communication styles. The goal of peer review at *South

Carolina Libraries* is for authors to benefit from constructive commentary and critique. Because of the

close-knit library community the journal serves, editors ask that reviewers provide encouraging and

positive feedback that will help authors to become better writers, researchers, and librarians.

Community members who are interested in performing peer review for *South Carolina Libraries*

should contact the journal's Peer Review Editor. Contact information can be found on the journal

website (SCLA, N.D.). Reviewers generally have three weeks to read an article and provide written

feedback and can decline to review an article if needed.

Authors who would like an article to undergo the peer review process in *South Carolina Libraries*

can request it at the time of submission. The journal allows peer review on many types of articles. When

peer review feedback is received, it can then be incorporated into the final revision to improve the

finished product. Through its robust peer-review process, *South Carolina Libraries* strives to be a non-

intimidating tool to help authors in their work and professional development.

Book Reviews

Publishing a book review can be an entry point into academic publishing and a rewarding way to

contribute to the professional community. Library professionals, workers, and students who are

interested in publishing but find the idea of undertaking research and writing a peer reviewed article

daunting, or who are not given time for research as part of their positions, may find the idea of a book

review attractive. Writing a book review allows the author to share information about a title with others

who might be interested in adding it to their collections and learn something new in the process.

When selection a title to review, it is often useful to start by contacting the journal's Book

Review Editor, who may have lists of titles that meet journal guidelines and can often acquire a copy of

the book for the reviewer. Contact information for the South Carolina Libraries Book Review Editor can

be found on the journals website at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/scl_journal/.

The guidelines for book reviews in SC libraries leave a lot of room for title selection and content.

Titles for review must meet at least one of the following criteria:

1.   Be written by a South Carolina author

2.   Address South Carolina related content

3.   Contain content of interest to South Carolina libraries

4. Be released by a South Carolina publisher

5. Be related to libraries

Preference is given to titles that have been published within the past two years. The length of the book review can vary but is often 400 - 600 words.

Often, potential book reviewers are interested to know what types of content they should include in a book review for *South Carolina Libraries*. Some components are required. These include title, publisher, date of publication, place of publication, ISBN, list price, information about the quality and content of the title, appropriate audiences, the reviewer's name, position, library where the book reviewer is employed/affiliated (if applicable), and one line about the book reviewer (SCLA, N.D.).

Other content to be included is largely up to the discretion of the reviewer. Many book review authors choose to comment on the authors' level of expertise or critically compare the work to similar titles. It is the intention of the *South Carolina Libraries* Editorial Board that authors make writing their book review an interesting and enjoyable experience.

Future of the Journal

The Editorial Board hopes to expand the voices that are shared through *South Carolina Libraries*. A primary objective of the journal is to publish unique content from librarians, library workers, and library school students across the state. The journal can accommodate numerous submission types, including news articles, best practices, conference proceedings, book reviews, and research from libraries across the state. It is the valuable contributions of the South Carolina library community that allow *South Carolina Libraries* to thrive as an academic journal, and the Board encourages everyone to become involved.

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