Language and Literature Research in Regional Comprehensive Institutions

A Report by the Modern Language Association

Anne Donlon
Project Manager, Digital Initiatives
Scholarly Communication

Angela Ecklund
Thesaurus Editor and Tutorial and Instructional Technology Producer,
MLA International Bibliography
Bibliographic Information Services

Julian Haller
Assistant for Vendor Relations and Customer Support
Bibliographic Information Services

Julie Frick Wade
Associate Editor, *MLA International Bibliography*
Bibliographic Information Services

September 2020

Introduction

In 2018, the Modern Language Association (MLA), under the leadership of Executive Director Paula Krebs, began a partnership with Ithaka S+R to study the research practices of faculty members in fields of language and literature and to identify areas where scholars may need support. This project is the tenth in a series conducted by Ithaka S+R in its ongoing Research Support Services program. The MLA partnered with Ithaka S+R to learn more about research needs in the disciplines of literature and language, cultural studies, and writing studies in the United States and its territories. The MLA strives to understand how researchers conduct their research and to work with academic librarians to better support this important work in the humanities.

With direction provided by Mary Onorato, director of Bibliographic Information Services (BIS) and publisher of the *MLA International Bibliography* (*MLAIB*), and Barbara Chen, former director of BIS and editor of the *MLAIB* until her retirement in December 2018, the MLA assembled a team of four staff members to conduct research interviews with faculty members and to write a report on its findings. The team received training from Ithaka S+R for qualitative interview procedures and coding methodology to support analysis and development of the findings. The MLA report was written simultaneously with local reports by teams of librarians at fourteen institutions and a corresponding capstone report by Ithaka S+R. While the local reports by other institutions were based on interviews with language and literature scholars at each respective institution (see appendix 1), the MLA's report is based on telephone interviews with sixteen language and literature scholars from regional comprehensive institutions across the United States and its territories.

What is a regional comprehensive institution? While there is no clearly established definition of the term, regional comprehensive institutions generally are public, comprehensive, four-year colleges and universities that educate most of America's postsecondary students, enrolling "nearly 70% of all undergraduate 4-year students at public institutions" (Schneider and Deane 4). Regional comprehensive institutions are neither research-intensive institutions nor community colleges nor flagship institutions (Fryar 23). They have limited graduate programs and range widely in size, from under one thousand students to over forty thousand (Schneider and Deane 7).

The MLA understood the need to include these regional comprehensive institutions in the study because they educate so many and yet are historically underfunded and undersupported. By purposefully interviewing faculty members at these types of institutions across the United States and its territories, the MLA could ensure these faculty researchers' voices were heard.

For the purpose of this project, the selection of regional comprehensive institutions was aided by data from the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. Samples were equal from the Northeastern, Southern, Midwestern, and Western regions of the United States and included states and territories outside the continental United States. Forty-eight e-mail invitations were sent to full-time humanities faculty members without regard to affiliation with the MLA or other scholarly organizations, and the first sixteen who consented to participate were interviewed (see appendix 2). Of these, six were employed at institutions that were designated minority-serving institutions. Seven interviewees were

from large institutions (10,000 students or more), five were from medium institutions (3,000–9,999 students), and four were from small institutions (1,000–2,999 students). Six were assistant professors, four were associate professors, and six were full professors.

The scripted questions for the semistructured interviews (see appendix 3) were compiled by Ithaka S+R in the context of the larger research initiative, and the telephone interviews were conducted by MLA staff members in February through March 2019. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. MLA staff members performed detailed qualitative analysis of the transcriptions, coding them for themes based on grounded theory methodology (Corbin and Strauss 7). Predominant or recurrent themes were identified and further organized into four major findings.

With a sample size of sixteen, this report does not aim to provide a full picture of the research experience of faculty members at regional comprehensive institutions, though research has shown that qualitative samples above fifteen do not significantly change results (Guest et al. 59). These findings may raise awareness of emerging issues, as well as increase the profile of known issues. These findings may also provide other researchers with grounding to pursue more extensive studies of particular issues highlighted in the report.

Findings highlight four major themes: public humanities scholarship, research practices, research workflow, and scholarly community.

Public Humanities Scholarship

In our interviews, many faculty members spoke about their desire to undertake public scholarship, and many spoke about ways they were creating work that addressed audiences beyond colleagues in their field and beyond academia. At the same time, they indicated several obstacles to undertaking more public scholarship, including a lack of familiarity with how to write for nonspecialist audiences and the pressures and constraints of tenure and promotion requirements.

Tenure and promotion requirements have a defining influence on the decisions faculty members make about the format, genre, and audience of their scholarly work. While in some interviewees' experiences, these requirements have been created in a way that allows for more public-facing work, overall, interviews indicated that tenure and promotion requirements often constrained the kinds of work faculty members undertook.

Many of the faculty members expressed a desire that research in their fields reach a broader, more public audience. A professor who studies Latin American literature argued, "We need to get beyond the borders of the walls of academia," and spoke about "educating a public, not just the academic world," "to try to make a difference." Consistent with a recent survey of arts and humanities faculty members at land-grant universities, in which eight-five percent indicated that their public engagement and outreach was motivated by "a sense of duty or personal commitment," our interviews indicated faculty members' sense of responsibility to share their work more broadly (Rose et al. 66).

Faculty members at regional comprehensive institutions may have a particular interest in writing for a more public audience. For some, the public aspect of their institutions affected how they thought about their work. An assistant professor at a medium-sized, minority-serving institution reflected, "All of my schooling has been at public universities, and I work at a public university, so I think everything I do is more or less for public consumption. It should be as accessible to everyone." He thought of this question of access not only in terms of access to traditionally composed scholarship but also in terms of writing for nonscholarly audiences. He planned to publish blog posts to accompany scholarly publications that "would translate [the scholarly] article into a broader public article."

Open Access

Overall, open access did not emerge as a major theme in the interviews. Some faculty members were attuned to making scholarship openly available. One professor indicated that she pays attention to her author's agreements with publishers to see how she can share her publications: "When it's allowable by a publishing entity, I try to make my work broadly available." This faculty member was paying attention to how publishers allowed her to make her work publicly and freely accessible.

Yet many interviews indicated, either explicitly or by omission, that faculty members were less aware of ways to make scholarship openly available. One professor said, "I don't know how to share work outside of the traditional publishing houses and that kind of thing." However, that faculty member had some awareness of open educational resources and open access through the activity of a vocal group of colleagues in her institution who would hold presentations and encourage faculty to use open resources in their teaching and encourage students to share work in open ways.

Engaging Broad Audiences

The faculty members interviewed engaged in a range of scholarly outputs. Although scholarly book projects and articles were the primary kinds of outputs that faculty members mentioned when asked to describe their research projects, many were also involved in nontraditional outputs for literary, writing, and cultural studies, including work for nonscholarly audiences, digital collections, digital platforms, and creative projects (including photography, fiction, and a literary magazine). In addition, a number of faculty members mentioned public-facing events where they played a role, such as speaking at a film screening, participating in community events related to a digital archive on local history, and writing program notes for theater.

The question of how to write for public audiences came up in several interviews. One professor indicated that her intended audience impacted the genre of her current project. She departed from a traditional scholarly genre that "maybe ... would be read by a lot of people, but it could also sit on a shelf and collect dust or sit in cyberspace and not be accessed." Another professor created a digital project to be "an accessible, online way for people like everyday citizens to engage with that history." Faculty members recognized how their choice of genre and medium affected who their work might reach.

While many voiced a desire or sense of responsibility to share work more broadly, most had not yet done so. One associate professor reflected, "*at some point* I would really like to explore the public

humanities or public intellectual side of things, because I think we have a responsibility to this world to be able to tell people, or narrate our stories, in a way that is understandable to the world at large" (emphasis added).

Some noted a lack of training in how to write for broader audiences. One associate professor had been involved in a scholarly society committee exploring "translational work, translating our research findings for broader audiences and stakeholders," but had not yet presented his own research in this way. He reflected, "I think it's pretty much the experience of most academics, in that it's hard to conceptualize. It's not how we were trained." Another faculty member suggested that if a scholarly society like the MLA provided a platform to reach a broader public "that would be welcome."

Digital Work

Several faculty members were interested in making their work available through public, digital projects but had questions they had not been able to answer so far. Faculty members thinking about undertaking digital work faced questions about digital infrastructure and discoverability. An associate professor in film studies who coedits an online journal has come up against a number of questions as he contemplates a more public-facing digital project. His idea for an interactive, multimedia map wouldn't really fit as part of the online journal. He is not sure who would "make it happen in terms of the technology" or where it should live so that people would be able to find it. He worried "no one would actually know about … it unless I put it out in some way other than … my faculty Web site for my college or something." For faculty members at institutions that do not have resources or staff supporting digital scholarship, the best practices for scholarly outputs that depart from traditional formats may not be apparent and may be difficult to implement. Support and expansion of infrastructure for digital scholarly projects located outside institutions, like the *Humanities Commons*, and disciplinary opportunities for training, like conferences and summer institutes, might be of particular value for scholars at institutions without such resources.

Tenure and Promotion

Several interviewees noted a tension between a desire to reach broad audiences and the kinds of outputs that are valued and rewarded by their institutions. An assistant professor remarked, "I don't think we entered the field to speak to ten people. I think we—many of us—are doing very exciting, thought-provoking work, and we want to be able to share that with the rest of the world." She went on to say, however, that "unfortunately we have a very short amount of time on the tenure clock to get that done." She indicated that she prioritized scholarship with a smaller audience that was valued in the tenure process.

The expectations around tenure predictably had a strong impact on the kinds of publications faculty members pursued. One faculty member remarked that she has not engaged in any work beyond traditional publishing in peer-reviewed journals or monographs "because I'm on the tenure track and that's the thing that is required." Another faculty member remarked that nontraditional output is "effectively worthless, in terms of promotion to tenure," despite being "just as much work and ... almost certainly much more important."

Another assistant professor noted, "If I get tenure, I might be more inclined to look at some other ways of sharing work. I've been following the work of some colleagues who share their work more publicly and make it more accessible for folks who are not just in academia, and I'm interested in doing more work like that." This junior faculty member was deferring publicly engaged work until she had secured tenure.

Even when particular administrators and particular institutions may accept and reward less traditional forms of scholarship, pretenure faculty members may play it safe and opt to focus on traditional publication. One assistant professor observed a shift when a new dean arrived at her university. Whereas the previous dean was focused primarily on scholarly publications, the new dean encourages the faculty member to include "other aspects that make you a whole person," like her creative work. However, the faculty member noted that she continued to work on traditional publications, explaining that "it's not a stable terrain because you never know when your dean is going to leave." She also noted that she focused on traditional publications because she felt they were more portable if she didn't get tenure at her university.

"Might Be Opening Up"

A few faculty members noted that the type of institution where they worked influenced their more public-facing work. A professor at a medium-sized public college reflected that her colleagues may have come to work at the institution "because they don't want to be the monograph-churning, scholarly-work-churning kind of faculty member." She noted that faculty members at her institution "do all kinds of things like curating museum collections and putting together online archives and giving talks and doing projects with the local historical society."

In some cases, the institution's evaluation processes take these nontraditional outputs into account. One faculty member had the sense that whereas "larger institutions are still very traditional in the way they think about scholarly work, ... smaller institutions might be opening up." Another reported that "our university has become much more tolerant of writing for blogs or other media online." In other cases, faculty members reported that although nontraditional work counted for something, "it certainly wouldn't be the thing that a tenure piece would hinge on."

Community Accountability

Most of the interviewees who discussed their interest in engaging a broader public with their scholarship framed it in terms of disseminating their work, but at least one also articulated the role of a broader community in shaping her scholarly work.

An associate professor in Native American studies offered a perspective on publicly engaged scholarship that was sensitive to the cultural and historical implications of such engagement. She was attuned to the "historical journey" of particular communities related to their experiences of oppression, colonialism, or other exploitation and the role that scholarship and the academy played in that exploitation. This faculty member spoke about working with specific Native communities (rather than "the public") and was cognizant of the need for their scholarship to be accountable to those Native communities. In a project she works on in partnership with two local tribes, she framed her role in terms of service: "something

that my teachers taught me was you have to be of service" (a framing different from the feeling of a responsibility to educate the public). She noted that unlike colleagues in American or British literature, for sensitive aspects of her research in Native American studies, she needed to "take back what I might be researching ... and take it back to a community and get community approval."

In her work on language revitalization, the faculty member was sensitive to the wishes of people in that community. She noted, "I wouldn't dare make a move without checking with all of the community people that I work with. ... If I didn't get that, I couldn't do it." And although she, as someone "who works in this national academic field," sees "advantages to sharing local information with the larger group," some members of the community "find that rather threatening or confusing, troubling in some way." The role of the academic "to swoop in and say, hey, we've got this great solution for this problem ... it's just very threatening." Insights such as this scholar's into power dynamics and historical considerations could inform the conversations and guidelines developed in the humanities for public scholarship.

Public Scholarship – Conclusion

While scholars at regional comprehensive institutions want to undertake projects that engage with a broader public, the pressures of tenure and promotion requirements and a lack of training in how to undertake public scholarship constrains them. In "Public Writing and the Junior Scholar," Sarah E. Bond and Kevin Gannon note that while faculty members at top-tier research universities or elite colleges may be evaluated solely on narrow publication requirements, other smaller or less elite institutions have taken publicly engaged work into consideration for tenure and promotion, especially in the light of its alignment with the institutional mission. While the interviews for this study suggest that traditional publication continues to be the dominant form of scholarship for faculty members at regional comprehensives, the interviews also record shifting institutional priorities to consider scholarly productions that are more experimental, creative, and public-facing.

Language and literature fields have an opportunity to develop and advocate for tenure and promotion guidelines that account for public scholarship. Models for such guidelines might be found in other fields, such as public history (see Labode) and digital scholarship. In addition, there is an opportunity to provide training and infrastructure resources for faculty members at institutions without support for public or digital scholarship.

Research Practices

Here we have focused on how scholars in sixteen regional comprehensive institutions discover relevant primary and secondary source material and how they then locate and access the full text of materials that they have decided to pursue. We found that research-oriented scholars at regional comprehensive institutions appear to be at a disadvantage when it comes to the practice of research. They are regularly driven to seek resources beyond the collections of their own institutions, and even beyond traditional library resources. They often have to make do with digital copies when it would be better to work with physical copies. There is confusion about scattered electronic resources and an accompanying fear of missing the right resources. Although the scholars we talked to have developed familiarity with

frequently used resources and successful habits for finding material, it is unclear to most how search and retrieval functions work in any one electronic resource or search engine versus another and what can be found where.

A Golden Age of Access

There was a general consensus among interviewees that we are in a golden age for access to materials and that online access makes it much easier and quicker to discover and access research material than in past decades. The savings in travel time and expense is difficult to quantify but is certainly enormously significant. Many projects can be completed without any travel, and online access also means having more time to peruse the material and to easily return to an item for a closer look later. As one participant said, "I can sit in my house and probably accomplish most of the research projects that I have planned out for the next few years." Yet the digital age has brought some issues relating to access to the forefront, and it appears that the benefits brought by this golden age are not distributed evenly.

Digital access has highlighted disparities in the breadth and depth of collections in different libraries. It's easier now to see what's out there that one's library doesn't have access to. Some participants spoke of a disparity between the collections they had available to them in graduate school and the collections at their current regional comprehensive institutions. An assistant professor in a metropolitan area described regularly returning to the Web sites of the two Ivy League universities where she had attended school as an undergraduate and graduate student in order to get a more complete picture of what research was available. Since she was still able to get access to these materials, she felt "well-resourced" with this supplement to her current institution's collection.

Some scholars we talked to described their institutional library's collections as being "limited" or "weak" in their subject areas to an extent that made their research difficult. One told us that her library has "no books," nothing in print at all anymore, and very few digital resources related to her field. A few described the "growing pains" being experienced in institutions that are currently establishing themselves as research-centered institutions. One participant said that his library always followed through on his purchase requests but that the process was too slow to be useful. It appears that in many cases, the libraries of regional comprehensive institutions do not fulfill the expectations of staff members who were hired because of their interest in doing research, both in terms of library staffing and the collections. An associate professor told us that he even "lean[s] on friends who are at research universities" to make requests for scans of journal articles, because they have more librarians on staff and are better able to handle the requests quickly. Social networking sites, like *Facebook*, and e-mail are also used to request items from friends' libraries or personal collections, and *Academia.edu* is used to request PDFs directly from authors.

The most frequently cited means to make use of other collections is through interlibrary loan. Some participants said that they were happy with the options they had for interlibrary loan, had positive comments about interactions with interlibrary loan staff members, and didn't mind using a digital scan or born-digital version of a publication in lieu of the print if it meant getting hold of it sooner. Two participants mentioned cases in which they were granted special requests to receive print copies of items even though they were available digitally. One said that librarians were "very considerate of the

tensions that exist sometimes between what we want and what they have." Some participants were thrilled with the experience of receiving print texts through interlibrary loan: "the book will come to my office. I don't even have to go to the library anymore. So, as far as I'm concerned, it's like Yahtzee. You know, everything is coming to me in the forms that I want."

For others, though, the delay associated with print interlibrary loan is unacceptably long, whether because of staffing issues or geographic distance. A participant in a sparsely populated part of the western region of the country said: "what usually happens is, at least a week or two passes between me asking for the book and the book actually arriving. By that time, I have either moved beyond the question that had first led me to that book or I have found a way to move my question into further research areas. So, often it happens that the book comes a little late."

Occasionally materials cannot be accessed in any format even after appeals to librarians and friends. Participants described reaching these dead ends as "frustrating" and getting "stuck." Some of the behaviors engaged in at this point are resorting to "a whole lot of googling" in the hopes of finding "hidden PDFs" on the Web; signing up for repository services that keep contacting them later, making them feel "scammed"; and even changing the direction of their research to accommodate materials they can access. Despite our being in a golden age of access, there is still plenty of scrambling involved in getting hold of some materials, and this burden falls more heavily on some faculty members, particularly those working in remote institutions and those whose library collections are weak or nonexistent in their fields of study.

Sometimes the desired resource is available for individual purchase. *Amazon* was frequently mentioned as the platform of choice for buying both new and used material. One professor of English told us that for her latest project, she has "ordered everything that [she's] gotten from *Amazon*." Another literary scholar said that she was cutting back on the number of items purchased through *Amazon*, because it was beginning to cost too much. *Amazon* was also mentioned as an alternative to interlibrary loan, because sometimes a book is needed for a longer period of time than interlibrary loan would allow. A participant warned, though, that you have to be careful when ordering used material on *Amazon*, because sellers sometimes list the edition incorrectly. A film scholar described frequently needing films from her home country that were not available through interlibrary loan. So she bought many of them on *Amazon*. When certain titles weren't available on *Amazon*, she had her mother purchase the DVDs and either ship them or send them on a plane with a friend or relative. Sometimes these out-of-pocket purchases were described as an "annoyance," but other times researchers were happy to support, for example, small journals or organizations that survive by subscriptions. One participant reported spending around ten percent of his salary on research expenditures, including purchases and travel. More research is needed to know whether faculty members in regional comprehensive institutions are spending more money on research than those at other types of institutions and whether this amount represents an increase or decrease in expenditure compared with that of the recent past.

Knowing What's Out There
There has always been a conflict between the goal of a thoroughly researched project and the limitations of time and space. And there is anxiety about what some call the lowest-hanging fruit.

Essentially, the concern is that those resources that are easiest to find and to access will be read and cited more often, regardless of quality or even relevance. What is new is that the realm of what is perceived as possible and necessary to review seems to have grown astronomically. As one participant said, "I imagine that I'm just touching the surface of what is really available to me; but, … no, I don't have time. … " All researchers face the difficulty of determining how much research is enough, but researchers at regional comprehensive institutions often face the special challenge of seeking information beyond their libraries' collections.

Participants' staying informed on current developments and on the names of scholars working in their specialization is perceived as "a continued challenge" both because of the volume of work being published in language and literature today and because of the various new means and venues through which this work is being made public on the Internet. Resources are scattered across platforms and exist in several types of media. Researchers seek efficient and effective ways to pull relevant material together.

One method that scholars at regional comprehensive institutions are using to meet this challenge is a traditional one: reading journals that cover their field of study. Often this means maintaining personal subscriptions to scholarly journals, sometimes in print format and paid for out-of-pocket. This method is vital to the process of several scholars we talked to who said that their institutional library collections were inadequate for their needs. Perhaps personal subscriptions work best for those scholars who are able to define their field in a such a way that a few journals can be trusted to cover or at least reference the important scholarship within that field. As one participant explained, "I read the journals in my field. Fortunately, [my field] is kind of small." An added benefit of having a personal print subscription is guaranteed access to the journal in perpetuity with one's own notes penciled in and tabs marking articles that are important to the reader. A participant described how she remembers relevant scholarly "conversations" from her journal when she's researching a particular topic. At that point the print issues stored at home can easily be pulled out again for reference.

In a time when many libraries are eliminating print collections, humanities scholars are known to defend print with anecdotes about serendipitous discoveries made browsing print books and journals in the stacks. The scholars we interviewed likewise defended their preference for print resources. Our interviews reinforce the finding of a 2012 Ithaka S+R report that a majority of historians prefer print versions of relevant source materials (Rutner and Schonfeld 17) and suggest that research support providers should take the issue seriously. The evidence collected in our study shows that researchers in language and literature feel that they are at an advantage when able to work with print collections and that, contrary to popular belief, nostalgia is *not* the leading cause for the retelling of research anecdotes.

No matter how good its search mechanisms and indexing, research done completely in an online environment suffers from a lack of context surrounding found items. As one participant said, "You can do a search and it just pulls up the thing that you need the most … the thing that's most relevant. And you're only looking at that, and you're very barely looking at it in context." With archival materials, especially those that are superficially or incompletely cataloged, browsing through print documents in person is a particular boon, because often beside the one document that has been originally sought,

others of like interest may be found. By comparison, browsing through scanned images can be quite tedious and straining, and it's difficult to tell how thorough one's browsing has been without a spatial understanding of what exists to be looked at.

The physical clues received about a collection and the items within it on-site are perceived to provide information that is either difficult or impossible to ascertain when looking at a digital version of the collection. A scholar of contemporary literature explained that, for his work, it is important to go to physical libraries and bookstores to see what new works exist on the shelves and to gauge circulation to assess the importance of new authors, especially those who are publishing in small, artisan presses. A researcher specializing in Japanese cultural production says he prefers to "walk around and actually look at stuff on shelves and get sort of a physical sense of what the collection [holds]. … It's like walking into a library or a bookstore where I feel like I can have a better sense about what's available and what fits into the current field by looking at it, seeing it physically rather than [in] some kind of digital format." Another scholar described walking directly to the literature section of his library and having relevant material easily at hand. A researcher with a comprehensive print collection is at an advantage.

A researcher in film studies recalled an instance when the whole run of a journal had gone missing from the digital catalog of a major research library—only the fact that he had seen the volumes physically and knew they existed led him to eventually discover that they'd just been moved and that there was an error in the catalog. This was an isolated incident, but it highlights an essential difficulty of conducting research in an online environment. The entire run of a journal is usually a large item; it is easy to stumble across while browsing physically, easy to return to on future visits, and it is unlikely to disappear from a shelf without causing notice. But what of the digital version of that journal? Would anyone notice if it disappeared or an error caused it to be unfindable? What if a mistake in a researcher's search causes it to be missed? Researchers can't know what they're missing, especially in a digital environment. This issue is exacerbated when researchers are performing searches on various systems that they are unfamiliar with or don't understand.

Browsing catalogs from publishers is seen as another valuable method of maintaining expertise in a field: "We search in the catalog for what is new in academia, from Duke University, from Chicago Press, from SUNY press house—the big and small press houses, either university or independent. …" Another place to browse the newest material that the publishers have to offer is exhibit halls, such as those at MLA conventions: "you go to the publishers' desks … [and] it's a nice opportunity to see what's out there." Another participant told us, "Sometimes if I'm really curious, I'll go online and see if there's any more information from the press itself."

Reading journals and looking at publisher catalogs to know what's out there requires academic professionals to use their judgment to determine what are the most important research materials. The logic is that presses or journals of strong reputation and quality will attract the most important submissions from scholars and will publish them.

Perhaps it is partly a sign of the times that methods for finding published scholarship that don't rely on vetting are gaining traction. It is surely a response to the perception that there is a larger and more

diffuse body of scholarship that needs to be perused. One new method the scholars we spoke to are using to keep up with new scholarship is automated recommendations and alerts. Recommendations for similar papers to those one has read in the past are pushed to users' e-mail from *Academia.edu* and perhaps other services. Google alerts were also mentioned as useful—for example, as a way to track new mentions of one's name across the Internet. E-mail alerts in the form of a recurring search can also be set up within many library research database platforms, but these were not mentioned specifically by any of the scholars we interviewed. One participant imagined having a "research concierge … somebody [who] would contact me … on a weekly basis and say, well, here are all the things that I know that you're interested in, so let me point you in some directions that you might like." It seems that for some, at least, it would be desirable to shift the burden of constant searching and browsing of an increasingly complex landscape of scholarship to a centralized, intelligent entity. In an ideal world, this intelligent entity might be a mind-clone of the researcher. In today's reality, these automated recommendations rely on either the artificial intelligence of algorithms or searches that are scheduled in advance by the researchers themselves.

A different type of recommendation that is gaining popularity among scholars relies on what is known informally as the "hive mind." Some researchers told us that recommendations on social media have become a "tremendous" help in keeping apprised of new publications of interest. Academics are often connected with other academics on social media—either individually or through third-party groups and forums—and the platforms provide a new way of forming knowledge of what is new and especially good. Users in these forums will often give a brief review of what they've read. Might not a personal commentary, however brief and casually given, seem more immediate or more sincere than a published review by an unknown person? The reality is that since reviews on social media are essentially pushed to users, academics are likely to read the social media review without ever seeing the published review unless they actively go searching for it.

Social media is also emerging as a tool for more directed academic research. While several academics we spoke with said that they disliked social media altogether, found it more distracting than helpful, or did not use it for research, others reported using Twitter, Facebook, H-Net, and WhatsApp, in addition to blogs and e-mail distribution lists, to tap into their personal networks and ask for help discovering resources relevant to their current research projects. This proactive use of social media to solve research problems contrasts somewhat to the "active listening" that participants also report doing on social media. A literary theorist, while expressing ambivalence about relying on the collective hive-mind and "short-circuit[ing] the rigorous part of doing research," stressed the limitations of time and geography that constrain researchers when trekking the "research route" alone: "the answer might be somewhere in the British Library, and someone in England might get to it quicker and send that answer to you sitting here on the West Coast." Researchers exchange thoughts and pose research questions in these forums; one participant described this as "throw[ing] the work to friends and colleagues." Other researchers with similar interests may respond. This pooling of resources has clear benefits.

However, enthusiasm about using these forums to stay informed must be dampened by continued international reporting on the ways that algorithms on social media and search engines determine which items can be viewed or viewed first by a user, fake users or users posing as authorities, image and

audio manipulation, and myriad other ways that public knowledge can be influenced. Some participants in our study never use social media on principle. Even in the most hopeful scenario, it is doubtful that commercial social media could give one an exhaustive vantage of new scholarship in any field.

In the information-seeking phase of a project, participants reported using a variety of strategies to take account of scattered resources, depending on the nature of the project, the systems available, and what is found in them as the project moves forward. As one participant told us, "I definitely go in with a research plan, but I do not hold tight to that plan. I know that other things will arise and it'll become this sort of organic thing." It does seem, however, that researchers generally develop familiar paths through the jungle, paths directly to one resource or other that have worked for them in the past. For the writing studies scholars we spoke to, searching often starts in *CompPile*. Then the search is broadened to other databases and union catalogs: "I go through a routine of checking the MLA [bibliography] first, then *WorldCat* and *JSTOR*, and then *Project Muse*." Several participants reported heading to subject-specific databases, like *CompPile* or the *MLA International Bibliography*, first to see the publications that have been indexed on the topic. A subject-specific database's mission is to cover the most important publications in that subject area, as determined by its editors. As a film scholar said, "if it's in an MLA search, I should find out about it or know about it." A literary scholar said, "MLA is absolutely critical." For scholars working in foreign languages, the ability to search descriptive indexing in English and find works in different languages is a key benefit of using an indexed database. Descriptive indexing and abstracts were said to be an important factor in finding resources, because often the citation alone is not enough to determine the content of the publication. A scholar of Latin American literature told us, "Sometimes the title is misleading, no? So I want to make sure that it is actually an article that relates to what I'm doing, because I don't have much time." This is an issue for all researchers, and terminology used in humanities publications may have greater potential for being metaphoric than those of other disciplines. When the majority of one's access is through interlibrary loan or other methods that take some time, avoiding false leads is even more crucial.

Even when one is familiar with the databases serving one's field, searching around in more than one can be confusing. There is overlap in collection scope among databases, and it's often not clear to the researcher which publication types and topics might be contained in each. Vendor interfaces vary as to where search buttons, boxes, and other key functions and data are located. And these interfaces are updated visually from time to time, making it difficult to stay oriented over the course of a career. In addition, each database within a vendor platform may use its own glossary or thesaurus of subject terms, custom-built to work best with the topics it covers but inadvertently making a researcher's search terms better suited to one database than another. This variation also creates complications for subject searches done in discovery.

Discovery layer searches were designed to be the solution to the problem of silos by performing federated search queries across many of a library's databases. Some participants said they rely on the discovery layer exclusively for searching their libraries' collections. As one scholar imagines it, the discovery service "dips into *JSTOR* and MLA and, you know, all these different journals. So, I always start there. … I don't really ever go specifically to *JSTOR* or MLA just because I know when I'm doing general searches I'm getting everything from them anyway—or at least I assume I am."

Assumptions are a matter of convenience when working with electronic resources because explanatory documentation is not forthcoming. Yet these assumptions are often incorrect. As another participant knowingly reported, searching the discipline-specific databases is also necessary, because "sometimes they will pull different results than what I find in just a general search from our library's central search function." She noted that her library's discovery service's search is not complete and universal, but she acknowledged that it is "getting better and better in terms of pulling results for the whole collection and all of the databases that the library subscribes to."

Some researchers begin with a broad discovery layer search, or "global search," as a "sort of default"; then, as one scholar says, the *MLA International Bibliography* comes "second, because that one's a lot more focused." One oft-cited benefit of using the discovery service has to do with convenience, so "I don't have to hop from one [database] to the other," and scholars also point out that the wider search provides the chance to see types of publications that wouldn't appear in an academic database, such as magazines "like *Psychology Today*" or newspapers. Finding these types of publications offers scholars the chance "to see what people are saying about the issue," which is valuable when researching a "pop-culture-oriented" project. But this aspect of discovery searching was also mentioned as a downside. Many times a researcher is unintentionally inundated with nonacademic publications. As one participant said, "Obviously, [discovery services] just give you too much," and then it is an "annoyance" to figure out how to filter out unwanted types of publications.

Several participants discussed the difficulties of researching topics on which there is little to nothing written, such as very new literature and film or neglected types of literature and film from earlier time periods. On the one hand, a lack of scholarly writing on a topic can be a boon, leaving an "open field" for the researcher. On the other hand, when there isn't an existing corpus of scholarship directly *about* a topic, researchers find that they have to "scratch around at the edges of things," meaning they are grateful to find less relevant secondary material or less scholarly secondary material such as magazines, Web sites, and blogs. Full-text search becomes more important then, as even a brief mention of the topic can be useful.

Regardless of how it was discovered and in what format, the first relevant source often heads a trail to the second and onward. Nearly everyone we interviewed described the continuing value of looking at a source's works-cited list and notes to find the next item to read, to establish an understanding of the conversation around a topic, and to ascertain whether one has inadvertently missed a key source with other methods of discovery. One participant noted that this method helps you find "what the things are that you have to be citing because everybody's citing them." Citations are seen as a gauge of a scholarly work's importance, and they are, circularly, a means by which importance is solidified.

Understanding How to Find It

Most participants in our study said that they believe it is important to understand how digital search tools work. Despite this belief, none of them described receiving focused training in the subject. On the whole, the process of learning search strategies appears to happen circumstantially, often in chance one-on-one encounters or by trial and error. One researcher described being pulled aside by a friendly graduate student who taught him to use the *MLA International Bibliography*. Another described

archivists helpfully "look[ing] over [his] shoulder as [he] was putting in keywords." Some participants said that watching tutorials made for specific databases was also helpful. Several said that learning the vocabulary that would help them pinpoint relevant material was a long and formative process, earned by "years and years of doing it." One participant described spending the first two weeks of a three-month dissertation fellowship learning to formulate the words to describe the material he wanted to find for his project.

Clearly scholarly search skills, although they may often be self-taught, are not intuitive. Several participants spoke of how working closely with students made processes that were internalized more overt. One literary scholar told us, "I don't think a lot about the strategies I'm using as a researcher." But watching her students fail to find a single item on a topic for which she can easily find hundreds made it clear how refined her search techniques have become by comparison.

While there is certainly a lack of concerted support services that address confusion about electronic resources in regional comprehensive institutions, help is sometimes available for those who seek it. Participants told us that specialist librarians and archivists are especially valued for their skill sets and knowledge of resources and strategies within a particular field. In-person sessions may work better, but online chat reference makes it easier than ever to access specialists' expertise. Video tutorials—both those designed for determining which sources to use and those that help researchers find what they want within a particular resource—were also said to be important sources of assistance. It may be that accepting a set of search results as they are without taking the time to understand why these results were retrieved is putting researchers who rely heavily on electronic resources at a disadvantage.

Whereas some said that they already had a basic or good understanding of how search processes work in the resources that they use, others said that they had no understanding at all but wished they had some. A few participants described the search process as remarkably simple: "I just look for the keywords, and always, when I put in a keyword, even if I'm using *Google* or *Microjuris* or *Choice*, *EBSCOhost*, I put in a word, and then I find what I'm looking for." However, as another participant pointed out, "One does not know one does not know something," and it may not be apparent that key resources are being missed. Four participants said that having some experience working in the creation of indexes for digital research tools (these included *CompPile*, a digital archive, and finding aids) or having to assign keywords to their own publications gave them a better understanding of the process of establishing relevance and of how the ideologies of individuals or organizations involved in the process are reflected in the choice of which material is cataloged or chosen for inclusion in a particular collection. Understanding that terminology is "ultimately interpretive," whether the terms are author-chosen or chosen by indexers from the controlled vocabulary of a database, gave them more patience for trying multiple searches and strategies when doing their own research.

Responses to the question of bias in the presentation of search results were varied. A few considered the possibility of algorithmic bias to be a drawback to using search engines that depend on them. Concerns mentioned include issues of censorship and the potential burying of useful results in favor of others that perhaps had a "corporate ad-based" reason to be listed at the top of search results. Most participants, however, had not given much thought to the question of bias in relevancy ranking before.

One participant said that he didn't think it has "really affected the way [he] does research" because of his thorough understanding of the field he does research in. A literary scholar said this: "As far as understanding how it works, or why it's sending me these certain things, I don't really care because I figure I can, and this is silly and probably foolish, but I figure I can outsmart it by asking in a different way for the things that I'm looking for. … I feel I can make [the algorithms] work for me even if I don't fully understand how they're working."

Several participants reported using *Google Scholar*. One told us that using *Google Scholar* for discovery is "absolutely fine to do." Another said, "Because why not?" Things that participants like about *Google Scholar* include getting a high volume of search results for each search and the fact that it is free. Participants did recognize, however, a lack of transparency in *Google Scholar* in terms of how the Google search algorithm works or why search results are presented in any particular order. One participant who said he understands how *CompPile* works "pretty well," said that *Google*, in contrast, "is entirely opaque, as I assume it's designed to be."

The assumptions of simplicity and objectivity that many people have regarding this black box of search engine relevancy ranking are being questioned by scholars such as Safiya Noble, in *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (2018), and Cathy O'Neil, in *Weapons of Math Destruction* (2016). At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a media lab project called the Algorithmic Justice League was recently founded whose mission is to highlight algorithmic bias and combat it through collective efforts and the development of best practices ("Overview"). Algorithmic bias is just now emerging as an issue of importance to academics. How this issue will shape research practices remains to be seen.

Research Practices – Conclusion

We find that scholars at regional comprehensive institutions face added challenges when doing research. Disparities exist between their current library collections and those of the research-oriented institutions many were educated in, whose faculty members continue to constitute both their research community and their competition. Interlibrary loan takes time, whereas gaining access through friends, colleagues, and connections on social media may strain relationships and strict interpretations of legality. Many times the best or only option is to purchase research material, and this may put a disproportionate financial burden on faculty members at regional comprehensive institutions. Attempts to take account of and access scattered research material often leads to confusion and possibly missing relevant material, and institutional research support services appear inadequate to train scholars on emerging tools and electronic resources.

Research Workflow

The research activities of faculty members in fields of language and literature at regional comprehensive institutions vary and continue to evolve in the digital age. How has research changed in the formative areas of developing a research topic and throughout the academic writing process? One finding is that there is a need for resources and tools to support the scholarly workflow lifecycle, from early stages of forming a research topic to stages of the academic writing process, including note-taking through to

publication. In the sciences, publishers are working to support these practices (Kramer and Bosman), though some are concerned that for-profit publishers may obtain full control of author content throughout the workflow cycle (Pooley). In the humanities, there is a corresponding need to attend to research workflow and to provide resources and digital tools to better serve scholars in language and literature at regional comprehensive institutions and more broadly. Humanities institutions providing such resources and tools may more holistically support research workflows.

Having an Idea and Forming a Research Topic

Thoughts, queries, and a sense of curiosity are common to all researchers, but how does an idea become a topic of research? Where does the idea come from, and how does it manifest in a scholar's publications or throughout a scholar's career? Many scholars develop an idea over many years, reporting an "ongoing, continuing project" or "continuation of a long trajectory" of research. Ideas may lie dormant for some time and are taken up again later. Several scholars reported that an idea often forms while a researcher is in graduate school, or even earlier, and continues to develop during the researcher's faculty career. Ideas often develop into dissertations and later into books. Conference presentations are an important part of this developmental stage; several scholars noted the importance of the MLA convention and other regional conferences. These presentations then lead to further research topic development and publications.

Several researchers reported that research topics form and develop with input from others, whether a group of peer tutors supervised by the faculty member, peer reviewers, peer researchers, authors of reviews online, or publishers. According to one, "people tell you, 'Look at this,' or you start reading online and you find that there is this new book and so on." Conferences are noteworthy for stimulating ideas. One scholar explained the value of attending the MLA Annual Convention: "because at the end of the day, all that [interaction] is fueling the writing."

Many other researchers described the individualized aspects of developing ideas and forming research topics. While one researcher claimed to have an idea and then do research "to see if there's something already out there" about a topic, another described walking through the physical library stacks' literature section for inspiration, "and if something pops to my mind, then I go to the computer and I check what they have online." Another researcher described the thinking process like this: "If I have to think about something for a while, if it's not clear morally or textually," then it is certainly a topic of interest that will continue to resurface.

What about the other side of the coin? How might scholars find support when they experience difficulty forming a research topic? One faculty member recommended workshops providing information on methodology: "How do you approach a particular kind of project? How do you conceptualize, first of all, the research question and then match it with an appropriate set of methods for addressing that question? … I think workshops for that would be good." Another scholar imagined a "peer-support system" for difficulties such as writer's block. Such a faculty support system could help researchers work together to share ideas and solve problems.

Thus, many of the researchers interviewed at regional comprehensive institutions would be supported in their early stages of research, including idea development and research topic formation, by access to resources including regional conferences, the MLA convention and other national and international conventions, workshops, and institution-level peer-support systems.

Academic Writing Process

The academic writing process is understood by many as a technique or methodology requiring concentrated effort and practice. What are strategies for gathering research, taking notes, and writing in various stages of a project? The interviews with faculty members at regional comprehensive institutions indicate that the genre of academic prose has changed little over the years but that faculty members and graduate students would benefit from continued training and support services.

Many researchers discussed the importance of conceiving of academic writing as a genre with conventions, strategies, and goals. According to one researcher: "You should study these things as genres of writing that have particular conventions and rhetorical strategies and that are sort of formulaic. … If you understand the formula, abstracts aren't going to be a problem anymore, and these conference papers aren't going to be a problem anymore, and you'll understand what an editor of a journal wants for an article." This scholar emphasized the importance of "demystifying the process" to help researchers "understand what the end goal of that research should look like."

Many faculty members noted that argument analysis and emulation of published research articles are key. A strategy includes reading secondary texts and case studies to understand how research is constructed. These researchers stressed the importance of training graduate students how to write dissertations and to support with research, as well as training faculty members how to teach writing and information literacy. Particular texts can be useful to instruct students how to write academic articles. Among the books faculty members discussed are Eric Hayot's *The Elements of Academic Style* to teach graduate students the rhetorical moves needed to make scholarly arguments and Wendy Laura Belcher's *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks*, which can be assigned to have students transform a seminar paper into a journal article draft and submit it to a journal for publication at the end of the semester.

Many faculty members expressed willingness to attend workshops while noting the effectiveness of graduate training: "I am still willing to learn if there is some kind of workshop that the MLA has at its annual conference. But I think the best place for this would be at the graduate level. … When I was a graduate student, … [this training] did not exist. … I think workshops at the MLA would be an excellent opportunity for us who did not get the opportunity … to come and really learn."

Many agreed that "from learning how to write, to learning how to develop research methods, to facing the challenges of executing the learned research methods, to completing a dissertation or learning from there to write a book," training is particularly useful to graduate students as well as to faculty members.

Again, we find that the scholars interviewed at regional comprehensive institutions need support through attendance at conferences and workshops and access to training for the academic writing process.

Research Tools for Note-Taking, Organizing, and Writing

The scholars interviewed described a variety of research tools and methods for note-taking, organizing notes and research, and writing but conveyed a limited understanding of comprehensive digital tools or applications for writing and information management. New mediums for sharing or experimenting with texts, including the ability to annotate and comment, are being developed and used by researchers and publishers in the sciences. The language and literature researchers interviewed, and humanities scholars more broadly, need access to these new mediums to support the research workflow lifecycle. Digital tool kits are designed to help researchers in various stages of organizing and writing about their research, and humanities scholars could benefit from them considerably.

Many scholars described the note-taking process as a strategy with definite stages. For most it begins before writing. One researcher described the research process, including note-taking, in detail:

> I start with a very basic search with the *MLA International Bibliography* and just get articles or books in *WorldCat*. Then I start reading, and I sometimes take notes on my computer, sometimes by hand—it just depends—but mainly on the computer, because I have a Google Doc in which I put everything. I copy the reference, and then I start taking notes. Sometimes I actually copy in quotes, the things that I think, "Oh, this phrase is such a key aspect of what I'm trying to say that I'm going to try to quote this person."

There are many different styles of note-taking, varying from handwritten to digital. One scholar stated that writing "longhand" helps with "writer's block," and some valued the physical book for easy handling when taking notes. Others noted that the digital is "getting increasingly easy," and many reported annotating digital files such as PDFs. Copying and pasting from digital sources is expedient and later easily searchable. The value of print and digital reading and note-taking has been described in other recent studies (Clark and Hill 36).

Several tools for note-taking, annotation, and bibliography creation are popular. Most researchers reported the popularity of Google Docs for note-taking and annotation work. Many understand it as a simple technology that is nevertheless easy to use for writing as well as collaborative research. Others reported satisfaction with Microsoft Word, while admitting that organization is challenging. Several researchers described RefWorks as a "pivotal, keep everything together" tool for tracking references and constructing bibliographies. Mendeley was also noted as a useful tool for highlighting and writing on digital sources. Some participants showed awareness of organizing tools such as EverNote and OneNote, though few reported using these tools. Other research tools include not only "nontech" notepaper but also methods such as cell phone pictures, scanning equipment, and high-quality camera systems for photography of objects. One researcher described the difficulty of organizing photographs, but this researcher found a solution with a research assistant who "was very good at doing spreadsheets."

Organization and information management are challenging, and language and literature researchers at regional comprehensive institutions discussed many different solutions. One technique is to create a digital research folder to collect notes on research articles or books. According to one who uses Google Docs, "I have everything organized by the literary author; … each of them has a folder, and then within

that folder I have all the academic authors that have been writing about them. … Then some others are very focused on topics; so, for instance, there are people who want to talk about the gothic aspects of [an author], so then I have one [folder titled] Gothic." Another shared that a continuous process of writing and rewriting, finding new sources of interest and developing new ideas, presented organizational challenges, noting that "it's just a very circular and concentric type of process" but that researchers and writers "continuously learn how to make it better."

Providing comprehensive tools and training to use them are key to supporting these researchers. Many described learning the research and note-taking process "by osmosis, through trial and error" as graduate students and continuing through their careers to seek advice in methodology books, from library faculty members, and online. These researchers could be supported with comprehensive digital tool kits providing some of the benefits of Google Docs and Refworks to organize notes, work efficiently with transcription and annotation, provide accurate citation, and develop a project from beginning to end.

Research Workflow – Conclusion

The scholars at regional comprehensive institutions noted many aspects of research workflow common to researchers elsewhere, but they need support through access to resources and tools. Many noted the need for resources such as attendance and training at conferences and workshops and access to peer-support systems. Many have found that tactics for adapting their practices of handwritten note-taking of physical objects of research benefit from digital technology, but there does not seem to be a mass uptake of digital tools for performing research in the humanities among the scholars interviewed at regional comprehensive institutions. The provision of tool kits to support the research workflow process would greatly benefit humanities researchers not only at regional comprehensive institutions but elsewhere and in a variety of settings.

Scholarly Community

Humanities research is lonely work in many respects, often demanding hours of solitary reading and writing. But many participants were quick to stress the importance of scholarly communities, at their institution and at large, in their research process. They were equally quick to note when the appropriate community was too small or did not exist. Research is classically likened to conversation; research occurs not in the minds of individual researchers but *between* them. However, researchers may often struggle to find the communities they need, fail to take advantage of the resources communities have to offer, or find that their communities are not reaching their full potential. Participants working in niche subfields often reported feeling especially professionally isolated. Implicitly and explicitly, participants acknowledged the powerful role community could but often did not play in their lives as researchers. The conference remains a classic form of scholarly community, and opportunity abounds to take further advantage of its ability to engender community ties. Participants also acknowledged the increasingly prominent formation of digital communities on social media and other online networks, although some expressed reluctance to get involved.

In reflecting on the isolating nature of research in language and literature, one associate professor suggested that universities or scholarly societies could provide support structures for faculty members facing challenges in their scholarly work. Though the work might be "very isolated and very lonely and very individualistic and done on your own," he imagined "if you have a peer to peer connection system, either in the institution or outside … communication might help you to find newer ways of navigating this issue." He saw potential for more formal support for faculty members from his institution. This sentiment was echoed by another participant:

> Doing this work is a lonely experience, and I wish there were institutional support or institutional awareness regarding how researchers go through a lot of psychological ups and downs when they are involved in their work. … There [could] be solid institutional support systems like counselors who will talk to you if you are really experiencing yourself in disarray. Your tenure is coming up, you don't have the required book or five articles that you need. For some reason, your final article is getting rejected over and over again. Is there some sort of support system that can help you to not only navigate the frustration and the psychological impact of this but make sure that you are able to get this particular article published, make sure that whatever is not working can be fleshed out and worked through?

This isolation may be exacerbated by a researcher's occupation of a unique niche within the school or department. One participant, for example, was the only historian in the department of world languages and cultures; another was the only film studies scholar in the English department, and yet another was the only rhetorician among a department focused otherwise on literature and literary studies. Sometimes participants instead occupied a niche in a broader sense, in that they were among the very few people involved in scholarship on a particular area. Being in a niche, in both regards, is often accompanied by a sense of isolation.

Given that departments often hire with an eye to covering a range of subjects and fields, it is not a great surprise that many researchers occupy a unique position within their department. Still, researchers' sense of being alone in their research contributed to feelings of alienation, one that they often reported made their work more difficult. One associate professor, the only in his department who uses quantitative methods in his research, reflected on the effect of his colleagues' lack of understanding and interest in his scholarship: "It makes my work more difficult. ... It's profoundly alienating and isolating." As a result, he looks outward for scholarly community instead of within his own department: "Most of my colleagues are not here in my department; they're all over the country and some places of the world."

In this regard, it is clear that there is opportunity for initiatives that help foster departmental community across research niches. Some interviewees mentioned campus or departmental initiatives to bring faculty members into conversation or collaboration. One assistant professor reported that in addition to informal information sharing across the department and school of humanities, the school hosted a faculty research day, where faculty members learned about each other's work. An assistant professor who works on Mexican and Latin American literature reported that, with support from the institution's

center for excellence in teaching and learning, the department created a "colloquium for languages and cultures so we at least tell each other what we are doing." That department also runs a course that is cotaught by faculty members who look at one theme "through the lens of the German-speaking world, the francophone world, the Hispanic world, and the Scandinavian countries." Researchers' immediate community, in their department and on campus, often plays a vital role in the acquisition of research skills as well. A repeated refrain was "osmosis," in the sense of learning from people around you. The community element in acquiring research skills is significant both at the graduate and faculty levels. One participant, an associate professor, found himself suddenly dealing with a significant amount of quantitative data and the need to perform statistical analysis beyond his skill level. His solution was to hire a PhD student in mathematics to privately tutor him, fostering *inter*departmental community.

That said, participants—especially, again, those in niche subfields—often justifiably found their departmental or campus communities insufficient. This may be particularly exacerbated by our participants' presence on the faculty of regional comprehensive institutions, which are often less research-oriented. Outside their universities, faculty members mentioned conferences as an important site of community. They spoke about conferences as a way not only to keep in touch with colleagues in their fields but also to circulate their scholarship; many faculty members indicated that attending conference presentations and visiting publishers' booths at the exhibit hall were important ways to circulate their scholarly work or to stay apprised of the work in their fields. The same faculty member who hired the mathematics tutor also mentioned conference-based professionalization workshops available specifically for graduate students or mid-career faculty members who were transitioning to more empirical methodologies (i.e., from qualitative literature methodologies to quantitative rhetoric methodologies), making conferences a site of community-based skills teaching as well. A couple of faculty members interviewed mentioned how their subfield took advantage of a larger meeting, like the Conference on College Composition and Communication or the MLA Annual Convention, to meet. A professor involved with a small scholarly society organized around a single author regularly meets at the MLA convention, holding a business meeting and dinner, and that anchor seemed to define her experience of the convention. Larger meetings were also seen as a way to communicate about work happening in a subfield to a broader community. Indeed, being in a niche subfield is sometimes the very thing that provides the researcher with necessary support, albeit outside one's institution. One researcher describes the strong community bonds formed within her "little community," whose members routinely share and give feedback on research, papers, and presentations. Another researcher states that in his niche, there is "a special interest group that meets every year. … There's probably about twenty of us or something." This participant expressed the need for greater support beyond a single group meeting, but the creation of his special interest group exemplifies how scholars can come together to provide for each other.

However, travel for conferences is expensive and often not covered by one's department, especially as humanities departments, and their researchers, struggle to secure funding. Participants often complained that they ended up spending their own money while doing research, especially on travel costs. One participant stated he spent ten percent of his salary on research needs, and several

participants reported confronting institutional bias toward the sciences that made funding a challenge. One described the situation at her institution:

> We have at our institution right now our professional development committee. That's the committee that reviews proposals to attend conferences. … It just so happens that a majority of the members right now are in the sciences. … I prefaced [my] proposal by explaining to them what we do as language educators. ... I've never done that before on a proposal, but I did that because it was clear to me that they had no idea what our discipline was about.

Even putting aside the financial and physical challenges of travel, conferences are infrequent. Can always-on social media replace more traditional forms of community making in scholarship? As established above, in "Research Practices," social media plays an increasingly large role in the processes of many researchers, especially in seeking recommendations for materials and sources through what is likened to a "hive mind." While many researchers report successfully receiving help in this way, what's less clear is if these sorts of interactions alleviate the feeling of professional isolation; after all, the kind of support researchers need, especially when their professional lives are at their most challenging, is likely not from the pseudo-anonymous "hive mind" but from direct, personal connection and support. This is to say nothing of the many participants who expressed their reluctance to engage with, or profound skepticism toward, social media as a whole. Although social media—both commercial social media sites and smaller social networks aimed explicitly at academics—can likely be a great boon to researchers, the need remains for community at the departmental and institutional levels. After all, participants view their need for community not only in terms of resources, workflow, or output but also in terms of mental health.

Community is not an ancillary aspect of researchers' work; it is a central tenet of the research process. Networks enable faculty members to keep their finger on the pulse of current research and to find necessary materials and learn new skills. Scholarly networks also serves as a vital counterweight to the often lonely work of research. Communities provide necessary mentorship and support. But community is not automatic, and participants often felt that they were not connected to the appropriate communities, if they existed, or felt that their communities were lacking in some way. The conference continues to be a common site of community for scholars, and social media often served community-making functions as well; both are not without drawbacks, and the need for local community—within one's department, at one's institution, and across one's field of research—remains. There is a great deal of potential for developing more formal ways of fostering community and offering researchers mentorship and support.

Conclusion

By interviewing a sample of faculty members at various stages of their careers in disciplines of language and literature, cultural studies, and writing studies at regional comprehensive institutions across the United States and its territories, the MLA team identified several areas for researcher support and

development, including public humanities scholarship, research practices, research workflow, and scholarly community.

Repeatedly, interviewees articulated a desire to engage in more public-facing work that was often stymied by institutional pressures to publish in traditional scholarly formats or a lack of familiarity with how to undertake such work. Scholarly societies could provide support for members to engage in public-facing work, perhaps partnering with state humanities councils to provide training opportunities. Infrastructure shared across institutions, such as *Humanities Commons*, could be specifically promoted as a space where members can publish work and make scholarship openly available. In addition, there is an opportunity to develop disciplinary guidelines for evaluating digital and public scholarship that could be incorporated into processes for tenure and promotion.

Researchers at regional comprehensive institutions face added challenges due to systemic underfunding of their home libraries and the subsequent reliance on finding and accessing research material through other institutions, online bookstores, or other means. The time and effort needed to gather scattered material, along with a lack of training in the use of electronic resources, creates a situation in which sources that are easier to find and access are most likely being used in place of more relevant or higher-quality sources.

Although scholars at regional comprehensive institutions note many aspects of research workflow common to researchers elsewhere, from early stages of idea formation and topic development through the academic writing process, these scholars need support through access to resources and tools. Many note the need for resources such as attendance and training at conferences and workshops and access to peer-support systems. Many have found tactics for adapting their practices of note-taking to benefit from digital technology, but humanities researchers—at regional comprehensive institutions and elsewhere—would benefit even further from having access to digital tool kits to support the research workflow process.

Researchers at regional comprehensive institutions may be susceptible to feelings of loneliness and isolation; many of those we interviewed reported occupying particular research niches in which they had no peers at their institutions. Regardless, researchers reported a need for strengthened communities at their institutions, online, and both across and within research fields.

These findings may prove fruitful for growth and development of research in regional comprehensive institutions and more broadly, to support disciplines of language and literature, cultural and writing studies, and the humanities as a whole.

Works Cited

Belcher, Wendy Laura. *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks: A Guide to Academic Publishing Success*. 2nd ed., U of Chicago P, 2019.

Bond, Sarah E., and Kevin Gannon. "Public Writing and the Junior Scholar." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 15 Oct. 2019, www.chronicle.com/article/Public-Writingthe-Junior/247342.

Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, 2017, carnegieclassifications.iu.edu.

Clark, David, and Mandy Hill. Foreword. *Researchers' Perspectives on the Purpose and Value of the Monograph: Survey Results 2019*, Cambridge UP / Oxford UP, Oct. 2019, global.oup.com/academic/pdf/perspectives-on-the-value-and-purpose-of-the-monograph.

Corbin, Juliet, and Anselm Strauss. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. 4th ed., Sage, 2015.

Fryar, Alisa Hicklin. "The Comprehensive University: How It Came to Be and What It Is Now." *The University Next Door: What Is a Comprehensive University, Who Does It Educate, and Can It Survive?* Edited by Mark Schneider and K. C. Deane, Teachers College P, 2015, pp. 19–42.

Guest, Greg, et al. "How Many Interviews Are Enough? An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability." *Field Methods*, vol. 18, no. 1, Feb. 2006, pp. 59–82, doi: 10.1177/1525822X05279903.

Hayot, Eric. *The Elements of Academic Style: Writing for the Humanities*. Columbia UP, 2014.

Kramer, Bianca, and Jeroen Bosman. *Innovations in Scholarly Communication: Changing Research Workflows*. Universiteit Utrecht, Apr. 2015, 101innovations.wordpress.com/.

Labode, Modupe. "Does It Count? Promotion, Tenure, and Evaluation of Public History Scholarship." *National Council on Public History*, 6 Dec. 2017, ncph.org/history-at-work/does-it-count/.

Nobel, Safiya. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York UP, 2018.

O'Neil, Cathy. *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy.* Crown, 2016.

"Overview." *Algorithmic Justice League*. MIT School of Architecture and Planning, www.media.mit.edu/projects/algorithmic-justice-league/overview/. Accessed 17 Dec. 2019.

Pooley, Jefferson. "Scholarly Communications Shouldn't Just Be Open, But Non-profit Too." *London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) Impact Blog*, 15 Aug. 2017, blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2017/08/15/scholarly-communications-shouldnt-just-be-open-but-non-profit-too/.

Rose, Kathleen, et al. "Faculty Public Engagement Attitudes and Practices at Land-Grant Universities in the United States." University of Wisconsin, Madison, Department of Life Sciences Communication, Oct. 2019.

Rutner, Jennifer, and Roger C. Schonfeld. "Supporting the Changing Research Practices of Historians." *Ithaka S+R*, 7 Dec. 2012, doi.org/10.18665/sr.22532.

Schneider, Mark, and K. C. Deane. Introduction. *The University Next Door: What Is a Comprehensive University, Who Does It Educate, and Can It Survive?* Edited by Schneider and Deane, Teachers College P, 2015, pp. 1–18.

Appendix 1: Participating Institutions in the Ithaka Language and Literature Project

Capstone Report

Cooper, Danielle, et al. "Supporting Research in Languages and Literature." Ithaka S+R, 9 Sept. 2020, https://sr.ithaka.org/publications/supporting-research-in-languages-and-literature.

Individual Institution Reports

1. Brown University, repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:957313/

2. Columbia University, doi.org/10.7916/d8-bkjj-rn70

3. Georgetown University, hdl.handle.net/10822/1057012

4. Haverford College, scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/handle/10066/21922

5. Indiana University, Bloomington, hdl.handle.net/2022/24639

6. Johns Hopkins University, jscholarship.library.jhu.edu/bitstream/handle/1774.2/62107/Ithaka%20MLS%20Report%202019.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

7. Kansas State University (report not available)

8. Modern Language Association

9. New York University, archive.nyu.edu/handle/2451/60898

10. Rutgers University, dx.doi.org/doi:10.7282/t3-2ydq-5h89

11. Swarthmore College, doi.org/10.24968/2476-2458.libr.82

12. University of Illinois, Chicago, hdl.handle.net/10027/23911

13. University of Illinois, Urbana, hdl.handle.net/2142/105501

14. University of Pennsylvania, repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1129&context=library_papers

15. University of Utah, collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6c871s2

Appendix 2: Informed Consent Form

Project: Modern Language Association and Ithaka S+R Language and Literature Faculty Research Project

Reason for the project: This project seeks to examine the research practices of faculty in literature in all languages, folklore, film, performance studies, and writing studies. The project goal is to articulate resources and services that faculty at various institutions need to be successful in their work.

What you will be asked to do: Your participation in the project involves a sixty-minute audio-recorded interview about your research practices, conducted with a representative of the Modern Language Association (MLA). Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the interview at any time and for any reason.

Benefits and risks: No known risks are associated with participation in this project. You may experience benefit in the form of increased insight and awareness into your research practices and support needs.

Confidentiality: Recorded interviews will be stored as digital audio files by the MLA and will be transcribed for the purposes of this project. Interviewees may elect whether or not to allow their names to be retained and possibly used by the MLA with the audio-recorded interview. Interviewees may also elect whether or not to allow the audio-recorded interview to be retained in the MLA archives. If the interviewee prefers the interview not to be stored in the MLA archives, the audio files will be destroyed following transcription, and pseudonyms will be applied to the transcripts and the metadata associated with the transcripts. Regardless of whether the interviewee chooses anonymity or identification, storage or non-storage in the MLA archives, the MLA will write and may publish a report of its findings and will maintain confidentiality or may identify interviewees according to the consent forms. The MLA will apply pseudonyms to the interview transcripts and the metadata associated with the transcripts for submission to Ithaka S+R for a larger report including interviews conducted by other institutions. This larger public report of the research findings will invoke all participants by pseudonym and will not provide demographic or contextual information that could be used to re-identify the participants.

How your confidentiality will be maintained: Participants will sign informed consent forms, but no key will link participants to their pseudonyms or the collected data. Informed consent forms will be stored as paper copies in a locked file cabinet only accessible to the investigator(s) and as digital files by the investigator(s) in a password-protected folder. Informed consent forms of interviewees who elect anonymity and/or non-storage of interviews in the MLA archives will be destroyed seven years after completion of the research project. Informed consent forms of interviewees who elect to retain identification and/or storage of interviews in the MLA archives will be filed indefinitely.

I, _____, understand and consent to participate in the study as described above, including:

____ being interviewed and being audio-recorded during the interview

____ retaining and allowing possible use of my name with the interview **(not required to participate)**

____ retaining the audio-recorded interview in the MLA archives and restricting access to project investigators and related personnel **(not required to participate)**

____ retaining the audio-recorded interview in the MLA archives and permitting public access to the recording **(not required to participate)**

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Interviewer Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 3: Semistructured Interview Questions

Research Focus and Methods

Describe the research project(s) you are currently working on.

- Tell me a bit more about how the research for the project has unfolded step-by-step [choose one project if multiple were listed above]. [e.g., developing the topic, identifying and working with the information needed for the research, plans for sharing the results]

- How does this project and process of researching relate to how you've done work in the past?

- How does this project relate to the work typically done in your department(s) and field(s) you are affiliated with?

Working with Archives and Other Special Collections

Do you typically rely on material collected in archives or other special collections? [e.g., rare books, unpublished documents, museum artifacts] If so,

- How do you find this information? How did you learn how to do this? Does anyone ever help you?

- Where do you access this information? [e.g., on-site, digitally]

- How and when do you work with this information? [e.g., Do you use any specific approaches or tools?]

- Have you encountered any challenges in the process of finding, accessing or working with this kind of information? If so, describe.

- To what extent do you understand and/or think it is important to understand how the tools that help you find and access this information work? [e.g., finding aides, online museum catalogs, "do you understand how database *x* decides which content surfaces first in your searches," and, "do you care to understand?"]

- Are there any resources, services or other supports that would help you more effectively work with this kind of information?

Working with Secondary Content

What kinds of secondary source content to do you typically rely on do your research? [e.g., scholarly articles or monographs]

- How do you find this information? How did you learn to do this? Does anyone ever help you?

- Where do you access this information? [e.g., on-site, digitally]

- How and when do you work with this information? [e.g., Do you use any specific approaches or tools?]

- Have you encountered any challenges in the process of finding, accessing or working with secondary sources? If so, describe.

- To what extent do you understand and/or think it is important to understand how the tools that help you find and access this information work? [e.g., algorithmic bias, processes for creating and applying keywords, "do you understand how Google Scholar decides which articles surface first in your searches," and, "do you care to understand?"]

- Are there any resources, services or other supports that would help you more effectively locate or work with secondary sources?

Scholarly Communications and Evaluating Impact

How are your scholarly outputs [e.g., books, peer-reviewed journal articles] evaluated by your institution and to what ends? [e.g., tenure and promotion process, frequency of evaluations]

- Have you observed any trends and/or changes over time in how scholarly outputs are being evaluated? [e.g., shift in emphasis between books vs. articles, shift in emphasis in the extent to which the prestige or impact factor of a publication is considered]

- Beyond tenure and promotion, does your institution evaluate your scholarly outputs toward any other ends? [e.g., benchmarking your/your department's performance using analytics software] If so, how, and to what ends?

- What have been your experiences being evaluated in this way?

- Have you observed these kinds of processes having a larger effect on your department and/or institutional culture?

To what extent do you engage with or have interest in any mechanisms for sharing your work beyond traditional publishing in peer reviewed journals or monographs? To what ends? [e.g., posting in preprint archives to share with peers, creating digital maps or timelines for students, creating outputs for wider audiences]

Do you engage with any forms of social networking, including academic social networking, as a mechanism for sharing and/or engaging with other scholars? If no, why not? If so,

- Describe the platform(s) you currently use and how.

- What do you like best about the platform(s) you currently use, and what do you like least?

- Are there any other ways the platform(s) could be improved to best meet your needs?

Beyond the information you have already shared about your scholarly communications activities and needs, is there anything else you think would be helpful for me to know about your experiences?

Research Training and Wrapping Up

Looking back at your experiences as a researcher, are there any forms of training that were particularly useful? Conversely, are there any forms of training you wish you had gotten and/or would still like to get? Why?

Considering evolving trends in how research is conducted and evaluated, is there any form of training that would be most beneficial to graduate students and/or scholars more widely?

Is there anything else from your experiences and perspectives as a researcher or on the topic of research more broadly that you think would be helpful to share with me that has not yet been discussed in this conversation?