

Navigating Scholarship Together:

Understanding a Librarian Scholarship Community Through the Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies

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Background

The Librarian Scholarly and Creative Activity Interest Group (LSCA IG), organized through the Michigan Academic Library Association, was founded in the late spring of 2023 to address some of the unique challenges faced by librarians undertaking writing and scholarship projects. The group grew out of informal conversations about how many librarians struggle to find time to write not just because they are busy but because library culture's focus on service to others can make it difficult to justify (even to ourselves) taking time for personal scholarly projects. Additionally, scholarship is often a job requirement for faculty librarians, yet learning to engage in scholarship is not typically emphasized in library science graduate programs.

The LSCA IG has explored these and other challenges with monthly meetings in a variety of formats over the last year, including guest speakers, article discussions, scholarship show and tells, brainstorming sessions, and virtual writing retreats.

Membership

- **38 members** from **17 institutions**.
- Members work at **public** and **private** institutions, as well as **community colleges**.
- Members include **novice** and **experienced scholars**.

Threshold Concepts

Meyer and Land describe threshold concepts as “akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way to think about something” (2003). Threshold concepts (TC) are:

- **Transformative**- They change the way learners think and behave.
- **Irreversible**- They can not be unlearned (at least not without some effort)
- **Integrative**- Expose previously hidden connections.
- **Troublesome**- They may contradict previously held understandings.
- **Bounded**- Often the boundaries coincide with the limits of a discipline.

Coming to understand a threshold concept is often not linear. Instead, learners may meander through “liminal” understanding (Meyer & Land, 2005).

Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies

Alder-Kassner and Wardle introduce the threshold concepts of writing studies in their book *Naming What we Know* (2015). Just as librarians may use the six threshold concepts found in the *ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* to evaluate and better understand the instruction and information literacy work we do, the threshold concepts for writing studies can help us better understand how writing and scholarship works, and what we can do to set ourselves up for success as writers.

Specifically, placing the work of the LSCA IG in the context of the Threshold Concepts of Writing shed light on why librarians sometimes face unique challenges in engaging in writing and scholarship, and helps dispel myths about writing.

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Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies & LSCA IG Activities



Writing Speaks to Situations Through Recognizable Forms

Writing acts as the “evidence” of unseen discursive work. A novice may have a hard time deciphering the how works in a particular genre (such as scholarly articles) are created (Hart-Davidson, 2015) .

The LSCA IG :

- Members discuss how a writing project may fit or not fit within specific genre of scholarship or within a particular publication venue.
- Members share with each other the work of writing that is invisible in the final product.



All Writers Have More to Learn

As writers move through their career, they encounter different genres of writing, speak to different audiences, and write in different contexts. Failure is often a key part of the learning process.

The LSCA IG:

- Discussed different types of scholarship and writing librarians frequently engage in.
- Discussed what happens when a writing project doesn't succeed and what to do next.

References

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Writing is a Social and Rhetorical Activity

Writers are continuously engaging with other people, both an imagined audience and other writers, leveraging shared contexts to create and clarify meaning.

The LSCA IG:

- Allows writers to engage directly with potential audience members (other librarians at the meeting) during the writing process.
- Show and tell activities let writers get feedback on projects in progress.



Writing Enacts and Creates Identities and Ideologies

Writing is inherently ideological because language and discourse exist in cultural contexts (Scott, 2015). Additionally, writing is “a key form of socialization as we learn to become members of academic disciplines” and other communities (Roozen, 2015).

The LSCA IG:

- Provides novice scholars a space to begin to identify as librarian-writers.



Writing is (Also Always) A Cognitive Activity

Writing is not simply a mechanical process, but the act of writing itself helps create new ideas. The affective aspects of writing can impact the cognitive aspects of writing .

The LSCA IG :

- Participants in writing retreats report discovering or uncovering new aspects of their topic during writing retreats.
- Hosts discussions and activities that invite participants to engage in metacognition around their writing.