Express Yourself!

Developing a research agenda and publishing strategy

Kim Clarke

Bennett Jones Law Library, University of Calgary

CALL Conference, May 2014

Why Write?

- Job requirement
- Professional development
- Foundation for career/job change
- Challenge yourself
- If not you, who?
- Mentor/educate juniors
- Filling a gap

- Increase your/firm's reputation
- Have something to say (original?)
- Intellectual curiosity
- Let off steam
- Raise awareness
- Persuade others to your position
- You enjoy it!

Research Agenda

- Short- and long-term goals
- Keep track of ideas; reduces headscratching
- Allows 360 degree view of endeavours
- Planning increases your confidence
- Focus activities for more impact
- Useful for secondary purposes:
  - Describing breadth and growth in scholarly activities in promotion and tenure
  - Support grant applications
  - Developing "elevator speech"

Serendipity Allowed in Plan

- Always room for unexpected writing opportunities
- May arise due to your developing reputation
    - Invited to write article or present
    - Selected as book contributor
- But could also be a whim
    - Based on something you did/read/thought about

Components of Plan

- Research themes
- Timelines
- Audiences
- Types of writing activities
- Publishing strategy – develop in conjunction with research plan

Research Themes

- What general themes or topics are your interested in writing about?
  - Start as broad as possible
  - What sub-themes/issues/theses do you want to explore?
- Keep track of ideas, put in order that you want to approach them
- Could also identify possible collaborators (by position if not by name)

Tips on choosing themes

- Make sure you are truly interested in the themes and sub-themes as you will be working on them for quite awhile
  - Work between themes to not get bored
- Brainstorm with yourself – write down all your ideas and then look for thematic connections
- Consider the different aspects of your job for ideas to identify themes

Timelines

- Set timelines and (try to) stick to them!
- Develop research plan over multiple periods
    - Current year, evaluation period, and multi-year
    - Project management software useful for visual representation
- Allows you to see gaps where another project could fit or overloaded spots in the timeline
- Build submission and editing processes into your timeline

Audiences

- Who would be interested in the theme?
- Who would be interested in this specific topic/issue?
- Often, multiple audiences for same issue
  - Different spins/presentation of information
  - Different type of documents
- Don't limit your possible audiences

Possible audiences

- Students (library, law or paralegal)
- Lawyers/faculty
- Law firm/school administrators
- Librarians (law or non-law)
- Clients
- Alumni/donors

Writing Activities

- Type of written document depends on its purpose, message and audience
  - Formal or informal
  - Informational or scholarly
  - Electronic or print
- Your confidence level and experience also dictate the type of document you feel comfortable in writing

Getting Started Writing

- Writing is a learned skill
- Start with small and personal projects
  - Book reviews, newsletter articles, blog postings
  - "How I did it" type articles
- "Unpublished" documents, such as research guides or committee reports
- Gain experience expressing your ideas through presentations or lectures

Gaining Confidence

- Tackle a longer writing assignment, requiring more research and analysis
  - Feature article, annotated bibliography, book chapter
- If still intimidated:
  - Think about collaborating on the project
  - Don't aim for scholarly publication
    - Perhaps professional magazine
  - Look for a "friendly" publication

Soaring High

- Scholarly publications
  - Law reviews, law library journals, peer-reviewed librarian publications
- Assume role of editor or lead author of a book
- Undertake original research projects

Publishing Strategy

- Many different types of publications available to law librarians
  - Law – law reviews, bar publications, magazines, student publications
  - Librarian – general publications, law librarian focused
  - Community focused publications
- Identify the general category of publication that would be best for the piece, then the specific publications you want to submit it to based on subject
- Simultaneous submissions?

General considerations:

- Employer's expectations
    - Variety of publications and audiences generally appreciated
    - How is electronic publishing viewed?
    - Is peer-review important to your career?
- How scholarly or informational is your writing style? Want to change?
- Who do you want to develop a reputation with? Share your message with?

Considerations for each piece:

- Who is the intended audience?
- Type of document (scholarly, casual, current awareness)
  - If scholarly, want peer-review?
- Publishing time
- Preferred format (electronic or analogue)
- Which publications include similar pieces?
- General focus versus topical publications

"Done is Better than Perfect"

- Get it written and send it in!
- Do not be discouraged if article is initially rejected or accepted with amendments
  - Consider comments and revise the piece
- Editing process is for your benefit
  - Strengthens the individual piece
  - Improve your future writing