



# Reflections on ISTL

## How Did I Get Here? Life on an Editorial Board

**Edward Eckel**

Engineering and Applied Sciences Librarian

Western Michigan University Libraries

[edward.eckel@wmich.edu](mailto:edward.eckel@wmich.edu)

### Abstract

A current ISTL editorial board member looks back at the process by which he ended up on the ISTL board, and looks ahead to a more equitable future.

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### Introduction

As *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship* (ISTL) hits its 25th anniversary as a web-based publication, I wanted to reflect on my time on the ISTL editorial board (I joined in 2010) and the changes the journal has gone through during that short time.

I initially became aware of ISTL in my first professional position as a librarian at Delaware County Community College in Media, PA from 2001-2005. While responsible for general information literacy instruction in all subject areas, I had main liaison responsibilities for the sciences (physics, chemistry, biology). I used *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship* as well as our rival publication *Science and Technology Libraries* to keep up with trends in my field, and get ideas for my own work. I really appreciated the fact that ISTL was – and continues to be – open-access, because the subscriptions we could afford at our community college were minimal, and mainly focused on EBSCO- and ProQuest-aggregated collections. At that time, my library did not even have a proxy-server for accessing subscribed resources such as electronic journals and databases, but instead gave students bookmarks printed with the login passwords for each database.

When I began my position as an engineering librarian at Western Michigan University Libraries in 2006, I began to eye ISTL as a venue for a future publication. After writing an early article about a keyword generating website called KwMap, and a second article focused on instruction at the reference desk, I completed an article on a citation analysis of engineering dissertations and theses at my institution, which I submitted in 2008 for consideration as a refereed article in ISTL. I distinctly remember the let-down I felt when editor Buffy Choinski made a comment on my manuscript that

A long laundry list of previous studies is not a literature review. It is a list. Cut out all references to anything that does not directly lead to your study. Anything you include in the Lit Review section needs to be relevant to your own study. ([Choinski, 2008](#))

I made the changes and my article was published in the Winter 2009 issue ([Eckel, 2009](#)). I have kept Buffy's advice in my head for every single literature review I have done since that time.

## Answering the Call

I began my involvement in ISTL as a reviewer by reviewing a webliography (Manuscript 0113) in March 2010 for editor Michael Fosmire. This was also the first professional review of my career. Later the same month, I responded to a call for a new editor for the "Tips from the Experts" column sent out by Editor Andrea Duda on the STS listserv on March 30, 2010 ([Duda, 2010](#)). It required a "cover letter, vita, and publications bibliography" and went on to state "Research and writing samples are welcomed." At this point, I had three publications to my name, so I felt like I had at least some experience. My application letter, dated April 27, 2010, stated my purpose for applying as

Your journal is one of the most important sources of information for my work as a science/engineering librarian. The articles cover an impressive range of topics in my professional life, and are a constant source of great ideas...Becoming a member of the editorial board would enable me to deepen my commitment to supporting your fine open access journal and provide me with very valuable experience in scholarly publishing. ([Eckel, 2010](#))

I had the opportunity to interview with Andrea at the 2010 ALA conference in Washington, DC. We agreed to meet in one of the conference hotels after the mid-day ALA committee meetings. She was cordial and invited me to talk about the work I did as an engineering librarian and what writing and research projects I had done. She may have asked me about my vision for the journal, which at that point was pretty minimal. I left the interview nervous but hopeful. Near the end of the conference, I ran into Norma Kobzina, editor of the Book Reviews column, outside the conference venue while we waited for a bus to our hotel. She said "I know I'm not supposed to tell you this yet, but...you're in." I got the official notification from Andrea via email on June 29, 2010. I would be replacing outgoing "Tips from the Experts" column editor Deborah Huerta. I edited the Tips column from 2010 until just this past January 2021.

## Now What?!

Early on in my time on the editorial board, Andrea asked me to brainstorm ways to solicit manuscripts. She advised me to check out posters and presentations at ALA, ACRL, ASEE, and any other conferences I attended. I got in the habit of drafting emails to presenters asking them to consider articles for the Tips column. I also wrote a set of guidelines for the Tips column, defining the purpose of the column. Over time, the column attracted a wide range of articles running the gamut from in-depth descriptions of how to search the SciFinder Scholar database for organic and inorganic compounds, finding translations of scientific works in other languages, and supporting students in digital storytelling, to how to make eBooks more findable for users by creating wooden "shelf dummies" in the stacks to act as eBook proxies. I have been involved in editing 26 manuscripts for the Tips column over the past 11 years. Of those 26 manuscripts, 10 have dealt with liaison outreach, three involved collections, and three were on teaching or instructional methods. The others dealt with search skills, student services, citation metrics and creating a conference presentation poster.

The editorial experience has been very smooth in most cases. All I had to worry about during most of my time on the ISTL Board was getting an author's manuscript into a publishable, production-ready form, then I would send the manuscript to Andrea, who would mark-up the HTML galley for publication. Even while serving as Tips editor, I still occasionally served as a reviewer for our refereed articles column. Buffy Choinski would send an email out to everyone on the board, saying "Hey, I need one more reviewer for this article. Can one of you take it?" and one of us would volunteer. It was a way for me to continue to develop my skills at reviewing and editing. So, on top of working on my Tips column, I reviewed about 20 other article manuscripts over the same time period.

## A New Home for ISTL

Sometime in 2018, the ISTL editorial board decided it wanted the benefits of a formal journal publishing system, so we began to look at other options for hosting the journal. From late 2018 through the middle of 2019, our peer-reviewed articles editor Michael Fosmire coordinated the search, evaluation and selection of the final system. Potential hosts we considered included the Texas Digital Library (which uses the Open Journal Systems, or OJS), the California Digital Library (which used the Janeway OJPS), and the University of Alberta Libraries, which also uses OJS. We met for online conferences with the hosting institutions, gathering information on the specifications of the systems, galley editing features, layout and design options, and system scripting options (Python versus PHP). In June 2019, the editorial board decided to go with the OJS system at the University of Alberta Libraries. Part of what sold us on the University of Alberta OJS system was that Alberta could register our DOIs for us through CrossRef, and that they participated in the LOCKSS program for digital preservation ([Stanford University, n.d.](#)), not to mention their palpable enthusiasm for hosting our journal, which was a big plus.

The University of Alberta Libraries OJS librarians Sarah Severson (Digital Initiatives Project Librarian) and Emily Zheng (Publishing & Digitization Specialist) began training the board in the OJS system. It was a learning curve for all of us to go from just

handling manuscripts in Microsoft Word to suddenly dealing with HTML templates, CSS, and a whole journal publishing platform. We had to come up with a theme for the new ISTL journal page, make decisions about article templates, and add a PDF galley option to our previously HTML-only journal. Ian McCullough of the University of Akron Libraries (who was on our board at the time) created a nifty new banner for the website. The board worked like demons to get our current manuscripts marked up as HTML and PDF galleys for the next issue. (Kudos to Michael Fosmire for getting this workflow ironed out.) We had our [first issue](#) (Spring 2019) published in the new platform on August 18, 2019. However, that was only the first step. We then needed to face the daunting project of migrating all of our previous issues from the original ISTL site ([Issues in Science & Technology Librarianship Archives, n.d.](#)) to the new platform.

Emily Zheng coordinated this process. First, we had to populate a Google spreadsheet with all of the metadata for the articles (nearly 950!) in our previous issues at the old ISTL.org ([Issues in Science & Technology Librarianship Archives, n.d.](#)) site. Then Alberta ran a batch ingest of the HTML galleys and corresponding image files. Afterwards, the editorial team has been responsible for going through each of the files in the backfiles and making sure the files were complete, all figures and appendices were present, and publication dates were added. One big complication was discovered – none of the PDF appendices were migrated over for the past issues. This necessitated an extra step in the process: when files such as appendices are missing, we download them from the original ISTL site and upload them to the OJS platform. We then have to update the HTML galleys to make sure they link properly to the appendices. What I have found to be most rewarding in the process of checking the backfiles is that it has given me a much better grasp of the OJS system, which is complicated, and to be honest, not the most user-friendly system. We are still in the process of this migration. At the time of this writing, all ISTL issues from issue no.30 (Spring 2001) to our latest issue no.98 (Summer 2021) are in the OJS system.

## The Past Year

Due to losing several editors over the past few years, we added five new editors to the editorial board in December 2020. This was a wonderful step for ISTL, to get new perspectives, experience, and ideas. In particular, we now have an official production editor, Marina Zhang of the University of Iowa, to handle typesetting galleys. Another important event happened in Spring 2020 when we began to publish a special column on "Science librarianship and social justice" ([Science Librarianship and Social Justice, 2020](#)). I am inspired by the new ideas the board and our authors bring to our journal. Some upcoming changes include new article templates, and a move from the CSE Citation Style to the APA Citation Style, beginning with this very issue.

Due to an increase in work responsibilities, our current acting editor-in-chief Michael Fosmire asked me to take on the role of editor-in-chief temporarily in March 2021. I have since been asked to stay on as acting editor-in-chief, and to take on the role officially after this special issue in December 2021. I am now responsible for managing our publication workflow, assisting the editors with the Open Journal Systems platform, and supporting our production editor. I have learned much over the past ten

years, but probably more in the past two years than previously. Every week brings a new challenge or a new opportunity. I am constantly learning and taking notes.

## Looking Ahead to the Future

There are some actions that ISTL will need to take to further consolidate our status as a peer-reviewed journal of choice for STEM librarianship. We are currently not indexed in the Web of Science database. In addition, we recently realized that the Scopus database only indexes ISTL back to 2009, thereby omitting all our content from 1996 through 2008. As editor, I will need to follow up with both databases to see if and how we can meet their requirements for content indexing. This will be essential to help librarians find and cite our content.

A more important issue is the question of our engagement with issues of equity and diversity in librarianship. The "Science librarianship and social justice" column was a step in this direction, in terms of educating our readers (and ourselves) within STEM librarianship in how these issues are integral to our work as librarians. However, more needs to be done by ISTL and by our discipline to diversify publishing and the profession at large. The ALA Code of Ethics states that we foster the "aspirations of potential members of the profession" as well as: "advance racial and social justice in our libraries, communities, profession, and associations through awareness, advocacy, education, collaboration, services, and allocation of resources and spaces" ([ALA Committee on Professional Ethics, 2021](#)). As a journal sponsored by the Science and Technology Section of ACRL, the board will need to consider whether or not it operates in a just and equitable fashion.

For example, right after I finished and submitted the first draft of this article, I read a statement on the appropriation of the labor of people of color within librarianship by white people ([Brown et al., 2021](#)). I was particularly struck by the following sentences from that statement: "Step aside and step down. Not every job or professional opportunity is for you." ([Brown et al., 2021](#)). This led me to reflect on the process that led to me, a white, male, cisgender librarian, to become editor-in-chief of ISTL. Admittedly, the position of editor-in-chief of a scholarly journal is a position of power and influence. We did not open up a national search to find a librarian to fill this position. We filled the position from within the board based on experience. On the surface, this seems a reasonable approach. However, one can probe more deeply by asking what part did whiteness have in my getting on the board in the first place, or in the professional connections I made at conferences? What privilege did I have as a white male librarian and how did that privilege enable me to be in this position? As the title of this article asks, "How did I get here?"

I believe that this is something to consider in relation to my colleagues of color, both on the board, and within the profession of librarianship. I already have tenure at my institution, and will probably be promoted this year. This is not to brag, but is the reality to acknowledge. The position of editor-in-chief would be a wonderful one for a librarian who is working toward tenure and/or promotion. Hence, over the next year, the board should discuss equity in our succession planning, or how we recruit, support, and mentor diverse editors. The board was able to recruit several librarians of color this

past year. Now, we need to consider how we can guide and mentor our newest editors to eventually replace me as editor-in-chief of ISTL or to take on the editorship of another library journal. This is where we need to go as a journal, and as a profession.

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