Editorial
Mark Atlay, Director of Teaching and Learning

Writing – why bother?
Arif Jinha at the University of Ottawa has estimated that the number of journal articles that have ever been published is around 50 million, with over a million now being published each year (Jinha 2010). Just why is there this seemingly insatiable compunction for people to publish their work? With so much being published, in so many fields, who reads it – and if no one reads it, does it matter?

To start with there’s the aspect of publishing that keeps academics in their jobs – it’s one of the mechanisms by which we are judged, so publishing adds to job security. Both appointments and promotions hinge on it. I once attended a job interview for a research post in a major multi-national petrochemical company where one of the interview questions was ‘what is the primary purpose of this company?’, to which my answer was ‘to keep all its staff in employment’. I was not successful.

Publishing, and being seen to be published, is important for departments and institutions because it contributes to how they are perceived in formal and informal league tables. Formal mechanisms such as the REF contribute significantly to this, of course, but academics make judgments about other institutions based on less formal assessment of the work of their colleagues in other departments. Making judgments about academic output is fraught with difficulty. Quality or quantity? How do you compare one seminal paper with another that may be twice as long but of much less value? How do you compare an article with a book? A consultancy report with an exhibition?

Internally, disciplines may have their own metrics, but comparing across subject boundaries is problematic. Furthermore, in making value judgments about authors, few consider the context in which the work was undertaken. How do you compare the quality and quantity of output of someone with a teaching load of fifteen hours across a year with another who has the same teaching commitment each week?

At an individual level it is very satisfying to see something that you have nurtured and slaved over finally making its way into print. The peer review process is a mechanism by which your work becomes ‘validated’ in the eyes of colleagues across the sector, adding to one’s sense of identity and self-worth. Thus, publishing is part of an academic’s identity. Ernest Boyer (1990) identified four aspects to scholarship: discovery, integration, application, and teaching. Discovery is closely aligned with the traditional view of research, which is about creating new knowledge and understanding and is fundamental to what universities do. Integration is about making connections across disciplines. Interesting research often happens at the intersections of different discipline areas. Application is about using the research, taking it out of the laboratory and into production, influencing policy and professional practice. Finally, in the Boyer view, teaching is seen as a core element of scholarship. The scholarship of teaching is itself multi-dimensional. At one level, through publishing discipline-based research, we are effectively engaged in the activity of teaching others. But the scholarship of teaching is also about bringing to bear the same qualities of critical analysis and evaluation that we apply to our discipline-based scholarship to our work with students. Articles in the JPD illustrate this dimension in action.

One final thought on why publishing is important. Articles do not arrive in their final format fully fledged. They go through an internal and often lengthy process in which the author, or authors, consider, review, develop, challenge and refine what they want to say. Often this involves sounding out colleagues and sharing early drafts. Final articles then go to editors or peer-reviewers for further consideration and dialogue. Thus it
is in the process of writing for publication that ideas get honed and refined, and where deep and meaningful learning takes place. Writing is often seen as an individual process; in reality it’s co-operative, collaborative and collegiate.

If you’re not already engaged in writing for publishing then I would encourage you to do so. There are a range of mechanisms in place to help and support this endeavour, which is at the heart of academic practice. As you read the articles in this journal think not only about their content but consider their long journey from original outline to final refined product.

References


Information literacy and Web 2.0: developing a modern media curriculum using social bookmarking and social networking tools
Keith Daniels, Academic Liaison Librarian, Learning Resources
Elouise Huxor, Senior Lecturer, Media Art and Design

Introduction
The term ‘Web 2.0’ continues to prompt widespread discussion in terms of definition, impact upon society in general and relevance to library and information professionals in Higher Education. Web 2.0 has been described by Notess (2006:40) as ‘a second wave of Web techniques to create more interactive and easy-to-use Websites using new technologies (or using older technologies in a new way)’. There has been debate in recent years concerning the importance of the adoption of Web 2.0 tools by librarians within information literacy teaching programmes. Godwin (2008:8) sees them as providing a vital link to the ‘Google generation’, which uses search engines effortlessly in a self-directed manner, placing complete faith in what they find on the web. He argues that Web 2.0 tools ‘...give us a whole set of new ways to reach our users, and tools with which to teach them.’ Abram (2006) claims that librarians can guarantee the future of their profession by embracing and exploiting the potential of such technologies. Furthermore, Bradley (2006) argues that an understanding of the term Web 2.0 is unimportant, compared to an acknowledgement that librarians are in a position to do more than they could in the past and being open to it.

Chad (2007) meanwhile, states that unless academic librarians embrace the Google generation they will become increasingly marginalised.

A Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) survey of first year university student expectations of Information and Communications Technology (2008:4) provided an invaluable insight into current levels of usage of Web 2.0 tools. 93 per cent of those surveyed used social networking tools at least occasionally, 67 per cent used wikis, blogs or online networks in the same vein, whilst 42 per cent maintained their own blog or website. However, the results indicated that usage of these tools in conjunction with academic study is less widespread. Although 73 per cent used social networking tools for study purposes, this was often for online discussion without the participation of the tutor. Indeed, evidence from the survey indicates that ‘shy’ students who feel uncomfortable in formal classroom situations do not tend to use these tools when prompted by a tutor, regarding such