

Making Openness My Business

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For a long time I let the things I am not - namely, a researcher and an expert - stop me from having an impact. I wasn't quite sure that my words carried any weight, especially as I struggled with [how to classify myself](#) as I transitioned from graduate school. Though I work for a library, I am not a librarian (*by training, sure, though not by job title*). I am not even a data specialist (*not by training, though maybe through experience*). I don't consider myself to have any specific expertise, not really, but I am conversant and curious. All of this led to real uncertainty over how to direct my work and the uncomfortable feeling that I didn't fit anywhere.

I got a lucky break, though. Open Con 2014 introduced a world teeming with ideas and energy. It didn't matter that I was a twentysomething with pink hair and a brand new job I didn't know what to do with. For the first time, openness felt inevitable and powerful, not just one of my weird tangentially relevant side interests. I recognized that there were passionate people from very different disciplines and corners of the world who were ready to work together. Critically, I heard directly from researchers who had embraced openness, including [Erin McKiernan](#), [Jon Tennant](#), and [Ross Mounce](#).

Open Con forced me to break down artificial boundaries I'd internalized: the idea of librarians as "other", separate from researchers, seen as helpful but somehow lesser. It wasn't that I felt disrespected in my library role; it was just that I found myself waiting for cues that weren't likely to come. It seems silly to say but before Open Con, my understanding of the inner workings of academic research was rudimentary at best. It felt like there were more doors closed than open when it came to interacting with researchers and really understanding their environment. I recognized that I wouldn't get an invitation to engage, not from my library or from researchers themselves. I would just have to make openness my business and bring my library along for the ride.

Prioritizing openness has allowed me to craft my own narrative, to develop a space for my work where I've embraced not quite fitting, where I can make things, break things, smile, push. Sharing my work openly helps me create meaning in a new and undefined role, as well as battling the impostor syndrome that so many early career scholars feel. As a result, I feel much happier in the undefined spaces I often inhabit. I don't fear the gray areas anymore.

Openness has manifested itself in my career in a variety of ways. [I've kept a blog for years](#), sharing my journey through grad school and experience as a new professional, including topics that I hope will help my peers' journey on this path: [coping with rejection](#), my [job search story](#), and [unpacking my new role](#). I give talks frequently, so slide decks are my most prolific output; [I share them under a CC BY license](#).

I also care deeply about building community around openness locally. In summer 2015, I co-founded the [UW Open Meetup](#), ongoing monthly gatherings centered on open access, data, and educational

resources. In fall 2015, I created a workshop series focused on digital scholarship topics for graduate students and early career researchers; my final talk of the semester will be an introduction to open research. And in my everyday consultations and workshops across campus, whether I'm talking to **undergraduate biology students** or **digital humanists** or my own **colleagues in the library**, I introduce the idea of openness. For many, it's likely the first time they're hearing about the concept. I try my hand at making it fun, relevant, and actionable by providing ideas for putting openness into practice.

I am still getting daily lessons on what it means to be an advocate for and practitioner of openness. Before I started my professional career I didn't recognize the perseverance needed, or the political savvy, or the tenacity of trusting your gut when it tells you that what you are doing is worth the worry that you are faced with a Sisyphean task well beyond your abilities. If you take anything away from this, know that you do not have to be a researcher to be an important advocate for openness, nor do you have to be an expert in the many facets of openness.

Instead, you can be enthusiastically inexperienced (like me!) and find your way through grit, an amazing online support system, and a desire to keep the conversation going. Nobody asked me to advocate for openness, certainly not overtly, and nobody held my hand while I made those tender first steps. It has been messy but fulfilling, a combination I'm guessing will stick around for a while. Don't let the things you are not, the fear that it's not your place, that you don't know enough to be useful, keep you quiet - there's room for you in the openness community. I'm still learning the ropes myself but a few good places to start are through **Open Con's community calls** and exploring Twitter hashtags (try #oa, #openaccess, #opendata, #openscience, #openresearch, etc.).