

# JLSC

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## Brief Reviews of Books and Products

### The Impactful Academic: Building a Research Career That Makes a Difference

Shannon Kipphut-Smith

Kipphut-Smith, S. (2023). The Impactful Academic: Building a Research Career That Makes a Difference [Brief Reviews of Books and Products]. *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication*, 11(1), eP16234. <https://doi.org/10.31274/jpsc.16234>



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## BRIEF REVIEWS OF BOOKS AND PRODUCTS

Book review: Kelly, W. (2022). *The Impactful Academic: Building a Research Career That Makes a Difference*. Emerald Publishing Limited. 200 pp. ISBN 9781801178457, 23.99 USD (paperback).

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The term “impact” has been used in higher education for decades and encompasses a wide variety of activities, including bibliometrics and altmetrics. Increasingly, institutions, funders, and national governments require researchers to demonstrate the impact that their research has had beyond academia. *The Impactful Academic: Building a Research Career That Makes a Difference*, edited by Wade Kelly, focuses on the researcher’s impact on society more broadly, defining impact as “the change out there in the world that your research can help generate” (p. 7). The reader is encouraged to determine what impact means to them in the context of their own work, taking into consideration external factors, including funder, institutional, and/or national requirements.

Kelly, Director, Research Excellence and Impact at Monash University (Melbourne, Australia), brings together a group of authors who engage with impact in a number of ways, including scholars, librarians, and research impact managers. The authors share their experiences at institutions in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the UK and thus reflect a specific set of institutional and national issues and perspectives. Indeed, Kelly explains that “impact” as the book’s authors engage with it is greatly influenced by the UK’s Research Excellence Framework (REF) and Australian Research Council (ARC) Engagement and Impact (EI) Assessment. Despite the geographic focus, many of the discussions and suggested activities are relevant to any researcher interested in demonstrating broader research impact.

The book is organized into nine chapters. Although each chapter addresses a different topic related to impact, the reader is directed to read them in order, as each chapter builds on previous chapters. Intended to provide practical, accessible approaches and activities related to impact, each chapter also includes questions for reflection. The first four chapters focus on the work the researcher can do before and during their research. Chapters 2 and 3 are, perhaps, most relevant to the impact work that many academic libraries currently support. In Chapter 2, readers are encouraged to develop professional networks (e.g., colleagues)



and identify local institutional resources that can help support their impact work. Researchers are encouraged to begin with their institution's website, searching for terms that their university uses to describe impact work. The authors explain that there are often a number of campus units that support impact work, including libraries. Although Chapter 3 does not specifically describe the support offered by many libraries, readers may find that the strategies for sharing and discussing work online and building scholarly profiles look very similar to many library impact resources (perhaps a reflection of the chapter's librarian co-author). This chapter highlights the importance of tools such as Google Scholar and Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORCID) in helping the researcher connect with others and foster community. In Chapter 4, readers are provided tips for writing about impact for funding and reporting purposes.

After these foundational chapters, readers learn some best practices for stakeholder engagement, including how to ensure that “research outputs meet the needs of stakeholders” (p. 11). In Chapter 5, readers are introduced to the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation, which can help researchers identify, develop, and implement impactful engagement skills. Chapter 6 explains how to apply the Knowledge Mobilization (KMb) model to research, building knowledge with a wide range of collaborators. This model highlights the importance of “reflecting and learning from both successes and challenges in the research process, the relationships you create, the contexts you operate in, and the processes you have used will generate new knowledge that you can apply in your next project” (p. 99). Chapter 7 then shifts the focus to communicating this impact to institutions, governments, and funders. The authors describe a set of principles, intended to change throughout the researcher's career, for collecting and communicating impact evidence. Sample text and templates are provided to illustrate how researchers can collect data on the impact of their work.

The final two chapters encourage readers to reflect on previous chapters and begin to make a plan for how to engage in impact work. Chapter 8 profiles several researchers from the University of Auckland to illustrate how diverse approaches to impact can be. Questions throughout the chapter are designed to help the reader better understand impact in the context of their career, including developing a personalized vision of what impact is and the institutional, national, and geopolitical contexts that it exists in. This awareness will help the reader to then identify the skills needed to do this work as well as find those in their community that can help to support this work. The final chapter (Chapter 9) provides strategies for keeping impact a priority and engaging networks and stakeholders, and it reiterates that “there is no one way to be an *impactful academic*...only you can decide what that will look like for you to be an impactful academic” (p. 161–162).

*The Impactful Academic* is a useful, timely resource for those interested in finding ways to meaningfully demonstrate the impact of their work beyond publication-based metrics. Those who support researchers, including those in libraries, may also be well-served by the guidance and activities offered. Academic library staff have long been engaged in impact work on their campuses, closely monitoring developments and new approaches and supporting researchers' unique needs. Although, unfortunately, this book does not highlight the role that many libraries play in supporting researcher impact work on their campuses, it does nicely complement a number of library-specific resources that are often more focused on bibliometrics and altmetrics. Librarians and other information professionals have played an important role in helping researchers to better understand title and article-level metrics and impact (including their limitations) and have long been a part of the conversation about expanding what "impact" means. Support for publication-based metrics aligns with collections-focused libraries, but libraries may need to shift the focus of impact services and resources to better support the changing demands on researchers. *The Impactful Academic* may provide those working in libraries with a better understanding of the current impact environment that libraries may soon need to engage and support, if they are not yet doing so.

## **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

Shannon Kipphut-Smith is the Scholarly Communications Liaison at Fondren Library, Rice University. She manages Rice's faculty open-access policy and collaborates with groups across campus to address a number of diverse scholarly communications issues, including copyright and author rights, new publishing models, and increasing the visibility of research.