I Hear the Train A Comin’ - A Postcard from Charleston

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situation. A local attorney wished to donate a large sum of money to the university’s science program in honor of her mother, a graduate of the 1950’s. She hoped to link her recently-deceased mother’s early interest in science with her undergraduate career at the university — the courses she took, the societies in which she had membership, and her work as a lab assistant (according to family legend) under a distinguished science faculty member. Nevertheless, the university’s archives were in such disarray that little could be learned about the woman and almost nothing about her time at the university. The potential donor found this lack of information about her mother so altogether unimaginable and so frustrating that she withdrew her initial proposal. Development personnel attempted to assuage the attorney’s misgivings, but the college’s lack of an organized archival record made that office’s efforts largely ineffectual. Later the university’s public relations department learned that the potential donor subsequently gave a significant sum to another institution’s chemistry program. Her mother, they discovered, had done graduate work there, and the institution’s well-organized archives easily uncovered details of her performance and life as a graduate student.

These two examples point to the enormous importance that archives can play in ongoing relations with alumni and potential donors. My scenarios delineate the drawbacks, of course, of neglecting and funding archives — the potential money that could be lost and the opportunities missed. But imagine the positive dimensions that could emerge from a library archives that did the opposite — of an archival and special collections staff that aggressively pursued good relations with its alumni and community. At the University of Central Florida the university archives did precisely that. They implemented a concentrated outreach program in concert with the alumni and development office that created, with one possible path heading toward further convergence and the other toward dissolution of the partnership.

There are a number of forces, from Doug’s perspective, that are pushing the university press and the library toward divergence. Some factors are political, such as disagreement over which units of the institution are best equipped to run point on new publishing initiatives. Some factors are economic, as different emerging scholarly communication models impact the budgets and fortunes of the press and the library differently. Some factors are technological, as new forms of hardware...
Kevin Guthrie took a systemic perspective on the issue of serving multiple masters in a rapidly changing environment. He examined the confluences and contradictions that go into serving both the local institution and the scholarly community more generally. Developments in technology have created a tension in which libraries hosting digital collections bear the costs locally, but the audience served by these collections is global. How does one justify the expenditures, of, say, an open access subject collection or an image database, to those paying the bills? How does the parent institution justify these costs if there is not an apparent or direct institutional benefit?

Kevin pointed out that some costs can be reduced by market consolidation and by scaling. However, these paths are anything but clear in the library world. Where will the larger scale reside? Within the libraries? Within the presses? At the joining of libraries and presses? Of academic disciplines? It will undoubtedly become more efficient to serve both the local institutional community and the larger academic world if such scale can be identified and implemented.

As Kevin explained, one reason we are fumbling in creating a more efficient scholarly communication space is because we are not big enough to support specialized solutions. Information now shares the same infrastructure, in every sector, all over the globe. Scholarly communications are no longer insulated from the commercial information marketplace. Does the scholarly community need to create specialized capabilities, or can it rely on commercial services, which may not be perfectly fit for purpose but which are innovative and inexpensive because of their scale (i.e., YouTube for videos, Google for search, Amazon for books, etc.)? Will it be more efficient if the local institution and the scholarly communication space operate more globally by adopting imperfect but widely accepted and cheaply available non-specialized tools?

Kevin also noted that the emergence and rapid maturation of the commercial information marketplace coincides with a fundamental change in the library’s role. With content going digital, libraries are deep in the midst of a shift from the need to manage a local capital and software options emerge that impact how parties view, value, and support traditional forms of scholarly communication (e.g., books, monographs).

On the other hand, Doug also sees political, economic, and technological forces that are pushing the university press and the library toward deeper convergence. Politically, both parties have an interest in working together to clearly communicate to faculty the strains that exist within the current scholarly communication system. Economically, it has become clear to all that neither presses nor libraries have healthy funding models; working together may make it easier to dig out of the hole. Technologically, it is becoming easier to envision and develop a system that captures an institution’s scholarly output at the source, and to build layers of publishing services around this scholarship. Both the university press and the library bring certain complementary expertise and skill sets to this type of endeavor.

While Doug did not definitively state where this relationship is headed, he drew some interesting conclusions by looking at the convergence/divergence outcomes through the lens of how to effectively serve multiple masters in a rapidly changing environment. The university press and the library each are both dealing with significant structural changes to their identities. Their business models and budgets are in transition. Their intramural and intermural relationships are subject to market forces, to political forces, and to new technologies. Given these rapidly swirling winds, it is important to remember that the university press and the library share unique and important values — a belief in the actual value of scholarship and knowledge, a desire to support and promote the work of research faculty, and a desire to draw faculty into the process of scholarly communication, not just as consumers or customers, but as participants. Given the tenacity with which both parties hold these principles, convergence seems the best way to advance them.
Concurrent Sessions 3 — Friday, November 7, 2008

National Science and Technology Library of China: Leading the Way in Technical Information Resource Collection — Presented by Mr. Jiancheng Zheng (Vice Director of Collection Development Department, National Science and Technology Library, China)

The fascination with the Chinese library and publishing scene was evidenced by the variety of attendees-librarians (a few originally from China), publishers (some already working with Chinese libraries, some investigating the possibilities). Not indicated in the program, and initially a bit confusing to newbies in this area, was the presence of two additional persons who joined speaker Zheng at the front of the room. They were from Philadelphia-headquartered Charlesworth Group (service/marketing agents for China). CEO Adrian Stanley provided background information and Marketing Coordinator Dan Yang served as an “ad hoc” translator, when one was needed, but by large Zheng’s detailed presentation on its own merit provided a thorough overview of the complex structures that make up the NSTL — the nine academies/institutes, the decision-making council, two expert committees. NSTL concentrates primarily on STM. Print collecting still takes place but the current priorities are digital and preservation issues. Licenses with international publishers are crafted carefully, keeping in mind the responsibilities and rights of publishers, providers, and preservers. The Q&A segment raised comments, e.g., “we must guarantee access no matter what happens,” analogous to a “Chinese Portico” (natural disasters cause breakdowns in communication networks with the world, “tsunami trigger events”). It was also clarified that NSTL is a government body focused on STM, but other private consortia exist, such as CALIS (China Academic Library and Information System), consisting of over 100 members and largely focused on humanities and literature.

Developing a Library Collection Development Allocation — Presented by Jeff Bailey (Assistant Library Director, Arkansas State University), Linda Creibaum (Acquisitions Librarian, Arkansas State University)

Deciding on how to allocate the library’s resource budget across the university’s programs is a topic of much debate in collection development departments. In this presentation the speakers described the formula used by Arkansas State University to distribute funds throughout the academic departments.

Arkansas State University has approximately 10,000 students, five PhD programs, and is experimenting rapid growth. The library does not have a book approval plan. Prior to using an allocation formula, almost 30% of the collection development expenditure was going to one department, mainly to journals. Funds had not been redistributed in many years. A task force was created to research current use of allocation formulas. The decision was made to base their formula on the one used by Colorado State University, and to run a single formula for books and journals. The factors used in the formula: semester credit hour production (actual enrollment), number of classes offered, degrees awarded and their levels, number of faculty per department, average cost of materials.

Before the formula is applied to the available budget, funds are set aside to cover interdisciplinary databases and other general library expenditures. Academic programs are advised as to how much of their allocation is needed to continue their current recurring costs and it is up to them to discontinue any they would rather not continue funding. The added benefit to this process is the active participation of the departments in collection development, including review of recurring costs.

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infrastructure (to house and distribute physical objects) to managing services (applied to digital objects), which are largely provided by infrastructure offered externally. Libraries are no longer judged by the size of the library or the number of print volumes they hold. Rather, they are assessed on the quality of the services they provide to connect their constituents to the right information when they need it. Kevin stressed that the key to succeeding in this new environment is nailing the services where the library (or the press, or any other local actor) has a unique advantage. He cited IBM as a possible case study, which has managed to transform a good part of its business from being capital driven (selling computers, especially mainframes) to becoming a business services provider. IBM is now a problem solver using technology, with more than 50% of their revenues derived from services. Libraries would be well-served to look at Big Blue as a model for transitioning their core business. The successful libraries will be the ones that develop and adapt their services, models, and approaches to further the goals of both their local institutions and the scholarly communication space globally.

As a quick editorial aside, I must commend not only Douglas Armato and Kevin Guthrie, but also the audience at the Train-LIVE session. All parties brought their “A” games, and the result was a lively and free-wheeling plenary that gave us an interesting peek at the challenges and opportunities our industry faces in this rapidly changing environment. ✪