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ATG Interviews Howard Harris

Robyn A. Dudley MLIS, BA Ed.
rdudley007@hotmail.com

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"Visualization allows our clients to get a graphical overview of the library in relation to...other libraries, library groups, or authoritative bibliographic sources ...drilling down to the level of wanted detail — even to individual full MARC bibliographic records."

— Howard Harris

**ATG: Who is Library Dynamics?**

**HH: Library Dynamics** offers libraries innovative tools for analyzing, understanding, and making decisions about the development and management of library collections, resources, and capabilities. Library Dynamics, founded in 1998, initiated Weedlist. This program matched the shelflists of numerous small and large academic libraries to the titles from each of the three successive Books for College Libraries. Libraries have used this tool to identify titles dropped from BCL as prime candidates for weeding. Librarians request for additional services have led Library Dynamics to bring to market a number of additional capabilities. In 2004 and 2005, Library Dynamics has expanded its services dramatically.

**ATG: Howard, why and how did you get involved with Library Dynamics? Were you there in 1998 when it was founded?**

**HH: Robyn,** your question lets me tell you a little about Library Dynamics and what led me to take on the role of General Manager of our company. Both of these comments should give you some insight into our company.

**Bill Buchanan,** a successful innovator and publisher in our industry, established Library Dynamics with Bob Asleson in 1998. Initially, the principle product of Library Dynamics was the development of Weedlist. Weedlist was based upon Bill's work with Evan Farber, former College Librarian at Earlham College. Farber proposed that academic librarians could base weeding and storage issues on titles that had been superseded in subsequent editions of Books for College Libraries. Farber wrote an article about this for Library Journal which can be found in Farber, E. L. (1997). Library Journal, 122(13), 44-45.

I knew Bill in the 1990's. He was a very interesting and creative guy, and he was successful in bringing Evan Farber's idea to fruition through Weedlist for quite a while. However, Bill's health began to fail in 1998, and any further development on Weedlist came to a stop. When Bill passed away in 2000, the library community lost a very creative and productive member.

After leaving the University of Maryland College Park in 2001 where I had been the Director for Information Technology, I returned to an active consulting practice with library clients. In late 2001 I began discussions with Bob Asleson and Eric Calaluca, principals of the then re-invigorated Library Dynamics; however, my real interest in the company developed at the ACRL Conference in April 2003 in Charlotte. At about the same time, I had a conversation with Bob Kief, the College Librarian at Haverford College. Our conversation focused on the type of collection analysis work that the Tri College Consortium had in mind and the type of service that they felt that they and others in the library community needed.

At that point, I was hooked. I could see a real problem to be solved and my background and experience contributed to my belief that I knew how I could approach the problem. At that point I renewed my conversations with Library Dynamics’ principals and was offered the position of General Manager. Work began on Spectra CRC in the Summer and Fall of 2003 and by Midwinter 2004 in San Diego we were showing Spectra CRC for the first time.

**ATG: Is Paratext your parent company? Who else is on the team at Library Dynamics and what strengths do they bring to the company?**

**HH: Although Library Dynamics** briefly operated as a division of Paratext, it soon became a separate corporate entity. I don’t think there is any way to overestimate the value that such working relationships bring to a company. The ability to benefit from a wide spectrum of insights and experience within our two organizations gives us the flexibility of a smaller company plus a number of advantages possessed by much larger companies.

In Library Dynamics, we have a highly talented team. Bob Asleson and Eric Calaluca, principals in Paratext, assist Library Dynamics with administrative matters and accounting. Susan Severson leads our nationwide Marketing and Sales efforts. Three of us from across our organization who are librarians serve as a product development team to assess new and existing products and services, product requirements and specifications, requested changes to existing products and services, market opportunity, and product support.

We have four people that work with client MARC bibliographic and use data by analyzing and processing it into a resource for our clients. They also create and maintain an impressive online search and retrieval capability to host that bibliographic resource.

Separately, we have a team of three Systems, Application, and Internet Technology technical staff who develop and deliver the visualization technology that allows us to work with quantitative data in new and exciting ways. We also have a group that focuses on the hosting and management of the servers that provide our Internet accessible services.

**ATG: I noticed on the company Website for Library Dynamics, that you produce Spectra CRC and NATC (North American Title Count). Please tell us about your background and how your experience has enabled you to publish these tools for libraries.**

**HH: From the beginning of my career I** have focused on technology, planning, management, and systems. Early in my career I had experience with approval plan book purchasing at Argonne National Laboratory’s Library and also as a part of the Systems Department at the University of Chicago Library where we made use of the MARC tapes to create an alerting service for bibliographers based on language and subject profiles.
Both at the University of Chicago and in my consulting work with libraries principally with RMG Consultants, Inc., I learned how to work with a technologically oriented team each of whom had specialized skills. I learned how to write requirements and specifications and how to coordinate the development of technologically oriented projects.

Later, as a consultant to the American Library Association and the National Center for Educational Statistics, I began to appreciate the value and efficiency of visualization tools that could analyze complete datasets, provide for repeated exploratory analysis of such data, and also convey insights directly to various audiences who may or may not have the time to review tabular presentations of data.

I think these are some of the elements of my background that have contributed to my understanding of how to go about creating and developing products and services for Library Dynamics.

**ATG:** Your experience as a library automation consultant and also as a practitioner and strategist, gives you a unique perspective. What trends for collection development and collection management can we expect in the near future?

**HH:** In some ways it feels so presumptive to think that my experience could give me such insights but let me try to share some of my thinking. Libraries have in place a number of substantial investments in physical plants, content, systems, and most importantly human resources and the challenge is to rationalize those investments and protect them. I think we are seeing a lot of change. At the front end of the process, I think we may see changes in buying patterns as selectors engage in some increased spot buying of materials in some areas based on need, not just anticipated need. I think the notion of "in print" is under challenge given the emergence of evergreen electronic content. Even in the print sphere there has been some recent research which challenges the notion that older, "out of print" material is scarce and pricey and that will have its effects.

I believe there has been great interest in various digitization projects with somewhat more modest understandings of how to take such projects into account at a working level in libraries. This falls in the area that we in Library Dynamics refer to as the "capabilities" area—what a library may not own or license but can deliver.

I think that the evolution of very specialized systems and procedures for the purchasing, management, and reporting with regard to electronic resources has left libraries vulnerable in terms of accountability for their resources overall. This is part of what prompts us to provide views of the library which integrate rather than segment such investments.

I feel those who support private higher education, as well as those in the public sector, have interests in fostering institutional strength, accountability, as well as new expectations for the benefits that collaboration including collaboration between and among libraries can bring.

**ATG:** I hear the word Data Mining used in a variety of ways. Would you explain your definition and how the tools produced by Library Dynamics assist librarians with their collection analysis? Is there a certain segment of the library market that can benefit best from your products?

**HH:** I agree with you about the term Data Mining. There is a movie titled “The Spanish Prisoner” in which there is some business process or formula that is supposed to make the company and its principals a fortune. Data mining always seems a bit like that to me as if gold could be extracted from information. To me very simply Data Mining consists in the after the fact observation of patterns and/or relationships within data that people create and maintain for some other more prosaic business or operational purpose. Someone could characterize what we do in that way and I wouldn’t disagree but I don’t choose to talk about it in that way.

What we do is allow librarians to visualize the patterns and relationships in their data that may have gone unnoted and to use the patterns and relationships that they discover to give them an overview of the library as a whole in relationship to a consortia to which they belong, another library, a set of libraries, and/or one or more recognized bibliographic sources including authoritative bibliographies or review sources. Our services allow librarians to examine those relationships within progressively more detailed subject areas, and ultimately to examine individual titles, their ownership, and standing within recognized bibliographies and review media. Those capabilities support a wide range of library operational needs.

I think that increasingly librarians are becoming aware of visualization techniques but it will take the community a while to learn and adopt such technologies. There are some efforts in our community that are beginning to...
Howard Harris Interview
from page 47

highlight the importance of visually based quantita
tive information including LibQUAL+™ in the
ARL arena and other such information that
focuses on libraries' use to solicit, track, under
stand, and act upon users' perceptions of ser
vice quality. In addition, visually based quantita
tive tools based on GIS and demographic data
within the public library sector have begun to
play an important role in communicating the
tangible value of library programs in the over
all health of communities. I believe we will see
a growing use of such tools across the board.

ATG: Many libraries are forming
multitype consortia. Do you have a model of
how consortia libraries are able to use Library
Dynamics' products and services?

HH: It's interesting that you mention con
sortia. I was showing an earlier version of Spec
tra CRC to a librarian who has written in the
collection development area. Two comments
from that meeting have stayed with me. This
librarian made the observation that although
Spectra CRC was initially developed for col
lege and university libraries, research libraries
share some of the same needs and could make
use of capabilities similar to those we have de
veloped. It was clear in our meeting that Spec
tra CRC not only makes the case for collabora
tion, but also provides the tools to guide and
evaluate it. I found this interesting in light of
the comment I read in an introductory text on
collection development. The comment said that
the effect that cooperative collection develop
ment has, is probably the most written about
topic in the collection development field but that
putting cooperative collection development into
practice programmatically is inherently difficul
ty and unrealized on a scale comparable to its
importance. My belief is that the lack of appro
priate tools contributes a good deal to that diffi
culty. Interestingly, I don't need to make the
case to anyone in a consortium who sees Spec
tra CRC. It's not only a tool that demonstrates
the value of a consortia but also allows those
involved in a consortia to coordinate and evalu
ate the effectiveness of their cooperation and
demonstrate it to their respective institutional
management.

ATG: You have decided to discontinue the
print version of NATC which was formerly
produced by the ALA Division ALCTS. Is this
because you feel that the digital age has fi
nally reached all libraries that could benefit
from NATC?

HH: The North American Title Count
(NATC) has for many years compiled counts of
the number of titles held by libraries in ap
proximately 700 subject categories. It grew out
of what was then called the National Shelflist
Count. It took a new name in time to reflect
the participation of libraries in Canada in the
Count. In the past the Count was undertaken
every four years.

Actually ALCTS discontinued the print
version of NATC when they were responsible for
the program in favor of a CD-ROM based prod
uct. I think we are just taking the next logical
step in moving the content from the CD-ROM
environment to accessibility via the web as well
as the additional step of making it an annual
undertaking which we think will help libraries
who depend on it when they undertake collec
tion development studies.

ATG: Who are your competitors? Why are
LD's tools superior?

HH: Companies have come and gone in
this market space. And of course it depends on
how you characterize the market. There are
some large companies and organizations offer
ning various tools for collection analysis includ
ing OCLC and Bowker. Other organizations
have focused on one or the other component of
the collection analysis business, especially for
serials or electronic resources. I think each of
us sees the market differently and I am not sure
there is enough cohesion in the marketplace to
call us competitors.

What we in Library Dynamics believe to
be distinctive in our approach is our belief that
clients value the ability to visualize graphically
key quantitative aspects of the library's content.
These aspects include its overall size, its sub
ject matter, its comparability in terms of dis	inctiveness, areas of overlap, and gaps, and its
usage. We believe that the ability to view a
number of different analyses in spatial terms
focused on the overall library or a library seg
ment of interest enhances the pace, the quality,
and the transparency of decision-making and
communication within the library and between
the library and its sources of support.

Visualization allows our clients to get a
graphical overview of their library in relation
to one or more other libraries, library groups,
or authoritative bibliographic sources. The user
can interact directly with the plotted data, high
lighting data points which reveal information
about the plotted point and drilling down from
an overall library level to the level of wanted
detail — even to individual full MARC bibliog
raphic records. Currently we provide twelve
(11) analyses at each of three progressively de
tailed subject levels: Class, SubClass, and In
terval. Plots at each of the 22 Classes, 250
SubClasses, and 6,000 Intervals provide more
than 60,000 potential plots. Intelligent naviga
tion among the levels and the plots guide the
user to only those areas of greatest interest but
does not limit the specialist who wants to work
at a very precise level of detail. All of this power
is further enhanced when you consider the num
ber of comparisons available to other libraries,
library groups, and bibliographic sources.

In visualizing usage we begin with circula
tion and in house usage data supplied by our
library clients. However, we combine the vari
ous types of usage, normalize it, and analyze the
data in several ways. Because we extract and
make use of the data that the library acquir
ed each title we calculate in each case its an
ualized use and report that in the biblio
graphic record. Based on that calculation we
provide two types of use data — one
that emphasizes the aggregate use of material
within subject categories and another, the aver
age intensity of use of titles within subject ar
eas. Usage is not just a column in a table for us.
We intend to develop additional tools and ways
of seeing and gaining access to data that im
proves the library abilities for understanding
both their collections and the behavior of the
individual library and library consortia.

Fundamentally, we are focused on deliver
ing tools, products, and services focused on
analyzing, understanding, decision making, and
interpreting library physical COLLECTIONS
— (i.e., what the library owns — the "C" in the
product name), electronic RESOURCES —
(i.e., what the library either owns or licenses in
electronic form — "R") and CAPABILITIES
— (i.e., the other "C" — what the library ne
ither owns nor licenses but can invoke and de
liver to meet the library user's need from con
sortia and shared system library partners or other
sources.)

We also believe in leveraging human and
financial investments that libraries and library
groups have made in purchasing and maintain
ing integrated library systems and the content
of those systems with respect to library materi
als and their use. I think the financial and hu
man investments in those systems need to be
leveraged and not abandoned in favor of some
other approach to analyzing the library's col
lection, resources, and capabilities.

ATG: I understand that you plan to par
ticipate in the 2005 Charleston Conference?
Why do you feel it is important for Library
Dynamics to be at this Conference?

HH: The Charleston Conference gives us a
unique ability to meet with those with interests
and responsibilities in the development, analy
sis, and management of library collections.
Actually, "meet" is an overworked word. It is
an opportunity to hear and participate in great
programs, to sit down with people and have a
conversation about what matters to them in col
lection development, and to do it at a time early
in the academic year — prior to ALA Midwinter
— a time of year that allows academic li
brarians to participate. Charleston is large
enough to have the facilities to host the confer
ence but small enough that the logistics of get
ning to and from meetings and hotels do not
absorb a disproportionate amount of people's
energy and time. And then of course, there is
Charleston, a city rich with history and culture.

ATG: According to the company descrip
tion on your Website, Library Dynamics will
be introducing new products and services in
the near future. Would you give the ATG read
ners a glimpse of what's coming up in 2006?

HH: We just recently brought Spectra
CRC to the Web. We are very pleased with how
websites are interacted with directly with the
plots of data which results in displays of plot
data based on responses from the visualization
engine at the server and clicking on points for
information in order to drive the analysis
into more specific subject areas.

For the present, we will be concentrating on
and large on ways of enhancing our existing
products and services such as Spectra CRC and
NATC. Whether some of those developments
become part of the core products and services
or emerge on their own remain to be seen. Also,
our experience in working with data which we
receive from libraries has led us to believe that
continued on page 52

<http://www.against-the-grain.com>
Libraries wanting to develop their collections in African American studies have had a few recent titles to ponder. The just released Greenwood Encyclopedia of African American Literature (2005, 0313329753, $495) may be on the short list for many. Edited by Hans Ostrom and J. David Macy, Jr., these five compact volumes are packed with close to 1030 articles written by some 280 scholars.

It comes as no surprise that coverage includes numerous articles on influential writers, as well as those on various literary forms, genres, and movements. However, there is also ample space given to the historical and social issues impacting African American literature ranging from Afro-centricity to the Vietnam War, affirmative action to the Middle Passage and from the Nation of Islam to the Underground Railroad. Other essays treat important newspapers like the Amsterdam News and literary journals like Callaloo while others cover influential regions and locations ranging from New Orleans to Detroit and from Haiti to Paris. While accessible to general readers and high school students, undergraduates will find the articles useful for background and facts, and will appreciate the list of added sources following each article.

The set also contains an alphabetized, as well as topical list of all articles, a helpful introduction and a chronology. These features all add value and give the reader a firmer sense of the contents and coverage of the Encyclopedia. Providing access to the page level is a thorough, easy to use general index.

Rich and detailed, the scope of this work is nonetheless broad and inclusive. The Greenwood Encyclopedia of African American Literature not only provides information about writers and literary movements but it successfully places them in historic and societal context. While it in no way replaces Macmillan's Encyclopedia of African American History and Culture (2nd edition will be released later this year), it is a worthy complement. It also serves to update, as well as broaden the scope of the critically praised Oxford Companion to African American Literature (1997, 0195065107).


Routledge's Encyclopedia of Christian Theology (2005, 1579582508, $495) offers a serious, scholarly treatment with a decidedly European slant. The reason for that is obvious. It is an English language translation of a 2nd edition of the Dictionnaire critique de la theologie, first published in 1998. Edited by Jean-Yves Lacoste, the over 500 articles contained in this three-volume set attempt to lend shape to the "massive amount of discourse and doctrines that Christianity has assembled about God and its experience of God." Lacoste draws on the expertise of 250 scholars, the majority coming from Continental Europe, to accomplish this challenging endeavor.

While there are discussions about liturgy, church administration, spiritual practices and social and moral issues, the main concerns here are theological concepts like the Trinity, Christology, Knowledge of God, Justification, Salvation and Revelation. Many of the articles are more than a background recitation of facts and historical development. The contributors are not afraid to point to controversy, speculate and provoke questions and may make some readers steeped in tradition pause. The production features are what you would expect from a work of this caliber. The organization is alphabetical with liberal use of cross references, and while there are no illustrations, the layout of the text is clear and visually engaging. The bibliographies are often extensive but many references are to works in languages other than English, a possible limitation for many students.

Intended for the scholar and upper division or graduate student, this reference will not be easy going for the general lay reader. Treating complex concepts and in the critical tradition of European, especially French theological thought, many of the articles ask more that a casual familiarity with the issues covered. All by the largest public libraries will probably pass on this work; however, theological libraries, as well as academic libraries supporting majors in religious studies should give it serious consideration.

ABC-CLIO has published another nicely focused historical encyclopedia suitable for either circulation or reference collections. The Constitutional Convention of 1787: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of America's Founding (2005, 1851196698, $185) includes more than 400 articles providing a multidimensional look at this central event in American history. Individual essays cover the delegates and other influential people, important committees, relevant documents, proposed plans of government, and philosophical influences. Author John R. Vite writes in an accessible, straightforward fashion informed by serious scholarship referencing authoritative sources throughout most of these essays. A series of appendices provide relevant historic documents prior to, during and after the convention, a selected bibliography, and a brief list of authoritative Websites. There is also a topical table of contents, a day by day timetable of the convention and an introductory essay setting the stage for the rest of the articles.

Academic libraries in particular will find this title useful. As noted above, given its special...