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Papa Abel Remembers-A Tale of A Band of Booksellers, Fasicle 20: Competition

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From A University Press
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publishers, but without the presses fiscal burden of cost recovery? The answer for me is that publication by a university press, by an entity with a mission that extends beyond its own institution, means something both academically and economically — it is both an evaluative process of editorial assessment, peer review, and faculty board approval and an evaluating in terms of the press’s decision to invest financial and personnel resources in a particular author’s work. At a time when the humanities and social sciences are being devalued within the academy, formal publication signals that such works have an economic and cultural value and are more than mere localized academic work product. Over the past decades, university presses have sponsored scholarly work in areas that in many cases were discouraged or actively disparaged by university departments themselves — areas such as feminist studies, Chicano Studies, and GLBT Studies and emerging areas of inquiry such as work on tourism, sports, and video games. Literary theory as a method flourished on the University presses long before it had more than a toe-hold in language departments, presses focused on African-American history while vestiges of segregation still existed in universities themselves, even areas of science such as human genetics and cognitive science, once both thought of as marginal, were aided by the recognition provided by the presses at Johns Hopkins and MIT. Sometimes accused of rushing to “trendy” areas of scholarship, university presses are at their best provide an alternate locus of accreditation for emerging areas of scholarship and scholarly method and, by working across institutional boundaries, help to correct for localized pockets of conservatism. As universities now address their budget crises by combining departments, shuttering interdisciplinary centers, and tightening tenure opportunities, university press imprints will be even more important to innovative and boundary-challenging scholars.

And university presses will survive and continue to evolve for this reason as well — that while new modes of scholarship continue to forecast “the death of the author,” the author is far from dead. Take it from a university press publisher, they hang down our doors, and not just to satisfy tenure and promotion requirements. And scholarly authors care: they are not just another repeated respondent but also a continuing volunteer of events no longer coming to my mind.

For the middle years, resort was again had to those mentioned above, as well as Keith Barker and Dan Halloran. These two, plus Ralph Shoffner and Don Chvatal, were the sources for the complexities of the last years. In this connection Don Chvatal deserves especial note for his critical assessment of the chronicle of the last several years.

Lastly the writer seeks the reader’s indulgence in offering his thanks to that remarkable crew who served the world of books and libraries so inventively and diligently.

Note was made that such a Band as conceived, created, implemented, and oversaw the systems created by the firm to radically increase the speed and efficiency of getting books into the hands of users would be difficult to bring together again. Such a setting of this Band fails if it did not underscore the inescapable fact that all the Argonauts willfully gravitated to the venture. We shared a common mind as to the place and worth of books as representing and incorporating the total cultural capital of the West. We well understood that we were the extraordinarily fortunate heirs of a vast inheritance for which we had done nothing warranting the showering of such a gift upon us. We well appreciated that our cultural inheritance was encapsulated in books. It remains virtually an axiom that, were some universal solvent capable of selectively destroying all the books in the world invented and released, all cultures would simply collapse into barbarism in a generation or two. And we were of the related view that the sustainable additions to the culture in our generation would be incorporated in the books in which we dealt. In short, all viewed themselves as the committed, honest brokers of knowledge as a modest acknowledgement of their good fortune in receiving an inheritance of such magnitude and of their labors to pass that inheritance on, not simply complete in its entirety but marginally richer.

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biz of acq — to check-in or not to check-in

A Survey of Librarians on the Relevance and Necessity of Print Serials Check-in in the 21st Century Library

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Abstract

It is no secret that the world of librarianship, particularly serials and online resources, has become increasingly complicated through the years. Whereas the primary goal of libraries was once ownership of print books and serials, that paradigm is shifting towards access through online serials bundles, individual online subscriptions, aggregated full-text databases, and open access serials. Thus, the serials librarians’ job descriptions that once emphasized print serials check-in now likely also include electronic resource maintenance. In addition, many patrons at academic and public libraries alike gravitate towards online articles that can be downloaded for convenience. Given the changes and increasing emphasis on online access as well as issues such as budget and staffing cuts and providing patron service, we must ask ourselves whether print serials check-in is necessary or sustainable. This study explores the purpose, prevalence, and relevance of print serials check-in in libraries worldwide and asks if change is needed.

Introduction

The decreasing ownership of print serials and increasing online serials access in libraries is not a new topic. The trend began in the 1990s with aggregator databases and has been growing ever since with online serials bundles and individual subscription and open access online serials. This shift towards online access has caused librarians to shift their budgets and staffing around and, for some, to use an electronic resource management system. Many libraries still subscribe to print serials, but some have implemented changes in processing to compensate for staffing changes and patron demands.1,2 In this article, this author questions the purpose of serials check-in, whether it provides access to information not available elsewhere, and if there are consequences to ceasing it.

Leading the charge behind the movement to abandon serials check-in in favor of simpler, less time-consuming processes are Anderson and Zink, who conducted an experiment to cease print serials check-in at the University of Nevada Reno Libraries. In a 2003 article, they challenge the necessity of serials check-in and emphasize improving patron services, including online serials and database access.3 Carr also notes that libraries are beginning to realize that many patrons prefer online access and are trying to appeal to that; therefore print serials check-in is becoming outdated and irrelevant.4 In opposition, Borchert tells about her library’s ceasing serials check-in after data loss in an ILS migration, and the resulting problems and lack of time savings.5

There seems to be little doubt that most libraries consider print serials check-in to be essential, because they are still doing it despite the fact that many have access to more online serials than print and that their print and online access may overlap somewhat. As other authors, including Stefanescu, have noted, there is almost nothing in library literature about the reason for serials check-in. A literature search confirms this, as this author was only able to find materials on the “how.” Carr agrees that there is no standard reason, but adds that it informs users of library holdings, enables libraries to identify problems, and records serials purchased and received.7 Anderson and Zink answer the question similarly, but add that assuming that check-in data is essential for patrons is incorrect, because that “is not central to patrons’ concerns.” This author will grant that patrons will likely care more about being able to use an issue than its receipt; however, if the library has serials in different formats in various locations, it is problematic finding it if no one knows if it was received or its location. In addition, Peritore surveyed libraries about the effect of serials check-in on reference services, and the results show that staff and patrons find the data helpful.8

In a 2002 article, Anderson gives the rationale for his library ceasing serials check-in and much of the routine binding they once did. He says that the change in processing was due to an increasing amount of online serials access and the need for staff time to set up and troubleshoot it, as well as low use of print, serials check-in not increasing access, and the expense of binding.9 He adds that some improvements appeared right away, including: issues are no longer at the bindery, funds previously spent on binding are now spent on magazine boxes, and issues get to the stacks more quickly.10 However, he notes that the biggest difference is that staff who previously spent time on claiming and other issues now concentrate on online serials access.12 He adds that if the library had more staff, they might spend more time on check-in, but print serials are used little and patrons prefer online, so the library will concentrate on that.13

Yue and Kurt reflect on University of Nevada Reno’s changes nine years after ceasing serials check-in. They note that action may seem extreme, but it did work out despite problems.14 However, they emphasize that their approach may not work for everyone, and that libraries considering ceasing serials check-in should consider “Size and physical organization of the print serial collection, serial storage facilities, library service models, and institutional cultures.”15 In an effort to assess the impact of the change on staff work and patron access, Yue and Kurt surveyed library staff. The results revealed that most staff felt that it did not negatively affect their work, but some felt that it negatively affected access.16

While ceasing serials check-in changes patron service,17 it also causes the need for change in serials processing work flow, including claiming. The University of Nevada Reno Libraries chose to reallocate staff to online serials management and cease most print serials check-in and claiming.18 However, Carr continued on page 64

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Further, we shared the understanding that libraries were the long-term custodians of that inestimable heritage, that library book collections were the warehouses of knowledge. All were devoted to traditional characterizations of the place of the library as the “caretaker of the vessels of culture and knowledge,” the library as the “heart of the university,” which seem to have become the laughing stock or the objects of mockery of many librarians deceived by the shabby doctrines of modernism. But not so for the Argonauts — all were convinced they served a critical and honorable role in assisting in the collecting and distribution of the wealth of the culture.

All were prepared to face and deal with the risks and hazards of brokering knowledge and serving the central facilities of culture.

Does such a group of individuals possessed of those cultural understandings and commitments exist out there someplace today? We can hope there is. And if such should prove to be the case, what might the probabilities be that such individuals would choose to voluntarily coalesce in the way the Argonauts did?