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Little Red Herrings-Now, Don't Go Chasing Rabbits

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now have opportunities to experiment with new pricing and access models. As technology improves and the desire for knowledge increases, demand for content in online education will continue to grow.

How are MOOCs changing the provision of content to students?

FL: I think there are two sides to this question. First, the type of content being provided to students is limited by the resources a school has available for creating that MOOC. We hear from MOOC instructors that they want to provide the richest learning experience possible to their students at a higher education standard. Sometimes openly available free content is appropriate, but sometimes it’s also necessary to require or recommend readings from content under copyright. The work and cost involved for a school in these cases is prohibitive, and the SIPX service is a solution to these problems. In addition, SIPX’s analytics provide hard data for better understanding the continuing changes in content and education.

Second, we also need to look at how students are consuming MOOCs and the content within. In most cases, a MOOC student’s motivations for taking the class are different from an on-campus student that commits (through tuition and degree incentives) to finishing the entire class. For example, the MOOC student might only be interested in one or two key topics, or only want a high-level overview. So a one-coursepack/textbook-fits-all mentality won’t work for every student in the class, and the SIPX service opens up options and empowers students to make their own choices.

What type of content is attractive to MOOC instructors?

HS: MOOC instructors want the best supporting materials for their students, whether that content is subscription-based, open access, or public domain. We’re seeing interest in articles, book chapters, newspaper, and magazine content. Thus, SIPX works with all types of publishers whose titles cut across all subjects and disciplines.

What has the response been like to date?

FL: There’s definitely broad and deep interest in the SIPX service, ranging from school faculty, librarians and management, school consortiums, as well as MOOC providers and the content industry, and we are ramping up with schools and content partners quickly. I feel that the main reason is because we solve a real problem felt across a huge, fragmented ecosystem; as the first end-to-end service that connects all the players and creates an efficient, logical network. The efficiencies through the SIPX platform are obvious — there are cost-saving benefits of license filtering (the ability to recognize and apply pre-existing rights from complex licenses such as library subscriptions), easy pay-per-use channels now open, analytics for better collections and pricing decisions, more efficient use of human resources, better copyright education on campus, and reduced infringement liability.

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Little Red Herrings — Now, Don’t Go Chasing Rabbits

by Mark Y. Herring (Dean of Library Services, Dacus Library, Winthrop University) <herringm@winthrop.edu>

The Ithaka U.S. Faculty Survey 2012 (http://bit.ly/10NwJw9) is out, and by the time you read my blur, it will have cobwebs on it, and the 2013 will be well on the way. So, why write about it at all? First, it’s always important to find out what people think of you, in this case, libraries and their main clientele, faculty, even if what you find out may need a dozen qualifications surrounding it. Second, we librarians live, as the saying goes, in interesting times. Libraries and librarians are either on the cusp of something new and exciting, or on the edge of the abyss, soon to fall into oblivion, so finding out what people think should be important to us. Finally, if we listen carefully, we may be able to strengthen the good and weaken the bad, so why not take a peek?

I am not the first to take this on, by any means. Barbara Fister had her say (http://bit.ly/16XCmou), as did Wayne Bivens-Tatum (http://bit.ly/12o9J6), so if you don’t like what you read here, you can also go there. There are, of course many others who have commented upon it. But I am less concerned about what library bloggers have to say about such studies than what wordaday librarians think about them, assuming they have time to read them among all their other regular duties.

In a word, the study indicates that faculty, one of our main clients, don’t think libraries all that important any more. The previous Ithaka Study said about the same thing, as have other studies, such as the Educause’s ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology. 2012 (http://bit.ly/U9NH5S).

Neither faculty nor students think they need libraries all that much. Faculty tell us that apart from the databases they cannot afford, they don’t use the library that much. Even then, they turn to us only when they cannot find what they need on the Web. Students tell us in the Educause Study that, while the library Website is important, other technologies are far more important, such as course management systems and, of course, our béte noire, Google.

What should we make of all this? Here’s what I think. First of all, the studies are important. They aren’t the be-all and end-all, but they help us balance the anecdotal evidence we may hear from day to continued on page 76
The library would be open and I would find students there sleeping, reading, studying, and writing. I would head for the area where the “little magazines” were shelved, a luxury coming from a technical university, and after choosing a couple of those inviting literary journals, would plop myself down in an overstuffed chair situated among other comfortable chairs and sofas, and read until time for my meeting.

I have no idea how many college and university libraries I have visited but it’s more than a handful and of them all, Reed has the most bookish atmosphere. I get the feeling there are nothing but curious undergraduates there and that it is understood that to be well educated is to read broadly and engage in intellectual and not so intellectual discussions that come from that reading and from the heart as well as the head. And in such an atmosphere, it is a matter of course to subscribe to Anthony Powell’s notion that Books Do Furnish a Room. And it matters which books furnish that room and they must be books that matter, classic titles along with perhaps idiosyncratic titles to be meaningful for the reader. Reading is, after all, a highly personal, private activity.

Some time ago at a conference in which information technology was the theme, a speaker somewhat derisively referred to books as outdated models of linear thinking. The preferred way to read, to that speaker, was on a computer. The irony, of course, is that reading on a screen that moves up and down or left to right, is literally linear and is a throwback to the scrolls of yore that were made obsolete by the codex, a superior way to present written literature in the age of manuscripts and later when moveable type became available.

I would not be surprised to learn that some, perhaps a majority, of these Reed essayists own eBook readers and have assigned them a specific role, but that is not what they turn to as they pursue their bookish passions. They want to see those trusted, cherished companions in bookselves, pored on desks, littering any available plane surface so that at a whim, the desired volume can be picked up, readily

day against what the majority believe. That is, you may help students find something that they have not been able to find and they may well show you their gratitude deserved praise. They may also fustigate the Web and Google and all the rest because they have been frustrated by their inability to find what they want. The same could be said of that ABD faculty member who wants to give you a Nobel Prize for finding that the current illustrated books, especially fiction, but there are many exceptions. This student, wanting to encourage support of a local press, gave away copies of illustrated books published by Good Ink, an imprint of Scout Books (www.scoutbooks.com), a Portland, Oregon publisher. The book that I chose is The Story of an Hour and other stories, by Kate Chopin and illustrated by Gemma Correll.

The day after the reception, I had to fly to Boston for a meeting. I don’t have a Nook or a Kindle, preferring paperbacks when I travel. The Story of an Hour fit in my shirt pocket and I didn’t have to power it down when the plane’s cabin doors were closed. Instead, I clicked on the overhead reading light and leaned back to enjoy Kate Chopin’s sense of humor. She would have made much of modern America.

College students are not only reading, they are collecting their favorite books and thinking about why they collect and why and continue. Aesthetics apply to the illustrated books but the other collections are reflections of intellectual interests and a drive to be educated beyond the classroom. These students, I call them curious undergraduates, are the ones I used to buy for. The students I met and listened to at Reed were living proof that curious (intellectually, that is) undergraduates exist. The national book collecting contest is testimony that we are still producing thoughtful readers and they are not satisfied with having hundreds of books on an eBook reader. Rather, they are content with a smaller number on their shelves where they can be seen, pulled off the shelf at will, held lovingly, opened randomly, perhaps to a hand-notated passage, and then placed gently back on the shelf. A couple of the students noted that some of their favorites had come apart from use and had to be replaced. Their collections are not museums of books that look good on the shelf but living things full of ideas, information, and sustenance as in “Season to taste: A love affair in cookbooks,” by Stephanie Bastek.

More than a decade ago I had occasion to go to Reed College for meetings in the library and would arrive before the staff got to work. The obscure bookish atmosphere of the library was open and I would find students there sleeping, reading, studying, and writing. I would head for the area where the “little magazines” were shelved, a luxury coming from a technical university, and after choosing a couple of those inviting literary journals, would plop myself down in an overstuffed chair situated among other comfortable chairs and sofas, and read until time for my meeting.

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