

If the University Is in the Computer, Where Does That Leave the Library? MOOCs Discovered

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If the University Is in the Computer, Where Does That Leave the Library? MOOCs Discovered

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The following is a transcription of a live presentation at the 2013 Charleston Conference. Slides and video are available online at <http://sched.co/17Jn63W>.

Meg White: Good afternoon, and welcome to our final plenary session of the day. We are going to spend the next hour or so, as John [Dove] said, discussing one of the hottest topics in higher education today: Massive Open Online Courses, or as they are affectionately known, and somewhat awkwardly known, really, as MOOCs. My name is Meg White, and I am joined today by a group of experts who will share a few comments to get us started, and then we will open the floor for your questions. And John will make sure to answer all of your questions even in our limited timeframe today, so no worries.

This is designed to be interactive, and I do not need to tell this audience what that means. Please, as our panelists are making their comments, note your questions, and you will have time to have a discussion with these folks with each other before we close the session today.

So let me get on with the introductions of the panel this afternoon. I am joined by Meredith Schwartz who is the Senior Editor of News and Features at *Library Journal*, and Meredith will provide us with some background and discuss the current MOOC landscape which is changing every day, quite frankly. Lynn Sutton who is Dean at the Z. Smith Reynolds Library at Wake Forest University will talk with us about how her library is leveraging this technology even today, and then finally Rick Anderson, who is Associate Dean for Scholarly Resources and Collections at the Marriott Library at the University of Utah, will give us some takeaways and hopefully some practical advice on what the future looks like for us as we return to our day to day after Charleston. So,

without further ado, I am going to take a seat and pass the baton to Meredith. Thank you.

Meredith Schwartz: What is a MOOC? That is the reaction that I got from many librarians when I was researching an article called “Massive Open Opportunity,” which we published last May. At the time, MOOCs were already on the radar of higher education pundits, but not many of the classes had actually started, particularly outside Staten fields. However, by the time the finished article appeared only a few months later, MOOCs had already started to enter the public consciousness, or to put it another way, they had started approaching the peak of the Gartner Hype Cycle. They were being touted as the solution to democratizing higher education in the face of rising costs, lifelong learning, college readiness, continuing education, grocery shopping, everything. Librarians were hungry to know what this hot new development meant for the library, and the answer seemed to be they have several hats to wear: supporting production of MOOCs, student use, dissemination, assessment, and preservation.

So, by far, the most mature role for librarians was being a materials matchmaker. Finding materials that could be made accessible to classes numbering in the thousands, most of whom would not pay anything or were unable to pay anything, and they were not matriculated students so they had no access to institutional holdings in print or electronic formats. So librarians got in the business of helping faculty hunt down OA materials which would serve the same functions as the text the professors were used to using. Some librarians also found that this had the side effect of encouraging more faculty members to make their own work open access. When that did not work, they had to start

negotiating for those traditionally published materials. At the time, that really was not happening very often. In the last few months, publishers have begun partnering with MOOC providers to offer content to students at no charge. Notable examples include Coursera, which is doing a pilot with Cengage, McMillan Higher Ed, Oxford University Press, Sage, and Wiley, and Elsevier is running a free textbook pilot with students in five MOOCs that are run by edX, which is a nonprofit MOOC provider. Meanwhile, digital textbook producer SIPX crossed the "MOOCs must be free" barrier by helping libraries offer content to MOOC students for a few dollars per article or chapter.

Here we give a shout out to some of those materials, and if you download the slides afterwards all of these are live links. Professors, especially those already used to flipping their classrooms, want to include not just videos of their own talking heads but images, music, and other videos in their MOOC presentations, so figuring out what counts as fair use is another library bailiwick. Because MOOCs have such large audiences; are not part of the traditional educational institution; are sometimes provided by for-profit companies, even if the professor and the librarian are working for a nonprofit university; and are viewed in countries with weaker protections for fair use, some of the safe harbors that faculty has counted on for educational purposes are weaker or nonexistent. All this material, by the way: shamelessly stolen from the OCLC Symposium in March.

So that does not mean that we are restricted to only public domain, open access, or publisher provided materials. The key is to use only the smallest portion of the material that you need for the point. Do not include the whole Monty Python skit to get to the punch line; only include the part that you actually need, and you have a much stronger case.

So the next role is pieces of the production puzzle. Libraries are helping professors produce MOOCs, literally. Providing the recording and editing equipment, of course the tech support, and in one case, they even provided a live studio audience

because the professor felt the lectures were not working without people to laugh on cue.

The next phase is MOOCs for librarianship for use within the profession, whether for paraprofessionals, for library school students, or for librarians who want continuing education. This did not make it so much into the article, but since the article was published, there have been three MOOCs run by LIS instructors. David Lankes of Syracuse University presented his New Librarianship Master Class, which was unusual compared to most MOOCs because it required that the students purchase a textbook, at a discount, and it also offered MLS or continuing education credit to students who paid a fee and completed the examinations. Michael Stevens who, full disclosure, is an LJ columnist and who is a San Jose University instructor, taught his Hyperlinked Library MOOC. We are going to do an article on it in December with more detail but one of the things that was interesting about that is that it was capped. It was not actually massive. It was only 500 students allowed. Of those, he said over 300 were active participants, so they also had a much smaller drop-off rate than many MOOCs show. It was also not run by Coursera or edX or one of these MOOC provider intermediaries. It was run through BuddyPress which is an offshoot of WordPress. Finally, Jeffrey Pomerantz at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill ran his course on metadata through Coursera, but although he is an LIS instructor, that course was not primarily aimed at the librarian audience. It was aimed to teach the general public about metadata, and I suspect that the interest was benefited by the fact that right around when this was happening Edward Snowden's revelations about metadata were entering the public consciousness.

So MOOCs in the public library is a still developing area. There is widespread agreement in principle that MOOCs offer a good opportunity for public libraries to build educational programming without having to recruit local experts, but, as of May, I had only found one public library that was actually doing it. That is the County of Los Angeles Public Library which included MOOCs into the Center for Learning Initiative as its Strategic Plan.

Since then, the Ridgefield Connecticut Library has used a Coursera MOOC on the *Fiction of Relationship* from Brown University as the centerpiece of its adult summer reading programs. We are going to cover that one in December, too. And a student in the Hyperlinked Library MOOC created a detailed plan to implement a MOOC club at Oregon's Corvallis-Benton County Public Library, but, at this point, theoretical discussions about why this is such a great idea really seriously outnumber places that are actually doing it. Of course we have no way to track how many students are using their public libraries on an individual basis to access MOOC content.

Libraries are also starting to produce MOOCs of their own. You will hear a lot more about that from Lynn in a minute, but I also wanted to call out New York Public Libraries Sinology 101 MOOC which was taught by Raymond Pun when he was there. He has now gone to NYU Shanghai. He also presented on it at LJ's Digital Shift Conference a couple of weeks ago, and that is online for free if you want to watch his presentation. That is where I stole the slide from. And across the pond, the British libraries signed up with UK Biz MOOC provider Futurelearn to create its own MOOCs based on its own materials.

So now we are into very largely uncharted territory: roles for the library in MOOCs assessment. How to assess the success of a MOOC is a really unanswered question at this point. Without any filtering for readiness before people come into the classes or any credentialing incentive at the end, dropout rates are huge. Ninety percent is the number most commonly thrown around. I have heard it as high as 98% of the people who dropout. The thing is, though, the enrollments are so huge to begin with that even 10% left can be more students than that professor can teach in a working lifetime. So is that successful? It is not clear whether students' learning goals are even well measured by completion or whether they are getting what they need and that is why they are dropping out, and, of course, the University's goals, in terms of prestige, or Coursera's goals, in terms of profit, may not relate to those metrics that all. So it is

hard to say libraries should participate in assessment when we do not really know what we are assessing, but I will say the growing role of libraries as data wranglers indicates that maybe there is a place for us there to figure out what we are measuring.

The next role, which I think is bigger, is preservation. Preservation of MOOCs' material is the key challenge because most MOOCs presented by third-party providers, many of whom since they are for profits may shake out as the category matures, and when they go away what is going to happen to that content? Even the ones that stay viable, they do not really have incentive to keep obsolete versions around and make them available for study. When the professor improves a class, they are not going to offer the six preimproved classes. So if you are a scholar studying MOOCs, you need that material preserved somewhere. It is important the libraries claim a place at the table in negotiations with those providers to make sure that that content can be preserved. Creative Commons is urging that MOOC providers use CC license, in part because it enables preservation. Also, the advantage to doing it now is there still are not that many MOOCs. I believe 493 is the last number I saw. So, if we can get a preservation structure going we can apply it without having to have a massive backlog of content.

Very recently in the UK, someone named Russell Boyett ran the Repository Fringe Developer Challenge with a proposal to build a MOOC preservation toolkit which would reach into MOOCs, particularly open source ones, put them together with social media interactions around the same content and use SWORD to push it into a repository together.

So back to the Gartner Hype Cycle. Today, MOOCs excitement seems to have done the slide into MOOCs skepticism. Faculty have raised concerns about who owns the intellectual property being offered in MOOCs and about MOOCs having the potential to reduce the diversity of scholarship to a few rock star professors from brand-name institutions. Concerns have also been raised about how well MOOCs actually work to democratize education. A study by Columbia University's

Community College Research Center found that all students performed less well in online courses than they do in person, and the gap is wider among those with lower GPAs, men, and African American students. When San Jose State and MOOC provider Udacity offered several for credit courses online to high risk students, pass rates were dramatically lower than in-person rates for not at-risk student population. These concerns have led to experiments with tweaking the format of MOOCs from a distributed open collaborative course built as an anti-MOOC to SPOCs, which are Small Private Online Courses, and even SMOOCs, which are Synchronous Massive Open Online Conferences. I swear I did not make that up. They have also led to calls for embedded librarians or library students doing virtual internships to provide support to MOOC students as they would for students in a paying online program or on a physical campus. However, as Forrest Wright pointed out in a D-Lib article, even in online courses with paying courses with limited enrollment time demands have been a challenge for this kind of support. So personalized one-on-one reference assistance is probably not happening for MOOCs at this point. What we can do though is to create scalable options like lib guides and tutorials that are MOOC focused and do not point to institutional holdings that those students can access and then reach out to faculty to make sure that those are included in the course resources.

This is a fast-moving field. It is so fast moving, but there are two things I want to include on this that happened after I finalized the slides. So in addition to these, Educause has recently released a massive MOOC review, which I highly recommend, and Coursera has launched overseas physical locations to take MOOCs in. I am not exactly sure how that is not a college but we can talk about that later.

MOOCs raise at least as many questions for higher education and for libraries as they answer. They may ultimately end up with floppy disks on the list of technological innovations that briefly transformed their industries only to be supplanted. Or they may become ubiquitous and eventually give rise to the next generation of

learning tools. Already there are calls to disaggregate the MOOC, turning it from a course into more of a course pack or a library for the flipped classroom. We cannot hang back to see where MOOCs end up any more than the right answer in the 1990s would have been to ignore floppy disks, because they matter now regardless of where they are going. Supporting MOOC production is fast becoming a core library role at many institutions and stretching beyond that to supporting use, dissemination, assessment, and preservation gives libraries an opportunity to help shape developing policy and priorities. That is all she wrote it. Thank you.

Lynn Sutton: I am tempted to ask you to all stand up and demonstrate the MOOC, but, I will just wait for the slides to come up. I am Lynn Sutton from Wake Forest University, and I have many opinions about MOOCs, in general, which maybe we will get into at the end. The primary one being that I think MOOCs are a reflection of a societal imperative to bring high-quality education at a low cost to global citizens. I think that is what is really driving all of this. But, my story here today is much different, and it is really the story of a library that did not want to be left out of the MOOC movement when its own institution was not participating, so we just decided to do our own.

Maybe it would help if I explained a little bit about my institution. Wake Forest is a small private research university in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Meg [White] is a proud alum of Wake Forest, and she can tell you that it is a place where there are small classes, where you get to know your faculty members on a first name basis, where you go to their house, where you have a close personal relationship. That is what Wake Forest stands for and prides itself on—this up close and personal kind of relationship, which is the exact opposite of MOOCs. This is my main point, I guess, which is that we as libraries have so much more to offer to the MOOC discussion than locating public domain materials and/or providing copyright assistance. That is certainly a valuable role that we can play, but it is not the only role that we can play. I believe that higher education is facing disruptive change like it has never seen in its 900-

plus year existence, and we, as libraries, have faced disruptive change very successfully in the past several decades. I have been a librarian since 1976, and we have had change every year. I do not know any industry that has changed as much as libraries have. Now change is coming to higher education, and I think that we have a role to play on our campus, and we can lead that change from the library. That is what we have tried to do with this MOOC.

This timeline is a very quick way for me just to walk through what exactly happened. We teach a 1.5 credit Information Literacy class at our library, and in fall 2011, we decided to teach two sections online. Wake Forest does not have any online courses in its undergraduate program. We had one developing course, a graduate course in counseling, but nothing at the undergraduate level, so we just decided to experiment and try it. We did and it was very successful. The instructor said she had very close personal relationships with her students. They told her things online that they would not tell her by sitting in a classroom, and she considered it to be a success, but the faculty on campus were very angry. They said "who told you you could do that?" And of course we had not asked for permission, so it started two years' worth of governance discussions on the campus, and now finally they have voted and they are going to allow online classes. But it all started with our two sections.

In February 2012, I made a presentation to the Board of Visitors, the undergraduate college Board of Visitors, about that course, and they were interested in the online aspect, but they were also very interested in the information literacy aspect. They said, "You are kidding; you have a class on how to manage information? Gee, I wish I had had that class when I was in school. And, in fact, if you give that class again I would love to take that class online." So that kind of got me thinking. Then, all hell broke loose in spring 2012. It was MOOC mania: Coursera, Udacity, edX. Teresa Sullivan got fired and rehired at UVA because they did not think she knew enough about online education. So all of that was going on in the background, and in summer 2012, we hired a new e-learning librarian fresh out of library

school to help teach that online graduate course in Counseling.

In fall 2012, I will never forget, I was driving down to Beaufort, North Carolina, with my husband kind of grumbling that Wake Forest was not going to be part of a MOOC. I loved MOOCs. I had taken two MOOCs by that time already, one on Beethoven sonatas and one on the Ancient Greeks, just because I loved it. I am a learner; I just thought it was terrific. So I finally said to him, "Well, if the University is not going to do it, we could just do it ourselves. We could just put our LIB 100 classes online and send it out to Wake Forest alums." So I took that challenge to our e-learning librarian, and he said, "I can do that," and in winter 2013, he put it together and it went live on March 18. It lasted four weeks, I will tell you a little bit more about it later, and we have had a second course since. It just finished on Monday. It was called Deacon Development 101.

Let me tell you a little bit more about each one. The name of our library is the Z. Smith Reynolds Library, but we call it "ZSR." ZSR is like a person on campus; she is very friendly, very smart, funny; people love her. She helps you. So when we went to name the course, we named it ZSRx because you have to add "x" to everything, right, edX, TEDx, everything "x," and then because it ended in "Rx" we called it "the cure for the common web." It was a short version of the Information Literacy course that we give to undergraduates. It was four weeks. These are the four modules that you will see. It was basically how to search the web. Basic searching, advanced searching, privacy, and filters, which was by far the most popular module, and then information management tools. We used Google Sites as a platform. We used Google Groups and Google Plus as discussion communities. We had hoped for 100 participants. I said to Kyle, "If we could get 100 people to sign up that would be great," (because we only marketed it to Wake Forest alumni, and there are only 40,000 alumni). So we marketed it, and we got 700 registrants. We were so happy; on six continents, they came from all over the place. We had many, many happy alumni and friends.

I was reporting on the success of ZSRx to the Advancement group, and the head of parent

programs heard it and said, “You know, we are looking for ways to engage our parents, especially incoming parents as their child starts Wake Forest, and maybe you can give that course again to new incoming parents. Could you do that?” And I said, “Absolutely!” because at Wake Forest, incoming parents are the highest profile donor prospects, so of course I wanted to get out in front of the parents. So instead of adapting the original course, we decided to build a custom course for Wake Forest parents on what it means to be the parent of a college student today. How not to be a “helicopter parent,” how to let your child grow and develop and make their own decisions. We reached out to offices all over the campus, in campus life, student life, everywhere; they helped us build the course and we came up with Deacon Development 101.

This time we used the Canvas platform. It is the free version of Canvas. We had 200 parents who signed up from three continents, and we had five weeks and five modules. It was a required orientation for the first time; which was to get acquainted with the Canvas platform. There was a module on Gen-Y. There was a session on Academic Development, and I had a module in that. The search for identity was the fourth, and then there was one on well-being which is an initiative on our campus. We wrapped the whole thing up into what we call “A Parents’ Toolkit” and it is packaged now and lives on Google Sites. You can go to our website in the library and you can look at both of these courses, all the videos, all of the reading materials, everything is still available online. Just the discussions are closed.

I will not read the testimonials, but I am here to tell you that people loved it. Just like any other MOOC, not everybody who started finished it. About half of the people who took the first ZSRx course interacted in some way with it. About 20%, as near as we can figure, made it to the end but those who did absolutely loved it, and they kept gushing and saying, “When are you going to do more? We want more topics.” The second course is having likewise a very positive impact. It only closed on Monday, but as we were driving down here on Tuesday, I started seeing testimonials come in. One mother told us that it had changed

her behavior toward her daughter because her daughter just told her she was changing her major to philosophy, and she said her initial reaction would have been, “How are you going to get a job with philosophy?” but now it is, “Well, tell me about that. Why is it that it is interesting to you?” So we made a difference in one family’s life, anyway.

We do have future plans. In winter, we are offering a digital publishing MOOC that I am hereby inviting all of you to take. Social media will be in the spring, and then our future plans are to try and partner with the public library to offer a genealogy course and then perhaps with the business and health information sectors. We would like to partner with the medical library and with our business library, and also we have thought that we could perhaps offer our platform to our own faculty since Wake Forest is not going to do any MOOCs on Coursera or edX anytime soon. Perhaps they would want to do a chemistry course or anthropology course or whatever they think they can get an audience for. We could make our platform available, and we could be the producers of that. But I think what we have demonstrated is that it is possible to create an open online learning community, and we did it in the “Wake Forest Way.” The Wake Forest Way is to be up close and personal and, through the discussions and so forth that took place and by having a limited number of people, we felt we could do that and we learned a lot. Thank you.

Rick Anderson: So you were promised practical advice from me, and what you are going to get, mostly at first, is more philosophical advice (good luck getting a job with it), but then I will offer some more practical recommendations.

As far as the way we think about MOOCs in libraries, I am afraid that sometimes we worry too much about the motivations of those who are providing MOOCs and other forms of alternative education, and what I would like to do is sort of acknowledge up front the possibility, and maybe even the likelihood, that there are people offering MOOCs who want nothing but to make money. Some of these may actually be people who are conscious enemies of traditional higher education. I am not saying that motives do not matter, but

while the motives of these folks are not entirely irrelevant, I think that it is important that we not be distracted by them when we think about what the future holds for us, and the strategy I use when I catch myself going down this road is to remind myself that real life is not a movie. Real life is not a novel in which you can assume that the person with the blackest heart is ultimately going to meet the worst fate. In real life, people and initiatives fail or succeed for reasons that have nothing to do with whether they are good people or bad people. So when it comes to making strategic decisions for ourselves, whether we are publishers or educators or librarians, I think discussions of the motivations behind MOOCs tend to be more distracting than useful. The reality, I think, is that MOOCs are operating in a real marketplace of time and attention, one in which students have to make difficult decisions about how to allocate those scarce resources. The impact that MOOCs are having, and that I think they will continue to have in the future, does not hinge on whether or not we think MOOCs are a good idea; it hinges on whether or not MOOCs solve a *real problem for real people at a price that they will accept*—a price in terms of money and a price in terms of time and attention.

This brings up a real problem. The real problem is that traditional higher education is very expensive. It is expensive in terms of money, and it is expensive in terms of time and attention, and an awful lot of people want it. There is the problem for those of us working in traditional higher education. To some degree, the people who want higher education want pure learning in order to improve themselves, in order to learn about things that are interesting to them, in order to become better people. But they also want certification, and currently MOOCs do a better job of providing the former than they do of providing the latter—but that is going to change.

Now, it is too soon to say exactly what is going to happen with MOOCs, but right now I do think it is safe to say that traditional higher education's monopoly on post-high school education is eroding, and I am concerned that we are wasting a lot of time and energy either evangelizing about MOOCs or demonizing them. I think the reality is

that the MOOC is a tool. It seems clear to me that MOOCs are here to stay, because there is absolutely no reason for MOOCs to disappear, so I do not think the question is whether MOOCs are going to usher in the great day of an educational utopia or whether they are going to destroy the brains of our children. The question is *what do we do with this tool?* How can we best use this tool to provide as the most possible good to the people we are serving?

So with those questions and that sort of philosophical background in mind, speaking as a librarian, how should we be thinking about MOOCs? Why should we care about them? For right now I want to bracket the question of libraries actually providing MOOCs, which is a great topic, but right now I want to focus on the question of what it means for my library if my university decides to get into the MOOC business. First of all, we in libraries normally restrict access to online information resources to currently enrolled students and staff and faculty, obviously. That is what our license terms require us to do, and the number of people that fit in that population is very often what defines the price that we pay for access to those online resources. However, we do not typically restrict access to our *research services* to people who are currently enrolled students or staff or faculty. Anybody can walk into the library and walk up to the reference desk and generally expect to get some kind of service. Now, this arrangement would not apply so much to MOOCs because few of the people enrolled in a MOOC are likely to be in a position to walk into the library and approach the reference desk. However, it is also true that we generally provide telephone reference and reference chat services to unaffiliated users. MOOCs, to the degree that they take hold and become prominent in our institutions, could very quickly force us to do one of two things: either change that practice and begin enforcing some kind of authentication, or to scale up, and scale is, I think, one of the great unexplored problems that we have in academic libraries when it comes to research assistance and traditional reference services. I have said this before, and I will probably say it 100 times again: the reason we think our reference services work is that so few of

the people we are supposed to be serving actually try to use them. MOOCs could force us to finally confront that issue and figure out a way to deal with it. And I want to emphasize that this is not a new issue. Scale is an old issue that we have generally avoided confronting.

This is another interesting question for us in libraries: whether sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. What I mean by that is that we in libraries tend to think that open access is a really wonderful idea as long as it threatens the traditional business of publishers. Once we start talking about open access solutions (such as MOOCs) that might threaten the traditional business of higher education and libraries, all of a sudden we start getting very grumpy about openness—and I will go one step further and say that, in my experience, the people who are most enthusiastic about open access in the scholarly publishing arena also seem to be the grumpiest about the concept of MOOCs in the higher education arena, whereas those who take a more measured stance on openness are, also, I find, a little more open minded to the idea of MOOCs. At the institutional level, I think one thing we will find is that at institutions where there is more enthusiasm for the development and administration of MOOCs, there may also be more administrative pressure in the direction of open access policies, or even mandates, because, obviously, locally produced open resources are going to be more useful in the MOOC environment than resources that are behind toll access walls and restricted by traditional copyright.

What do I think we in libraries ought to be doing right now? I would like to suggest three general categories of endeavor with three fairly specific recommendations. What Lynn [Sutton] has done at Wake Forest is a perfect example of the first, and I think somebody ought to make a documentary film about what she and her crew

have done with MOOCs. If, in fact, we in libraries believe that going down the road of MOOCs is a good idea, then we need to be taking the opportunity to show leadership. All of us could be asking ourselves, “How much of what we traditionally think of as bibliographic instruction could be turned into a MOOC that anybody, either on our campus or off our campus, can take advantage of?”

I also think we also need to be looking for opportunities that are created by the way in which MOOCs are softening the ground of higher education practice and, particularly, the textbook market. Personally, I suspect MOOCs are going to destroy the traditional textbook market long before they destroy the traditional higher education market. This is partly because traditional textbooks are already kind of on the ropes in a way that higher education is not, but also partly because the MOOC has the capability to perform a function very similar to textbooks, whereas the MOOC is not yet, I do not think, in a position to replace an awful lot of the desirable functions of a college experience. If, in fact, MOOCs pose a threat to traditional textbook publishing, then libraries, I think, are in an unusually strong position to take advantage of that and to help that happen.

And then the third thing that we need to do is take care. I believe very strongly in risk taking. I also believe in due diligence. The Tony Robbins quote that Meredith used, I think, is worth considering here: “The path to success is to take massive determined action.” That is absolutely true—but what is also true is that it is also the path to disastrous failure. Now, that does not mean we should not do it—it does not mean that we should not take massive determined action. It only implies the importance of due diligence. We need to know what we are getting into, to a reasonable degree, before we take the leap—and then I believe we need to take the leap.