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Back Talk -- CD in Digital Era CALIS

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Marijane White, recent graduate of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, finds this interlinking of patterns and yarns to finished projects to be one of the more useful functions of **Ravelry**. **White** points out that “before **Ravelry**, you had to visit a whole bunch of different sites to find patterns (**Knitty**, **Knitting Pattern Central**, etc.) and then if you wanted to find example projects that others had made, you had to comb through **Flickr** or blog posts to find them.” **White** went on to say, “One of the most remarkable things about **Ravelry** to me is how it brings diverse sources of information together into a really useful knowledge base.”

Sarah Roy, Public Services Librarian at **Tennessee Wesleyan College**, describes **Ravelry** as a bibliography/yarnography of patterns and yarns. Says **Roy**, “The pattern pages act like a citation count; some patterns have been ‘cited’ (made, photographed, modified) so often because they are reliable sources — well-written, highly useful, and, by now, considered classics.”

Roy goes on to express the opinion that the pattern and yarn searches in **Ravelry** serve as an example as to how databases and library catalogs should work. She explains:

A knitter (patron) says, “I need to find a pattern (article/book) for X item (topic) that is free online (free/on the shelf/full text in the database), and I can only use Y type of yarn (recent/peer reviewed materials).” The *knitter* finds a range of patterns targeted to their needs in one search box and two to three clicks, in a clearly laid-out results page, with pictures and notes to help them decide which objects suit their needs. The *patron* gets a mass of results sorted by the vendor’s idea of relevance, often without an abstract to help save time, in unattractive interface that can be difficult to navigate.

Honestly, the functionality of the search features within **Ravelry** make it worth checking out, even if you don’t knit or crochet.

An Online Community

Ravelry also has a vital and thriving online community component, facilitating communication between users in a number of ways. Each registered user has their own message box, through which they can contact any other registered user. There are also groups and forums, where people with common interests can congregate and talk with each other. You name it, and there is probably a group for it on **Ravelry**. If there isn’t a group for it, you can create your own. **White** finds this ability to create groups to be particularly important. “There were a good number of message boards and mailing lists out there before **Ravelry**, but none of them allowed their users to create their own sub-communities,” she says.

Librarians, for example, have their own special place on **Ravelry**, in the **Ravelibrarians** group (Figure 4). There, job announcements are posted, questions about library school programs are asked and answered, and librarians often consult with each other on professional issues. Just recently someone posted asking for ideas and assistance on cataloging a vintage knitting collection, and received feedback and suggestions about how to get started.

“Even if someone is not very active in terms of contributing to the discussion, there is still an incredible amount of information to read. It’s like having your own personal knitting staff available 24/7/365 to answer questions, make suggestions, or offer feedback,” says **Jensen**. In the case of the **Ravelibrarians**, **Ravelry** users consult not just on issues of knitting and crocheting, but on professional topics as well.

Prior to working for **Ravelry**, **Cogar’s** favorite features of **Ravelry** centered on her design portfolio and the way it allowed her connect with people who were knitting designs. Says **Cogar**, “It was pretty amazing, for me, to join back in May 2007 and see that other users had already knit my designs — I never would have known or seen the projects they made from my patterns if it wasn’t for **Ravelry**.” **Cogar** went on to say that “**Ravelry** allows such a great means for connection between designers and knitters/crocheters, or shop owners and their customers, is one of the most inspiring things about the site — it puts everyone around the world on a similar level and offers so many ways to communicate.”



Figure 4. Ravelibrarians Group

Not Your Average Social Networking Site

As an online community, one of the significant differences between **Ravelry** and social networking Websites like **MySpace** or **Facebook** is that on **MySpace** or **Facebook** users are primarily looking to make connections with people they know in their off-line lives, while on **Ravelry** users are primarily looking to connect with people with common interests, not people they already know.

Ravelry allows people who have a common interest (knitting, crocheting, and other fiber arts) to connect with each other and explore other common interests, whether it is librarianship, insects, or Buffy the Vampire Slayer. “I firmly believe that **Ravelry** is the 21st century answer to ‘bridge night’ or other social networking institutions of the last century,” says **Ravelry** user **Elizabeth Trzebiatowski**, a stay-at home mom in Stevens Point, Wisconsin. **Trzebiatowski** went on to explain, “People are busier in general than they were then, but **Ravelry** provides an outlet for people with similar interests (and subsets of interests, as evidenced by the massive number of individual groups devoted to wildly divergent topics) to gather and converse and share... Where else can so many people with a shared interest in, say, cephalopods and entrelac join together and chat about it?” [For the non-knitterly, entrelac is a particular knitting technique.]

Where else, indeed?

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mine for free materials. Doing **Google** searches for specific topics also reveals scores of wonderful databases which are free for the picking.

Our goal has always been to make it easy for readers to find the information they needed; and in the past we bought as many books and journals as possible to increase the chances that we had already acquired what they wanted before our students and faculty members entered the door. This is still the same but we now have Web resources to help us meet our goal. Because of the Web, we work more consortially than in the past. Collection Development in the print and digital ages has one more thing in common: You didn’t have enough money then, and you don’t have enough now!! 🌿

Back Talk — CD in Digital Era CALIS

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This past week I attended the 10th Anniversary celebration of the founding of CALIS (China Academic Libraries Information System). It is sort of a cross between a SOLINET (<http://www.solinet.net>) and OCLC (<http://www.oclc.org/us/en/default.htm>) in that it clearly sees its role to be one of total “no holds barred” advocacy for its members by purchasing content in their behalf, by negotiating shared licenses, and by operating a shared cataloging bibliographic utility. During my attendance at the meeting I was struck with a sense of the break-neck gallop into the digital era that these libraries have been experiencing since China decided to become a major actor on the world’s stage. Thirty years ago when I went as a member of the **Committee on East Asian Libraries** delegation to China, college and university libraries were largely unattended academic dustbins. Now scores and scores of them are bright, shiny, and rapidly growing with legions of young and ambitious librarians.

I was asked to talk about university library collection development in the digital environment and to say something of the situation in Hong Kong. It occurred to me that most of the basic functions performed by collection developers were the same: we need to understand user needs, what our collections already have to meet those needs, what relevant material is being published, and then to select as much of what is good as our pocketbooks will allow.

Such talk is comforting, but of course I also had to talk about the environment in which we continue to shuffle our CD deck chairs around is completely different: unlike in the past when our patrons would fairly quickly come to the library after exhausting the value of their own bookshelves and those of their friends, today’s users only give us a glance when THE fount of all knowledge, the WWWeb, fails them. As shown in the OCLC “College Students’ Perceptions of Libraries and Infor-

mation Resources” report (<http://www.oclc.org/us/en/reports/perceptionscollege.htm>), 89 percent of college students start their information searches with a Web search engine, while only two percent begin with a library Website. Moreover, most of these students are perfectly satisfied with what they get from the Web and their abilities to navigate it. I stressed in my talk that because we live in such a changed environment, we need to change so many things about how we operate our libraries.

At the **University of Hong Kong** my colleague **Gayle Chan** was curious to see whether Hong Kong’s students were like those in the OCLC study. Her own surveys showed that while a smaller proportion of our students started with the Web and a larger proportion started with our library’s Website, still the percentage of our students going for a Web search engine first exceeded 75 percent and those going with the library’s Website were still only around 15 percent. Another area where there was a significant difference in the two surveys related to student satisfaction with the information provided by search engines. While more than 95 percent of the OCLC student survey respondents were satisfied with the information they got from Web search engines, only half of our students were so satisfied.

Most of my talk focused on a discussion of while the basic collection development functions performed by my library’s collection developers were the same as in the past, the methods employed to do this work had changed significantly. For example, we now conduct online user satisfaction surveys in order to understand the needs of our users. Biennially we ask all members of our user communities to gauge for us the importance of our services and collections and then to tell us how well we are doing. This enables us to conduct a “gap analysis” and to develop a list of the areas of most importance to our readers where we need to improve. For undergraduates, the

most consistent gap over the past six years has been the “lack of sufficient books in my field.” While we always did surveys in the past, the Web makes this job much easier. We now have a group studying this issue more carefully: is the problem the lack of duplicates, the lack of unique titles, or the lack of English or Chinese language materials? I also illustrated how we use e-journal and eBook vendor reports, proxy server use statistical reports developed by our system’s office and OPAC circulation statistics to better understand the needs of our readers.

Collection analysis services of the type provided by OCLC’s **WorldCat Collection Analysis Service** or **Library Dynamics’s Spectra Dimension** were also discussed. While collection analysis tools like these have been around for several years in North America, having such services easily available in China have yet to become a reality. Many were interested in being able to compare one library’s holdings with those at other libraries and to be able to print out lists of books which others had for significant areas of interest.

Certainly another area where collection development work is very different in the electronic era, from how it was in the print world, relates to the amount of consortial purchasing going on. I remember well, as a new selector in the 1970’s, spending hours supplementing approval plans by going through tall piles of publisher brochures and exclusion slips deciding a “yes” or a “no” for each purchase decision. Part of the fun was being able to make independent decisions on what to buy. Now, with our own library spending 62 percent of its library materials budget on electronic materials, **Janny Lai** our E-resources Coordinator has to spend a lot of time meeting or communicating with her colleagues before decisions are made. We estimate we saved about US\$3.5 million dollars last year through consortial purchasing (we also buy North American and British monographs together).

A final area of difference discussed is the importance of “mining the Web” for freebies. In the old days gift and exchange materials composed a very small part of the books which we added to the academic libraries where I worked. I foresee this changing significantly in the future. Of course linking to books relevant to local needs in the **Google Book Search** system is the obvious place to look for out-of-print books to supplement current purchases. For example, we have a significant interest in books about China. When I did a **Google Book Search** for “China” I found 188,600 entries with 4,313 available to downloading. Of course a selector will have to sort out the books about chinaware dishes, but this is a simple illustration of what is possible. If you haven’t looked at **Bookyards**: library to the world (<http://www.bookyards.com/>) you should take a look at another example of where to

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