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From the Other Side of the Street

University Press, Academic Library, Library Wholesaler: Views on the Current Environment

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For the past five years, a small group of librarians from the Academic Affairs Library at the **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill** and members of the **University of North Carolina Press** have met together at least annually to learn more about one another's work and trends in scholarly communication. In May 1998, the group welcomed **Bob Nardini**, Vice President of Collection Management at **Yankee Book Peddler**, as a guest.

The synergy in the group was evident as **Kate Torrey**, Director of UNC Press, **Gordon Rowley**, University Bibliographer, and **Bob Nardini** from YBP presented five major trends from their perspectives.

Their brief remarks generated 15 trends which the author of this paper collapsed into four categories of changes: 1) content, 2) economic situations, 3) organization, and 4) technology. The ideas here are my interpretation and spin on the comments made by the speakers and participants at the symposium.

University presses find themselves publishing more interdisciplinary works today because the traditional subject boundaries seem to be increasingly permeable. Not only books but many online resources are being aggregated. In the face of these trends, can libraries maintain long-held subject allocation budgeting practices? Can the library translate prior assumptions about a collecting "core" within the framework of the new interdisciplinary research and publishing? How can approval plan vendors observe the traditional boundaries and the new ones when categorizing these books for distribution to libraries?

In the journals area, the content is being disaggregated, i.e., the content or articles become more important than the container (the journal). Also, publishers are starting to add value by the interface provided to the actual content. Interestingly, as these dynamics are playing out in publishing and collecting, the vendor is faced with a new way to view his services. No longer is the vendor selling just a product; now there is a rapid movement toward demands for other services, in addition to the actual product.

As we all know, economic forces are producing a number of changes affecting all parties in the scholarly communication chain. One of these which rightly concerns publishers is that of consortial buying to offset economic pressure. When this occurs, the publisher has a somewhat different market. This may result in sales to customers, such as smaller libraries, previously unreachable. However, will this trend result in a decrease in sales overall? It is too soon to tell. Librarians are likewise con-

cerned about the increased world of information and the decreasing resources with which to collect or access it. Their responses have included appeals for more money to their governing bodies, complaints to publishers of high prices, and the banding together into consortia. Unfortunately, even a combination of all of these strategies will not be sufficient to purchase all or even most of the products available and of interest to libraries.

These economic factors have led, as everyone in the scholarly publishing field knows, to a decline in the purchase of monographs. Many vendors' response to decreased sales has been to broaden their customer base, both in terms of sales to international markets and broader coverage (e.g., U.K.) for their U.S. customers. With broader coverage, the vendors have introduced Web-based databases which librarians can use to locate data about British titles as well as domestic ones.

After centuries of clearly defined roles, publishers, libraries, and vendors are all finding that there is a blurring of functions. A significant role being reconsidered is that of preservation, traditionally the domain of the library. New partnerships are being forged with changed roles. As more individuals begin using the Web for communication, there could be a trend toward removal of those in the middle, in this case, all three parties represented at the meeting.

Vendors also are forced into a new role, that of bibliographic information provider, both prior to order and after receipt of material. This role has led to new relationships, such as those with bibliographic utilities like OCLC. Vendors also must work more closely with the integrated library systems vendors as libraries seek to streamline work flows and maximize the use of technology.

Technological changes are driving much of what is happening. Publishers are watching the growth in distance education and pondering how it will affect their markets. The impact of this and other new developments, such as electronic reserves, is unclear; however, publishers and vendors alike fear a potential adverse effect upon sales. A major concern for libraries with the electronic products is that of archiving. If a party other than libraries must take over this function because the library does not have the funds or technol-

ogy to do so, a major mission is eroded. Will organizations other than libraries be able to honor the long-term access commitments traditionally done by them? If not, the long-term consequences for scholarly communication are reasons for concern.

Vendors share common concerns with publishers and librarians by the steady raising of the technological bar. As more transactions are done electronically, all three organizations must support multiple systems with the concomitant costs and staff development implications. How can each party maintain normal operations while absorbing these additional costs?

Despite the evident concerns with the trends facing publishers, libraries, and vendors, this group took refuge in a nostalgic look at a book. Even as we face new electronic opportunities, publishers are still publishing printed materials, libraries are buying what they can afford (and less than they want), and vendors, such as YBP, are selling these titles. The meeting was a good opportunity to share perspectives. Therefore, the author of this article chose a book, *Closing: The Life and Death of an American Factory*, and asked participants to react to the book from their particular perspective. This exercise, which started with the vendor's viewpoint, was revealing and stimulating. The vendor's view focused upon the bibliographic data included in the book, including authorship affiliation, series, indexes, etc. The publisher's view focused upon the context within which the

scholarly work had been done. The bibliographer was concerned with the scholarly apparatus, the price, the binding, etc. However, after each party had reviewed the title from several aspects, it was clear that quality and relevance to the scholarly community were the primary concerns of all three parties. For the publishing staff, it was perhaps most interesting to see how the vendor's perception of a book affects the way it is pro-

filed and marketed to libraries. It is important, however, to keep in mind that the vendor is merely following instructions given by the library. These instructions in the profile determine what is sent to the library as both parties want to have as few returns as possible.

The review of this book led to a further discussion of the values added by each party in the scholarly communication process. Clearly a university press offers a certification of excellence. It is also apparent that librarians and booksellers evaluate the products

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Oregon Trails — Why Can't a Library Be More Like a Fitness Center?

by **Thomas W. Leonhardt** (Oregon Institute of Technology) <leonhart@oit.edu>

A few years ago in an *Against the Grain* "Profile Encouraged," and in answer to the question, "What do you want to be doing five years from now," I answered, "Breathing on my own." I was trying to be funny but I was not joking. To plan one's life in terms of years stopped making sense (if it ever did) when I turned 50. But the desire to live on grew along with a keener awareness of my own mortality, gray hair and middle age paunch notwithstanding.

There are no guarantees when it comes to life — all aspects. Riding high in April shot down in May. Still, it is only human to want to hedge our bets. Exercise may not extend your life, but it won't kill you either — ha! But it is true that when I finally paid for a year's membership in my college's fitness center, it was not with Methuselah in mind, but Kohelet (AKA. Ecclesiastes or Solomon). It was Kohelet who first told us that "All is vanity." And Vanity it was who led me by the hand to the fitness center. The last time I changed clothes in a public room, I was a PFC in the United States Army, but back then I had no choice, and I was in good shape. So — I just sucked it in and imagined that it was 1963. That was the easy part.

Our fitness center has a weight room, a basketball court, rowing machines, stair machines, stationary bicycles (upright and reclining), treadmills, and a super circuit. The super circuit appealed to me because I wanted to distance myself from The Blob and I wanted to be able to open a jar of dill pickles without turning as red as a beet. The stationary bicycles also appealed to me, even though I would rather run than ride a bicycle. The reason? I noticed that those riding the bicycles were reading while they exercised — men's sana in corpore sano.

Some libraries, intimidated or inspired by Barnes & Noble et alia, have begun installing coffee bars so that their patrons will come back to the library to read. Everyone doesn't like coffee, especially health nuts. Why not cater to them, too, with a library fitness center? Each stationary bicycle and treadmill — rowing machines, etc. are out because you wouldn't be able to read, much less turn the page — would be fitted with a magazine/book holder. The one in my center is portable and only holds magazines. Books must be held in one's hands, the old fashioned way.

What a great thing, exercise the body and the mind at one time and not waste time. What a great concept. Why do one thing when you can do two? For those privileged enough to commute long distances to work, how many people do you see every day applying make-up, shaving, drinking coffee, talking on the cell phone, brushing one's teeth and washing one's hands of the sticky bun — all done while driving to work and listening to the radio?

The next day I brought a book with me and climbed aboard a stationary bicycle. It was a non-fiction work, the kind of book that I often bypassed for a work of fiction at the end of the day when I needed a diversion. I don't know what it was, the perspiration running down my forehead, my back, my armpits? The distractions of VH1 turned up so Generation X could hear it? The comings and goings of my vain companions? Whatever it was, I couldn't get past the first page.

The next day I brought a book of short stories and actually finished one but I was having to work too hard at it. Even a book holder would not have helped. It just wasn't fun. I would rather be on the treadmill, simulating running and letting my mind wander, writing wonderful pieces of prose or letters that would

never make it to paper, but never mind.

Then it occurred to me that the other exercisers who were reading were reading magazines. Some held them, others placed them in the magazine holders. Now I was on to something. So on day three I went to the magazine rack, the kind you might find in a public library, and looked for something to read. Hmm? *People*, *Us*, *Fitness*, a *Victoria's Secret* catalog, *Sports Illustrated*, *Esquire*. Of course I chose *Esquire* and dutifully climbed up on the exercise bicycle.

Reading that issue of *Esquire* I discovered a couple of things. First, *Esquire* ain't what it used to be. I was actually able to concentrate on the articles in it, but I wasn't very interested in the content. I also discovered that while I had been reading and exercising, I wasn't doing justice to either activity. I surmised that the reading matter, if reading is really the right word in this context, must be low level with lots of pictures and advertisements, if it is to have any chance at all of blending into the exercise regimen. Second, I found that any reading matter that truly exercised the mind must have a place of its own — like a library — and that such reading was incompatible with vigorous physical exercise.

There were more practical reasons why libraries, spiritual and intellectual fitness centers, would not want to install physical fitness centers. There's the question of changing rooms, showers, the whir of the machines, and the grunts and groans of those of us who are fighting gravity and inertia as much as time, and for whom one strenuous activity at a time is enough, thank you.

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of publishers, partly on the reputation of the publisher. This led to an interesting discussion of the role of university presses in producing the midlist scholarly titles formerly published by small niche publishers recently subsumed by large conglomerates. Interestingly enough, while these titles appear to be a new area of expansion for the university presses, some members of the press expressed reservations about jumping into this arena without careful forethought. For the press, the primary concern is one of identity and status. The primary selling point for university presses is their reputation for quality in scholarly works. If they move into a new type of publication, they will, of course, maintain the quality. However,

what will be the impact of a different audience that may either not know about or be intimidated by the publisher's scholarly reputation?

The discussion of publishers' reputations flowed easily into a report by **John Rutledge**, West European Bibliographer, at UNC-CH. He reported on research he and two colleagues are conducting into the value of book reviews. Their preliminary findings indicate that book reviews serve mainly as an announcement of publication as most of them are positive. However, as he pointed out, the same is true for most products, except television shows and movies. To illustrate his point, he used a review of Volvo in which he substituted "UNC Press." In both cases, the bottom line was quality with some variations in the features available. John remained skeptical regarding the role of reviews in the actual purchasing deci-

sions. However, his creative substitution of one producer for another was witty and provided another lens with which to view the press!

The nature of these meetings has been informal with active participation by the audience and many questions as new ideas arise. One example at this meeting was the following question: Would UNC Press go head to head with Norton (or some other publisher) to gain the option to publish an autobiography of **Dean Smith**, the renowned basketball coach at UNC-CH? **Kate Torrey** was quite focused in her response when she indicated that the primary consideration for the press would be its mission. This rejoinder was a good reminder for all participants to keep their primary missions in mind and not be distracted from them by the changing contents, economics, organization, or technology.