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Op Ed -- The Dueling Op Eds

Allison P. Mays

Millsaps College, maysap@millsaps.edu

Larry Madison

Millsaps College, madisle@millsaps.edu

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The Dueling Op Eds

Random Rantings and Ravings: My Thoughts on E-journals, Embargoes, Etc.

by **Allison P. Mays** (Acquisitions/Serials Librarian, Millsaps College, 1701 N. State Street, Jackson, MS 39210; Phone 601-974-1083)
<maysap@millsaps.edu>

We were sitting in an aggregator's demonstration for their online products a few months ago, and the subject of embargoes came up: those nasty little "grace periods" when the publishers won't provide full-text content in electronic format so that libraries will not cancel their print copies. And it just struck me that the glory days of paper journals are indeed over. With the advent of the e-journal, librarians said to themselves, "Fabulous, now I can cancel that paper subscription and buy something else we desperately need." And the publishers said to themselves, "Oops. How can we keep the paper alive?" And thus the embargo was born. You have to hand it to the publishers: embargoes are a pretty nifty idea. They've got us over a barrel. They know we have to have certain titles, and by denying us the online access for a period of time, they've ensured the continuing sale of the print. This really annoys me, especially since I'm at a small college library which can't afford to play these games. I think what annoys me the most is being forced to keep the paper subscription; my immediate reaction to this is, Don't tell me what to do. Many libraries have had frozen serials budgets for years, if not actual budget cuts, and if something has to give, chances are it's going to be the paper format. And my message to the publishers is: deal with it and get used to the idea.

I would never have thought I would hear myself say this, but in a perfect world, journals cannot go online fast enough to suit me. I hope the paper dies out completely because that's the only way we're ever going to truly make the switch. Publishers, left to their own devices, have no incentive to give up paper when they can force us to pay for both formats. But think of it: no more checking in, no more claiming, no more binding, no more shifting. We wouldn't have to get the serials module on our new online system. I walk around our Periodicals Room and think, "This is a dinosaur." Let me qualify this by emphasizing that I'm talking as a manager of the department, or as a former coworker used to say, "When I rule the world..." (She wanted a mandatory course on how to use the Yellow Pages.) I know there are issues to be worked out, such as standardizing licensing agreements, better archiving, and doing away with embargoes. And I know EBSCO, Faxon and other serials vendors don't want to even

consider the possibility, and I can't blame them. But as I sit here with a frozen serials budget, watching the prices go up an average of 9-10% every year, and knowing that we're paying twice or even three times for some titles (we used to even get microforms for some but have recently cancelled many), I can see we're approaching a point where we have no choice. Plus, we're rapidly running out of shelf space and there is no new building in our immediate future. In order to stay competitive and to offer the students what they rightfully demand, we have to provide the online journals. In terms of ease-of-use, especially for our off-campus students, there is no comparison. The students love the online journals because they don't have to fork over change to make photocopies of the print (our students are charged a flat comprehensive fee for computer printouts) and the e-journals can be accessed 24/7. We don't have to worry about missing issues, if the volume has been misshelved, if it's at the bindery, etc. So here we are, in the same boat with many other college and university libraries in America: we have to subscribe to several online aggregators, which costs us a lot of money, and we cannot afford to pay twice for the same material. For many of us, it's a matter of survival, not of convenience. At Millsaps, we do not yet have a blanket policy of canceling any title that is available online, but it may be coming. Of course, the archival nature of the aggregators' databases comes into play with this issue, and the content would have to be very secure before we would make this kind of decision; we'll save that debate for another day.

The other message I want to get across to publishers is: look at it from our perspective. It's OUR decision, sort of a "my library, my choice" kind of thing whether we cancel paper journals or not. We have to squeeze as much as we can out of our budgets, and the days of being able to afford two different formats of the same title are over. Wake up and smell the coffee, and, if I ever get to rule the world, kiss your paper goodbye.

Author's note: All opinions expressed above are completely my own. —APM

Drive, She Said: But Who or What is Really in Control?

by **Larry Madison** (Instructional Services Librarian, Millsaps College; Phone: 601-974-1072)
<madisle@millsaps.edu>

One of the dangers of technology is that it doesn't adapt itself to us, we adapt to it. Rather than being driven by us, it drives us. The center doesn't hold, and technology rushes in to fill the void. I'm not a technophobe or a Luddite. Nor am I opposed to new technology. It's difficult to understand how some people decide that technology beyond some arbitrary point is somehow wrong. But technology must be approached

with prudence: "Circumspection as to...risk," "sagacity or shrewdness in the management of affairs."

By and large, librarians have not been prudent in their embrace of technology. Desire to be on the cutting edge and fear of becoming irrelevant have resulted in bringing libraries nearer to irrelevance. The more information goes online,

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the library as a place and the need for librarians are diminished. The idea that electronic information makes the role of librarians more vital is just whistling past the graveyard. At our small liberal arts college the majority of students and faculty seldom, if ever, visit the library.

They search, download and print the materials they need from dorm rooms, computer labs, offices, and homes. There is little interaction with a librarian. Is this limiting them in finding information they need? Yes, but apparently they don't care. After I presented a class on using the library, a professor told her students "I never fool with anything that isn't full text online." What kind of message is this sending?

This mind set is the result of what **Thomas Mann** and others call the **Principle of Least Effort**. Numerous studies have shown that information seekers, even "serious" scholars, will settle for less valuable information if more valuable information requires more effort to find. This is especially true of students. This "scholarship in haste" is poor to mediocre scholarship. Immediacy and convenience have taken the place of the willingness to engage in the laborious and time-consuming work that solid research and scholarship require.

Perhaps as troubling is that technology diminishes our ability to choose books and journals that support the mission of the library. It's all presented in take it or leave it packages that contain materials we don't particularly want and may not contain things we need. Those items we don't want or need take scarce funds that could be used to purchase more traditional materials. Moreover, electronic sources are ephemeral. Publishers can pull a journal or full text coverage at any time. It's risky business to cancel print subscriptions on the basis of online availability. What's here today is gone tomorrow. And, of course, there are the problems of archiving, of systems failure, and interruptions of electric service.

You've heard most of these arguments before, but apparently they've fallen on deaf ears. Some turn to electronic sources out of preference, convenience, and/or the desire to be viewed as the type who is forward thinking and embraces the next new thing. Others do so out of economic necessity. But we must not let technology beguile us, become the center of our existence, or drive our programs and thinking.

I'm not naïve about the impact of technology, and I'm cognizant of the good it does. Too, I understand that it's not going away, and it shouldn't. But with all due respect to my colleague **Allison**, we must make our decisions based on reason and prudence rather than emotional responses to the perceived unfairness and arrogance of publishers. 🐘

ATG Interviews John Kennerly

Library Director, McCain Library, Erskine College and Theological Seminary

by **Katina Strauch** (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <strauchk@earthlink.net>

ATG: Tell us about Erskine College Library and Theological Seminary. When was it founded? How many students go here? What types of degrees are offered?

JK: Erskine College (EC) was founded by the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church in 1839. Prior to this time the church had established in Due West, SC, an academy for men in 1835. Erskine Theological Seminary (ETS) was founded in 1837. EC offers the Bachelor of Arts and the Bachelor of Science degrees. ETS offers the Doctor of Ministry degree as well as six masters level degrees: Master of Divinity, M.A. in Christian Education, M.A. in Counseling Ministry, M.A. in Pastoral Ministry, M.A. in Theological Studies, and Master of Church Music. The combined FTE enrollment for the fall of 2001 was 777 (582, College/195, Seminary).

ATG: How long have you been at Erskine? Where did you come from? How did you end up in Due West?

JK: I have been at Erskine for seven years. I came to Erskine directly from graduate school after earning my masters degree in Library and Information Science from the University of South Carolina. I knew that I wanted to work in an academic library setting, preferably remaining in the Carolinas. When I saw an opening for an interlibrary loan/cataloging librarian at a small, private, liberal arts college in upstate SC, I was intrigued. Once I visited Due West and the Erskine campus, I knew this was where I wanted to begin my career as a librarian. My wife and I moved from North Charleston to the nearby city of Greenwood in 1995.

ATG: How old is the library? It looks as if it's been added to.

JK: McCain Library was built in 1949 as the library for the College. With only 9,000 square feet of space, the building housed approximately 28,000 volumes. In 1973, an addition was made, more than doubling library space to 22,500 square feet and creating the facility that you see today.

ATG: How many staff do you have? What kind of budget for materials? I know that there used to be two libraries: one for the theological seminary and one for the college. When were these combined?

JK: McCain Library has a FTE staff of seven, including three professional librarians, three full-time non-professional staff members, and two part-time non-professional staff members. In addition, the library employs 15-20 student workers during the school year and receives assistance from three volunteers.

The 2001/02 materials budget was \$165,500 (College and Seminary combined). For 2002/03 we will see a twenty-two percent increase to \$201,800.

McCain Library was constructed for use by the College in 1949. When the expansion occurred in 1973, the Seminary's library was merged with the College's. The library has separate budgets for college and seminary materials, but the collections are housed together.

The first small group of books bought for use by college students were purchased with college funds in 1839. But, apparently, the book-gathering and book-circulating efforts of the literary societies (beginning in the early 1840s) formed the real nucleus of what would become the official college library. The current library is composed of materials from the original **Erskine Library**, the once active **Due West Female College**, the once separate **Euphemian** and **Philomathean** literary societies, and the **Seminary Library**.

ATG: What's the capacity of the library? How many students do you have? What sorts of students are they? Do you give graduate degrees?

JK: The current facility was designed to accommodate 155,000 volumes and to provide seating for 275 people. However, we are under a severe space crunch. Our actual total volume capacity is 247,000 volumes. As a result, space is at a premium. In fact, our seating capacity has been cut back to 200 people. The institution has just approved the renovation of a vacant building on campus — a portion of which has been designated to serve as a library annex. We plan to relocate archive and special collection materials to the library annex once the renovations are complete next fall. The annex will afford the library approximately 5,000 square feet of additional space. This is seen

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