December 2005

Back Talk -- OCLC Report

Anthony (Tony) W. Ferguson

University of Hong Kong, ferguson@hkucc.hku.hk

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>

Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ferguson, Anthony (Tony) W. (2005) "Back Talk -- OCLC Report," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 17: Iss. 6, Article 13.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4595>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Something To Think About? — Winter Musings

Column Editor: **Mary E. (Tinker) Massey** (Serials Librarian, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Jack R. Hunt Library)
<Mary.Massey@erau.edu>

It's winter again and I always recap what's happened for the year and try to get a feel for the projects we will be doing. Having a new job with new responsibilities makes me grin, but it causes me to think seriously too. In January, I will be learning all about the Reference Desk and how we give such fine service to our patrons. This will be the first time it will be a vital part of my job, comprising four hours a week. What a great way for a Serials Librarian to learn the ways people search for things and how we can catalog better for those needs, as well as purchase materials with knowledge of the research being done on campus. I am just completing the beginning Aeronautical Sciences course and find myself wishing it would not end. Attendance in this course is designed to give us a chance to learn vocabulary and specialized principles of flight, as well as possible areas of research, so we can understand the questions that are brought to the Reference Desk. Did I mention that I am also completing the required interviews with each staff member? For fifteen minutes, a colleague tells me what his/her job is and how they accomplish it. I have found this helpful in learning who will be helping me in the future, or what people I can tap for specific skills. It also gives me a chance to hear a little about them personally and how much they value their work here at Embry-Riddle.

As for the summer, we are looking forward to a weeding project in the Periodical stacks. Perhaps some of you have experienced this process, but it is new to me in many ways. We will be looking at ways to retain access to the

journal issues while cleaning physical issues off the shelves. There will be much perusal of circulation records for usage, searching microfilm/fiche provider lists for specific volumes at reasonable prices, or perhaps free or inexpensive online access. This will be a very foreign process for me, as I tend to be a pack rat. I abhor the very thought of destroying reading materials, but the space is essential. We have a limited amount of room and there will be additional titles bought this year for the collection. We have a number of recreational magazines for the students and believe that we can easily provide microform replacements for those journals without jeopardizing the research aspects. Luckily, we have some new microfilm cabinets in an interesting archway construction, as well as some new fiche cabinets being procured with gift monies. I thought it might be fun to research how one develops this process and follows through with restricted funds, since we all face this task from time to time. Where would you weed? What criteria would you establish to help clean the shelves? Would you contact faculty for their recommendations? Involved with this project is a Periodicals Holdings List (print), which we edit twice a year, in January and September. Just thinking about the many changes makes my head spin. We will be discussing and exploring the many possibilities in this project. Would be interested in hearing from you on the subject.

Did you ever think about how many projects we create and complete in the library? How many are created by our physical environment? How many are from technological changes? How many are from crises? I think it is interesting to sit back and think about all the ways we create work for ourselves, or are directed by external causes. Try making some lists of these activities and categorize them. Look at the patterns. Are we problem creators, problem solvers, or both? What percentage of time do you spend on these activities?

By the way, what's happening with claims? They seem to be running away from us. What's so difficult about actually getting issues you pay for? Do vendors just make lists and charge money, then become mute? We have a bunch of active reps trying to find out why publishers just don't send things when they are paid. Sure puts a crimp on our ability to provide access to those titles. We try to track claims every two weeks to stay on top, because I am tired of getting notices that we have waited too long to claim. What's too long? Sometimes I feel we need to claim before they are published so we have a 50-50 chance of receiving them. Just kidding, but it does get frustrating! Hmmm? Do online full text sources use this frustration to snatch us from the print world? Are we being manipulated? I hate the thought. I don't remember this much confusion with the old one on one, get it from the source subscription style. Well, it's something to think about anyway.

My other task to complete in January is the Collection Development list for serials. We have a request for new material, the OCLC record, Ulrich's indexing and review information, and a sample issue clumped together in a folder, so that all the librarians can evaluate the material and vote on its worthiness. We route the folders to everyone, then wait for the return package and totaling of the votes. Our patrons eagerly await the results. This year we are looking at a number of good aviation titles, as well as some on terrorism, hearing, engineering physics and a few leisure titles. Should be an interesting and exciting time.

We acquire new materials, make them accessible to patrons, help them find any of the materials they need and then we weed. A year in review, but not without the preservation we do everyday in cleaning, repairing and binding. We are preparing binding at this moment since the classes will be ending in a week. Nothing like seeing paper things in a new dress or binding with clear lettering. It's like starting new again. Have a great year and look forward to your many tasks. They can be new and adventuresome when you see them in a different light. Try it! 🍀

Occasional Rambles ...

from page 84

this act of stimulating the public square they are immensely assisted by the robust local booksellers possessed of not simply the aim of economic survival but serving readers as fully as possible.

This ethical concern extends to the management of inventories as well. The niche publishers have for centuries endeavored to keep their lists in print as long as possible, now a much more readily achieved objective with the introduction of affordable print-on-demand technology. The serious booksellers also seek to make as wide an inventory available to readers as possible.

Out of concentration has arisen a revived version of the classic book-person.

Mirabile dictu, to this book-trade old hand the world of the book remains firmly embedded in the centuries old mold of the scholar-publisher, the erudite bookseller, and the learned librarian, all masters serving the traditional intellectual and ethical cultural exercise of advancing the evolving search for truth and goodness. 🍀

Back Talk

from page 86

search engine. Therefore, I suggest we simply stop trying and instead make sure that our students are the most accomplished Google clients on the planet. Next let's understand what Google can't offer: current eBooks; books that never go electronic; current e-journal articles; e-journals that never go open access; local content that cannot be shared with the world; paperbacks that are easily read in bed/at the beach/in the bathtub, and whatever else your patrons want but can't get freely/easily on the Web. And

then focus on making these available and KNOWN by our user community. These are my New Year's wishes and resolutions. 🍀

Endnotes

1. See "Bush Authorized Domestic Spying: Post-9/11 Order Bypassed Special Court" by Dan Eggen, *Washington Post* Staff Writer. Friday, December 16, 2005; Page A01.
2. See *South Coast Today*. <http://www.southcoasttoday.com/daily/12-05/12-17-05/a09lo650.htm>
3. *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources* (2005). <http://www.oclc.org/reports/2005perceptions.htm>

Back Talk — OCLC Report

Column Editor: **Anthony (Tony) W. Ferguson** (Library Director, University of Hong Kong; Phone: 852 2859 2200; Fax: 852 2858 9420) <ferguson@hkucc.hku.hk>

December 2005 was a momentous month for the information world. We learned, surprise, surprise, that our Patriot Act President wasn't satisfied with openly seeking information about the American people and resorted to "legal" secret information gathering.¹ And for a moment at least, the library world was accused of helping the FBI learn more about the reading habits of college students. A student at the **University of Massachusetts**, Dartmouth claimed his borrowing of Mao's little Red Book brought with it a visit from the FBI.² **OCLC** was scrambling to make sure no one thought it had fed the Feds this information — which of course it had not.

Boring by comparison, but the most important information related event of the month was **OCLC's** release of its *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources* (2005).³

While this report may not stack up well against the most recent **John Grisham** crime novel as bed time reading, I found it very interesting and believe it has something of value for all librarians. First the good news: "Over 80 percent of U.S. youth and young adults, respondents 14 to 24 years old, hold a library card — more than any other U.S. demographic." (p. 1-1) And now the bad news: "Nearly one-third of respondents say their library use has decreased in the past three to five years." (p. 1-1). The question for those of us working on the service provider side of the desk is: How do we prevent the other 2/3rds from following them?

I can't summarize all the interesting facts and figures that appear in the report but will share those that appealed to me as a librarian working at a university library:

- 50 percent of college students indicated that they thought their use of libraries would remain the same and only 12 percent thought their use would decrease. (1-6)
- 44 percent thought their use of libraries had increased and only 16 percent thought it had decreased in recent years. (1-4)

- 62 percent of college students were extremely or very familiar with search engines but only 55 percent said the same of the physical library. (1-10)
- While 83 percent of college students indicated they used search engines, only 61 percent had used a library's web site and only 8 percent had used an online reference service. (1-13)
- 89 percent of college students indicated they typically began searches with a search engine while only 2 percent said they went to a library Website. (1-17)
- An 18-year-old in Canada noted, "I despise searching the library for books and other sources. It takes a long time and rarely can you find sources needed. This difficult process is the first thing I think of when I think of using the library." (1-22)
- 92 percent of college students rate search engines as very or somewhat favorable source/place for information while 85 percent said the same for the physical library. (1-24)
- 85 percent of college students agree or completely agree that electronic magazines/journals are worthwhile sources of information. (1-33)
- At least monthly, 48 percent of college students use the library for study and 39 percent borrowed books. (2-4)
- The top three online library activities for college students are to use the library's Website, 56 percent; use electronic magazines/journals, 49 percent; and use the library's online catalog, 47 percent. (2-13)
- 33 percent of all college students have asked for a librarian's help when using electronic resources; 54 percent have not. (2-17)
- 75 percent of college students agreed or completely agreed that librarians added value to the information search process. (2-10)

- 60 percent of college students were very satisfied with the overall information seeking experience using a search engine while less than 50 percent of them felt that way when they sought assistance from a librarian.

I could go on an on but will stop here and ask myself and all of you, so what? What does this all mean? For me it signifies that we are on a downward slope in terms of our war to win the hearts and minds of our student clientele — compared to that of the search engine alternative.

But I don't view the slope as slippery as yet. Eighty-five percent of students value our costly e-journals; 75 percent feel reference librarians add value; and 48 percent still come to the library to study. Yet, the evidence is there that our electronic mother nature is spraying a bit of grease around: 89 percent of students start an information search with a search engine; and 92 percent of them rate the experience as good — leading librarians at 85 percent. But students are still not completely satisfied with either search engines (60 percent) or librarians (50 percent). So where do we go from here?

The **OCLC** report asked library patrons what they thought libraries should do. I think you will find the suggestions comfortingly and/or annoyingly familiar (I have translated these suggestions into my own words):

- Buy more content/update content.
- Provide longer hours.
- Relax the rules/be less bureaucratic.
- Get rid of charges.
- Provide more seating, more comfortable seating.
- Make the library a more inviting place, e.g., add a cafe.
- Decrease the noise.
- Hire more staff, more friendly staff, and smarter staff.

I don't deny any of these suggestions and my library, like yours, is working on most of them to one degree or another. We need to make our libraries super easy to use, friendly to a scary degree, and more inviting than home (easy since most homes don't welcome a dozen or so friends in search of study, food, music, talk, computers, printers, etc.). But will this be enough? Do any of these suggestions deal with what our students hail as wonderful about the **Google** alternative?

What is it that **Google** does so well and can't we do it even better? For me, what I like about Google is it is fast and it gives me full text — not (shudder) metadata/abstracts, etc. For most common, pedestrian informational needs libraries and librarians can't compete with a good

continued on page 85

ADVERTISERS' INDEX

7	ACS	14	BROCKHAUS/GERMAN BOOKS	61	McFARLAND
31	AM. INSTITUTE OF PHYSICS	11	BRODART/MCNAUGHTON	88	MIDWEST LIBRARY SERVICE
23, 65	AM. PHYSIOLOGICAL SOCIETY	77	THE CHARLESTON ADVISOR	21	PROJECT MUSE
73, 81	AM. PHYSIOLOGICAL SOCIETY	10	THE CHARLESTON REPORT	2	PROQUEST
35	ANNUAL REVIEWS	17	COUTTS	53	RITTENHOUSE
41	ASME INTERNATIONAL	43	DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS	57	ROUTLEDGE
5	ATG	49	EASTERN BOOK COMPANY	27	SERIALS SOLUTIONS
69	BASCH SUBSCRIPTIONS, INC.	25	EBSCO PUBLISHING	19	WILEY
3	BLACKWELL'S BOOK SERVICES	29	ELSEVIER	39	WILEY
15	BLACKWELL PUBLISHING	13	IEE PUBLISHING	33	YBP
87	BOOK HOUSE	9	IEEE		

Ad Manager: Edna Laughrey Internet: elaughrey@aol.com
phone: 734-429-1029; fax: 734-429-1711