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From SEP to SEPIA: How and Why Indiana University is Helping the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

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From SEP to SEPIA: How and Why Indiana University is Helping the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

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A

over eight million words, it would take

almost 14,000 large-format pages to do

a traditional printing of the Stanford

Encyclopedia of Philosophy this summer. Wait

a year, and you’d probably need about 15,500

pages. And that’s just the current contents. Each

quarter, all the entries are archived to provide a

complete snapshot for scholarly citation and ref-

erence. The dynamic nature of the SEP means that

revisions can be made anywhere in any entry, affecting many more pages than looking at

the numerical growth alone would suggest.

The SEP’s current growth spurt will event-

ually settle down, but even when it does, the

SEP is designed to keep growing and respond-

ing to new scholarly developments. Authors

edit their entries through a Web interface on

the server and submit the changes for editorial re-

view. Every addition and change is reviewed by one or more subject editors before the entry

is published.

A traditional print edition is not in the SEP’s

plans, but maintaining open access is. The en-

cyclopedia has been built with major grants from

the National Endowment for the Humanities

and the National Science Foundation. These

grants have covered basic operating expenses

as well as the design and implementation of

software that allows a principal editor, an asso-

ciant editor, and a copyediting assistant, all work-

ing part time, to oversee over a thousand au-

thors and over a hundred subject editors. Au-

thors and subject editors volunteer their time

and efforts because they see the value of the

SEP for teaching and research and because of

the prestige it brings to be associated with the

project. But the principal editor and assistants

have demands on their time and energy going

far beyond reasonable volunteerism. Thus

the server and software have to be monitored, kept

running, and improved, adding to the basic costs

of operation — currently about $200,000/year.

SEP, SPARC and ICOLC

Hence, three years ago, the SEP started talk-

ing to the Scholarly Publishing and Academic

Resources Coalition (SPARC) and the Inter-

national Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC)

about ways to keep the encyclopedia free to the readers worldwide who download hundreds of thousands of entries weekly. The result is an innovative fundraising plan that seeks to raise over $4,000,000 through indi-

vidual and library contributions to a fund that

provides a permanent source of income for the

SEP under management by the Stanford Uni-

versity Foundation. A literally unique part of

this arrangement is that Stanford has agreed to

return library contributions with any unspent

interest, should it ever cease to support the en-

cyclopedia.

Indiana University Founds SEPIA

When the idea of applying for a matching

grant from the NEH came up, the Southeastern

Library Network (SOLINET) stepped for-

ward to represent librarians by applying for

the funding. And when the grant was awarded, it

required a fiscally independent entity to rep-

resent the contributing libraries. Enter SEPIA

(the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Inter-

national Association) and Indiana Univer-

sity (IU). Colin Allen, the SEP’s Associate

Editor, had just moved to IU in the fall of 2004,

and was pleased to find a very receptive envi-

ronment on campus for digital library projects.

The Indiana University Libraries have a

national reputation in the field of digital library

innovation and activity. Its Digital Library

Program (DLP) was established in 1996 as a

partnership among the Libraries, the School of

Library and Information Science, the Office of

the Vice President for Information Technology,

and the School of Informatics. It is “dedicated
to the selection, production, and maintenance

of a wide range of high-quality networked re-

sources for scholars and students.” The DLP

supports existing University digital endeavors,

and also has published some of the special col-

lections available at Indiana: the Frank M.

Hohenberger Photograph Collection, the

Hoagy Carmichael Collection, and the U.S.

Steel Photograph Collection, a series of more

than 2,200 photographs of the Gary Works

Steel Mill held by the Calumet Regional Ar-

chives at Indiana University Northwest. Other

DLP projects more clearly support the

teaching and research of IU faculty: VARIA-

TIONS2, a project that provides online access
to selected recordings and scores from the In-

diana University William and Gayle Cook

Music Library; Wright American Fiction, a col-

lection of the nineteenth-century American

novels and novelettes itemized in Lyle

Wright’s 1957 bibliography, American Fiction

1851-1875; Film Literature Index; and the

Russian Periodical Index Digital Project,

which digitized a twenty-year portion of

Lopatina’s Zhurnal’nykh Statei (1956-1975), a

serial publication that indexes both scholarly

and popular Russian periodicals. In addition to

conducting the research that makes these

projects technically possible, Indiana Univer-

sity staff are dedicated to keeping the results of

this work openly accessible to the scholarly

community.

On the more traditional side of the house, the

Libraries, like its counterparts throughout the

world, purchase and lease access to data-

bases that benefit the Indiana University user

community. As readers of these pages know,

there are scores of ways for publishers and ven-

dors to calculate costs for electronic resources:

student FTE, academic unit FTE, Carnegie

classification, size of materials budget, histori-

cal spend on periodicals, pay-by-the-drink, etc.

Throw in the complications of consortial pur-

chases, and the permutations for payment mod-

els seem endless. The challenge for collection

development and acquisitions staff lies in un-

derstanding, recording, and remembering the

financial model for each individual license. So

when Colin Allen approached the Libraries

about supporting the Stanford Encyclopedia of

Philosophy, librarians expected a variation on

an existing model. Their opinion changed after

Director of Collection Development Cecile

Jagodzinski and Associate Director Julie

Bobay discussed the Libraries’ possible role

in this venture with Allen: all agreed that this

was a partnership worth exploring. Not only

did SEPIA seem an improvement over the tra-

ditional financial model (libraries pay publish-

ers; publishers provide content; license is re-

newed; libraries pay publishers again), but the

idea of supporting a widely respected open ac-

cess encyclopedia in partnership with faculty

seemed to mesh squarely with the values of li-

braries and librarians and the IU Libraries’

commitment to open access. An especially at-

tractive aspect to the project was the fact that

it focused on a scholarly discipline in the humani-

ties — one of Indiana University’s (and the

Libraries’) academic strengths. If partnering

with the SEP would help increase the accep-

tance of and investment in digital resources and

research by humanities scholars, all the better

— the Libraries would be fulfilling one of its

traditional missions. More importantly, it was

a way for the Libraries to participate directly

in the publishing process by helping humanities

researchers produce tools they would actually

find useful. On the practical side, who could

argue with a publisher who offers a money-back

guarantee? The Libraries would serve as the

front door for SEPIA on the Web, and its own

financial contribution would help ensure that

the NEH would offer those matching funds.

Jagodzinski and Bobay took the idea to the then

Dean of University Libraries, Suzanne Thorin,

and she readily agreed that this was a project

the Indiana University Libraries could and

should support.

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<http://www.against-the-grain.com>
The move towards firm long term funding for the SEP does much more than guarantee open access for readers. It has already freed the SEP’s developers to start thinking about how the project can contribute to digital humanities needs in general. Instead of writing grant proposals simply to cover basic operations, it has been possible to turn to research projects that will enhance the functionality and utility of the encyclopedia, and that may have broader applications to other digital reference works.

Again, IU has placed itself firmly behind this research with a $40,000 grant awarded through its New Frontiers in the Arts and Humanities Program supported by the Lilly Endowment. The project, titled “Automatic Metacomment Management for Dynamic Reference Works,” seeks to develop tools and software that can ensure that rich and accurate metadata is always available for the SEP.

The scale, complexity, and dynamic nature of the SEP provide unique opportunities for digital humanities research. For instance, each time a new entry title is added to the database, a new entry comes online, or new research leads to an update of an existing entry, the SEP’s metacomment must be modified to remain current—metadata, cross-references, themes for navigation, and archival relationships may change and must be updated accordingly. To keep the SEP project economical, this metacomment management must be automated to the greatest extent possible.

The goal under the IU grant is to build tools for automatically maintaining a formal ontology for the subject domain under study. This will allow improvements in several areas, including better methods for cross-referencing entries and enhanced search and navigation. Fortunately, the problem of getting philosophers to agree on how to represent the structure of their discipline can be sidestepped to a large degree given the practical objectives at hand.

The development of effective methods for automatically managing the SEP’s metacomment requires interdisciplinary collaboration between computer scientists, who understand the technological issues, and philosophers, who understand the needs of humanities scholars and students. The grant from IU is supporting two graduate students, one from philosophy and the other from computer science, for the coming academic year: they, with Colin Allen, will be pursuing additional opportunities for external funding in order to further develop this line of research.

The Libraries have also reaped benefits from the New Frontiers Program. In fall 2005, the Libraries, in collaboration with IU’s sister campus in Indianapolis, decided that it was important to discuss the local implications of the draft report of the American Council of Learned Societies’ Commission on Cyberinfrastructure for Humanities and Social Sciences and for faculty to participate in the national dialogue. The joint application by the Libraries was successful, and funds will be used to host a two-day seminar (with follow-up discussions) on “New Models of Scholarly Communication: Defining the IU Perspective.” By bringing together campus opinion-makers, the Libraries hope to challenge faculty, give them the opportunity to think about and articulate their needs in humanities computing, and to consider how computing can serve the very specific research needs of historians, philosophers, art historians, students of literature, and other humanists at Indiana University.

The librarians and faculty of Indiana University see the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy and its supporting association, SEPIA, as part of the University’s larger contribution to the transformation of scholarly communication. SEP and SEPIA return the funding and management of the products of scholarship back to their rightful home in the academy. By using technology appropriately and husbanding scarce financial resources wisely, scholars and librarians can ensure that the work of scholars remains a public good, freely available to readers throughout the world.

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Collecting Abstractions: Music in the Library

by Amanda Maple (Music Librarian, The Pennsylvania State University; Phone: 814-863-1401) <alm8@psu.edu>

“Music is an abstraction, realized in sound or on paper or whatever.” As an abstraction, music presents special challenges in library collections: the physical challenges of acquiring and housing its various realizations (in sound or on paper); the intellectual challenges of defining the “work” or “text,” describing its realizations, and tagging them for later retrieval. Works of music exist in many versions (editions, formats, parts of a whole) and often in complex relation to other works. Music is realized by performers: libraries acquire performing versions of notated music (“parts”), conducting and study “scores,” and multiple recordings by different performers of the same version of a work, as well as many versions of that work.

Music on Paper

Kevin Kelly in “Scan This Book!” described his vision of the near-future “universal library,” in which every work ever created is available (some for free, others for a price) in digital form, as texts without physical carriers. The physical carrier is important to musicians, who read from scores and parts during rehearsals and performances. For hundreds of years, music has been printed on paper, and paper is still prominent in the digital music world. Scores stored as digital files can be accessed and printed on demand. Many scores are now born digital, created with notation software that enables musicians to input, edit, and print music using a computer keyboard or mouse, or by playing an electronic musical instrument connected to a computer with MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface, a protocol for data exchange between electronic instruments and computers). Collections of printed music digitized by libraries are proliferating, prompting the formation of the Sheet Music Consortium of libraries, whose goal is to build “an open collection of digitized sheet music using the Open Archives Initiative: Protocol for continued on page 46