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I Hear the Train A Comin' — ALCTS: Part 2

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You will recall that in the last installment of this column (see, *ATG* v.19#1, February 2007, p.82) I began an examination of the changing nature of scholarly communication. I looked at several emerging examples of the **Web 2.0** philosophy in the scholarly communication space, and discussed the inevitability of this trend. In this month's column, I will examine how institutional repositories and open access fit into this discussion. I will also offer some perspective as to how all these changes are affecting the role of the library, and offer a look ahead into the world of **Web 3.0**. Consistent with Part I of this piece, I will attempt to relate key points to the childhood pranks detailed in my humor book, *Atomic Wedgies, Wet Willies, and Other Acts of Roguery*.

How do the clamorous discussions concerning institutional repositories and open access overlap with the trend toward **Web 2.0** services outlined in Part I of this column? So that we are operating from a common framework, I'll offer this definition of an institutional repository. An IR is a Website intended to present the depth and breadth of an institution's intellectual output. It can hold lots of different types of content, including working papers, postprints, reports, presentations, and so forth. It can contain materials from faculty, students, and researchers affiliated with the institutions.

Materials included within IRs are typically posted at their creator's discretion, with perhaps only light vetting by an administrator within the department or the library. This idea that content should be able to find its connections with an audience, unfettered by gatekeepers, is accordant with **Web 2.0**. Consistent with this light gatekeeping mindset, the qualifications one must have to post to an IR are typically limited to institutional affiliation. In other words, a junior adjunct part-time instructor can post materials to his IR roughly as easily as a tenured department chair. It is less an exclusive country club and more a community pool. Another commonality concerns the ongoing evolution of available works. Materials posted to institutional repositories are often works in progress. The informal distribution of materials in their formative stage is based at least in part on the hope that others will download these materials, offer some feedback, and help strengthen future iterations. Finally, I would note that while on one hand IRs are very much driven by institutional norms, as witnessed by the word "institutional," they are also rather experimental. Policies, posting procedures, software choices, and site look and feel are but a few of the ways in which implementations differ from IR to IR. Remember that **Web 2.0** tends to be messy. So, too, is the attempt to standardize the IR experience. The "let's find our way as we go along" perspective very much ties IRs into the **Web 2.0** spirit.

Institutional repositories differ from **Web 2.0** principles in some important ways as well. The IR infrastructure generally allows for a lot of different forms of expression and

experimentation. However, the uptake of this opportunity has been somewhat limited. In many implementations, IRs have often come across as glorified aggregators of departmental working paper sites. I recall that when I was at **The Berkeley Electronic Press** we spent considerable time first developing and then promoting features like video posting and reader commentaries. In reality, the population of IR contributors has shown little interest in using these types of dynamic elements as yet.

Another aspect of divergence concerns content streams. The first generation of research and analysis concerning IRs is now beginning to pop up. What we see is that much of it involves the sparse population of repositories. There is wide adoption of IRs across schools, but actual deposits are fairly shallow. This has kicked up a good deal of dust concerning content recruitment strategies. How do we pull content from our faculty so that it can appear in our repository? An examination as to whether fishing for materials is appropriate or not is a wholly separate conversation. I broach it here not to imply any sort of value judgment, but rather because it points to an essential top-down construction of the IR model. The **Web 2.0** world, of course, is much more defined by how users embrace new technologies than by how we *get* users to embrace new technologies.

As a final note on institutional repositories, I would like to return to my earlier observation that IRs can serve as a platform for works in progress to be vetted, critiqued, and strengthened. In my view, this expectation of feedback to improve future versions has been largely unmet. While IRs provide the framework for ideas to be accessed, critiqued, and ultimately improved, I don't see much evidence that this is indeed happening.

Tied to institutional repositories as developments that are changing the nature of scholarly communication is open access. Again so that we are operating from a common framework, I'll offer this simple definition of open access. Open access (OA) means free online access to digital scholarly material. So how does open access interact with **Web 2.0**? I would argue that open access is a business model, or perhaps an ideology. In that sense, it can be mixed and matched with **Web 2.0** services as one sees fit. **The Social Science Research Network (SSRN)**, for example, makes its content freely available on its Website. So that makes it open access, right? Well, yes and no. Some people abhor visiting sites and running searches to discover newly posted materials of relevance. For this population, SSRN offers subscriptions to tailored email alerts for a fee. The content is free and the notification is not. Another example is my old company, **The Berkeley Electronic Press**. They are in the process of creating an academic **MySpace** where professors and researchers can create personal pages detailing their writings and interests as part of a larger network. Some of the posted materials

will be free, some subject to copyright restrictions and subscription control.

As a general rule, I think that the mantra of the OA community, that "information wants to be free," is likely to be applied in some areas of scholarly communication **2.0**, and not applied in others. This is, of course, what has happened with OA and scholarly communication **1.0**. There is one more point I would like to make about the divergence of Open Access and **Web 2.0** tools. They share a common difficulty in being treated as serious scholarship by many within academia. Many scholars, for better or worse, do not view OA publications as credible sources. Many scholars, for better or for worse, are reluctant to accept community-created content and other aspects of **Web 2.0** information-sharing as legitimate sources of information. Given these compound credibility problems, we may find that initiatives attempting to marry OA and **Web 2.0** find themselves subject to the virtual Chair Yank.



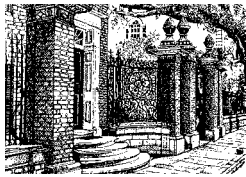
A full marrying of **Web 2.0** concepts to the scholarly communication world is constrained by other factors as well. Here I will reintroduce the definition I proffered for **Web 2.0** in last issue's column. **Web 2.0** refers to the emerging practices and services that use the Internet as a platform for communal participation. The **Web 2.0** movement involves marked socialization and collaboration among Internet users. People are sharing information, data, content, expertise, and opinions in a way that first generation static Websites could not accommodate. This sharing often takes the form of rapid peer-to-peer communication, unvetted by any expert authority. Using this definition, we can see some obvious roadblocks to a full embrace of **2.0**-edness by the scholarly world. The value of **Meathook69's** five star review of a song on **iTunes** is an interesting marker for me. I don't know anything about him, but trusting his review is at worst a 99 cent mistake. Contrast that with an undifferentiated marketplace of research and ideas. Tens of thousands of scholarly works pouring into a single bucket, with opinions and reviews and annotations by the **Meathook69's** of the world. Think about the time and effort that would need to go into each individual's effective use of this marketplace. In today's scholarly communication model, a journal's reputation, rejection rate, editorial board, and peer review policies provide a sort of pre-approval shorthand. If *Nature* publishes an article, I am confident it will be worth my while to explore. If the *Southeastern Journal of Ornithological Anthropology* publishes a paper, I won't place as high a priority on reading it.

My belief is that **Web 2.0** will change the contours of the existing scholarly communica-

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tion model, but not its fundamental structure. The gold standard of scholarly communication will continue to be the peer-reviewed journal. This is not to say that the journal form will be uninfluenced by open access and other pressures, but rather I mean that the important cues upon which the academy has come to rely are deeply ingrained enough that they are not changing anytime soon.

The contours will change, though. Content will be delivered more rapidly. Indeed, this is already happening as journals like *Nature* offer advance online publication. Feedback layers like what we see with **PLoS One** that in effect render an article a jumping off point for discussion and debate will become more common. Nontraditional forms of information will continue to be grouped in experimental ways, an extension of what we see with raw data and the **Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR)** and grey literature in IRs and **SSRN**. The best of mainstream **Web 2.0** applications will be adapted to the scholarly communication realm, as we see with **MySpace** for professors.

So how does the library fit into all this? In straining to apply my acts of roguery theme, the best I could come up with here is the Hertz Donut. Anyone with an older brother might recall this one. He comes up to you and asks if you'd like to try a Hertz Donut. You eagerly and innocently reply, "Boy, would I!" He then

smacks you on the arm and says, "Hurts, don't it!"

Libraries presently are being asked by their patrons and their administrations to get on the **Web 2.0** bandwagon. As yet, though, this has remained a vague directive, a set up for failure. This means that the library must be careful about how it steps forward, or risk a metaphorical Hertz Donut from angry and disappointed constituents.

In that stepping forward, libraries should recognize that they share a fundamental principle with the **Web 2.0** movement. At their core, they both are concerned with facilitating connections. The library serves to connect its patrons to information, ideas, and knowledge. Within the context of **Web 2.0**, I would argue that the library's role here is more important than ever. The library can and should try to make some sense of the panoply of **Web 2.0** offerings that are out there. What are the most relevant blogs, wikis, podcasts, and RSS feeds on the Web today? The library can't be in the role of verifying the quality of every podcast posted on **Learn Out Loud.Com**, just as it can't provide micro-level verification of every article indexed in *Medline* or *ABI-Inform*. However, it can point users interested in this medium to the site, and let them know that it seems to be a stable, well-rounded service.

The library can also play a collaborative role in the rollout of tools designed to help



faculty contribute to the **2.0** world. As I have previously mentioned, IRs are a part of that effort. But how does **Yale** decide the level of support it should provide for professors wishing to create blogs, to pick one example? What wiki software should **Penn State** offer its departments? These issues are too big to fall into the library's lap alone. The library should have a voice in this discussion, but not the sole voice. These are big picture issues that must necessarily involve academic computing, IT, the administration, and other interested parties. To the extent that this happens, the library must maintain a laser focus on strategies that serve to better connect the university and its personnel to information, ideas, and knowledge.

I would also argue that there are a number of ways that libraries can embrace **Web 2.0** technologies to further their mission of facilitating connections. Take the **University of Houston Library**, for example. There, a number of subject specialists have their own blogs. They use them to post links to pertinent popular press, job openings, calls for papers, and other goings-on in the field. This is meant to be a less formal, more real time connection to patrons. Another creative example is the **National Library of Australia's** collaboration with photo-sharing service **Flickr**. The partnership leverages the mass market's use of **Flickr** by piggybacking special tagging options onto photos related to the Australian experience. Two **Flickr** groups *PictureAustralia - Australia Day* and *PictureAustralia - People*

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think I should have borrowed a tactic employed at Columbia to help staff working in the Main Library endure ten plus years of its floor by floor renovation process. Floor by floor we had to move out of the way of the builders and then move into the new area. Some people moved more than once. You can imagine the chaos that we had to deal with during these many years. To keep everyone from going crazy, they produced a monthly newsletter that did three things: it gave us information on what was happening to us (fulfilling one of the basic needs that we all have), it helped clarify what could be expected in the near and more distant futures and it gave us a feeling that while we had to endure many inconveniences, a better day was coming (helping us deal with the difficulties of the loss curve and giving us realistic expectations of what was to come), and it helped us avoid thinking that this process would never end (helping us to fight off irrational fears that since we couldn't get our work done, our performance evaluations would be terrible and we would lose our jobs and we would have to move in with our parents once again).

Change, like cooperation, is a bit of an unnatural act. But I think paying more attention to these five factors can help a lot. I hope to do better next time. 🐾

Endnotes

1. Team Technology. Change Management: Five Basic Principles and How to Apply Them. <http://www.teamtechnology.co.uk/changemanagement.html>

Places and Events were set up on the Flickr Website in January 2006. Images loaded into these groups are harvested on a weekly basis into the **National Library's** collection. Over a thousand images are being harvested each month. A third example concerns the use of **Web 2.0** technologies to further the library's instructional mission. A good instance of this may be found at **Washington State University**. The library recently released its first tutorial podcast. It is a downloadable mp3 file that discusses search strategies on the library's information gateway. For students unwilling or unable to come to the library for an in-person lesson, this provides the next best thing.

Another way that libraries can play effectively in the **2.0** space is to go where the action is. Lock into step with patrons' current Web behaviors. One obvious example of this is tighter integration with the university portal and course management systems. If any campuswide community exists within the academy today, it is the course management system. It is thus sensible to expose library services there. What materials on course reading lists are currently available via the library, either physically or with the click of a button? What databases and digital collections are relevant to students

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taking Economics 110? For that matter, what books has a patron checked out that might soon be due? Established online communities at which your patrons congregate and interact (such as the course management system) are an opportunity. These pathways can be leveraged as a means of service delivery.

It is, of course, quite likely that by the time we all get up to speed on **Web 2.0**, the world will have moved on to **Web 3.0**. In terms of scholarly communication, I suspect this will mean ever shrinking barriers separating researchers from content, but with a greater success rate in filtering out noise. Today, I can get information at the snap of a finger from a thousand different sources. What I can't do is get only that information that is relevant to me, and nothing else, devoid of false positives and false negatives.

Web 3.0 will see people sharing information, data, content, expertise, and opinions in a way that first and second generation Websites cannot accommodate. This sharing will take the form of rapid peer-to-peer communication,

unvetted by any expert authority *save for my own preset preferences*. Literature services that know I want peer-reviewed articles about macroeconomic policy, but not working papers. I want the latest **Steven Levitt** video diary beamed to my **iPod**, but not my work machine. I want my recently finished presentation posted to the institutional repository, the course management system, my personal page, and the virtual community of professorial presentations simultaneously, with the click of one button. This will be the **3.0** world.

In this reality, the library will play a vital role in guiding patrons through the various opportunities to customize the receipt and exchange of information, ideas, and knowledge. As we all know, faculty are not shy in articulating what they want from us. They are, however, impatient in investing the time and effort necessary to maximize the benefits the library has to offer. Libraries will continue to hold their hands to improve the efficiency of their scholarly communication, from **Web 2.0** to **3.0** and beyond. 🐾