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ATG Interviews Mark Sandler, Director, Center for Libraries Initiatives

Katina Strauch

Against the Grain, strauchb@citadel.edu

Tom Gilson

Against the Grain, gilsont@cofc.edu

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ATG Interviews Mark Sandler

Director, CIC-Center for Library Initiatives

by Tom Gilson (Associate Editor, *Against the Grain*) <gilson@cofc.edu>

and Katina Strauch (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

ATG: Mark, some of our readers may not be that familiar with the CIC Center for Library Initiatives. Can you tell us a little about the CIC? What is your core mission? What is your relationship to The Committee on Institutional Cooperation?

MS: The Committee on Institutional Cooperation or CIC is an academic consortium of fifteen top-tier research universities in Midwestern and Eastern states. Fourteen of our member schools comprise the Big Ten Athletic Conference, and the fifteenth, the University Chicago, was a founding member of that conference, but no longer competes athletically. The CIC is provost funded, and provost led, regularly bringing together all manner of campus leaders — Chief Information Officers, Library Directors, Deans, University Relations Officers, Senior International Officers, General Counsels, Vice Presidents for Research, Chief Financial Officers, Registrars, Provosts, Presidents, Faculty Senate Leaders, Student Government Leaders, and many more. The mission of the CIC is to leverage campus expertise and resources for the benefit of all members; to extend available opportunities for faculty and students; to amplify the influence of our schools in higher education; and to encourage innovation.

The Center for Library Initiatives operates within the larger framework of the CIC to support the collaborative ambitions of our fifteen member libraries. In the aggregate, these libraries manage over 110 million volumes, expend nearly \$600 million per year on collections and operations, employ 4,500 librarians and staff members, and serve 600,000 student FTE. The libraries collaborate on — and co-invest in — a wide array of initiatives, including a shared print repository, collaborative digitization through Google and other channels, shared digital archiving (HathiTrust), co-investment in large-scale acquisitions, collective licensing, ILL, a common gateway for geospatial data, and other programs large and small.

ATG: Two of your projects, the HathiTrust Digital Library and Google Book Search Project, have gotten particular attention from the library community. Can you give us a status report on them? Why should small and medium size academic libraries be concerned about their success? Do such projects have a role in local collection development strategies?

MS: Google Books and HathiTrust are two awesome (as in “awe-inspiring”) initiatives. Since 2004, Google has digitized some 30 million volumes from libraries in the U.S., Europe, and Asia. That makes Google the second largest “not-a-library” in the U.S., behind the Library of Congress, but likely to overtake it in the next five years. Of course,



LC, founded in 1800, has had a bit of a head start, but who’s counting? Since the CIC executed its Cooperative Agreement with Google in 2007, the company has worked steadily with our schools to digitize several million volumes, over and above the 5.5 million volumes contributed by the Universities of Michigan and Wisconsin under prior agreements. Some of our schools are done supplying now, but Iowa, Chicago, Illinois, and Minnesota are still sending books, and we expect Nebraska, Maryland, and Rutgers will, in due course, be called upon to offer up unique items from their collections. Throughout this process, Google has been very respectful of the needs of our partnering libraries, communicative, and professional in managing the vast quantities of content moving back and forth.

As an example of Google adapting the 2007 Agreement to help meet our expressed library needs, they agreed in 2009 to give some priority to digitizing U.S. federal documents held in CIC libraries. To date, Google has digitized over 500,000 government publications supplied by our libraries. Whether we think about documents or the general content digitized by Google over the past ten years, it would be hard to overstate the value of this “Google moonshot” for preservation, access, and keeping libraries relevant in a digital age.

As a library consortium director, I’m in the collaboration biz; the more libraries are willing to co-invest and seek out common solutions to their problems, the happier I am. HathiTrust is an exemplar — the preeminent example — of what can be done by libraries trusting each other and acting in concert. Google partners needed a way to store large quantities of digital content being returned by Google. At great expense, they could have each built and maintained local capacity, and the result for users would have been having to look for content in forty different systems with

forty different search protocols and terms of access. Instead, we now have HathiTrust with over 13 million volumes — 5 million of which are in the public domain and fully accessible to readers everywhere. The implications of HathiTrust for libraries, scholars, and readers are continuing to emerge, and will shape our landscape for decades to come. Hathi has opened up a world of resources to users with print disabilities; created a preservation archive for replacing deteriorating works in the nation’s libraries; advanced scholarship by providing an important index to print resources held in our libraries; and will serve as an organizing principle for grappling with print collection management going forward.

When I think about big, bold, transformative initiatives in our library space — Wikipedia, JSTOR, Google digitization, PLoS, OCLC — I have to acknowledge that most come from outside of libraries, and ultimately rain down on us. In the case of HathiTrust, libraries themselves — Michigan, Indiana, the CIC, CDL — offered a bold vision, made it happen, and successfully defended it against the naysayers. Our CIC libraries are proud of their founding member status in HathiTrust, and the collaborative principles underlying the project are something to take note of... and try to replicate in other arenas.

ATG: You recently wrote, “there should be little doubt that the future of libraries will be less about managing stuff (including such trendy “stuffs” as data and special collections), and more about managing relationships.” Could you elaborate on that?

MS: Well, first, I say and write a lot of things, but you’ll notice I don’t offer any warranties. So, in the world today, there are lots of ways to connect individuals to the products and services they want. Yes, there are still shoe stores, bookstores, video stores, and record stores but it’s pretty easy to envision the ways that they will fall by the wayside (if they haven’t already). It’s also pretty easy to conjure scenarios by which authors, publishers, or uber-aggregators like Google or JSTOR could supply needed content to users without the intermediary of a library (and bottled water, FedEx, private schools, and toll roads should remind us that providing something for free doesn’t always guarantee market success). In a world where content can move from anywhere to anyone at the speed of light, proximity for delivering stuff is no longer a competitive advantage. The real benefit to libraries of being based in the middle of campuses and communities is the opportunity that it provides to build relationships with users — personal, caring, ongoing relationships — like those that some of us establish with our hair cutters, bartenders, or doctors.

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I have repeated, too many times, “that libraries need to become the cosmetic counters of the campus.” By that, I mean they should be big, bright, welcoming spaces where people go to overcome their insecurities; where they believe that staff know more about selecting and applying make-up than they do; and those cosmetologists are willing to give their personal attention to overcome whatever shortcomings they are trying to address or cover up. You can sit home and order the make-up online, or pick it up at a corner Walgreens, but the cosmetic counter stays relevant because it offers expertise and personal attention. Well, on campuses, everyone, at every level, is fighting the belief that they may not be smart enough to achieve their academic goals — i.e., to get into medical school, to get tenure, to get published, to get a grant, to finish a dissertation. Going forward, the big opportunity for libraries is not to be handing people books or articles, or pointing them in the direction of a bank of computers. The big opportunity — the competitive advantage, if you will — is using proximity and expert staff to help users overcome their fears and inadequacies. That’s a real value proposition libraries need to be exploiting.

ATG: *You also noted that libraries would need to undergo some significant transformations to make such “high-touch services” possible. What transformations do you see as essential? How well are libraries positioned to make these transformations? What barriers need to be overcome?*

MS: If, as I said above, the goal is to develop a dedicated or loyal clientele, libraries need to hire people who are appealing to users; they need to provide these appealing staff members training and oversight and feedback; they need to reward successes and address failures. In our campus libraries, we have many smart people with the desire and attributes to build mentoring relationships. For the most part, however, they don’t have measurable or achievable goals; there aren’t management structures in place to direct their work; nor are there budgets or infrastructure in libraries to facilitate what businesses call “customer acquisition.” So, for all their good intentions — and lip service about liaisons, outreach, and embedded librarians — I believe our libraries will continue to flounder until they jump the shark and shift their focus and budgets from acquiring heaps of inventory to the work of becoming high-touch service providers.

ATG: *What place do you see for consortia like the Committee on Institutional Cooperation in such efforts? Is there a role for consortia in enabling such transformations within member libraries? How about in the implementation of these changes?*

MS: Well, consortia are not in a position to deliver high-end services to users of public or academic libraries, so we can’t be much

against the grain people profile

Mark Sandler

Director, CIC Center for Library Initiatives
Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC)
<mhandler@staff.cic.net>

BORN & LIVED: Born and grew up in NYC (Queens). Attended **City College of New York**.

EARLY LIFE: Was a long time ago.

EDUCATION: Ph.D. in Sociology from **Michigan State University**; MLS from **University of Michigan**.

FAMILY: My wife **Claire** runs a very successful instructional support unit at the **University of Michigan** (the Science Learning Center) which provides peer led study groups and tutoring to over 3,500 students per semester.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Worked for twenty years in a variety of collections related positions at the **University of Michigan**, the last being Chief Collection Development Officer. Some good things happened at **Michigan** during my time there — **JSTOR** was founded there; we created a lot of SGML (and eventually XML) encoded texts, and the systems to read them; the Making of America Project was an early mass digitization initiative; we spent two years in secret conversations with **Google** before the **Google Print** partnership was finally announced in 2004; the Text Creation Partnership was initiated by — and hosted at — **Michigan**; the Scholarly Publishing Office came to fruition and reported through Collections. Lots of good people and digital library energy during my years at Michigan.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE: To write profiles about myself.

FAVORITE BOOKS: *American Pastoral* (**Roth**); *Ragtime* (**Doctorow**); *Something Happened* (**Heller**); *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (**Thompson**); *A Fine Balance* (**Mistry**); *White Noise* (**DeLillo**); *The Signal and the Noise* (**Silver**).

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: Boring presenters; eBook ILL; Kansas.

PHILOSOPHY: I was an undergraduate philosophy major — this should be easy. Um... um... The peloton always catches a lone rider (except when it doesn't). 🐘

help there. What we can do, however, is clear away some of the other work that engages so much of the time, staff, and money at our libraries. There are a lot of activities carried out in our individual libraries that should be done at scale — regionally, nationally, or internationally. I would argue that 80, 90, 95 percent of selection, licensing, preservation, cataloging, storage, systems (e.g., ERMs, catalogs, enhanced discovery layers, acquisitions), ILL, etc. could be managed off-site. I can’t say for sure that all of these things could be done better in one or several central places than they are being done in a thousand individual libraries. It’s inescapable, however, that all of the redundant, back-office work being carried out by our libraries undermines their ability to focus on relationship building with users, and the costs of this redundancy will eventually erode the confidence our funders — taxpayers, city managers, provosts, students — have that they are receiving a good return on their investments. A faculty member once said at a meeting about digital humanities, “consortia are good at doing the stupid things.” I think he was right — let us relieve libraries of the mundane tasks so they can double-down on enriching the lives of the people they serve.

ATG: *What impact will this focus on “managing relationships” have on the future of collection development? Where will collections fit into the future of library services?*

MS: I’ve been a collections librarian for my whole career, but I see now that the landscape has changed. Collections aren’t an end unto themselves — these investments only make sense in the context of serving user needs. Connecting a reader with the right resources is invaluable (at least to that reader). Hoarding ten million volumes for the sake of climbing up some ranking scheme is not going to cut it in a world where the emphasis on analytics is less about inputs and much more about outcomes — i.e., what difference did it make? Somehow, the symbiotic relationship between libraries and vendors is going to have to extend the loop to account for library users, and the difference we’re making in their lives.

ATG: *In a recent Webinar you also noted that in order to compete in a climate where scholars have multiple options in finding information, libraries should seek out strategic partnerships with publishers who are invested in demonstrating the value of their products. What form should such partnerships take? Are there any specific examples where this has resulted in successful outcomes for both library and publisher?*

MS: This is a space where publishers and libraries share common ground. Publishers want to show that the content they produce is valuable to users, and libraries want the same for the content they purchase. Now

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we're in a space where libraries buy stuff and then direct blame at the publishers if use falls below expectations. It's actually a two-way street; the content has to have inherent value, and it has to be positioned in ways that users can find it. So, libraries need to do their part to actually promote what they buy, and publishers can and would help with that. A journal publisher can see a lot about who is using their content, and how they are accessing it. When analyzed in the context of hundreds of other libraries, they can start to see patterns related to the more or less effective ways that libraries position content.

As to who is actually doing this, I know that **Springer** has a group dedicated to this kind of analysis, and **Gale** has — or at least used to have — a “post-sales” group that could help with issues like content promotion. I'm sure other publishers also have programs, or provide ad hoc assistance, if asked, but I think the point I'd make is that librarians seldom ask (note: some interesting exceptions might include **John McDonald** at **USC**, **Michael Levine-Clark** at the **University of Denver**, **Jason Price** from **SCELC**, and **Doug Way** from Wisconsin). Most libraries and librarians seem to resist the notion that publishers have a role in leading users to content: “that's what librarians do.” The fact that we might be doing it poorly, or, if you prefer, “not optimally,” seems easier for them to accept than the thought of bringing vendors in to advise on building user relations, or organizing content in ways that optimizes its visibility.

ATG: *What other strategies can libraries employ to gain a competitive edge in attracting and retaining users?*

MS: That's easy. They can hire and retain staff members who are irresistible to library constituents. They can marshal persuasive data that they have and will deliver tangible benefits to users. They can create relationships with potential users — social media, luncheons, events — that build trust, before trying to preach the library's message. And, like with any other successful business, they can deliver the services that people want, at the time and place of need.

I know — this sounds like a lot to ask. But libraries have a lot of strategic advantages that could help to secure their future:

- Most people are positively disposed to libraries.
- Their goods and services are largely free.
- They have substantial infrastructure — space, inventory, personnel — to share.
- They are part and parcel of the communities they serve.

That's a pretty good basis for entering a competition. As they say in the sports world, “it's their game to lose.”

ATG: *Mark, you seem to be incredibly busy with your work at the CIC. How do you*

against the grain publisher profile

Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC)

Champaign, IL
www.cic.net

OFFICERS: **Barbara McFadden Allen** is the Executive Director of the **CIC**, and the fifteen **CIC** University Provosts serve as our Board.

PARENT/AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS: The **CIC** enjoys a positive working relationship with the **Big Ten Athletic Conference** (headquartered in Chicago), in which fourteen of our fifteen **CIC** members participate.

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 24

CORE MISSION: Create the most responsive and effective framework for academic collaboration in higher education.

KEY PROJECT(S): **CIC** collaborative initiatives cover a wide range of campus interests and activities, including — but definitely not limited to — coordinating course sharing; managing significant research grants on traumatic brain injury, health disparities, tracing the economic impact of **CIC** university research, and post-doctoral fellowships in the humanities; coordinating study abroad opportunities; managing a high-speed fiber network for data transmission among our universities; providing secure access to our university computing systems; procurement; and much more.

As part of this larger set of cooperative activities, the Center for Library Initiatives supports the collaborative ambitions of our member campus research libraries. Our key projects include cooperative mass digitization (including government documents), collective digital storage (**HathiTrust**), content licensing, collective investments in large-scale acquisitions, resource sharing, shared print storage of journal backfiles; developing a unified portal for geospatial data, an annual conference for **CIC** librarians, and several initiatives in the broad domain of “scholarly communication.” To keep the ship afloat, we're lucky to have our Deputy Director **Kim Armstrong** overseeing all aspects of these programs, **Rebecca Crist** managing the Shared Print Repository initiative, and **Susanne Garrison** serving as our Office Administrator.

MAIN CONSTITUENCIES: The **CIC** is Provost funded and Provost led, but other key stakeholder groups choose to make significant investments in collaboration each year. These key stakeholder groups include the University Librarians, the Chief Information Officers, Deans of Arts and Sciences, Graduate School Deans, and Senior International Officers, all of whom contribute funding to support **CIC** staff members.

HISTORY AND BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF YOUR ORGANIZATION: The **CIC** was founded in 1958, and is probably the oldest, largest, and we think most successful, voluntary academic consortium.

ANYTHING ELSE THAT YOU THINK WOULD BE OF INTEREST TO OUR READERS? No, I'm pretty sure I've exceeded their level of interest by now. 🍷

maintain such a high energy level? Are there some specific fun activities that you enjoy that help re-energize you? Do you have any hobbies that help you relax?

MS: Well, truth be known, I work from home so am more sedentary than the majority of the working world. One of my few daily goals is to make sure that I shower before my wife gets home from work. I do run regularly, and I really enjoy the 6:30 a.m. fun run at the **Charleston Conference** (thanks **Mitchell Davis**, et al. for organizing that). As for sources of energy, I'd venture that consortia leaders interact with more colleagues than most librarians working in a single library, or even vendors with a targeted customer base. There are 1,800 librarians in the **CIC** libraries, and while that might sound like a nightmare, it's actually very energizing to have all these

touch-points with all of those smart people — librarians and vendors alike.

ATG: *It's been great talking to you. We've really enjoyed getting your perspective on these key issues.*

MS: I don't read a lot of print media anymore — I just promiscuously flit from blog post to blog post — but I do read and appreciate *Against the Grain*. I think you guys do a great job, I think **Katina** has built something amazing and impactful in Charleston, and, as a shout-out to one of our **CIC** members, I really appreciate the efforts of the **Purdue University Press** to promote and archive the proceedings and publications coming out of Charleston. I'm glad for the opportunity to give credit where it's due. Thanks for reaching out to me. 🍷