

2015

Little Red Herrings--DC + SEUG

Mark Y. Herring

Winthrop University, herringm@winthrop.edu

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



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

Recommended Citation

Herring, Mark Y. (2015) "Little Red Herrings--DC + SEUG," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 27: Iss. 4, Article 44.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.7162>

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.



by **Mark Y. Herring** (Dean of Library Services, Dacus Library, Winthrop University) <herringm@winthrop.edu>

On 5 June this past summer, my university hosted the first ever digital commons southeastern users group. The cryptic header to this column is thus immediately revealed. While other such groups have appeared across the U.S., some of them in place for a half a dozen years, a handful of us with institutional repositories decided last fall that now might be the time for a southeastern omnium gatherum. **Winthrop**, by virtue of being centrally located, hosted the event.

While a small group (35-40), we made up for that in enthusiasm and innovation. I have written before about IRs/digital commons and the whole open access calculus. This was the time actually to do something, and it turned out to be nothing short of spectacular. I can say that because I had very little to do with the conference, other than to welcome our guests. We had two representatives from **BePress** in California, and users from Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Mississippi, and, of course, from South Carolina.

If you want to get a sense of what we did, take a look at <http://digitalcommons.winthrop.edu/dcseug/>. Several things struck me about this process, but one thing stands out as you look over our day-long conference — a lot of folks are doing some very wonderful things. Whether you have a digital commons or not, now is the time to get on the bandwagon. It's a great way to create your university's digital footprint by capturing its intellectual capital. But it is also more than that. It's a way to showcase your library, your faculty, your institution, and your students. In short, it's a win-win, no matter how you look at it.

We began building our IR in October. Several events occurred at once and allowed us to redefine positions last summer. Out of this came the creation of a digital commons librarian role. We have hit the ground running and only recently saw our 2,000th download. We are basically a one-person operation, a point that troubled me in the beginning. But what I learned at the conference is that this is hardly unusual. Most IRs have one person with several others who contribute when they can. The same is true for us. We have individuals in our Pettus Archives who help out with posting. Later on this past summer we reassigned catalogers to the metadata end of our work. For the first time ever, some of our archival materials will be accessible online.

As I said above, I participated mostly as a spectator, but several things have emerged since we took on this new role. I am certain these are obvious kinds of things, but I share them because what is known is not always obvious, and what is obvious, isn't always known.

Librarians need to take more risks. We live in tumultuous times in librarianship. There are days when it looks to me like librarianship won't make it to the next month, much less the next decade. Then there are days when conferences like this one occur and renew my faith that our profession may be somewhat weakened but we are hardly terminal. With some creative risk-taking, we can recapture and redefine what we mean by the word library. I don't mean taking risks just to take them, but to look at the landscape and see what might work. Librarianship needs more of that, not less.

Librarians should not be afraid of failure. Having said that, know that some things will not work and that's okay. I'm not going to bore you (more) by trotting out the tired adage that you learn more from failure than success. While that is true, it doesn't help a whole lot when you're in one of those fallow fields of failure. But we do need to realize that we are going to have to try a lot of different things in order to continue to flourish. Many of those things will not work. That's okay. Try them; and if they fail, move on and try something else.

You don't have to know code to be inventive. Many of the IRs I looked at are astonishing in their appearance and their complexity, but one doesn't have to know coding to do this. Of course, knowing how to code is and always will be a plus, but you don't have to know how to do that in order to begin. I am under no obligation to **BePress** to say this, but we chose them *because* our coding abilities are elementary and our access to sophisticated coding severely limited. The folks at **BePress** won't do it for you, but they come pretty close!

Creativity abounds in digital commons. I thought I knew a good bit about what was going on in digital commons around the country. I'm no expert, but I do try very hard to keep up. This conference showed me that I've only scratched the surface. This is great news for libraries and for librarianship. While not every digital commons is associated with a library, many are, and a good many who run them are librarians by training. With minimal support, libraries can create an entirely new information access point that not only rivals what is already there, but may even surpass much that is in place, or has outlived its usefulness. For a flavor of what's possible, take a peek here: <http://digitalcommons.bepress.com/>.

There are no sacred cows. For a good portion of my career, librarianship has had certain rules and expectations that could not be transgressed or ignored. All of those sacred cows have been sacrificed on the altar of survival. I'm not saying that we throw caution to the wind, but what you do or want to do to attract users to your building is limited by what you're willing to allow. No one is stopping you. There are no wrong answers, and though some might well arch an eyebrow or two at new initiatives, let them arch away. At least one of our jobs as librarians is to preserve what has worked well and find new and imaginative ways to attract new and younger patrons. Sacred cows have a way of, well, getting in the way of needed change.

The future is now, but be patient with the past. The folks who know me know I am a traditionalist at heart. But the longer I work in this profession, the more I see that you can preserve traditions by building the future on that very solid foundation. Our IR is growing by fits and starts but only because we're still trying to get everyone on board. And while this is frustrating at times, I remind myself that it wasn't so long ago that I was right there with them. Plodding really does win races.

The Internet is still no substitute for a library, and I still believe it never will be. But the Internet is a vehicle, a tool, with which you can augment, enlarge, and even aggrandize your library. There's nothing wrong with that. So, jump into that digital commons if you haven't already and use the Internet to hammer home all the wonderful things your library is doing and has always done. 🐞



Evolutionary Ecology Research

MICHAEL L. ROSENZWEIG — EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

"The report of my death...is greatly exaggerated." — Mark Twain

- **Pioneer open-access-green-road journal**
www.Evolutionary-Ecology.com
- **Your gadfly to the publishing world**
- **Cooperating with librarians since 1999**
- **Illustrious, international board of editors**
- **Start a subscription or renew now:**
Contact scarab@u.arizona.edu or your journal service.