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At Brunning: People and Technology--At the Only Edge that Means Anything/How we Understand What We Do

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To Blog or Not To Blog — Why Scholars Blog

by **Pat Sabosik** (General Manager, ACI Scholarly Blog Index; Phone: 203-816-8256) <psabosik@aci.info>

There are a lot of reasons why scholars blog, not the least of which is to advance their research and refine their craft of writing and to clearly communicate their ideas in their field. Digital presence and reputation are also key drivers, especially for younger scholars and scientists. Their digital footprint will be bigger and broader than today's scholars. Scholarly blogs, once considered ephemeral, are now becoming part of the scholarly record and an important component of a scholar's work. Let's look further into these topics.

Digital Footprint

Young scientists coming into the field are digital natives. They have an affinity for technology, are socially connected, and are driving a sharing economy. Blogging and a range of Internet-enabled social connections like Facebook, Twitter, Academia.edu or ResearchGate are a regular part of their lives. A social presence is important and can help scholars gain recognition in their field. Scholars need a digital presence to be discoverable; that's where their peers, mentors, and funding agencies will find them. Using social media smartly, particularly blogging where commentary can be expanded, can help benefit the young scholars and bring attention to their work.

Digital Reputation

Digital commentary has to have substance as young scholars build their reputation as burgeoning experts in their fields. Commenting on trends in a thoughtful way through a scholar's blog goes a long way towards building that digital reputation and showing mastery of an idea or topic — essentially, what does a scholar want to be known for? Maintaining profiles and activity on key social media resources becomes important as scholars build their digital resume and social presence.

Interdisciplinary Scholarship

How many scholars actually use blogs or social media? Will scholarly blogs be read and referenced? According to a **Pew – AAAS** study, “47% of AAAS scientists have used blogs or social media to discuss or follow science, 24% have blogged, 19% regularly follow blogs and 12% regularly follow Twitter in order to keep up-to-date.” Given the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of science, nearly 92% of AAAS scientists, in the same **Pew** study, “read a journal article outside of their primary specialty area in the past year and 57% published a study with a multidisciplinary team.” The same use of blogs and interdisciplinary practices can be traced to scholars in the social sciences and the humanities.

Funding and Publishing

In the same **Pew** study, 83% of AAAS scientists report “that obtaining federal research funding is harder today [2014] than it was five years ago.” Industry funding and private foundation funding are also down. “Concerns about adequate funding are widely shared among scientists of all disciplines and employment sectors.”

Limits in funding have put restrictions on research and potentially the number of traditional outlets for publishing research results. In fast-developing fields like the life sciences, delays in the traditional publishing cycle make research results seem out-of-date when they actually are published. Couple these trends with the digital native behavior of young scholars and the scholarly blog becomes an attractive outlet for publication while they work through funding channels for more traditional sources of funding and publication and build their digital footprint.

With these demographic and economic shifts in research and scholarly publishing, blogs are an excellent vehicle for scholars to use to document their research and build their reputations through expert commentary, stay current on trends in their fields, and remain in touch with their readers. Scholarly blogs can be broad in scope or as specific as a journal article reporting on research outcomes. Scholarly blogs are at the forefront of their fields reporting on trends in advance of, or in some cases instead of, journal articles and can be found side-by-side with journal articles in the major discovery engines such as **ExLibris Primo**, **Ebsco Discovery Service**, **OCLC World Cat** and **ProQuest Summon**. This next generation of scholars will continue to push the boundaries of scholarly communication through blogs and other forms of scholarly discourse. 🌿

*Pat Sabosik is the General Manager of the **ACI Scholarly Blog Index**, an editorially selected and curated collection of scholarly blogs covering all academic disciplines. Pat will be moderating a panel discussion: “Why We Blog – Reshaping Research, Captivating Tales from Academic Bloggers.” During the upcoming **Charleston Conference** October 31st to November 5th, in Charleston, SC.*

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@Brunning: People & Technology

At the Only Edge that Means Anything / How We Understand What We Do

by **Dennis Brunning** (Associate University Librarian, Arizona State University) <dennis.brunning@gmail.com>

Annals of Analytics: Usage Data

Library use is like **Donald Trump's** delegates. We've got plenty but somehow they get no respect.

My own library drowns in numbers. We've got millions and millions of article downloads. eBook use isn't too shabby either.

Why be surprised, the industry and its customers, librarians, are a massive knowledge engine.

Yet ask anyone in academia, even high mucky mucks, and everyone says they get all their information from Google. Thank you.

What's the deal?

Well, borrowing from **David Weinberger's** observation that there is a library size hole in the Internet we can state a corollary. There is a huge leak in publisher Websites, flowing from Google, pooling in Dropbox and other cloud redoubt.

Check with your usage people, I'll bet numbers, especially STM downloads, are huge. Who is even tracking views? Requests arrive from many places, mainly Google Scholar. So why doesn't this use lift all ships, that is, get our users to applaud us?

Our users, myself included, search Google and find much library content on the open Web. We can blame Sci-Hub, but c'mon, it's much bigger than that.

Sci-Hub easy? You'd have to be a professional skip tracer to find it. Find it at best, it's bad aggregation. It's about as easy to use as the “tear here” instructions on convenience store aspirin packets.

Our stuff is easier to open than bitty aspirin packs, often (sorry OA advocates) as economically priced, and more often than not the results of a highly efficient search engine.

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Improving eBooks

The focus of question 24 (1,302 respondents) was improving the usability of eBooks. It is similar to questions asked in 2008 and 2011 (see Table 9); however, the 2016 question included three options that were not in the earlier questions — “Fewer restrictions on downloading,” “Improved accessibility,” and “Better search.” Apart from these three additions, which ranked second, third, and fourth in 2016, the rankings were almost identical for the features held in common among the surveys. The top rank in all three surveys was “More titles in my subject area.”

The selection pattern in the smaller set of factors in the earlier questions separated into two groups with the top group garnering about two-thirds of the votes and the other group important to only about a third of the students. The top three factors in the 2008 and 2011 surveys lost an average of 4 points each by the 2011 survey. The decline in concern could be the result of advances in these areas — increased numbers of titles at academic libraries and improved access through collections like **Google Books** and **HathiTrust** as well as increased flexibility in printing and copying.

The 2016 survey had a gradual spread of selection percentage that was roughly 10 points on average below the results of the earlier surveys. The drop could indicate improvements in the areas. The only factors to switch positions in the 2016 survey were “Better training and instruction” and “multimedia capabilities.”

Table 9 – Preferences for improvements to eBooks

Characteristic	2008 %	2011 %	2016 %
More titles in my subject area	76	73	58
Fewer restrictions on downloading			54
Improved accessibility			51
Better search			49
Less restrictions on printing and copying	65	60	46
More current titles	59	56	42
Better e-book readers	35	39	31
Better training and instruction	32	34	21
Multimedia capabilities	30	31	26

Amount Read for an Assignment

Students (1,281 respondents) in question 25 selected one option from a listing of portions of an eBook that they typically read when doing research or completing assignments. Just over 59% reported (Table 10) reading a chapter or more. Only 5% selected the entire eBook. The question does not exclude e-textbooks. A fair percentage of students are now using e-textbooks, which generally require reading about a chapter a week. The question also does not specify a time frame, which implies a portion of an eBook for a given assignment. But, it can also be understood as one sitting or throughout a term.

Table 10 – Portion of eBook typically read

Answer Options	Response %
More than one chapter but less than the entire book	41
More than 5 pages but less than a chapter	16
One chapter	13
1-5 pages	12
The entire book	5
I don't read eBooks	5
Other (please specify)	4
Just the table of contents	4

Reading Devices

Question 26 asks students (1,295 respondents), “When you have to read an eBook for a longer period of time (i.e., more than 20 minutes) how do you usually read it? (Multiple Selections).” Nearly half the time (45%) students are reading on a desktop or laptop computer, tablets (18%), print outs (13%), a smartphone (12%), and an e-reader (8%). Nearly three quarters of the students (73%) in question 27 (1,292 respondents) report preferring to download and read rather than read online and 21% prefer online reading.

Table 11 – How do you read an eBook?

Answer Options	Response %	Response % of Total Selections
On a laptop computer	52	30
On a tablet	31	18
On a desktop computer	26	15
Printed out	22	13
On a smartphone	21	12
On an ereader, such as Kindle or Nook	13	8
I wouldn't read an eBook for longer than 20 minutes	7	4
Other (please specify)	1	1
Total	173	100

Instruction

In 2008, online tutorials ranked highest with 62% of students selecting them as “the most effective support and training tools for learning how to find and use eBooks.” Tutorials continued to rank number one with 65% of the vote in 2011. In-person instruction and online help pages continue in the 2nd and 3rd slots but they switched places and swapped 4 points. Training videos, paper guides, and online chat all received less than a third of the vote between the two earlier surveys with paper guides losing 3 points and training videos and online chat both gaining points.

In 2016 question 28 (1,282 respondents) found 56% of students selecting in-person instruction as “extremely or very effective” as the top selection. Online tutorials was in second place with 48%. The change was accompanied by an increase in the percentage of students selecting “training videos” from 2008 (22%) to 2016 (44%), which are now online in place of tutorials. Therefore, the training videos and online tutorials might best be understood together, which would then account for scores of 84% in 2008, 87% in 2011 and 88% in 2016.

Table 12 – Most Effective Instruction

Method	2008 %	2011 %	2016 %
Online tutorials	62	65	48
In-person instruction	51	55	56
Online help pages	56	52	44
Training videos	22	32	44
Paper guides (i.e. user guides)	30	27	35
Online chat	15	19	31

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Still the “got it Google” bias or hyperbole lingers.

What we need is the right data. User data is the money machine for Web companies. We need to know where they are coming from. Good that they find our content through our search engines; great if they find our content from any search engine. Fundamental if we learn we've poured billions into the greatest open access repository the world has ever known.

Annals of the Reader's Advisor(y) Bookbub

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acquisitions? Is this financially feasible? How does it influence or how is it influenced by any growth of truly collaborative collection initiatives?

- How will resource sharing change? Do libraries and library consortia need to begin to evolve a new infrastructure to support resource sharing on a larger scale? What role might increased digital delivery play in efficient operations?

And, the beat goes on..... We look forward to the continued evolution of shared print projects and to working together as a community. Libraries or library consortia interested in addressing these questions or joining EAST as part of the second cohort should reach out to **Susan** at <sssteams@blc.org> or **Anna** at <aperricci@blc.org>. 🐟

Endnotes

1. EAST's initial focus has been monographs though journals and serials are in scope for EAST and planned for the future.
2. A title set is an **SCS** term used to describe all the holdings of a particular title. Across a collective such as EAST, a title set can have one or more associated title holdings.

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Bookbub promotes and refers books. They make money from authors and publishers. Promotional fees aren't cheap so low retail priced books seldom get promoted in my **Bookbub** feed. Rather, I get selections that often find me clicking "buy" when interest intersects with a darn good price.

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Downloads from the Zeitgeist

Negative Rates — Central banks throughout the world are lending money to banks at

zero to minus zero interest rates. This quantitative easing keeps a lead lid on inflation and makes money cheap. The idea is to promote economic growth while holding inflation at bay.

Unfortunately, growth in jobs or capital expansion has occurred; instead companies hold on to cash only to spend while buying up competitors.

Negative rates are the new normal. It explains the M&A in our industry. This is good business; as about the only customers for many of these companies, we should expect no less. We should also expect some price relief. Or some awesome tech advancement at modest cost.

Lo and Behold — sounds biblical but deployed by **Werner Herzog** as the title of a new documentary on the Internet, it's a play on the first message sent via the Internet. The time and place was **UCLA** engineering, room 3041. A military grade steel case server stands tall and 1950s-ish in a corner. There. **UCLA**. 1950. Yet to be released, nevertheless the good parts flow as snippets all over said web. Self-defined a non-user, **Herzog** sees the Internet as an extreme environment capable of social media's "massive, naked onslaught of stupidity" to a once-in-a-millennium existential event. **Herzog** is after ecstatic truth of what most of us take for granted not the accountant's truth of a Waze estimate of commute time. "Have the Thai monks stopped meditating? They all seem to be tweeting..."

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the review. Statistics, title lists, submission forms, and links to past review projects are all featured on the site. A blog dedicated to the serials review is the primary method for technical services to inform public services of newly uploaded statistics on the intranet site, changes in deadlines, or other pertinent serials related information. Internal technical services discussions regarding licensing and technical requirements is documented on a group site dedicated to technical services communications.

The annual serials review project experiences constant improvements based on participant feedback. One major concern last year was that faculty who begin their tenure at the university usually arrive on-campus in August, which traditionally has been too late to participate in the review project for upcoming changes for the following year. A special review was held in October where new faculty could select titles to add to the collection from a preselected list of publishers. With a shortened timeline, a preselected list of publishers with which we had existing licenses was essential for licensing to be completed before the subscriptions began the following January. This project garnered praise from new faculty, and the intention is to continue this special review for new faculty.

It is challenging to commit to review as a default, but through the implementation of both the database review process and the serials review process, it is assured that decisions are defensible and data-informed. Documentation of these processes creates opportunities for internal assessment of collection efficiency, delivery time, and ROI (return on investment) as was never possible previously. Both the database review and the annual serials review project offer openings to actively cultivate and assess the collection holistically. The success of these processes is entirely dependent on interdepartmental collaborations, a culture of assessment, and a commitment to delivering collections as a service. If this course of action, ongoing review, is occasionally challenging or demanding, the rewards are worth the work. 🐼

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GE — General Electric? — a smart series of TV ads sets young geek graduates against a world convinced that innovation is exclusively about “digital.” An old school Dad cajoles his tall skinny coding graduate to lift Grandpa’s sledge hammer; same kid faces his friends insisting in vain that trains powered by **GE** turbine engines require intricate programming. The message: apps haven’t disrupted industry — don’t forget to send your CV to **GE**.

Wrong — the assumption that our predictions play out right may be wrong and all those forecasts may turn out some variation of wrong. Or so says **Chuck Klosterman** in his new book, *But What if We are Wrong*. **Klosterman**’s thesis isn’t new — that we have no idea of what now will be important in the future or what will be wrong or plain forgotten. **Chuck** is a cultural critic so mainly he challenges us on such questions of how important rock music will be — is it here to stay or will the **Beatles** go the way of **John Phillips Sousa** — a side influence. Something to ponder as we work out our ideas of the library’s future.

Library Sized Hole in the Internet — Ever since Internet clairvoyant and pundit, **David Weinberger**, coined the phrase in a 2012 **OCLC** interview, I’ve kept my eyes peeled for said hole. I’m familiar with holes, real and metaphorical, by having dug many according to my parents, worked construction, dug foxholes in ROTC, and paid my dentist a mint for those holes called caries. Also found that philosophers concern themselves with holes as a peculiar form of absence. This I discovered on the Internet from sources I would describe as library sources. I learn that we look more closely at things when they disappear. Holes are a great place for things to disappear. Are we looking closely?

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higher proportions of overall usage. These preliminary findings suggest that eBooks, despite their convenience, are complementing rather than replacing print. Among eBook collection types, the perpetually owned titles are used most heavily (18 uses per held title), greatly outdistancing the PDA pool (0.3 use per held title) and the subscription-based eBook collection (0.22). This pattern suggests continued high demand for titles owned through automat-

ic purchase or efirm order. Moreover, the PDA pool is generating a healthy mix of short-term loans across the breadth of the collection, in some cases leading to automatic PDA purchase — factors pointing to an effective PDA profile. **Caveats:** These broad findings alone are not sufficient for collection decisions responsive to the needs of a diverse mix of study programs. While overall trends have shown rapid rise of eBook use and steady usage of print books, nuance-sensitive decisions require insights into usage and expenditure patterns by discipline — the subject of next issue's article. 🌱

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aging the ubiquity of small portable devices to keep this conversation alive and to broaden the audience of people who are participating. We are constantly looking for ways to bring more people into the conversation and reach a broader audience, and I think the trends are very promising.

One of the things that interested me at the SSP meeting was the number of corporation representatives who approached us and asked if we would be interested in doing something like a team-building exercise. That it is something that we would enjoy doing because CSI's mission is to get people thinking more ambitiously and optimistically about the future. The role that books and publishing would play is obviously part of that conversation.

My personal research interests are looking at interdisciplinary collaboration and how to support people with very different backgrounds in collaborating and doing big ambitious projects. This project is a nice example. We had already talked about bringing representatives of the publishing community and authors together. Seeing the results of that is really exciting, and we are always looking for more opportunities.

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Technology Doping — Olympic swimmers, especially the Gold Medalists, break records in waters stilled from drag producing waves over waters deep enough for optimum buoyancy. Smart pools through smart design. So why can't our industry use the cheap money to produce smart UI, heck, smart content. Yeah, an Olympic award winning Website...

Edtech — so new it confounds spellcheck, so promisingly vast, **Fintech** places a global 5 trillion valuation, we're talking an uberization of every teacher, professor, university

DTH: I think this is a fascinating project and will follow it with interest. Do you have a newsletter or a way to keep people up to date with what is going on?

RW: You can sign up for a subscription to the newsletter on the CSI Website.

DTH: Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with me. 🌱

*Donald T. Hawkins is an information industry freelance writer based in Pennsylvania. In addition to blogging and writing about conferences for **Against the Grain**, he blogs the **Computers in Libraries and Internet Librarian** conferences for **Information Today, Inc. (ITI)** and maintains the **Conference Calendar** on the ITI Website (<http://www.infotoday.com/calendar.asp>). He is the Editor of **Personal Archiving: Preserving Our Digital Heritage**, (Information Today, 2013) and Co-Editor of **Public Knowledge: Access and Benefits** (Information Today, 2016). He holds a Ph.D. degree from the University of California, Berkeley and has worked in the online information industry for over 40 years.*

administrator. Why? Well just about every educated parent feels a kid could learn more, faster, and safer with a computer and an Internet connection; every taxpayer lusts to be unburdened from subsidizing the teaching of someone else's kid, and legislator's can only smile. How? Oh, apps of course, free information, regulated access pipes, and interactive visual learning that scales. Never? Sure, every trillion dollar reference is either debt or Silicon Valley bubble, but, heh, here comes my **Uber** ride, while I refinance via **Rocket**, eating a Calzone **Jimmy John's** delivered to me wherever... 🌱

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