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Op Ed--Opinions and Editorials--Pelikan's Antidisambiguation--"Digital Golf Clubs"

Michael P. Pelikan
Penn State, mpp10@psu.edu

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Pelikan's Antidisambiguation — "Digital Golf Clubs"

Column Editor: **Michael P. Pelikan** (Penn State) <mpp10@psu.edu>

"Golf is a game in which one endeavors to control a ball with implements ill adapted for the purpose." — **Woodrow Wilson**

When the topic of conversation swings around to that of patterns discernable in the incorporation of technology into business processes I sometimes think of this quote from the 28th President of the United States.

It reminds me of an episode I encountered in the early days of the World Wide Web, as colleges were making early efforts to make room in their planning and processes for publicly accessible Web pages — what were these things *for*? Most people could figure out that interested members of the public might want to *read* about the programs or activities of a college or university — so in that sense I guess the first view many administrators had of the Web was as a publishing platform of sorts.

I can recall college Web pages that were built with the understanding that they might be the source of initial contact between members of the public and an organization. The convention of a link to a page entitled something like "Contact Us" was established fairly early on. In the early days, of course, that contact information was in the form of a mailing address and a telephone number. It didn't take too long for the contact information to be expanded to include an email address. There was a period of thrashing around while email addresses were figured out. For a while personal email addresses and corporate office email addresses were sometimes intermingled. Initially, not all organizations had their own domain, nor even email address for all on their staff or faculty. The need to keep web pages updated and current was revealed early on in the handling of email addresses.

I remember a college office which received emails from prospective students making initial contacts with the college. At that time, the administrators of that small college felt the most straightforward way to fold contacts initiated through email into their business processes was to have an administrative assistant print out each and every email that arrived and place it in the in-box of the administrator. From there, presumably, it would be read, and afterward, filed, as a printout, with the other paper files. I recall an earnest discussion concerning whether to distinguish those printouts from other paper-based contacts, either by category or by some form of color-coding in the filing system — or were they simply contacts, just like other attempt to get in touch? I think it's accurate to say that the discussions went back and forth.

At some point somebody realized that contact could be initiated through a web-based form, to be filled out by the contact initiator. At last! A process the administrators could understand! So very quickly, a project was initiated to produce a Web-based version of the intake form that previously had been filled out and mailed in. Easy, right?

And what happened once prospects started filling those web forms? That's right — the administrators asked the administrative assistants to print out those filled-in forms and simply fold them into the existing paper-based processes. And Voila! The entire business model was transformed overnight and untold new efficiencies were realized!

Well, no. The new efficiencies were untold because they did not exist. If anything, the corporate arteries were even more blocked up and impacted than before. Cynicism set in. It became a sign of enlightenment and worldliness to exhibit healthy skepticism about the new technologies.

Workflow and tool selection have traded places as cart and horse over and over, over the years. One knows not to place the cart before the horse. One does not always accurately judge which is which.

One of the most enduring fables my observations of the interaction of process evolution and system design has produced is that of the fictitious 239 field. I wish to emphasize that I'm making this up. I'm aware of no college or university system employing a 239 field in the way I'm about to describe — or, if there is one I've overlooked, the fact that it's a 239 field, and not a 240 field or the Murphy Field, or the Joe Btfsplk field, is strictly a matter of coincidence.

But imagine, for the sake of the illustration, a pair of heavy-iron steam-powered mainframe-based legacy systems running in an institution that put them in place long enough ago to have been in the forefront of such things. And imagine that it was discovered there was a need to interchange selected data between those systems. So, a particular piece of data needed to be brought from one field in System "A" to a different field in System "B." Perhaps it was "Affiliation" in System "A" and became "Previous Affiliation" in System "B." So the wizards and gnomes of the IT realm devised an interchange field, the 239 field, to serve as a point of deposit for this data from System "A" and as a point of retrieval for System "B."

Now fast-forward twenty years. It wasn't really that "fast," or at least, it didn't *feel* fast — unless you were looking back at it later, wondering where it all went.

New blood is on site. Old hoary systems are being reviewed. It's time to modernize these systems — fer crying out loud, these systems are older than our students! So the consultants and the architects arrive, and begin to examine systems and processes, to bring to reality the promise of new efficiencies to be won.

As they begin to trot out and socialize their findings, somebody who's been around a long time — someone who has personal, deep familiarity with the organization, its systems, its processes and the unique sets of one-off adaptations and customizations (sometimes referred to with the technical terms "bailing wire and spit") will point out, "You forgot the 239 field. We use the 239 field to get that data over there." Well, the young whelps point out, it's all in the same system now — you don't need to move that data anymore. "But we use the numbers totaled from the 239 field to drive the estimation process. We need the 239 field if we're going to make proper estimates!"

In most such moments I've encountered, the consultants and the architects will fold. They'll build in a customization incorporating the 239 field, simply because it's less work for them to do so than to overcome the objection. Besides, it's the only way to prevent the disaster that might occur later if, owing to unforeseen consequences, somebody stands up and says, "I told them we needed the 239 field but they wouldn't listen!"

And as a result, after months or years of planning and implementation, and expenditures in five or six figures or more, the shiny new system will have

Collecting to the Core — Cross-disciplinary Criminal Justice Resources

by **Beth Sheehan** (Asst. Professor & Social Sciences Research Services Librarian, Social Sciences, Health, and Education Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Criminal Justice and Law Editor, *Resources for College Libraries: Career Resources*) <edivince@illinois.edu>

Column Editor: **Anne Doherty** (*Resources for College Libraries* Project Editor, CHOICE/ACRL) <adoherty@ala-choice.org>

*Column Editor's Note: The "Collecting to the Core" column highlights monographic works that are essential to the academic library within a particular discipline, inspired by the **Resources for College Libraries** bibliography (online at **http://www.rclweb.net**). In each essay, subject specialists introduce and explain the classic titles and topics that continue to remain relevant to the undergraduate curriculum and library collection. Disciplinary trends may shift, but some classics never go out of style. — **AD***

Many two-year and four-year colleges offer associate or bachelor's degrees in criminal justice and criminology. It is also common for sociology and other social science programs at colleges and universities that do not offer dedicated criminal justice degree programs to include criminal justice courses and course concentrations within the curriculum. However, even when colleges lack dedicated criminal justice degree programs or academic courses, students often require criminal justice and criminology resources. Whenever students are given license to select topics for research projects, invariably some will choose a theme that intersects with criminal justice. Whether it is the sociology student examining issues related to undocumented immigrants and border control, the education student who wonders whether prisoners with access to G.E.D. classes are less likely to be re-incarcerated, the computer science student writing a software encryption protocol to deter hackers, or the social work student studying the relationship between intimate partner violence and substance abuse, all will require some level of criminal justice research relevant to their topic.

If a college library has a limited budget for purchasing criminal justice resources because it is not a major curricular focus of the institution, careful selection is critical to ensure that titles will be useful for applied and interdisciplinary criminal justice research. This essay recommends several titles drawn from the "Criminal Justice and Law" section of *Resources for College Libraries: Career Resources* that should be considered core for supporting criminal justice-related study and research, even at institutions without criminal justice programs or course concentrations. This list is not all-inclusive but offers one or two representative titles for each type of reference resource.

Encyclopedias

With a potentially vast and diverse number of student research interests, ideal collection candidates are those which provide breadth of coverage on a variety of criminal justice and criminology topics, balanced with sufficient depth of content to provide students with useful background information and suggested readings for further research. Two comprehensive encyclopedia sets that fit these criteria were published in 2014, with nearly identical titles: *The Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice* published by **Wiley-Black-well** and *Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice* published by **Springer**.[1-2] If limited resources require a choice between these two large, expensive sets, this author recommends the **Wiley-Blackwell** encyclopedia, edited by **Jay S. Albanese**. This five-volume work contains approximately 500 entries and is available in print and electronically. It has received several accolades, including selection as a 2014 *Choice* "Outstanding Academic Title," and recommendation by the **Reference and User Services Association** in the "2015 Outstanding Reference Sources List."[3-4] Although the **Springer** encyclopedia provides more breadth and depth, since it is comprised of 10 volumes and approximately 600 entries, the **Wiley-Blackwell** version offers accessibility for introductory-level students and those with limited prior background and knowledge of criminal justice. The online and print versions of the **Wiley-Blackwell** encyclopedia facilitate browsing by topical category in addition to the traditional A-Z alphabetical list and search functions, a feature which is lacking from **Springer's** encyclopedia. In addition, some of the **Wiley-Blackwell** entry headings are more intuitive and contain less jargon, and the content of entries is generally written to provide a general overview as opposed to the more in-depth analysis of subtopics found in some of the **Springer** entries. For example, the **Wiley-Blackwell** encyclopedia has one entry

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been field-modified to behave exactly like the twenty year old dinosaurs it replaces.

Honestly — if your business process relies on getting a small white ball into a hole, would you use golf clubs to get it there? If some end-state relies on that ball being in the hole, your end-users won't even know about the ball anyway — they'll just know about the end result. They don't care about the ball; let alone how you get it into the hole. There are no style points being issued.

So we've been well positioned over these past couple of decades to observe the evolution of libraries', and publishers', and book sellers' responses to the evolving environment. We've seen a world organized around the production, sale, distribution, and management of paper-based artifacts evolve into a world in which some of the most valuable assets take on the appearance to the uninitiated of being intangible.

We've learned that it's not enough merely to translate the processes that were relevant to the physical business model into a digital format — but rather that a more thorough transformation of the underlying processes themselves must occur — one that's based upon analysis that starts with the desired end state and works backward, rather than one that starts where we are and works forward. In other words, an analysis that doesn't begin with, "We've got this excellent set of golf clubs, beautifully designed, evolved, and handed down to us," but rather begins with the question, "We've got a process stage that used to be triggered by a ball dropping into a hole. How can we best trigger it now?"

My guess would be that the average reader of *Against the Grain* doesn't need to be shown any of this. First of all, let's be honest: there really *are* no average readers of *Against the Grain*! For the most part, those whom I've met or spoken with over the years are canny, storied, long-term observers of all the forces discussed here. Perhaps I can serve merely to affirm the impressions and insights you've gathered, or to say, "Hmmm. Yes, it looks like that from here as well…" Perhaps you can tuck this away for use at an opportune time. Truly — when was the last time you got to quote **Woodrow Wilson** to underscore a point? 🦔