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Little Red Herrings — Arf!  A Bark Really Worse than Its Bite

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

I
t is never my intention with a column to affront anyone’s sensibilities. Since my scribbles are opinion pieces by and large, it goes without saying that more often than not, someone is going to disagree. I don’t worry so much about that, but when I do get the very occasional bitter pill in the form of an irate email or poisoned letter, I’m sorry for the individual who was so annoyed that he or she took the time to say so. I know that whoever it is, he or she probably had better things to do than occupy valuable time on something that peeved.

Consider this an apology-in-advance for a column I know is going to annoy some, if not most, readers. I’ve even put off writing it for several semesters, thinking that I might not have to make any noise at all: the problem would just vanish. Alas, it has not, and like most things that start downhill, this one has gone dergingolade, as a physician, a French physician, might say.

This column is about the recent rising, and ongoing proliferation of emotional support animals (ESAs) on college and university campuses, not to mention just about everywhere else you look nowadays. The gushing glut has given new meaning to “animal house” at institutions of higher education everywhere. And it is now becoming an ever-growing and difficult-to-manage problem, as the New York Times reported recently (http://nyti.ms/2jKDvhP).

Now let me be very clear. This column is NOT about ADA approved animals, such as Seeing Eye dogs, or even small ponies that help someone do something he or she is physically unable to do (the blind to “see,” the deaf to “hear,” and the physically or mentally unable (e.g., PTSD), enabled). I support ADA regulations and I would expect anywhere I work to do the same. It is, after all, the law.

Ah, but we never leave well enough alone, do we? Today, we have emotional support animals, not to mention therapy animals that comfort the comfortless, befriend the friendless, and assuage the … assuageless. These animals can be almost anything, from a 195-pound St. Bernard, to a 6-pound ferret, to a 60-pound potbellied pig, to whatever else the individual in question has “registered.” I put the term in quotes because registering — or task, they do not qualify as service animals under the ADA.

Q3. Are emotional support, therapy, comfort, or companion animals considered service animals under the ADA?

A. No. These terms are used to describe animals that provide comfort just by being with a person. Because they have not been trained to perform a specific job or task, they do not qualify as service animals under the ADA. However, some State or local governments have laws that allow people to take emotional support animals into public places. You may check with your State and local government agencies to find out about these laws.

So, while the NSAR links to ADA, giving one the impression that all therapy and emotional support animals are ADA protected, they clearly are not in the majority of cases. To say this is confusing to people is an understatement. Most people are simply polite enough not to say anything, and most know that you cannot inquire too deeply into a person’s ADA disability. But that is the point, really. All ADA approved animals automatically have a designation as a service animal because those animals have undergone extensive training. ESA animals have not.

As I said before, all you need to register an ESA is money. Most owners of ESAs, to be on the safe side, get some quacksalver to agree to whatever emotional need they have and so provide an official-sounding letter. The letter provides a further patina of science to bolster the quackery. The rest of us are forced simply to kowtow to the individual.

Some of you are doubtless wondering why this is such a big deal since, after all, libraries are exempt from ESAs. While that is true, individual colleges and universities can make their own determinations, and so many are, and increasingly in favor of admitting these animals everywhere. Institutions, obviously scared to death of possible litigation, choose to bow the knee rather than raise a brow. And so, here we are, on our way to campuses (not to mention a culture) that may soon look like Noah’s Ark, but without the flooding waters or the Ark!

If all of this were not enough to give you pause, the actual “illnesses” might at least raise an eyebrow. In one case I observed, the young person had “test anxiety,” among other stressors. The animal in this case helped “alleviate” the problem. What struck me as laughable is that this so-called “test anxiety” is what every student — with rare exception — had when I was in school. It made us study harder. Today, a menagerie of creatures are the rescue. Then I witnessed first-hand at least one contributing factor to the so-called test anxiety during testing week. The student in question spent the majority of the time in our building texting friends, reading People magazine, and tweeting. Could this have been as much the cause of test anxiety as anything else? Just saying. Another case had to do with a student who had, among other “issues,” “noise anxiety. Granted to the student, among other accommodations, was the “right” to listen to rock music whenever necessary.

Although I have inquired about these “conditions” regularly, I am not allowed to know the nature, breadth, depth, or diagnoses beyond “conditions” regularly, I am not allowed to know the nature, breadth, depth, or diagnoses beyond...
community. Also, these new interpretative analyses could be filtered into writing for popular audiences in general trade books, thus enlightening the public at large. The vision included the networking of these different types of publications through a national central system like the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) where they could be linked with similar cultural and historical resources contributed by other states. Eventually the linkage could be extended internationally, and the DPLA has already been working with its European counterpart, Europeana, to begin the long-term job of extending the network of digital library resources worldwide.

How does open access figure into the equation? Although it may be too much to expect that the books at the peak of the pyramid intended as trade books for the public would ever be made available as OA publications, including regional trade books published by university presses that are an important source of revenue now, one can readily envision all the other levels working on an OA model, even including textbooks, which would follow the increasing interest in developing Open Educational Resources (OER). At the base level all of the digitized local collections would be made OA by written agreements with the citizens who contributed original documents. These might even be integrated into university institutional repositories, preferably with all linked into one central system like the state’s flagship university. The university presses publishing the monographs drawing on these resources could follow one or another of the OA models already in existence at Amherst, California, Michigan, Penn State, Purdue, and elsewhere. And the journals could be developed to use the Gold OA approach. What copyright status to assign to these different types of OA materials can be debated. As I have argued elsewhere, I think the CC BY-NC-ND license works best for the humanities and social sciences.

This dream of an integrated system for regional publishing has yet to reach fruition even at just the state level anywhere I know about. But there are encouraging signs that progress is being made. On April 16, 2016, for instance, the Penn State Libraries announced a new online service hub called PA Digital through the DPLA. The press release explained: “DPLA is a platform that brings together the riches of America’s libraries, archives and museums, and makes them freely available to the world. The new Service Hub, called PA Digital, launched on April 13 led by the State Library of Pennsylvania, Temple University, Penn State, the University of Pennsylvania, the Free Library of Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts Library, the Health Sciences Libraries Consortium, the Interlibrary Delivery Service of Pennsylvania, the Philadelphia Consortium of Special Collections Libraries, and a variety of cultural heritage institutions from across the Commonwealth. The Service Hub includes select digital collections from partner libraries ranging from academic to K-12 to special collections and archives.”

The publication of what is commonly called “enhanced” eBooks also has a place in this system. The ODSP had hoped to produce such editions. For example, in the Romance Studies series the idea was to be able to include links in citations of French novels quoted and discussed in English in the monographs to OA editions in French of these novels held in the collections of the Bibliothèque nationale de France. And in the social sciences where a rich set of social survey research underlay the findings of a book, it was our hope to make these results available as a linked database. Alas, too many competing priorities and insufficient time and money to pursue them all left these dreams unfulfilled. But the day will arrive, I feel confident, that this kind of dream too will come to pass.

Sanford G. Thatcher was director of Penn State University Press from 1989 to 2009. He was president of the Association of American University Presses in 2007/8. In retirement he serves as an acquiring editor part-time for books in political science for Lynne Rienner Publishers and the University of Rochester Press.

emotional upset (the recent election an outstanding case in point). While the “suck it up and be an adult” approach has its own inherent problems, it did have the distinct advantage of helping those of us under its tutelage to understand that the slings and arrows of outrageous misfortune are part of regular life. The sooner one adapts to it, learns to cope with it, and moves on, the better.

Not so anymore. We coddle students today; we become their enablers for a legion of disgruntlements and whatever real or imagined ills they have. Those of us charged with helping these young people to become functioning adults make it certain that the unforgiving “real world” awaiting them in four, five or six years, is one they are decidedly not prepared for.