

# Against the Grain

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Manuscript 8209

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## ATG Interviews Heather Staines, Director of Partnerships at Hypothesis

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# ATG Interviews Heather Staines

## Director of Partnerships at Hypothesis

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

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

**ATG:** *Heather, according to your LinkedIn profile, you have a Ph.D in military and diplomatic history from Yale. How did an aspiring military historian get interested in academic publishing?*

**HS:** When I finished my degree in the 1990s, peace was breaking out everywhere and the Russians were our friends. We weren't supposed to need any more military historians. I worked for a few years as a postdoc, considering my next move. As long as I could remember, friends had asked me to provide feedback on their essays or chapters, and in my own work I'd always enjoyed the editing process much more than the initial writing stage. **Yale University Press** was kind enough to let me volunteer as an intern to learn the ropes, and **Greenwood/Praeger** took a chance on me as a textbook editor. After being on the job for only a few weeks, the military history editor who had been there for ten years announced that he was leaving. I moved into the position and never looked back.

**ATG:** *You have worn a number of hats in your academic publishing career and accomplished a great deal. Can you tell about those accomplishments of which you're most proud?*

**HS:** Honestly, the things that stick out most to me now are the ways I have been able to help others. I think this is because I was fortunate to have folks who went out of their way to assist me. As an acquisitions editor, I was able to transform many dissertations into first books, helping academics further their careers. I also played a small part in enabling veterans of many conflicts to tell their stories. Many folks who started for me as assistants or interns are now well-established in their careers, and I am enormously proud to watch their accomplishments in publishing and beyond. Today, having moved from a publisher to a services company, I still do a lot of mentoring, both for the **Society for Scholarly Publishing** and for the **STM Association**. My mentees are scattered around the globe — as far away as Australia and India, all doing incredible jobs. One of my recent mentees, **Isabel Thompson**, now of **Holtzbrinck**, won the **SSP Emerging Leader Award** last year in Chicago. It's been such an honor to watch her grow as an unstoppable force and to be able in turn to learn from her keen insight. Along the way, all of these people have made such a difference in my life, and they will go on to make a difference for others as well. (Mentor — you won't regret it!)

**ATG:** *You worked with Franny Lee to launch SIPX, a tool that helped universities eliminate duplicate spending on course packs by connecting to material available through their library. Can you tell us how that worked*



*out/is working out now that you have left that business?*

**HS:** I joined **Franny** at **SIPX** in 2012 shortly after the company was spun out of **Stanford University**. It was gratifying to work on a project designed to maximize the use of library-subscribed content and increase the visibility of free and open readings, all to reduce costs for students and schools. I enjoyed learning about the education space, which was new to me. The team was so much like a family. **SIPX** found a home in 2015 with **Proquest** and **Ex Libris**, two companies with which we had long working relationships. I understand that today the technology is part of the **Leganto** reading list tool within the **Alma ILS**, still helping libraries and students. As for me, I certainly missed the energy of a startup and could hardly wait to jump back in. In addition to its non-profit status, one of the things that most excited me about **Hypothesis** was the many benefits in the education space. I'm thrilled to maintain my connections to the library and university world!

**ATG:** *Currently, you are the Director of Partnerships at Hypothesis. For those readers who are unfamiliar with Hypothesis, can you tell us more about the company and your role within it?*

**HS:** **Hypothesis** is a non-profit open source technology company with a mission to bring open annotation to all content across the web. It's my first non-profit and first open source company, so it was at first a bit of an adjustment for me, coming from the commercial sector. Initially grant funded, the tool had become very popular among instructors, students, and researchers, and it was time to transition to more of an earned income model. I was brought in to create partnerships with scholarly publishers and other players who wanted to explore annotation to streamline workflow and increase engagement with readers and researchers.

Because we are open source, other entities can embed our code into their websites whether or not they work directly with us to do so. In these cases, should they find the service to be useful, we hope that they will support us as we maintain and improve the code and expand features and functionalities. Many companies, however, want us to run an annotation service on their behalf, and so they partner with us to provide branded and moderated annotation layers across their content for purposes that range from community discussion, to additional content created by authors or editors, to peer review of all varieties, and more. This is our paid service, often referred to as "publisher groups." Today we have a number of partners from small to large, books to journals, open to subscription, including university presses, STM publishers, OER providers, and preprint servers. We're also launching pilot integrations with all LTI-enabled Learning Management Systems in early 2019, through activities overseen by my colleague **Jeremy Dean**. While instructors have utilized **Hypothesis** in their courses for years, the LMS pilot will enable single sign on through student accounts and will integrate with grade books.

Despite all of this activity on the organizational front, we remain committed to keeping the tool free for individual users. As a nonprofit, we're beholden to our community partners, not to shareholders. With all of the consolidation taking place in the scholarly communications space, we take pride in assuring partners that we will continue to be an independent voice.

**ATG:** *You mention that Hypothesis also runs annotation services for a fee, providing branded and moderated annotation layers for some companies. What does that entail? You also note that you want to keep the tool free for individual users. How can individuals make use of the tool? Do they have to download the code?*

**HS:** Some partners want more control than the free version of the tool can offer. From a publisher standpoint, the amount of work required to set up a branded layer is not significantly more than embedding the code for the free version. We have simple pricing that uses the number of documents a site adds per year as a proxy for company size. (We've found that to be more fair than per journal pricing, as journals can vary widely by size.) Publishers get unlimited groups (open and/or restricted), customization to fit their site, full customer support, open source maintenance to maintain and expand the code, and an adoption/engagement program aimed at meeting publisher objectives. For an additional fee, we can also connect to

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existing publisher accounts for single sign on. Publisher partners can deploy back to volume one issue one for journals or the earliest copy-right years for books. Our document-based pricing means a lower price per document the more broadly the tool is deployed. We also have special pricing for non-commercial academic projects. Just ask us.

As **Hypothesis** was developed to enable broad community participation across the web, it's important to us that end users are able to use the tool without a cost. Once browsers incorporate the standard, it will simply be a matter of setting user preferences. Until then, we have a Chrome plug-in and a bookmarklet for other browsers, including mobile. (Sites that embed **Hypothesis** directly remove the need for their users to even have to do this all while making annotations visible to all visitors to the page.) Each user gets a profile page where all their annotations automatically populate. There, you can search or browse your annotations, filter by tags or groups, and return to any of your annotations in context (where you can share via social media). You never have to worry about losing your notes. In a few clicks, you can create a collaboration group and invite colleagues. A group can also be a simple way to curate a set of resources. I made a five-minute video of how a researcher can use **Hypothesis**. You can see it here: <http://bit.ly/Hypo-Demo>.

**ATG:** *Hypothesis has developed a new and innovative annotation technology that has created some buzz. We're sure our readers would love to hear more. What exactly is this technology and what does it do? How is it different from other similar technologies?*

**HS:** Annotation was an original capability envisioned by **Vannevar Bush** in 1947 when he detailed the scope of what would eventually become the world wide web. Why did it take so long for annotation to come into its own? For a variety of reasons, including computing power limitations, proprietary siloed tools, and the lack of a standard to build towards. Many previous attempts to enable individuals to participate in a conversation across the world's knowledge failed.

The publication of the Web Annotation Standard on February 23, 2017 changed everything. Tool creators now have a well-defined standard in place. Future versions of browsers will enable users to designate their annotation client in the same way that they set their preferred search engine today. The existence of the standard means that annotations made by one client will be able to interact with those made by other clients in the same way that we can currently email each other even though we use many different email providers. To take it further, open annotation puts users, both individuals and organizations, in control of their data through robust APIs or export tools. This prevents vendor lock-in, as annotations can be ported from one standards-based tool to another.

The buzz that you mentioned is a direct result of these developments. Individuals can now invest their time and energy in making private notes, forming collaboration groups, or making public annotations without the fear that they will lose access to their work. Each annotation has a unique persistent web address, so it can be cited and linked to — opening up powerful possibilities around linked data. Public annotations are fed into the **Crossref** Event Data project for indexing by **Google** and discovery and reuse by others. **Hypothesis** is a very flexible workflow tool which can be used for many purposes. (I've used it to plan two vacations, and many folks use it to keep track of online recipes.) Another key benefit of **Hypothesis** is that, when necessary, it can connect to existing account systems through SSO (Single sign-on). This is key for LMS (Learning management systems) integrations, for example. Also, because we are open source, interested organizations can even install and run their own **Hypothesis** instance, bringing all of the functionality and annotation storage in house.

As part of our mission, we believe a healthy annotation ecosystem should contain multiple players, but, for the benefit of the end user, these players need to be interoperable with other tools based upon the new standard. Few users would want to sign on for a proprietary email client that only worked for others using the same vendor. It's this future that we're building for.

**ATG:** *Heather, we also have what you might call process questions. Are these open annotations peer reviewed? What quality control is there? Are these annotations signed? Can they be copyrighted? How are they discoverable?*

**HS:** Process around annotation depends upon specific use case and the goals of those who embed the tool. Annotations could be peer reviewed should the publisher desire to do so. Updates made, for example, atop **American Diabetes Association** content, undergo careful review before posting. Annotation itself can streamline the peer review process, by enabling feedback to happen in-line and facilitating replies by authors and editors. (An **eJournal-Press** peer review integration is already complete, and conversations with other manuscript submission systems are underway. Journals such as *Murmurations*, a new interdisciplinary title, are using **Hypothesis** directly for open peer review. Community review, such as that being done by **BMC** upon submitted manuscripts in their In Review program, can proceed concurrently with more traditional peer review.)

Quality control is always in the hands of the publisher who sets annotation guidelines, reviews any annotations made by users, and moderates any that violate their standards. With moderation capabilities, most publishers are comfortable enabling open groups for discussion. We've not seen any significant abuse over 4.4 million annotations, but we keep a close eye on it and are prepared to adapt functionality as needed. Publishers who wish can implement a restricted group where only

those they designate can annotate. The choice is up to the publisher.

Annotations made in the **Hypothesis** public layer carry a CC0 license. Private annotations and those made within private groups are all rights reserved to their creators. We have had publishers consider applying different licenses to annotations in their groups, which is certainly possible. In early 2018 we were asked to rescue comments from PubMedCommons when support was discontinued. We took great care to indicate that these comments — which now live as **Hypothesis** page notes — carry a CC-BY license.

Public annotations are discoverable in a variety of ways. They are included in **Crossref's** Event Data project and subsequently indexed by **Google**. Any user, via their profile page, can remove their own account filter to see and explore hundreds of thousands of public annotations made around in the world. Our freely available API also enables those interested to set up a feed of public annotations or ingest them for text and data mining purposes. Users can also see all annotations in a particular publisher group from the activity page. Anyone receiving an annotation link via social media need not have an account to view. As long as they can get to the content, they can see the annotation in context.

**ATG:** *You say that with open annotation, robust APIs or export tools prevent vendor lock-in and allow individuals and organizations to keep control of their data. Can you explain how that works? Is it currently happening? Are these APIs and tools available now?*

**HS:** Anyone who wants to learn more about our API can consult our developer page. Using the API, any group creator or individual can get their annotations out at anytime. Folks like me who are less tech savvy can request an export of their annotation data in a CSV or Excel file. An export button is one of our most requested features, and I'm happy to report that the developers are working on this now, so it may well be done by the time this issue goes to press. Through any of these mechanisms, companies or end users can then take their data and incorporate it into another open standards-based tool.

**ATG:** *You also mentioned that a healthy annotation ecosystem should contain multiple players. Are there others with technologies that provide services similar to Hypothesis? Where do you see Hypothesis fitting into the annotation ecosystem?*

**HS:** One of the highest profile annotation tools is **Genius** (formerly **Rap Genius**) which you may have encountered if you're interested in music lyrics or if you read the *Washington Post*. But nearly two years ago, **Genius** announced a pivot to focus back on the music space. We're in conversation with some **Genius** customers to ensure that they can continue to access their annotations if support for them is discontinued. In the scholarly space, there are additional tools, such as **PaperHive** and **Remark**, which have annotation functionality.

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Both companies are part of the **Annotating All Knowledge Coalition**. Both require integration by a site owner before a user can attempt to leave feedback for others; so, in that way, they aren't as widely useful or multi-purpose as we built **Hypothesis** to be. Annotations made with these services are not publicly discoverable via **Crossref Event Data**.

Our biggest differentiator is our non-profit status. Unlike these other startups, in accordance with our charter, we cannot be acquired. Many of our partners have seen their platform hosts and their manuscript submission systems acquired by competitors, so our independence gives them some peace of mind. Ultimately, we want to work with any standards-based system that keeps researcher needs firmly in mind. **Alex Naydenov**, Co-Founder of **PaperHive**, and I collaborated on a *Scholarly Kitchen* article this past summer to detail a shared vision of open annotation.

**ATG:** *Recently, Hypothesis and Atypon announced a collaboration to align annotation capabilities in Atypon's new in-browser Literatum eReader. How will that work and how will it benefit the end user?*

**HS:** **Atypon's** new Literatum eReader is quite an exciting development. Our work enabling the annotation of content in the EPUB format was initially funded by a **Mellon** grant in collaboration with **NYU Press and Libraries** and developed in conjunction with **Evident Point**. When **Atypon** approached us about integrating **Hypothesis** into the new eReader, we brought the experienced team at **Evident Point** into the discussion to ensure that everything would proceed as smoothly as possible. The eReader will provide readers with a cohesive book experience with some great new features like open annotation and collaborative research. We're also looking forward to the coming wider integration of annotation with Literatum outside of the eReader in early 2019.

**ATG:** *Hypothesis also has arrangements with HighWire, Silverchair, PubFactory, and Ingenta. Are they similar to the collaboration with Atypon? Are there differences?*

**HS:** One of the first things I did after joining **Hypothesis** was to widen conversations with as many platform hosts as possible to enable publishers, regardless of their size or hosting situation, to incorporate annotation. Thus, we established partnerships with these platform hosts, as well as many other open source platforms like the **Public Knowledge Project's** Open Journal Services, **Pensoft's** ARPHA, **Ubiquity Press**, and more. Each collaboration works a bit differently, with some hosts enabling the free version of **Hypothesis** for all publishers opting in and others facilitating conversations for partners to add publisher groups as an additional service. The eReader integration with **Atypon** is somewhat special due to the extensive work undertaken to modify the tool to fit their unique interface.

**ATG:** *In addition, Hypothesis has partnered with the developers of EPUB.js and the W3C to make annotation a permanent feature of EPUB and the open web. It sounds like a project that will have a major impact on the industry. Can you give us a status report?*

**HS:** The EPUB project I mentioned above with **NYU** and **Evident Point** enabled annotation on content rendered in EPUB.js and also on **READIUM.js**. As **Hypothesis** annotations were long able to cross formats from HTML to PDF and vice versa, we thought extending this capability to EPUB as well was key. With more publishers adding EPUB to their list of outputs, we wanted to ensure a good annotation experience. We will continue our work with the W3C on the standards front with this firmly in mind.

**ATG:** *Heather, you have been a member of the Board of Directors of COUNTER since 2016. Can you tell us about the work that COUNTER performs for the industry and the role the Board plays?*

**HS:** When the **COUNTER** Executive Director **Lorraine Estelle** reached out to me about joining the Board of Directors, I was beyond excited. (I admit it, I jumped up and down and whooped about it. Then I had to sit my husband down and explain what **COUNTER** actually does.) I've participated on standards committees and working groups for some time, both for **NISO** and for **Crossref**. I can't stress enough how critical standards are for every-

thing we do, professionally and personally. I initially learned about **COUNTER** and how it enables libraries and publishers to compare usage across resources in a uniform manner when I started at **Springer** (now **SpringerNature**) in the spring of 2008. Electronic resources are far from static, and different challenges in assessing their use arise every day. I was fortunate to join the Board just as the informational kick off for **COUNTER** Release 5 was accelerating, so I witnessed first-hand all the technical and educational legwork necessary even before the Release details were announced. We're now deep in the transition from Release 4 to Release 5, which hopes to introduce clarity and promote consistency across reports, so things are getting real! Board members participate in all **COUNTER** committees and working groups that keep things moving forward. You wouldn't believe the detailed questions that come in on a daily basis. I'm humbled to find myself in true standards-nerd paradise.

**ATG:** *Given all of your professional commitments and responsibilities, making room for down time must be difficult, but nonetheless necessary to stay re-charged. How do you find time to unwind? And what activities do you most enjoy when relaxing?*

**HS:** I love this industry so much that many parts of what I do hardly seem like work at all. A busy travel schedule sometimes makes things tough, but I try to find an afternoon here or there to visit a museum or a park, particularly in a place I'm enjoying for the first time. (As an historian, I highly recommend adding a visit to Charleston's Patriot's Point to the USS Yorktown and other historic ships.) I also use such occasions to set aside time to keep up with friends living in far flung places. When I'm home, I often find myself at marching band or drum corps competitions with my 17 year old tuba-playing son or enjoying the antics of our gorgeous pet rats with my 15 year old son. My husband, who is an English professor at **CUNY's John Jay campus**, and I binge on **Netflix** and attempt to catch our breath. I'm also an absolute karaoke maniac — I've been known to sing even if I'm not in an actual karaoke bar. (You've been warned.) 🍷

## Rumors from page 47

**What a woman!** **Erin Gallagher** has accepted a new position as **Head of E-Resources at University of Florida libraries**. Her final day at **Reed College** was December 7th. Until **Erin** has an email account set up at **UF**, please use this address to contact her: <egallagher6431@gmail.com>.

Do you all read **ATG Quirkies**? They are selected by **John Riley** and posted by **Tom Gilson**. The **Quirky** on November 28 was from the **Fairbanks Daily News-Miner** — An intoxicated book lover broke the glass in one of

the **Noel Wien Library's** front doors to gain access after hours Tuesday night. According to library director **Melissa Harter**, the man "really wanted to read and didn't realize the library was closed." People do love libraries! What a man!

[http://www.newsminer.com/news/local\\_news/intoxicated-fairbanks-man-breaks-into-library-to-read/article\\_adj5b51e-e96e-11e8-94ce-9373d48724b2.html](http://www.newsminer.com/news/local_news/intoxicated-fairbanks-man-breaks-into-library-to-read/article_adj5b51e-e96e-11e8-94ce-9373d48724b2.html)

Connected with **Rick Anderson** before the holiday! He is back from the UAE. **Rick** and his family drove to Wyoming for a Christmas visit with the in-laws. With them were two of their kids: **Rick's** son is currently at the **Air Force Academy** and their

daughter **Maggie** and her husband were with them. **Rick's** other son is currently serving in Oklahoma as a missionary. Since **Rick** wasn't at the **Charleston Conference**, I shared a couple of potential debate topics that came up in November: a) Who owns usage data? and b) Do we still need collection development? Send us your ideas and let us know if you have another topic to suggest! Debate coming up!

<https://www.against-the-grain.com/?s=debate>

Was on a conference call today and learned that the incredibly helpful **Melanie Dolechek** has horses just like the incredible **Leah Hinds**. The tidbits you don't pick up over the telephone!

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