Against the Grain

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Little Red Herrings — Uncommonly Odd

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

About the time you think you know where things are going, they go somewhere else. I had that experience recently with our institutional repository (IR).

About five years ago, we stumbled into **bepress's** Digital Commons. I had argued for one for about a decade, but no one really understood what I was talking about, and honestly, I probably ham-fisted the explanation. But then came one of those unfunded mandates for which administrations — local, state, and federal — are so famous. I mentioned **bepress** to a quondam administrator who had just come from another institution that had it. The off-the-cuff remark worked like magic. A light turned on and we were told to “get it.” After much toing and froing about who was going to pay for this (only this year has it been added to our budget in a permanent kind of way — let us say in heavy pencil for now), we did get it.

The next few years we labored — really labored — trying to help faculty understand that publishing in our IR in no way jeopardized their publishing chances elsewhere. On the contrary, we argued, it actually increased them. And not only for them and their work, but also their students and their students' work.

Some faculty never got on board. They were convinced that whatever showed up in our IR, with or without an embargo, put an end to any hope of publishing, and, subsequently, tenure. I explained copyright, not really being an attorney, but having stayed in my fair share of hotels, as it were. Transformative works, the fact that publishers would insist on rewrites and so on

didn't do a lot of good. The most exasperating discussions had to do with theses. While our students were encouraged to submit them to dissertation abstracts or similar entities, they were cautioned not to put them in our IR.

It took a great deal of handwringing, pleading, begging and more, but eventually most came around. We hired a delightful young librarian to whom I credit most of the good will, coaxing and cajoling. There followed about three or three-and-a-half years of IR *dolce far niente*, as it were. Everyone seemed pleased. In fact, we had more than our share of success stories. The helpful dashboard that comes with our digital commons also impressed more than one faculty member.

Once up and running, we began uploading past theses and all went well. We had one small hiccup with a graduate who asked that we erase all evidence of a thesis he had written many years before, but we embargoed it instead for about twenty months. We never knew why but guessed it had something to do with maturity of craft. Still, we argued it was a record of work that had to be preserved.

While I did not do this with every opportunity, I often sent the powers that be our headlines: surpassing various download thresholds, our recognition for various papers in various disciplines, and our papers that had “topped the charts,” so to say. Frankly, we were all feeling doggone good about ourselves.

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The “Gifted Book” is next on **Spinnen's** list. He notes how books are ideally suited for gifting and that bookshops and maybe even the book trade would cease to exist without people buying books as gifts. Books are the ideal gift, as one can tailor one's choice specifically to the recipient's interests. And if things go awry, books are the easiest of gifts to exchange.

“Signed Books” come freighted with a load of metaphysics. An author's signature gives one immediate contact with their personality. Books nowadays are industrial products and the signature of an author offers the illusion of “uniqueness.” Unfortunately, the Internet has revealed just how many copies of first editions and even signed first editions there are in the world. Prices have plummeted for all except the most rare books.

Spinnen finally explores the many ways of collecting books. He reminisces about his first visits to his town library and how certain books were forbidden to children. Of course he could hardly wait to grow up and see what had been denied him. He also extolls the private library and says that a private library can be of any size. What counts is its value to its owner.

“Collecting means giving order to something, inasmuch as one brings together those things that one feels belong together. And as long as one doesn't commit theft or murder in the process, that isn't the worst way to employ one's mind or money.”

If you are a book lover, collector, or both, this book will be an ideal checklist for comparing your book experiences with another devoted bibliophile. This is a book to keep on the nightstand and relish one little chapter after another. 🍄

And then, this spring, as you have doubtless surmised at this point, and as we surpassed 100,000 downloads, the wheels wobbled significantly, and nearly came off.

I got a very anxious email, freighted with gloom, from a faculty member about what we were doing and why. The email came to me, surely, but also to about two dozen other faculty. I gave my usual explanation, replying to all, and explaining about how the IR works, why it's important, and even added a plug for open access. Following the email, one of the other faculty emailed me back that she knew I could explain it better than she could and all would be well. Again, I felt pretty good.

Not so fast. Another email came, explaining that I had missed the point and that tables, PowerPoints, posters and so on simply should not be deposited. These represented works in progress and letting those cats out of the proverbial bag would spell doom for faculty trying to publish.

I went back over my explanations, taking more time to explain that surely that would not happen. I explained that acceptances to papers often required many rewrites, and whatever we deposited would not be the same as what appeared later. I also pointed out that many IRs had both pre- and post-prints included. Another faculty member chimed in that oh, no, that business about posters and PowerPoints and data are all things that must be held secret. *Après moi, le deluge*, and all that. That publishing might take three or more years and someone would beat them to the punch.

I didn't help matters making the case that surely researchers who might well look at anything in our IR would cite it, but if there were some who wouldn't, well, they'd likely get hoisted on their own petard. I tried talking about copyright and derivative and transformative works. I came off sounding as if I wasn't respectful of researchers everywhere, hardly my intent. More emails followed and the two faculty claimed they could not in good faith deposit anything like posters, PowerPoints, and the like.

I must admit that at this point I despaired of making any further headway. I responded finally that I respected their decision although I disagreed with it. I pointed out that our IR was entirely voluntarily but not using it not only proscribed one's influence, but also constrained open access.

This small episode has taught me that however far we have come with open access, we are still very far away from making any permanent inroads. I know this isn't the case everywhere, of course, but I also know that our faculty aren't the only ones with these concerns. We are a teaching institution, and while research is important, it is not *sine qua non*. Good teaching is.

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CONCURRENT SESSIONS

The Print Book Purging Predicament: Qualitative Techniques for a Balanced Collection — Presented by **Allan Scherlen** (Appalachian State University); **Alex McAllister** (Appalachian State University)

Reported by **Amy Lewontin** (Snell Library Northeastern University) <a.lewontin@northeastern.edu>

Scherlen, the social sciences librarian, opened the session by mentioning that the project they were planning to discuss was based on an article the two speakers had recently published in the journal, *Collection Management* in 2017, titled, “Weeding with Wisdom: Tuning Deselection of Print Monographs in Book-Reliant Disciplines.” He began by discussing the recent trend of getting rid of books in libraries, and also highlighted the fact that the word they were using in their talk, “purging,” was considered taboo, at the moment, in many libraries. “Renewal” and “refresh” are considered more acceptable words. He discussed how many libraries were being asked to reclaim space for other things and that based on a recent **ProQuest** eBook survey of 400 libraries, 78% were in the midst of de-selecting books in their collections as libraries moved to redefine themselves. **Scherlen** then went on to explain that their library, and many others have no storage facility, so weeding and de-selecting might mean that the books would no longer be accessible to users, so librarians needed to get things right as they moved to manage the process. And what he also emphasized was that libraries need to get a handle on how different disciplines use material differently.

McAllister, the humanities librarian, then stepped into the conversation and discussed the emotional reaction that many faculty feel to the book weeding process. He also discussed how many humanities faculty simply use library material differently. He reminded the audience that with humanities books, the age of a book does not indicate a lesser value and that an older book is possibly very likely going to be needed in future research. Many humanities and “humanistic social science researchers” use older, lower circulating books, and they also often compare translations of varying editions, as opposed to the need for more current material in the sciences and the business disciplines. Also, humanities researchers tend to browse the library, and many times do not check a particular title out. **McAllister** talked about a need for quantitative discipline-specific criteria that should be created for each area of study, if possible. Also, a need for librarians to develop techniques for evaluating the value of older low circulating monographs was strongly emphasized during the talk. At **Appalachian State**, the two librarians discussed how a LibGuide was created that had the lists of de-selected titles and that these lists were then shared and reviewed with faculty. There was also a discussion of the various criteria used to review the books, but overall, both **Scherlen** and **McAllister** made the strong recommendation for finding discipline-specific evaluation criteria, as libraries move to de-select their collections as they free up space and provide newer more relevant services.

“Money Doesn’t Grow on Trees”: Using a Data-Driven Review Process to Add New Resources with No Budget Increases — Presented by **Teri Koch** (Drake University); **Laurie Krossner** (Drake University); **Priya Shenoy** (Drake University)

Reported by **Colleen Lougen** (SUNY New Paltz)
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Librarians at **Drake University** detailed their rationale and development of an annual review process evaluating current electronic resource

subscriptions and new acquisitions. Their process involved several factors: rigorous review of usage and cost per use data; development of a deselection candidate watchlist; promotion of underutilized electronic resources to faculty and students; and collection of faculty and liaison librarian input about deselection and new acquisitions. Ultimately, the **Drake** librarians deselected a substantial amount of low-use electronic resources that allowed them to purchase new subscriptions and cover the annual increases of all subscriptions. At the end of the session, the presenters polled the audience about how they make data driven decisions at their libraries. This presentation was practical and provided concrete ideas about how to tackle a review at one’s own institution.

“Mr. Watson – Come here – I want to see you.” Upgrading Your Tech Support Communications — Presented by **Carol Seiler** (EBSCO Information Services); **J. Michael Thompson** (Baylor University)

Reported by **Ethan Cutler** (Western Michigan University Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine)
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The session began with six volunteers from the audience, paired in two groups of three, playing a *silent* game of cards. Written directions were provided to each group on the first hand, but instructed not to discuss the rules verbally. Winners of the first hand were then directed to switch tables. Shortly into the second hand the objective of the game was revealed to the audience: *attempting to accomplish a task under differing sets of communication rules can be difficult and confusing*. Communication is crucial during technical support situations, and throughout the remainder of the session **Seiler** and **Thompson** provided authentic support scenarios to illustrate useful skills and etiquette for both sides of library and vendor troubleshooting. To highlight a few, having a positive tone and staying concise, considerate, and descriptive are tremendously helpful rules of etiquette to remember. In addition, taking full advantage of available resources, including screenshots, crowdsourcing, and various technologies to organize communication is helpful when properly utilized. Lastly, the presenters provided the audience with a humbling reminder: “none of us are perfect” and respect is always a requirement of professionalism. 🌿

*That’s all the reports we have room for in this issue. Watch for more reports from the 2017 Charleston Conference in upcoming issues of **Against the Grain**. Presentation material (PowerPoint slides, handouts) and taped session links from many of the 2017 sessions are available online. Visit the **Conference Website** at www.charlestonlibraryconference.com. — KS*

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Still, the allegiance to conventional publishing continues to hold — stranglehold — most faculty. It’s baffling, too, when you consider that *conventional publishing hoovers out research from our institutions of higher education, pays nothing for it, copyrights the materials for themselves in perpetuity, and then charges a fortune for that research to reappear in libraries on those same campuses where those faculty work*. An outsider who hears this calculus finds it ridiculous; we in academe not only find it normal, we often protect its survival.

We have made great strides from where we were when I began this profession forty years ago. And that makes me optimistic. Nevertheless, events like this one remind me that we still have a long way to go. 🌿