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People Profile: Tim Daniels

Editor

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Website, the ability to post entries without knowledge of HTML, the ability to allow multiple people to contribute content and share responsibility for managing the blog, and the ability to provide an RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feed to allow readers to be notified of updates to your blog through their RSS reader. Over a year ago, as part of an effort to raise awareness about problems with the current state of scholarly publishing, Georgia State University Library created a blog about scholarly communication. This essay will discuss the Georgia State experience to date and offer suggestions for librarians interested in using blogs as a tool to keep themselves and their communities informed.

A Brief History of Blogs at Georgia State University Library

Georgia State University Library currently offers more than 20 subject-specific blogs to patrons. All include RSS feeds. In addition to the library’s main news blog, others blogs are devoted to: economics, education, government information, history, public health, religious studies, sociology, and science. The “Issues in Scholarly Communication” blog is unique in that most of the library’s other blogs are maintained by subject liaisons and are targeted to the students and faculty of the departments they serve, while the scholarly communications blog is currently maintained by librarians in technical services.

Two excellent articles detailing the background of blogs at Georgia State University Library have been published by those responsible for starting the library’s blogging initiative. If you are interested in further information, please look at these articles. We will not devote additional space to them here except to note that, a) our blogs are hosted on our server and were built by our Web Development Librarian and Web Programmer with Windows IIS, MySQL, and Active Server Pages, and, b) rather than developing their own software, librarians interested in starting their own blogs might consider an existing free application like WordPress or may wish to look into a hosted Weblog provider.

Why Bother?

For those of you thinking, “Ugh, not another blog, there are already better sources for information about scholarly communication,” you’re absolutely right. There are better sources for current news and information about particular issues in scholarly communication, the absolute best being Peter Suber’s Open Access News. Thankfully, it’s not a competition, and it is perfectly fine if a blog fails to attract anything beyond a local readership. In fact, that may be a good thing. Since it’s unlikely that the best existing resource on a given topic is targeted specifically to your community, you have the opportunity to create a resource specifically for it. As noted on the Website Create Change, “Library directors who have mounted successful advocacy programs on scholarly communication have stressed the importance of understanding the local culture and subcultures in mounting advocacy programs.” Your faculty may or may not be interested in particular topics, or they may not have the time or inclination to read 15 to 20 posts a day on another site. Much like current literature alerts and selective collection development, targeted blog postings can be used to provide an institution’s users with the most current and relevant information.

Our Blog

The “Issues in Scholarly Communications” blog was launched in December 2003. From the start, the intent has been to provide links to news items of relevance rather than offer much, if any, commentary. Although early posts were dominated by items discussing Open Access, we have tried to cover the last several months to broaden the scope so that other issues of interest... continued on page 87