Group Therapy -- Database Trials

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I think the few times the faculty continued to agonize about not having a database were times when we really did need to acquire the database and their persistence resulted in helping us find funding — or get more creative. In the case of OED we scrounged the funds, and I’m glad we did. The database gets enormous use. (And the English faculty did not need to chain themselves to the library, as threatened.)

We have a trials page http://library.au- raria.edu/findit/dbase-trials.html, though just having that page brings in little input. During trials I send an email to the appropriate faculty members and ask them to try it. Also an email announcement is sent to the library.

RESPONSE:

Submitted by Gloria Selene Hinojosa (Collection Development Librarian, Alkek Library, Texas State University-San Marcos) and Paivi Rentz (Electronic Resources Librarian, Alkek Library, Texas State University-San Marcos)

Texas State University has been offering trials/previews/demos of databases for quite a while. We send emails to our faculty liaisons and ask them to share access information within the department. Vendors have always agreed to our request to share the login via email with faculty. Our biggest problem is getting faculty to actually look at the databases and give us some feedback. When we send announcements to all faculty members, we seldom get enough responses to get a real reading. If I approach my faculty liaisons individually because I feel the database might be relevant to their or their colleagues’ research or curriculum, I get a better response, though not necessarily a lot.

On one occasion, several faculty members really liked a searchable image database on trial. We had arranged a trial, though we knew we probably couldn’t afford it, because we really wanted the faculty to know what was happening in that area of database searching. We got several emails of support. For the one person who insisted we should buy it, we referred him to the cost. We try to give faculty an idea of the cost when we announce trials, so they can understand what the funding issues may be relevant to the library allocation of the related discipline(s). We do use some of their library allocation money when appropriate (i.e. relevant to the one discipline) and make that case when asking them to contribute. Sometimes the database is so useful that several academic departments actually cooperate and will pitch in to help pay for it. Other times they have to take “no” for an answer, as do we. They are understanding as long as we can give them good information regarding why we can or cannot get something (and be prepared to prove it), such as there is too much duplication with what we already own, or the price is unaffordable, etc… You’d be surprised how often they are not aware of some of the other resources we already have, but that provides us the opportunity for an information sharing experience. We’ve never had any unpleasantness over having to do with it.

We have had faculty suggest that we write a proposal to get money to purchase a database. Remember, we are often talking about an ongoing cost, though faculty don’t always consider that issue. An exchange of information can make that clear. With one-time purchases,
I spoke recently with Mike Furlough, Assistant Dean for Scholarly Communications and Co-Director, Office of Digital Scholarly Publishing at Pennsylvania State University about the progress they are making in bringing their library and press closer together. He told me that the library and the press have been working together for nearly six years and that a librarian has been on the university press board for twenty years. Many of the functions that define “library as publisher” are already in place there. The nexus for their work together is the Office of Digital Scholarly Publishing, a sort of Virtual Organization as Mike Furlough describes it. Currently the Penn State Libraries are focusing on four projects as the building blocks for their publishing enterprise.

1) Creating a digital back file of journals, on a JSTOR model, mainly in Pennsylvania history. This looks to be an appealing approach for other libraries who want to emphasize their regional strengths.

2) Publishing conference proceedings for conferences held on the campus. These are in digital format now and will be available in a print on demand basis.

3) Publishing a monograph series on Romance Language Studies. These are open access and also available in a POD format. RomanceStudies@romancestudies.psu.edu

4) A reprint series of out of copyright books handled by Lightning Press and available through the PSU Press.

**Digitizing and Distribution of Library Holdings**

Of course we all know about Google’s massive digitization project, but many other libraries are working on their own (such as the Boston Library Consortium) or with other partners, such as Microsoft and Yahoo to accomplish similar ends. Two of the more interesting projects are at Cornell and the University of Maine. Joyce Rumery, Dean of the Fogler Library at the University of Maine, told me how they are working with the Maine State Library to digitize many of the state’s town histories and rare material related to the native Wabanaki Tribes. They are making their books available through Book Surge, a subsidiary of Amazon. They also digitized their entire collection of yearbooks and posted them on the Web. It was a big hit at their annual alumni get-together. Likewise, Cornell University is working with Book Surge to make available many of their scarce materials that are out of copyright. Oya Rieger, Cornell’s director of digital library and information technologies, showed me some of the new titles being reprinted from their unique anti-slavery and mathematics collections. Reprints from these collections retail at prices far below the rare book market and open up their collection to scholars all over the world. I did suggest however that reprint material needs to follow some of the same guidelines as traditional publishing, such as including a colophon and printing history. Adding introductions by current scholars would also be a good idea to put these works into a contemporary context.

**Celebrating the Book**

The Pioneer Valley in Western Massachusetts has been the center of a four month long celebration entitled “Celebration of the Art of the Book” featuring exhibitions and programs dedicated to book making, printing, literature, and literacy. The idea came from the cooperation of ten museums in the area (museums10.org) working together with area bookstores and libraries. One of the highlights of the celebration was a two-day event at Mt. Holyoke College called “Books to Blogs and Back” focusing on the future of the book in the digital age. Robert Darnton, famed historian and Director of the Harvard Libraries kicked off the event with his keynote speech “The Research Library in the New Age of Information.” His central thesis involved the inherent instability of the text, whether as “constructed” newspaper articles or even the variance in the Shakespeare folios. Google adds to the question of textual authenticity with their lack of bibliographic control. Darnton asks which editions should be scanned and preserved, what was the original format of the text, and how will they be preserved? He envisions that research libraries will be crucial in correcting and maintaining digitized information. And they will become even more important in the future as they foster development of new kinds of scholarship.

Other speakers at the conference included Jason Epstein speaking about his new project “Espresso,” the instant book distribution and printing machine. Espresso has had some test runs in libraries and bookstores, but it has encountered an old fashioned glitch that has halted its commercial introduction: paper jams. Its sheet-fed printing process needs more tweaking before we see it in wide use. Other speakers included Sven Birkerts, Terry Belanger, and Lisa Gitelman. See (www.mitholyoke.edu/go/bookshlgs/07)

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