

The Fiesole Collection Development Retreat Series, Number 8
August 3-5, 2006
Lund, Sweden

"The New World Order in Collection Development -- Revisited"

Program Wrap-up.

The Conference began from the following premise:

"With all due respect to the caveats, cautionary tales, and legal, fiscal, and emotional issues, it nevertheless is clear that within a foreseeable time the vast majority of the materials scholars and students need to do their research and further their educations will be available online, electronically, on the internet.

"This cannot help but have profound implications for the organizations we have constructed in a different era to facilitate the delivery and use of scholarly information. There are very substantial resources being applied to that facilitation right now, by publishers both primary and "secondary", academic institutions, societies, libraries, and others. These resources necessarily will be redirected, either by their managers or the markets and organizations they serve."

From this perspective, speakers and participants addressed the following question:

How should we proactively redirect our resources so that we can continue to provide crucial value to the research and education enterprise and process?

Related questions include:

What should libraries collect, if anything?

What secondary services will add value and attract support, commercially or otherwise?

Who will provide those services?

Where will we find the required skills?

Who will preserve and enhance the certification & dissemination processes given the growth of institutional repositories, e-print archives, open access journals, secondary services the like?

Most agreed with the premise, and that there needs to be considerable re-thinking of how we spend our resources, and for what, although there was some considerable disagreement over timelines for these changes. No one, however, thought that this was much in our control -- a consistent observation was that these changes are happening to us, not because of us.

In his keynote, Blaise Simque pointed out that revolution is often a series of small changes, which sometimes sneak up and aren't recognized as revolution until after the fact. This makes it difficult at best to effectively manage those changes. The Academy is here to stay, though, and he recommends watching its transformations very carefully. He discussed several warnings that indicate to him that change is necessary, and spoke of some of the apparently evolutionary but, taken as a whole, revolutionary changes he sees at Sage.

He pointed out that what are important are not "things", like books or journals, but rather processes and communication, and that we must be careful to not simply try to protect the status quo. "No mourning or nostalgia" -- at least not much, and above all look for useful adaptations to new environments.

Anthony Watkinson organized a session reporting on two major user studies, from Elsevier and CIBER. Michael Mabe, reporting on the Elsevier study, noted that there has been and continues to be considerable behavioral change among authors/users, but no significant change in the fundamental requirements. While scholars may inform themselves through different mechanisms, they are still informing themselves. Thus, he suggests that we make sure we learn how best to support and enhance these fundamentals, and success will follow.

David Nicholas reported some very interesting data from a study he and colleagues carried out at CIBER, noting among other things that search engines matter a great deal, and most everyone starts at Google. He also noted, though, that there is considerable diversity in the scholarly community. "One size does not fit all", and if we generalize we will be inevitably misled. He reflected on the importance of trust and brand as a driver of user behavior.

David Warlock organized a session on innovation in the UK Scholarly Community that explores answers to some of the challenges above. He asserted that everything changes -- not just that which is obvious -- and pointed out that he would be hard pressed to explain the concept of "journal", "article", "bundle", "author pays", "pre, post or prior publication", "monograph", or "e-book" (he proposed "e-jiffybag"), to users of tomorrow. Each of these concepts particularly restricts our thinking, and is of very little concern to our publics.

Five things we shouldn't need to worry about (but do) are the future of peer review; the success of open access, where is the archive?, what happens to format?, and the future of copyright.

These will all change, but the change will come from outside and not from us. We must avoid defensive mode at all costs.

Derek Law presented a series of strategies, with examples, for participating in the transformation. He spoke of consolidation, syndication, lowering transaction costs, advertising, social networking, "hubs", and the "just enough" mode of delivery. He discussed fully using data about user behavior, while cautioning us about generalization, and spoke in this context about "mobilizing the edge". He believes in building e-research, coordinated services with other parts of the Academy, and developing a theory of e-collections that actually serves the aggregation needs of users as their behavior evolves.

Ronald Milne discussed the background, development, and status of the Bodleian Library's collaboration with Google, and some of the results and potential services and capabilities he already sees. Although his data connection failed during his talk, I had the good fortune to see what he was discussing during earlier testing, and recommend that you follow up by looking at the web addresses he offered to provide on the Fiesole web site. It is very provocative, and we will be watching the project with great interest as it develops.

Another institution we'll watch is Stanford. Michael Keller presided over a panel of U.S. librarians for a look at the scene in the U.S. He spoke of a number of very impressive initiatives at Stanford, experimenting with innovative ways of supporting scholars and students. He noted discipline diversity, and related that to different design approaches to new Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, and Performing Arts branch libraries. He described a new Engineering library, which will be almost completely bookless. He discussed the library as space being subsumed as part of another space, likely differently in different communities.

He called for new approaches to the development of discovery mechanisms, including semantic extraction and at least semi-automatic taxonomic indexing to support various kinds of associative tools, and predicted the end of "cataloging as we know it". He also discussed institutional digital archiving, and explained by example how and why it is much more than simply "marking and parking" the University's output. Attendees will recall as particularly instructive his discussion of handling the work of John McCarthy, Donald Knuth, and Edward Feigenbaum.

Katina Strauch discussed initiatives and challenges as the College of Charleston develops support strategies for a new king of student, and reminded us that we cannot just stop doing those things we always have done, because people still depend on

them. At the same time, we've got to respond to new expectations as they arise -- rather like rebuilding the train while it's rushing down the track.

Margaret Landesman added that wishful thinking doesn't help, and that we cannot find our most effective role by simply asserting it. She spoke of developing collections of lasting value, while not wasting resources on duplicating materials readily available elsewhere. She called for redirecting some of our budgets to developing new collections or services that wouldn't otherwise exist, picking them based on the individual institution's capabilities and interests. She described the Utah Arts Project as an example. She also pointed out that institutional affiliation is a particularly bad criterion for access.

John Cox, in the second keynote address, was anything but optimistic about our collective future unless we pay some pretty strict attention right now to what is going on around us. He pointed out that our industry is tiny -- considerable smaller than the chocolate industry, for example, and that the changes going on in the scholarly world are caused by huge commercial and other outside forces. We must, he said, give up the grossly unhelpful and unfair distinction between for-profit and non-profit institutions, which so seriously weakens our ability to collectively progress. If we are to not just fade away into irrelevance, we must discover how to add real value that real users appreciate as valuable -- it is not very useful, for example, to talk about how important "the peer review process" is if users have other, better, faster, less expensive ways to evaluate research. Also, we need to look for added value that is under our control. And he closed asking "What is the critical addition?"

Chris Beckett organized the final session on the commercial perspective, and he and Steven Rhind-Tutt each presented many examples of the kinds of value adding called for by Mr. Cox.

Steven Rhind-Tutt showed us a number of examples from the "new form" publishing that Alexander Street Press is accomplishing, and by example showed that there is a real market for very different aggregations and associations of materials and sources, whether pre or post coordinated, and echoing Mr. Keller, showed us the tip of how much needs to change in how we make materials accessible. Alexander Press is another entity to watch.

Finally, Chris Beckett took us through a look at several new structures of communication that are completely beyond the paradigms we are familiar with. No journals, articles, monographs, or the like here, and he convincingly predicted that more and more of what we need to make accessible to the world at large will become less and less "fixed" and more and more transient, just as it becomes more and more useful.

All in all, this was a rich couple of days. While the points of view and topics were wide ranging, there were several common themes.

There is general agreement that the fundamental changes we've observed are real, inevitable, and extremely positive. There is less agreement about the speed of the changes, but ultimately, the speed relates only to specific tactics.

There is general agreement that there will be print, but only as an adjunct or even a byproduct of digital information.

There is less general agreement that the intellectual forms (as opposed to the physical ones) that we know will decrease in importance or be overtaken by other forms, but that there will be other forms is clear. There already are, and we're at a loss to know what to do about them. It is clear that we need to be just as interested in Google Earth as in Google Scholar -- perhaps more so. The good news is that there are many pushing this edge, as we saw over the meeting.

My nightmare is that we'll perfect the mechanisms for publishing, distributing, storing, preserving, and accessing books and articles -- just in time for that to be irrelevant to the scholarly process. We are having a very hard time thinking about this, and meanwhile all those forces we don't control are moving on -- fast.

My hope is that we will find ways to make the extraordinarily complex and rich panoply of intellectual and communication tools, now here and yet to come, both comprehensible and useful to the world. Sounds a lot like Google's mission statement -- but that's just fine. There's lots of room in this revolution for contributors, but not much for those who only look back.

ward shaw