

REPORT ON ELECTRONIC RESOURCES & LIBRARIES CONFERENCE,

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Reporter: Jill Dawson, University of North Texas Libraries

Keynote – Libraries and the Practice of Freedom in the Age of Algorithms

Presenter: Barbara Fister, Project Information Literacy

Barbara Fister, Scholar-in-Residence at Project Information Literacy, opened the conference with a thought-provoking presentation about the role libraries can play in an era where data is commodified and online information is used as a tool for manipulation and misinformation. Project Information Literacy conducted research to understand how students and faculty navigate the current information landscape. The researchers found that students turn to their peers to learn how to do research and evaluate sources rather than to faculty or librarians. Students are aware of algorithms and how they are invasive and skew web search results in ways that may not represent information appropriately or accurately but the students are resigned to using familiar web search platforms because they are so ubiquitous. Students today have grown up in an atmosphere of skepticism about any information found online, but surprisingly information literacy is not integrated into most of the courses students take. Because librarians have a long history of commitment to education, privacy, and equity, they are uniquely poised to lead campaigns and educational programs that strive for “algorithmic justice.”

Electronic Resource Librarianship: Past, Present, and Future

Presenter: Susan Davis, Acquisitions Librarian for Continuing Resources & Licensing Specialist, University of Buffalo

Susan Davis led attendees on a fascinating journey through the history of electronic resources and how the library’s approach to them has developed over the years. Research just prior to the advent of e-resources entailed notecards, copy machines and complicated paper filing systems such as Kardex. Several attendees chuckled when Davis displayed an image of the cover of the *Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature*. Libraries relied on

printed renewal lists and serials holdings lists to manage their serials. Looking even further back in time, scholarly journal publication began with the *Journal des sçavans* (later *Journal des savants*) in 1665 and the first peer reviewed journal, *Medical Essays and Observations*, in 1733. Fast forward to the twentieth century: scholarly publishing grew exponentially after World War II and authors signed over their copyrights to publishers in exchange for greater scholarly impact.

The early years of online access (1980s and 1990s) included the rise of the Serials Pricing Crisis, libraries providing access to databases in the online public access catalog (OPAC) via the Multiple Database Access System (MDAS) from NOTIS, and indexes on CD-ROM. Publishers began giving libraries free online access with paid print subscriptions; then they offered print + paid online package deals. The first NASIG Conference took place in 1986 at Bryn Mawr College with the theme, “Serial Connections: People, Information, and Communication.” Electronic resource licenses also emerged in the 1990s. There were many presentations at conferences about copyright and licensing. License templates such as Liblicense and SERU developed as tools to help libraries negotiate with vendors.

In 2008, Oliver Pesch created the “E-Resource Lifecycle” as a much-needed framework for managing electronic resources from acquisition to renewal. Jill Emery and Dr. Graham Stone expanded this concept in 2013 and wrote *Techniques for Electronic Resource Management* (TERMS). Other events of note during this time include the Serials Solutions incorporation, forming COUNTER, the launch of discovery systems, and the proliferation of ebooks. In 2013 the NASIG board adopted the “Core Competencies for Electronic Resources.” Sessions at the Electronic Resources & Libraries Conferences in 2015 and 2016 focused on providing advice and best practices for new electronic resources librarians (ERL). Today, libraries can offer more seamless access to e-resources through browser plugins. The need for continuing education and better documentation of procedures is a current issue as many librarians find the responsibility of managing e-resources and serials being thrust upon them despite not having the ERL job title. Other current ERM concerns include accessibility, market consolidation, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The Myth of the Big Deal

Presenter: Tim Bucknall, Assistant Dean of Libraries UNC Greensboro; Founder and Convener of Carolina Consortium

In this presentation, Bucknall questioned some of the commonly-held assumptions about the high cost and inflexibility of big deals and brought greater nuance to the discussion of how big deals affect libraries. The Carolina Consortium was founded in 2004 in order to facilitate the negotiation of three big deals for a group of libraries; the consortium now manages 21 big deals. All the deals in the consortium are opt-in; none of the members must participate in a deal. The consortium is extremely analytical about its decisions regarding deals, and all the information is shared amongst its members.

The first myth Bucknall identified is that big deals involve enormous amounts of content. In fact, very few deals include over 1,000 titles. Most contain less than 100 titles. The second myth is that big deals are expensive. According to Bucknall's research, most of the deals are less than \$10,000, and 60% of the deals are less than \$25,000. The third myth is that big deals always require multi-year commitments from libraries. Most publishers will accept shorter deals with higher inflation rates. Myth four is that it is impossible to leave a deal mid-license-term. In Bucknall's experience, almost all the publishers have allowed libraries to leave mid-term. It is in the best interest of a publisher to maintain good relations with libraries. Upset customers will purchase less content. In myth five, big deals are viewed as a method to trick libraries into subscribing to new launches for more money. Bucknall knew of one publisher that openly engaged in this practice without being underhanded about it. These tactics are not as prevalent these days, with most publishers offering libraries many options.

The sixth myth is that big deals are hyperinflationary (often 5-15%). The inflation rates on Bucknall's deals are less than 4.5%, but newly-launched journals could be more expensive. Myth seven claims that big deals are rapidly declining in the U.S. In fact, each year some libraries drop deals, and some add them as a part of normal operations. The media tend to focus on a large academic research library that drops a deal but rarely reports when the

library adds the deal again a few years later. Myth eight is that big deals create massive profit margins for publishers. If a library drops a big deal in favor of single subscription purchases, the publisher still makes money. Even interlibrary loan provides royalty fees to the publisher. Myth nine alleges that big deals are bad deals for libraries. Some libraries in the Carolina Consortium pay less than \$100 a year for a big deal, and some libraries have paid zero inflation over the years. Myth ten argues that big deals are like cable television, where the library pays for much unwanted content in order to get the small portion of content that matters to the library. Bucknall reminded the audience that big deals are opt-in. It does not make sense to purchase a huge package when the library only needs a few journals. Big deals are diverse but often oversimplified by many in the profession. Libraries should share more information amongst each other about their deals so they can enter negotiations with more facts. It is possible to describe a deal without getting too specific, as Bucknall did in his presentation. Libraries should also consider usage as well as cost when considering a deal.

Transformative Agreements and Their Headaches: New Roles for Librarians

Presenters: Johanna Säll, Karolinska Institutet; Sara Parmhed, Södertörn University

In this presentation, two librarians, Säll and Parmhed, from Karolinska Institutet and Södertörn University in Sweden, described their experiences working with transformative agreements (TAs). They began with brief descriptions of their respective universities and libraries. Both are small universities with full-time enrollments of roughly 6,000 each. Karolinska Institutet is a medical university with about 1,700 researchers and 22 departments in Medicine and Health Sciences. In 2018, these researchers produced 6,687 publications, of which 3,551 (53%) were published via open access (OA). The library has a budget of \$5.2 million. Five library employees work with TAs. Södertörn University has 489 researchers and 6 departments in Humanities, Social Sciences, Technology, and Sciences. In 2018, the University's researchers published 272 titles, of which 135 (50%) were OA. The library has a budget of \$950,000. One employee handles TAs.

The Swedish government has issued a directive to shift publicly-funded research to fully

OA by 2026. The Bibsam Consortium, led by the National Library of Sweden, is a national consortium that negotiates license agreements for electronic resources for 79 universities and research institutions. In 2018, negotiations between Elsevier and Bibsam stalled, resulting in the consortium having no deal with Elsevier for 1.5 years. This year, however, Bibsam has signed a TA with Elsevier. The consortium has also signed many new TAs with all the big publishers in a short time. The TAs are a mixture of access methods which include fully OA

and a hybrid of OA and subscribed content. Hybrid OA is viewed as a temporary solution in the eventual shift to full OA. This change, however, means higher costs for Swedish universities as they are paying both subscriptions and OA publishing fees.

In the midst of this transformation, Säll and Parmhed found themselves filling new roles in addition to the rest of their workload. They act as “approval managers” when researchers submit articles for publication. They must verify each author is affiliated with the university and determine the type of publication. Säll and Parmhed provided several examples of publisher OA platforms so the audience could see how much they vary in appearance and workflow. The role of approval manager means the librarians are now involved in the publishing process as they provide the link between article submission and publication. At the same time, librarians must support researchers without interfering in their work. Librarians have also become *de facto* spokespersons for TAs. They provide most of the documentation, web pages, communications, and support for anything related to TAs.

Although TAs provide great benefits to both libraries and the scholarly community, the transition has created a number of “headaches” for librarians. Some agreements do not cover author publishing charges (APCs), leading to upset researchers who look to the librarians for answers. Conversely, the librarians encounter researchers who are happy to find they do not have to pay any fees to publish their works. In addition, librarians must decipher all the differences between agreements, including invoicing and variable deadlines, and keep information for the public updated. Librarians are also expected to provide support in tricky situations, such as unclear author affiliation, without national guidelines. Recently, though, the National Library of Sweden has held workshops for libraries on best practices.

Overall, the researchers like the agreements because they take away the financial burden associated with OA publishing in high-quality journals. They have responded positively to what they see as a leveling of the playing field within scholarly publishing. The researchers also enjoyed the relatively seamless process of submitting their work through the university. Although the shift to OA has created extra work for librarians and increased costs for the libraries, the increased access to scholarly research is a benefit to everyone.

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