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Academic Libraries & Others: Hunting for the Overlooked in Online Learning

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Academic Libraries & Others: Hunting for the Overlooked in Online Learning

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Higher education is ensconced in a communication revolution and re-definition. Despite a spate of relevant scholarship, an inherent fog continues to cloud understanding of online education. On the pedagogical beat, literature deconstructs primarily as transitions from established practice—albeit adapted for both asynchronous and synchronous settings. Methods for lectures and media inclusion remain featured along with calls for embellishing with new Internet applications. Measurement surfaces from the ether as a yet unstandardized force for addressing the chimera of educational evaluation, as well as proactive engagement to enhance the classroom. MOOCs rapidly rise in disturbing fashion to command the conversation, but remain in an unsure position. On the practical side, modes of delivery and intellectual property rear to prominence. Schools struggle to cope with textbook inflation and look to OER (open educational resource) substitutes.

As displayed in this issue of *Internet Learning*, I take personal delight in helping to stretch that impressive list of topics. In keeping with someone engaged by a fully online university, different and emergent types of educational institutions need to be increasingly taken into account. From my position on the U.S. Commission to UNESCO, globalization and cross-cultural values certainly must be considered. As a librarian and archivist, I feel especially compelled to surface almost unconscionable oversights. The most traditional of academic support units offer tailored subject knowledge and

Web skills to assist with such looming issues as:

- Instruction in new research paradigms as tailored to individual disciplines.
- Ensuring a proper injection of peer-reviewed/professional literature.
- Reducing the costs for course materials and textbook dependency.
- Maintaining currency in the rapidly changing Web environment.

About this Issue

This issue of *Internet Learning* is divided into two sections. As suggested above, the first embraces academic libraries. It joins at a pivotal moment in the development of online education and prospects for library sustainability. The contributions offer a sample of current issues. Most come from a call to the pens of distance education librarians—practitioners long consigned to the fringes of the main campus library, but now with an increasingly pertinent narrative. The second provides a sampler of pieces with different global and institutional perspectives, but also surface as primary research and opinion pieces in preparation for hypothesis testing by future investigators.

Reinventing Libraries for Online Education

The section also was designed to provide counterpoint contemporaneous with the release of my *Reinventing Libraries for Online Education* by ALA Publishing. That book lends full scope to the preceding de-

¹ APUS VP/Dean of Libraries, Electronic Course Materials & ePress, U.S. Commission to UNESCO

bate. Its CRIS (Classroom/Research Information Services) approach argues for a reversion to Sorbonne's original model. This applied theory calls for the university library to place a premium on actively engaging and populating the classroom. Librarians assert their unquestioned Web and subject-specialist skills to work in concert with the faculty. They combine unique knowledge of licensed and all-important peer-reviewed literature out of the library with exceptional abilities to vet related resources, social networking, and methodological sources on the Open Web. The results enhance the quality and currency of classroom readings, provide trusted launching pads for student research, and lower costs for students.

Prelude to Academic Libraries

A bit of historical reminding may be in order for the start of this issue. Robert Sorbonne led the way in the mid-13th century. His lasting reforms created the faculty-driven institution. They also extended to the invention of a university library. That creation was a socialistic operation in support of a higher good. The library was designed to alleviate costs for students, as well as serve the academic community at large by sharing knowledge with qualified scholars. This model drifted somewhat in the aftermath of Guttenberg. It took renewed importance in the 19th century with the German "New University" and American land-grant movement. The modern university library emerged as a campus landmark—albeit with an enhance research mission in support of burgeoning bands of new PhDs and the purchase of their monographic and journal outputs.

Although easily overlooked, the modern research library led the way in automating information resources and developing contemporary forms of scholarly research. In the early 1980s, the OPAC (on-

line public access catalog) first introduced many college students to computers. Citation analysis began to leave its mark as a metric. Libraries blazed related openings on the Internet. They followed in the 1990s with pioneering presences that remain as major treasure troves of trusted material on the World Wide Web.

The web itself is wreaking fundamental change in libraries with direct implications for online education. Today's facilities extend to a look and feel unlike anything in the past. Users are no longer tied to a chain of physical engagement—dedicated visits, catalog/stack searches, physical retrieval, and opening materials for reading. Travel and parking have become optional. Hours of operation have vanished and library walls disappear before a virtual interface. By the early 21st century, the automated catalog has meshed with newly digitized hordes of content. Search engines have replaced the reference desk. Patrons anticipate anytime and anywhere access to full text on devices from desktop computers to smart phones.

While altered, the web did not obviate the academic library. That institution continues as intermediary to impact and define scholarly practice. 21st-century academics now need to master the intricacies of library-accessed databases to engage their trade, but also to prepare their successors. Yet, such new skills appear largely underappreciated in the literature of online education. Oversight is doubly so for populating online courses. OER proponents and textbook aficionados have studiously avoided the obvious. How can one discuss upper-division and graduate level online courses without active recourse to peer-reviewed content? Why turn to commercial producers and electronic textbooks without exploring the full range of university services—and, not incidentally, looking to the

financial wellbeing of one's students? Moreover, who is better informed on the university's holdings and more expert with the new medium than professional librarians? Kay Cunningham begins such investigations with "Current Issues with Copyright and Higher Education." Intellectual property issues and overlapping balance with handicapped accessibility have taken front stage with the Web. To me, academic libraries cannot escape engagement and have an expanded role to play for their university community.

The parallel redefining of roles in the Web Age is on display in the form of faculty partnerships and information literacy specializations. Discussion unfolds within two complimentary articles: Denise Landry-Hyde and Lauren P. Cantwell: "Virtually Yours: Online Embedded Librarianship in Higher Education"; and, Jeneen LaSee-Willemsen and Lisa Reed: "Continuous Improvement and Embedded Librarianship." Library treatments close with MOOCs. In 2013, such facilities appear to have goaded an awakening of mainstream academic libraries to the opportunities and challenges of online learning. Hence, Lauren P. Cantwell responds with "'MOOL' in a MOOC: Opportunities for Librarianship in the Expanding Galaxy of Massive Open Online Course Design and Execution." That is followed by Michael Stephens' treatment on educational needs with "MOOCs for LIS Professional Development: Exploring New Roles in Transformative Learning Environments."

The Other

The second section holds a small potpourri of "Other" articles. These had been scheduled before the librarian topic elbowed its way into the production schedule, but ironically match the theme of overlooked prospects. For example, Marco Castillo suggests the importance and needed research agendas for two-year institutions with his "Efficiency, Economy, and Social Equity in Online Education at America's Community Colleges." Molinari goes even further out-of-the-box with "Mindful Meditation for Online Learning: Lighting the Fire by Dimming the Lights: Helping College Students Relax and Focus to Prepare for Online Learning."

Global perspectives steps forward in the final two essays. Australia's Jayanath Ananda offers "Curriculum Design for Flexible Delivery: An Assessment of e-Learning Approaches," which explores "tertiary educators" and the challenges of designing e-learning course for business. Finally, South Africa's Jennifer Glennie and Tony Mays proffer policy considerations and a long-term view for their country in "Rethinking Distance in an Era of Online Learning."