

## Against the Grain

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### IR-Themed Issue – IRs R Cool Again

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Natasha Simons

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# Against the Grain

*“Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians”*

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## IR-Themed Issue — IRs R Cool Again

by **Burton Callicott** (Head of Research and Instruction, College of Charleston Libraries) <CallicottB@cofc.edu>

and **Natasha Simons** (Associate Director, Australian Research Data Commons) <natasha.simons@ardc.edu.au>

When they first arrived on the scene, Institutional Repositories (IRs) were like the new kid in school. They drew a lot of attention and, for a time, even sat with the cool kids at lunch. After a few months however, the novelty wore off and IRs settled into a group of friends more suited to their temperament and status — smart, earnest, and a little awkward. Many library administrators who championed repositories and, in a lot of cases, even reconfigured their org charts to accommodate them, continued to support IRs but stopped paying a lot of attention once the buzz has faded and the teaching faculty failed to embrace the idea, let alone an added step in the publication process. Those library leaders who held out, either for financial reasons or due to inertia, and never bought into a repository platform and the additional positions, would wax smug whenever

IRs came up in conversation and state with a suppressed, knowing smile that they never thought they were worth it from the start.

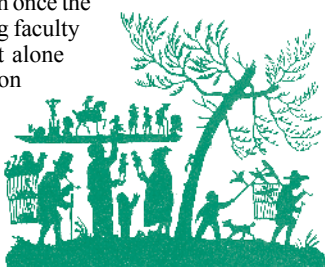
A recent and surprising/not surprising push for open access in general and Open Educational Resources (OERs) in particular coupled with the emergence of Plan S, a global trend towards reproducible research and enabling FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) research data means that IRs have been thrust back into the limelight. In the face of the ominous (and confusing and perhaps elitist)

“open access” publication hurricane coming out of science centers in Europe, many of the problems that plagued IRs and conveniently justified their lack of attention — inability to acquire consistent and significant content, competition from discipline-specific repositories, lack of sexy, easy, and

aggrandizing services offered by academic social media, etc. — have been minimized by the solutions that they offer to the current open access infused scholarly conversation puzzle. In essence, this is the very staid and drab thing that they have always offered: a space for scholarly contributions that is free and open to anyone with access to the Internet.

Of course the terms “free” and “open” carry a huge amount of weight and controversy in this context. Many of the contributors to this issue grapple with the implications and subtleties of these concepts — it turns out that freedom is not necessarily free when it comes to scholarly publishing. Other authors outline the more specific ways that IRs can smooth out some of the rough spots of Plan S. And,

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## If Rumors Were Horses

In July 2018 **Eleanor Cook** started “phased retirement” at **East Carolina University**, which is a part-time assignment for three years. The 1st year **Eleanor** stayed in her position as AD for Discovery & Technology Services while a national search was conducted to replace her. In July 2019 **Eleanor** moved over to the **ECU Music Library** as interim head, filling in for **David Hursh** who is on a medical leave; **Eleanor** will possibly remain at the **Music Library** for her last year of phased retirement if **David** is not able to return. Working at the **Music Library** has been wonderful, **Eleanor** says, and she is learning many new things! And in case you were wondering ... the new AD for Discovery & Technology Services at **ECU** is **Amanda McLellan** who was the head of Application and Digital Services at **Joyner**. **Eleanor** says she is thrilled to have one of her former direct reports in that position!



**Rick Anderson** is a grandpa! His beautiful granddaughter is named **Miriam**. Congrats **Rick**!

**Eleanor** also sends word that her colleague **Angela Dresselhaus** joined **Innovative** in September 2019 as the **ERM product owner** with over 18 years of academic library experience, most recently at **Eastern Carolina University** managing the Electronic Resources Department. With every new team member, **Innovative** is focused

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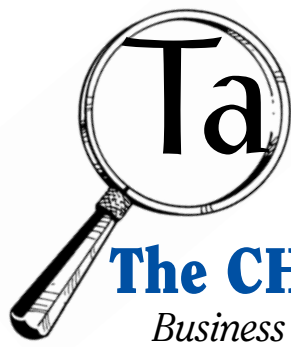
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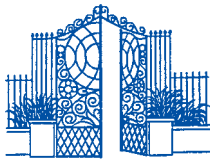
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### IRs R Cool Again

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like any good collection of IRticles, we include essays that largely ignore the messy stuff and simply explore the ever expanding possibilities and capabilities of IRs from non traditional research objects (NTROs) to providing entries to the surrounding local community. Even those authors who originally planned to write essays critical of IRs found it very difficult to do so once they got a few paragraphs in. To state the obvious, IRs are not sexy. The name itself is quite fitting. IRs are not perfect. Many of them are clunky (especially compared to slickly produced, commercial social media subterfuges) and, largely because there are so many different platforms and so much variety from institution to institution, they do not offer easy ways to integrate and interoperate (a problem that some may say is essentially solved by Google, but that may require another special issue). However, despite all of that, IRs are undeniably functional and provide an obvious and ready-made duct tape of sorts that can shore up the many gaping holes that come with open access and any grand plans to transform/secretly maintain the scholarly publication industry.

We hope you find the following IR-themed essays thought provoking and enlightening. 🌱

## Eradicating the Written Word

### Power and Symbolism through the Lenses of Book Burnings and Takedowns — A Research Project

by **Dr Frances Pinter** (Senior Research Fellow, School of Advanced Study, University of London) <frances@pinter.org.uk>

**Y**ou might well ask why I, a UK publisher who has devoted most of my professional life to broadening access to knowledge, would be interested in book burning. Well, it dates back to travels to communist countries in the seventies and eighties where books that I'd freely studied from were still banned. In the nineties, at the request of **George Soros**, I was given an unprecedented opportunity to help foster the development of the newly independent publishing sector in thirty post-communist countries, including supporting translations.

Over the decades, I felt a perverse, almost macabre interest growing in me about extreme acts against the spread of knowledge — that of book burning. Not just a simple act of destruction, there was more, much more to be understood — if one looked beyond the ashes.

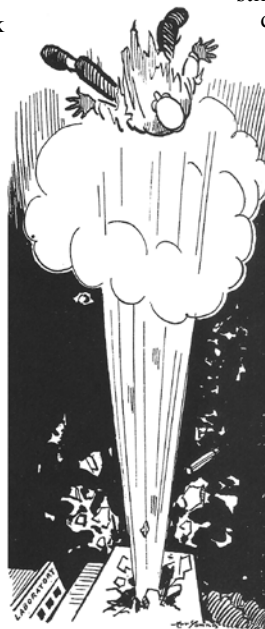
Essentially, book burning is about power and symbolism. How is power exercised through book burning? And, how should we understand the symbolic power of book burning? Who does it, and why? To what effect has its use as a tool of control changed over time as technologies of book production improved? Changes such as the growth of literacy, education and increasing availability of multiple and, more recently, digital copies of books have

altered the way in which control of knowledge and its dissemination (and destruction) occurs. Book burning isn't merely a matter of flammable material, it can be a powerful political instrument or just a futile gesture.

An historical review of book burning makes clear that these gestures have been a feature of our history throughout the ages. The earliest known papyri burnings date as far back as 1300 BC by the **Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaton**. The earliest known book burnings in China were carried out in 213 BC by the emperor **Qin Shi Huang**. Millions of books have been burned over the millennia all over the world. You can now see schoolchildren on YouTube burning copies of *Catcher in the Rye*. Only a few years ago history books were burned by local officials in Northern Siberia because their revisions, though by Russian authors, had been sponsored by the philanthropist **George Soros**

(a project with which I'd been involved and helped to deliver). And, of course, whole libraries have been burned down.

Today, knowledge stored by digital means still has considerable challenges of discoverability, accessibility and preservation. Even if we can solve the technical challenges, how do we protect content from malice and neglect? The phrase "Digital Flames" has emerged from the library community, conjuring up a really dystopian future that none of us want. So, I'm looking at what we know about the intentions and motivations behind book-burning to see if there are lessons to be drawn for protecting our cherished knowledge base. 🌱



*If you'd like more information about this project or if you want to share your own thoughts and experiences please contact me at <frances@pinter.org.uk>.*