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Content, Services, and Space: The Future of the Library as Lines Blur

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Content, Services, and Space: The Future of the Library as Lines Blur

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The following is a transcription of a live presentation at the 2013 Charleston Conference. Slides and video are available online at http://sched.co/17JvDDW.

David Parker: Today, in our brief 45 minutes together, we are going to discuss roundtable examples of lines of blurring in the library space. We have two representatives from the library, and we have two representatives from companies that serve the library. Each speaker will have 5 minutes to present their topic, which should leave us about 15 or 20 minutes for questions. I have got questions, I believe our panelists have questions for one another, and, of course, we want to hear questions from all of you. So on to our introduction of our panelists: Rick Anderson from the University of Utah, Stephen Rhind-Tutt from Alexander Street Press, Nancy Gibbs from Duke University, and Heather Staines from SIPX. Without further ado we will take it away using the panelists' topics today. Rick, off to you.

Rick Anderson: I have just prepared some general notes about what I see happening in libraries in terms of lines blurring, and one of the things that I think is very interesting is that libraries are starting to become publishers. This is happening in a couple of ways: first, an increasing number of libraries are beginning to actually publish journals that are based on content in their institutional repositories. In most cases, these libraries are not identifying themselves formally as publishing houses, but they are actually acting as publishers, so that is one example of how a line can blur. It is also true that libraries are tending to become publishers in a more general and ambiguous sense in that they are digitizing and making publicly available rare and unique resources that would otherwise have never been made available to the general public. In that sense, again, libraries are not typically saying, "We are publishers," but they are actually publishing in an informal but very real way. So with the IR-based journals you are publishing in a formal way, with digital special collections you are publishing in an informal way, and in neither of those two cases are libraries typically thinking of themselves or presenting themselves as publishers.

But there is another way in which libraries are getting involved with publishing and that is by absorbing formally constituted presses. In some cases they are creating presses, and I think the most obvious and prominent example is the Amherst College Press which is a press based in the library at Amherst College. The more common way that this is happening is that university presses are being moved under the roofs of libraries—often physically, and sometimes just in organizational terms. So one thing I wonder is whether this trend is going to grow. I do not know. Right now we have got somewhere between 20 and 30 university presses that are located in their campus libraries. The bigger and more important question, I think, is whether it should grow. I really do not know the answer to that question.

I can see a lot of very good things emerging from the lines blurring between libraries and publishers. One thing that concerns me is that we talk a lot in libraries about how important it is that we move into publishing, and sometimes I hear that message seeming to come from the position that, "this would be good because it would take business away from publishers." I have nothing against taking away business from publishers, but I do have a problem with taking away business from publishers as an end goal in and of itself. To me it is a little bit like talking about innovation as a goal or collaboration as a goal. To me these are means to an end, not ends in and of themselves.

A few last thoughts: when libraries start doing publishing activity of their own, that is where you are talking about lines blurring. When university presses move into libraries, that does not blur lines, that just changes the location of lines. I think that is kind of interesting in an abstract sense. The blurring of lines in this, as in any other area, presents a particular set of opportunities and challenges because it creates ambiguity—and ambiguity is always both scary and exciting. For me, I think the opportunity for libraries is to create value in ways that we never have before, but the risk is that we will expand and dilute the definition of the library, or frankly, of publishing, to such a degree that we end up undermining the library's effectiveness and, therefore, its funding. That risk is not a reason not to do it. It is just a reason to do it with all due diligence.

One salutary effect of moving university presses into the library is that it tends to make the library better informed about the realities of publishing, which I think is always a very good thing. We, in libraries, have a tendency, I think, to believe that we understand publishing better than we do, just as I think publishers often believe that they understand libraries better than they do.

Stephen Rhind-Tutt: I would like to thank David for inviting me to this. He, in fact, asked me before he joined Alexander Street press. There is a lot to talk about in this topic. For me, what I thought I could start with is a little bit of background about myself. I have actually been in the industry for about 30 years, and I have watched many, many changes. When I started, it was not self-evident that everything was going to become electronic, and really, over the past 30 years, I have seen shift to shift to shift. From the early days of online systems through CD-ROM, watching how initially journals and abstracting index databases got converted, then watching e-books getting converted, and then music and stream to video, the thing that has been central in all this is the library. And as a nonlibrarian, I have got to tell you from the outside it is very obvious, to me at least, of the importance of the library. I live and work in Virginia, and at UVA, Jefferson put the library right in the middle of the university, and for me what is exciting about this

topic is I believe it gives the library an opportunity for the library to resume its place as central of the university's operation. What do I mean by that? Well, yes, as Rick said there is very definitely a move for libraries to become publishers, both in special collections and institutional repositories. But far more than that, the library's value as a codifier of knowledge for me has come into the full. I watch libraries have 20 to 30 software developers, the large academic research libraries. I watched Lib Guides get created, which are, in and of themselves, important publications. I watched a move away from books and journals toward data, toward streaming video, toward streaming music, when, in all of these things, the skills of librarians come to the full.

Many of you, I am sure, heard Beth Paul's presentation a moment ago. In the presentation, she talked about how librarians are absolutely essential to the operation of the university as a whole, and I think that is absolutely right. When I look at the skills that the university actually needs over the next 10 to 20 years, many of the disciplines that librarianship represents can really, really help. I am sure it does not surprise you that, when you think about it, learning objects are horribly cataloged, that video is horribly cataloged. We have an enormous amount of creation going on in our society and much of it does not fit in books and journals, yet librarians have all of the skill sets necessary really to make value and really to help society. Who is actually preserving the learning objects? Who is actually curating the learning objects? Who is actually curating the video? To my mind, there is indeed a huge blurring, and it is not something that we should be frightened of—quite the contrary. Librarians and publishers have had to give up a great deal over the past 30 years. How many of you have got old VHS cassettes or CDs which you all recognize are obsolete, and yet the move to actually change to something new is difficult but must be done. So for me, the goal here is, and the exciting thing is, in these blurring of lines there is huge opportunity to put the library right back at the center of the university and the skills: preservation, access, organization of material, curation, and last but not least, the technology itself. Many other areas of the university have not

had to wade through constant technical change in the same way that librarians have, and publishers for that matter, for a very long time. I think we can all see where it is going to head. To my mind, learning, data, video, audio, manuscript collections, e-mail, pretty much every form of human expression is deserving of the attention that historically has been paid to books and journals, and who is best to do that? In my opinion, it is publishers and librarians because we have actually been dealing with those problems for many, many years. Thank you.

Nancy Gibbs: Thank you. My topic is what is next after the traditional PDA as we know it, where we throw these records into the catalog and how people find them. My blurring line seems to be discovery of new content outside of the library catalog that I would like to purchase, but how do I provide for those models, and what do I do when I am trying to purchase it? Recently, we had a couple of new things be requested by our patrons and our selectors, and I wonder if these same things are occurring at you library? More corporate business-type materials and products are being requested. Single Kindle books are wanted by faculty for course reserves. Specific types of software requested to run programs that graduate students need to complete their research and purchasing professors' self-published materials. How do we evaluate these offerings before we buy them? Previously, we relied on vendors to run the title, throw a profile, and it either hit my approval plan or it did not. I also knew that good publishers published good materials. That is not necessarily the case anymore. So, in today's world, there are a lot of materials that do not get reviewed and are not available for mainstream publishers, but my faculty, my selectors, and my patrons still want those things.

Let me give you a glimpse of one of those. A professor requested us to purchase a TED Book, like the TED Talks, only as a Kindle single book, and he wanted it put on reserve. Only professors would think these things up. We have Kindles but they are not used for reserve materials. They are used for current literature, new and noteworthy type popular materials. So we had to figure out a different solution to get this onto a Kindle and put into reserve. We bought six additional Kindle title devices. We purchase the one Kindle single for use on those six Kindles, limited the circulation period for those Kindles to approximate the course reserve and solved the immediate problem for the moment, and it only took about two weeks to figure that out. Going forth, we knew that this was not something that was a sustainable model, but yet once we did that one TED Book, things caught on. So what do we do? We picked up the phone and called TED and they were like, "You want to do what? Oh, you know, Disney wanted to do something like that last week and we did not know what to do." So I said, "Well, I have a plan for you. Let me tell you what I want to do. I want to download your books and put them in my IR, my institutional repository. I want to be able to provide access to my authorized users, I will not give it to anybody else, and I want to put in the catalog, and I want to see if you have a license agreement that will allow me to do that." Well, they did not have a license agreement, and they did not know what SERU was. It was like talking to a brick wall. And I thought these are people who are giving TED Talks where new technology is happening! So after a few twists and turns, we have figured out how to do this. We have downloaded all of the TED titles, put them into our institutional repository. We found this great program that was free on the web that converts those TED books to a Kindle edition, an ePub edition, a Mobi edition, and a PDF edition, so our students can access this material on any kind of device in any kind of format that they want to. That was a great thing to do. That took about a month, and it worked well, but I cannot do this for every single new device and product and title that is coming down the pipe. So I was telling the humanities selector about this the other day and she said, "Oh, I have got some other ones for you." There is a book that can only be purchased from iTunes; a Cambridge University Press Explore Shakespeare book, which is multimedia in nature, with performance deals, audio, and educational activities; Chicago Shorts; New York Times iTimes, books which are really shorter e-book material that is topical in nature; and a freely available PDF on an artist web site. How do I put that into the catalog? How stable is that content? What do I do

about preservation? And of course a Kindle title that is only available as a Kindle title, but authored by a Duke professor who writes romance fiction in her spare time, and we try to collect all of our Duke authors' writings. So I ask you, do I ignore what is new and trendy and hot and stick with my old processes, or do I embrace these new ventures and figure out what it takes to accommodate the new content? Should I just give each student an iTunes card? How about a Netflix card? How and where does the vendor, my traditional vendor, fit into this new process and what are these new initiatives that my collection development selectors seem to be coming up with faster than I can absorb them? What is out there that I am totally unaware of and what are you doing for these types of materials? Thank you.

Heather Staines: Thank you. It is always great to go last because then people steal all of the remarks that you were going to make, so we can just take questions now. I come originally from the publishing side of things, and I work for a services company, so I am thinking that I have been a student, I have been an instructor, I have worked for a publisher, I am now in services, so I guess what is left for me is to become a librarian. That would be great. What I wanted to just touch upon, and perhaps open up more in the question stage, are some of the initiatives that librarians are taking to increase the visibility of subscribed content within learning management systems within other course creation platforms so that the role of the library in acquiring resources is recognized more readily by the instructor, by the students, again breaking down the silos. I thought it was a great remark, again, to go back to Beth Paul when she said the librarians are inciters, that they are trying new things and stirring things up, and I think that is a perfect example. The analytics

that are possible through a variety of different channels, not just through companies like SIPX, but the wide array of analytical tools that libraries can now look at to make perhaps different or better budgetary decisions; the instructor's ability to see how consuming content, or not, is tied to course outcomes; and, of course, the more recent developments with libraries becoming much more involved in massive open online courses. Where do you go from there?

The professor self-publishing topic, which everyone seemed to perk up with, I have actually been dealing with this recently. A lot of our professors who are creating MOOC courses, they do assign content that is for purchase by each individual student, but one of our professors has put together his course notes into a self-published five dollar textbook. At Stanford, you do own your course notes, so it is allowed for him to do this, but we thought perhaps that would detract from the other paid readings in the course. Instead, what we have seen is actually quite the opposite. I think that self-publishing is a growing initiative among the faculty, and I would love to talk a little bit more about that.

Also, the moving of the presses into the domain of the library. We are working with a number of university presses, and one of the interesting things associated with this that I see is actually the library and the press both being put into the IT department at universities where that was not the case even just a few years back, so there are obviously pieces of the puzzle that are not represented here amongst our panelists, but I think maybe we have got enough interesting folks that we can have a great discussion, so I will leave it at that.