

## Against the Grain

---

Volume 23 | Issue 1

Article 39

---

February 2011

# The Grass is Often Greener -- Settling In

Forrest E. Link

*The College of New Jersey*, [linkf@tcnj.edu](mailto:linkf@tcnj.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>

 Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Link, Forrest E. (2011) "The Grass is Often Greener -- Settling In," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 23: Iss. 1, Article 39.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5762>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

# The Grass is Often Greener — Settling In



Column Editor: **Forrest E. Link** (Acquisitions Librarian, The College of New Jersey;  
Phone: 609-771-2412; Fax: 609-637-5158) <linkf@tcnj.edu>

In July of 2010, after a period of unemployment occasioned by the corporate buyout of my former employer, I had the good fortune to be hired by a college library untroubled by my unconventional resume and imaginative enough to see the advantages of bringing a former sales rep into academia. After nearly thirty years as a commercial traveler for three different book vendors, I had learned a thing or two about the industry and the folks who inhabit it, and I was about to use that experience in the service of **The College of New Jersey**.

My plan in this series of articles is to reflect on my transition from an itinerant peddler to a stationary buyer, hoping to inform and even reassure others contemplating a move either to or from the commercial sector.

## Settling In

My arrival at **TCNJ** was a bittersweet time for the acquisitions staff. My predecessor, **Marilyn Apelian**, fondly known to many readers of *ATG* as a regular attendee at the **Charleston Conference**, had been absent on a long medical leave. When **Marilyn's** illness ultimately proved fatal, there followed the usual bureaucratic wait to determine if (would there be an exception to the hiring freeze?), then how (should the head of acquisitions be a faculty-status librarian?), and then by whom (the extended search) the position should be filled. The upshot was a department in stasis for nearly two years, struggling mightily to keep up with their workload but without the time or experience to introduce newer technologies or workflows.

I took my place at **TCNJ** much to the relief of a harried staff who have been uniformly welcoming, helpful, and open to new ideas. I am particularly grateful to **Ann Wittik**, our acquisitions supervisor, for holding the department together under very difficult circumstances and for her patience and wisdom in my first few months.

## The First Project

Coming from the world of monographs, I was interested early on in reviewing how **TCNJ** did book buying. The **TCNJ** library is a **Voyager** shop and had begun to take advantage of the features of its acquisitions module. The acquisitions department was importing **OCLC** records to pass on to cataloging and beginning to use **EDI** to transmit orders and receive invoices from some vendors. But they were still relying on **3x5** cards to track

orders from the selectors. I saw what I thought would be an easy target: eliminate the **3x5** cards by taking advantage of systems offered by our vendors and streamline our workflow by shifting manual processes to automated ones. Thus began my first lesson in library land.

In a way, the fundamental work of a vendor rep or an acquisitions librarian is quite similar: we solve problems. In sales, though, the problems are sometimes hyped or even manufactured. We've all seen bloated or overly complicated solutions being marketed to remedy minor inconveniences. Incremental improvements in library processes are regularly heralded as revolutionary and indispensable. Sales often relies on the grand generality, the vague reassurance that all will work out fine once the deal is done. Details are relegated to customer support, those great, unsung heroes of any successful enterprise.

In acquisitions, it seems the opposite is true. We are blinded to potential advancements by entrenched habits and comfortable workflows. Problems may exist we barely recognize. Sometimes it takes a fresh set of eyes. As a new acquisitions librarian, I saw that we really didn't need to manually key in orders, that we could order from our book vendor's web site, that the vendor could send us order confirmation records which we could load into our system. But it wasn't enough to assert that I could help to make all of these things happen, and it wasn't as easy as the sales folk would have you believe. The devil was, indeed, in the details.

My first challenge was getting the confirmation records to load correctly into **Voyager**. Note the operative word "correctly." With the help of our extremely patient systems librarian who was the local **Voyager** administrator, we were able to get the records to load in fairly short order. Now, I had heard the term "bulk loader," but had not entirely grasped its significance. Our systems librarian had not encountered the process before and, eager to gratify the brash new acquisitions librarian, assumed that all record loads are created equal. The problem was, we were loading order confirmation records into the cataloging module. This did not please the catalogers.

Bruised, but undaunted, I set about digging through manuals (not something a brash new acquisitions librarian, particularly a male one, does eagerly) and took to shamelessly imposing

upon various friends and contacts within the industry (something *this* brash new acquisitions librarian does do eagerly). I learned the correct loading process. When this finally worked as promised, I was elated. But this wasn't the entire solution.

Since we are not a research library and most of our book buying is of newer imprints, it occurred to me that some of our obsessive, pre-order duplicate checking was, shall we say, inefficient. I wanted to adjust our workflows accordingly, but also wanted to be fully confident of our systems. In the course of the aforementioned manual reading (ugh!), I discovered that our vendor's Website offered openURL linking to our catalog. This would enable us to directly confirm whether or not we held a title offered on the vendor's site. "Aha!" I thought, "Let's set this up."

Here beginneth the second lesson: Unless one explains one's needs very clearly to systems people in language replete with their arcane jargon, one must be prepared to ask the same question multiple times. It took me a few weeks to make myself understood by our link resolver service, and the results are still not exactly what I'd prefer, but, as someone once said, "Good enough is usually good enough."

The third lesson I learned in this process was perhaps the most important. It's also something I should have already learned: Don't be too quick to make assumptions. I assumed that the duplicate checking function I was setting up was a two-part operation. We would check our holdings and we would check our open orders. I didn't realize that in **Voyager** the **035** field would be retained and used as a key part of duplicate checking. I was making things harder than they needed to be.

My work isn't done yet in this project, but the major hurdles have been overcome. There are still areas of monographic acquisitions that are not amenable to the processes I am putting in place (subsequent editions, for example, are problematic), but I can see things getting wrapped up. **Ann** and I will need to write up some procedures and the upcoming addition of a notification plan will, no doubt, bring some complications. Still, it feels good to have one success under my belt and to have the satisfaction of both learning and teaching a new trick.

Next time: the notification plan and thinking about eBooks. Stay tuned. 🐼

## Collecting to the Core from page 66

the one which seems best suited to **Brooks** and **Richards**, is precisely that it is *not* crucial to current critical discourse. It is likely that a majority of contemporary works of criticism will be viewed as dated, no longer relevant, or passé within a few years. This in no way means libraries should avoid collecting such works, which remain crucial to scholarly work and more indirectly to undergraduate teaching, but librarians should have a clear view about

the overturn of contemporary criticism. Works such as *Principles of Literary Criticism* or *The Well Wrought Urn* are important not merely because of the weight they bear within the history of modern literary study, nor because they serve as exceptional examples of how critics once worked, but despite those facts. Having survived the winnowing effects of relentless disciplinary change, they represent something of the distilled insight of the New Critics and thus can, and should, be retained in the college library collection on their own merits, rather than the degree to which they conform to current critical opinion. 🐼

## Endnotes

1. **Richards, I. A.** *Principles of Literary Criticism*. 1925. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Javonovitch, 1985. \*
2. **Brooks, Cleanth.** *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*. 1947. New York: Mariner, 1956. \*

\*Editor's note: An asterisk (\*) denotes a title selected for *Resources for College Libraries*.