Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large/Online Edition

Libraries • Policy • Technology • Media

Volume 17, Number 3: April 2017 ISSN 1534-0937

Intersections

The Art of the Beall

Prefatory note: My plan was for this edition of *Cites & Insights* was a roundup on economics and access—more than a hundred items in a handful of overlapping subtopics. The original timing came and went, as I found it easier to focus on *Gold Open Access Journals 2011-2016* than on *C&I*. As I completed the first pass of data gathering, and managed a faster-than-expected pass of article-count checks for "gray 1" journals (journals that were in *DOAJ* on January 1, 2016 but not on January 1, 2017) I figured it would make a good essay for a belated issue.

Except that the source lists for "gray 2 and 3," otherwise known as *Gray OA 2012-2016*, disappeared—and there's been a lot of discussion around that disappearance. If you're wondering: Gray 3 is the portion of Beall-listed journals for which Beall made some sort of plausible case; Gray 2 is the larger portion for which we're expected to trust him with no evidence at all.

So here's a roundup of sorts, with items mostly ranging from January 16, 2017 to April 2017—including a brief humorous piece by Phil Davis, providing the title for this. Thanks, Phil.

Then I remembered that I'd done a rare library-related essay in late December that didn't make it because of the Gray OA issue. So… As for the economics roundup: maybe next issue, whenever that may be.

This service is no longer available.

Even those of us who find "service" a misnomer for Jeffrey Beall's lists of ppppredatory journals and publishers might have been startled by that one-sentence January 15, 2017 replacement for those lists.

Inside This Issue

I have no knowledge of Beall's reasons for taking down the blog and the lists. Nor do I plan to speculate on those reasons. The lists were, of course, still readily available on the Internet Archive and, for that matter, in the freely available [Figshare] spreadsheet that accompanies *Gray OA 2012-2016*.

I've critiqued Beall's "methods" and the whole idea of a blacklist often enough that I see no need to do so now. As a longtime ACLU member, I support Beall's right to say anything he chooses (that doesn't directly incite violence or the like)—but I also recognize that speech can *appropriately* have consequences.

This roundup looks at and comments on some of the stuff since the disappearing act. As usual, most items are in roughly chronological order (as I encountered them) and added opinions are my own. "List" and the correct "lists" are used interchangeably throughout.

What Happened to Jeffrey Beall's List of (Allegedly) Predatory Publishers?

Emil Karlsson asked that question on January 16, 2017 at *Debunking Denialism*. The lede:

> Jeffrey Beall is an academic librarian at the Auraria Library at University of Colorado Denver located in Denver, Colorado. He got tenure in 2012 and became an associate professor. For a number of years, he has maintained and curated a blacklist of allegedly (he calls it "potential, possible, or probable") predatory open access publishers.

Karlsson offers a quick comment on the lists and describes the situation—that both *Scholarly Open Access* and the related Facebook page were essentially purged, that this seems to have been noted first by a presumed "anti-Beall activist"—and speculates as to what might have happened. There are some updates over the following three days, some pointing to items also discussed here.

Perhaps the most interesting part of this particular set of updates is the claim by Cabell's Lacey F. Earle that it was a forced shutdown involving the "academic mafia":

> @CabellsPublish stands behind close personal friend @Jeffrey_Beall who was forced to shut down blog due to threats & politics #academicmafia

More here—and more than 80 comments as well. The comment stream begins with an interesting back-and-forth with Michael Nason about "predatory"—with Karlsson saying:

> Even the most vocal critics of Beall probably admit that there are some open access journals that are predatory in nature.

Nason responding:

> Here, let me fix that for you:
>
> "Even the most vocal critics of Beall are definitely aware that there are some journals that are predatory in nature, but that not all of them are open access. And, open access isn't synonymous with predatory behaviour".

Karlsson begins the next reply with this:

> I do not think any serious person is claiming "predatory if and only if open access".

From everything I could see, Beall consistently claimed that only OA journals could be predatory—and yet I don't believe Karlsson thinks Beall is not a "serious person." (Beall attacked all of OA, but admittedly never claimed that *all* OA journals were predatory or even ppppredatory.)

The comment thread is revealing in a number of ways—such as this Karlsson comment:

> This issue is not about if Beall is right or wrong on particular issues or even if the blacklist is a good or bad idea.
>
> It is about how someone appears to have decided to make a strategic lawsuit against public participation (SLAPP) in an effort to get the list taken down instead of taking part in an open and honest debate (or improving their publisher or journal). It is possible to disagree with Beall on a wide range of issues without taking such anti-intellectual and probably counterproductive action.

At that point, Karlsson "appears to have decided" what caused the blog and lists to go away. That doesn't seem to be well-supported.

There's more, including one from Duncan Weller who finds blacklisting so vital that "it's a job that the science community needs to address by setting up a think tank and watchdog funded by the universities with a legal department to take on the predators." No comment, although Weller repeats that comment elsewhere.

Why did Beall's List of potential predatory publishers go dark?

This brief item, posted January 17, 2017 at *Retraction Watch*, is straightforward—except that the original post offers only speculation, no answers. But there's this same-day update, an apparently official statement from Beall's employer:

> Jeffrey Beall, associate professor and librarian at the University of Colorado Denver, has decided to no longer maintain or publish his research or blog on open access journals and "predatory publishers." CU Denver supports and recognizes the important work Professor Beall has contributed to the field and to scholars worldwide. CU Denver also understands and respects his decision to take down his website scholarlyoa.com at this time. Professor Beall remains on the faculty at the university and will be pursuing new areas of research.

Several dozen comments, with a disturbing number of folks who think that one person is entirely appropriate as the gatekeeper for journal legitimacy.

I won't bother to repeat that in the future, since the Beall fan club was out in force in several places.

No More 'Beall's List'

Carl Straumsheim provided this journalistic effort on January 18, 2017 at *Inside Higher Ed.* The subhead is provocative, albeit accurate:

> Librarian removes controversial list of "predatory" journals and publishers, reportedly in response to "threats and politics."

Given "reportedly" and Lacey F. Earle, it's an accurate statement—and note that Straumsheim scare-quotes "predatory." Straumsheim also points to one of the things that made Beall's work questionable:

> Beall's lists have been controversial among researchers and scholarly communications experts. Advocates of open-access publishing have criticized Beall for being overly negative toward the model. In a 2013 essay, for example, Beall wrote that the open-access movement is an "anti-corporatist, oppressive and negative movement, one that uses young researchers and researchers from developing countries as pawns."

Nothing really new here, but the most balanced early coverage. More than 50 comments, some the usual—and at least one arguing that a *proper* blacklist would *prevent* people from working with blacklisted journals! Also someone uses Wikileaks as a *desirable* model, and "Sean" applauds guilty-until-proven-otherwise as a desirable method of blacklisting…and explicitly said that it's fine for non-predatory journals to be included. After all, it's only the publisher (and authors of articles in the journals) who get hurt by defamatory listings!

Then there's Tracy Lightcap's comment:

> I think there is a bright line rule here: if a publication asks for a fee to publish anything—article, "proceedings", or what have you—it is by definition predatory and illegitimate. If any fees are involved in publishing, they should run the other way and, if they do, the author(s) have an obligation to reveal it. I'm sure everyone knows this and runs the usual check—does the journal list an address in China?—but I'm not sure how much Beall's list contributed. I'm sure he meant for it to be a shaming device, but I'm also sure he found out soon enough that this had no effect.

Whew. So much for all APC-based OA, all hybrid journals, and oh, by the way, Cbina's apparently all bad.

Items not cited

I'm leaving out lots of coverage and discussion because it's repetitive, I never saw it, or it adds little or nothing to the discussion. I'm also trying to not link to sites that may be unavailable, such as newspaper sites that limit you

to ten free articles a month. One such report in a Canadian newspaper is fairly startling in that the reporter implies that journals on Beall's lists consist of nothing but "conspiracy theories and incompetent research." I'm also not dealing with India's own lists, the University Grants Commission, and ranking methods: I lack the background to make sense of that situation. Similarly omitting "oh what shall we do now that the wonderful professor's excellent work is gone?" pieces. They're not hard to find.

Website That Tracked Fake Science Journals Has Suddenly Vanished

Here's an example I perhaps shouldn't bother citing, especially as it's on IFL Science, where the initialism stands for "I F***ing Love" and I've seen other stories indicating that "love" and "understand" don't go hand in hand. The January 23, 2017 piece is by Stephen Luntz and it not only repeats the erroneous "more than 400,000 dubious papers a year" but also assumes that *all* listed journals are "pseudo-peer reviewed." The closest it gets to balance is this sentence: "However, he also faced criticism from genuine scientists who accused him of casting his net too widely, listing some legitimate publications as suspicious simply because he didn't like the look of them." Immediately followed by this:

> Nevertheless, the disappearance of Beall's website has aroused anxiety among those who have watched the rise of predatory journals, publications, and pseudo-science with alarm. Many have noted the timing. When Presidential spokespeople call obvious lies "alternative facts", the idea that anyone with $1,000 to spend can see their claims treated equally as years of painstaking research looks particularly frightening.

I'd call it a stretch to connect the tens of thousands of mostly narrow research papers in listed journals with Trumpworld. For that matter, the commentary about "predatory" conferences is strange:

> He subsequently extended his efforts to inform people about "predatory meetings", conferences that are held where bad science can be presented, once again for a fee, to an audience who can't or won't question it.

So fake conferences are full of real attendees who pay real fees to hear fake papers they won't or can't question? Really?

Mystery as controversial list of predatory publishers disappears

Dalmeet Singh Chawla contributed this reportage on January 17, 2017 at *Science*. It's brief and adds little new except to quote a pseudonymous blogger calling "predatory" journals "a huge problem," but worth noting here because it's at *Science*.

A handful of comments, one essentially repeated from elsewhere, one noting that "Beall had a systemic bias against Open Access" and one with this sentence:

> Beall is the best librarian I ever known, his black lists were beacons to many researchers, fast publication is very tempting, particularly, for young researchers who want to establish good cvs to start their careers, in addition to postgraduates who are limited with a tight schedule. the advance of Beall's lists opened the eyes to the booby traps made by predatory publishers and journals, I, myself was one of their victims when I started my research career. but not anymore, Thanks to Mr Beall.

Post-Beall's List

Karen R. Harker offered the first librarian's comment I encountered, on January 18, 2017 at *Libraries are for Use*. It's a brief item, and I think it's worth quoting the last two (of four) paragraphs:

> Several people have commented about the risk of having a single person making judgments and applying labels of "predatory", although his criteria is clear and documented. Perhaps this is an opportunity for the librarian, researcher, and publishing communities to collaborate in the development of a set of evaluation criteria that could applied more openly. There could be a variety of ways that handle the evaluations – who evaluates what based on which criteria and how frequently. It needn't be something that everyone agrees to, but if there were more voices involved, it might gain more acceptance.
>
> Professionally, I admire Mr. Beall for his fearlessness and his tenaciousness to start and continue with this effort. I do not want to see it gone by the wayside. However, I believe his use of the defamatory label ("predatory") and his resistance to collaboration have made him and his work a lightning rod of controversy. As a collection assessment librarian, I am always looking for tools and methods for comparing the quality of our collections. I have always wanted to expand Beall's methods more broadly, and perhaps now is the opportunity to do so.

My problems with the first paragraph are twofold, one general and one specific. The general problem: I believe blacklists are inherently and philosophically unsound unless actual dangers to life and limb are involved. The specific is the last clause in the first sentence: "although his criteria is clear and documented." Not the "is" rather than "are"—it's a blog post—but the reality: the criteria may have been clear, but Beall rarely bothered to show why a journal or publisher was condemned based on these supposed criteria. More than 85% of the time, we were expected to trust Beall's word. [See this post or the longer article in *C&I* 16.3]

My main problem with the final paragraph is, again, the blacklisting orientation.

Beall's list is removed

Linking to a list is always tricky, and I'm inclined not to attempt deep discussion of this topic at GOAL or, indeed, any direct quotation. Here's a link to Jean-Claude Guédon's post in the thread on January 18, 2017, which quotes some previous items in the thread, adds some forthright opinion and appears to be the last post in the thread. I find Stevan Harnad's comment (quoted in the thread segment) a little bizarre, but Harnad's consistent opposition to *all* Gold OA is nothing new. (As you might expect, I like David Prosser's comment and appreciate his mention of my work, and I'm also close to Guédon's stance.

Roughing out a new system for identifying useless journals

The Library Loon posted this on January 18, 2017 at *Gavia Libraria*—and while I remain unconvinced that a blacklist is a good idea even if done "correctly," the Loon offers a lot of wisdom here—enough that I'm quoting the whole thing:

> The hot news in the generally rather staid world of scholarly communication is the sudden disappearance of Jeffrey Beall and his eponymous List. The Loon will not particularly miss it, to be sure, but she regrets to say that given the outcry apparent on social media, many will.
>
> The last thing open access needs is for another of its enemies to take up Beall's battle standard. It seems safe to ignore Cabell's vaguely-announced offering in this space, as it will doubtless be subscription-only and will face an uphill battle for market penetration and awareness. As for Think-Check-Submit, find the Loon *five authors who actually use it semi-regularly* and she might rethink her earlier sharp skepticism.
>
> Like it or no—and the Loon doesn't, particularly—given the context of Beall's List's former popularity, anything purporting to replace it needs to be as simple to use as it is. A journal is reputable or it isn't, after all. An A-F grading system à la Terms of Service; Didn't Read might also do. In either system, transparency of grading criteria will be vital. The criteria needn't be ground into a casual user's face, of course, but they must be available. They must also apply equally to all journals regardless of business model; the Loon is quite *quite* sick of toll-access Big Deals packed with citation cartels, guano like *Chaos, Solitons, and Fractals*, or the Australasian Journals of Clinician Scammery, and she is all in favor of such publishers earning the guerdon of their guano.
>
> She also believes such a list had better investigate *journals* rather than publishers, at least to start. Did you know, for example, that both *Chaos, Solitons, and Fractals* and the six Australasian Journals of Clini-

cian Scammery were published by none other than Elsevier? As ludicrous to condemn an entire publisher's output over a tiny fraction of that output as to exempt any publisher from scrutiny altogether. Now, once a certain percentage of a given publisher's offerings come out smelling of guano, it seems fairly safe to write off that publisher, but in the interests of lawsuit avoidance, the Loon had rather present the percentages of known guano and as-yet-uninvestigated journals unvarnished; she believes even the rankest publishing neophyte can sort out how to react to that.

What might suitable evaluation criteria be, and what system can be created and sustained to evaluate journals against them? That is the hard part, of course. There can be a tension between the usefulness of a criterion and its ease of investigation. For example, scam journals often have faux persons on their editorial boards, or real persons who did not consent to serve. This is obviously awful, but it is also highly time-consuming to catch a journal at. Easy criteria to judge, such as "does it tout Ulrich's membership?" are also easy for a scam journal to defeat (though the Loon is constantly astonished at how many don't).

Because it is sensible to bootstrap something fast and adapt it as opportunity presents, the Loon inclines toward starting with easy criteria that don't produce giant numbers of false positives. These might include (but doubtless would not be limited to):

- Being on the DOAJ's list of lying liars who lie. (Other lies should also disqualify a journal, but this particular lie has the benefit of being easy to check thanks to DOAJ's list.)
- Not being indexed in DOAJ, or analogous reasonably reputable indexes such as Web of Science. The Loon is not *entirely* sure this should be a deal-killer long-term, but as a bootstrap criterion it should be fairly solid.
- Spamming calls for papers, if a suitable spam-collection mechanism can be developed.
- The usual "indexed in Ulrich's" and "indexed in Google Scholar" nonsense claims. "Look, we have an ISSN, aren't we shiny?" might not be a disqualifier, but it certainly adds a slight odor of guano.
- Being publicly caught publishing total garbage. (Over time, this criterion could be expanded into a statistically well-run sting operation. The Loon would not be at all averse to such a scheme, as long as toll-access journals get their share of guano to desk-reject!)
- Domain hijacking. (This is usually fairly easy to ferret out with a few whois searches. Any competent e-resources or systems librarian will have little difficulty!)

- Potemkin squatter journal publishing essentially nothing. (A check of the Wayback Machine will often hint at how long a Potemkin journal has been pretending to publish.)

> Rather than recruit a large crowd of journal reviewers from the get-go in hopes of building a large backing database, the Loon would be inclined to recruit a smaller cadre and set up the new system in two layers: if the system already has a score for a given journal, present it; otherwise, pass the journal to the reviewer cadre for scoring. This keeps the reviewer cadre from being utterly overwhelmed by the sea of web objects falsely calling themselves journals, most of which see near-zero author interest.
>
> Take these notions for what they are worth; the Loon asserts no ownership in them. By all means improve on them!

A handful of comments, one of which says it's fine to smear all of a publisher's journals—and Elsevier isn't predatory because, I guess, Elsevier.

Again: if for some reason I don't understand it's *necessary* to have a blacklist, then the Loon offers a sensible starting point.

Beall's list and what we need to replace it

This January 23, 2017 piece by Hontas Farmer at *Science 2.0* is interesting in a number of ways, setting aside minor English issues. Farmer's second sentence gets right to it: "A big problem with this list is it was academically classist and biased towards journals in non-English speaking countries."

Farmer has published in and reviewed for a journal from a listed publisher and feels that the journal behaved properly. I do wonder when she talks about OA journals charging $25,000 APCs—to the best of my knowledge, there are no such journals, with the highest APC for any OA journal being $5,200 in 2016 (one journal, with two others at $5,000 even). But most of what she says is worth hearing, even if the numbers are a bit out of whack.

As to her suggestion—well, I'll quote it below and ask one simple question: isn't *DOAJ* good enough?

> How best to replace the idea of a list of predatory publishers? An organization like the NSF or a group of such organizations from more than one country should compile a white list of publishers based on peer review and published criteria. This group should be diverse, multi lingual and multi cultural. This group should represent those from top research institutes to community colleges and those who are retired. The criteria should include at least the following.
>
> 1. Does the journal uphold its own published standards of peer review and governance? How often is it fooled by computer generated garbage papers? How does the journal respond to bad papers

and is it in accordance with their stated standards and general publishing standards?

2. Does the journal provide a clear review process before publication and at least a commentary function after publication? Does the journal allow for publication of comments as papers in their own right? Does the journal allow authors to revise and withdraw their own papers?
3. Does the journal charge a reasonable fee for providing a web only and PDF based service? Any journal of any level that charges more than $2500 for this service should be held suspect. Does the journal allow for waiver of all or part of the fee for hardship cases (and not just in certain countries either)?
4. Does the journal misrepresent itself in any way and when informed of an inaccuracy does it act to correct this?

> This is not an exhaustive list. It can be summed up as ... is money the number one motivator of the publisher and do they have poor ethics in their practices. **Where the journal is published, who it is associated with, where it is indexed, things like that are immaterial. Using such criteria only serves to limit the practice of science to the haves of the world.**

The emphasis in the last paragraph is in the original—and, I believe, worth emphasizing.

List of predatory science journals disappears due to "threats and politics"

I'm citing this January 23, 2017 item at *Uncommon Descent* not because it adds anything useful (it doesn't) but because it appears in such an amusing venue to be commenting on fake science: namely, a website with the tagline "Serving the Intelligent Design Community." Approach with caution or prolonged laughter...

Time for a new list of junk journals

So says Zen Faulkes in this January 25, 2017 post at *NeuroDojo*. Faulkes *does* recognize that Beall was explicitly opposed to OA in general and says that junk journals aren't that big a problem, but still desires a blacklist:

> People want resources to help them find their way in the wild west of scientific publishing in the early twenty-first century. And while the Directory of Open Access Journals is a valuable, it has a problem: it's a whitelist. Beall's list was a blacklist, and somewhere along the way, Beall mentioned something important:
>
> > No one lies about being on a blacklist.

> We can't spend all our time sending obviously bad manuscripts to junk journals to punk them. I kind of hate to say it, but we could use a journal blacklist. Maybe even one that would call out legitimate publishers who don't clean out their stable as they should.

But but but…it takes *less* effort to see whether a journal is in *DOAJ* than it did to see whether a journal was on Beall's list: for the latter, you generally need to know the publisher as well as the journal.

Of course, if the much smaller journal blacklist was transparently prepared using clear criteria and included *all* questionable journals, regardless of their business models, that might be different.

Steering clear of predatory open access journals: beyond Beall's List

This opinion piece by Marc Couture appeared on January 25, 2016 at *University Affairs/Affaires Universitaires*, which you can probably guess is Canadian. Couture notes the shutdown of the blog and lists, then goes on to add some refreshing perspective.

> While I acknowledge Mr. Beall's undeniable contribution, I think it necessary to add some qualification to the value of the list that he built up over the years and, more generally, to the usefulness of "blacklists" or "whitelists" when making informed decisions as to which open access journals to publish in – or not to publish in.
>
> Mr. Beall has publicly posted the (rather long) list of criteria and indicators that he once used to assess a publisher or a journal. Although some clearly point to fraud or false representation, others are more questionable. One recent study shows that journals seen as legitimate and even prestigious by researchers in a particular field may fail Mr. Beall's criteria. The problem stems from the lack of transparency regarding the manner in which Mr. Beall applied the criteria in his decisions—which he took alone—to put publishers or journals on his blacklist.
>
> In many cases, he only gave general and sometimes very brief comments in support of his decisions, which made it difficult to understand what role the various criteria played, not to mention the threshold at which a publisher or journal would find itself included on the list. There was an "appeal committee" available to anyone wishing to challenge a decision, but nothing was known about its operating method or its makeup.

That first sentence in the third paragraph above is misleading: in *most* cases, as I've already noted, Beall gave *no comments whatsoever* to support his decisions.

He adds other reasons to distrust the lists—the binary nature, the "one bad journal spoils the whole barrel" attitude (which would manifestly condemn at least the largest subscription publishers), his bland assumption that only OA journals can be predatory.

Couture explicitly prefers whitelists and specifically the strengthened *DOAJ*, while also noting that no list inclusion can be absolute.

All in all, one of the best commentaries. But then there's…

What should we do now Beall's List has gone?

If you know much about Mike Taylor, who posted this on January 26, 2017 at *Sauropod Vertebra Picture of the Week* [SVPoW], you can guess the answer: **Nothing**.

> To get this out of the way: it's *always* a bad thing when legal threats make information quietly disappear; to that extent, at least, Beall has my sympathy.
>
> That said—over all, I think making Beall's List was probably not a good thing to do in the first place, being an essentially negative approach, as opposed to DOAJ's more constructive whitelisting approach. But under Beall's sole stewardship it was a disaster, due to his well-known ideological opposition to *all* open access. So I think it's a net win that the list is gone.
>
> But, more than that, I would prefer that it not be replaced.
>
> Researchers need to learn the very very basic research skills required to tell a real journal from a fake one. Giving them a blacklist *or* a whitelist only conceals the real issue, which is that *you need those skills* if you're going to be a researcher.
>
> Finally, and I'm sorry if this is harsh, I have very little sympathy with anyone who is caught by a predatory journal. Why would you be so stupid? How can you expect to have a future as a researcher if your critical thinking skills are *that* lame? Think Check Submit is all the guidance that anyone needs; and frankly much *more* than people really need.
>
> Here is the *only* thing you need to know, in order to avoid predatory journals, whether open-access or subscription-based: **if you are not already familiar with a journal—because it's published research you respect, or colleagues who you respect have published in it or are on the editorial board— then do not submit your work to that journal.**
>
> It really is that simple.
>
> So what should we do now Beall's List has gone? Nothing. Don't replace it. Just teach researchers how to do research. (And supervisors who are not doing that already are not doing their jobs.)

I'm not a scientist. I don't normally publish in peer-reviewed journals (for one thing, I lack the access required to do a Really Good Literature Review and would fall asleep attempting to do one). I'd add to Taylor's bolded comment: "If you want to give a less well-known journal a chance, at least check to see whether it's in *DOAJ*."

More than two dozen comments. One asks how much time they'd need to invest in deciding whether to accept requests to review. (My answer: *DOAJ* has a very short URL—doaj.org—and takes very little time to check. Another commenter notes that *truly* questionable journals won't be asking scholars to do peer review because they don't *do* peer review.) Another, from a pseudonymous commenter, attacks Beall *and* DOAJ, calls for criminal prosecution, and generally muddies the water (Taylor responds, disagreeing with every one of the five points in the comment.)

It's reasonable to question Taylor's simple formula, especially as it disfavors newer and smaller journals. It's also reasonable to note that this only helps authors, not readers. The Library Loon does indeed question that in:

Who knows whose journals?

Posted February 2, 2017 at *Gavia Libraria*, and I'll mostly just link to it. The Loon makes a case. I'm not sure I'm qualified to argue for or against the case in general, but I don't see that the case (that it's non-trivial to identify the best journals) justifies a blacklist (and see Cameron Neylon's post later in this discussion). I may be wrong.

A famed journal blacklist is dead. Long live a blacklist!

That headline appears over an Ivan Oransky and Adam Marcus story posted January 27, 2017 at *STAT*—and it's an odd one, starting with a huge picture of Beall and mourning the loss of "an important voice" in "the community of science watchdogs" but also…eventually…recognizing that there just might have been flaws:

> But his targets were not the only ones who strenuously objected to his site. Beall was a vocal opponent of the author-pays model, and that made for enemies among open-access advocates as well. There were those, like Walt Crawford, who said Beall had tunnel vision, only going after open-access journals even though traditional "closed-access" publishers print a lot of crap, too. (The latter is certainly true, we'd agree.) And then there were some, like Karen Coyle, who argued that Beall was biased against publishers from the developing world.
>
> Some of those critics may have simply wanted Beall's list to improve. And every venture benefits from constructive criticism like that. But those who wanted to see it go away now have their wish. And regardless of the site's flaws, that's a loss.

I don't always agree with Karen Coyle (search "privatizing" if you're interested) but she's usually right, including this case. The piece goes on to say we need better lists, including better blacklists.

Blacklists are technically infeasible, practically unreliable and unethical. Period.

If only Cameron Neylon would say how he *really* feels, not wishy-washy stuff like the title of this January 29, 2017 post at *Science in the Open*.

This well-argued post says, in plain language, why blacklists don't work even if not flawed by personal bias and animus. He links to my key writings on the OA/Beall aspects, but he's making a more general case, and makes it so well that I'll quote the central portion in full (Neylon's blog isn't just CC BY, it's CC0!):

> But the real reason the list doesn't help isn't because of its motivations or its quality. It's a fundamental structural problem with blacklists. They don't work, they can't work, and they never will work. Even when they're put together by "the good guys" they are politically motivated. They have to be because they're also technically impossible to make work.
>
> ### *Blacklists are technically infeasible*
>
> Blacklists are never complete. Listing is an action that has to occur after any given agent has acted in a way that merits listing. Whether that listing involves being called before the House Committee on Un-American Activities or being added to an online list it can only happen after the fact. Even if it seems to happen before the fact, that just means that the real criteria are a lie. The listing still happens after the real criteria were met, whether that is being a Jewish screenwriter or starting up a well intentioned but inexpert journal in India.
>
> Whitelists by contrast are by definition always complete. They are a list of all those agents that have been certified as meeting a certain level of quality assurance. There may be many agents that could meet the requirements, but if they are not on the list they have not yet been certified, because that is the definition of the certification. That may seem circular but the logic is important. Whitelists are complete by definition. Blacklists are incomplete by definition. And that's before we get to the issue of criteria to be met vs criteria to be failed.
>
> ### *Blacklists are practically unreliable*
>
> A lot of people have been saying "we need a replacement for the list because we were relying on it". This, to be blunt, was stupid. Blacklists are discriminatory in a way that makes them highly susceptible to legal challenge. All that is required is that it be shown that either the criteria

for inclusion are discriminatory (or libelous) or that they are being applied in a discriminatory fashion. The redress is likely to be destruction of the whole list. Again, by contrast with a Whitelist the redress for discrimination is *inclusion.* Any litigant will want to ensure that the list is maintained so they get listed. Blacklists are at high risk of legal takedown and should never be relied on as part of a broader system. Use a Whitelist, or Whitelists (and always provide a mechanism for showing that something that isn't yet certified should still be included in the broader system).

If your research evaluation system relies on a Blacklist it is fragile, as well as likely being discriminatory.

Blacklists are inherently unethical

Blacklists are designed to create and enforce collective guilt. Because they use negative criteria they will necessarily include agents that should never have been caught up. Blacklisting entire countries means that legal permanent residents, indeed it seems *airline staff* are being refused boarding onto flights to the US this weekend. Blacklisting publishers seeking to experiment with new forms of review, or new business models both stifles innovation and discriminates against new entrants. Calling out bad practice is different. Pointing to *one* organisation and saying its business practices are dodgy is perfectly legitimate if done transparently, ethically and with due attention to evidence. Collectively blaming a whole list is not.

Quality assurance is hard work and doing it transparently, consistently and ethically is even harder. Consigning an organisation to the darkness based on a mis-step, or worse a failure to align with a personal bias, is actually quite easy, hard to audit effectively and usually over simplifying a complex situation. To give a concrete example, DOAJ maintains a list of publishers that claim to have DOAJ certification but which do not. Here the ethics is clear, the DOAJ is a Whitelist that is publicly available in a transparent form (whether or not you agree with the criteria). Publishers that claim membership they don't have can be legitimately, and individually, called out. Such behaviour is cause for serious concern and appropriate to note. But DOAJ does not then propose that these journals should be cast into outer darkness, merely notes the infraction.

So what should we do? Absolutely nothing!

We already have plenty of perfectly good Whitelists. Pubmed listing, WoS listing, Scopus listing, DOAJ listing. If you need to check whether a journal is running traditional peer review at an adequate level, use some combination of these according to your needs. Also ensure there

> is a mechanism for making a case for exceptions, but use Whitelists not Blacklists by default.

Yep. As I said in the last of a few comments:

> Thanks for stating the case against blacklists--in general--more clearly than I've been able to. Also, of course, thanks for the mentions.

I am still trying to figure out what my new research agenda will be: Jeffrey Beall

I'm almost obliged to cite this February 3, 2017 post by Prasad Ravindranath at *Science Chronicle*. Ravindranath got Beall involved in a Facebook chat around 6:30 p.m. in India—early in the morning in Colorado.

Beall absolutely denied any connection with Cabell's, tossed out dismissive comments about Think! Check! Submit! and otherwise was, well, Beall. Ravindranath's own opinion is fairly clear:

> Beall, wherever you are and whatever you do, let me wish you the very best. I saw a good friend in you and professionally you were a huge help to me whenever I wrote about predatory journals. Wonder who would take that place now. I don't see anyone in the horizon. Many in the scientific community might have disagreed with you on many issues, but many have thoroughly appreciated your selfless, single-minded initiative. Good bye, I'll miss you, the scientific community too will miss your valiant efforts to call a spade a spade. Take care.

Cabell's gets involved in the comments, and a byplay involving bias and objectivity takes place as well.

Predatory versus low cost?

This essay is out of sequence, appearing *before* the lists disappeared, but it's still worth noting: David Wojick on September 8, 2016 at *David Wojick's writings and stuff*.

Wojick looks at the Shen/Björk article:

> The report is Shen and Bjork, "'Predatory' open access: a longitudinal study of article volumes and market characteristics," BMC, 2015. What they did was study a sample of the roughly 11,000 journals on Beall's list of so-called predatory journals, and then they project the results to the entire list. This is crude, so the results are admittedly rough estimates and we will treat them that way by rounding them off a lot.

He rounds off to "over 400,000"—still too high by a quarter million, but, as he responded when I commented to that effect, the difference may not matter for Wojick's purposes.

He sees the "explosive growth" in journals on the lists and article publications as *good* news "masked by a colossal conceptual confusion.

> Specifically, the so-called "predatory" net is actually capturing a lot of simple low cost journals. Note that they classify about 11,000 journals as predatory. Last I knew there were an estimated 30,000 indexed journals. So they are classifying roughly one third to one quarter that number of journals as predatory. Not likely. The total number of published articles may be as high as two million so the rough fraction is the same, one third to one quarter. Are we to believe that this many articles are somehow being published fraudulently? Surely not.
>
> The key datum is the average APC of less than $200. Here is what I think is happening. The developing countries, especially China and India, are pouring a lot into research, hence generating a lot of articles. (Last I knew China was overtaking the US as the leading generator of scientific articles.) In pace with this we are seeing the rapid growth of the low budget APC journal, to serve the low budget researcher market. This makes economic sense and there is nothing predatory about it.

There's more. Some I agree with—e.g., that only a small fraction of journals on Beall's lists are actually "predatory" and that more of them represent deliberately low-cost publishing models that may be needed for the global south and developing nations. Also that low-cost journals probably won't be as fancy as high-cost ones, and that this may not matter.

Some I'm less certain of, such as Wojick's claim that peer review "may be too expensive for this low cost business model" and maybe that doesn't matter. Peer review should not be expensive.

Wojick's impressed that the number of "active journals" on the lists increased from 2,000 in 2010 to over 8,000 in 2014, while the number of articles jumped from over 50,000 to over 400,000. Except that only about 2,600 journals on the lists at the time the article was researched actually published articles in 2014, not 8,000, and those journals only published about 114,000 articles, not over 400,000. For that matter, the actual average APC per article in 2014 was $299 (among journals with APCs), not "less than $200" (the average *of journal APCs* in the Shen/ Björk research—I didn't calculate such an average because it's not meaningful, especially since most "journals" didn't actually publish articles).

Wojick makes a case for the merits of $150-APC journals. For 2015, 1,045 of the listed journals (that actually published articles) had APCs between $100 and $195, and those journals published 64,025 articles in 2015 (out of just under 300,000 total). Still, the 357 journals (with articles in 2015) in the same APC range that are in *DOAJ* published 36.386 articles in 2015—and, perhaps more noteworthy, 6,749 *DOAJ*-listed journals active in 2015 published 250,954 articles *while charging no APCs at all*.

Still, I think Wojick makes useful points, weakened mostly by the fact that there's nothing preventing low-cost journals from being in *DOAJ*. I'd suggest that careful copyediting and layout work are both things that *do* cost real money, and quite a few low-cost/free journals are quite clear

about not doing one or both of these labor-intensive tasks. (For layout, a decent template will take care of most of the work.)

Critical thinking in a post-Beall vacuum

Maybe it makes sense that this commentary by INASP's Andy Nobes, appearing March 29, 2017 at *Research Information*, appears after the Wojick discussion—especially since Nobes seems happy to use "predatory" *without* scare quotes or qualification as a proper term for all the journals and publishers on Beall's lists. To me, that bland acceptance reduces the credibility of this discussion, and maybe that's unfair.

> Beall's List was highly flawed – it captured the main players in the predatory journal industry quite well but Beall was clearly struggling to keep up with some of the new arrivals on the scene, and I think he was too harsh on some genuine but low-quality regional publishers which deserved the benefit of the doubt and yet were never re-assessed. Some entries on the list were documented and well-justified, while others had no explanation or background, and the reason for their inclusion was not obvious or transparent.

I dislike the term "low-quality" here for low-cost regional publishers, but that's me. The last sentence is distinctly flawed: "A few entries on the list were well-documented, while the vast majority had no explanation or background" is a true statement, and in my mind failing to explain 87% of inclusions on a list clearly intended to damage journals and publishers is reason enough to condemn the lists outright.

Nobes has some useful things to say here, to be sure.

The Art of the Beall

Let's be clear: this Phil Davis piece at *The Scholarly Kitchen* appeared on April 1, 2017 and it's a goof, an April Fool's Day joke. It's short and nicely done, and I won't quote it (go read the original). I mention it because it is clever, and because I copied the title.

Predatory journals and researcher needs

This April 3, 2017 editorial by Pippa Smart appears at *Learned Publishing*, a subscription journal((**full disclosure**: I've published there, an invited piece based on a study of *very* early OA that originally appeared in the May 2001 *Cites & Insights*); the editorial itself is freely available online.

The key to this piece may be the subtitle: "What to us is predatory may simply be a new model." In a sense, it's building on (and credits) David Wojick's ideas. Although Wojick almost certainly overstates the size of the beyond-*DOAJ* need, that doesn't make his basic point wrong.

> There is, rightly, a concern that if low-quality or fraudulent research becomes readily available (similar to 'fake news') this will be detrimental to research globally, and there is certainly a risk of this where researchers only have access to such information. However, we need only look back 20 years when use of digital journals was not as widespread as now and most developing country researchers relied on out-of-date printed materials in their institutional library. The fact that there is now a wealth of good (as well as bad) content available to them must only be beneficial.

A bit later, Smart offers five examples that point out difficulties with the "predatory" model; they're all worth reading, including this one (which I find especially worrisome):

> Another publisher/journal with whom I work was dropped from DOAJ when the acceptance criteria was updated. The reason it was dropped is that the journal is not particularly efficient and has not prioritized resubmission for inclusion. Unfortunately for them, removal from DOAJ has been interpreted as indicating that they are predatory.

I'd bet there are hundreds if not thousands of small journals out there, some of them formerly in *DOAJ*, that are as ethical and sound as other journals but either lack the resources or the focus to reapply successfully. I think of those as "gray 1" journals and suspect that relatively few of them are questionable, much less "predatory." (Gay 1 journals published at least 140,000 articles in 2016, down from roughly 158,000 in 2015 and 163,000 in 2014.)

This is a piece worth reading. The concluding paragraph:

> I think that we have to accept that enforcing the western journal business and operational model on the world is not feasible—and may not be scalable in the long term. We need to look more to education and less to criticism. This was put perfectly by Liz Wager in her recent article, 'Why we should worry less about predatory publishers and more about the quality of research and training at our academic institutions' (Wager, 2017). I couldn't say it better myself.

Anarchy and exploitation in scientific communication

This piece, by Philip G. Altbach on March 31, 2017 at *University World News*, is troubling on several counts. The lede:

> Technology, greed, a lack of clear rules and norms, hyper-competitiveness and a certain amount of corruption have resulted in confusion and anarchy in the world of scientific communication. Not too long ago, scientific publication was largely in the hands of university publishers and non-profit scientific societies, most of which were controlled by the academic community.

There's more, in what almost seems like an elegy for the Good Old Days when there were only a few universities and students and academic conferences and publishing was "all quite 'gentlemanly', controlled by a male-dominated scientific elite." But now there are hundreds of millions of students and tens of thousands of universities—and this rather startling assertion:

> There are now more than 150,000 scientific journals, of which 64,000 claim to be peer reviewed.

Can those numbers possibly be right? (That's an honest question, and I suspect the answer has much to do with how you define "scientific," "journal" and "are now.")

Altbach simply assumes that all journals on Beall's lists are "fake journals" (my quotes, not his) and makes a bad assertion worse by slamming two countries in particular:

> The fake journals are often published from Pakistan or Nigeria by invisible publishers and editors. They often claim to be peer reviewed and list internationally prominent academics on their editorial boards – people who seldom actually agreed to serve there and find it difficult to have their names removed when they request it. But almost all papers submitted tend to be published quickly once a fee, often substantial, is paid to the publisher.

Whew. In fact, *by far* the largest number of 2015 articles from journals on the lists come from India (161,920); Pakistan and Nigeria are fifth and sixth, and *oombined* account for fewer than 8,000 articles, less than 5% of India's output. Also, the fees are rarely "substantial" at least in Western terms; low-cost journals are the norm.

He also flatly states that *most* scientific papers have "little scholarly value" and repeats that there's a "huge new coterie of fake publishers."

I'd like to point out the redeeming strengths in this commentary. Maybe you'll see things I missed.

Postscript

I had another 15 pieces tagged as "oa-pred," some preceding the disappearance of the lists, some more recent. After inspecting them, I've abandoned them all, including the cluster related to yet another stunt piece of "scholarship" having to do with editorial boards. If my random thoughts aren't sufficiently clear from this roundup, my apologies.

One closing thought: when a journal has no print version and no full-time copyeditors or layout people, with all submission, peer review and publishing being done electronically, why *can't* it be published out of an apartment? Apple, Google and Hewlett-Packard all began in garages; what makes small-ejournal publishing so dependent on office buildings?

Libraries

Libraries and Communities

It's been a long time since any C&I essay carried the "Libraries" flag, and even longer since I discussed library issues that weren't directly related to technology. For that matter, I've mostly stopped tagging library items (that don't directly relate to some other ongoing topic) because I think other, younger, smarter people are more qualified to discuss them.

The most *recent* item in this group is from May 2014, and the items go back to 2010 or earlier (I see that 21 of 41 items are from December 22, 2010, so I suspect that's when they came over from an earlier tagging system). At the time, I thought these merited citing and that I might have useful insights, and that the relationships between libraries and their communities (of patrons, of users, parent organizations, whatever) was a useful organizing principal. Is that true at this late date? Read and see… Do note that some of these items are from colleagues I consider to be friends.

Turns out that the first group of these—all tagged December 22, 2010—are in *reverse* chronological order, most recent first. After that come somewhat more recent items.

What do they really need?

Meredith G. Farkas asked that question on December 13, 2010 at *Information Wants to be Free*. Damned if the moderately long discussion doesn't hold up pretty well more than six years later. The lede:

> I'm not sure if I've become more cynical or just more observant, but lately I feel like I've been seeing things through new eyes. We make so many assumptions in this profession, often based on the idea that we know what students need and want. Time and again, research has shown that we're usually wrong. Some of the things we think are great might actually be great… just not for the average college student. Some things create a whole different set of problems. I've been thinking a lot about how so many of our efforts to make things simpler for our students only seem to make it more difficult for them to find the best resources for their papers. Are we making things better or just more complicated?

That's followed by one specific example and a number of related items. The example has to do with whether it's better for students to offer broad federated searches or to go directly to all-scholarly databases (I'm oversimplifying here). Later we get the issue of how you teach this stuff most effectively, and specifically whether screencasts work very well.

To some extent, this may be a "sometimes you just need to give them the damn fish" piece, but there's a lot of good thought here. I'll leave it with the closing paragraph:

> And don't get me started on ebooks or patron-driven acquisitions! I'll save those for future posts. I'm not saying I have all the answers—or any of them for that matter—but I do think the answers for figuring out what our patrons need come from… wait for it… *our patrons*. We need to understand how they do research, how they use our current resources, why some of them don't use the library, and what they want from the library that they're not currently getting. So often, library surveys ask about their satisfaction with our current services, not what the ideal library would look like or how we can support their research needs. They may never even have thought about those things themselves. We need an in-depth understanding of our users, through focus groups, surveys, ethnographic studies and more. And while studies like those from Project Information Literacy are fantastic, they aren't a substitute for studying your own unique population. Development of technologies in the library world is way too vendor and librarian-centric, when the focus should be on what it is our students really and truly need.

"I do think the answers for figuring out what our patrons need come from… wait for it… *our patrons.*" Hmm.

Quote for Today

First the quote itself: "Librarians are the worst enemies of books there are."

Then the link, to "Rufus F."'s November 10, 2010 essay at *Ordinary Times*. And the first paragraph following that quote:

> He smiles sardonically when he says this, an amiable old fart that the library keeps around to shelve books. With his fire-hose arms and gut like a sack of wheat, by law, his name must be Gus or Gord or Hank. It's questionable that he grew up in a home with a television set or was born after North and South Korea declared war. And when he mutters this quip, he has a mordant half-smile that sets his white mustache diagonally on his face. He was responding to my own gibe- he lit up like a kerosene lamp when I noted that the library "seems none too fond of books", thinking maybe he'd found a kindred spirit. In reality, I'm just tickled by amiable old farts who have long passed the time of keeping their opinions to themselves in fear of 'professional repercussions' and who will instead, at the slightest encouragement, let loose with a flood of invective, dirty jokes, phlegm and wisdom.

Beyond that…it's tough. The writer, who comes off as sort of a grizzled old Luddite like me—except that he's 35 years old—appears to be writing about McMaster University in Ontario, but seems to bring public libraries into the discussion as well.

The discussion is—well, I don't know what to say. As one who's bemoaned the seeming wish of some academic librarians to get rid of Those

Damn Books (or at least send them off to rot in a remote facility), I was prepared to be sympathetic. But…

Well, hell. Herewith the last two paragraphs (before a footnote identifying the university), noting that you really need to read the 58 comments to try to get the full flavor:

> However (and this is the point of at least 50% of what I write here), there is no coherent reason that progressives should accept the adulteration and debasement of their culture in the name of progress. If environmental degradation and the loss of social mobility distress people on the left, then the growing *cultural inequality*—elevating culture for the few and mean-spirited pabulum for everyone else—should enrage liberals just as much as it does conservatives, and for the love of God, I *hope* cultural decline still upsets conservatives. And if you need some examples of political liberals who are cultural conservatives, look to the university; I have yet to meet an academic in the humanities who is not a cultural conservative, nor one who would admit it openly.
>
> Or just look to the old-timers in your place of employment. I mean, Gus might be a churlish old tub of grievances, but at least he's not a full-time compulsive liar like every other functionary of the mall. He's right—they're the enemies of books, and all other attempts at clear and enduring thought. But they're in the majority.

Given the antepenultimate sentence, it's not hard to see why some commentators thought Rufus F. was being a trifle hard on libraries. Just to repeat, with emphasis added to the last sentence (and "the mall" is pretty clearly what he believes the library has become):

> I mean, Gus might be a churlish old tub of grievances, but at least **he's not a full-time compulsive liar like every other functionary of the mall**.

Damn.

Using Library Experts Wisely

Rob Weir published this on July 16, 2010 at *Inside Higher Ed*. It's about his experience (as a faculty member) integrating a subject librarian into a course, rather than offering the usual library orientation.

"The usual library orientation" may assume facts not in evidence, of course: I don't remember any time during my inglorious student days at the University of California when a library orientation was offered, much less required. Maybe that's why I didn't use library resources well. Of course, that was a long time ago…

This particular success story is worth reading and energizing—but one has to wonder how many schools have enough librarians to offer such intensive integration. Sure sounds good, though. I won't offer excerpts; it's not all that long.

Do read the comments, even if one of those feels like a somewhat stereotypical "don't use librarian stereotypes" response.

Witnessing the technological divide

This post by Amanda Halfpenny appeared on July 2, 2010 on *BiblioBlond's Blog*, which is still there but hasn't had a post since November 2013.

> The past two years in library school I have fallen into a rather "techy librarian" group. I've been greatly influenced by local librarian friends like Amy Buckland, Lora Baiocco and Graham Lavender who all promote web-based technologies and e-resources in an effort to improve and expand on current library services. My involvement in Web 2.You has also allowed me to meet and discuss new technologies in libraries with great minds like Michael Stephens and Michael Porter along with many other engaging thinkers. I even found myself visiting out of curiosity the websites, blogs or Twitter accounts of various libraries to see how they were using the web to reach out to users. I took the only Web Design course offered through the School of Information Studies at McGill in an effort to increase my ability to reach out to users via the web.
>
> The main reason I have been such a huge proponent of Library 2.0 is its attempts to "meet the users where they are". I have heard so often in the past two years the phrase "we can't wait for the users to come to the library; we have to go to them". All this has gotten me very excited about the potential of Web-based technologies in libraries. Then I began as a director of a small library in a more "rural" area. In the past week that I have been directly serving our users, I have realized how far off my expectations were of the average level of the technological literacy of the library users in my new community.

2010 was a bit late for Library 2.0 posts, but it's never too late to recognize that almost all library conditions, technological or otherwise, are local.

Her two examples are unusual (I think) and perhaps worth reading in the original: two youngish patrons bringing CD-Rs into the library to print out their CVs—in both cases, saved in Microsoft Works.

> I checked and in both cases, the original document had been saved as a "Microsoft Works" file which meant that it was not compatible with the library's Microsoft Office. I was full of questions: What was Microsoft Works? (I've since looked it up) Who still uses CDs for saving files needing regular updates like a C.V.? Apparently the users in my community do.

I suspect my first question in this case might be: "I wonder whether Word will open a Works file?" I know my version will; maybe her library was different. And in 2010 I was certainly still using CD-Rs as an easy way to "transmit" files securely to publishers and elsewhere. In any case, she was able to help. And the last paragraph:

> Come'on users, didn't you get the memo? Information is all going to be e-based. For library services you will interact with librarian avatars and follow our tweets to discover new releases and upcoming activities. Ahem, I think that I will need to rethink my Library 2.0 approach with my new library community. I'm not saying that all members of my community are technological illiterate but I think that rather than starting a library twitter account for my library users to follow, I might concentrate my efforts on offering some good old fashion computer workshops like "How to open an email account". I really like the courses offered by the Milwaukee Public Library. I might use some of their computer class curriculum as a template for developing my own courses. To be continued…

Six years later, those "good old fashioned computer workshops" still appear to be worthwhile even in a small city where one out of eight residents is a scientist with security clearance—you know, one of those backward places.

Who Are YOUR Users?

In a somewhat similar vein, Andy Burckhardt celebrates the locality and community-centeredness of libraries in this May 5, 2010 post on his eponymous blog. (At the time, it was called "Information Tyrannosaur.")

> Libraries may be much smaller than a company like Google, but because of that they can be much more focused. Google is trying to "organize the world's information." Libraries aren't trying to do that. We're trying to organize and provide access for information that's relevant to our users.
>
> Because there are a lot of small libraries serving different communities, we can provide resources that's relevant to them. The Fletcher Free Library here in Burlington lends out gardening tools. This is because they know that there's a lot of interest in home gardening in this area. Because libraries are small and many we can know our specific communities and deliver value from that knowledge.
>
> Knowing our users is one of our big competitive advantages, so don't forget to make use of it. In things like implementing new technologies, figure out what YOUR users are using.

Neither the start nor the whole of the post, and he follows with examples. It's short, and pretty much still as relevant as it was then.

Several Items Skipped…

I find that I'm skipping over lots of items that say some combination of:

- Libraries should meet the needs of *their* community, not some abstract Community.

- Librarians should ask what patrons (and would-be patrons) want…and, equally important, should both listen to and act on the results (while still following sound professional tenets).
- All too often, this is said with an overlay of "even if this means putting up with those damn printed books we all know we should be rid of by now," rarely said so bluntly.

Some of this said in items already offered, and it does get redundant.

Seven Arguments for Building New Libraries

This one's more than *seven* years old, by Jamie LaRue on December 5, 2009 at *myliblog*—which is now *James LaRue*, just as LaRue himself is now director of ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom. This is from his library-director days and is a fine, community-oriented, rejoinder to those who say we don't need any new public libraries.

The seven arguments, each of which comes with a brief paragraph:

- The library is an anchor store and traffic generator.
- Library construction is a powerful economic stimulus, esp. in a recession.
- Library buildings are a bridge over the digital divide.
- The Internet encourages, not replaces, library use.
- Library buildings foster community, both through providing meeting space and lifelong learning programming.
- Library buildings manifest and reinforce a statement of community values.
- Library buildings are an investment in our children's brains.

The expansions are excellent and in one case linked to research.

Serve the Community or Serve the Individual

Brian Herzog considered this distinction in an October 27, 2009 post at *Swiss Army Librarian*.

> I know that as a library, we are here to serve the community. But on a day-to-day basis, I don't work with the community, I work with individual people.
>
> Are the two mutually-exclusive? This is all just rhetorical thinking on my part, but two interactions this month brought this dichotomy to light and got me thinking about it.

In the first scenario, a patron complained that the computers were full all the time, frequently with kids playing games or checking Facebook, when he wanted to be job-hunting. In the second, a patron asked if the library

could digitize (and OCR) the Town Annual Report, and when told it would be a while, equated herself with The Community.

> So, what is a librarian to do? In the first situation, the bottom line was that the patron wanted us to stop other patrons from using computers for hours at a time so that *he* could use a computer for hours at a time. In the second, the patron wanted us to scrap our project timeline for improving access to all Town records for all patrons so we could focus on the records she wanted.
>
> The problem seems to stem from point of view. The library's point of view is to serve all patrons equally, as faceless members of the community. The patrons' point of view is that they want whatever subset of our service they're interested in right now, without consideration to how that impacts other patrons.

It's an interesting distinction and Herzog discusses the scenarios. I like part of one discussion so much I'll quote it:

> If someone "checks out" a library resource, be it by taking home a book or by using one of our computers, they are pretty much entitled to use it for whatever they want, so long as they don't damage it.
>
> This means that if someone checks out a book and uses it for the three-week loan period to prop up a broken table leg, they are entitled to do that. Similarly, if someone spends their hour on the computer playing games, that is their business. Libraries make information and resources *available*, not police how patrons put them to use. But to the first patron, us not kicking someone off a computer so he could (ironically) do the same thing they were doing is not providing good service.

Now, back to chronological order…
I only cited one-third of the December 22 group for a variety of reasons including space. Remaining items are in chronological order, more or less.

The Public Library Manifesto

Did I mention that manifestos tend to bother me? The subhead for this lengthy David Morris piece on May 6, 2011 at *yes! magazine* doesn't help: "Why libraries matter, and how we can save them."

After opening with a truly odd *and atypical* situation—Fort Worth removing "Public" from the name of its library and saying, in a press release, "Why? Simply put, to keep up with the times."—we get this lede:'

> In an age of greed and selfishness, the public library stands as an enduring monument to the values of cooperation and sharing. In an age where global corporations stride the earth, public libraries remains firmly rooted in local communities. In an age of widespread cynicism

> and distrust of government, the tax-supported public library has widespread, enthusiastic support.
>
> This is not the time to take the word "public" out of the public library. It is time to put it in capitals.

I'll admit that I find the Fort Worth change odd (part of a "rebranding" paid for by a grant from the Fort Worth—*wait for it*—Public Library Foundation). It's tempting to suggest that "only in Texas" would removing "public" from the name of a tax-supported public library be considered keeping up with the times, but I wasn't there (in 2008) and don't know the actual reasons.

What about this "manifesto," though? Are public libraries in need of saving? Does this article provide useful ways to affect that salvation?

My own response is "no, and no." But I've never bought into the "Now, the lights are beginning to go out" storyline with regard to America's public libraries (that's a verbatim quote from the article): it is simply and demonstrably not true in general, and I continue to believe that public libraries should argue from strength rather than weakness (and am pleased to see that EveryLibrary seems to take that approach). It's usually not a matter of saving a failing institution, it's a matter of strengthening thousands of thriving local institutions.

I looked for the manifesto here, the clear statement of policies and aims. I found none. I looked for ways offered to "save" libraries. The closest I found to the latter is this:

> Because most libraries get 90 percent of their funding from local taxes, grassroots initiative can have a major impact. When activists have managed to put a library funding measure one the ballot, they usually win. In 2010, some 87 percent of these ballot initiatives were approved across the country.
>
> We need a grassroots effort to defend our public libraries, an effort that can and should be part of a growing nationwide and international effort to defend the public sphere itself. Such efforts have begun.

Reading that first paragraph, one might conclude that library funding initiatives all or mostly come about because of "activists." I'm suspicious of that narrative. I'm *not* suspicious of grassroots efforts—but they should be to *improve* public libraries, not generally to "defend" them. Following that last link leads to a discursion that…well, here's the final paragraph:

> To deliver us from current economic and ecological calamities will require more than administering a few tweaks to the operating system that runs our society. A complete retooling is needed—a paradigm shift that revises the core principles that guide our culture top to bottom. At this historical moment, the commons vision of a society where "we" matters as much as "me" shines as a beacon of hope for a better world.

Maybe, maybe not.

3D printing—is it for libraries?

This January 2, 2013 post by Phil Bradley on his eponymous blog is to some extent a commentary on and response to Hugh Rundle's January 2, 2013 post "Mission creep—a 3D printer will not save your library." Probably worth pointing out that both writers are British, where the situation with public libraries is bad and getting worse.

On one level, Rundle's certainly right: "a 3D printer will not save your library" in any scenario I can imagine. On the other hand…

A bit from Rundle's post:

> The harsh truth is that there is no business case for public libraries to provide 3D printing. What this is really about is technolust and the fear of being left behind. How many of the librarians clamouring for 3D printers currently provide their patrons with laundry facilities? Sawmills? Smelting furnaces? Loans of cars or whisky stills? I'm guessing none. All these services would be justifiable on the same grounds used to justify 3D printing—individuals would find the service useful, currently they are expensive to buy or rent commercially, and potentially they could be helpful to productivity and the economy. They are also nothing to do with the core business of libraries. As Brett Bonfield reminded us in July last year, when you confuse form with function it is easy to create a Cargo Cult instead of innovation.

There are U.S. public libraries that lend tools, seeds, other objects that enable their communities in various ways—*in addition to* "information" services. Is that a bad thing? Apparently to Rundle it is:

> As librarians we deal with intangibles. Tying your library to something like a 3D printer moves you in the wrong direction. It moves you towards manufacturing physical products. It leads you to the tangible—that's not your job. It is the concept of the intangible that connects all the objects librarians have traditionally dealt with- books, records, photographs, magnetic tape and compact discs. It is this tradition of dealing with the intangible that makes librarianship such an exciting profession right now. Far from being a time of crisis, the times suit us. That's why *Forbes* reports that 'Library Science is a really hot degree right now'—pointing out that librarians should be good at data-mining and market research. Dr Alex Byrne, State Librarian of New South Wales, notes that Google has 'turned people on to information' like never before. Indeed, what's holding back many libraries and librarians may well be a stubborn attachment to the physical. Once you start (honestly and wholeheartedly) thinking about 'the library' as a service rather than a place, opportunities abound. Betsy Wilson from the University of Washington has called this the 'Flipped Library'.

I see a strong strain of "if only we could get rid of Those Damn Books" in the antepenultimate sentence here, but maybe that's me. Meanwhile, this may be a key excerpt from Bradley's commentary:

> So is 3D printing about creating stuff? Well yes of course it is—stuff does end up being created at the end of the process, quite obviously. But does that mean libraries need to be involved with it? I think the answer to this question depends very much on the role that you see a library having in a specific community. With the rise of real time media people are starting to produce things for themselves—firstly content, but music, video and so on; people can create their own culture, rather than just sit and passively consume it. Mr Rundle makes the point that libraries don't offer washing facilities, which is perfectly true. However, libraries are increasingly offering facilities, advice and information to their communities in a whole range of areas. Children are able to use library facilities to learn about heraldry, how to paint model figures, military strategy and history, and then play wargames. Teenagers can use library facilities to create and play music, learn from libraries how best to save, mix, share and promote what they are doing. People want to use computers, so libraries provide computers, teach people how to use them, and help them create their own materials, either for themselves or for clubs or societies. We're used to the idea, and in fact we (hopefully) encourage youngsters who use the library to expand their horizons, not just by reading, but by exploring and trying out new things. Why is this—intrinsically—such a different thing?
>
> Libraries are about bettering communities…

The whole commentary is worth reading.

Community Centered: 23 Reasons Why Your Library Is the Most Important Place in Town

This moderately long article by Julie Biando Edwards, Melissa S. Rauseo, & Kelley Rae Unger appeared April 30, 2013 at *Public Libraries Online*, but it's actually from the September/October 2011 *Public Libraries*.

It's very good, and well worth your time to read. Each of 23 reasons (in five groups) has a good discussion, with an overall discussion preceding them. I'll just provide the reasons and groups.

Libraries as Community Builders: Libraries help revitalize struggling or depressed neighborhoods and downtowns; Libraries are important partners in sustainability; Libraries' special collections grow out of specific community needs; Archives preserve historic artifacts, oral histories, digital history projects, and monographs relevant to the community, including minority groups; Libraries are places where people come to know themselves and their communities; Libraries serve as catalysts for addressing social problems; Libraries, which champion, promote, and reflect important democratic values, are a part of the community's political life; Library buildings

as architectural structures are culturally relevant; Libraries provide important business resources, especially for small local businesses.

Libraries as Community Centers for Diverse Populations: Libraries help to ensure that non-English speakers see themselves represented in their communities; Libraries provide immigrants with helpful information about, and opportunities to connect with, their new communities; Libraries provide information, resources, and support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersexed, and questioning (LGBTIQ) patrons; Libraries provide information, resources, and support for patrons with disabilities.

Libraries as Centers for the Arts: Libraries provide access to non-mainstream points of view and give voice to local artists; Libraries provide opportunities for free classes that encourage art appreciation as well as art participation; Libraries provide access to the arts for all, not just those who can afford them.

Libraries as Universities: Libraries serve as the "people's university"; Libraries offer opportunities for remote access, making it possible for those who can't get to the library to still access the library's cultural and educational offerings; Libraries go beyond providing content to enabling patrons to create their own content; Libraries promote civil discourse.

Libraries as Champions of Youth: Libraries teach teens important life skills; Free tutoring, homework help programs, and summer reading programs for kids and teens help bridge the economic divide that impacts students' academic performance; Libraries are important partners in child development.

Read the whole thing, which is heavily footnoted with appropriate links. Does every public library serve all these functions? Of course not. Are they all reasonable aspirations to think about? I think so.

Reading Between the Lions

Let's finish with a librarian with serious writing and thinking chops, Barbara Fister on May 8, 2014 in "Library Babel Fish" at *Inside Higher Ed*. It's about NYPL's change of a planned renovation of its research library and sale of two branches.

> There has been an enormous amount of commentary on the plan, but several things seemed to be flashpoints:
>
> - The plan was rolled out without public discussion. Input was solicited, but not systematically and only after plans were drawn up.
> - A large percentage of books in the research library would be put into storage to create space for other uses (or "space for people, not books" as flatfooted defenders put it).
> - The plan seemed to favor spending on a grand architectural gesture over spending on branch libraries serving a diverse population.

- The plan implied that the library would be improved if it was made into a popular destination rather than remaining a stuffy place for stuffy people to do elitist things.

After noting some of the reactions academic librarians tend to get when considering renovations—especially renovations that reduce space for books—Fister discusses four lessons. Parts of the first two paragraphs:

> First, librarians know a lot about libraries and the needs of their communities, but the libraries they work in belong to the community. Not to the mayor, the university president, or the board of trustees, nor the librarians – the community that uses the library. The future of libraries can't be decided behind closed doors by top officials and donors. It's only common sense to build a library that reflects community values and needs. If the community doesn't buy into what you're doing, you have a problem…
>
> Second, we have to talk about books. Books are valuable, but libraries can't keep everything. Most of us would improve our collections enormously if we got rid of lots of books – the ones that are out of date, that weren't much good when they were published, are about things that we no longer teach, or are in languages we don't offer… Faculty shouldn't feel threatened when libraries take responsible steps to keep their collections within a reasonable size. Librarians, in turn, need to respect the fact that books still matter to many people who will bristle if you act as if they're just in the way.

And the last part of the fourth bullet:

> [I]f we decide that the collection is standing in the way of valuable things, like providing room for tutors and counselors and faculty developers and information technologists and food services and everything else that might play a role in student success and comfort, then we have forgotten that the library itself is pretty damned vital for students and their learning. It's not elitism to resist repurposing library space for other purposes if the library doesn't have space to spare. We don't have to be everything, but we do have to be a library.

Masthead

Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large, Volume 17, Number 3, Whole # 202, ISSN 1534-0937, a periodical of libraries, policy, technology and media, is written and produced, usually monthly, by Walt Crawford.

Comments should be sent to waltcrawford@gmail.com.

URL: citesandinsights.info/civ17i3.pdf