

# Editorial Board Thoughts: Issue Introduction

## Discovery: What Do *You* Mean by That?

Judith Carter

**M**wuah ha ha ha haaa! Finally it's *my* turn. I hold the power of the editorial. (Can you tell I'm writing this around Halloween?) Seriously now, I've been intimately and extensively involved with *Information Technology and Libraries* for eleven years, yet this is the first time I've escaped from behind the editing scenes to address the readership directly. As managing editor for seven of the eleven volumes (18–22 and 27–28) and an editorial board member reviewing manuscripts (vols. 23–26), I am honored Marc agreed to let me be guest editor for this theme issue.

This issue is a compilation of presentations from the Discovery Mini-Conference held at the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) Libraries in the spring of 2009. The first article by Jennifer Fabbi gives the full chronology and framework of the project, but I have the pleasure of introducing this issue and topic by virtue of my role as guest editor, as well as my own participation in the Mini-Conference before I left UNLV in July 2009.

### What is discovery?

When the dean of libraries, Patricia Iannuzzi, announced that UNLV would have a Libraries-wide, poster-session style Discovery Mini-Conference, Jennifer Fabbi and I decided we wanted to be part of it. We had already been exploring various aspects of discovery as part of an organizational focus as well as following up on a particular event that happened earlier in the year. While serving on a search committee, we posed a question to all the candidates: "What do you see the library catalog looking like in the future? What do you see as the relationship between the library catalog and other access or discovery tools?" One of the candidates had such a unique answer that it got us thinking: Are we all talking about the same thing when we discuss discovery?

The Mini-Conference gave us the opportunity to explore the idea further. An all-library summit that preceded the Mini-Conference announcement had focused on users finding known items. We knew that discovery was so much more and that it depended on the users' needs.

Of course, first we went to multiple online dictionaries to look up the meanings of "discovery" and found the following definitions:

- Something learned or found; something new that has been learned or found
- The process of learning something; the fact or process of finding out about something for the first time
- The process of finding something; the process or act of finding something or somebody unexpectedly or after searching

We also looked at famous quotes about discovery. There were some of our favorites:

A discovery is said to be an accident meeting a prepared mind.

—Albert Szent-Gyorgyi

Education is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance.

—Will Durant

Next, a colleague recommended we look at Chang's browsing theory.<sup>1</sup> This theory covered the broad spectrum of how users seek information and showed a more serendipitous view than the former focus of known item search. Obviously, browsing implies a physical interaction with a collection, so we reframed the themes to fit discovery in the "every-library" electronic information environment.

Chang's five browsing themes, adapted to discovery:

- Looking for a specific item, to locate
- Looking for something with common characteristics, to find "more like this"
- Keeping up-to-date, to find out what's new in a field, topic or intellectual area
- Learning or finding out, to define or form a research question
- Goal-free, to satisfy curiosity or be entertained.<sup>2</sup>

All interesting information, but a little theoretical for a visual presentation. To make these themes more concrete and visual, I suggested we apply them to personas as described in one of my favorite books, *The Inmates are Running the Asylum*.<sup>3</sup> This encourages programmers to create a user with a full backstory and then design a product for their needs.

To do this in an entertaining way, we identified five types of users we've encountered in our libraries and described an information-seeking need for each. I then created some colorful and representational characters using a well-known, alliteratively named candy's website.

Our five characters were

1. Mina, stylishly dressed and always carries a cell phone, is an undergraduate who rarely uses the library. She has a sociology class library assignment to find information on the cell phone habits of Generation X.
2. Ms. LVite lives in the Las Vegas area and contributes to the library. She is a regular from the community

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**Table 1.** Relating discovery behaviors to electronic discovery tools

<b>User wants . . .</b>	<b>Provide the User . . .</b>	<b>Other tools?*</b>
To find a specific item	Search by title, author, or call number (e.g., Libraries' WebOPAC)	Search a database WorldCat Flickr Google Books
To find items with common characteristics	Items linked by subject headings, format, or other elements; tag clouds; federated search for article databases (e.g., WebOPAC, Encore, Article databases)	Flickr Summon Twine Delicious
To be kept up-to-date	Recently added items by subject; integration of blogs for news or updates (e.g., New Books List, LibGuides, Encore "recently added")	Blogs RSS Feeds Apple iTunes Amazon Readers Advisory Authors/Musicians websites Newspapers online
To learn more about something	General information that provides context, reviews (e.g., Wikipedia, Google, Encore community reviews)	Dissertation abstracts Encyclopedias Database of databases (for context) Peer to peer: delicious, social tagging
To satisfy curiosity or be entertained	Surfing the Web, multimedia, social networking (e.g., Google, YouTube, Facebook)	MySpace World of Warcraft Second Life Podcasts Wikipedia "random article" feature

\* Ideas generated at the Discovery Mini-Conference

who likes to dig into everything the library owns about small mining towns in Nevada.

3. Dr. Prof is a faculty member with a slightly outdated wardrobe but a thirst for knowledge. He wants to know what books have been published in his field of quantum bowtie mechanics by any of his colleagues across the country.
4. PhDead Tired is a slightly mused grad student who is always in the library clutching a cup of coffee. He needs to narrow down his dissertation topic.
5. Duuuuude is an energetic, sociable young man who likes to hang out in the library with his friends. He has some time to kill on the computer.

On our poster, we asked the Discovery Mini-Conference attendees to place cutouts of our personas

on a pie chart divided into the five themes of discovery. Jennifer and I expected certain placements and were pleasantly surprised when our attendees challenged our assumptions with alternate possibilities.

Another section of the poster related discovery behaviors to specific electronic discovery tools. We provided a few and asked the attendees to add others (see table 1).

While talking with each attendee, we provided a bookmark listing the five discovery behaviors (with colorful character personas) and suggested they keep them in mind as they visited the other conference sessions. We challenged them to identify what user behaviors the other presenters' systems or services were targeting.

The message Jennifer and I hoped to convey with our poster was this: The way we think about discovery, or the users' goals in finding information, drives the discovery

## Initial Thoughts

The term “discovery” has many definitions in the English language, such as:

- something learned or found; something new that has been learned or found
- the process of learning something; the fact or process of finding out about something for the first time
- the process of finding something; the process or act of finding something or somebody unexpectedly after searching

The way we think about discovery, or the users’ goals in finding information, drive the discovery system we have or will create.

## Five General Themes of Discovery Behavior\*

- 1) Looking for a specific item to locate
- 2) Looking for something with common characteristics: to find more like “this”
- 3) Keeping up-to-date: to find out what’s new with a field, topic, or intellectual area
- 4) Learning or finding out: to define, form a research question
- 5) Goal-free: to satisfy curiosity or be entertained

\*from Chang’s Browsing Framework

*“A discovery is said to be an accident meeting a prepared mind.” - Albert Szent-Gyorgyi*

systems we have or will create. As you read through this issue, I hope you’ll see some new ways to think about discovery and that those ways will fuel this audience’s potential to create new tools.

What follows is a textual walk around our Mini-Conference. Taken as individual articles, each might not look like what you are used to seeing in *ITAL*. Taken as a whole that grew out of the process, these articles are what makes this a special issue. As I said before, Jennifer Fabbi provides the background and process for the Discovery Mini-Conference. Then, Alex Dolski describes a prototype MultiPAC discovery system he created and demonstrated, and he discusses the issues surrounding the design of such a system. Tom Ipri, Michael Yunkin, and Jeanne Brown, as members of the Usability Working Group, had already been conducting testing on UNLV Libraries’ website. They share their methods, findings, and results with us. Thomas Sommer presents a look at what the Special Collections Department has implemented to aid discovery of their unique materials. Wendy Starkweather and Eva Stowers used the Mini-Conference as an opportunity to research how other libraries are providing discovery opportunities to students via smart-phones. Patrick Griffis describes his work with free screen capture tools to build pathfinders to promote resource discovery. Patrick Griffis and Cyrus Ford each looked at enhancing catalog records, so they combined their two presentations here to describe ways to enrich the online catalog to better aid our users’ success.

## References

1. Shan-ju Chang, “Chang’s Browsing,” in *Theories of Information Behavior*, by Karen E. Fisher, Sanda Erdelez, and Lynne McKechnie (Medford, N.J.: Information Today, 2005): 69–74.
2. *Ibid.*, 71–72.
3. Alan Cooper, *The Inmates Are Running the Asylum*, (Indianapolis, Ind.: Sams, 1999). Personas are described in chapter 9.

Figure 1. “Initial Thoughts” and “Five General Themes of Discovery Behavior” panel from the Discovery Mini-Conference poster