

As I write these lines in late February, the first hints of spring on the Alberta prairie are manifest. Alternatively, perhaps it's just that the longer and warmer days are causing me to "think spring." There are no signs yet of early bulbs—at least, none that I can detect with around a foot of snow in most places—but the sun is now rising at 7:30 a.m. and not setting until 6 p.m., a dramatic change from the barely seven hours of daylight typical of December and January. And while none but the hardiest souls are yet outside in shorts and shirt-sleeves, somehow, daytime highs that hover around freezing seem downright pleasant in comparison with the minus thirties (not counting the wind chill) we were experiencing even a couple of weeks ago. Yes, spring is in the air, even if the calendar says it is still nearly a month away. . . .

So what, you may fairly ask, does the weather in Edmonton have to do with *ITAL*? This is my first issue of *ITAL* as editor, and it may not surprise you to hear that I've been thinking quite a bit about what might be the right theme and tone for my first column. While I've been associated with the journal for quite awhile—first as a board member, and more recently as managing editor—my role has always been comfortably limited to background tasks such as refereeing papers and production issues. Now, that is about to change; I am stepping a bit out of my comfort zone. It's about beginnings.

I follow with some awe in the footsteps of a long line of editors of *ITAL* (and *JOLA*, its predecessor). I've been honored to serve—and to learn a great deal—from the last two, Dan Marmion and John Webb. You, the readers of *ITAL*, and I are fortunate to have as returning managing editor Judith Carter, who preceded me and taught me the skills required for that post; I hasten to emphasize that she is definitely *not* responsible for the things I did *not* do right in the job! Regular readers of *ITAL* will recall that John Webb often referred humorously and admiringly to the members of the *ITAL* editorial board as his "junkyard dogs;" he claimed that they kept him honest. With the addition of a couple of fine new members, I'm confident that they will continue to do so in my case!

Okay, with that as preface, enough about me . . . let's talk about *ITAL*.

What's inside this issue

ITAL content has traditionally represented an eclectic blend of the best mainstream and leading/bleeding edge of library technology. We strive to be reflective of the broad, major issues of concern to all librarians, as well as alert to interesting applications that may be little more than a blip at the edge of our collective professional radar screen. Our audience is not limited to those actively working in library technology, although they certainly form

ITAL's core readership; rather, we seek to identify and publish content that will be relevant to *all* with an interest in or need to know about how technology is affecting our profession. Thus, some articles will resonate with staff seeking new ways to use Web 2.0 technologies to engage our readers, while other articles will be of interest to those interested in better exploiting the four decades' worth of bibliographic metadata that forms the backbone of our integrated library systems.

The current issue of *ITAL* is no exception in this regard. We lead off with two papers that reflect the renewed interest of the past several years in the role and improvement of the library online catalog. Jia Mi and Cathy Weng review OPAC interfaces, searching functionality, and results displays to address the question of why the current OPAC is ineffective and what we can do to revitalize it. Timothy Dickey, in a contribution that received the 2007 *LITA/ExLibris Student Writing Award*,¹ summarizes the challenges and benefits of a FRBR approach to current and "next-gen" library catalogs. Interestingly, as will become clear at the end of this column, Dickey's is not the first prize-winning FRBR study to appear in the pages of *ITAL*.

Online learning has long been a subject of interest both to librarians and to the education sector as a whole. Whereas the focus of many previous studies has been on the techniques and efficacy of online learning systems, though, Connie Haley's paper takes a rather different approach, describing and exploring factors that characterize the preference of learners for online training, as compared with more traditional in-person techniques.

In Gary Wan's and Zao Liu's investigation of content-based information retrieval (CBIR) in digital libraries, the authors describe and argue for systems that will enable identification of images and audio clips by automated comparison against digital libraries of image and audio files. Finally, Wooseob Jeong prototypes an innovative application for enhancing Web access by the visually impaired. Jeong's application makes use of force feedback, an inexpensive, proven technology drawn from the world of video gaming.

Some ideas about where we are going

A change of editorship is always one of those good opportunities for thinking about how we might improve, or of

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different directions we might explore. With that in mind, here are a couple of things we're either going to try, or that we're considering:

Different voices. *ITAL*'s format has long included provision for two "opinion" columns, one by the editor, and another by the president of LITA. From time to time, past editors have given over their columns for guest editorials. However, there are many other voices that could enrich *ITAL*'s pages, and the existing structure doesn't really have a "place" for the regular airing of these voices. Beginning with the June 2008 issue, *ITAL* will include a regular column contributed by members of the board, on a rotating basis. The column will be about any topic related to technology and libraries that is on the author's mind. I'm thinking about how we might expand this to include a similar column contributed by *ITAL* readers. While such reader contributions may lack the currency of a weblog, I think that they would make for thought-provoking commentary.

Oh, and there's that "currency thing." In recent years, those of us who bring you *ITAL* have—as have those responsible for other ALA publications—discussed at length the whole question of when and how to move to a sustainable model of electronic publishing that will address the needs of readers. This issue is of course especially important in the case of a technology-focused journal, where content tends to age rapidly. Unfortunately, for various reasons, we're not yet at the stage where we can go completely and solely electronic. A recent conversation with one board member, though, surfaced an idea that I think in the meantime has merit: essentially, we might create a preprint site for papers that have been accepted and edited for future publication in *ITAL*. We might call it something such as *ITAL Express*, and its mission would be

to get content awaiting publication out and accessible. Is this a "done-deal"? No, at this stage, it's just an intriguing idea, and I'd be interested in hearing your views about it . . . or anything else related to *ITAL*, for that matter. You can e-mail me at marc.truitt@ualberta.ca.

■ And finally, Congratulations Dept.

Last week, Martha Yee, of the Film and Television Archive at the University of California, Los Angeles received the ALCTS Cataloging and Classification Section's Margaret Mann Citation for 2008. Martha was "recognized for her outstanding contributions to the practice of cataloging and her interest in cataloging education . . . [and her] professional contributions[, which] have included active participation in ALA and ALCTS and numerous publications." Of particular note, the citation specifically singled out her work in the areas of "FRBR, OPAC displays, shared cataloging and other important issues, [in which] Yee is making a significant contribution to the discussions that are leading the development of our field." Surely among the most important of these is her paper "FRBRization: A Method for Turning Online Public Finding Lists into Online Public Catalogs," which appeared in the June 2005 issue of *ITAL* (p. 77–95). Archived at the *ITAL* site, D-list, the CDL e-Scholarship Repository, and elsewhere, this seminal contribution has become one of the most accessed and cited works on FRBR. We at *ITAL* are proud to have provided the original venue for this paper and congratulate Martha on being named recipient of the Margaret Mann award.