

# Curation in Academic Libraries

## Abstract

*In chapter 6 of Library Technology Reports (vol. 50, no. 7), “Social Media Curation,” the authors report on interviews with academic librarians, which emphasize the importance of embedding support for learning in curation efforts and online learning and of teaching academics new skills for managing their own information. The authors also discuss an ethnographic study of how faculty members save, share, cite, and archive scholarly information.*

The examples of Capella and the Georgia Institute of Technology present strategies that engage library communities in learning and in learning to learn. At Capella, Instructional Services librarian Erika Bennett describes a process for the thoughtful design, development, and testing of LibGuides as a chief tool for delivery of instruction. At Georgia Tech Library, Crystal Renfro and Mary Axford maintain a variety of LibGuides as well as the blog Personal Knowledge Management for Academia and Librarians. They believe in the value of personal knowledge management as a personal learning strategy for their graduate students and faculty. Their blog, workshops, and curation efforts support the discovery of curation tools and strategies. And at Penn State, librarian Ellysa Stern Cahoy and her team shared discoveries from a recently conducted fifteen-month ethnographic study that examined how faculty save, share, cite, and archive scholarly information. The study reaffirmed the need for unification of the entire scholarly research cycle, including the acts of finding, organizing, and archiving information. Our academic interviews emphasized the importance of embedding support for learning in curation efforts and online learning, as well as the importance of teaching academics new skills for managing and curating their own information landscapes.

## Erika Bennett, Capella University (September 16, 2013)

*Erika Bennett lives curation as an embedded practice. As the Capella University Instructional Services librarian, Erika has a unique approach to digital curation. Capella University operates entirely online, heightening the necessity for its librarians to be truly embedded into courses. The team of twelve Capella librarians use LibGuides as their chief tool for curation and instruction delivery. They have a well-designed, smoothly working system for designing guides, integrating them within online courses by ensuring that they correspond to the targeted competencies within each unique course. The team develops instructional tie-ins to course competencies, tests all tools and guides before they go live, continually reviews them, and gathers feedback. Capella’s curated resources and instruction are integral to the working of the online course rooms, the main learner portal (iGuide), and specific program research. Instruction for doctoral-level information literacy developed by Capella librarians has been recognized by ACRL and is part of the Peer Reviewed Instructional Materials Online (PRIMO) database.*

*Capella’s competency-based curriculum enjoins an instructional design approach to library services. We spoke with Erika on September 16, 2013.*

### **BB: How would you describe the Capella curation workflow?**

EB: The library team is charged with targeting the specific competencies within each course. These competencies become the focus of the initial meeting the librarians hold with the faculty who are the designers of the online courses. The university has three information literacy teams: a reference team that fields traditional reference interviews, calls, or

questions; an access team of web technicians; and an instructional services team whose members serve as dissertation consultants. We develop LibGuides for specific purposes. We develop assignment guides; database guides; program-specific research guides for education, business, nursing, and so on; skill development guides; and subject guides.

**BB: How do you determine the structure of the guides?**

EB: Guides are integrated within courses and are available to help students at PhD colloquia. There is flexibility as far as look and feel of each guide. It's really up to the faculty designers. Librarians work as individual liaisons with faculty to meet their specific criteria for each course. We also perform individual professional research for faculty, who often may have requests for specific guides, custom instructional videos, or other learning objects for their courses. A specific protocol is in place to determine who addresses needs or requests and the specific time frames for these solutions, answers, or assistance to be given.

**BB: What is the development process like?**

EB: When we create instructional guides, we can apply for a course resourcing team. This is an interactive design team that includes a curriculum specialist, instructional designer, project manager, user experience specialist, and assessment specialist. When courses are developed, there is another final review to see if library resources should be integrated anywhere else.

**BB: How do you gather feedback on your LibGuides?**

EB: LibGuides are tested before going live and are assessed based upon their specific purposes. Feedback is also gathered from guide monthly traffic and statistics that are analyzed and compared to key performance indicators. User surveys are built into guides and within courses for basic feedback. The guide surveys have users rate different aspects of the guides and their usefulness from 1 to 5. The course guide surveys ask whether the guide helped the student improve the targeted competencies of the course. Our guides are reviewed quarterly for usability with a checklist of criteria. Reference technicians do these reviews, but ultimately the liaisons are responsible to see that usability criteria are met.

**BB: What projects are you working on now?**

EB: The team was working on a new LibGuide on performing literature reviews that will have built-in dynamic assessments to provide doctoral researchers a custom learning experience.

**BB: What other tools do you use for curation?**

EB: I use Twitter, especially to collect resources from conferences. I am part of lots of listservs and use Delicious to keep track of sites.

**BB: What are your thoughts on curation and search?**

EB: I think the issue of authority and trustworthiness are the biggest challenges researchers face when utilizing the curations of others for research. The concept of authority is broadening, so it's increasingly important to connect it to trustworthy curation. But for librarians, this challenge is an opportunity to help learners practice critical thinking. Another big challenge is the issue of the limited accessibility to peer-reviewed resources. Because these are still heavily locked down, it's a struggle to curate and promote these great sources in an accessible way.

**Crystal Renfro and Mary Axford,  
Georgia Institute of Technology  
(April 1, 2014)**

*Crystal Renfro and Mary Axford maintain the blog *Personal Knowledge Management for Academia and Librarians* and believe in the value of personal knowledge management as a learning strategy for their graduate students and faculty. Crystal is a Faculty Engagement Librarian at Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, where she helps graduate students and librarians become more effective by applying principles of personal knowledge management in their daily lives. She is a subject librarian in the areas of mathematics and industrial and systems engineering. Mary Axford is a librarian at Georgia Tech, where she is part of the Faculty Engagement department, which develops services for and performs outreach to faculty and graduate students. She is the library's liaison to the schools of International Affairs, Psychology, and Public Policy. She also works to help students and faculty be more efficient and productive in their academic work. We spoke with Crystal and Mary on April 1, 2014.*

**JV: How do you define curation?**

CR: I look at what I call content curation as having a different purpose from digital curation and data curation. There is a tension. The online world talks about content curation. We are all either tweeting or linking to articles that other people have written, but if that's all we do, are we really adding value? For content curators in the social media world, content curation is doing more than simply forwarding a link of somebody else's work on to your list of readers/friends/followers. Content curation says that we need

to somehow ingest it and add value to the original information and only then send it on to our followers. In the library world, the focus is a little different. We're talking about curating for posterity, for archival preservation and in many cases for university archives, for maintaining the body of knowledge creation that our faculty and community creates. Personally, I think content curation is something different. It is more free-form, occurring on various platforms, and is very individualized in the way it is done, and to what extent the writer chooses to reflect on the content being passed on to others. Both types of curation are important, just distinct from each other.

MA: Yes, it's more like current awareness, what we're interested in right at the moment, and it may not have longer term value.

CR: It will exist as long as the medium we use exists, so from that perspective, it could have a long tail. People could find it 20 years from now and look at the curation comments. When people are building up communities of knowledge, they're doing it for personal and community reasons, documenting what's out on the web. I don't really think the library is doing as much in terms of documenting general discussions on the web. A lot of what you see forwarded on in communities are blog posts or Scoop.it items or online articles from open-access publications. If it's an original thought that the writer is expressing, that's one thing. If, however, the writer is commenting on or adding clarity to somebody else's work, then it's content curation. It can be a short curation—for instance, what Mary does on our blog with our link roundups. I think of that as content curation. She's listing links and also giving commentary about what the link is and why it might be of interest.

What we do on our LibGuides, listing links and suggesting "this is good for such and such a reason" is content curation. What Robin Good does is content curation, but I think he mixes both content curation and original content in his blog and Scoop.it entries. What Robin and others like him are doing is curation in a newer world. This is how I have distinguished the difference between content curation and digital curation. The Scholarly Communications and Digital Curation Department at GA Tech—our digital curation and data curation librarians and the curators in our Archives Department—may have a different definition of the two terms.

MA: Those departments specialize in the output of the Georgia Tech community.

CR: What I see them doing is curating online content for dissertations, curating objects that have been created or donated, whether they be digital or audio or whatever types—making collections of those online

so that people can access them. They're digitizing dissertations and blocks of the data professors submit or the presentations they have done. They are cataloging those with metadata and creating collections. Our Scholarly Communications area captures and preserves the content and the creative effort of our own community. There's a specific purpose and boundaries behind what they are curating.

Some librarians are beginning to see that there's all this content out there on the web and until recently, nobody has been really connecting it to the library, to the traditional bodies of knowledge libraries have. Just recently, the Library of Congress has become the exception, and it has started archiving Twitter feeds. And some of those people, who are not librarians, are saying that there is a need to make sure that there's connectivity and community on the web. These people, who are doing blogs and Pinterest accounts listing links, are not always adding value to the original content. A course I recently took on content curation advised that you need to be sure that what you are putting forward is more than just a link. You want to add value to that. You want to say what it means to you, what insights you gather from it. You want to add something to the body of knowledge so that it continues to grow.

My Scoop.it account, for example, is a bad example of content curation. I have traditionally been using it as a personal archiving strategy. I see the difference between mine, where I don't make a lot of comments, and Robin Good's, who always offers very thoughtful comments. I can see the value of using Scoop.it both ways. I've started trying to add more value now when I add new items.

**JV: But I find your Scoop.it valuable, even without the comments. It's one of the places I make discoveries.**

CR: I'm pleased it has helped you. My main topic is on academic workflow, and even without comments from me, it shows what I thought were items on target for that topic. That's why I don't mind having it public. If somebody else is interested in this topic, they might find something they hadn't found before. And that was one of my arguments when I took that course that spurred me into writing the article that you read on our blog. There is value to the mere collection. It's like finding a bibliography that's not annotated. We, as librarians, still look at that and go "oh wow, look at what we found." We're interested in finding the sources and going to them for the detail. The power content curators out on the web are saying we should include the first paragraph of an item of interest and include our insights. Now I am afraid to post new items on my Scoop.it until I can find time to actually read and reflect on each item.

I asked them in the class, “What do you use to aggregate things if you want Scoop.it to always be curated? Where do you put your collections of aggregated links until you can ingest them?” I never got an answer.

MA: I have a Library Technology Scoop.it, where I store things I am interested in going back to. I don’t comment on many of them. For me, it’s more of an aggregator.

CR: I started a Scoop.it account to see how it worked, but also because I was finding people posting on topics I was interested in already on Scoop.it, and I wanted to keep track of the things they were writing about. I was rescoping what they had scooped without really adding from outside Scoop.it too much.

**JV: So we’re all also using this as a search tool or a current awareness service.**

CR: Yes, the search tool aspect, the community sharing knowledge aspect is key for Scoop.it. From a content curation perspective, however, just aggregating links is not a good use of the tool. They want more value added. But if I go to the amount of effort that Robin Good goes to on his Scoop.it, I tend to save it up for a blog entry. I have a full-time job. I don’t have the luxury to report in detail on each article that I find.

**JV: So what does it look like at the university, when you teach others about personal knowledge management?**

CR: I maintain a LibGuide on PKM tools, and the PowerPoint that I use in my productivity tools workshops is on the LibGuide. The workshops are targeted at graduate students, but I also get postdocs, staff, faculty, and undergraduates. That class is an overview of different types of tools. The idea came out of a recognition of all the aspects of life grad students struggle with—they have families, jobs, and a lot of them are TAs or have full-time research positions. They’re so scattered, and this is all new to them. So we try to offer them tools that can help them reach their own best potential.

MA: We’re both part of the Faculty Engagement department that focuses on outreach. We try and keep in mind how very busy these people are, and anything that we can do to save them time, make their time more efficient and productive, that is what we are aiming for.

CR: That’s why I did an overview type of class and touched on many different kinds of tools. I talk a little bit about mind-mapping. I talk about Evernote and

OneNote. I talk about project management tools. I talk about David Allen’s getting things done concept—how to think about all the different tasks they have. I tell them at the beginning, “There is no holy grail. I am not going to give you the answer. Each of these tools has drawbacks.” The goal is to give them a taste, to show how a variety of tools may be used and hope that they say, “Hey, this might be helpful for me here.” Eventually, we’d like to offer some level two classes to cover one or two of the tools in more depth.

MA: LibGuides is great for providing a framework for what you are teaching. It enables you to point to things you may not be able to cover in a workshop and gives students something they can go back to and look at later. In doing research for our blog, I’ve been able to add new tools to our LibGuide for citation management tools that are particularly useful for faculty and graduate students.

CR: My Productivity Tools guide has remained in the top three of all the guides at the university for a couple of years now. We can’t tell whether the visits are from inside the university or outside, but it is being accessed a great deal. And it speaks to the fact that the need is there. People are looking for solutions.

**JV: What are your go-to tools?**

CR: If we are gathering resources for our own faculty, staff, and students, we will create a LibGuide for that. We started our blog to bring together things that we kept running into and didn’t have a place to talk about. We couldn’t find other people who were talking about this, and we were hoping to bring more attention to personal knowledge management with librarians because we thought it was a really good match, as well as find other people out there. So we used the blog to help us continue to learn—the best way to learn is to teach somebody else. I embraced OneNote; Mary embraced and won me over to Evernote. We now do a lot of our blog planning on Evernote.

MA: For example, when we were doing the Year to Productivity class in 2013, we used Evernote as a planning tool.

CR: We used a lot of different tools in that yearlong course. I started out by coming up with a list of topics to cover throughout the year and I mind-mapped those. We switched to Evernote and created a note for each week of the yearlong program. This way, either of us could just throw links and notes in any of the topic areas throughout the year as we came across good sources. By the time one of us would reach the topic for the new week, we’d often have a whole list of resources on that topic already gathered and waiting for us.

MA: So I think of Evernote as my brain. It stores everything I need, and it has good search capabilities. I got totally won over when I had to move from my apartment complex in one month. I used Evernote to collect all of my information. I would have gone insane without it.

**JV: What else should I know about your curation efforts at Georgia Tech?**

MA: We're a work in progress. We think of PKM as enabling people to find information, synthesize it, and then add their own knowledge to the universe of information.

**JV: How do you distinguish between PKM and curation?**

CR: I think of PKM as your overall process of how you deal with the information you encounter and use throughout your life. My personal knowledge management system is how I deal with the world. We're trying to introduce it to others as a way for them to deal with their worlds.

I think of curation as a piece, one aspect of your personal knowledge management. It is the piece that is outreach to others. . . . You are sharing your insights on items with others.

PKM is the overriding environment.

MA: PKM is the process; curation is the content or the tool. The phrase PKM doesn't mean much to people; you have to explain it. It's useful, but you do have to explain it.

CR: People could be talking about productivity, they could be talking about personal information management, they might talk about their personal learning networks. It's all talking about how do we as individuals and as groups find, use, and create knowledge. By just pushing information out to someone else, you are not creating knowledge. When you synthesize and create something new, you are starting to develop your knowledge. That knowledge remains internal to you until you push it out to the world, either through publication or curation.

**JV: So you are teaching others how to do PKM. Are other universities involved in this?**

MA: I've looked at a lot of other university LibGuides, and I don't see much of this going on.

CR: But people may not call it PKM. They may be defining it using different terms, like academic workflow. I think we're all talking about the same stuff, but we're not using the same terms.

MA: I don't see a lot of them dealing with tools other than citation or reference management tools.

CR: It seems like the K-12 folks are the ones who are worlds ahead as far as embracing personal learning networks and these environments. The academic world has not embraced these tools as much. I think we have a lot to learn from K-12.

*David Allen, GTD: Getting Things Done*  
<http://gettingthingsdone.com>

*Personal Knowledge Management for Academia and Librarians*  
[www.academicpkm.org](http://www.academicpkm.org)

*Mary Axford and Crystal Renfro, "Note-Worthy Productivity Tools for Personal Knowledge Management," Online 36, no. 3 (2012): 33-36*  
<https://smartech.gatech.edu/handle/1853/50762>

*Scoop.it on Library Technology*  
[www.scoop.it/t/library-technology-by-mary-a-axford-1](http://www.scoop.it/t/library-technology-by-mary-a-axford-1)

## Georgia Tech Library LibGuides

*Productivity Tools for Graduate Students*  
<http://libguides.gatech.edu/content.php?pid=144183>

*Notebook Software: Evernote and Microsoft OneNote LibGuide*  
<http://libguides.gatech.edu/content.php?pid=343530>

*Current Awareness Tools*  
<http://libguides.gatech.edu/currentaware>

## Academic PKM: A Study of the Scholarly Research Cycle and Information Practices

In her work as education and behavioral sciences librarian at Penn State University, Ellysa Stern Cahoy became interested in discovering how academic faculty manage the flow of scholarly information. Particularly, she wanted to uncover faculty attitudes about their own professional knowledge management in order to pinpoint how the library and librarians could better assist them through training. To learn the answers to these questions, a three-phase Mellon Foundation-funded project is underway.

The first Andrew W. Mellon Foundation-funded

phase of this Penn State–based project (2012–13) investigated how faculty create and manage personal information collections. Led by the librarian, the fifteen-month ethnographic study examined in detail how faculty save, share, cite, and archive scholarly information. Ellysa collaborated with a team of Penn State librarians and a research anthropologist, Dr. Smiljana Antonijevic, inviting selected faculty from liberal arts, humanities, social science, and science disciplines to share how they build, maintain, and archive their personal information collections. This phase of the project confirmed expectations that the greatest number of resources faculty were archiving included PDF and Word documents, data files, and presentation files; however, the majority of these items are still stored on local computers, hard drives, or flash drives rather than cloud-based storage. Nearly a third of faculty reported that obsolete storage formats had caused loss of data, a point suggesting that faculty could use assistance from the librarians in managing and archiving important scholarly work. The results of this study reaffirmed the need for unification of the entire scholarly research cycle, including the acts of finding, organizing, and archiving information.

The second (2014–15) and third (2015–16) Mellon-funded phases of this project are a partnership between George Mason University (Zotero) and Penn State University, with the goal of further customizing Zotero and creating a linkage between Zotero and a Hydra-based institutional repository. The project team, led by Ellysa and Dr. Sean Takats of George Mason University, will add functionality to the Zotero client software to allow users to assert authorship over their own scholarship and to indicate whether they hold the copyright to such materials. The team will also develop a pluggable backend for Zotero that will allow any institutional repository (IR) to draw such content from the Zotero ecosystem. Its first implementation will involve linking Penn State’s IR, ScholarSphere, a Fedora repository built on a Hydra-based platform.

The results of this collaboration will provide open-source code for others in the Hydra community and an open API for adopters of other repository software (e.g., DSpace, Islandora, EPrints) to link institutional and subject repositories to Zotero. Additionally, the

project will further enhance discovery within Zotero, adding in the capability for journal article RSS feeds, optimizing users’ ability to quickly find, store, and organize research.

In the third phase of the project, Ellysa and the research team will repeat the research methodology utilized in phase one of the project, assessing how the Zotero optimizations help Zotero users in the humanities further unify their research practices, particularly in the areas of personal archiving and information discovery.

## Beyond the Conversations

Other academic libraries, like those at the University of Maryland and Arizona State University, use their YouTube library channels to document and archive lectures, events, and tutorials. Yale University points to events, shares a fabulous array of images, and highlights elements of its collection on its Facebook page. Columbia University Library maintains a Twitter feed that energetically shares events, additions to the collection, and library news. Montana State University shares archived and carefully tagged historical photos, as well as books, on its engaging Tumblr.

*University of Maryland Libraries YouTube channel*

<https://www.youtube.com/user/UMDLibraries1>

*Arizona State University Library YouTube channel*

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCOCXGdYNA8jFAYFFFNbyWkg>

*Yale University Library Facebook*

<https://www.facebook.com/yalelibrary>

*Columbia University Libraries on Twitter*

@cumbialib

*Montana State University Library Tumblr*

<http://msulibrary.tumblr.com>