

October 8, 2015

Vice Provost for Learning and Residential Affairs

Greetings!

I want to begin this month with a story that illustrates how Vanderbilt's transinstitutional orientation and emphasis on digital technologies can make for fruitful—and often unexpected—outcomes. Awhile back, Richard Willis, Catherine Lee, and Michael Stuart from the Owen School of Management were beginning to work on a project that, roughly, investigates the impact of the wording and tone of earnings conference calls that corporations hold with investment analysts.

Ultimately, in order to pull this project off, the team needed access to a large number of earnings conference call transcripts and the ability to “read” these reports efficiently and consistently. The team worked with Hilary Craiglow, the director of the Management Library, who helped Vanderbilt negotiate a deal with Lexis-Nexis to provide greater access to these documents. In addition, Cliff Anderson, director of scholarly Communications at the library, helped the researchers think through tools they could use to read these documents. The LexisNexis access, called a WSK—Web Services Toolkit and XML Delivery—promises a great deal of fascinating outcomes.

While the Earnings Call project and the Lexis-Nexis WSK access the Library negotiated are interesting and promising on their own, the story only begins there. When Earth and Environmental Science Professor Jonathan Gilligan started work on a project with his team that was attempting to investigate the discursive links (in published news stories) between hurricanes and climate change, Rick Stringer-Hye, the subject librarian for Earth and Environmental Sciences set up a meeting that involved Jonathan's team and some of the staff of the library. This group included Cliff Anderson, who, knowing about the work being done at Owen on the Earnings Call project, put them in contact with Craiglow. Then, armed with tools developed by graduate student John Nay, the team was able to analyze a vast quantity of data in ways that would have been impossible months before.

At this point, Gilligan—who was familiar with the type of work performed by people in my home discipline (Communication Studies, Rhetorical/cultural studies)—contacted me to explain the WSK tool and the analysis model they are developing. What I discovered was a tool that will allow me and my colleagues to analyze thousands of documents in the time we used to be able to code a few hundred. While I have not yet utilized the tool, I can't wait to dig in.

Ultimately, what I want to highlight here is not the program itself—which is very useful and powerful—but rather the fact that a project initiated by a team of researchers in the Owen School of Management led to a solution negotiated by the Management Library which—through informal channels—came to the attention of a team of researchers in Earth and Environmental Science. And while the team was beginning their investigation, one member of the team drew the attention of a professor in the humanities (me!) to the possibilities. It's a story of how a great idea in digital research can work across the institution and benefit multiple researchers. When transinstitutional research works this well, I feel optimistic about the future of digital learning and research on our campus.

For more information on using Web Services Toolkit and XML Delivery, please contact Hilary Craiglow at hilary.craiglow@owen.vanderbilt.edu.

Sincerely,

