

# NASIG Newsletter

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## Profile

### Profile of T. Scott Plutchak

#### 31<sup>st</sup> Annual NASIG Conference Vision Speaker

Sharon Dyas-Correia

T. Scott Plutchak is the Director of Digital Data Curation Strategies at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and the first of three exciting Vision Speakers slated to spark the imaginations of attendees at the 31<sup>st</sup> annual NASIG Conference this June in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Plutchak holds a Bachelor's degree in Philosophy and a Master's degree in Library Science, and he completed a post-graduate fellowship at the United States National Library of Medicine (NLM). The profiles editor asked him to answer a group of questions related to his background, ideas, interests, and what conference attendees might be treated to in June. The following are some of the questions and the information provided by Plutchak.

#### ***Are there highlights of your work background you would like to share?***

In 1984, during my fellowship year at NLM, I was working on a project to see how videodiscs might be used to distribute information to first responders in the event of a chemical spill (not very well, as it turned out). As I was doing my research, I started to read about these new digital compact discs – CD-ROM. As part of my final report, I calculated the number of discs that would be required to hold the MEDLINE database and suggested that they might be an ideal medium for distributing the database so it could be searched locally. I'm pretty sure I was the first person to make that

suggestion in a public presentation. But there were only about seven people in the audience so I don't think it made a big impact.



*Photo Courtesy of T. Scott Plutchak*

#### ***Please describe your current position and work.***

After nineteen years as director of the Lister Hill Library of the Health Sciences, I wanted to focus on issues related to the long-term curation of research data, which has been an interest of mine for a long time. The senior vice-provost and I created this position with the charge of working across the university to try to figure out what we need to develop in terms of services, policy and infrastructure to effectively manage research data.

So I'm attached to the provost's office rather than the libraries. I have no staff and no budget, but a very supportive boss and considerable freedom to set my own agenda. Having worked as a senior administrator here for almost two decades, people know me well, and I have a good understanding of what the issues and opportunities are.

***What are some of the challenges and rewards of your work?***

The challenge is that the problem space is huge, very complicated, and dealing with it effectively requires getting a lot of people from different parts of the university to work together effectively. The reward is that the problem space is huge, very complicated, and dealing with it effectively requires getting a lot of people from different parts of the university to work together effectively.

***What do you hope to accomplish in your current position?***

In the short term (over the course of the next year), we should be able to establish a baseline set of services to assist researchers in complying with emerging federal requirements for public access to research data. In the long term, I hope to help the institution sort out the organizational structures and systems that will enable us to more effectively manage our overall research enterprise.

***How does your work relate to the work of NASIG?***

The issues that I'm dealing with are fundamental to how the work of librarians will evolve over the next couple of decades. NASIG's interests were originally rooted in issues surrounding the management of serials. Now we're facing the challenge of managing access to knowledge outputs of all kinds in a way that enables, even requires, us to be much more integrated into the workflows of the members of our communities than ever before.

***What makes your background ideal for your work?***

I've been involved in the issues and debates surrounding open access for a long time, so I know the issues well. I understand the particular skills that librarians can bring to the task. And, having led organizations for over twenty-five years I'm pretty good at appreciating the human factors involved in motivating people to do the things that I think they should do.

***What background do you wish you had?***

I wish I'd learned calculus. I didn't understand, until it was too late, that it's a language that is key to our understanding of the universe. I wish I had that. I don't know that it would have any practical application to my work but I believe it would make me a better person.

***What is the topic for your vision session at the conference in Albuquerque?***

I'm still working it out as I'm answering these questions. As usual when I've got a presentation coming up, I'm very curious to find out what I'm going to say.

***Can you give us some highlights or a teaser?***

I've been asking myself some questions about institutional repositories and how they relate to open access and open data. I'm hoping to challenge some of the received wisdom in these areas and maybe get people to ask some questions of their own. If I do this right, maybe I can shake up some people's thinking a bit.

***Why is the topic important?***

Some librarians are investing considerable resources into developing institutional repositories. Others are thinking they should. I think librarians need to take leadership roles in the development of open systems, but I'm not convinced we're going about it in the right way.

***What would you like to tell the world about you, your family, hobbies, etc.?***

I didn't have kids of my own, but eleven years ago my wife Lynn's daughter, Marian, had a little girl. She's doing this as a single mom so I've been one of Josie's primary caregivers. We are very close and she has transformed my life in very many positive ways. The stories I write about Josie on my blog are far more popular than anything I have to say about librarianship. My wife, by the way, is Lynn Fortney, who, until she retired in 2014 was vice-president and director of the Biomedical Division for EBSCO. Many evenings, after dinner, over the last glass of wine, we've had long, passionate discussions about the vagaries of the serials industry. It's been a great partnership and I've learned a lot from her that has helped to shape my thinking about the entire scholarly communication ecosystem. As to hobbies, words, music, and art pretty much sum up my interests. Oh, and food – both cooking and eating...and wine...and whisky.

***Other fun things or facts you would like to share?***

For over a decade I've been the leader of the world's first international open access librarian rock band, the Bearded Pigs (<http://beardedpigs.net/>). Geographically, we're pretty widely distributed so we've ever only gotten together a couple of times a year and we never practice. For years we did a show at the annual Medical Library Association conference, but we wrapped that up in Boston in 2013. If I hadn't become a librarian, it's likely that I'd have spent my adult life as a very poor musician.

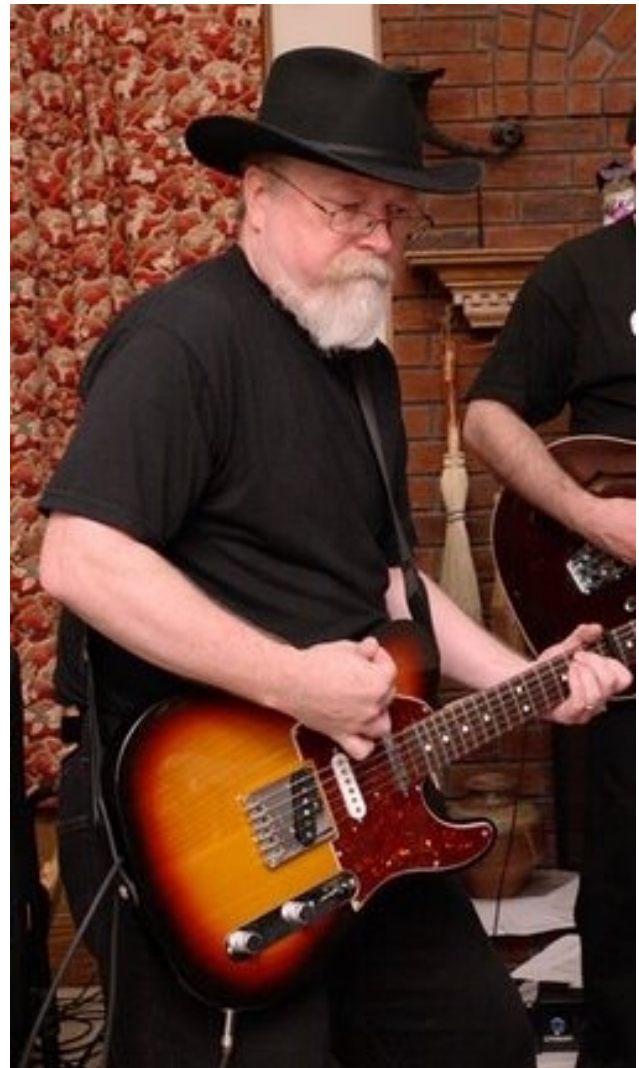
***Organizations you belong to that you don't mind the world knowing about?***

I'm not a joiner.

***Anything else you would like to include?***

I'm glad I'm doing my talk on Friday morning so I can relax and enjoy the rest of the conference.

***Plutchak's Vision Session is sure to be stimulating and a great kick off to Friday morning. I am sure attendees will enjoy his presentation and the rest of the conference!***



*Photo Courtesy of T. Scott Plutchak*