Profile of Dr. Philip Schreur, Associate University Librarian for Technical and Access Services at Stanford University and Vision Speaker at the 34th Annual NASIG Conference

Christian Burris, Profiles Editor

Did your background in music help you transition into librarianship?

Music was an immense help! First was music’s focus on languages. I needed to study German, French, Italian, Latin, and Greek to complete my PhD, and the ability to work with those languages has helped me throughout my career. I also began my library career as a music cataloger. The complexities of music uniform titles and cataloging of sound recordings was a true trial by fire. After that, everything seemed simple. System developers often love, or should I say fear, music people as well. Music discovery is so complex that it is usually what will break a system, so if you know music, you get lots of opportunities for IT development projects.

Your experience includes working for a provider of services to libraries. What was your biggest takeaway from that work?

My biggest take away was setting and adhering to deadlines. Library projects can tend to linger or never be completed, but vendors have hard deadlines with financial penalties for lack of adherence to contract specifications. It’s a healthy approach to project work.

You’ve had the chance to develop ontologies and taxonomies for said provider. Could you describe some of your contributions?

Hmm, this was a complicated area! I had to develop a broad, science taxonomy for the journal Science, a medical taxonomy for journals such as the BMJ journals, and social sciences taxonomies for SAGE. I had to learn how to separate the skills needed to logically organize knowledge from actual subject knowledge.

What were some of your challenges in transforming your library’s Cataloging Department into the Metadata Department?
It’s actually all in the name. Cataloging has a bad rep and I could see support for us dwindling. Many universities rely on outsourced metadata now. But everyone loves metadata. By changing the name of the department, we became an integral part of all new library developments and the Metadata Department has actually grown. I think the most challenging aspect was convincing the catalogers they already had the skills for this new environment. In fact, what they do has never been more essential. However, they need to think about the skills they have in a broad sense—subject analysis, organization, identifier management—and not so much on the particular ways they accomplish that work today. That part of the job will always be evolving.

**What are some emerging metadata standards that libraries should watch for?**

SHACL and ShEx will be important for constraining and shaping RDF graphs. I’d also closely watch developments in the International Imagine Interoperability Framework (IIIF) for the discovery, access, and annotation of image-based resources.

**Where do you see the relationship between linked data and libraries over the next ten years?**

10 years!? I’m not even sure linked data will be around in 10 years, LOL. However, it is currently the language of the Semantic Web, and to survive, libraries must take their place there. Libraries have essential skills in the organization of knowledge and the understanding of relationships between entities, skills the Web is in desperate need of. It’s an ideal match in many ways. But just as in the transition of my Catalog Department to Metadata Department, libraries must be willing to execute those principles with skills that are relevant to the new Web environment, or be relegated to the semantics of the catalog card.