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## Designing for the Discipline: Open Libraries and Scholarly Communication, Summary of a Presentation by Thomas Krichel

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## Designing for the Discipline: Open Libraries and Scholarly Communication, Summary of a Presentation by Thomas Krichel, Long Island University

Thomas Krichel speaks about the RePEc (Research Papers in Economics) system (<http://RePEc.org>). RePEc is a large digital library Krichel founded. Krichel says he is “bringing the world of economics into the world of computing and live information.”

Krichel’s talk offers insight into the broader workings of scholarly communications and scholarly communities as well as specific details of the RePEc system. He touches on where libraries may go wrong in how they approach scholarly communications and how they could do better if they want to play a role.

Krichel believes that there is now, and historically has been for a long time, an abundance of communities where scholars talk to scholars in their own disciplines. Scholars are not primarily speaking to students and to others outside their disciplines. Additionally, the methods of communication and the extent of communication within a discipline vary from field to field. As Krichel points out, “informal publishing doesn’t work for all disciplines.” Nonetheless, he says, “the internet affords scholars in different disciplines opportunities to communicate in less expensive, innovative ways. A successful scholarly communication initiative usually comes from within . . . [a] discipline; it’s tailored for the people in that discipline. Often it is not particularly well known outside that particular discipline.”

Historically, and before the internet, scholarly communities have collected and disseminated preprints and working papers. “The preprint communities were basically all for circulating their preprints among their peers,” says Krichel. “The working paper communities [were] where the working papers were essentially issued by departments, and a more departmental level publishing took place.”

Krichel argues that where libraries err is that they are “concentrating on the wrong things. Libraries concentrate on access to the whole system. They concentrate on the readers and they concentrate on the documents.” Libraries would do better, he argues, if they focus on the needs of the writers rather than the readers.

Krichel gives details about how RePEc works. The system draws data from 460+ archives (or sites where full text resides) world wide. Volunteers maintain the structure and a number of search interfaces. Scholars contribute metadata about their digital objects (articles) to RePEc and RePEc then links to the articles. RePEc relies heavily on authors keeping their own information up to date so that their materials can be found. In order to assure that their articles have impact, or are downloaded, scholars feel an incentive to keep their material findable and their personal information up-to-date.

A major concern of writers, as Krichel sees it, is that their writing have impact. RePEc is a system that, to some degree, can measure impact. Because it tracks and reports downloads of content, writers are eager to contribute. Scholars can offer statistics on download frequency as signs of the impact of their writing.

The discussion of impact raised the concern that measuring downloads is not the same as measuring citations. Evidence of citation is often equated with impact. One might question whether either downloading or citation are measures of impact or quality in an article. Krichel thinks there are several ways we can measure quality. As he purports, “we can measure quality of downloads, we can measure quality of citations. We can measure quality of an author and number of papers written; there [are] various ways in which we could do it. Correlating these various ways is not that trivial because of the problems still with the underlying data; the data is not perfect.” In answer to his own question, “do downloads act as a forecast for citations?”, Krichel suggests that it is still too hard to tell but that a system may be built at some point that will help in this determination. Regardless, downloads do indicate a step in the research process and should not be discounted.

A question raised indicates that some may try to cheat the system. Robot downloaders could raise the statistics for any article. Krichel suggests that there are safeguards to help prevent this.

Is RePEc acting in the role of the librarian gathering resources and offering access? Krichel agrees and comments that involving librarians in the process is “not a bad idea.” He goes on to say that “if librarians would be taking over the dissemination role of scholars and basically ---- output and organize it in a more efficient way than scholars can do, then they would be doing a great service.”

RePEc has some undeniable preservation problems. For instance, some authors may give the permission to archive their content only for a limited time and others may withdraw their papers when a publisher requires them to do so in order to move a work into formal publication.