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Introduction

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Introduction

I am sure most of you have heard the catchphrase “Open books, open minds.” Perhaps you have seen it on a bookmark or hosted a program around the theme. Library staff pride ourselves on opening people up to information in whatever its form, whether by exposing them to an information resource or simply by ensuring that our doors (physical or digital) are open.

In this issue, you will discover that there is more to openness in libraries than open books and open doors. Surely we want people to open up to the wealth of knowledge libraries possess. But to fully open our libraries requires us to open the processes, policies, and tools that enable us to provide said knowledge. The authors in this issue discuss just that.

The issue starts with a library’s most basic principle: customer service. Jane Salisbury beautifully describes the importance of being open to the myriad people who come through our doors. Her argument is supported by Carolee Hirsch’s sketches of the diverse patrons who may frequent your library. We move from openness to the public to openness among staff with Carol McGeehon’s article about how implementing a staff-wide wiki at the Douglas County Library System improved communication.

The next two articles explore open source software. Authors discuss how this alternative to proprietary software benefits their libraries. Sean Park and I detail how switching to the open source operating system Linux has allowed us to improve public computing at Coos County Libraries. And in a project eagerly watched by many in Oregon’s library community, Beth Longwell of the Sage Library System writes about its switch to the Evergreen open source integrated library system.

Rachel Bridgewater takes us from openness of information tools to openness of the information itself with her article about the free culture movement. Free culture touches on a topic near and dear to our hearts: copyright and information policy, and the need for more balanced laws on these issues.

One aspect of free culture—open access—is addressed by Kim Read. She shows how library consortia have been instrumental in promoting open access publishing and the importance of that commitment in this era of skyrocketing journal costs. With open access also comes an opening of the processes by which scholarship, and specifically science, is done. So says Hope Leman in her discussion of how science is changing, as both the processes and the results it produces becoming more accessible.

Finally, the issue ends with a pair of articles on open government, a topic that has received plenty of press lately. Patrice McDermott and Roberta Richards show how government policymaking is opening up at both the national and state levels, and how critical it is that we continue to press officials to shine light on how our laws and regulations are made. This government openness benefits libraries directly, as Ann Reed and Jane Scheppke demonstrate. Their article about Oregon’s Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant program shows how libraries and patrons throughout the state profit from the openness of the LSTA program.

As those technical geeks among us might be wont to say, we also “eat our own dog food” in this issue: all of the authors have agreed to license their articles under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial license, including any original images within the articles. This means that future content creators are free to reuse, remix, and build upon the articles without the authors’ permission provided they abide by the license terms. For more details, check out Rachel’s article about free culture.

Thank you to all of the authors for their fantastic contributions to this issue. We hope that you find this issue informative and intellectually-stimulating. Most of all, though, we hope that the articles inspire you to find ways to make your own libraries even more open.