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Is the Sky Actually Falling? Using the Theory of Fields to Illuminate Contemporary Discourses in Academic Librarianship (presentation slides)

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Is the Sky Actually Falling?
Using the Theory of Fields to Illuminate Contemporary Discourses in Academic Librarianship

Kristin Hoffmann
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Attempting Elegance
Jenica Rogers. Burn the land and boil the seas, you can't take the sky from me.

About Jenica and this blog   Speaking, consulting, and mentoring   Attempting Physicality   Contact Jenica

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Walking away from the American Chemical Society

September 12, 2012   Posted by Jenica under Collection Management, faculty, Libraries, The Vendor Files   75 Comments

There's no gentle introduction to this, so I'll get right to my point:

Librarians, this is a call to action.

tl;dr: SUNY Potsdam will not be subscribing to an American Chemical Society online journal package for 2013. We will instead be using a combination of the Royal Society of Chemistry content, ACS single title subscriptions, the ACS backfile, and ScienceDirect from Elsevier** to meet our chemical information needs. We're doing this because the ACS pricing model is unsustainable for our institution and we were unable to find common ground with the sales team from the ACS. Instead, we explored other options and exercised them. You could do the same if you find yourself in a position similar to ours as ACS standardizes their pricing, and maybe together we can make enough choices to make our voices heard in meaningful ways.

So here's how we got here.

The problem:
In May 2012, after much internal discussion and debate, three SUNY library directors from the comprehensive colleges (myself included) and the university centers, along with two SUNY Office of Library and Information Services staff met with three representatives from the ACS at SUNY Plaza in

Thank you for saying this.

It's about time!

… more power to Jenica Rogers for what she has done.

Why haven't we seen more widespread, successful attempts to "fix the system"?

What might it take for us to fix it?

Theory of Strategic Action Fields

Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam. *Theory of Fields*.
Oxford U Press, 2012.

Theory of Fields

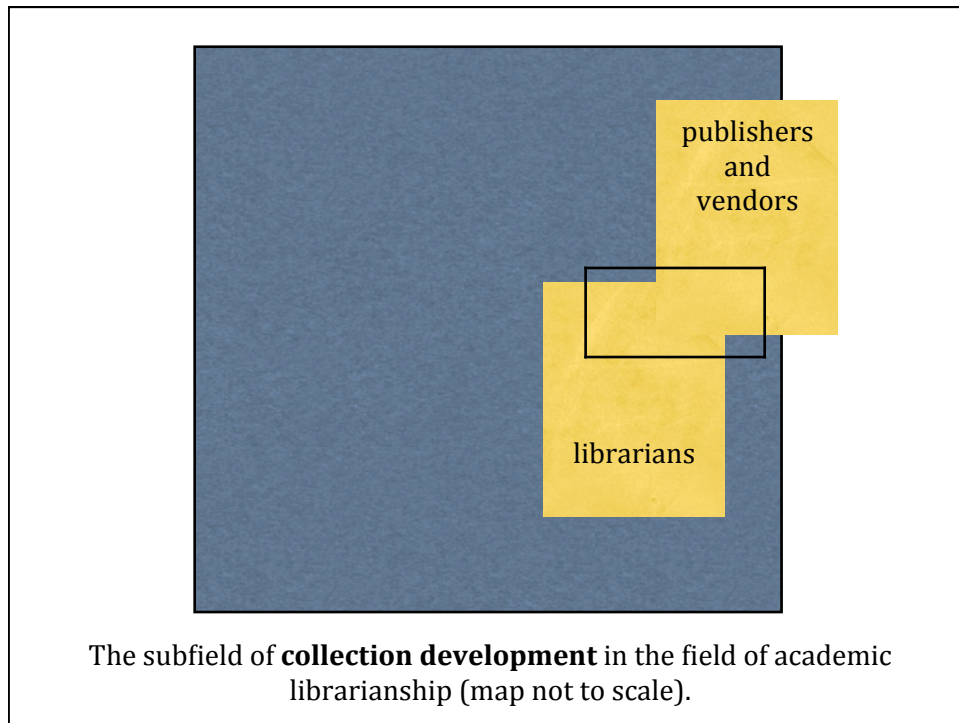The field: boundaries, rules, structure

Incumbents and challengers

Social skill

Stability within fields

Crisis and episodes of contention

The subfield of **collection development** in the field of academic librarianship (map not to scale).

Academic librarians want to serve faculty and students by making collections available for them to use.

What is at stake is the ability of librarians to have real decision-making authority over their library's collections.

"Rules"

1. the publisher/vendor sets prices for materials and terms for access
2. pricing is confidential
3. library budgets are limited
4. librarians acquire materials – it's we who do the selecting and buying
5. librarians acquire materials on behalf of faculty and students
6. librarians are "nice", polite, civil, kind, generous, don't rock the boat

Incumbents = Publishers and Vendors

Challengers = Librarians

Social Skill

"the ability to induce cooperation in others"

Read people and environments
Frame a course of action
Mobilize others

A stable field is constantly shifting, but the overall structure of the field stays the same.

Episodes of Contention

A crisis external to the field

The field is completely changed: new incumbents, new rules, new structure

The new field will be shaped by the strongest, most socially skilled actors

Strive to improve our position
Tell meaningful stories
Take stock of available resources
Try alternative courses of action
Develop social skill

"Libraries are always changing"

Shifts and adjustments
vs.
Large-scale transformations