

CREATING A VIRTUAL COMMUNITY TO HELP FOSTER INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

A BRIEFING SESSION SPONSORED BY THE RESEARCH, TEACHING, AND LEARNING STEERING COMMITTEE

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Moderator:

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Presenter:

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Background

What new opportunities do libraries have for fostering interdisciplinary research? As both the size of the university and the geographical distance between researchers increases, how does an institution draw together the “biologists, physicists, chemists, computational scientists and engineers in an atmosphere where traditional departmental and college boundaries become secondary to the intellectual work itself.” Leibniz, the 17th century mathematician, philosopher, and librarian, believed that scientific progress depends on the ease of communication between scholars and that the purpose of great libraries is to provide and keep open the channels of communication. How do concepts and standards from the semantic web community help libraries achieve Leibniz’s vision?

Three years ago, the Cornell University Library created a virtual life sciences community to promote the discovery of faculty and their research activities. VIVO organizes and presents information on people, research, information resources, and education activities to help the academic community discover common interests and make connections. Using an ontology-based model, curators and programmers from the library manage and assemble this content for delivery. This single point of access for research activity provides a cohesive view of the life sciences at Cornell.

VIVO's search engine clusters results into categories (“People”, “Activities”, “Events”, “Organizations”, “Publications”, etc.), providing a campus-wide search capability that offers a richer context than undifferentiated text-based indexes. VIVO draws on content from across the university by ingesting human resource and grants information, subscriptions to licensed and public domain publications databases, and department or college faculty reporting mechanisms. Machine feeds are augmented via manual curation. Following the success of VIVO for the life sciences, several smaller portals were created, including one for the entrepreneurship program, another reflecting the academic priorities of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, etc. Recognizing the utility of VIVO for the life sciences, the university administration recently supported the expansion of VIVO to cover areas such as the physical sciences, social sciences, and international activities. As a result of these activities, the library developed closer working relationships with central IT leaders and with individual college and departmental administrative staff who recognize the potential of VIVO and the important role that the library can play in fostering interdisciplinary research. This briefing highlights key features of the enterprise.