

Trip report: Intersect and University of Sydney

last week I headed to Sydney for a couple of days. I visited Intersect, spent some time with Peter Turner talking about iCat and the DataMINX project and had a lunchtime meeting with a group of eResearch people at usyd.

Intersect

It says on the [Intersect website](#):

Intersect is the new peak eResearch body servicing the local research and innovation sector including all NSW universities and relevant public and private sector research agencies. With a much needed concentration of eResearch expertise in the state, Intersect will coordinate the resources of existing islands of technical capability among its members and partners to identify, develop and deliver world-class ICT enabled platforms to drive the next generation of research and innovation.

Intersect has been established by a consortium of NSW universities, SIRCA and the NSW State Government, and is constituted as a not-for-profit company.

Intersect is new and still getting up to speed. Ian Gibson, the CEO took me and a group of his staff through a presentation about what it is and where it is going. The bit I liked most was the way they are going to have embedded eResearch Analyst positions at all the member universities (although one per faculty or one per department might actually get things happening). I also liked the fact that they may be able to host IT services and mind data as well – I have observed that sometimes in the university sector it seems to be easier to contract with outside providers than with ICT at one's own institution, not naming any institutions here of course.

Tuesday afternoon at Intersect I talked about:

- [ADFI](#) The Australian Digital futures institute where we work on eResearch and eLearning for USQ and external stakeholders.
- [ICE](#) – The Integrated content environment, our scholarly publishing system set up to create distance education materials in web and print forms. To illustrate this I pointed to some of our open courseware [OCW](#). ICE is now part of our work on eResearch, see the report from the PKP meeting in December 2008 [ICE vs OJS](#).
- [The Fascinator](#) - one of the outputs from our eResearch work. The fascinator is an application with two modes:
 - i. A lightweight repository front-end.
 - ii. An experimental eResearch desktop application.

See [The Fascinator](#) site for more information.

In any conversation about publishing scholarly stuff LaTeX will come up, and it did at Intersect. Yes, ICE supports it, sort of, but no there is not guarantee that any given LaTeX file can be rendered into HTML – it just doesn't work like that. Clare Sloggett suggested that maybe we could take an ICE-like approach and support just one way of doing LaTeX – like we support just one set of word processing styles. Why didn't I think of it like that? That's what we did with word processing after all – and here I was expecting there to be a magic any-old-TeX to HTML converter. (We had sort of discussed a standard 'template' with a group at USQ and found it too hard, but we'll look that option again, the

discussion has been re-opened with Intersect and at USQ.)

The purpose of my visit to Intersect was to make myself know to the team, show them what we do and find out just what it is that they are planning to do. I think there's scope for future collaboration. There was certainly some interest in ICE.

Peter Turner / [Data-MINX](#)

I've been talking to Peter Turner for a while about collection, labeling and routing chemistry data from instruments to lab computers, to departmental and institutional repositories. This visit I got a demo of the ICAT software they are planning to use. The demo was a bit limited partly because it seems to be a bit hard to get hold of test data, does anyone know of a demo instance we could look at?

Peter and I talked about architectures for synchronizing data around a set of ICAT instances and allowing data to flow out to repository services, for which I guess you would use OAI-PMH or Atom Archive, or both. Some interesting work to be done there.

usyd

On Wednesday I visited a group convened by [Jim Richardson](#) at Sydney. We ran through the same sort of stuff as with Intersect, only faster, and I talked about the new [CAIRSS service](#) that we will be running at USQ for the Council of Australian University Librarians. CAIRSS is new enough that I was unable to talk about it except in the most general terms, like that it has two staff who will be supporting the repository community, one a repository manager, Kate Watson from USC and the other a technical officer Tim McCallum from USQ. I know these two will be helpful, we're sorting out with the steering committee and the community just what form the help will take.

Of particular interest to this group was the new desktop version of The Fascinator – we're keen to keep getting requirements and comment from Jim Richardson and Rowan Brownlee. We didn't quite have taxonomy support ready to demo but as soon as we do we will put up a screencast and seek input from one and all. Gratifyingly, Jim endorsed our open approach of twittering, blogging, screencasting and hosting an open source code base.

Finally I caught up Steven Hayes at the Archeological computing lab. He showed me [Heurist](#) – a bookmark manager that turned into a full-on semantic-web eResearch environment. I hope that's a reasonable way to describe it.

Of particular interest to our work was the way Heurist has been used to manage resources about the ANZAC campaign at Gallipoli, including details like an ontology of army ranks which could be re-used for the work we are doing with the Public Memory Research Centre ([PMRC](#)) at USQ, with Leonie Jones.

Steven offered to put up a Heurist instance we can try out, and was encouraging about our work on the Desktop Fascinator picking up the goals of the Field Helper application that came out of that group. Heurist could definitely be one of the places to which data can be routed from the desktop.

Agenda

Repositories and eResearch tools: