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Optimizing Library Services — Academic Libraries in the 21st Century: Adapting Services to Fit Digital Resources

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Iwork at a regional campus library for **Western Kentucky University**, one of four campuses in the system. Because we are seventy miles away from the main campus, we rely heavily on the use of digital materials for our students to be able to complete their homework assignments and term papers. These digital materials have made a world of difference to our ability to provide quality education in these regions and to students online. Unfortunately, the advent of digital materials in the late 20th century has caused some difficult challenges for libraries, and especially, academic libraries. As the years go by, more and more students seeking higher education already have a tremendous amount of experience with technology. This experience has led to certain demands and expectations on academic libraries, not all of which can be readily met. The following is a discussion on the services and resources that academic libraries should be offering as the 21st century progresses.

Electronic Resources are Not Optional

By this point, most academic libraries have reconfigured their budgets to allow for the purchase of databases, which provide greater access to journal articles and other scholarly works than was ever possible before. However, the need for databases continues to grow as more scholarly journals develop online access and as patrons come to expect online access. Electronic resource literature recommends that academic libraries have not only ERM (electronic resource management) software but a dedicated electronic resource manager whose job it is to handle contracts, negotiations, and many aspects of troubleshooting once the products go live (Wright, 2013). This is an invaluable resource to the patron base, as it matters very little if the electronic resources exist if the patrons cannot access them. In addition to all of these duties, an electronic resource manager or their subordinate may

host workshops on database use for faculty and students alike. Even workshops for the manager's coworkers in public services might be necessary to ensure that the databases are being used to their fullest extent.

Our electronic resources manager at **Western Kentucky University** (whose actual title is Coordinator of Electronic and Continuing Resources) is kept very busy by these demands, and yet still finds a way to continue to innovate in her position, adding even more depth to both the faculty and students' knowledge of electronic resources. **Western Kentucky University** is not alone in its appreciation of a capable electronic resource manager; a quick look at the **American Library Association's** Joblist shows that approximately twenty percent of the jobs posted in the last month (at the time of this writing, January) had some component that dealt with electronic resources. Many of the jobs *only* dealt with electronic resources. While we should never discount the aesthetic

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appeal of physical books, electronic resources are an important asset for the academic library, allowing the institution to bring more resources to the students and faculty than ever before.

Once the academic library has become accustomed to digital materials through the use of databases, it may be time to expand the collection to include eBooks. The demand from patrons for eBooks may be different depending on subject area, but the demand is there and growing. A bonus of eBooks is that the materials are more easily available if the institution has multiple campuses; while many university libraries have excellent delivery systems that run efficiently (**Indiana University** comes to mind here), there is nothing quite like instant access of materials. Students who grew up in affluent areas or who have prior experience at other institutions might already be familiar with eBooks. Even smaller communities sometimes receive grants or charitable contributions to provide their students with the technology required for digital textbooks, such as laptops or tablets. Assessment of the college or university's needs is imperative here: some disciplines (like the health sciences) prefer digital materials because knowledge of their subjects changes rapidly. If an institution has purchased a license to an eBook and there is a new edition the next year, they can (dependent on their agreements) discontinue the first license in favor of a license for the newer edition. On the other hand, other disciplines may not be as amenable to digital materials or might question their usefulness because of formatting issues. There is often hesitation, for example, from art departments regarding the quality of reproductions in digital material, though even this is changing. My colleagues and I have been loath to remove physical copies of art journals for this reason, and it makes sense that the trepidation would extend to eBooks. However, in the few short years since I completed my master's degree in library science, quality has rapidly improved, and I am hopeful this will become less of a problem in the future.

Another subset of digital materials is streaming video and music. Services like **Kanopy** allow institutions to buy one-year or three-year licenses for streaming video that faculty can use in their classrooms. These services are newer and most likely less familiar to the average institution, but their popularity is rising. These licensing agreements give the faculty an opportunity to change their routine, while still ensuring that common videos will be available long-term with a minimum of fuss. The best way to shift faculty members to this format, in my experience, is to identify individuals who are using video in their classroom and give them suggestions of videos in the streaming service that are complimentary to what they already use. This will facilitate a gradual change in the faculty without overwhelming them or

making them feel like they are being forced to switch. Based on my institution's experience, though, I would recommend starting with just one streaming service, even if it does not have everything the faculty might want, because it will help the electronic resource manager learn the ins and outs of that type of licensing. If the introduction of one service works well, there are always other services that could be added to make a more well-rounded collection.

At my institution, our electronic resources are reviewed by a committee before purchase, to weigh the short-term and long-term costs against the benefits of purchase. This includes individual purchase like the streaming videos found on **Kanopy**, which can add some time to the process, but also streamlines the acquisition of materials, in case many librarians (there are seventeen of us with collection development responsibilities) request the same or similar materials. The committee can assess if there is too much overlap in the requests and save the institution money in the long run.

How Do Services Change?

All of these digital materials provide information to the user faster and more efficiently, but it is still the academic library's job to ensure that students are able to understand the information they are receiving. The reference and instruction departments of the academic library exist not only to facilitate the access to materials, but to help students understand the material and learn how to access it on their own. Gone are the days of librarians as gatekeepers; they are now guides to a wide world of information that the consumer should be thinking critically about. Even news broadcasts have lost some of their authority, and students must learn not only how to find and interpret material, but how to analyze and evaluate the source of the material. Some sources of information considered to be scholarly, like databases, may have material indexed in them that is not scholarly — like trade journals and letters to the editor — while other sources that are generally deemed to not be scholarly, like Wikipedia, might be the best place for starting research, because they have more current information than other general reference sources and often link back to more authoritative or scholarly sources in their references that the average user would not be able to find on their own.

Their patrons have changed as well. Students — as well as younger faculty members — would have had access to computers from an early age, if not their whole lives. The concept of digital natives was born over a decade ago and has made its rounds in the literature. **Prensky (2001)** coined the term digital natives to refer to individuals who “spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers and videogames, digital, music players, videocams, cell phones, and all other toys and tools of the digital age” (p. 1). While it is important to take into consideration cultural differences and socio-economic status, this definition does describe a lot of the students that academic li-

brarians will see at the reference desk or in their instruction classrooms.

I am not quite a digital native. Not to give away my age, but I remember a time before there was a computer in my home (though I do not remember a time before there was a computer in my classroom; I have fond memories of playing games on an **Apple** computer located in the back of my first grade classroom). However, I spent enough of my formative years with access to a computer and the occasional expectation of using it that by the time I got to college, I thought I knew how to find things and how to research. The truth was I knew how to *google* my question, which is not the same as researching at all, not even in the most user-friendly databases.

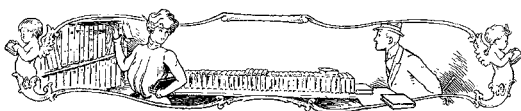
I think this gives me a good insight into how digital natives perceive reference instruction. These students who have grown up with technology equate their comfort level with the technology with expertise on how to use it, and that is not always the same thing. They also often conflate similar types of technology with each other though they might need to be approached differently. I have found this to be especially true with search engines versus databases; on the surface these things seem to be the same, but in reality they are not. If one uses the same search term in each, one will get a very different result, depending upon how each is indexed. The assumption that they behave the same requires a shift in how database searching is taught. While a non-digital native might need to be taught how to construct a search query because they do not construct search queries at all, a digital native will often also expect an explanation of why their search query (which might get usable results in a search engine, but not a database) needs to be changed, rather than accept a librarian's expertise as authoritative. Then, there are the more minor differences: a search engine will often display related search terms at the top or bottom of the search, while related terms and keywords in databases are usually found in the records of the results or in the thesaurus. All of this is, of course, in addition to the analytical skills needed to be taught to a generation of students who trust search engine rankings. So many of my students have thought the first result on a database search was good enough and refused to look for more.

Academic libraries must offer digital resources to meet the demands of 21st-century researchers. That being said, they must also be prepared to modify their teaching and reference practices to accommodate not only the new resources but the changing student. As technology becomes more integrated into society, it will change how we perceive information, and librarians should be ready to guide their patrons in the analysis and evaluation of such, no matter its format.

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The Scholarly Publishing Scene — Professional, Scholarly and Other Magazines

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I subscribe to half-a-dozen magazines whose print issues arrive in my mailbox. Included are *The New Yorker* (I began reading it when I was an undergraduate in the late 1950s), *The Nation* (I began reading it in late middle age), *DownBeat* and *Jazz Times* (both cover real jazz, a passion since my teens), and the *New York Review of Books* (*NYRB*), started during the New York newspaper strike in the 1960s and in my mailbox or bought on newsstands from the outset, and the *London Review of Books* (*LRB*), which I've been taking for the past 10 or 15 years.

Just in case you haven't seen them, these last two publications are tabloid size with text of most articles in four-column format. Readership for both skews academic, I'd guess. I base my hunch not only on the readable scholarly tone and substance of many of the articles (although "readable scholarly" may sound like an oxymoron, in my experience there are many academics in all disciplines who can write clearly and with verve), but also on the plethora of university-based advertising in the *NYRB* and in the case of the *LRB*, back-of-the-book ads for university offerings, such as short courses and conferences about writing.

A recent *NYRB* issue had full-page ads by university presses at **Cornell**, **Toronto**, **Harvard** and **Princeton**, plus a half-page ad by the **University of California Press**. In addition, the **University of North Carolina Press** took over the back cover to advertise eight books, half of them on U.S.-Cuba relations, and the **University of Connecticut** took over the inside front cover to tout its expertise in 3D printing technology.

A recent *LRB* issue had ads from university presses (**Princeton**, **Leuven** and

NYU), universities (**NYU** again, **King's College London**, **Essex** twice, **Aberystwyth**, **Birmingham**, **Birbeck**, **University of London**, **Georg-August Universitat, Cambridge** twice, **King's Lynn** and **Winchester**), plus a boatload of other learned organizations and associations. In addition, many contributors to both publications moonlight as members of the professoriate — or is it the other way around?

After poring over the *LRB*'s ads, should readers feel the need, they can turn to the **London Squint Clinic**, whose large notice appears under medical services classifieds. By the way, I would be remiss if I didn't alert you to the book, *They Call Me Naughty Lola: Personal Ads from the London Review of Books*, compiled by **David Ross**, employed at the **MIT Media Lab**, no less. Publishing example: "Employed in publishing? Me too. Stay the hell away. Man on the inside seeks woman on the outside who likes milling around hospitals guessing the illnesses of out-patients. 30-35. Leeds." And if you haven't had enough of that, there's a follow-up volume, *Sexually, I'm More of a Switzerland: More Personal Ads from the London Review of Books*.

As if all of the above weren't enough, there are still more magazines that arrive in my mailbox. I get three alumni magazines. Then there are two technical magazines: *Mechanical Engineering* and *Plastics Engineering*, which come to me monthly as a result of my membership in the **American Society of Mechanical Engineers** (**ASME**) and the **Society of Plastics Engineers** (**SPE**).

Publishing flagship magazines like these — both are printed on glossy stock and are colorfully illustrated — is a benefit that major technical societies provide to their

members. Some of the magazines are impressive. The **Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers** (**IEEE**), which bills itself as the world's largest professional association (LinkedIn doesn't count, of course), publishes *IEEE Spectrum* monthly with a circulation of over 380,000 worldwide. The **American Chemical Society** (**ACS**), publishes *Chemical & Engineering News* (*C&EN*) 51 times a year with a staff of over 50 writers and editors. It's the largest magazine covering the chemical industry. Its circulation of over 127,000 is an order of magnitude larger than that of **IHS's** *Chemical Week*, for example.

IEEE Spectrum has been in continuous publication since 1964. (It was a successor to a magazine called *Electrical Engineering*.) *C&EN* has been in continuous publication since 1923. *Mechanical Engineering*, also in the top rank, is much older. It has been in continuous publication since 1880.

According to *Mechanical Engineering's* editor **John Falcioni**, to whom I spoke in late February, **ASME's** membership bounces between 100,000 and 140,000, including 20% international, depending on members' annual dues cycles. The magazine's circulation averages around 120,000 copies. Libraries worldwide, who pay non-member rates, account for 15,000 to 20,000 copies.

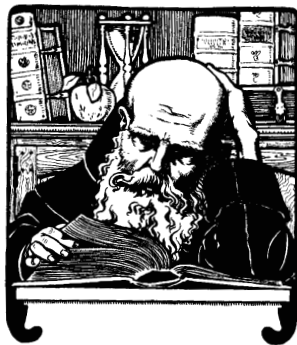
Mechanical Engineering's staff numbers just 10. Not so many years ago, the magazine published more pages than it does now until its advertising base was reduced by the Internet alternative that hit most print publications (the ad base has been stable in recent years).

In order to engage a younger readership, *Mechanical Engineering's* design was completely revamped in January 2013 to give the magazine a more contemporary look, according to **Falcioni**. Graphic elements were completely changed, fonts were made more contemporary, and a different color pallet was introduced.

Falcioni told me that the front of the magazine is of particular interest to readers. Besides his own topical column, there is a multipage section called *Tech Buzz*, which features numerous trends and developments of interest to **ASME's** membership, including salary surveys, and a *Vault* page, which features articles published in the magazine decades ago but still of interest. There's no shortage of practitioners and academics who want to write feature articles. *Mechanical Engineering* publishes 35 to 40 a year in total (fewer than used to be published due to the popularity of *Tech Buzz*).

Falcioni reports to the person who runs **ASME's** entire technical publishing program, which includes, among other things, over two dozen scholarly journals. An Editorial

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