

January 2019

## The Role of Libraries in a Digital Age

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### Recommended Citation

Annis, Ethan, "The Role of Libraries in a Digital Age" (2019). *Archbishop Alemany Library | Faculty Presentations*. 1.

<https://scholar.dominican.edu/library-faculty-presentations/1>

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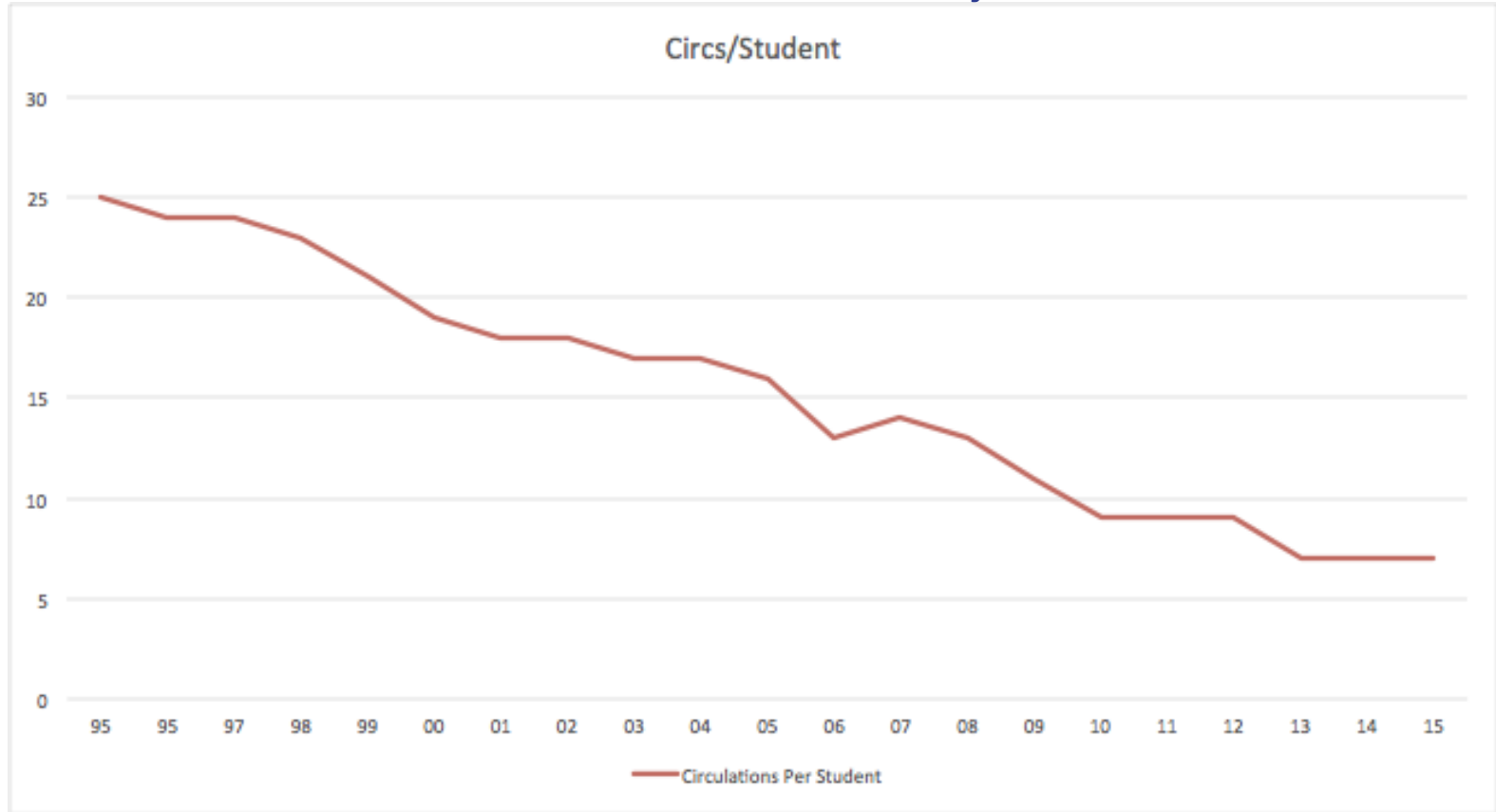
# The Role of Libraries in a Digital Age

By Ethan Annis, November 27, 2018



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## 20 Years of Circulation Items/Student at 114 Major Universities in the US



Adapted by presenter from Rick Anderson's blog post "Less Than Meets the Eye: Print Book Use Is Falling Faster in Research Libraries," in The Scholarly Kitchen, August 21, 2017 (-72% in 20 years)

# What has been tried to increase circulation?

- Making it easier to borrow items. (It is already easy and there are no lines.)
- Loaning different types of items. (textbooks, laptops, etc.)
- Having more items available. (Consortial borrowing, purchasing items.)

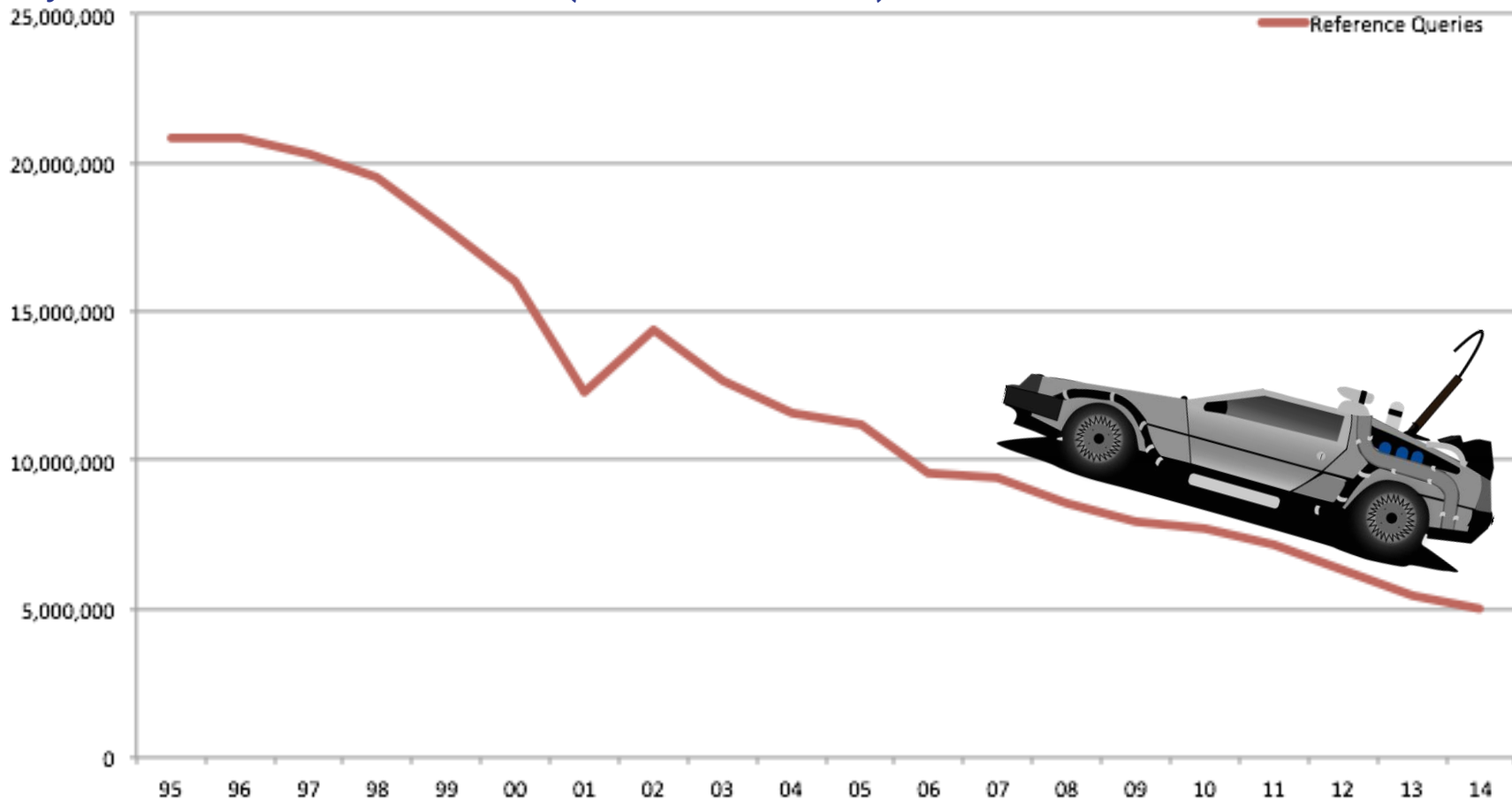
**But it's still down 72%**

# How have academic libraries responded?

- Reduced the amount of space and/or prime real estate, devoted to collections
  - Using compact shelving and automated retrieval systems
    - This is done in combination with normal shelving for frequently used items
  - Storing unused books offsite
  - Downside is browsing becomes difficult or impossible
- Dramatically reduced holdings
- Reduced the number of personnel devoted to maintaining, purchasing and processing collections. These personnel can be given new roles.

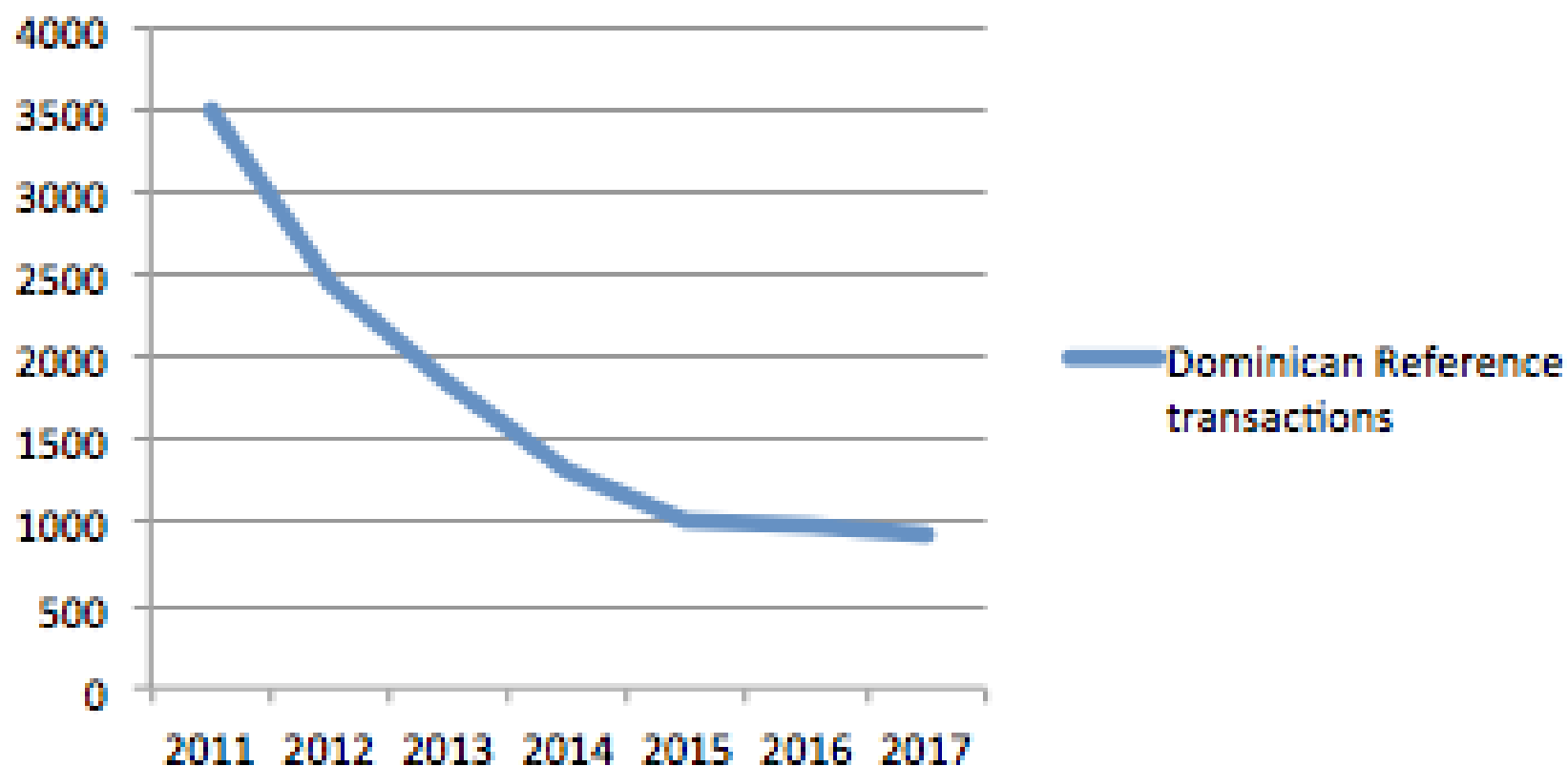
Later we will talk about what they have done with the freed space, personnel and funds.

# 19 years of Reference Queries (Not Per Student) From ~106 US Research Libraries

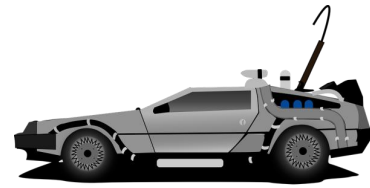


From data in Brian Mathews' June 19, 2015 blog post "Could Your Library Answer 1 Million Reference Questions A Year?"  
Based on ARL data. (-76% over 19 years)

# Dominican Reference transactions



# What has been tried to increase reference questions? (Delorean Dreams)



- More convenient access to reference librarians (text, social media, email, etc.)
- Friendlier, less imposing furniture between librarians and patrons
- Roving reference librarians, going to where the patrons are, such as cafeterias
- Increasing hours of reference (by using external services, sometimes to 24/7 during semesters)

**But it's still down 76%**



# How have academic libraries responded? (Post Delorean Dreams)

- Many have reduced or eliminated reference desk hours and availability has become on-call
- Some have eliminated reference desks and/or consolidated the services into the circulation desks

**In my opinion, the reason there has been a decline is because the questions have remained roughly as complex but the tools to answer those questions have become orders of magnitude easier to use. I see no reason that this trend will not continue.**

**We will talk more about what reference librarians can do later.**

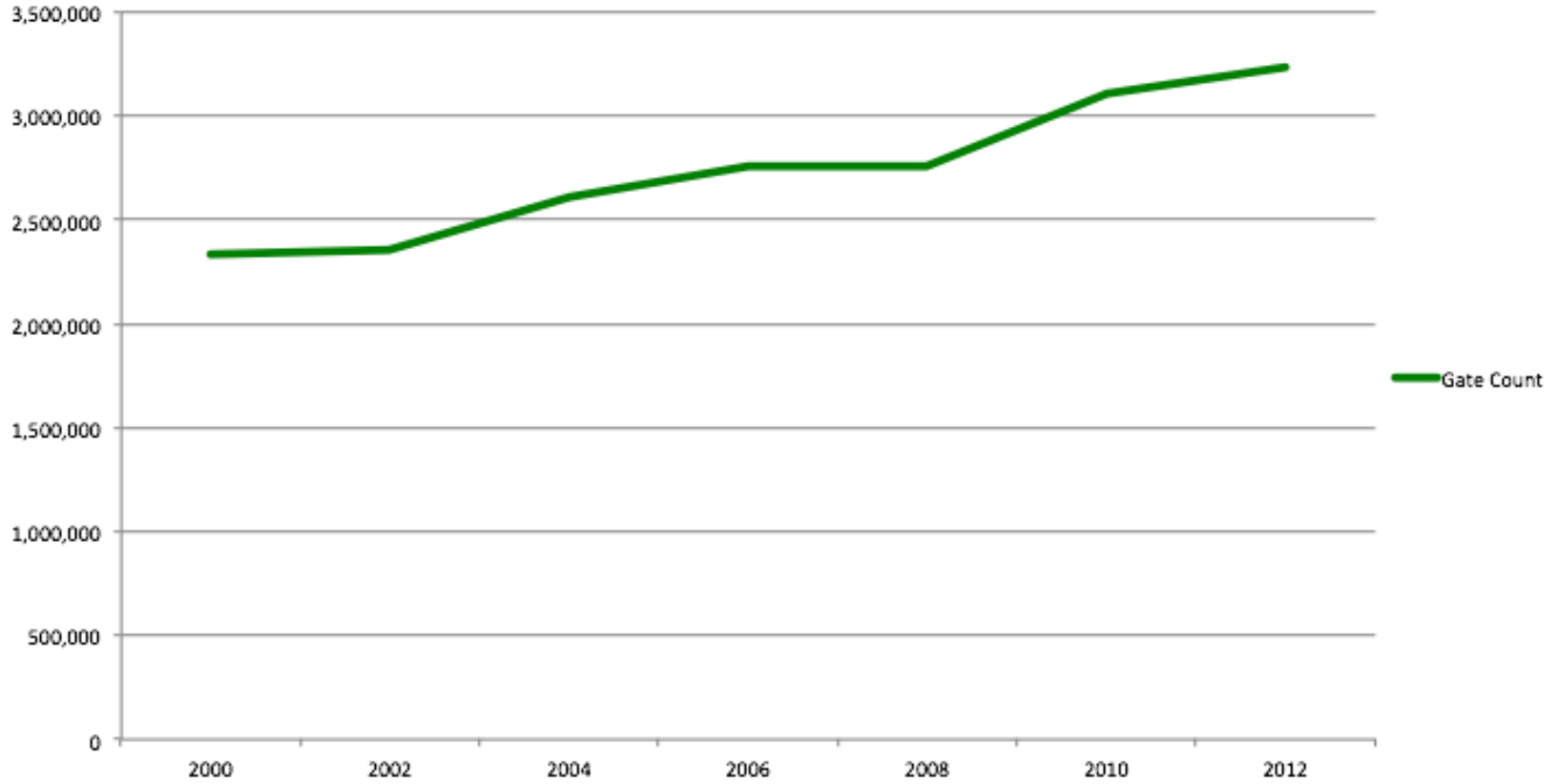
# A note about these libraries

Many of these R1 libraries have larger annual operating budgets than Dominican's entire annual budget and have more employees than Dominican. (That's not just Dominican's library.) It's not as though they have no resources available to address the problems but they also are not as nimble as smaller schools, like Dominican.



We've seen what's down. What's Up?

# Gate Count for 60 Largest US Academic Libraries



From data in Donald A. Barclay's article, "Has the library outlived its usefulness in the age of Internet? You'd be surprised." In *The Conversation*, April 28, 2016. (+38% in 12 years)

# Space is being used, what are libraries doing to improve their spaces?

- Nap Rooms
- Water bottle refilling stations
- Study rooms
- Better noise reduction/insulation
- Power and wifi everywhere
- More whiteboards
- All night study area
- Rooms like smart classrooms
- Discard much of the stacks

# What can we teach?

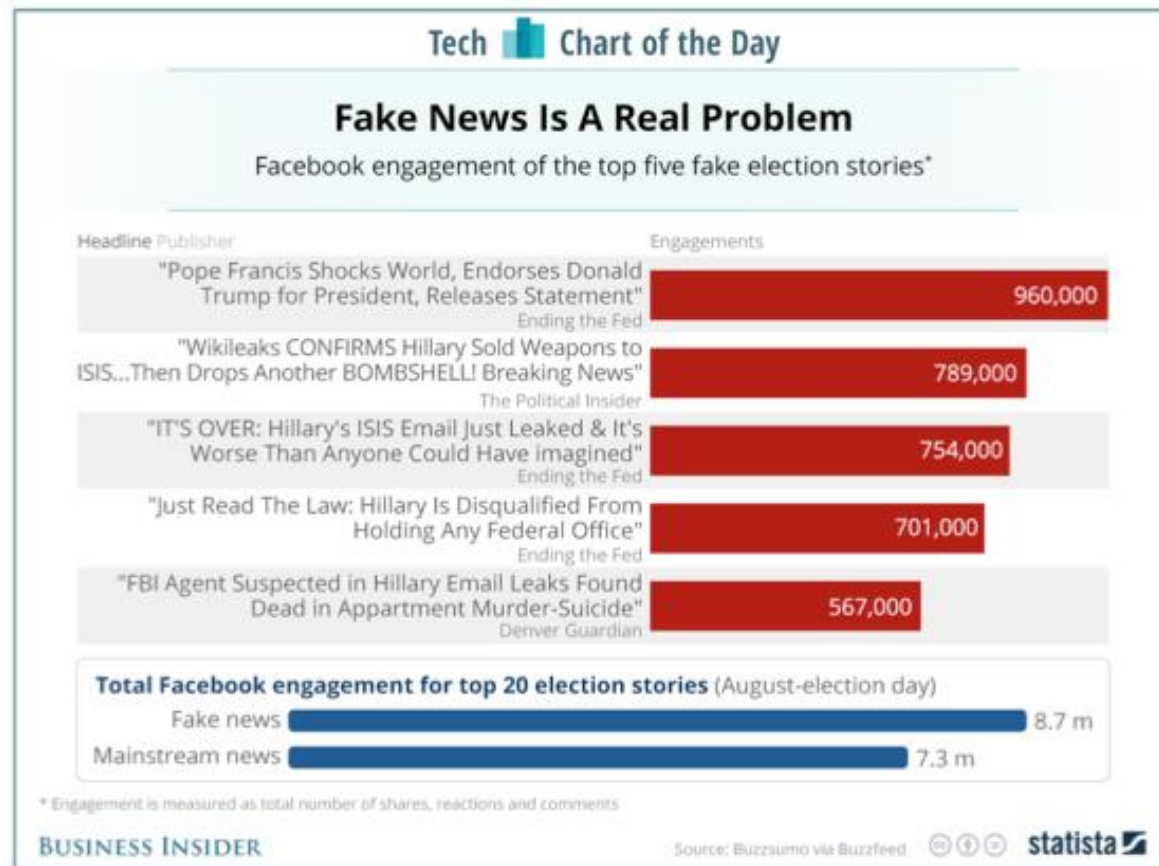
## "Critical Thought"

The ACRL's Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education provides a good framework for teaching critical thought. Here is their definition of information literacy: "Information literacy is the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning." (2016)

Why is this so important now? The volume of information with no empirical basis being disseminated by very powerful people in this country is, to the best of my knowledge, unprecedented. There is such a high volume of non-empirically based information that often the press does not even report it. Someone who has been taught information literacy can see that information produced via fabrication has no value except in fantasy/fiction and that pretending fabricated information is empirically based is unethical.

Gary Kasporov tweeted: "The point of modern propaganda isn't only to misinform or push an agenda. It is to exhaust your critical thinking, to annihilate truth." (@Kasporov)

# The Scope of the Fake News Problem



# Even Peer Review Is Not Safe

Now, even many deeply flawed articles supposedly undergoing the "peer review process," the former gold standard for reliability, are accepted for publication in fee-charging open-access peer review journals. John Bohannon demonstrated this when, from January-August 2013, he submitted deeply flawed papers to 304 "peer reviewed journals" and 157 of the journals accepted the papers. Not only were the methods described in the papers flawed but also the conclusions advocated bypassing any clinical trials of a supposed drug for cancer in humans! Other journalist have done similar exercises, with similar results.

(Bohannon, John. "Who's Afraid of Peer Review." Science 342.6154 (2013) Web.)





# Imagine if all Dominican graduates had tools distinguish between real & fake news + fake peer review articles

As librarians we can take a lead roll in teaching the community to distinguish between:

- Facts and "alternative facts"
- Semantically empty statements vs. statements with meaning
- Ad hominem plus other types of bad arguments and relevant arguments
- Propaganda vs. News and the relevance of empirically based arguments
- Satire vs. news
- Primary vs. secondary sources
- Predatory “peer reviewed sources” vs, non-predatory peer reviewed sources
- More reliable and less reliable sources (how to research content and authors)

# Promotion

Think of promotion as a number you multiply all you offer by. In other words, if you do no promotion but have great resources and services, no one will know about your offerings and they will be unused. Likewise, if your offerings are not useful, promotion will not help.

# Tips for Promotion

- When you do a survey or a focus group use it as an opportunity to promote
- Serve on committees and promote library resources/services. Help other library employees from your positions on committees.
- Attend meetings and every time someone mentions a need, if it's true, announce how the library can help.
- Announce new library services/resources in large forums, emails, newsletters, new faculty orientations, brochures, signs, screens
- Teach classes to faculty
- Get involved in writing documents affecting the entire campus, like the student learning outcomes and the strategic plan. Include the library.
- Provide library tours
- Reach out to personal contacts (Develop LinkedIn Contacts)
- Set up displays/exhibits with related programming

# Summary

- Circulation is down
- Reference is down
- Use of library as a third space is up
- We can make our spaces better reflect their usage
- Fake news and predatory journal usage is up
- We can teach students to filter that fake stuff out
- Whatever we do, we need to promote it or people will not know about it

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Thank You.  
Questions Now or  
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