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How It All Started: 1996, the First Year of Dokvit

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When the Documentation Studies program (“Dokvit” in Norwegian) started at the University of Tromsø in January 1996, it was after a long political process both inside and outside of the university. In the late 80s, there was a general lack of librarians in Northern Norway. The library associations of Norway, after discussing this problem, suggested a librarianship program should be started in the northern part of Norway to complement the existing one at Oslo, in the south.

In 1988, a committee of librarians and professors was established in Northern Norway; in February 1989, this committee launched a proposal for a program in Documentation Studies as the basic program for the education of librarians as well as archivists (Utdanning for informasjonssamfunnet, 1989). Such alternative programs were proposed in two other places in Norway—Mo i Rana and Trondheim—but after a long political process with more committees, conferences, etc., it was decided in 1995 that a program in Documentation Studies should start in Tromsø in January 1996.

Alongside this process, two other important things happened in 1989. The first was a new act of legal deposit in Norway, which demanded all publishers to deliver any published document, no matter the medium—in other words, not only printed publications—to the newly established National Library, posing a huge challenge for the National Library to deal with all sorts of media and formats. The second thing was the creation of World Wide Web by Tim Berners-Lee in 1989, enabling dissemination of all kinds of documents worldwide. There was a need for an educational program to support this—and, moreover, an academic discipline dedicated to dealing with these new challenges.

In 2006, celebrating the 10th anniversary of Dokvit, I concluded:

The criteria for whether a discipline of documentation studies will be sustainable in the future is a matter of whether it will be considered as relevant for society. (Lund, 2007, p. 25)

Now celebrating its 20th anniversary, Dokvit lives on. Since 2013 it has been called *Media and Documentation Studies*, but it is still relevant for society. This may be due to the foresight of the original proposal committee back in 1989:

Educational institutions are facing new challenges in the Information Society. The concept of the document has been extremely broadened in recent years, including multiple new media in addition to the traditional carriers of information, e.g., books and journals. Information in different formats must be registered, stored and retrieved in relation to the very diverse functions of information professionals in culture, business, administration, and research. (Utdanning for informasjonssamfunnet, 1989, p. 3, translation mine)

In 1989, many librarians and archivists still considered movies, music recordings, photography, and broadcast as “new” media compared to the default format of a printed publication, and computer-based information systems were only just beginning to emerge and move into the libraries.

Since 1989, many new media have emerged, all more or less as a result of the development of computer technologies. It is now 2016—twenty-seven years after 1989—and the situation has been turned upside down. The once-primary information carriers—printed books and journals, as well as handwritten or typed documents—are now relatively rare in comparison with digital media.

In 1996, when the first Dokvit students started their studies, the Internet was still very new. The first homepage came in 1991, email became open for ordinary people in 1993, and The World Wide Web—the hyper-document system that made the Internet useful for ordinary people—was founded as late as 1994, so when you read articles from 1996, the Internet as well as the web are mostly presented as “breaking news” announcing “new” possibilities.

In order to understand how the first year of Dokvit was a part of the “neo-documentalist” movement, I will offer a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of the first year of Dokvit, giving as many details as possible of what happened during that year. I will use the terminology we used in 1996, trying to avoid the eventual conceptual inventions of the following years, in order to show how the whole experience of the first year set the stage for development of Dokvit, including its recent incorporation of Media Studies.

The Dokvit Program

The first year was the beginning of a whole academic program for Documentation Studies that was to be implemented on all levels from undergraduate to Ph.D. When the first year started, the full program was not yet formally recognized by the Norwegian government, but it was in principle recognized by the university as of 1995. The undergraduate program consisted of these elements:

- 1st semester** Documentation Studies – basic year
- 2nd semester** Documentation Studies – basic year
- 3rd semester** Documentation Studies – advanced
- 4th semester** Library studies – basic year
- 5th semester** Library studies – basic year – internship
- 6th semester** Basic year in another program free choice
- 7th semester** Basic year in another program free choice

A graduate of this program (equivalent to a bachelor's degree) would be eligible to apply for positions as head of a public library in Norway—in many cases in very small libraries, especially in Northern Norway. When the first students from the undergraduate students had finished their studies, the master's and Ph.D. programs were initiated, but that's another story.

Right from the beginning in the planning process of the the program as a whole, the complementary perspective was stressed, demanding the recruitment of a diverse group of faculty, with qualifications from humanities, social sciences as well as the natural sciences and technology. Although the work of Dokvit belonged at the same time to many scientific schools, it was for practical reasons placed at the School of Humanities.

Faculty and Students

When the students arrived on January 15, 1996, I was the only person employed at the program, responsible for everything: teaching, research, administration, library textbook acquisition, and more. During the following months, administrative personnel were hired and a number of temporary teachers taught courses. I became professor in August 1996, but no other permanent faculty members were in place until 1998. While I could take care of the humanistic part of the program, I tried to find social scientists and technical scientists/computer scientists to help me in the first year. This, of course, meant a lot of work for the only full-timer, but it also provided an opportunity to invite interesting guest-lecturers to come and talk about their special kinds of documentation, whether it was within poetry, classical English literature, indigenous documentation, or computer games.

The first 18 students were mostly from the region of Northern Norway who had been waiting for a local offering of library education. Some were young students, while others came from other educational backgrounds and wished to become librarians.

The Curriculum

There were two main principles behind the curriculum in the first year of Dokvit.

The first principle came out of the complementary approach to documentation as a scientific discipline. It required three different angles on the subject, based on the three main scientific traditions: humanities, social sciences and the technical-natural sciences. This approach provided cultural, social and technological perspectives on documentation as a whole.

The other principle was the PBL-principle—that is, the *problem-based learning* principle. When the students arrived to the first class, they would, for instance, be asked, “what is a document?” and be expected themselves to come up with an answer instead of being told by the professor. In this way, the professor would present the students with one of the subject’s most important problems (indeed, one that is still open for discussion), about the nature of documents. From the very first day, the students would be recognized as scholars and researchers, of course with the need of training and practice in discussion and analysis, but knowing that the answer to many questions is not a fixed and absolute thing, but is, rather, always open for consideration. Based on that philosophy, the students could start on their first research projects already in their first semester.

With these two principles, the first year was divided into four blocks, with two blocks in each semester. Blocks one to three covered the production, use and dissemination of documents, while block four integrated all three themes and perspectives into one project.

Block One

The purpose of the first block was to offer a general introduction to documentation studies, document analysis, and the documentation circuit (i.e., the life cycle of a document from its production, organization and use), with an emphasis on the production of documents.

Within a given week there were four classes, three courses and a seminar. I taught the main course on the concept of the document from the perspective of the humanities. Secondly, there was a course on document production from an IT perspective, taught by a computer scientist, and thirdly I taught a course on the conditions for document production from the perspective of social sciences. Last but not least, I led a weekly seminar, where all three dimensions around document production were discussed together.

During the first block the students were required to do projects:

1. Create your own text document, then make an email and send it as attachment
2. Choose a document and find out how and by whom it was produced

The first project may sound naive today, but in 1996 using a computer and email were still new to many people—including young people. In the second project, the students were challenged by the request to find a document without yet knowing distinctive defining features of the concept of the document; they were more or less on their own to decide if something was a document or not. It turned out that most students came back with “traditional” documents, like a book, letter or photograph. The next challenge was to find out who had produced the

document, not only the so-called “content,” but also the material object, which led students to recognize the complex of producers involved.

Block Two

The second block was an introduction to problems around the relationships within and between a complex of documents, the use of documents, and basic principles for organizing all kinds of documents. It was structured in a similar way as the first block with three courses and a seminar, but now with an emphasis not only on the production but also on the use of documents. I taught two of the courses—one main course with the focus on documentation in a social environment and the course on the reception of documents—while a computer scientist ran a course on basic database principles.

There were two projects in block two:

1. Analyze the production and use of documents in a specific field or sphere, focusing on the media, language and social function, as well as the relationship among these three aspects.
2. Make a database of the documents analyzed in the first project.

The first project required students to study not just one document, but the whole complex of documents in a certain sphere—for instance, the family sphere, with photos in a private collection; or the administrative-political sphere, with a complex of reports in connection to a political decision; or the commercial sphere, with advertisements such as mail-order catalogs. Nowadays it seems remarkable that none of the students’ projects involved digital documents! In 1996, this was only natural. In doing this project, students came to understand the complex interplay among documents, their producers and their users.

In the second project of block two, students were asked to make a very simple database of their documents from the first project. Given that none of the documents students selected in the first project were digital, they were forced to confront the matter of making a digital catalog of analog documents.

Blocks Three and Four

In the second semester of the program, a third and fourth block were offered. The main goals of block three were to introduce students to problems in the dissemination of documents and to cultivate basic knowledge and skills in document retrieval and searching for documented knowledge. Like the previous blocks, there were three courses and a seminar each week. The main course, on search and retrieval, was taught by a computer scientist; a social scientist taught a course in user studies; and I, as a humanist, taught a course in indexing and categorization.

There was one project in this third block:

1. Test out search systems for different kind of documents and users

It was still a very new experience for the students to use a computer for search instead of card catalogs, and so this assignment gave them a sense of the opportunities with the new technology.

In the fourth and final block of the year, the purpose was to do a large project bringing together all three perspectives and aspects of documentation studies. There were four courses in block four:

1–3: Three courses of equal size, each managed by a humanist, a social scientist, or a computer scientist on a thematic topic chosen by the teacher together with the students

4: A joint project seminar discussing issues around making the larger, integrative project

In this block, the main focus was on the large project dealing with all three perspectives, which we will come back to later.

The Reading List

When using problem-based learning as the main principle in the curriculum, the complete reading list cannot be formulated in advance. Rather, it has to be developed along the way as the problem is solved. When you don't know in advance the exact character of the problems to be solved or the nature their resolutions will take, you cannot decide ahead of time which texts would be the best support for solving and discussing the problems.

At the same time, a number of texts were presented for the students, not as “must read” texts, but as possible relevant texts, which in many cases could be substituted by other texts which might turn out to be more relevant than the texts selected in advance. Each student's reading list was individualized, to a certain extent. Thus it was not the literature that determined what the students would learn; rather, the questions each student wanted to explore was what determined the literature.

Today, twenty years later, one can see how curricular reading lists develop through progressive interaction between a relatively well-defined corpus of literature and relatively well-defined problems to be solved. The main difference between 1996 and 2016, is that in 1996 we didn't have a well-defined corpus of literature. In 1995, I was supposed to put together reading lists for the program before the first students arrived. It was really hard to do, but I tried to compile a

single reading list that covered the major themes of the program as a whole, since many of the texts would be relevant in all blocks. The reading list was organized into eight sections:

1. The concept of the document – history of terminology and disciplines
2. Document production
3. Documents in the IT perspective
4. Knowledge organization
5. Information law
6. Computer technology
7. Organization of documents – organizing systems
8. Document institutions

The reading list for the program was developed from current research in the field—and beyond. The nature of this list came to shape the understanding of Dokvit and promote a discourse specific to neo-documentation.

The first set of articles that influenced Dokvit were from the first conference of Conceptions in Library and Information Science, or CoLIS. This series of conferences was an important precursor for the invention of Dokvit. In the proceedings of the first CoLIS conference (Cronin & Vakkari, 1992), there was one of the very few articles on the concept of document at that time, “Restructuring and mobilising information in documents: a historical perspective,” by W. Boyd Rayward (1992). For perspective, Michael Buckland’s article “What is a ‘Document’?” came the year after, in 1997.

Another important text was Jean-François Lyotard’s (1979) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Even though Lyotard’s text was almost 20 years old in 1996, it was still relevant for comparing the analog world to the emerging digital world. Today, of course, this discussion is more or less irrelevant, as digital technology has come to dominate human communication.

In order to place documentation studies in relation to other media and communication studies, we used John Fiske’s (1990) *Introduction to Communication Studies*. In some ways, this book may still appear to be the most universal text on the subject, independent of its age—but then, after a closer look, perhaps not. In the empirical cases Fiske used for demonstration of the general theories, examples from print, newspapers, photographs and television; there are no examples from the digital world.

Also included were texts on the emerging digital revolution in Norway. One of them was the book *The Messenger and His Mastery: Perspectives on the the Culture of Writing*, by the Norwegian historian of ideas, Trond Berg Eriksen (1987). He showed how history was full of media revolutions and that the digital

revolution was just the latest of that kind, placing the new situation in a long historical perspective.

Bridging Literary Studies and Media Studies was the book *Screen Texts: The Writing Culture and Electronic Information Technology* (Schwebs, 1994). It contained articles that attempted to define new kind of texts, such as those made on and by computers, reflecting on the possibilities for combining multiple texts and even media in what was being called “hypertext.” That discourse was very much centered around digitizing texts. A broader perspective was intimated in *The Digital Field in Culture: The Impact of Information Technology*, written by media scholars Rasmussen and Sjøby (1993), which included an essay on the discourse of computer games. Of course, in 1996 there was not all the digital multimedia there is today.

Then there were texts about knowledge organization, taking two approaches. The first was more theoretical and philosophical, with titles like “To what end knowledge organization?” (Jaenecke, 1994) and George Lakoff’s (1987) *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind*. Then there was the more practical literature such as *Knowledge Organisation with the Help of Information Technology* (Bakken, 1994).

The legal issues surrounding the development of the digital world were very important, and so we included a lecturer in law, who compiled a reader on Information Law with emphasis on the impact of information technology on law (Haugen, 1996). In addition, there was a text about how to search for legal information in printed as well as online sources. The students also had access to Norwegian laws.

There were also texts on computer technology—or, as it was called, information technology—such as *A Short Outline of the Development of Information Technology* (Schieflo & Sørensen, 1986) as well as a technical text on *Database System Concepts and Architecture* (Elmasri and Navathe, 1994).

In addition, there were now-classic texts on cataloguing (Spangen 1995), archiving (Marthinsen, 1994) and keyword cataloguing (Hjortsæter, 1990).

Finally, there were two texts on on document institutions, one on how to organize public institutions in accordance with public values, *The Public Dimension: Values and Governance in the Public Sector* (Eriksen, 1993), and another called *Our Digital Future: On the Electronic Dissemination of Information* (Fagerli, 1995).

Teaching: Didactics of the First Year

The teaching in the first year consisted of four main elements:

- lectures
- seminars
- visiting lecturers
- supervision of project work

The lectures and seminars were often mixed as the teaching was based on asking important questions then finding answers in discussion with students. In other words, in principle, the teacher didn't come with a readymade answer, but rather opened the class up for exploration and discussion in order to train the students to explore and do research and to be creative in their work, both as scholars and information professionals.

In addition to lectures, there were seminars where groups of students presented their project work. They worked in groups, which enabled them to approach topics from several angles and trained them to collaborate with colleagues.

We also had a number of visiting lecturers, coming from different disciplines and sectors of society, who talked about creating poetic documents, indigenous documentation, medieval traditions of documentation and more.

Finally—and perhaps most important—was the supervision of the student projects. It was through the different projects that students really got into the problems of Dokvit and, even as undergraduates, started to do research. Importantly, there were no predetermined answers or solutions to the questions and problems the students dealt with in their projects.

Student Research Projects

One may wonder how projects done by first-year students could be considered research projects. It was due to the main goal of the program: to teach students to approach interesting questions and solve problems in a systematic way—in other words, to do research. The only difference between the research done by a freshman student and a tenured professor was the amount of training and experience they had, not the very act of doing research.

Students could choose any topic of documentation on one condition: they had to study it from all three complementary perspectives (the humanistic, the social-scientific and the technical). Here are some of the projects those first-year Dokvit students decided to do:

- A Database for an Art History Slide Collection: Problems in Designing a Database for the Art History Department
- A Museum Exhibition as a Document: A Documentological Study of the Exhibition at Lofotr, the Viking Museum at Borg
- The Process of Selecting Documents at the Public Library in Tromsø
- An Index to the Yearbook of Senja
- The Production, Use and Organisation of Documents for the 200th Anniversary of the City of Tromsø in 1994
- Be Familiar with Petter Dass
- Sør-Senja on the Internet: A Homepage for a Museum
- Old Wine in New Bottles: Considerations Around Digital Museums and a Homemade CD-Rom
- A Catalog for the Jens Hagerup Archive
- Media and Youth Between 12 and 16 at a Mortensnes Public Library Branch
- Analysis of the Tromsø International Film Festival – The Catalog – The Festival – The Film
- From Public Library to Knowledge and Information Center? The Role and Development of the Public Library in the Last Quarter of the 20th Century

When you look at all the projects, five characteristics are visible:

- Relationship to Tromsø and Northern Norway
- Relationship to Archives, Libraries and Museums
- Relation to text, images, film and three-dimensional objects
- Exploring possibilities of using digital information technology
- Submitting multimedia reports

If you look more deeply into some of the projects, you will also find questions which could be used ultimately as bases for further graduate-level studies and research projects.

In the art history database project, the two students faced the challenge of making a collection of several thousand analog slides showing paintings, sculptures, buildings, etc., searchable. In a database they could relate each slide image to multiple relevant index terms, enabling art history scholars to find the same image via different search terms. This could be done in an analog catalog as well, but it was much easier to do it in a digital database environment. In addition, there were, in principle, no limit for how many index terms you could relate to a certain image when doing online indexing, leaving a new question to face about

how many index terms should be attached to an image in order to cover its full information potential. The answer, of course, depends on the universe of the users: There would be one number for art historians, another for historians and another for archeologists. Even within each of these disciplines, different paradigmatic traditions could be expressed in different conceptual universes. In other words, the whole search process and the necessary indexing prior to the search are challenged in a fundamental new way by digital technology. The fact that the two students at the end of the project only dealt with 30 slides demonstrates the scale of the complexity of indexing and searching images in a digital environment. They submitted a written report together with a floppy disc with the database.

Two other students, with a background in archeology, studied how a Viking museum exhibition could be considered a document. This project showed the material dimension of the documentation process in an archeological museum. Following the discussion of complexes of producers, they not only looked at the role of the archeologists in assembling the exhibition, but also at the architects who reconstructed a Viking building as part of the exhibition. Besides the archeologists and architects, a slew of craftsmen and carpenters were involved in the exhibition. As you can imagine, it requires particular skills to be a craftsman at a museum.

Yet another student worked on making a web homepage for a local museum. In 1996, a homepage was not something everybody had. The question was, at the time, what kind of information should be put on the website. Photos could be posted, as well as the museum's mission, location and opening hours. All the possibilities you have today with video clips and live online dialog were not possible in 1996; the World Wide Web itself was very new, the idea being born in 1989 and the very first webpage being published in 1991, only five years before Dokvit started. In these five years, a webpage slowly, but steadily became something every company or organization had to have in order to be visible in the new digital society. Still, even in 1996, the web was new in Norway, with only about 25 percent of Norwegian households having internet access. The student submitted a floppy disc with the homepage design.

Three students wanted to make a CD catalog of the Church art collection at the University of Tromsø Museum. The collection included religious paintings and different church furniture (the pulpit, epitaphs, etc.). The catalog classified the different objects and described each object together with a photo of each object. The students' catalog included a soundtrack with sacred music from the Renaissance. The CD-Rom was developed in the late 1980s and had a storage capacity of 630MB. Using this medium, it was possible for the very first time in history to create a document consisting of independent elements of text, images and sound with the possibility of connecting them all through links—a true

multimedia document, quite different from a movie, even one with subtitles and a soundtrack. This was the seed of a digital museum that didn't require being online. The students submitted the CD-Rom along with a written report.

Two students worked on an archive of Jens Hagerup, a local entrepreneur who made matches in a small hamlet on the Island of Senja in Northern Norway and also authored several novels. The challenge in this case was organizing the archive and developing an archive key, one that would embrace both Hagerup's factory archive and artistic archive. The students didn't consider any possibilities for using the new digital technology. For them, it was still a matter of sorting out paper.

Examination

After the students turned their projects, they took an oral examination. It lasted one hour in total, one part done with literature at their disposal and the other part open to the public; the latter part included 15-minute presentations and 15-minute discussion with the teacher and an external examiner.

The main purpose of the oral examination was *not* to check if the students had read their texts, but to give both the teacher, the external examiner and the student an opportunity to discuss their projects and possible new problems and questions in documentation studies, partly in order to develop an awareness among other students and faculty of the utility and interest of Dokvit! To this end, the questions were meant to challenge each student to consider alternate ways of approaching their project and handling problems.

For the five projects described above the questions were as follows:

For the student making a homepage for a local museum—

Q: Discuss homepages on the World Wide Web as a specific kind of document.

For the student organizing an archive of a local author and entrepreneur—

Q: Discuss the possibilities for using computer technology in the organization, retrieval and use of documents in archives.

For the three students making a catalog for the Church art exhibition in Tromsø on CD-Rom—

Q: Discuss the CD-Rom as a document type in a document-historical perspective.

Q: Compare and contrast the classification of books, images and sculptures.

Q: Compare and contrast the role of modern information technology in respectively museums, archives and libraries.

For the two students making an art historical slide database—

Q: Discuss the concepts of *work*, *artist*, *original* and *slide* in an art historical perspective as well as a documentation studies perspective.

Q: Based on examples of your choice, discuss how the categories and terminology used in your database relate to different user groups and situations.

For the two students analyzing the Viking museum exhibition—

Q: Discuss the differences and similarities in how libraries and museums disseminate scientific knowledge.

Q: Compare and contrast the exhibition and book as types of documents, focusing on their production and use.

If one looks at all these questions, one can observe that we tried to push the student into a comparative perspective in relation to both institutional conditions as well as different kind of media or user groups—and last but not least, a historical perspective. In this way, one could keep the research perspective in the oral examination and make it interesting for other people to attend the examinations.

In 2016, What Can We Learn from Our Experience in 1996?

Today in 2016, Dokvit, or documentation studies, has become a field of research, a fully-fledged discipline with a body of literature that didn't exist in 1996. At the same time, Dokvit grew out of the Library world, and one may ask if it was as new as it claimed to be.

Classic Topics, Or...?

To a large extent, the topics chosen by the students with an emphasis on making documents more accessible for a broader audience was not something new for the library world. What was new, were the possibilities provided by the emerging digital technology, an exploration of something which had not been possible before. Twenty years later, making a database, a homepage or a multimedia catalog are all default solutions. But in 1996, it was an experiment.

Did the Document Perspective Make a Difference?

In library education and in Library and Information Science, very little attention was on the material dimension of texts. The document perspective made a difference by stressing production, shedding light on the material dimension of the document in contrast to only focusing on the so-called content or information. It gave the possibility of analyzing the complex of producers—not only the author, but also the designer, editor, printer, etc.—and their role in the production, organization and use of documents.

Did the Complementary Principle Work in Practice?

While it was stressed from the outset of the program that it was important to approach the document from three complementary perspectives—a material, a social and a mental perspective—it was not given that it would work in practice. But when you look at the final projects, most of them touched all three perspectives, especially in relation to the complex conditions students needed to comply with and understand in order to make a homepage, an exhibition, or a catalog for a specific user group.

Was There a Media Perspective?

In most library education programs before 1996, the primary focus was on the book, and not on other media formats like film or audio—and of course not on the very new digital media. Inherently in the document perspective, there was a medium format perspective. By taking the document perspective, the material dimension of the document was stressed, making visible the different media used in documentation. There was also a new element in the student work by having the possibility of submitting not only written reports and papers, but also being able to submit different kind of media formats, like CD-Roms, floppy discs and video cassettes.

The media perspective was also combined with an institutional perspective giving an opportunity to compare different media and different institutions. It gave a possibility for setting up two kinds of analytical approaches: a historical approach, looking at different ways of doing things through history within different institutions using different kind of media; and an experimental approach,

trying out different possibilities for using different kinds of media in different institutional settings.

Media-and-Dokvit in the future

Twenty years have passed since 1996, and one may question whether the experience of the first year of Dokvit is of any relevance for the program of today, which is now named Media and Documentation Studies—showing explicitly the media perspective in Dokvit. I believe it indeed has relevance: It is important to keep the comparative perspective alive.

Today, digital formats and media are more or less a given in our world. If you want to have letters in print from your bank, municipality or hospital, instead of getting it in an electronic mailbox, you have to apply and pay for it. In this basic way the relationship between analog and printed worlds have changed radically since 1996. Nevertheless, it is still important to compare different formats and media at different moments of time in order to keep one open for new possibilities and understand the conditions being faced at a certain point in time.

One of most important qualities of the document as a concept is that it is still one of the few concepts, if not the only one, that covers all results of use of a medium, including images, written texts, video, dance, music, architecture, etc. By stressing the interaction between the means (media) and the result (documentation) in the new name of the discipline, since 2013 Media and Documentation Studies has a huge potential for a future where students can begin to understand their present situation in a historical comparative perspective regarding conditions and possibilities, as well as to explore options for future documentation.

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