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The Library 2.015 Conference: An Open Dialog About the Future of Libraries

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Abstract: The Library 2.0 Virtual Worldwide Conference series aims to create an open dialog about the future of libraries in the digital age. At Library 2.015, the fifth conference in the series, thousands of participants gathered online to share their knowledge, experience, and ideas on the evolution of libraries and the information profession. This article reports on some highlights of the October 20, 2015, conference. Archived conference presentations remain free, online, and open to all at <http://tinyurl.com/Libr2015presentations>.

On October 20, 2015, thousands of information professionals gathered online to share their knowledge, experience, and ideas at the Library 2.015 Worldwide Virtual Conference. Attendees came from all corners of the physical and professional worlds, representing many kinds of libraries across a dozen continents. On that day, they were all part of a single community, brought together by common interests.

It was the fifth conference in the Library 2.0 series, founded in 2011 by Dr. Sandra Hirsh, director of the San José State University (SJSU) School of Information (iSchool), and Steve Hargadon, leader of the Learning Revolution Project. “Our goal,” said Hirsh, “is to create an open dialog about the future of libraries in the digital age” (2015).

Trends and opportunities

The conference’s keynote speakers included SJSU’s Hirsh, event co-chair, Toby Greenwalt, director of digital strategy and technology implementation for the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, and Dr. Norman Jacknis, president of the board at the Metropolitan New York Library Council.

Each keynote, in its own way, highlighted trends that affect information professionals everywhere and drive the need for new “Tools, Skills, and Competencies,” the conference theme. Jacknis (2015), for example, spoke of how trends in technology, society, the economy, and government are creating opportunities for libraries to lead in their communities. “Librarians should not just wait and see how to respond to this century’s trends,” he said, “but instead seize the opportunities these trends open up, and provide leadership to define the future of libraries and society in our knowledge-based economy.”

Jacknis identified eight trends and opportunities that went beyond the often-cited examples of ebooks and makerspaces to consider developments like machine intelligence and greater individual participation in open government. Libraries, believes Jacknis, can support their communities by offering tools and spaces that tap into these trends.

Core competencies

The conference's distinguished speakers turned toward library and information science (LIS) fundamentals. Speakers included Dr. David Weinberger, senior researcher at Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet & Society and author of *Too Big To Know*, and Dr. Michael Stephens, associate professor at the SJSU iSchool and *Library Journal* columnist. Both speakers tackled aspects of libraries' evolving core competencies, whether those competencies are embedded in people, places, or platforms.¹ Weinberger addressed the library as platform, drawing on lessons learned from the news media, while Stephens focused on people.

Stephens led a conversation—and it truly was a virtual conversation—on the changing library and information science workforce. With so much change happening so fast, wondered Stephens, how do we successfully lead our information organizations? What are the hallmarks of today's savvy librarians?

Whether they're introverts or extroverts, he concluded, the savvy librarians are creative and curious. "They are very interested in how the world works," said Stephens. "They are conduits, connectors, and discoverers. They don't have to know it all, but they would know how to connect people, how to facilitate conversations. These are the folks you would want to let loose in your community, the ones you would want to embed in your campus, or anywhere the presence of the library should be felt" (2015).

Practical experiences

The library's presence was strongly felt in every breakout session. Throughout the day, dozens of sessions were presented by information professionals who shared their research and best practices for 21st-century libraries and information centers. Presentations were organized into four subject strands:

- Digital services, preservation, curation, and access
- Emerging technologies and trends
- The user experience
- Management of libraries and information centers in the 21st century

Discussions of technology trends and applications, as always, were popular. Attendees could learn to "Become Your Library's Technology Futurist" with Tina D. Jagerson, an information manager with the U.S. Department of Justice, or hear about "Librarians Utilizing Virtual Reality" with information literacy consultant Dr. Valerie Hill and University of Washington researcher Suzette Lewis.

All were keenly aware that the evolution of technology is directly affecting the information professional's job. "Content formats are changing, and so are our searching strategies," said Hill. "And that means roles for librarians are also changing" (Hill & Lewis, 2015).

While Hill believes that "virtual reality is about to become mainstream," she also acknowledged that "each of us can't be an expert in every innovation that comes along. So I think it's important for us to be aware of new technologies, and it's important for us to develop a professional network that can expose us to new ideas, new formats, and new platforms that we can add to our information toolboxes" (Hill & Lewis, 2015). For Hill, Lewis, and the dozens of people connecting in the session, those networks were expanding already.

International themes also emerged. Library 2.015 attendees could learn about “Creating and Using a National Multilingual Authority File” with Ahava Cohen, librarian and LIS instructor at Israel’s Beit Berl College, look at “Cultural Differences in Motivating Students to Seek Information” with Dr. Sherry R. Crow and Dr. Lisa L. Castello, who teach at the University of Nebraska, or discuss “Strategies for Internationalizing LIS Courses” with Melanie Sellar, founder of Librarians Without Borders, a nonprofit organization that supports libraries around the world.

Sellar, who teaches courses in global librarianship at the SJSU iSchool, offered strategies for incorporating international perspectives into LIS education. Many of her ideas could be applied to other types of courses, information literacy instruction, and professional development in general. “Internationalization has become a stated objective in many institutional strategic plans,” noted Sellar (2015). Instructors can support that goal, she explained, by incorporating global perspectives and helping students develop intercultural competencies. Tactics can be as simple as encouraging students to connect with people in other countries through the International Librarians Network, or as involved as volunteering to build libraries abroad.²

“International librarianship is all about relationships and cooperation and collaboration between people,” said Sellar, who recognized Library 2.015 as an important opportunity for international connection. “It’s great to be part of such a wonderful conference,” she added. “Free, online, and global—it’s perfectly in line with the priorities and values of Librarians Without Borders” (2015).

Learning together

When all was said and done, more than 50 presentations were packed into 13 hours. More than 3,000 participants from 20 countries logged in to learn on conference day, listening to speakers and joining discussions through voice connections or text chat. The event was presented online via Blackboard Collaborate web conferencing, and all presentations were recorded. The archives are open access: anyone, anywhere, is welcome to listen to the recordings at any time, and no registration is required. Recordings of previous Library 2.0 conferences also remain available.

To access archived presentations from the Library 2.015 conference, visit the SJSU iSchool website at <http://tinyurl.com/Libr2015presentations>. To join the Library 2.0 community and learn about future events as they are announced, bookmark the conference website at <http://www.library20.com>.

“There’s so much we can learn from one another,” said SJSU’s Hirsh. “Our field is evolving dramatically, and we’re all trying to cope with changing technologies and user needs, no matter where we are in the world or what kind of organization we work in. Worldwide conferences like Library 2.015 present unique opportunities to share our knowledge and spark new ideas” (2015).

Indeed they do.

Notes

1. For more on the concept of libraries as people, places, and platforms, see the 2014 report *Rising to the Challenge: Re-envisioning Public Libraries*, by Amy K. Garmer of the Aspen Institute, at <http://csreports.aspeninstitute.org/Dialogue-on-Public-Libraries>.
2. To learn more about the International Librarians Network, visit <http://interlibnet.org>. To learn more about Librarians Without Borders, visit <http://www.librarieswithoutborders.org>.

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