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An Academic Librarian's Response to the "ITHAKA Faculty Survey 2009: Key Strategic Insights for Libraries, Publishers, and Societies"

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The mission of libraries and librarians is to serve the information needs of our patrons. Thus we continually adapt to their changing requirements and interests. However, when we are presented with our future diminished role or total technological answers with which we disagree, we seldom speak out publicly. ITHAKA, a digitizing organization, sees libraries as a budget line and predicts a background role maintaining digital archives for academic librarians based on answers to their recent faculty survey. Interlibrary loan is often placed in this background role even as use of our services grows, defying predictions. We benefit from digitization and electronic communication, but we need to build upon the initial patron point of contact we enjoy to expand into a larger resource sharing role.

KEYWORDS resource sharing, academic libraries, relations with faculty, digital collections, librarians, scholarly communication

INTRODUCTION

Let me begin with the words of Danish physicist Niels Bohr: "Prediction is very difficult, especially about the future." When a survey of faculty research attitudes is conducted by ITHAKA, "an organization dedicated to helping the academic community take full advantage of rapidly advancing information and networking technologies" that incorporates JSTOR and Portico and is interpreted to support their archival view of the future of libraries, academic

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librarians should reexamine the faculty survey questions and the interpretation of the responses based on our expertise.

Conducted every three years since 2000, the 2009 study is based on responses to questionnaires mailed to 35,184 faculty members in September 2009. Considering that the survey followed an initial introductory letter, which would have eliminated incorrect addresses, the response rate of 8.6% seems low. Copies of the report are available at www.ithaka.org. In the report ITHAKA writes of the "paramount importance" of faculty "needs, attitudes, and behaviors" as they relate to new technologies, then notes that "institutions that serve scholars" must "help *lead* scholars, in order to best support and facilitate scholarship as well as to ensure their own continuing relevance."

The report summarizes its findings as follows:

- Basic scholarly information use practices have shifted rapidly in recent years, and as a result the academic library is increasingly being disintermediated from the discovery process, risking irrelevance in one of its core functional areas.
- Faculty members' growing comfortable relying exclusively on digital versions of scholarly materials, which opens new opportunities for libraries, new business models for publishers, and new challenges for preservation.
- Despite several years of sustained efforts by publishers, scholarly societies, libraries, faculty members, and others to reform various aspects of the scholarly communications system, a fundamentally conservative set of faculty attitudes continues to impede systematic change.

DISCOVERY AND THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE LIBRARY

What ITHAKA considers a "core function" that risks becoming irrelevant is the faculty member's "face to face consultation with a librarian." They determined this by asking faculty if they begin their research in "the library building." I need only consult the three other PhDs in my family to verify that this was not how faculty, or even graduate students, "traditionally" began their research process. Faculty members have "traditionally" relied on interaction with peers, either directly or via bibliographic references, primarily turning to librarians to buy or borrow what is needed. Graduate students have always been guided in their research by professorial faculty. Both may turn to librarians when faced with learning to use new locator tools (print or online), and both faculty members and graduate students would grab at the chance to have a study room in the library.

It is the undergraduate who is less likely to begin research with a "face to face" interview at the reference desk, but even this reflects only the few decades between the period of traditional faculty guidance to using resources they selected for the collection and the advent of Google and

Wikipedia. Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote that "History is a cyclic poem written by Time upon the memories of man." We tend to freeze memories of the way things were for us while ignoring the continual change taking place. Faculty gave up oversight of collection building as academic institutions grew rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s. Undergraduates turned to librarians when they no longer accepted limiting term paper topics to those that coincided with the faculty member's area of expertise. Ironically, if a survey were to ask students today if they begin their research in their library, they might say yes because students in greater numbers are coming to the library for study, drafting and printing term papers, searching the Internet, checking e-mail, or just for the ambiance.

Faculty members are again becoming an important force behind collection building, driven by interlibrary loan requests, budget cuts, and low usage of the librarian-selected collection. A recent Association of Research Libraries study concluded that 6% of a library's collection would satisfy 80% of its patron's needs, down from the traditional 20/80 usage rule cited in the past. This library as buyer role, always ranked "very important," has risen in this survey to 90% of faculty respondents. Interlibrary loan librarians need to lead technology in directions that will improve usage of those materials carefully selected by their colleagues. Why not send information to the interlibrary loan requester, as Amazon does, suggesting items in our library collections that would be of interest? Interlibrary loan is on its way to becoming the new reference as we have the opportunity, if we learn to use it, to help faculty and students during the discovery process, not just the delivery process.

The advent of OCLC in 1982 freed a multitude of catalogers to fill a new purpose in reference departments everywhere, that of bibliographic instruction. This was welcomed heartily by faculty as it gave them one less class presentation to prepare and coincided with the change to student-centered research topics. It also began the exponential growth in interlibrary loan that is not viewed as the gift to library service and librarian networking that it deserves. The STARS/RUSA new Guidelines for Interlibrary Loan Operations Management asserts that "Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery is expanding into a larger resource sharing role . . . related to collection development, instruction, reference, and becoming an initial patron point of contact" in the library.

Discouraged by faculty reluctance to embrace total change to the "electronic hub," ITHAKA expects librarians to lay the groundwork for this change by "taking on new research-support roles by providing digital information curation and management services and by establishing a new professional identity for themselves as 'informationists.'" Of interest is the dictionary derivation of the word "curation" from "curate," a priest's assistant who "curates" a museum or gallery. *Wikipedia* defines the "informationist" as providing research and knowledge management services in the context of clinical care

or biomedical research. ITHAKA concludes that it is the library as "budget line" that causes 60% of faculty to respond that they are "very dependent" on their library for their research and our "background role" that leads 14% of faculty to strongly agree that librarians are less important.

FACULTY AND A FUTURE RELYING EXCLUSIVELY ON DIGITAL MATERIALS

One of the sessions by a library automation provider at the 2010 American Library Association Annual Meeting was introduced as follows:

> Explore the challenge of providing access to digital content in the coming decades. Intended for institutions which understand the fragile nature of digital content and want to take steps today to authenticate and prepare all types of file formats for both long term preservation and access.

I applaud the honesty of this description. Librarians have long been actively involved in developing programs for the preservation of library material both through the increased use by publishers of acid-free paper and microfilming efforts such as the national newspaper project. Librarians did not accept microfilm as a medium of storage for print until the quality level of silver halide, the only film considered archival, was available, because properly processed and stored it has a life expectancy of 500 years. Most do not know and the rest have forgotten that microphotography was the previous answer to library space problems. The use of microfilm was also promoted in the 1930s and 1940s as a way for libraries to save money since the sale of books and journals for salvage would more than cover the cost of microfilm replacement. This story is told in Nicholson Baker's book *Doublefold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper* (Random House, 2001). From his interview of Michael Lesk, Professor of Library and Information Science at the Rutgers School of Communication and Information and a fan of JSTOR, Baker concludes that the desire to divert funds from libraries into database maintenance is a repeat of the microfilm story.

Because my doctoral research focused on access to government records, I continue to receive publications with articles describing data that is lost due to the prevailing belief that electronic records last forever. Many in government units are unaware that electronic records cannot even be read a decade later when a word processing program is discontinued. Electronic archiving is not free; it needs to be backed up and periodically transported to new media, which is costly. Books and government documents that are hundreds of years old can be read today. What are the sources of this faith in information technology and the views of the people who provide it? Issues abound about accessible and sustainable digital formats that range from who is responsible and who pays. While ITHAKA is careful to use "long term" in

its references to electronic storage, librarians often read this as "permanent." An example is an announcement that appeared online last June for the New York State Archives workshop on "Preserving Electronic Records in Colleges and Universities," which offers to "help you build a solid foundation for working with permanent electronic records at your college or university."

ITHAKA believes the "tipping point" has been reached for access to current issues of scholarly journals "solely in electronic format." The question asked of faculty members was, "If my library cancelled the current issues of a print version of a journal but continued to make them available electronically, that would be fine with me." The percent answering yes has risen from 50% in 2003 to 70% in 2009. Of course, we all like instant access to a current article when doing a search. However, when asked about journals they use regularly being published only in electronic format, the numbers drop to about 25% in the humanities, about 42% in the social sciences, and just under 50% in the sciences.

An even smaller number (just over 35% for sciences and about 20% for the other two) agreed when asked if "readily accessible" would they be "happy to see hard copy collections discarded and replaced entirely by electronic collections" if proven "to work well." The report takes this to mean that they are not strongly opposed, while I see signs of suspicion with "work well" and "readily accessible" from the majority as well as acceptance of what they expect the library will do anyway. The report does admit possible "concerns about the reliability of e-journal preservation," but no mention is made of the many embargoed online journal articles that interlibrary loan staff members diligently seek for our patrons. They would probably dismiss the project of a faculty colleague at my institution studying the placement of stories in magazines of years past because she wants to see the actual print issues. Digitization should supplement, not replace, the print originals.

SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATIONS

ITHAKA wonders why faculty value highly their professional conferences, their peer networks, and the peer-reviewed scholarly journals published by their scholarly organizations. This section begins with the complaint that these "traditional channels" have been little affected by new ways to communicate and thus "unlike many of the other topics this study explored, no clear trajectory of change is indicated." They find that "free accessibility online" remains of the "least importance for scholars across disciplines in their selection of a journal for publication." It should not have been a surprise that readership by peers is of the most importance to faculty in the selection of a journal for publication and "revamping the scholarly publishing system is secondary to concern about career advancement." The report concludes that "faculty members cannot be expected to lead the transformative change

in scholarly communications that many [?] believe to be necessary or even inevitable."

Further concern is raised about the reluctance of over 70% of faculty members to deposit articles or papers in a college or university digital repository or even on a personal Web page. Use of materials that have been deposited by others is even lower, at about 15%. Here the report lists discovery problems, quality perceptions, and unease of citation as probable reasons. The admission that reasons are "not apparent from the data here" should have been raised many other times in the analysis of the survey data.

The skepticism that faculty members show toward online interaction via listservs, blogs, and other group collaboration tools should be given more attention. The value of "word of mouth" in communicating awareness of new resources and causing them to use a new resource, even one that is electronic, should not be devalued. Librarians are well aware of this and probably are the ones most likely to promote an electronic resource to faculty members. The statement that "preferences among faculty members [are] only one ingredient in the strategic planning process for the future of a scholarly society in an environment of tremendous change" could be enlarged to include their view of librarians as well. Thus, it is not surprising that the report concludes with calling for incentives and mandates from the university leadership to bring about the "changes to the scholarly publishing system" that "a fundamentally conservative set of faculty attitudes continues to impede."

CONCLUSION

American Libraries (May 2010) presents the survey findings without question. *Library Journal* (May 1, 2010) sees the findings as a challenge for librarians "to ride the wave of change." Leslie Morris, founding editor of *Journal of Interlibrary Loan, Document Delivery & Electronic Reserves*, wrote an editorial in 2005 (Volume 15, Issue 3) about ILL librarians dissatisfaction with OCLC services that complaining to listservs "may be personally satisfying, but is probably ineffective." It is up to interlibrary loan librarians to collaborate with faculty members to lead technology in ways that serve research needs, and to do this we can no longer function primarily "behind the scenes." I urge you to read the report available at www.ithaka.org and then find a forum in each of our professional organizations where we can meet face to face with the leadership of ITHAKA. Leslie Morris in that editorial quoted social activist Maggie Kuhn, who said, "Go to the people at the top. . . .Well-aimed slingshots can topple giants."