

Cooperation in digital library development

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Recently, a number of independent studies have begun to demonstrate with reliable evidence how faculty and students perceive of and use scholarly information and the role that academic libraries play in this broader picture. Although much more work needs to be done assessing academic users' needs, interests, and behaviors, it is becoming apparent that they are interested first and foremost in accessing information. No surprises here except that with rather substantial and highly reliable evidence we can begin to flesh out in a little more detail what an interest in access actually means in a world where information is available in both print and electronic formats.

We can see, for example, that faculty and students want access to information irrespective of where it is located and by whom it is owned and managed. They don't care much about format (although they prefer to find things using online vehicles and to use things that are available in some hard copy whether because it exists as such or because it can be printed). They value information they can trust and thus trusted information suppliers. Most prefer working with information from their offices (faculty) and their residences (graduates and undergraduates). Where print and digital exist side-by-side (as they do with so many scholarly journal titles) scholars prefer (by as much as 16:1) to use the electronic. More scholars are finding more of what they want online and as the online information resource satisfies a growing share of their information needs (interestingly, it appears that the total "share" is more or less a fixed sum) the use of the analog declines proportionately. The number of "finds" annually recorded in online bibliographic catalogs, for example, are, like library gate counts, exhibiting a declining trend.

These trends do not of course spell the end for the academic library as an institution. They do, however, have implications for how it builds, organizes and funds its collections and services, for the way it utilizes its physical and virtual spaces, and for the way in academic libraries inter-relate with one another. Some of these implications are profound. For example, libraries have always emphasized access. Historically they have done this by independently assembling in a single place great quantities of scholarly information. Access was once contingent upon the library's ownership of information and the scholar's physical proximity to it. In an increasingly networked age, access is neither contingent on ownership nor proximity. Indeed, ownership and proximity have become barriers to access which relies instead on deep interoperability, information exchange, and cooperation in a networked environment. Despite the premium placed on interdependence, fundamental assumptions about ownership and physical location continue to guide the development of library collections and services and to inform and shape the way libraries are organized, managed and funded. At the beginning of this new millennium, this contradiction seems counter-productive, even dysfunctional.

Plying this seam, the talk will do three things. First, with reference to data that have been gathered in a number of independent studies, it will infer a scholarly user's vision for the 21st century academic library. Second, it will demonstrate how the scholar's vision challenges today's academic libraries forcing them to think about kind of resource sharing than is deeper than they have been used to when contemplating the development of library collections, services, even staff. Finally, it will look at ways in which libraries are confronting these challenges and building cooperatively toward the scholars' vision. Although reference may be made in this last section to a range of institutional experiences, recent developments at the University of California will absorb the lion's share of attention. This focus should not be mistaken to suggest that the University of California libraries are traveling the only cooperative path or even one that is somehow exemplary.¹ The focus is chosen instead because the University of California has for some years been involved in a strategic process through which libraries (there are 11 university

¹ One expects that libraries will adopt different strategies to confront a common set of challenges and also that these strategies will be judged largely on their effectiveness in highly varied local circumstances

libraries) are transitioning away from the traditional campus-based, print-centered service model in which ownership and proximity are essential means of providing access. In that process, the libraries are exploring a variety of cooperative strategies through which they can provide access to library holdings as if they constituted a single virtual university library. They are, in effect, building in one way towards the scholars' vision of the library as it is beginning to emerge from our use studies. Through those years, the UC libraries have derived experience of deep resource sharing but also valuable data with which it is possible to assess its benefits and costs in building an academic library where information ownership and proximity no longer matter quite so much as they once did.