

*Thank you Dr. Gilton, the University and the GSLIS for inviting me to speak this evening. It is always a delight to attend the annual gathering and see the profession swelling and growing with the perspectives and talents of a new generation. Congratulations to all who were honored on this platform today.*

Dr Gilton asked me to take up a particular question this evening: Why do we need libraries now that we have the Internet?

I've been hearing that question for nearly two decades now, ever since a colleague on the task force that was building RINET (the telecommunications network connecting RI schools and libraries to each other and to the Internet) in the early 1990s described sitting in his living room with his daughter on his lap, doing her homework with resources they found online. Faculty at Brown University's IT Department, he was a little ahead of the rest of us hardware, software and connectivity-wise so it was easy to answer the question: for most people, the library was where the resources and the help were. But now nearly everyone has access to the facilities he had then – and then some -- is the question still pertinent?

More recently, I began asking the question rather than trying to answer it. Asking in a variety of places and getting a variety of answers; everything from "We don't, do we?" to "Books aren't going away any time soon, you know." My favorite answer so far came from a twenty-something friend of my college-age daughter, "Because it's there," she said, "The library is really there and the Internet just isn't."

Let's follow up on that a little. The library is indeed there in a way that little else is. A physical place like home, work the mall or a restaurant, the library has a definite location in time and space. You can touch it taste it smell it, feel it. The library is a community resource, a public commons whether the community is a municipality, a school, a college campus or a law office. All are welcome, all are valued. It is the physical space where you are allowed, welcomed, even encouraged to be.

Many librarians have begun speaking in the *Project for Public Spaces* terminology of Ray Oldenberg, author of *Great Good Places*<sup>1</sup>, describing the library as a premier 'third place' in contradistinction to work and home, where community can develop. The third place by definition has engaging activities and uses for all. It has comfort and an image that "...signals that someone took the time and energy to design amenities that welcome, intrigue, or help". It is easy to see and to get to and is 'sociable'; i.e., good for people watching and easy interaction.

So, in that sense, a library is unlike the Internet (or Gertrude Stein's Oakland, CA), where "there is no there there. . ." Libraries are also online, though; note, however, that the important piece of that is the ALSO.

Most recently I have come to the conclusion (perhaps this is why I took on the challenge of speaking to the topic to this evening) that "Why do we need libraries now that the Internet is

---

here?" persistent though it is, is the wrong question -- a little like Chomsky's famous question, "Would you rather go to Chicago or would you rather go by bus?" -- Well-formed, but nonsensical because it contrasts libraries and the Internet as though they were both the same kind of thing.

Although the library and the Internet cross paths again and again, they are not at all the same *kind* of thing. Neither could stand-in for, let alone replace the other. The confusion that leads to our question of the evening arises perhaps from the misconception that the mission of the library is the provision of information and that the Internet, too is primarily a provider of information, or that the mission of the library is to provide books and the internet will soon have all of the books online.

So, if the library and the Internet aren't simply purveyors of information, what are they? Let's begin with the library, and let's begin by examining the value of libraries. The value of a library, Michael Gorman says, is that it is:

- the focal point of a community
- the heart of a university
- one good place in a city
- a place remembered fondly by children when they have grown up
- solace of the lonely and the lost
- the place where all are welcome
- a source of power through knowledge.

That was 1970, and much has changed. Some of those characteristics -- focus of a community, source of power -- could arguably apply as well to some Internet resource, especially as the era of social media develops. But they apply to the library as a community with a local and a physical presence in a way that the Internet cannot. They also say library very loud if you add the word 'trustworthy.'

For comparison with the Internet, however, more to the point are S.R. Ranganathan's five laws of library science, which embody the essence of the library and the profession that cares for it. Ranganathan speaks in terms of 'the book.' Because the publishing trade has far surpassed 'the book' as its common denomination in the years since the five laws appeared in 1963, as you listen again to the laws, you might think of the 'book' with the more sterile, but more encompassing term "library resource" -- to relate it back to information, a package of cultural or informational content."

- Books are for use
- Every reader their book
- Every book, its reader

Save the time of the reader

A library is a growing organism.

What distinguishes a library then is its capacity to put the information resources (books) in context. The books, indeed, contain information but that information is contextualized by having been collected into a resource. In turn, the library takes as its mission putting that resource in turn into a context where

it will be used,

it will be readily available

whoever arrives seeking it will recognize it as what they need (as Ranganathan puts it “the majority of readers do not know their requirements, and their interests take a definite shape only after seeing and handling a well-arranged collection of books”),

the reader is not overwhelmed with a welter of resources to wade through, and

the whole is well looked after; i.e., the library’s collection and services are conceptualized as a whole, conscientiously weeded and added to and adjusted to new accessions

The library is thus, we hope, aimed at you, the reader; its highest mission is to make itself your context. Moreover, the library is an organism – all of those books (library resources) together, tended in the light of its mission through its catalog, physical arrangement and space configuration. It is a human organism at that, staffed with people who understand books, readers and cultural organisms and who wish to understand you.

The Internet on the other hand is untended. Although that is in part its glory, it makes it much harder to say just what it is. Neither is it a consciously gathered collection nor is it ever entirely weeded (or weedable for that matter). Its most active organizing principle is the gathering of data about its users (what Jaron Lanier calls the social graph) for sale at some future time in the interest of advertising. The Internet is thus a marketplace. On the one hand the collective effusion of us all, on the other a way to sell us all to future mad men. It is staffed not by people looking out for our interests, but by spiders which understand bits, bytes, techniques of comparison and statistics and wish to find out about us in order to better serve their masters.

This is not to dis the Internet, or the library, just to assert that they are different in kind with different motives and different missions. The collective effusion that is the Internet contains much of great value – from digital copies of many those same library resources all the way to what Conrad Aiken refers to as the *omnivorous quotidian*. What’s more, for many purposes, the digital version on the internet is of much greater value than the contextualized version in the library. Moreover, the search engine is frequently more effective than the catalog – and its predictions welcome. When I need to quick prepare dinner and have nothing on hand but lentils and rice, I want a recipe for Mujaddhara, not *A Book of Middle Eastern Cooking* and will

be happier if I can find it by searching lentil-plus-rice, even happier, if the net, knowing I am often in this predicament asks “do you want a recipe for Mujaddhara?”

On the other hand, if I am planning dinner I prefer to browse the cookbook section of the library – recipes in context. History, sorcery and go-withs are important.

So, The Internet is not a library and the library is not the internet. Why do we need libraries now that there is an Internet is the wrong question. What then is the right question? I suggest that there are two:

- what can the library do for the Internet?
- what can the library do with the internet?

(there would be four, but the Internet will be the Internet and will welcome libraries for its own purposes as it welcomes all else)

Although I further suggest that each library must answer these questions on its own, there are some generalities. As a matter of fact, a brand new study sponsored by the IMLS, *Opportunity for all* (I refer below to it as *OFA*, the full study is available at <http://cis.washington.edu/usimpact/projects/us-public-library-study/>) for the first time quantifies much of what public libraries are doing for and with the Internet so that, although I have not yet had time to fully digest the study, I can speak to you this evening about what is actually happening in addition to my original plan to speak of what could be happening!:

1. What can the library do **for** the Internet? To wit what as the MBAs say value-add does the library have for the internet itself?

Critically, libraries – especially public libraries – must impose library values on it. What are these library values? We can refer to those implicit in Ranganathan's 5 laws, Michael Gorman has posited eight core library values and the ALA Bill of Rights and related documents elucidate further. From Gorman we get a summary:

Equity of access

Customer focus/service

Stewardship

Democracy

Intellectual freedom

Rationalism

Literacy & learning

Privacy

It all adds up to a culture of integrity and trustworthiness that the Internet needs but cannot support by itself. Paul Jaeger and Kenneth Fleishman point out that public libraries in particular have become “. . . guarantors of Internet and e-government access.” in their communities.

That trust -and our core values – cannot be taken lightly. Library values have been threatened by CIPA by the Patriot Act and Network Neutrality, Google's copyright settlement and much else. We are fortunate to have a very effective and proactive ALA watching out for those values and lobbying to support them.

What are libraries doing to apply library values to the Internet:

--Most important simply providing access to it for the 100 million Americans (if it is an American library) that have no broadband access and millions of other across the digital divide. By making it part of the context that is the library (assistance from well trained staff is key here) the library enhances the Internet. From *OFA*: “. . .45 percent of the 169 million visitors to public libraries connected to the internet. . .during their visit, even though more than three quarters of these people had Internet access at home, work or elsewhere.”

--bridging the digital divide. From *OFA* “. . .44 percent of people in households living below the federal poverty line. . .used public library computers and Internet access. . .Among young adults. . .below the federal poverty line, 61 percent. . .seniors living in poverty, 54 percent. . .”

--putting it into a community context. From *OFA* “Apart from addressing their own computing needs, nearly two-thirds of library computer users. . .logged on to help others. . .”

--putting it into a customer service context. From *OFA* “. . .Overall, two thirds of people who used library computers received help from library staff or volunteers on computer or wireless network issues. . . .”

--developing the Internet as a marketplace for good things for the library; i.e., online databases, path finders, custom local apps.

2. What can the library do **with** the Internet? To wit, how can the library use the Internet to enhance service?

--communicate through a library website, twitter, blogs, etc.; let everyone know about the library and its activities

--break down barriers of time and space by being available 24/7 and everywhere to anyone with an Internet connection when and where they are; eg., online catalog with patron initiated reserves, reference via email text and chat, podcast of library programs

--fill in gaps in the collection via e-books, google books, etc.

--take advantage of computer-power – online databases

--provide services otherwise unavailable through the library like e-government.

An example of what libraries and the internet together can be is the story of e-government in Rhode Island; particularly as it applies to the state Department of Labor and Training (DLT).

Rhode Island entered the e-government arena when the Office of Library and Information Services (OLIS) went out to bid for web portal services in 2001 because libraries recognized the need. The resultant contract with NIC, Inc. has since become the fully developed state website [ri.gov](http://ri.gov) with over 180 online services available, including such things as

- online income tax filing
- reregistration of motor vehicles
- DEM: Sewer permits, boat registration
- DLT: job hunting and resume writing

As is true elsewhere, government offices routinely send users to the library. From *OFA* "More than 26 million people used public library computers to get government or legal information or to access government services. . . ."

At OLIS' first meeting with management of the DLT, for example, one of the DLT managers quipped that the unemployment insurance division routinely refers clients to the One Stop career centers, which, in turn, routinely refer them to the public library.

From the library, the job-seeker has access not only to the online resources of the DLT, but to other online, as well a physical, resources and the assistance of librarians; the library puts the resources in context. From *OFA* ". . .40 percent of the respondents used library computers and internet access for employment or career purposes. . .76 percent [of those] used a library's computers or Internet connection specifically for their search for job opportunities. . . .Sixty-eight percent. . .submitted an application online. . . .Forty six percent. . .used library computers to work on their resumes. . . .twenty three percent. . .obtained job related training. . . ."

--OLIS is now working with DLT to link to each other's websites; cross-train library and DLT line staff; share costs of online databases, etc.

--libraries are thus prime e-government access points, but rarely see extra support as a result and get few kudos as well.

--publicize library as the DLT resource they already are

Finally, what do we do about the persistence of the question: Why do we need libraries now there is an Internet? Follow the advice all of the media consultants give – answer the right questions instead of the wrong one, and do it in public frequently. Libraries must let it be known what we are doing to make the internet more valuable – especially the assertion of library values in Internet access. To that end, we must

let it be known that the internet is an essential part of any good library's collection, but that like the rest of the collection it must be curated; trained staff is the key.

get our libraries online and stay prominent online using all the tools available; tweet, blog, facebook – and do the next thing, too whatever it turns out to be.

compute the savings from using the internet, eg., the savings to government from library access and brag about it.

make sure that as librarians we understand what the Internet is and does as part of our collections

keep up to date especially with those most significant Internet components, like e-government

There is a challenge here not only for libraries and librarians but for the GSLIS as well. As a profession we need to develop and articulate our library values in relation to the Internet and we must geek up our library education and training in order to make the most of the Internet, which is likely to become one of the most significant parts of our collections.

See you online.