Be Careful What You Wish for: Three Alternative Collection Development Visions for Academic Libraries[*]

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Most of us are familiar with the saying, "be careful what you wish for, you might just get it." I would like to start out our discussion by examining two digital futures that I have heard some librarians wish would come to pass and a third that I personally would like to see become reality. After sketching the basics of these three visions, we will brainstorm together our joint futuristic scenario of what we would like to see take place.

As a reality check, however, I think we need to consider how our scenario will address the major issues faced by our sponsoring institutions. I fear that unless we look at how our new library fits into the larger higher education context, we will risk being seen as irrelevant to the needs of our campus communities. The long-term decline of **ARL** libraries as a percentage of total university expenditures is already an indication of our unfortunate success in this area. Otherwise, we may decide that our visions are nightmares.

Non-Commercial Information Digital Library Model

The first wished-for future I'll call the non-commercial information, digital library model. Like all models, it is an over simplification of reality. Its central feature is its rejection of, and frustration with, the current situation in which research conducted by university scholars is published by commercial and societal publishers and then repurchased by libraries. Its goal is to stop purchasing so much information and instead capture and share this research using modern forms of telecommunication without resorting to commercial channels of communication. The Los Alamos high energy physics preprint electronic archive is the poster child of this movement. This model assumes that libraries and universities are interested in scholarly communication and publishers are interested in making money. The relationship between libraries and universities on the one side, and publishers on the other side, is adversarial. If one side wins, the other side looses. The strength of this model is that it clearly defines what is the problem: Money grubbing publishers have created a situation where libraries have too little money to buy too much information. The weakness of this model is its overly simplistic view of everything: Not all publishers are profit driven, not all universities are interested in freely sharing information. Today's universities rely upon services like hospitals to bring in upwards of one-third of their revenues. Furthermore, the only solution to the central problem identified by this model is the destruction of

commercial publishing, or at least those publishers who are seen as the most egregious predators. Unfortunately, to one degree or another, the number of adherents to this model is growing. The **SPARC** revolution is designed to change everything.

Personal Information Spending Account Model

The second digital future vision I will characterize as the personal information spending account revolution. It is the topic of Professor Malcolm Getz's paper, "Academic Publishing: Networks and Prices" at the upcoming **ACRL** conference in Detroit. Unlike the previous vision, this model embraces commercially published information, but it advocates distributing each university's information dollars to the users themselves and then letting them purchase—an article at a time—what they want, when they want it. The goal is to stop the buying, cataloging, shelving, and preservation of information in anticipation of use. This model assumes such library activities are not only capital intensive, but wasteful. It also assumes that publishers are in the business of selling information and will sell it to libraries in whatever format that libraries require. Basically, in this model, libraries will lead and publishers will follow. The strength of this model is that it promises to give people what they want and it potentially can radically reduce the costs that universities must pay to meet the information needs of its faculty and students. The weakness of this model is that it presumes that publishers will follow the lead of the universities and not change how they charge for information; that publishers will assume the risk that libraries have heretofore assumed when libraries bought materials without knowing if they would be read, in this future publishers would publish without knowing if the item would be read; and it also presumes that faculty and students will have the equipment and skills to access all of this new digital information.

Library-Publisher Collaboration Model

The third collection development vision I will call the library/university-publisher collaborative model. Its central theme is one of both sides working together to achieve each other's goals: Libraries want to provide their users with as broad and deep an array of information as possible and publishers want to cover their costs plus make a profit. This model assumes that neither side is out to destroy the other and that both sides want to help each other. The examples of this model are few and far between—indeed the paranoia of the first model almost precludes belief that this kind of cooperation can take place. However, at the risk of being seen as a Pollyanna, I will advance a couple of examples of the sort of thing that ALMOST achieves the goals of this model. More than one periodicals publisher of late have agreed to consortial deals where every library pays some additional amount for electronic access in exchange for the ability to look at all of the journals any member of the consortia owns. Further, the library agrees to not further cancel a publisher's journal in exchange for agreed upon price increase caps.

While libraries are still somewhat uncomfortable, this is an example of what creative collaboration can achieve. Another example of what could happen would be for a coalition of the major university and trade publishers to work with a coalition of research libraries to develop a "Librarynet.com" sort of digital library for books which are out-of-print but still published over the past twenty years. These are books that publishers hold the copyright, but from which have little hope of making more revenue. They are also books that are still of interest to large numbers of researchers. Together all parties could determine the protocols for entering scanned content, images, etc. Then the participants would contribute to the database and benefit from its use according to their contributions. The cost would be at a level to encourage use. The profits would be at a level to encourage contributing content.

In this sort of model, universities, libraries, and publishers can all be winners. The strengths of this model includes putting the acrimony and hostility that has characterized our relationship behind us while at the same time increasing the amount of information that one can access without seeking each member's fiscal destruction. The weakness of this model is that collaboration seems to be an unnatural act. Libraries have seldom been able to cooperate with each other, let alone publishers. Or can we?

Reality Check: Central Issues Facing Higher Education

I recently went back to school to study higher education administration and international educational development. Based upon my studies of education, I suggest the following are some of the most important problems/issues facing institutions of higher education today and that we consider how our different visions for digital/print collections relate to the successful handling of these issues:

1. Meeting the needs of the distance learner.
2. The fractured nature of many campuses along racial, gender and class lines—each with their own demands for materials that address their issues.
3. The steady growth of professional programs and the sciences at the expense of the humanities.
4. The need to develop undergraduate critical thinking skills.
5. The need to improve the quality and relevancy of graduate education to society's needs (there is a Ph.D. glut in many areas).
6. The changing demographics of the student body—increased numbers of minority students, international students, female students (now the majority), older students (now one third are age 40 and above).
7. The competing research and teaching missions of large universities.
8. The graying of the faculty; faculty burnout.
9. The social, economic, and service role of the university to local and national communities.
10. Competition for government and foundation support.

Author's Note:

My talk ended with the invitation to discuss how each of the three digital future models addressed the 10 major needs of higher education. Time restraints precluded serious discussion at the meeting. Yet, now, more than a year later, I continue to find the third model the most persuasive in the long run: Library-publisher collaboration. The problem with the other models, I believe, is that they are so rooted in trying to resolve the library's fiscal problem that they push the central issues facing higher education completely off our radar screens. Yet, unless academic libraries contribute to the resolution of these issues, we will be further marginalized as players in higher education. I also fear the non-commercial model will result in the chaos of the web spreading to what has been a fairly stable print publishing world. The bad thing about our current situation is that about a dozen publishers control the most important journals. The good thing is that only about a dozen publishers have to work together to provide electronic links between the most important journals. Finally, I continue to worry that the personal information spending account model would just result in useful information becoming more expensive and useless information becoming cheap with large libraries like my own called upon to pay the bill, perhaps larger than the one we are currently paying. We need to get beyond our adversarial roles and pay attention to the larger issues of higher education. Publishers and libraries working together, therefore, offers the most hope of success.