

Are Libraries Thriving? An Oxford Debate

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Are Libraries Thriving? An Oxford Debate

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Libraries, librarians, are thriving. Moreover, they are evolving, morphing into a new concept of information conveyance and literacy in the 21st century.

Many like to argue that libraries are dead and dying because print materials are no longer the conveyance of information in this 2nd coming of the information age. However, I'd like to posit that libraries are no longer the sole brick and mortar pillars of the printed word they once were.

By way of an example: In 1861, there was the publication of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*. In this book, the word: terrific is used to describe Mr. Wopsle reading aloud in a "terrific manner" meaning something along the lines of "in a terrifying and traumatic way." Some sixty years later, we end James Joyce's *Ulysses* with Molly Bloom's terrific heaving bosom and know that now terrific means something grand and magnificent with a little devilish double entendre thrown in for added pleasure.

Libraries/librarians as a rhetorical derivation are historically tied to "the book" be we are no longer "of the book" or "by the book." Libraries and librarians are, instead an interwoven aspect of the web. Libraries are digital, virtual, networked, wired, in the clouds, and scaling the web at a quickening Pace. Libraries have become centers for learning, information commons, networked plazas, electronic resource centers, library learning terraces, media pods, and e-lobbies.

Librarians are chatting, tweeting, linkedin, giving face (book) time, embedded into the myriad of virtual learning environments around us. Librarians are sage guides through a gaggle of disinformation and unsubstantiated research. Libraries/librarians highlight the worthwhile research, validated resources, get-it-now, let patrons do-it-themselves, while exposing predatory publishers and circumspect vagaries of purported "academic" scholarship.

Most academic libraries now deliver 70 to 80 percent of their total collection expenditures electronically. We share our amassed print collections in regional,

national, and international exchanges. We digitize and crowd source special collections to leverage our collective and collaborative might. We pick up whatever orphans we find along the way and give them new recognition and notoriety. You just know they wanted to call it Google Library at first!

Many library professionals expend 60% of their day interacting with patrons and each other through technological devices and interpersonal exchanges to help aid in the discovery, interpretation, and delivery of information not only to local constituents but also via shared virtual reference hours now spreading across international time zones. Librarians are plugged in, embedded, online, and more popular an ever.

In summation, eighty some years post Dewey, libraries/librarians are terrific. We are The Library. Libraries are evolving, growing, expanding at the speed of DSL and satellite. Libraries/librarians are so out there that we're in there. Libraries/librarians are still linked to the book but we've evolved and changed with technology and are hyper-realized in a hybrid environment. Thriving are libraries and librarians.