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## Devil's Advocate -- Public Library Trends, FY1992-FY2003

Bob Molyneux

*SirsiDynix*, bob.molyneux@sirsidynix.com

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them using their own terms, search for their articles, and find out what their library's holdings are all from one site. When researchers have to search multiple databases and other resources to gather information, having all of those resources bookmarked on a Web accessible site can save the user valuable time when they need to review their sources.

Social bookmarking tools and services are still evolving, and their use is growing quickly. As with any evolving technology, there are drawbacks such as user privacy and accessibility, but the popularity of social bookmarking indicates that the benefits outweigh the negative aspects of social bookmarking. These services

are presenting a new and user-friendly approach to organizing and finding information, and libraries would do well to take an active part in their development.

### Some Social Bookmarking Services

What follows is a brief list of available social bookmarking services. This is not an exhaustive list of services currently available, but these services provide a good place to begin learning about social bookmarking and how it can work for you.

**del.icio.us** (<http://del.icio.us/>)

**Flickr** (<http://www.flickr.com/>)

**Jeteye** (<http://jeteye.com/>)

**Simpy** (<http://www.simpy.com/>)

**de.lirio.us** (<http://de.lirio.us/rubric>)

**Connotea** (<http://www.connotea.org/>)

**Furl** (<http://www.furl.net/>)


**BlinkList** (<http://www.blinklist.com/>)

**Spurl** (<http://www.spurl.net/>)

**Jots** (<http://www.jots.com>)

**CiteULike** (<http://www.citeulike.org/>)

**Yahoo! My Web 2.0** (<http://myweb2.search.yahoo.com/>)

For more information on available social bookmarking services, **Roxomatic's** comparison of nineteen available social bookmarking services is available for PDF download from [http://www.irox.de/file\\_download/3](http://www.irox.de/file_download/3). 

#### Endnotes

1. Hammond, Tony, Timo Hannay, Ben Lund, and Joanna Scott, "Social Bookmarking Tools (I): A General Review," *D-Lib Magazine* 11, no. 4 (April 2005) <http://www.dlib.org/dlib/april05/hammond/04hammond.html> (accessed 11/21/2005).

## Devil's Advocate — Public Library Trends, FY1992-FY2003

by **Bob Molyneux** (Chief Statistician, SirsiDynix, 101 Washington Street, S.E., Huntsville, AL 35801-4827; Phone: 256-704-7019; Fax: 256-704-7007) <[bob.molyneux@sirsidyndix.com](mailto:bob.molyneux@sirsidyndix.com)>



As a part of the work I am doing at **SirsiDynix on the Library Normative Data Project (NDP)**,<sup>1</sup> I have been investigating trends observable in public libraries in the US. This is a report of what I have found so far and is a revision of preliminary work on the **NDP Website**<sup>2</sup> which you can refer to for more detail. What I have found so far is that the public libraries in the US — looked at as a national system — generally did well in what we measure quantitatively over the period from 1992-2003. The last few years however, have shown signs of strain.

For a bit of context, the **NDP** integrates data from a variety of sources, including from integrated library systems (ILS) where transactions-level data are recorded. Information on circulations and holdings at contributing libraries<sup>3</sup> are integrated with data from **Census** and from the **US National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Public Library Survey**.<sup>4</sup> When I was at the **US National Commission for Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS)**,<sup>5</sup> I recompiled several **NCES** annual series into longitudinal files so that one could do trend analysis. Two of these datasets are integrated into the **NDP**, also. For this analysis, I use the **State Summary data**, a series that has summary data for each state's libraries by year. These data are the best to use for national assessments of public libraries in the US. The data are available on the **NCLIS** site.<sup>6</sup>

If one looks at the entire interval from fiscal year 1992- fiscal year 2003, there is good news. Public libraries in the US grew from a reported 647 million volumes in 1992 to 802 million

(24%) in 2003. Income grew from \$5.0 billion to \$8.7 billion (74%), and expenditures rose from \$4.5 billion to \$8.3 billion (84%). The number of library "outlets" (branches, central libraries, and bookmobiles) increased 2.7% from 16,840 to 17,299 while library systems increased 3% to 9,214 from 8,944. There were more people visiting libraries (from 932 million to 1.3 billion) and more total staff to help those visitors as staff increased from 110,000 to 136,000.

That is a lot of numbers to absorb quickly but the trends looked at this way are all positive.

A major concern to public librarians is the notion of "population served" by the library and from that, they calculate per capita ratios. Sure income went up, but so did population. Did Public library per capita expenditures...or income...or whatever...go up or down? Per capitas are also a way of balancing the differences in raw figures we find in public library data that reflect the vast differences in the size of the libraries. With these ratios we can compare how my state or library did compared with others? In fact, one of the most consulted set of tables done by **NCES** is the **State Rank Order Tables**,<sup>7</sup> a set of 22 tables with per capita rankings by the states. Now, population served increased from 243 million to 280 million or 15% over the period...did libraries keep up? Briefly, yes, the trends we see in these per capita figures are also positive. As a national system, public libraries in the US kept up with the increase in population for the entire period.

However, when we look at the data annu-

ally and take into account inflation in the financial variables, a more complex picture emerges and recent years have shown stark declines and evidence of libraries adjusting to new realities is reflected in the variables we have.

About the late 90's, depending on the variable you examine, financial figures indicate that libraries budgets were not keeping up with increases in their costs. This fact can be seen in raw figures and in the per capita figures. One long-term trend presages what we are seeing now.

Income received in libraries is greater than operating expenditures because income goes to things other than operations — such as capital expenditures. Over the period, income rose 74% while expenditures rose 83% as librarians squeezed more income from expenditures. The per capitas show that 91% of income per capita was expended in FY1992 while in FY2003 the comparable figure was 95%. A number of forces could have been behind such a trend such as increasing efficiency of operations or responding to pressures on expenditures' budgets.

What happens when there is no more room to trim? Per capita expenditures on collections fell nationally from \$4.19 in 2001 to \$4.18 in 2002 and further to \$4.12 in 2003. Current serials subscriptions fell from a high of 7.5 per 1,000 population in 1997 to 6.79 in 2003. For the first time in this series, the total staff fell in 2003 — after years of steady increases on the order of 2,000 or so a year. As I said when I first analyzed these results, libraries were eating their seed corn.

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# IMHBCO (In My Humble But Correct Opinion) — Three Kinds of “Research” and Two Kinds of Researcher

by **Rick Anderson** (Director of Resource Acquisition, University of Nevada, Reno Libraries; Phone: 775-784-6500 x.273) <rickand@unr.edu>

Of course, these are national trends and some states will do well and others will do poorly and how libraries are funded is a factor. I started to investigate this question about whether some methods of funding public libraries are better and I can't say I have gotten very far along because there are intervening variables such as the health of a state's economy. It may be that some methods of financing public libraries do better in good times than bad and this is a question worth investigating.

But, I can tell you that the experience of the states varies considerably. Almost all beat inflation in income and expenditures but five (Hawaii, Illinois, New Mexico, Nevada, and Alaska) had declines in inflation-adjusted income from 1992-2003. Hawaii's income per capita figures fell in absolute terms and about \$5 in terms of purchasing power. Expenditures per capita fell in inflation-adjusted terms in Hawaii, New Mexico, and Alaska.

The change in 2003 was rather more stark. 24 states had declines in inflation-adjusted income per capita — 12 in actual dollar figures. There were 16 states that showed a decline in expenditures.

Some states showed increases. Rhode Island increased the greatest amount for the whole period, for instance, its inflation-adjusted income per capita up 62% from 1992-2003. Expenditures per capita rose 69% in real terms in Oregon. In 2003, income per capita rose the most in Tennessee, Missouri, Kentucky, and Vermont. Expenditures rose the most in Delaware, Missouri, South Dakota, and Wyoming.

Increases and decreases in per capita dollar figures only tell a part of the story. Ohio's per capita total operating expenditures in 2003 was \$54 and if it declines by 20%, it will still be above Mississippi's (\$13) if it were to increase by 20%.

Clearly, there is more work to do. 🐼

## Endnotes

1. <http://www.libraryndp.info/>
2. [http://www.libraryndp.info/nces\\_2003\\_data.html#trends](http://www.libraryndp.info/nces_2003_data.html#trends)
3. No, there are no personally identifiable information in the system.
4. <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/libraries/Public.asp>
5. <http://www.nclis.gov/>
6. <http://www.nclis.gov/statsurv/NCES/pusum/index.html>
7. [http://www.libraryndp.info/nces\\_2003\\_data.html#srot](http://www.libraryndp.info/nces_2003_data.html#srot). This version of the State Rank Order Tables was compiled before NCES's figures came out and it a bit more accessible than the NCES figures available here: E.D. Tab: Public Libraries in the United States: Fiscal Year 2003, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005363.pdf>, pp. A3-A13.

An English professor I once knew had an exercise that he used with all of his classes at the beginning of each semester. He stood at the front of the room and wrote the word “dog” on the chalkboard, then asked the class what the word meant. As the discussion unfolded, wildly varying (yet all equally valid) definitions would be offered: “dog” is a noun that denotes a canine animal; it's a verb meaning “to follow obsessively;” it's an adverb (as in “dog-tired”); it's a metaphor for failure; and so on and on.

His point, obviously, was that words are slippery. Sometimes two people use the same word in the same conversation to mean completely different things, and end up wasting a lot of time arguing — each of them thinking the other has utterly lost his mind — before they finally realize that they actually agree on the substantive issue. But that's not actually the worst-case scenario. Much worse is when the conversation continues without either party realizing that they're talking past each other — or when everyone in a group simply goes along happily using the same word to mean fundamentally different things, not arguing or contending, but also not making much progress because all are unwittingly pulling the project in slightly different directions.

I'd like to suggest that this is exactly where we are in the library profession regarding the word “research,” and that this state of affairs is holding us back from realizing our potential for good in a recently and radically changed information marketplace.

All of us agree that we're here to support research, and that our patrons need good research skills in order to function well as scholars and citizens. But what do we mean when we say “research”?

As I understand it, that word can be used equally well to refer to three very different activities (and maybe more, but for our purposes I think these three are the most relevant). The first is what happens in a laboratory or in field investigation: scientists test hypotheses against the observed properties of the physical world, or against the actual behavior of animals and people. Obviously, this type of research doesn't really happen in a library, though a library may support it in various ways. Of more relevance to us as librarians are the two general types of research that remain: first, the process of identifying, locating and gathering materials that you need to master (which I'm going to refer to as Finding/Gathering), and second, the process of

actually exploring the content of those materials: reading, evaluating, selecting, rejecting, absorbing, and synthesizing their content (a process I'll call Reading). The problem is that we use the word “research” to refer to both activities, despite the fact that they're fundamentally different activities.

But wait — aren't Finding/Gathering and Reading just two sides of the same intellectual coin? There's a reason we use the word “research” to describe both of them — isn't it because both are an important and integral part of the learning process?

No. In fact, I would argue that the Finding/Gathering process is little more than a necessary evil, a process that is unavoidable but not especially beneficial in itself. I think it's much like the process of gathering wood for a campfire. There's not much benefit to be had from the gathering itself; the benefit isn't realized until the wood is piled up and the fire is started. That's not to say that



there's no benefit *whatsoever* to the process of wood-gathering (it does involve some physical exercise, after all, and you're out walking around in the fresh air, which is nice), but real, useful heat isn't generated until the wood is gathered and you start burning it. No rational person would walk farther than necessary to find the needed firewood, or fell a tree when a pile of usable logs is already on the ground nearby, or gather a month's worth of fuel to feed a one-night campfire. The fire, not the gathering of wood, is the point.

The same is true, I think, of education and the research process. Finding/Gathering — one of the activities that we commonly call “research” — may have some small intellectual benefit (you're thinking about your topic, you're out walking around in the literature), and in some disciplines it may yield more direct benefits than it does in others. But compared to the benefit that comes from actually *reading* those resources, the benefit is minimal. It seems to me that an hour spent Finding/Gathering yields far less intellectual growth than an hour spent Reading. Education is about reading, evaluating, selecting, rejecting, absorbing, and synthesizing content; it's not about walking across campus, checking the sorting shelves, photocopying articles, or learning how to use the OPAC or some other user-hostile search interface. The Reading, not the Searching/Gathering, is the point.

What makes this whole question even more

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