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## Something to Think About -- "The Name's the Thing!"

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and 1970s was still in use until several years ago. The systems brought up for library use became increasingly useful and robust as well as able to perform a wide array of library in-house functions with increasing sophistication — and increasingly common in a near-totally systematic configuration

Subsequent to the relative mastery of the major in-house library functions a new breed of computer product, widely employed in libraries, came into being — inaugurated by the **Lockheed Missile & Space Co.** This was the creation of a massive data-base of results covering a broad range of scientific and technical experiment and applications crudely indexed for purposes of identification and means of ordering. Roughly simultaneously the early versions of *Science Citation Abstracts* and *Current Contents* were launched by **Eugene Garfield**.

These early indexing and abstracting ventures soon loosed a flood of similar undertakings followed by the rapid emergence of on-line journals. The vast bulk of the currently disseminated information formerly made available in paper and ink form was converted in a relatively brief period of time to electronic form. This migration was, in part, enhanced by the new technology of the electronic transfer of information over long distances — the **DARPA** initiative, exceeding its founder's wildest imaginings.

But as all these marvels in information technology were rolled out in rapid succession a strange and a potentially decisive and potentially debilitating cultural change was set into motion. That aberration was the subtle transformation in the definitions and understandings of the differences between and the complimentary roles of information and knowledge in the training of learning minds and the culture-forming exercises of knowledgeable minds. Knowledge and its pursuit began to be casually displaced by the mere accumulation of information. (The even more decisive and vexed matter of the pursuit of wisdom is best simply set-aside in the present context.) This information is increasingly simply packaged as an accumulation of bits of information (data) as if these slapdash assemblages of more-or-less related crumbs of fact betraying a more-or-less haphazard sense of organization bear some significant meaning. Nearly every library is now awash in crowded terminals with users apparently busy — some clearly seeking to uncover various bits of data for their packrat's hoard. Others are involved in less edifying endeavors — playing games, creating email, trying their hand at day-trading in equities, and various other kinds of pastimes readily offered by the Internet.

Returning to those genuinely searching out bits and pieces of information. At least some are bent on digging out evidence for a paper of greater or lesser import. But for openers we now well understand that the Internet is an absolute sink-hole of inaccurate or positively false informational bits. What intellectual good, a pursuit that libraries have for centuries posited

as the primary purpose for their existence, can such a questionable means of acquiring valid evidence as this be? Further, far too frequently, as any faculty member will tell you, such searches wind up in downloading a paper more-or-less bearing upon the assigned topic. The search strategy in such cases is simply that of locating a site where such a paper might reside or alternatively, the Website of service supplying prefabricated papers on a comprehensive collection written to touch upon the more commonly assigned subject matters.

Such ways of seeking evidence and arguments contrast sharply with the traditional means of proceeding with paper-writing, and the means still employed by scholars in preparing a

serious paper or a book. In these cases some study, often quite intense, is undertaken to form a base-line of broad understanding of the previous learning/hypotheses offered to make sense of the "big, buzzing, blooming confusion" marking the pursuit of knowledge. And it is books which lay out the sustained arguments together with the then-supporting evidence that those seeking to explain the confusion have written out their thoughts. Then, and only then, can a tentative hypothesis be formulated and the

search for evidence to sustain that tentative hypothesis be undertaken.


Books, the library's centuries-long principal *raison d'être*, remain the library's enduring reason for being. Information technology certainly has proved its worth in the operational aspects of the library and as clearly the provision of public IT resources must continue to be supported. The ubiquitous precedence and support of IT by the library community, including the recently renamed Schools of Information Technology, presently being advanced simply reflects a fashionable but ill-founded understanding of the pre-eminent role of culture-learning

and culture-forming roles of the library. Rather than flying the banners of the ill-advised advancement of IT academic

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librarians should be leading the parade celebrating and advancing the critical and central cultural-learning and the culture-forming roles of books and their fundamental place in the library — the memory of the species. Such a role is not presently fashionable — but when has the nuts and bolts of making and preserving a culture ever been anything but fashionable. Fashion has never found a comfortable home in the nuts-and-bolts world of genuine cultural creation and transmission. 

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## Something To Think About? — "The Name's the Thing!"

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Part of the problem with weeding is the need we have to make sure our chosen serial titles actually continue to fit the curricula in academic/special libraries or, they continue to serve the needs of our shifting patronage in public venues. We can usually count on trade magazines to continue entertaining and edifying our patrons in the same traditional ways, but what of the more technical or esoteric journals? **Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (ERAU)** is a unique blend of academic and special libraries. While we have some general scholastic programs, the majority of programs are geared toward



the aeronautical and aerospace professional fields. It has been interesting to learn of the programs, research and adjunct studies that abound here. I have been very pleased to have taken a beginning course in the aeronautical sciences as part of my

training, because I have learned the language, nomenclature and acronyms of a difficult field of study. This has allowed me to become more familiar with the needs of the students and faculty. Another third of my training has been learning the reference tools used in our library, so that this summer, I may be privileged to work at the desk for four hours a week. This will help fill in other answers for those mystical needs of the collection. The last third of the training has been learning my job as the serials librarian — selection of serial materials, care/maintenance of the serial collection and cataloging of the materials. Along with these responsibilities is that of de-selection of materials. I find this task the most difficult because I am a "pack rat" at heart. As you have learned in previous articles in this column, **ERAU** is a pleasant library and very friendly, but space is not a strong feature. In order to continue having enough space to operate, we just have to "weed" the collection.

The Periodical Collection can be divided into entertainment journals, technical news journals and technical hardcore materials. The former include such titles as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Men's*

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*Fitness, Marie Claire, Allure, Skiing, Skin Diver, Soccer, National Geographic, and Car and Driver.* You're probably familiar with the newsy kind of technical journals, such as *Chemical and Engineering News, Aviation Daily, Business Daily*, and others too numerous to mention. The hardcore technical journals are those from the large research organizations such as **ACM, IEEE, IEE, ASME, ASCE**, and some that have heady titles like *Vision Research, Journal of the American Acoustical Society, Journal of the American Mathematical Society, Acta Metallurgica, and Perceptual and Motor Skills.* The other part of the Collection includes all of the aviation and aerospace materials. This is the core of the Collection. We evaluate the core very thoroughly when we agree to purchase them, so they are usually left untouched in weeding seasons. The major concentration comes in a study of the entertainment magazines, by virtue of deciding whether the material is relevant enough for the curricula to keep more than one to two years on the shelves. Some of these titles are important to the programs, such as *Car and Driver.* This journal discusses a great deal about engines and parts in cars that are very similar in airplanes. The principles of development are virtually the same, so we want to keep this journal historically. Some of our nature journals are used for environmental studies, such as *Defenders* and *National Geographic.* Others, such as *World Soccer, Skin Diving, and Skiing* actually support clubs on campus.

On a more technical note, the psychological journals support the Human Factors studies and research. Fitness magazines help encourage our pilots and other students to be healthy, as most will have to pass physicals to become certified in their fields. We, of course, have technical journals supporting other areas of study including engineering mechanics, physics, computer science, astronomy, meteorology, and business curricula. Some of these journals cease over the years or change titles, and some have their research become obsolete after ten years because the technology changes so rapidly. These are titles we might consider to have the print replaced by microfilm or fiche.

It becomes readily apparent that we must evaluate titles in our Collection on the basis of relevancy to the curricula and other on-campus programs, but also be aware of the many formats that will allow us to clear print from the shelves and replace with either microtext or electronic formats. These alternatives will allow us some flexibility and still be able to be scanned for our Extended Campus students at some 140 learning centers around the world. We will not be deleting any titles from our Collection in this year's weeding project, but we will be making space. Our first step is almost complete, as we have removed a great many journal boxes from the shelves and will be replacing them with bound volumes as they return from the Bindery in one month. Step two is almost complete, as I have developed **Excel** lists of various sub-collections such as General use, Engineering, Computer and Business materials identifying their

# Four ways TO ENHANCE your collection.



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holdings, other formats available with prices, indexing, full-text online versions, and areas of curricula supported. These lists, when complete, will be circulated to all of our librarians for consideration and votes as to retention years, alternative formats, and or alternative locations. Each librarian in **ERAU** is required to work at the Reference Desk, so they should have different experiences as to needs for the specific journals we house. They are also required to be a liaison to particular teaching and research areas on campus, so that will give them some other perspectives on the journals. We expect the results of the voting to be completed several

weeks after presentation to the group and then we will be able to begin acquiring alternative formats or cutting retained holdings to accommodate their wishes.

We have a good start on this summer's weeding project. As **Sherlock Holmes** has been quoted, "The game is afoot, Watson!" We will be soaring through the project and tackling the problems of minimum shelving and over-stuffing of shelves, but we will always keep the beloved titles like "The Monthly Honker."

It is truly something to think about and consider. 