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The Dual Mission Paradigm: A Ranganathanian Critique

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Many believe that libraries have two objectives: they provide access to resources, and they preserve those resources. The preponderance of this paradigm is evident in the mission statements of countless libraries and the views espoused by the profession's leading organizations. In 2006, for example, the **American Library Association** and **Association of Research Libraries** issued a joint statement asserting that "The mission of libraries is to preserve and provide access to information, regardless of format."¹ This short essay draws on **S. R. Ranganathan's** five laws of library science to critique the dual mission paradigm.

Given the reverence that the five laws inspire, one might imagine that they were etched in stone tablets by the finger of some omnipotent bibliographic deity. In reality, they were the product of five years of intensively studying, applying, and reflecting on the tasks of librarianship. **Ranganathan** recounts that this period began in 1924 when he ended his career as a mathematician in order to accept an appointment as head librarian at **Madras University**.² To receive training for his new post, **Ranganathan** traveled to Great Britain, where he attended classes and studied the operations of roughly one hundred libraries. He returned to India in 1925 and set about developing his Colon Classification system and using this system to catalog **Madras University Library's** collection. During this time, **Ranganathan** became consumed with identifying librarianship's fundamental principles. As he wrote of the libraries he observed, "There was no evidence of an overall view... what could be seen was only an aggregate of diverse practices without an integral relation."³ The search for this "integral relation" came to a conclusion one evening in 1928 when an offhand remark from a friend revealed to **Ranganathan** the first of his laws. From this moment of epiphany, the other four laws followed before the evening's close.

Since their publication in 1931, **Ranganathan's** laws have become a theoretical cornerstone of library science. But, while their renown is universally acknowledged, adherence to the dual mission paradigm suggests an incomplete grasp of the laws' implications.

First law: Books are for use.

The first law — which is meant to refer to all resources, not just the monographic variety — asserts that collections serve a single purpose: use. **Ranganathan's** stated intention here is to dispel the prevalent notion that libraries have collections not for use but for preservation.⁴ He considers this notion to be the legacy of a past era of information scarcity

when libraries needed to vigilantly guard their collections from theft, vandalism, degradation, and the other perils that use poses. With the passing of this era, **Ranganathan** argues, libraries should value use of their collections above all else.

Second law: Every person his or her book.

The assertion that collections are for use begs a question: use by whom? **Ranganathan** answers this question in his second law. Describing the relationship between this law and its predecessor, he writes that, "If the First Law replaced the concept 'Books Are for Preservation,' the Second Law widens the concept 'Books for the Chosen Few.'"⁵ Indeed, the second law advocates for equality.

It holds that a collection should be reflective of and accessible to a library's full community: the poor no less than the rich, the marginalized no less than the privileged, and inactive users no less than the library's most frequent visitors.

In his self-styled "meditation" on this law, **Michael Gorman** identifies another way that libraries should seek equality. He writes that "One must base decisions not only on the known community of the present but also on likely future changes in that community."⁶ In effect, **Gorman** is saying that a library's community is two dimensional: one dimension consists of the current range of users, and the other consists of future users. This point implies that, to comply with the second law, libraries must develop collections serving future users no less than current ones.

Third law: Every book its reader.

Ranganathan's third law inverts and builds on his second law. It states that, in addition to developing a collection reflective of the needs of its full community, a library must implement tools and services that effectively align these needs with collection contents. In other words, the third law aims to ensure that a collection is used to its fullest potential.

The means for complying with this law vary. **Ranganathan** states that it necessitates having open stacks along with effective reference services, marketing methods, and cataloging and classification systems.⁷ Today's libraries are finding new ways to align users' needs with collection contents. **Michèle V. Cloonan** and **John G. Dove** authored a 2005 article on this topic in which they discuss how libraries can comply with the third law by developing Web presences with diverse and easily accessible pathways to e-resources and reconfiguring reference services to focus on online points of contact.⁸

Whether they are old or new, these tools and services uniformly neglect the segment of the community that **Gorman** had identified: future users. These users are unique because there is no way of knowing the resources they will need. While librarians can make predictions based on emerging patterns and trends of use, the future lasts a long time, and the potential needs of future users are limitless. Consequently, a library's best means for meeting the needs of future users (thereby complying with the first and second laws) and ensuring that its collection reaches its fullest potential (thereby complying with the third law) is preserving everything it acquires forever. Therefore, while **Ranganathan** warns against considering preservation as an end in itself, an analysis of the first three laws shows that preservation is necessary as a means for compliance with these laws.

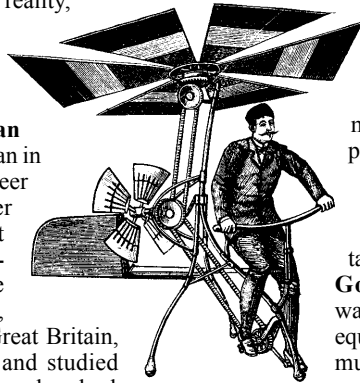
Fourth law: Save the time of the reader.

Ranganathan's fourth law retains the user-centric principles of its predecessor but shifts the focus of these principles from users' needs for information to their time. It presupposes that, like information, users value their time, and it asserts that library tools and services should demand as little time as necessary. This shift in focus creates a tension between the third and fourth laws. The third law implies that the metrics for evaluating tools and services is their effectiveness in aligning resources with users' needs. In contrast, the fourth law implies that this metrics is the rapidity with which tools and services align resources with users' needs.

When considered together, the third and fourth laws suggest that libraries must assess the trade-offs between effectiveness and rapidity and then determine and implement tools and services with the optimal balance. This need for a balancing point has often prevented libraries from pursuing the earlier-noted implication of the first three laws: preserving everything acquired forever. In **Ranganathan's** time, for example, the more that was preserved, the more space the collection occupied, the more records it required, and the more difficult it became for a library to manage and for users to search. Today, technological innovations have mitigated the tensions between effectiveness and rapidity. Current users have access to online tools that utilize powerful data harvesting, indexing, and searching capabilities to immediately and accurately align resources with users' queries.

Unfortunately, these innovations introduce a new point of tension. Users' enhanced capabilities to find resources are accompanied by expectations for seamless access. Libraries that aim to provide this seamlessness comply with the fourth law in their services to current users, but they risk failure in their services to future users. The risk is due to the many categories

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of resources for which the only options that libraries have for providing immediate access are through acquisition terms lacking perpetual access provisions.

One reason for this is budgetary limitations. A library cannot afford to purchase all of the books and maintain subscriptions to all of the journals to which users might want access. Therefore, the only means for providing immediate access might be pay-per-view transactions and aggregated package subscriptions — both of which generally lack strong perpetual access provisions.

Another barrier to securing perpetual access is vendor license restrictions. Although research by **Jim Stemper** and **Susan Barribeau** found that many vendors will concede to libraries' expectations for perpetual access provisions, they stress that these concessions must be negotiated into the license.⁹ Negotiations can significantly delay access or, if the vendor is unwilling to meet the library's demands, result in termination of the acquisition.

Fifth law: The library is a growing organism.

Through its characterization of a library as a growing organism, the fifth law stresses the importance of planning. Like an organism, **Ranganathan** posits, a collection grows in size. He therefore urges administrators to anticipate this growth and strategize so that it has the maximum benefits for users.

In **Ranganathan's** time, collection growth occurred as a gradual increase in physical size. The current environment's so-called "information explosion" has introduced a new form of growth: the rapid proliferation of online resources. A primary driver of this proliferation is the bundling of resources into aggregated databases and "big deal" publisher packages. Another driver is the emergence of a long-tail information marketplace in which libraries can quickly and affordably acquire a large and broadening array of individual resources as need for them arises. Because both of these acquisition methods often lack perpetual access provisions, the range of resources accessible to users is shifting from a clearly delineated collection to a nebulous cloud.

Ranganathan considers how to address such radical changes in his discussion of the fifth law. He states that, in addition to their tendency to grow, libraries and organisms share another characteristic: they must both adapt to evolving environments.¹⁰ In many ways, today's libraries are striving to follow **Ranganathan's** guidance. Leaders in the profession are responding to changes in collections and users' expectations by rejecting arguments purporting "That's the way we've always done it" as a justification for maintaining traditional practices. Instead, they are becoming advocates for innovation and experimentation.

This pioneering spirit generally stops short of questioning libraries' longstanding commitments to retaining permanent ownership of the resources they acquire. On the contrary,

the contents of the profession's literature and conferences suggest that in recent years there has been an intensification of focus on how libraries can continue to perform the traditional activity of preservation in the evolving environment. How can we account for these two seemingly contradictory trends, one challenging the ways of the past and the other upholding them? The answer is the dual mission paradigm. While tools and workflows are means, the dual mission paradigm claims that preservation is an ultimate end.

As my analysis of the five laws of library science has shown, **Ranganathan** rejects this paradigm. He contends that a collection's only value comes in its use. While preservation has in the past been necessary as a means to facilitate use, the activity is of no inherent value.

Libraries must decide whether they agree with **Ranganathan**. For those that do, two implications come to the fore. First, these libraries should, if necessary, revise their mission statements to make clear that they develop collections with only one core objective: use. Second, libraries must develop a better grasp of how they believe preservation activities (including commitments to perpetual ownership of online resources) function as a means to facilitate future use. In doing so, libraries must weigh the anticipated benefits of preservation for future users against the detrimental impacts it can have for current users. While the future lasts a long time and includes unforeseeable users and needs, the current environment is one in which users and their needs for immediate access are clearly defined. Developing strate-

gies that balance the urgency of the present with speculations about the future is one of the most important but least understood challenges facing libraries today. 🌱

Endnotes

1. The **American Library Association** and **Association of Research Libraries**, "The ALA and ARL Position on Access and Digital Preservation: A Response to the Section 108 Study Group" (Nov. 9, 2006), www.arl.org/bm-doc/the-ala-and-arl-position-on-access-and-digital-preservation.pdf (Accessed Oct. 13, 2010).
2. **S. R. Ranganathan**, *The Five Laws of Library Science* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1963): 19.
3. *Ibid.*, 20.
4. *Ibid.*, 26-27.
5. *Ibid.*, 80.
6. **Michael Gorman**, *Our Singular Strengths: Meditations for Librarians* (Chicago: ALA, 1998): 57.
7. **Ranganathan**, *The Five Laws of Library Science*: 258.
8. **Michèle V. Cloonan** and **John G. Dove**, "Ranganathan Online," *Library Journal* 130, no. 6 (2005): 58-60.
9. **Jim Stemper** and **Susan Barribeau**, "Perpetual Access to Electronic Journals: A Survey of One Academic Research Library's Licenses," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 50, no. 2 (2006): 91-109.
10. **Ranganathan**, *The Five Laws of Library Science*: 351.

The Future of the Textbook

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E textbooks are the latest and, some would say, last major eBook category to finally start opening up to active experimentation and sales development worldwide. Over the last year or so we have seen a number of new and innovative business models, pricing ideas, and interactive or "born digital" products being explored by major Publishers as well as new market entrants. These new suppliers, distributors, and aggregators are developing some innovative approaches to eTextbook supply that are in some cases challenging, and in others sitting alongside the established players.

Against the Grain asked **Maverick Outsource Services** to explore this debate in more detail and to co-ordinate a series of special report articles in upcoming issues regarding the emerging future for eTextbooks.

We spoke to some key contributors to find out their views on the decline of print and the rise of electronic and to understand what factors would significantly drive the move to

a digital world. The research explored three specific areas and their subsequent impacts on students, lecturers, publishers, and authors:

- the current market and the shift from "p" to "e,"
- the development of eTextbooks and eMaterials, and
- the supporting technology that delivers and enables access to content.

Over the course of three editions of *Against the Grain*, we will discuss the findings of this research. In this issue, we explore the market trends that are driving the shift from print to electronic as we try to uncover: What is the future of the textbook? What issues does the change from "p" to "e" present? How quickly, or slowly, will the market move until we reach the tipping point? And ultimately, who might be the winners and losers?

The second article (appearing in an upcoming edition of *Against the Grain*) will look in

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