

Forward

On May 31, 2013, Rhode Island College, founded in 1854 as the first public institution of higher education in RI, was the site for a regional conference, “Querying the Library: Digitization and Its Impact.” In its early years, the college and its library focused on preparing teachers, but over the years, its library holdings have expanded to serve the needs of programs in arts and sciences, management, social work, and nursing offered to around 7300 undergraduates and a smaller number of grad students.

I applaud our James P. Adams Library director and staff as organizers of the conference and everyone who attended for having a keen interest in seeing that libraries keep step with the changes in teaching and learning as we move deeper into our digital age. Because the subject is complex, I am pleased to note that the presentations examine the range of ways that digitalization impacts a library.

Why are the conference proceedings important? Change of any kind is disruptive. My fellow presidents and I struggle to administer effectively in a time when MOOCS and other forces are changing teaching and learning. It is, of course, not the first or last time that stodgy old higher education has been forced to reconsider its models.

Back in 1450 literacy blossomed with the advent of Guttenberg’s printing press. The Protestants during the Reformation had a vehicle to spread their then-radical ideas by means other than word-of mouth or beautiful, but painstaking, hand-written missives. If we fast-forward to today, the pope can tweet around the world in multiple languages, spreading his own message. The exchange of ideas has become instantaneous and available to the masses. Students might not be able to afford a smart phone, but they all seem to have one, and they use hash tags to gather more information on whatever interests them. . . without any concern over who provided the information and whether it is accurate.

As a child of the 1960s I recall not long ago thinking that a hash tag sounded like the price tag on a bag of marijuana. I grew up pre-personal computers, so the use of technology does not come as naturally to me as it does to our students and young professors, but I do recognize its importance as a source of fresh information. The new technology - and the timeliness it enables -- is changing the way we get information. I watch sadly but with understanding as I see scores of newspapers and magazines like *Newsweek* first grow thin and then disappear entirely.

Even the 6 o'clock news is no longer timely. Ordinary citizens can capture --and relay around the globe with their cell phones -- the news as it happens. TV news is only of interest now if the commentary and analysis are thought-provoking. The world is changing rapidly, and libraries - and administrators like me - need to change with it.

Libraries are, indeed, changing. My son -who is very much of the digital age - graduated from Brown eight years ago. He spent most of his years there in the Sci-Li, a high-rise scientific library. A few years ago, though, the Sci Li was emptied of its stacks and converted to a learning commons. On our own campus, we have been weeding, digitizing, and expecting to repurpose space used by the stacks.

Libraries must change in our Digital Age to keep pace with the way students learn and, consequently, faculty must teach to be effective. I salute you for your interest in keeping libraries relevant, welcoming, and enticing and expect that these proceedings will help you to do so.

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