Books and Beyond: Evolving Libraries and Media

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For the handful of you who read *Cites & Insights* or my columns [in *American Libraries*], maybe I should begin by noting the topics that I'm *not* going to talk about today. Filtering, censorware, CIPA: not on the agenda. Personal computing: certainly not directly. Copy protection, the imbalance in copyright, and the bizarre attitudes of Big Media: not directly — but it's impossible to discuss the future of books and libraries without some mention of copyright and the public domain.

I don't know of any plausible way to talk about the future other than by looking at the past and extrapolating from the present. It's reasonable to say that libraries and library services 20 years from now will be considerably different from libraries and library services today, and also that they'll be quite similar in many ways — just as today's libraries differ from those of 1983 and are also quite similar.

Evolution can be more difficult than revolution, because we lose the comfort of inevitability. But evolution is how the world works, and it's how libraries, their collections and services, and their users will change over the next couple of decades.

I'd like to consider present concerns and probable evolutionary futures in three general categories, spending the most time on the first: books and other resources. I hope to stay on schedule well enough not to slight the other two: libraries and what makes *your* library different from "the" library, and the need to serve all users, maintaining long-term missions despite short-term crises.

Books and Other Resources

Print books are doing just fine, and I have every reason to believe that print books will be doing just fine 20 years from now. That's an easy statement that deserves a more complex expansion. Let's look at a few facts of today and the most likely near-term future.

Last year, 150,000 new titles and editions were published in the United States, according to Bowker. That represents continued (if small) growth in the number of *new* print titles—and sales of print books continue to grow, albeit slowly. That's a *huge* change from nearly all projections made in the early 1990s, 1980s, and even before, which had books either disappearing or being relegated to quaint relics and genre paperbacks by the turn of the century.

Do I believe that traditional Web-fed print book publishing will continue to grow over the next two decade? No, actually, I don't, for reasons that may become clear as I continue. But I wouldn't be at all surprised if it did, and I would be astonished if traditional publishing isn't still a substantial business

in 2023, probably at least half as large as today.

While big-name publishers may be consolidating into a few major owner-ship clusters, that's balanced by the incredible growth of new small publish-ers. Thanks to word processing, desktop design, short-run presswork and Print-on-Demand, it's never been easier to start a new publishing house. That's why there are more than 10,000 publishers in the United States today: A fact that may create problems for acquisitions, but offers the greatest prom-ise of maintaining diversity in publishing. I *do* expect that trend to continue. Most of the new publishing "houses" won't exist as physical entities, unless you want to count the computers of the writer/publishers or the portions of Print-on-Demand service bureau server space that the works occupy. But they will continue to appear, and some of them will produce important books, once in a while even generating best-sellers.

Print-on-Demand (PoD) is small now, but still by far the biggest aspect of so-called "e-books." There's every probability that PoD will grow in the future. That bodes well for the continued health of the print book and for continued access to books that might otherwise disappear. If you add PoD to traditional print publishing, I'd guess that — although some forms of print books will be replaced by better tools — the overall printed book field *will* continue to grow over the next two decades.

As with almost any good new thing, PoD has negative consequences, both for established authors and for libraries and book customers: The former be-cause "out of print" reversion clauses may never take effect, the latter because it just gets harder to distinguish the interesting and worthwhile new little-press books from the growing pile of vanity-press garbage. One hundred and fifty thousand titles and editions may sound like a lot — particularly when compared with 20,000 new sound recordings and 800 or so motion picturest— but that's still only one title for every 1,500 or so potential authors out there.

Print books will continue to be the dominant way to tell long stories, both fiction and nonfiction, and the primary textual way that the culture is pre-served for the future. Print books *will* give way to electronic distribution in areas where the book itself has been a necessary nuisance, and that brings up the next couple of topics.

The hammer

Why do I expect print book s— and I do mean ink or toner on paper, fixed ex-pressions that stay the way they are—to continue as vital parts of all academic and public libraries? It may be useful to revisit the old saying, "When all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail." When the only means of dis-tributing stories and information beyond the immediate community were presses and binderies, everything looked like a print book or a magazine.

Okay, so now we have an expanded tool chest — the power tools of full-text online, the screwdrivers of nonprint media. In some ways, the centrality of the book is diminished by all the new means of distributing stories and facts.

But, you know, even the best-equipped tool user finds that a lot of things really need to be pounded on. Sure, you can use the butt of a screwdriver or the casing of a power saw to pound a nail — but wouldn't a boring old ham-mer do the job faster and better?

The printed book is a highly evolved technology, improved considerably over several centuries. It is a technology that serves long narratives extraordi-narily well. Long narratives, in turn, remain essential for civilization — sto-ries, whether fiction or fact, make us what we are and allow us to grow. And the library as a long-term repository for a wide range of stories serves those roles best through printed books. I don't see that changing much next year, next decade, or in the next century.

Notably, print books also represent one technology that seems to work well for the agencies that control copyrights (typically publishers) without be-ing burdensome on the users — libraries and readers. No proposed replace-

ment for print books manages to balance copyright and fair use as well as plain old books — and, so far, it looks as though any proposed replacement will substantially shift the balance away from user and library flexibility.

Print Resolution and Other Issues

Beyond the fact that print books work really well, there are major problems with supposed replacements. Despite promises over the past decade, there has been remarkably little real-world improvement in the resolution of display devices, particularly LCDs. The range has improved from 85 dpi (dots or pixels per inch) ten years ago to, at best, 133 dpi today in some expensive Dell and IBM notebooks.

PC Magazine used convoluted language to discuss the future: "Theoretically, at 200 dpi, a screen will seem to have almost printlike clarity." Note the presence of three qualifiers in a 13-word sentence: *theoretically, seem, almost.* Note also that 200 dpi is as big a jump from 133 dpi as 133 dpi is from 85 dpi, and it's taken a decade to get from 85 dpi to 133 dpi. To get from "almost printlike" to "printlike" would require *at least* 300 dpi (and preferably 600 dpi or more). How long will it take to get to 200 dpi or 300 dpi at real-world prices? The usual answer is "a couple of years." That's been the usual answer for more than a decade.

Does that mean that sensible people just won't read long text from LCD screens? Not at all — although it does mean that most people have no real interest in doing all of their reading from anything other than print.

E-books

What should I say about e-books? How about this: There's a good chance they will never mean much, it's absolutely clear that they're important to libraries already, they're a significant business with some heartening aspects, and it's just too soon to tell. All four of those contradictory notions are correct; it all depends what you mean by e-books. Of the many possible meanings, let me give one for each of those four statements, in order:

— E-book appliances, dedicated readers, may never mean much in the trade book marketplace — although they could be significant in education and some niche markets. I think it highly probable that e-book appliances as replacements for trade fiction and nonfiction books are losing propositions. That's become even more probable with the collapse of Gemstar's e-book business. Gemstar bought out the two companies that originally introduced dedicated e-book appliances, Rocket and Softbook, both of which planned to work to *expand* the range of literature available. Gemstar dropped that model, aiming for bestsellers, and managed to get Thomson/RCA to take on the major expense of producing the readers in return for vast advertising expenditures, almost all of which turned out to be in-house ads, either in Gemstar-owned *TV Guide* or on the TV Guide Channel. Except for grant-funded library purchases, almost nobody bought the appliances. Gemstar locked down the system even harder, so that you couldn't even load your own texts onto the appliance without overriding its normal methodology, as the company realized that the only possible way to make money was to be a bottleneck on text distribution. That didn't work, and before long the company wrote off the whole absurd operation. But Gemstar still owns a patent portfolio, which seems likely to emerge as a barrier to any other company silly enough to introduce a dedicated e-book reader.

— Since I've seen 7,000-word digitally-distributed works called e-books, one comment would be that academic libraries are using e-books like crazy, only you're calling them online full-text articles.

— Print-on-Demand, wrongly but commonly included in the e-book market, is already a significant business, probably in the low millions of books produced each year.

— For many e-book definitions, it's too soon to tell. That goes for netLibrary's

pseudobooks; for textbook appliances; for slice-and-dice books-on-demand outside the courseware market; for widespread use of downloaded text read on multipurpose appliances (PDAs, notebook computers, etc.), and for true e-books, digitally-based monographs that include features that aren't possible to emulate in print on paper.

Let's look a little more at some of those niches. One billion-dollar niche that seems like a natural for e-book readers is the textbook field: two related fields, K–12 and higher education. In both cases, print books suffer from currency and cost issues—and students suffer from the weight of multiple books. In the past, e-book fanciers have suggested that e-book equivalents to textbooks would save money for students. That's not at all clear. But if 90-pound school students are actually hauling around 30-pound backpacks (as reported on a recent *Marketwatch*), a two-pound e-book reader that could eliminate 25 of the 30 pounds would be worthwhile if only to prevent premature back problems.

Nobody seems to be working on the K–12 market—preparing the high-resolution, color, ruggedized readers that would be needed or building the publisher relationships to make it work. Meanwhile, other companies seem to be solving the back-strain problem in a manner that may remove one big argument for text ebooks. To wit, backpacks on wheels: school versions of carry-on luggage costing as little as $20.

What does that have to do with e-books? Nothing, directly — but indirectly, it's worth noting that high technology doesn't necessarily offer the best solution to apparent technology problems.

National Academy Press, which publishes scientific and technical analyses and policy reports, publishes more than 200 book-length works a year, with more than 2,100 available to date. Every work is available online (at www.nap.edu), all 400,000 pages' worth — searchable, browseable, and even printable by the page. The material is in page images, so you can't easily download a whole book — but it's all available. In the first two-thirds of 2001, 3.2 million users looked at 15 million book pages. Meanwhile, the same site has sold more than 40,000 books, 25% of overall book sales — and overall book sales are at record highs. Baen Books (a science fiction publisher) has also found that offering some books free online increases print book sales.

What about online book libraries? A mixed bag with more failures than successes. Questia seems to have vanished into the woodwork. netLibrary, which works with the recognition that it only makes sense to read *little pieces* of books online, failed commercially but was saved by OCLC. It's not clear whether the netLibrary niche will succeed. There are others, including survivors and startups, but no clear successes.

The great journal shift

Novels and nonfiction books consisting of extended narratives will mostly stay in print form. More reference works may move to electronic form, although that's not an unmixed blessing—and it's worth noting that the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is once again publishing a print edition.

There is one element of library collections that's already shifted heavily toward electronic access — and may move largely away from print distribution over the next 20 years. It's also the aspect of an academic library that's done more to distort library collections and budgeting than any other. I speak, of course, of scholarly journals, specifically scholarly journals in science, technology, and medicine, or STM.

The continually increasing cost and out-of-control proliferation of journals in science, technology, and medicine—popularly, but inaccurately, known as the serials crisis—carries fairly obvious threats for academic libraries. I'll mention three major threats:

— By consuming not only almost all of the acquisitions budget but almost all of librarians' attention, the STM problem threatens the long-term health of library humanities, monographic, and other collections.

— Since even the wealthiest libraries can't keep up with the situation, access to scholarly information becomes more difficult.

— As libraries substitute online full-text access for print collections both for good reasons (to improve casual access) and for bad (to get access to more journals for the same money, even though those may not be the journals you need), they become more dependent on the publishers, threatening both long-term access and the ability of new scholars to browse backsets and acquaint themselves with the literature.

While shifting from print to electronic full-text article access certainly adds convenience for students and reduces shelving and handling problems, I'm not sure that it really reduces the use of print. Rather, it distributes printing and its associated costs. I'm certainly not arguing against full-text articles — in fact, part of my job over the past year or two has been to facilitate movement from RLG's article indexes to the full-text articles. But full-text access, as with almost every other innovation, has unintended consequences, not all of them ideal.

Actually, full-text access isn't the problem, except for budgets. And you already know the budget issue. The 119 ARL libraries spent more than 15% of their FY 2001 budgets on electronic materials — five times the percentage as in FY 1993. Public libraries are also spending substantial sums on full-text resources. That rate of growth can't continue for another decade; fortunately, growth curves don't work that way.

Most problems with full-text access are indirect, caused because publishers and libraries alike will move *away* from print publication, specifically within STM journals. Libraries will force that move because they simply can't afford to pay for both online and print, which has three long-term consequences in addition to consuming probably more paper rather than less:

— It reduces the ability of a new scholar to become familiar with a field by browsing its key journals, since browsing is far more difficult in full-text aggregations than within shelves full of bound volumes.

— It raises real questions for long-term access, since we don't know how to preserve digital materials and there's no sure mechanism in place to guarantee access.

— It reduces the effectiveness of interlibrary lending, since there's no print journal to photocopy—and since license agreements almost certainly preclude "lending" a full-text digital copy.

There's a fourth consequence, homogenization, that I'll discuss later in the talk.

Issues and Possibilities

In the interests of time, let me toss out a few words about several things I think are worth thinking about and hoping for. This is a miscellany, to be sure:

— I believe (and hope) that first-tier journals in most fields will survive in print form, and that larger academic libraries will continue to bind those journals. Since the first-tier journals are the ones that fledgling scholars need to browse, that survival — not certain, but likely — may mitigate one problem.

— A number of initiatives may help to improve long-term survival. You might look for articles on LOCKSS (Lots of Copies Keep Stuff Safe), an initiative out of Stanford; it looks promising. There are also a range of open access initiatives, some more likely than others—but those initiatives do more to improve full-text access than they do to assure long-term survival.

— Nobody really knows how many scholarly STM journals exist or how many articles appear in them. One popular number is 20,000 journals and 2 million articles per year, but there are strong indications that 20,000 is far too low a number. I don't find many people asking whether there are actually two million *worthwhile* STM articles published each year, or whether the majority of STM articles are the result of "least publishable units," publish-or-perish pressures, and other ways of assuring that fourth- and fifth-tier

journals will survive.

— The move from print to digital, and the move of full text into aggregations, tends to dissociate the article from the issue and the journal itself. In the humanities, at least, that's troubling: Some journals do thematic issues where the articles take on more meaning because of the theme, and many journals have "personalities" that affect the articles. But then, I believe humanities journals are less likely to abandon print — if only because their costs have not been increasing with the rapaciousness of for-profit STM journals.

— Most academic libraries spend most of their acquisitions money on journals, and most of that money on STM. That may not be ideal for the long-term health of the institution. A move to open access that works properly could help to restore the centrality of the monograph in academic libraries: what you collect and preserve, instead of what you can fit in from what's left over after Elsevier and friends have wrecked your budget.

— Finally, it's important to note that the journal crisis — which has been going on for at least 30 years now — is *not* a periodical crisis. Most magazines, most of the periodicals received by public libraries, have not increased in cost at more than the rate of inflation. Most magazines get most of their revenue from advertising, and magazine print advertising works in a way that doesn't appear feasible in an online equivalent.

I think that's enough about books and other print media. I would expect to see print books doing very well in 20 years. I'm fairly sure that print magazines will be doing just fine 20 years from now. I *hope* that first-tier STM journals, and believe that most first- and second-tier humanities journals, will be available as print publications in two decades. And I suspect that, while most other STM journals will eventually be electronic-only, that process will be slower and more painful than most publishers and libraries would like.

The Library, Your Library?

I'm a little troubled by one aspect of huge shared full-text databases. To some extent, they tend to homogenize libraries — and I don't believe that's a good thing. It's wonderful that an extension campus can offer its students access to 15,000 journals in electronic form, and that the access is immediate. It's less wonderful if there's really not much difference between the library at NCSU and the one at UNC at Chapel Hill.

I don't believe that's the case. I don't believe it *should* be the case, any more than all colleges and universities should have exactly the same curricula and set of degrees. I also don't believe this deserves more discussion. The distinctions exist, for good reason. Librarians should clarify and publicize the distinctive strengths of their own libraries as they work to improve sharing.

In other words, while there are lots of issues that concern the library profession in general, I don't believe you should be thinking about *the* library. You need to be thinking about *your* library: its strengths, its weaknesses, its community of users and supporters, and why it's not a McLibrary, just like every other McLibrary.

Distinguishing types of libraries

Do I need to tell you that public libraries aren't academic libraries aren't school libraries aren't special libraries? Probably not. There are huge areas of overlap among the different types, but also huge and fundamental distinctions.

But that isn't what you always get from library leaders. Many, perhaps most, have only worked in one type of library and have a natural tendency to view all other libraries through the filter of their own.

I don't know. Do you folks talk to one another across type-of-library lines? If so, you don't need to hear the few comments I have here, which mostly reflect the deepest levels of ignorance I've encountered.

— First, public libraries aren't backwards academic libraries — although

most good public libraries do have elements of academic libraries about them. I've heard library gurus discussing the apparent decline in library circulation and in-house reference use at academic libraries and assuring me, without a doubt, that it will happen at public libraries, too: it just takes a few years longer to trickle down. That's nonsense, and it's nonsense that damages public libraries.

— Second, academic libraries aren't just stuffy public libraries — although most good academic libraries do have reading collections of popular literature and serve some of the functions of good public libraries. I haven't heard this particular error much; that's probably because most writers and gurus in the field come from academic or special libraries or work in academia.

— Third, special libraries are called "special" for a reason. I continue to believe that every good public and academic library needs to be a place as well as a set of services, but there's no question that *some* special libraries can function better without physical service centers.

— And, of course, school libraries are another breed. I don't know much about them, so I won't say much about them.

Distinguishing your library

But even that breakdown oversimplifies. The public library in Winston-Salem isn't a clone of the public library in Greensboro or the public library in Raleigh — and none of those is a clone of the libraries in San Antonio, San Jose, San Francisco, San Diego, or for that matter the other San Jose, down in Costa Rica.

My wife and I visit public (and sometimes academic) libraries when we travel, at least when it's convenient. We've found that each library is distinctive, with its own look, its own mix of clientele, and its own collection. That is as it should be.

Let me toss out a few more notes about understanding and supporting your own library.

— Yes, circulation has declined at many colleges and universities. You've spent millions of dollars each year providing more and more full-text resources. You've publicized those resources and made them as convenient as possible. In essence, you've done everything in your power to get students to use those resources *in place of physical resources*. It's worked. That means declining circulation, even though it probably also means increased overall use.

— Libraries need to find the counts that matter. Maybe that will happen, but it's likely to take a while. Clearly, input measures — number of books and subscriptions—aren't sufficient; they haven't been for a long time (although they're certainly not trivial either). Also clearly, simple circulation isn't adequate as an output measure.

— Academic librarians could probably learn a lot from public librarians about defining the worth of the library as a place. When you talk about sharing, it doesn't hurt to share with colleagues from other types of libraries. Public libraries, the last great public spaces in many cities, can be the hearts of cities in much the way that great academic libraries can be the hearts of great campuses. Just as sensible librarians now recognize that print books are not dying, sensible academicians recognize that campus life will not be replaced in its entirety by distance education and the University of McPhoenix.

There's nothing here you don't already know, and you're far more qualified to discuss the details than I will ever be.

Facing Change While Avoiding Despair

I'm going to interject a few notes about facing change while avoiding despair, and the need to keep up. I've been struck by some individual responses to the future on some library lists. There's one public librarian who's pretty well given

up on the future of libraries and librarians — and I'll assert that his future may be fairly grim. A few librarians seem to think that you're doomed unless you jump on every hot new trend, "keeping ahead of the users"— and I'm not sure that's a much better idea. These are both forms of future despair, and you do well to avoid both.

The problem with despair is that it makes you desperate — and desperate acts rarely work well. Did your public library buy a bunch of Rocket eBooks or REB appliances so you'd be in on this hot new trend? The good news is that you probably got grant funding. The bad news is that they're becoming expensive paperweights already — and general adoption of e-book appliances is no closer now than it was in 1998. Have you canceled print subscriptions wholesale, without regard to browsing needs and long-term prospects, to make way for massive full-text access? Was that a good decision?

Libraries and their users will change, just as they've been changing throughout their history. Some of that change will be difficult, some disruptive. But there's reason to believe that most change will be evolutionary and that both libraries and librarians will survive — and maybe even prosper.

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You — as in, your library staff as a whole — do need to keep up with trends and technologies, at least to some extent. You also need to think about those trends within your local environment, recognizing that each library differs from every other.

I'd love to give you a list of technologies and trends to track, but that list keeps changing. What I can tell you *for sure* is that you can't individually keep up with everything. It's not possible, even if you devote every waking hour, particularly as the rest of society impinges on libraries at all turns.

How do you keep up? You don't, to some extent. A few quick suggestions, however:

— Find people with interests in certain areas and have them join the appropriate lists, track the appropriate literature, whatever.

— Use secondary sources. Those may be Weblogs and lists. I'd argue for inclusion of two free publications — *Current Cites* from Roy Tennant and his band of co-conspirators, and *Cites & Insights* from yours truly.

— Don't pay too much attention to daily news and weekly journals. Too many shiny new toys never even make it out of the lab; it won't hurt you to be a *little bit* behind.

— Focus on fit — when you see something that looks particularly interesting, and when the same interesting trend pops up over and over, think about its relationship to your library's strengths and weaknesses.

— And, of course, think about some of the other issues I talk about.

Serving All Users: Library Missions

I believe that a library should serve its users, but that it needs to define "users" as broadly as possible. Good public and academic libraries must serve the next generation as well as today's borrowers, and public libraries need to take special care to serve those who aren't well served by alternate means.

Good service to all users means building the long collection as well as meeting today's needs. I don't believe it means buying enough copies of the latest best-seller to saturate demand; good public libraries *complement* good bookstores and shouldn't replace them. It should mean buying *some* copies of best-sellers and setting aside some money to buy the local works that make the library distinctive, the important works that will speak to the users 10, 20, 50 years from now, the special works that meet special needs. (It may mean keeping a list of local bookstores on hand to guide users who really can't wait a few weeks for Harry Potter.) For academic libraries, as I've already discussed, there's a pressing need to maintain the long-term record of our civilization as expressed in monographs, not abandoning that collection in a hopeless effort to provide all the

journals anyone can use.

I could preach about that for the rest of the talk, but why bother? Your library needs its own slowly evolving mission statement, and I can't write yours for you. Some other service notes may be worth discussing.

Getting Beyond Convenience

Here's one that I've never mentioned before, and I don't think many librarians have thought about it much. The heading in my speaking notes is "getting beyond convenience," and I think it's a serious issue for the long-term health of both libraries and scholarship. If you don't pay attention, you may think I'm using a classic Kids These Days argument—"they're no good, they don't have attention spans, we're all going to hell in a handbasket." That's not true. I think we have a situation that requires attention; I don't believe it's either a disaster or an inevitable problem.

I can describe the problem best by offering two statements that I've heard and read a few times too often, perhaps not in these exact words:

— "If users can't get it online, full-text, right now, they can't be bothered. So nothing except full-text online really matters."

— "All Web users understand about searching is that you key in some words and you get back some results. If library portals don't work that way, nobody will use them."

If these arguments are both true, we're in serious trouble. I believe both are oversimplified, even for freshmen, sophomores, and public library users. As a student, I was almost certainly as lazy as any student is today. Of course, I would have relied primarily on full-text articles for most undergraduate papers, at least until I found a topic that fascinated me and wasn't simply fulfilling an assignment. I didn't have that option, but I sure don't begrudge those that do. I was delighted to see how well OpenURL worked in Eureka, suddenly adding substantial full-text coverage for databases that have never had such coverage. I don't believe I once thought, "Well, if students are serious about their work, they should go get the print versions." On the other hand, I'm also somewhat unsympathetic to librarians who tell me — as one has — that we have to have a setting so that the students don't even see search results unless all the articles are available in full text. Apparently their tender little psyches will be damaged if they find articles that require more than clicking a mouse, and they'll be so offended that they won't use the database. I don't believe that.

I do believe that honors students, upper-division students, grads, and certainly researchers and faculty must and will go beyond full-text resources to use the print collection and interlibrary lending. I know public library users don't expect everything to be online, full-text. I suspect that a sophomore who's found a really interesting topic will go to the stacks for more information, maybe even open a book. And I believe that will continue to be true.

The idea that library users won't do anything but keyword searching is both offensive and patently ridiculous. I won't go into this one further. I will say that when I see the implicit suggestion that cataloging doesn't count, because only keywords matter, I believe there are people who really don't belong in the library field.

We need to provide convenient tools and solutions — but we need to go beyond convenience as well, and find ways to encourage users to do so. I don't believe that's particularly difficult. I do believe that the need to retain and encourage sophistication is likely to be an issue over the next decade or two, as we cope with the fallout of failed dumbed-down systems.

Long-term missions and short-term needs

No library has an infinite budget for resources, infinite space, infinite connectivity, or an infinitely large staff. Therefore, no library can offer perfect service — and even with infinite resources, perfection might be illusory. After all, how can you know what the user *really* needs or wants?

Perfection will always be beyond your grasp. Excellence is the best you can

hope for—and it's a direction, not a goal. I think of excellent library service as one that maximizes the overlap among three Venn circles:

— The library-related needs of all users

— The library's resources (human, physical, and digital)

— The library's mission—which really can't be to meet every need of every user, or even every library-related need of every user.

I had originally titled that first circle "the *needs* of all users," because I don't like the qualifier "information needs" as being simultaneously too broad, too narrow, and generally meaningless. But there are many user needs that libraries have no business being involved with.

The three circles aren't independent, to be sure: part of a library's stated mission involves a local definition of "library-related needs." But that's another and much longer discussion, one that goes deeply into the nonsensical term I've just used too often, namely "the library."

Conclusion: Toward a Credo

I'd like to end with a set of nine points that seems to be my current credo for the last year or so. Some of these points serve as a summation of this talk; others have barely been touched on today.

— Print books will survive, and will continue to be at the core of all good public libraries and the humanities and social science portions of good academic libraries.

— Technology and media will continue to interact in unexpected ways, but ways that will lead to more rather than fewer media. Different media serve different kinds of stories well, and new media should enable new kinds of stories—but the kinds of stories that books serve continue to be critically important for libraries.

— We will continue to see revolutionary predictions based on oversimplification, bad economics, infatuation with technology, and failure to appreciate people. Librarians who fall prey to such predictions will suffer, as will their users. Librarians and library supporters must be ready to challenge unlikely projections, analyze faulty economics, and assert the need for choice and the importance of both history and the present.

— Good public and academic libraries are both physical institutions and sets of services. They serve a variety of purposes within real communities and colleges, and some of those purposes can only be served effectively through physical libraries.

— All libraries and librarians need to deal with increasing complexity, not as "transitional" issues but as the reality of today and tomorrow.

— Libraries matter, and librarians should build from strength. There are many fine public and academic libraries and many more that do remarkable work with inadequate resources. The goal should be to improve and diversify from what libraries do well, not to abandon existing services and collections in search of some monolithic futures, whether all-digital or otherwise.

— Libraries must serve users — but all users, not just today's primary users. There's a difference between being user-oriented and pandering, and it's a difference librarians should understand.

— Libraries will change, just as they have been changing for decades. Good libraries will maintain live mission statements — and the missions won't change rapidly.

— Effective libraries build communities, and the need and desire for real communities will continue to grow. Libraries that work with their communities should prosper; those that ignore their communities will shrivel.