

# Librarians: It's Time to Redesign Librarianship

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## Abstract

The article surveys a few aspects of librarians' work in light of current events and trends; as library collections become more digitalized than print, virtual librarianship may take the place of conventional work settings; further claims are that librarians are uniquely qualified to take on society's information literacy problem. Potentially embedding on popular Internet platforms, librarians can help Internet users improve their information discernment skills, so they are better able to find information and identify inaccuracies in the forms of misinformation, disinformation, propaganda, and to be cognizant of confirmation bias.

**Keywords:** Critical Information Literacy, Digital Literacy, Embedded Librarian, Fake News, Information Literacy, Internet Librarian, Internet Literacy, Librarian, Librarianship, Virtual Librarianship

Librarians: It's time to redesign librarianship.

*The eventual and total demise of print 'is inevitable... It will get harder and harder to understand why anyone would print something that's heavy, hard to ship and not customizable'...there will come a point where print just doesn't make a lot of sense!*

Libraries without books may seem counterintuitive, but a book's content - that is, ideas and information - is not the pages it is recorded on, and a library is not a brick-and-mortar facility; it is a place where organized and accessible information is contained. In other words, a virtual library is still a library. Meanwhile, in the second decade of the 21st century, an information revolution is here, democracy is in an Internet induced information crisis, and digital age librarians have an important job to do. A contemporary design must reinforce, not redefine, what we have always done, except we will do it in the library of all libraries: The Internet.

Why should librarians make this move to the Internet? We may not always have a choice, and the open Web is where our skills will be needed. Keeping an open mind, unconstrained by limitations of what we think is possible right now, imagine the Web as a giant community. Of the variety of activities occurring on the Internet, our concern is the myriad of digital resources that the public relies on for information. In this community, embedded librarians interact with Internet users through a chat interface, where we are needed because most people do not know that Google-like search engine results are not based on information quality. Artificial Intelligence cannot think and use judgment to navigate nuances as humans can, so until Siri becomes sentient, human librarians can do virtual librarianship. We just need to get on those platforms where the public hangs out.

How will we use the open Internet to reach more people? Institutional social media accounts on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter as well as blogs,

videos, podcasts, and more are not enough. Until we can figure out how to show up in user feeds as prolifically as ads and other click-bait, our WebPages and resources are limited to those who are looking for them - the public cannot yet stumble upon a virtual library while searching the Web. One way to dramatically expand our public reach would be a chat tool in Google and other search engines and browsers, social media, as well as (and especially) Wikipedia. We might even have our own mega search engine (something like the old "Ask Jeeves") accessible by an icon strategically placed on Web platforms. While library databases are packed with organized information vetted for credibility, they require memberships that are barriers to access, but commercial tools offer prolific results at lightning speed. Being where the public is more likely to be receiving inaccurate information is crucial. What will we do in chat? We can do what we have always done as reference librarians, only we will do it (or more of it) virtually.

Incidentally (at the time of this writing) a deep dive into library science literature produces no results for how to embed a librarian tool on the open Web. Meanwhile, fake news, misinformation, disinformation, propaganda, and confirmation bias distract the public from true problems (as well as progress and positive realities). Historically, we have seen propaganda papers accompany war and genocide. Today, inaccuracies and mixtures of fake news instantaneously spread worldwide and have real life consequences, as we have seen play out in recent years. This information crisis provides librarians with an opportunity (even if print goes away) to keep working and benefit society but securing our position in this realm is essential. We have been teaching "information literacy" for decades. If we do not establish this role, who will? As our peers in other fields also search for solutions, promoting our skills and expertise is vital.

What will we do in the meantime as formats transition? First, we will continue our jobs using the resources we have, but will we continue to outsource a job to an industry that we can do ourselves? In Florida, during the COVID-19 pandemic when everyone had to stay home for work and school, library databases were cut from the state budget. Library networks aside, the subscription databases of traditional publishing houses are extremely costly. They provide a wonderful service, vetting and classifying resources and providing research tools. On the other hand, while commonly requested resources are unavailable, there is duplication among these databases.

Meanwhile, librarians are skilled at compiling, and creating access points to, information. We can continue to expand virtual collections with resources from non-commercial sites such as university digital commons, creative commons, research and articles from education and government websites. As open access resources become more prevalent, we will transition, innovate, and adapt to changes as they occur, just as we always have.

Managing collections is an important part of our job, but equally important is our educational role. Academic, school, and public librarians can secure our place and work in the public sphere if we are unified with a commonly understood aim - an educated society. Within an overarching philosophy and set of ethics are the practical and tangible parts of our job. We teach information discernment skills using information literacy tools that have become part of the Internet landscape. For instance, the CRAAP (pronounced "crap") test is one such tool. Originally a collection development tool created by a librarian at the turn of the twentieth century, the acronym represents terms used to address basic information discernment issues. It has been adapted by librarians for information literacy instruction and generously shared with composition teachers for nearly two decades. Information users are taught to evaluate a source's CRAAP - that is: currency, relevancy, authority, accuracy, and purpose (potential bias). However, newer methods have been developed (such as SIFT<sup>3</sup>), and according to current library science literature, the trending pedagogy is "Critical Information Literacy" (informed by Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory, or CRT) and therefore rejects conventional notions of authority and credibility. New developments in pedagogy raise practical and ethical questions: what can be done about the existence and use of outdated teaching tools, especially in cyber space?

We are also qualified for a critical intermediary role in the digital age because of a unique set of ethics designed for intellectual freedom and censorship issues. Some social media platforms have attempted to curtail misinformation with censorship. Librarians have been balancing on a fine line between censoring and guiding users toward credible information resources for decades. While having an ethical obligation not to censor, neither are we required to promote claims that a preponderance of evidence refutes or to present false information as true. We facilitate a public space - material or virtual - for civil intellectual freedom, education, and enrichment.

Librarians are uniquely suited for this pivotal role in the preservation of democracy in an information revolution. The redesign explored here suggests a new way of thinking about information format and emphasis in the work we do. Changes will continue organically as we use technologies that shape the future. Within the overarching principles of librarianship, we can fit into and continue to serve our role in the modern landscape. We will do what we have always done but with digital collections on the Web.

1. Rachel Nuwer, "Are Paper Books Really Disappearing?"
2. Sarah Blakeslee, "The CRAAP Test".
3. Mike Caulfield, "Web Literacy for Student Fact-Checkers".

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