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MANAGING INFORMATION

AAAS's 37th Annual Forum on Science and Technology Policy

G. Arthur Mihram

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the largest general scientific organization in the USA, held its 37th Annual Forum on Science and Technology Policy again this year in the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center in Washington, DC on Thursday and Friday, 26-27 April 2012. This year's Forum was sponsored by the Canadian Science Policy Centre. The Forum was attended by more than 400 government and business leaders, researchers, educators, and journalists. The program was assembled by the AAAS Center of Science, Policy and Society Programs; its major focus was the current "intertwined budget and political crises". In addition, discussions on prospects for start-up tech firms, new insights on voter psychology, and science diplomacy, were part of this year's themes.

The Forum's publication, *AAAS Report (No XXXVII, 2012): Research and Development FY 2013* (AAAS, 2012) attempts to provide each spring a complete tabulation of that part of the Federal budget dealing with science (i.e. research and development (R&D)) for the upcoming fiscal year (FY), though the necessary congressional resolution of spending vs reductions has meant that the report falls short of accomplishing the goal of being

complete for the upcoming fiscal period. The US Senate, having failed to pass the requisite budget, has also constrained the completion of the report. Nonetheless, the current volume's chapter 1 provides a quite good overview of the current plans for supporting R&D in FY 2013.

The slides of AAAS's Director of R&D Budget Analysis Program (Matt Hourihan) constitute a detailed presentation of "Research and Development in the FY 2013 Budget" (available online at: www.aaas.org/spp/rd/presentations/aaasrd20120426.pdf). Furthermore, ongoing updates on the status of FY 2013 appropriations are available at: www.aaas.org/spp/rd/

Because the Forum deals with policy as it pertains to supporting scientific endeavors, the program itself covers a considerable variety of scientific disciplines and therefore provides attendees with a quite good appraisal of the current forefront(s) of science. The variety of the professional backgrounds of the speakers in the Forum attests to this.

Two of the presentations at the Forum this year were of particular interest to librarians, whether they be of the present-day technology-oriented or of the mindset dedicated to the archival responsibility of the library more generally.

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Libraries as the gate: “ways” and “keepers” in the knowledge environment

Adetoun A. Oyelude and Alice A. Bamigbola

Introduction

In a knowledge environment it is assumed that knowledge that is useful and can be stored, organized and disseminated is kept. This knowledge undergoes many processes and rules and regulations are set for managing this knowledge. This is what each individual who has a private library strives to do for example. In more organized settings (i.e. formal library environments, physical or virtual), the same is simulated. The question then for us is – is the library a gateway to knowledge, or a gatekeeper? Is it keeping away unwanted materials, people who want to access and choosing who or what to open up information and knowledge to?

Let us picture a gate – it has two functions: keeping in and keeping out. In this paper, we posit that the role of the library is dual and each of the roles is just as important as the other. Libraries function as gateways and gate keepers and changes have occurred over time. Acquisition and packaging of knowledge has changed from traditional to electronic resources; traditional librarians have evolved into information scientists; there are concerted efforts in ensuring and organizing access to e-materials.

There is paradigm shift in the role of libraries because of the emergence of information communication technology in the twenty-first century. Many more issues pertaining to the role of libraries as gateways or gatekeepers are raised. Some of the issues are:

- How can libraries serve as gate keepers in the knowledge environment?
- What is the knowledge environment?
- How can libraries handle privacy and rights to information in the digital knowledge environment?

- What are the challenges of the new shift in paradigm in library services?

A scenario has been created for digital literacy because of web sites and digital repositories that have sprung up. A world class networked global library and information centre has been provided, of web-based quality information services to users in real time in the e-learning environment, and libraries are now pathways to high quality information in a variety of electronic media and information services.

For the e-learning environment, there is provision of access to online e-journals and e-books and all relevant information are integrated on networks across the world, while for the physical library, provision of library premises with computers and networks where the development of new standards and skills is encouraged has emerged.

Libraries as gateway

The library provides access to all forms of knowledge. Collection development in libraries ensures that what is focused on by those responsible gets acquired. The knowledge is gathered in different formats, modes and media, while a lot is invested in the libraries to organize (catalogue and classify) the collection. The all important decision of what to leave for users and how to leave it for them subsequently applies. These are taken care of with access and reference services. The road is thus open to knowledge users.

In this environment of technological innovations, libraries have metamorphosed from secured inventory systems to collaborative discovery systems, from knowledge keepers to knowledge access. Libraries now serve as gateways to knowledge through the following functions:

- Identifying, describing and providing access to web resources.
- Giving sufficient, reliable and qualitative support to research.
- Preventing duplication of resources (Campbell, 2000).
- Librarians are to teach skills as advised by non-librarian Jorge Reina Schement when he was defining the future role of libraries in the information society, or in essence, what he referred to was information literacy skills.
- Provision of specialized information services to their communities.
- Provision of public information kiosks – in tourist information centres, civic centres and hospitals.
- Collaboration and alliances with other institutions such as cultural centres, information agencies.
- Librarians serve as information interpreters, repackaging, synthesizing information, and content analysis of a wide range of media and to help users to design a precise search profile (Kajberg, 1997).
- Library serves as a place of integration and education centre through the following:
 - multiple home-work support cafes where there is interaction btw students and tutors;
 - job applications and curriculum vitae writing support; and
 - hybrid functions that are combining public information services, health centres and job searching support in Denmark (Multicultural Centre Prague, 2006).

In totality, the library is seen as a lever in creating hopes and making dreams come true (Multicultural Centre Prague, 2006, p. 26).

Some scholars have studied user behaviour and tried to apply the results to help information specialists meet the user at the point of their need. Web 2.0 tools are being employed in libraries to aid information seeking and access, even though these tools require other skills in addition to basic computer literacy and internet skills. It was discovered that students require information literacy skills, ICT skills, and collaboration skills for using Web 2.0 tools for educational and professional purposes. The Digital Library Learning (DILL) students in a study by Bamigbola (2010, p. 90) advocated for “formal training on these skills to be able to use Web 2.0 tools effectively in their learning and later in future as digital librarians”. Lippincott (2002, p. 192) had earlier advocated librarian involvement, as teachers and learners, in learning communities, recommending that the “librarian can shift the focus from explaining library resources to meeting the ongoing information needs of students in the broad information environment”.

The tools for access to information are provided, however there are rules, regulations, and ethics in information provision. What do you put behind the gate? How do you make it available? Are there copyright issues involved? What of knowledge that is reserved for certain audiences, or indigenous knowledge that should not be thrown open for reasons of “secrecy” or even “safety” or for reasons of protecting the knowledge? Is it ethical to throw open knowledge that is meant for the private domain to the public domain? How does the Freedom of Information Bill affect libraries in the knowledge environment?

An information gateway has been described as communications service which provides a single point of access to networks such as the internet. This definition applies to virtual libraries. Virtual libraries have in turn been referred to as a technological gatekeeper. This concept proposed by Thomas Allen and expounded by Sturges (2001, p. 65) sees a technological gatekeeper as a member of the organization who keeps fellow researchers in touch with the broad world of research. The individual in this instance keeps the gate and opens the

knowledge to other fellows. The changes in role of libraries to that of gatekeeper is reflected in librarians providing informal information counselling functions along with other professional colleagues, training of library users, and interpreting the information in the library resources.

Murray (2006) views libraries as the best hope for the controlled release of information, and the library profession as a trusted gatekeeper with librarians having a track record of providing orderly access to shared information resources and taking seriously the responsibility to provide access to those resources under the terms with which they were acquired. Conformity with rules and regulations governing use of the library resources is seen here as an asset – a trusted gatekeeper role.

Librarians as gatekeepers

Libraries can play the gatekeeper role through the custodians of the resources – librarians, archivists, information scientists, or info scientists, a new title being advocated by some scholars. Librarians are trained to disseminate information, or knowledge. They are the ones to keep the gate, make sure nothing unauthorized goes out of the library and that whatever goes out is brought back in good condition. With information technology constantly being deployed in libraries, knowledge is being disseminated in books, removable devices, on the internet, through handheld devices (iPods, iPads, telephones), in the cloud, is being exchanged, changed, and re-changed.

Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other social media are having some effect on the role of librarians as gatekeepers. Non-professionals are moving into the territory of professional librarians through all these information technologies. These information technologies themselves are creating problems for the older generation of professionals (Oyelude and Oladele, in press) as the deployment of these technologies creates fear of loss of jobs and other reactions to the younger generation.

The challenge of “gateways” and “gatekeepers”

The challenge to us as information specialists is that we should re-evaluate ourselves and the role we play in the knowledge environment. We are gatekeepers in charge of the gate to knowledge. Our jobs are not on the line if we do not slacken our pace at keeping abreast of the knowledge we are keepers of. Staying abreast is the key factor for us to use the abilities and power we have as gatekeepers. According to Cooper and Dempsey (1998) librarians “must assert themselves as key players in the learning process thereby changing their roles from information providers to educators.” Librarians are custodians (gatekeepers) as well as the gateway. Haricombe (1998) believes and we agree that librarians have been transformed from “information gatekeepers” to “information gateways”.

The knowledge environment is open and can as well be closed in certain instances. Whether there is closed access to the library (virtual or physical), the library remains a knowledge spot that cannot be ignored at all, least of all from information specialists themselves.

Gateways? Gatekeepers? Both: a survey

Methodology. A survey was conducted online using Social Media and a survey using Survey Monkey. The Survey Monkey poll did not yield many results though it was on for only one month and it was sent to personal contacts and some contacts newly met at an international librarian’s conference. As a result, a poll as well as discussion was started through LinkedIn. Within two weeks, the LinkedIn discussion yielded some comments that are presented below. The question asked was – how do you see the library? As a gateway or as a gatekeeper?

Findings.

- “I believe that the library is a gateway and a gatekeeper. The library as a gatekeeper is the past, from the beginning of libraries until the invention of printing. The role

of the library changes slowly but steadily after the invention of printing and becomes the gateway in the last couple of centuries. The path to the future is the blend of the two roles because both functions are important and necessary. This means that we build on the past but we evolve in the present to move into the future”

- “Gatekeeper sounds so snobbish and unwelcoming”.
- “Libraries are gateways. We (librarians, libraries) provide access to information and technology that people might not otherwise have”.
- “Our job as gateway is to provide the information, technology and recreational reading to people. It is up to them to be their own gatekeeper”.
- “I prefer to think of myself as a ‘gateway to knowledge’ rather than ‘the keeper of the books’. I think in the past people tended to think of librarians as the people who kept the books because the information we were trying to share was kept mainly in books. Today information is found in many formats, and we as librarians are still helping people find information, but we show people the way to the knowledge they are seeking”.
- “I am a children’s author, not a librarian. I hadn’t really thought about whether/how much the information in a library is filtered until recently, when I borrowed a book from the teen shelf. Its introduction stated that the collection of short stories was specifically for adults, but I assume the book had been classified as teen because the book’s editor was a famous children’s/YA author. The first story in particular was pretty graphic (all kinds of violence), so I raised this issue with the desk librarian when I returned the book. She was very receptive to my feedback and assured me the book would be read by a librarian, and perhaps reclassified. So I would say a library is both a gateway and a gatekeeper”.
- “The libraries are a gateway and the genius librarians are guides to the plethora of information available”.

- “How about gateway with a signpost? Many of my patrons want me to a gatekeeper in respect to other patrons (never themselves), but I see myself as a gateway and signpost. I want to help people find information/materials but also give them a clear idea of what they might encounter when checking out that information. As an example: parents have become more supportive of our new Manga Collection once they discovered the age appropriate ratings. This is a way to say that their 13-year-old son can read this, but not that yet, etc. It gives power to the patron to help know what he/she will or will not like in advance”.
- “I work in a tax-supported academic library, and we are required to allow other patrons in here (I did not know that until I came to work here). It causes some real problems at times, when we have transient people monopolizing our computers that are really here for the use of our students. It is an interesting dilemma, as none of us wants to be gatekeepers or have to ‘police’ adult behaviour. For the most part, people follow the one hour time limit (for public patrons on our computers), but we do not have software that requires them to do so, and we have a few who always push the limits”.
- “The ability to publish on the web has made the stewardship of information much more complex. With publishers trying to impose fees on works that can easily be copied and shared, libraries are in an awkward position of being brokers for publishers. Managing license agreements instead of purchasing, cataloging and shelving books is a strange change. I think leaders need to arise to make sure that information flows in a way that benefits the local and global community as a whole and not just money interests and intellectual property rights holders. There needs to be a balance between entrepreneurship and the information needs of the community. Making sure that access is still provided with the new digital publishing dynamics needs gatekeepers and gateway

providers to keep the balance healthy. I think that part of the mission of librarians is to take leadership with the kind of changes that information technology is bringing about and insure that access flows in a way that is healthy for the community as a whole not just for a select few who can pay”.

- “When academic libraries limit their membership to students and staff of that institution, then they are gatekeepers. Google has opened its gates to all to access their information. Now, comparison of libraries and Google has become inevitable. Like it or not, academic libraries are gatekeepers and whether we should remain that way is a question we must ask ourselves”.

The LinkedIn poll on the other hand asked respondents to vote on if the library was a gateway, a gatekeeper or both gateway and gatekeeper. At the end of the two weeks, 55 people had voted and half (28) of them felt it was both gateway and gatekeeper, 47 per cent voted for gateway and only one (1 per cent) felt the library was a gatekeeper.

The findings indicate that librarians and non-librarians alike see the library more as gateways to information. The use of technology in libraries throws challenges to the librarians who have to ensure that they constantly interact positively with their library users.

The following recommendations are therefore made.

Libraries should redefine their roles and stick to their mandate, constantly striving to improve the knowledge base they provide and the ways in which they make their resources available. Libraries as gateways should be seriously guarded so that problems of access, accessibility, copyright violations, institutional repository issues, security issues (physical and electronic) and other issues do not arise.

Libraries as gatekeepers are a force to be reckoned with and therefore since gatekeepers need to be alert and up to date, libraries need to redefine their unique role based on the needs within the external environment. To do this, libraries must develop collaborative relationships and leverage existing tools and services. Libraries with similar mandates or focus need to

collaborate to share resources, training opportunities, content (their knowledge repositories for example), and also form solid consortia locally, regionally, nationally and ultimately globally. This will make it easier for them to fulfill their roles as both knowledge gateways and gatekeepers effectively and efficiently.

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FURTHER READING

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