

Libraries, Archives, and Museums in the Digital Age:

Importance of Information Professional Education

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Abstract

Libraries, archives, and museums (LAMs) are institutions of knowledge where we learn about the past, present, and potential future. As these institutions begin to digitalize their information and incorporate digitally born information into their collections, collaboration among these institutions is important for the benefit of the end user. Due to the varied skills needed to provide instruction, education, and maintenance of information professionals to maintain a digital repository, collaboration within libraries, archives, and museums is necessary to be able to combine their knowledge but maintain their individual aspects of their institutional infrastructure. This paper will briefly discuss the need for collaboration among LAMs and the educational needs of the Information Professional.

Libraries, archives, and museums (LAMs) are institutions of knowledge where we learn about the past, present, and potential future. They educate and entertain us by making accessible “artifacts and evidence of the world’s social, intellectual, artistic, even spiritual achievements” (Dupont, 2007). Traditionally, libraries, archives, and museums have provided us with the knowledge we were seeking in diverse ways. Libraries provided this knowledge through books, journals, and encyclopedias, archives through documents, letters, and records, and museums through artifacts and objects. They each utilized their own strategies, schema, and procedures for cataloging, describing, accessing, and educating on their information. With the advent of the internet, patrons now want to be able to access their desired information quickly and completely. As these institutions begin to digitalize their information and incorporate digitally born information into their collections, collaboration among these institutions is important for the benefit of the end user. The convergence of libraries, archives, and museums is necessary to provide a comprehensive collection of information to the digital user to enhance their educational or entertainment experiences. In the digital age, users want instant information, it benefits these institutions to work together to provide the means of “...discovery, collation, use, and representation of the content they hold” (Trant, 2009).

An example of the need for integration can be found in Michael Paulus’ article *“The Converging Histories and Futures of Libraries, Archives, and Museums as Seen through the Case of the Curious Collector Myron Eells”* (2011). In the early 19th century, Myron Eells collected numerous books, records, and artifacts, all catalogued, numbered, indexed, and classified. After Eells death, this collection was scattered among libraries, museums, and archives. Paulus discusses how in this digital age, being able to “unify collections that have been broken up due to the types of materials in them, aggregates of related materials can be restored and the possibilities for discovery, interpretation, and use can be enhanced” (2011). This is a good example of the need for the different institutions to work together in this digital age to bring together and unify an individual collection. Online users are less concerned whether information comes from a library or museum, they just want the information presented to them with the least amount of searching and are “not interested where that information is coming from” (Marty, 2011). LAM professionals are “aware that access to digital resources has blurred traditional distinctions between information organizations, leading to a digital convergence of libraries, archives, and museums” (Marty, 2011). In April 2008, professionals at the Cultural Heritage Information Professionals workshop addressed the issue “about the challenges facing information professionals as they work to transcend the traditional boundaries between libraries, archives, and museums, and meet user needs in the information age” (Marty, 2009). Information professionals are cognizant of the need to collaborate to provide comprehensive digital information, but challenges are present. How to integrate three different metadata schemas, vocabulary, standards, and protocols into one system? One way to help address this issue is education of information professionals.

“Increasingly, libraries, archives, and museums find that they need a new generation of information professionals to manage digital resources. This need exists across all types of institutions, from libraries that need to preserve research data and electronic publications; to archives that need to preserve administrative Email and student theses and dissertations; and to museums that acquire digital artworks, sound recordings, or scientific data” (Ray, 2009). Staff and new students must be trained in the field of digital curation (of all types of resources), digital preservation (for long-term use in the future), digital libraries, and infrastructure. There must be collaboration within the institutions to share

their “knowledge and understanding of the different modes of presentation appropriate for different audiences and different needs” (Trant, 2009). Information professionals in the digital age are working across the various facets of information and must be aware of the common as well as the diverse methods of preserving and presenting information. Education is a key component to help bridge the gap between the boundaries of libraries, archives, and museums. In 2004, library, museum and information professionals met at the “21st Century Curatorship” meeting. This conference “sought to define the changing roles of curators in research libraries and museums and to determine what knowledge, experience, and skills are required to fill these roles” (Dupont, 2007). Information professionals need to be educated to utilize methods that can aggregate information from various repositories to bring together related information for the end users. Due to the varied skills needed to provide instruction, education, and maintenance of information professionals to maintain a digital repository, collaboration within libraries, archives, and museums is necessary to be able to combine their knowledge but maintain their individual aspects of their institutional infrastructure. “Nearly 50 educators and practitioners, representing library, archives and museum programs across the USA as well as the University of Toronto, convened to discuss the information needs of institutions and their users to identify the relevant information skills needed by professionals working in cultural heritage institutions. Workshop participants readily agreed that they have common needs and that users will be best served if institutions work together to address them” (Ray, 2009). Ray goes on to state “[a]ttendees noted a growing interest in archival education, and they believe that new archivists with skills in data management will be valuable to museums as well as to libraries and archives” (2009).

The topic of convergence has been discussed for many years due to the increasing use of the internet information, both digitized and born digital. To maintain relevance in this age, libraries, archives, and museums must work together to not only provide the information, but to also educate future information professionals to research, put together, preserve, and maintain the information. Throughout my research, it was noted that information professionals “develop a better understanding of the relationship that exists among libraires, archives, and museums, as well as among established and emerging institutions that combine elements of one or more of these traditional venues” (Ray, 2009). Information professionals must be able to collaborate with and work within libraries, museums, and archives, and to have the knowledge to organize, preserve, collate, and provide access to comprehensive information for end users.

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