

# Editorial Board Thoughts:

## Technology and Mission:

### Reflections of a First-Year College

Library Director

Ed Tallent

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As I reflect on my first year as director for a small college library, several themes are clear to me, but perhaps none resonates as vibrantly as the challenges in managing technology, technology planning, and the never-ending need for technology integration, both within the library and the college. It is all-encompassing, involving every library activity and initiative. While my issues will naturally have a contextual flavor unique to my place of employment, I imagine they reflect issues that all librarians face (or have already faced).

What is perhaps less unique is how these issues of library technology intersect with some very high priority college initiatives and challenges. And, given myriad reports on students' ongoing ambivalent attitudes toward libraries (after everything we have done for them!), it still behooves us to keep working at this integration of the library into the learning and teaching process and to hitch our wagon to larger strategic missions.

So, what issues have I faced?

**The campus portal vs. library web site:** this issue is neither new nor unique, but is still is a tangled web of conflicting priorities and attitudes, campus politics and technology vision, the extent and location of technology support, and the flexibility of the campus portal or content management system (CMS) and the people who direct it. It is not a question of any misunderstandings, as the need to market the library via the campus web site is obvious and the goal of personalized service is laudatory. Yet, marrying the external marketing needs with the internal support needs is a difficult balance to achieve. The web offers a more dramatic entrée to the Library than a portal/intranet, and portal technology is not perfect, as [Jacob Neilson](#) highlights in a recent post.

The goal obviously is further complicated by the fact that the support needed to maintain a quality web presence--one that is well graphically interesting, vibrant and intuitive--is significant when one considers library web sites are rarely used a place to begin research by students and faculty.

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**Ed Tallent** (edtallent@curry.edu) is Director, Levin Library, Curry College, Milton, Massachusetts.

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The portal, on the other hand, promises a personalized approach and easier maintenance, but lacks the level of operability that would be desirable. The web presence can support both user needs and offer visitors a sense of the quality services and collections the library provides. So, at this writing, what we have is a litany of questions not yet resolved.

**Mobile, tablets, and virtual services:** the questions also abound in these areas. Should we build our own mobile services, or contract out the development? Do we (can we) focus on creating a leadership role for the library in the area of emerging technology, or wait for a coordinated institutional vision and plan to emerge? In the area of tablets, we are about to commence circulating iPads and anyone who has gone through the labyrinthian process just to load apps will know that the process gives one pause as to the value of such an initiative, and that is before they circulate and need to be managed. Still, it is a technology initiative that demands review of library work flows, security, student training, and collection access. Virtual services were at a fairly nascent state upon my arrival and have grown slowly, as they are being developed in a culture that stressed individual, hands-on, and personalized services. Virtual services can be all that, but that needs to be demonstrated not only to the user but to the people delivering the service. The added value here is that the work engages us in valuable reflections on the way in which we work or should work.

**Value of the library:** I began my new position at time when the college was deeply engrossed in the issue of student recruitment, retention, and success. For my employer these are significant institutional identity issues, and the library is expected to document its contributions to student outcomes and success. Not nearly enough has been done, though a working relationship with a new Director of Institutional Research is developing and critical issues such information literacy, integrated student support, learning spaces, learning analytics, and the need for a data warehouse will be incorporated into the into the college's strategic plan. The opportunity is there for the library to link with major college initiatives, for example, and make information literacy more than a library issue.

**Citation management:** now, here is a traditional library activity, the bane of many a reference service interaction and the undergraduate's last-minute nightmare. A combination of technical, service and fiscal challenge revolve around the campus climate on the use of technology to respond to this quandary. What to do with faculty who believe strongly that the best way to learn this skill is by hand, not with any system that aims for interoperability and a desire to save the time of the user? For others, which tool should be used? Should we not just go with a free one? While discipline differences will always exist, the current environment does present opportunities for the library to take a leadership role in defining what the possibilities are and ideally connecting the approach to appropriate and measurable learning outcomes and to the larger issue of academic integrity.

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**E-books, PDA, article tokens:** one of the unforeseen benefits of my moving to a small college library is that there is not the attachment to a print collection that exists in many/most research libraries. There is remarkable openness to experimenting with and committing to various methods of digital delivery of content. Thus, we have been able to test myriad possibilities, from patron driven book purchasing, tokens for journal articles, and streaming popular films from a link in the library management system. This blurring of content, delivery, and functionality presents numerous opportunities for librarians to have conversations with departments of the future of collections.

**Connecting with alumni:** this is always an important strategic issue for colleges and universities and it seems as though there are promising emerging options for libraries to deliver database content to alumni, as vendors are beginning to offer more reasonable alumni-oriented packages. My library will be working with the appropriate campus offices next year to develop a plan for funding targeted library content for alumni as part of the college's broader strategic activities to engage alumni.

**Web design skills:** while I understand the value that products like LibGuides can bring to the community, allowing content experts (librarians) to quickly and easily create template-driven web-based subject guides, I remain troubled by the lack of design skills librarians possess, and by the lack of recognition that good design can be just as important as good content. This is not a criticism, as we are not graphic designers. We have a sense of user needs, knowledge about content, and a desire to deliver, but I believe that products like this lead librarians to believe that good design for learning is easy. I do not claim to be an expert, but I know this is not the case. This approach does not translate into user friendly guides that hold to consistent standards. I think we need to recognize that we can benefit from non-librarian expertise in the area of web design. One opportunity that I want to investigate along these lines is to create student internships that would bring design skills and the student perspective to the work. A win-win, as this also supports the college's desire for more internships and experiential learning for students.

There is neither time nor space to address an even broader library technology issue on the near horizon, which will be another campus engagement moment, the future ILS for the library. Yet, maybe that should have been addressed first, since what I have read and heard, the new ILSs will solve all of the above problems!