Book reviews


These two volumes, the first in a new series Digital Libraries and Electronic Publishing from MIT Press, offer contrasting styles yet complementary perspectives on the development of information systems and services in the networked world. Borgman’s is an academic treatise with a bibliography that runs to 39 pages; Arms appears to write almost entirely from his own knowledge, with frequent recourse to his own experience as a pioneer in the field, and does not provide references to the literature – there is at the end merely a remark that nearly all sources he used were obtained on the Internet.

Arms, who is both the series editor and the author of the first volume, has had a distinguished career in the development of the theory and practice of digital libraries and is well placed to take a broad, multidisciplinary approach to the subject. He has a foot in both the library and computing camps although it is the latter that informs most of this work. Nevertheless, Digital Libraries gives attention to the interlocking technological, legal, economic, societal and individual understandings needed to build successful and sustainable services. Arms, who is Professor of Computer Science at Cornell, recognises that “the real story of digital libraries is the interplay of people, organizations and technology” while emphasising that the technologies involved are both critical and complex and that their interoperability is crucial. The main thrust of the book is towards an identification of the key issues and technologies, each provided with a basic introduction. Students will find a great deal of useful explanation, not just of what developments such as XML, Digital Object Identifiers, Z39.50, public key encryption and Dublin Core are, but of why they are important. Each Chapter is interspersed with highlighted panels providing succinct explanations of technologies, services and research projects which feature in the narrative.

After an introductory chapter on basic concepts, Arms looks at developments in resource description, including library catalogues, and the development of electronic journals and early digital libraries. His overview of research activity includes a useful section on the many facets of interoperability, perhaps the most crucial issue for digital library designers at the present time. Economic and legal issues are examined in what Arms admits is a “quick review of an extremely complex area”, but this should not be allowed to detract from the usefulness of this summary for a novice reader (who must however bear in mind that it is the American legal system which is described). Old economic models, in which the end-user pays directly or through an agency such
as a library, are under challenge while the whole scholarly publication chain could unravel as new approaches, especially e-print archives, become widespread. Progress is so rapid in this area that Arms’ comments must inevitably be taken as indicative of issues rather than prescriptive of approaches which are current – twelve months on, the Open Archives initiative (OAI) would no doubt have featured prominently in the account.

Arms moves on rapidly with an account of access management and security issues, including the authentication of digital library users and the authentication of digital library content. There is discussion of the trade-off between security and access, and Arms observes that “the publishers who are least aggressive about enforcement keep their customers happy and often generate more total revenue than any other publishers”. Again this is a useful point, but the lack of cited evidence makes it difficult for a reader to know quite what to make of it.

Chapter 8 covers users and usability. While there is useful material in this Chapter, for example the panel which succinctly describes Java and accounts of experimental user interfaces at Stanford and Carnegie Mellon, it doesn’t really do justice to its subject. For example, there is very little about use, which is surely the point of the whole exercise, and no attempt to consider different types of user.

A chapter on “text” provides a basic introduction to character encoding, mark-up, page description etc. and introduces XML and XSL. Chapters 10 to 12 are particularly useful, providing an overview of object identification and metadata, including recent core developments such as the Resource Description Framework. Parts are rather superficial – the section on performance evaluation of retrieval systems would be one example – but overall this will be a useful introduction for those relatively new to the field or practitioners wanting to update themselves on these issues.

The penultimate chapter deals with the technologies required for digital archiving and repositories. This returns to the issue of interoperability but also risks some confusion by introducing concepts like object-oriented programming which might better have been dealt with earlier. Again, it is disappointing that ideas on, for example, advanced repositories are introduced but neither explained in detail (a statement such as “the repository should be able to store very large volumes of data, should be absolutely reliable, and should perform well” really needs unpacking) nor provided with references to enable the reader to explore the literature on these ideas further.

The final chapter brings together digital libraries and electronic publishing. This rehearses a number of arguments about collections, access and technology and poses questions about how the networked information environment is changing the way in which people work and lead their lives. Arms understands the complexity of building digital libraries – “a dream of future libraries combines everything that we most prize about traditional methods with the best that online information can offer” – but it is difficult to discern the research and development agenda in the detail that he offers in this volume. Rather than offering a coherent vision (admittedly a very tall order) the
book reads at times like a personal encyclopedia of recent digital library research. Possibly the integrative vision will appear in a later volume in the series.

Meanwhile, Christine Borgman, in her *From Gutenberg to the Global Information Infrastructure: access to information in the networked world* provides a very different approach. Beginning with quotations from Al Gore in the US and the Bangemann Report in Europe, she takes as her starting point the development of the global information infrastructure and places the digital library within its social, national and personal contexts: “the success of a global information infrastructure will depend on how well it fits into people’s daily lives”. The information infrastructure is thus both a technical and a social construct overlaid on content. Understanding of it can be gained by studying the interactions between all three.

In the first chapter she explores the underlying assumptions and models behind policy statements on the global information infrastructure and national information infrastructures. She then shifts the focus to the digital library itself, examining the different ways in which that term has been used and the dichotomy between research- and practice-based understandings of it. She suggest that it is useful to think of digital libraries as components of the global information infrastructure, supporting access to information. This leads in Chapter 3 to a consideration of access itself, emphasising the key concepts embedded in that term, such as connectivity, content and services, and usability. The last of these is seen as embracing three facets: the usability of the infrastructure, the literacies and other skills which users bring with them, and the usability of content. The concepts of information and of documents – clearly crucial to an understanding of digital libraries (and indeed of the broader content of the global information infrastructure) – are explored in some depth, drawing on Buckland’s classic work [1,2].

Borgman’s concern to emphasise the human element in digital library design is stressed in the next Chapter, where she links developments in electronic publishing to changes in the ways in which information objects (documents) are created and used. She points out that “the community basis of scholarship is evident in the structure of the documents (authors) create” and that this evidence is even more marked in electronic documents, with their embedded objects and clickable links. She explores the literature of information-seeking behaviour and stresses how formal and informal activities, the latter including face-to-face-communication, must be regarded as a whole.

The title of Chapter 5, “Why are digital libraries hard to use?” encapsulates an interesting discussion of usability and use. Reference is made to two case studies with which the author was involved, and attention then shifts to cognitive issues and the importance of understanding the users’ conceptual models. This leads to the next Chapter, “Making digital libraries easier to use”, which suggests four key areas for study: the relationship between metadata and data, the development of linked systems, the shift from searching to navigation, and the requirement to create digital libraries which are integrated into group, as opposed to purely individual, processes.
There follows a discussion of the role of the “library” in the electronic age, taking as a starting point the oft-posed question as to why libraries are still needed when we have the World Wide Web. Borgman emphasises that “the challenge for the information age is not choosing between libraries and computer networks. Rather the challenge is determining how best to provide access to information, and how best to support the marketplace for ideas”. There follows a discussion of the importance of metadata creation and standards, rather sparse in its coverage of metadata for electronic documents (Dublin Core might have been discussed at greater length, for example) before the focus switches to the library as a social institution. Short sections on different sectoral perceptions of libraries lead to the suggestion that four areas need to be considered as we engage in “rethinking libraries in a digital age”: the invisibility of infrastructure, the changing nature of collections, preservation, and the boundaries between what in Europe are now known as “memory institutions” – libraries, museums, archives etc.

A short chapter entitled “Acting locally, thinking globally” raises some issues for libraries as they start to operate on a much wider stage, including language and interoperability. The latter is an example of an area where Borgman might have drawn more widely on the non-American literature, since the UK’s Interoperability Focus has provided a more thorough analysis of these issues than the sources she cites. The following and final chapter continues the globalisation theme with a concentration on scalability and a reprise of the idea of a “global digital library”. It is good to see emphasis here on the needs of less-developed countries. A lengthy case study of Central and Eastern Europe does, however, read rather oddly and might better have been omitted (or rather lessons might better have been inserted appropriately throughout the rest of the book).

In summary, MIT Press has produced two interesting yet contrasting volumes to launch its “Digital Libraries and Electronic Publishing” series. Arms’ contribution will be particularly useful as an introduction to digital library concepts, but does not provide links to take the reader more deeply into the literature. Borgman provides a more integrated approach, with heavy if somewhat partial reliance on the research literature, and offers pointers towards the development of international information infrastructures based on understandings of information behaviours. Both are useful additions to the literature.

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References


This is a compendium of 22 articles published previously in JASIS, IPM and ARIST between 1995 and 1997, with some updating and added material. There is also an introduction by the Editors, noting aptly that “information science has the curious property of perennially being regarded widely as a ‘new and emerging field’”, plus a brief account by Robert V. Williams of the “Pioneers of Information Science in North America Project” (accessible via the ASIS home page: www.asis.org) and a “Bibliography of the History of Information Science in North America, 1900–1997” by the same author with two co-authors.

The contributions are largely focused on developments in the US and continental Europe (principally Belgium, Spain, France and the former USSR) with little on German, British or Asian developments. In regard to Britain, for example, the work of B.C. Brookes, Robert Fairthorne and Jason Farradane is cited in several of the papers, but there is nothing of substance (and certainly no index entries) on Aslib, the IIS or Journal of Documentation. Whether this constitutes an imbalance is a matter of opinion: historians being licensed to discern trends where they will. Nevertheless, many readers will perceive parallels between trends in the US and the UK from several of the articles. For example, Williams, in a third contribution, notes the influence of the so-called ‘special library’ movement (focused on the SLA) in the earlier part of the 20th Century, with its then newer concerns for the delivery of information rather than information sources. (“It is quite clear . . . that they were the first American documentalists.”) Following the need for rapid and more sophisticated industrialisation during and after the First World War, it has been said that much the same trend occurred in Europe, focused in the case of the UK on what is now Aslib. The formation in 1937 of the American Documentation Institute (the forerunner of ASIS) by Watson Davis was, he also notes, a response to Davis’s observation that in Europe documentation work was being undertaken by many more kinds of people than librarians, and in “all kinds of places, not just in libraries”. The British ‘equivalent’ of the ADI developed much later of course, in the form of the IIS, now merging with the LA as both ‘sides’ attempt to catch up with the wider game. (The reviewer’s view, if he may, is that the growth of the IIS was very largely associated with the then novel process of ‘online’ rather than the realisation of the Farradane ideal of the ‘information scientist’ as a person who worked within information user teams. With the widespread adoption of online in the late 1970s, the impact of the IIS began to fade, not helped by what seemed to be a condescension (sometimes deserved) by many of its members towards academic approaches to information
science, in contrast to the situation in the US and ASIS. The weaknesses of university and polytechnic resourcing in the UK, and the decline in Government funding of basic research in information science areas, probably share most of the blame.)

A criticism of a more serious kind is that histories of the major database manufacturers are trivialised or non-existent. The Chemical Abstracts Registry Service is treated to an article reprint, but the history of its parent organisation is ignored. So is that of the NLM and IM/MeSH/Medline, apart from the odd incidental sentence. The IEE’s Inspec service, the printed origins of which go back to the end of the 19th Century, is also ignored, and VINITI, although its 25,000 employees and 70 abstracting journals are mentioned, is treated to just half a page – and that only incidentally to the theme of the paper concerned. The omission of any serious treatment of libraries in general, perhaps especially the main national libraries and their many and major document-surrogate products, and of commercial publishers contributing in the surrogacy area (e.g., R.R. Bowker, H.W. Wilson) could also be argued to constitute imbalance in the selection. Clearer scope notes and disclaimers were accordingly needed, it is felt, to justify such omissions.

To note such matters is, however, only to introduce what seems to be the main issue of just what it is that is having its history written. However boring the question may be to some, we need, if we are to develop a sound (consensual, coherent, well-defined) ontology of ‘information science’, to iterate that question until that happens. The problem is non-trivial, no matter that it may have been debated for many years over barrow-loads of chestnuts. (What is information? Is information science primarily about the information needed by R&D, or about the science of knowledge creation and sharing? etc.) Information processes exist, both man-made and within biological systems. In the human case they are managed, they involve knowledge flow, distillation and creation, and they are embedded by us in higher-level enabling processes (computing, management, documentation). We bring to our interactions with these processes a variety of different viewpoints, some expressed in the classical rhetoric of the social sciences, some in the slang of communication studies, some in the voodoo of the systems analyst, and some drawn from the high altar of statistical theory. We are also party to value frames to guide our conduct, whether bearing on society at large (the information needs of prisoners, say), or on the people in a specific organisation. It is therefore to the credit of this work that several serious (though uneven, and in the end still unresolved) attempts at addressing this question are presented. Papers by W. Boyd Rayward (of three), Anthony Debons and Williams all address this question in various ways, where the editors might easily have taken the easy way out and said something like ‘we see information science as defined by the papers we have included’. That by Debons on the direction and outcomes of the MITRE/ESD congresses and NATO Advanced Study Institutes concludes: “Information science . . . runs the whole gamut of disciplines.” The issue is most thoroughly addressed in Rayward’s article “The History and Historiography of Information Science: Some Reflections” in which he concludes: “Let us accept that ‘information science’ is a term that is now conventionally used for attempts within
the last 50 years or so to study in a formal and rigorous way processes, techniques, conditions, and effects that are entailed in improving the efficacy of information, variously defined and understood, as deployed and used for a range of purposes related to individual, social and organizational needs.” But even here, the phrase “to study” detaches information science qua knowledge from the engagements of practice, which is what most persons who call themselves information scientists profess strong loyalties to. The debate will no doubt go on for some decades. One hopes the differences do not become self-perpetuating. At least we are reassured (I think) by Rayward saying (quoting Foucault) that “a discursive formation has occurred”. This seems to mean, to use modern counsellingspeak, that we are permitted to carry on arguing.

The papers pay their respects, well deserved, to the contributions of Paul Otlet and Vannevar Bush, but one wonders whether the attribution of credit to founder heroes is carried a little too far. The implication in the discussion of these pioneers is that they ‘foresaw’ Ted Nelson’s hypertext, or its global extension the Web (per Tim Berners-Lee), plus videostorage/transmission and multimedia, and so on. But what is it to ‘foresee’? There seems to be an unsatisfactory ambiguity in such accounts as to whether Otlet and Bush helped determine what did come, predicted that it would come, or simply noted possibilities. If the implication is that they determined much of modern IT, one feels that the post hoc ergo propter hoc fallacy applies, i.e. it is as if they are saying: ‘Ted Nelson’s and Tim Berners-Lee’s work followed Otlet’s vision in time, therefore it must derive from it.’ Such a way of thinking would give da Vinci the credit for building the helicopter (instead of doodling what would be an unstable device on a sketch-pad), or Democritus the credit for discovering the atomic nature of matter (instead of betting on one side of a tautology). History is not an art form – Dand our heroes deserve to be squarely treated – so that one hopes that such historians will go on to interview the engineers of modern IT to see whether they were in fact influenced by Otlet and Bush. Anti-heroes also: the harsh treatment of MIT’s Intrex programme in an article by Colin Burke seems well-deserved, the project having apparently focused on means (computing) rather than agreed ends (a rigorous experimental regime involving system users), although one wonders whether its detailed concerns for richer variety in record fields deserved a more generous crediting. Still, as Nietsche said, one needs worthy enemies. And heroines also, let it be emphasised. The article by Pamela Spence Richards on “Scientific Information for Stalin’s Laboratories, 1945–1953” pays what seems to be a well-deserved tribute to Margarita Rudomino, founder of the Library of Foreign Literatures in Moscow, who surreptitiously, and no doubt very bravely, helped the USSR overcome its xenophobia by making available Western information sources in order “to expose to [the library’s] readers the truth about class and national oppression in the capitalist countries”. Richards puts it well when she writes: “By appearing to be using Western materials as tools to dig capitalism’s grave, Rudomino created a protective screen behind which practical steps could be taken to acquire what users really wanted from the West.”
Two final cavils. (1) Why was commentary on the prestigious, post-Sputnik ‘Weinberg Report’, a paper of the US Office of the President published as I recall around 1963, and laying out new information-related responsibilities for the science and engineering communities, not included? What influence did that report have on the creation of the NASA/RECON and DIALOG systems, for example, or did the evolution of these and similar systems largely evolve without Federal prompting and funds? What impact, if any, did one of its main (and novel) recommendations – that scientists should take more responsibility for the subsequent retrieval of the information they generated – actually have? (2) Why is the theoretical vision of William Goffman not discussed more fully, the only representations of it being brief comments in a paper on the history of the ‘relevance’ concept? If information science is to evolve from discursive formation to an ontology, his vision may prove to be the one way of doing it?

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This compendium of papers presented at the third Libraries Without Walls conference held in Molyvos, on the Greek island of Lesvos in September 1999 explored the components of distance teaching in a wide range of countries. The concept had become part of the mainstream initiated by the UK BIBDEL Project in 1993. In the keynote speech by Alexander L. Slade, of the University of Victoria, Canada, problems such as lack of infrastructure, equipment and know how are granted as common sense obstacles to be addressed by distance librarians. Undoubtedly demographically determined “pockets of poverty” mean lack of access to technological infrastructure, and perhaps always have. With the development of ICT, there is an increased political motive behind distance learning which is the enhancement of the present educational system by means of telematics. Academic institutions are regarding distance learning as a means to offset shrinking revenues and reduced budgets for programme delivery. Various initiatives are currently developing between countries to attract international students to distance learning programs. “Niche Learning” has led to competition and fragmentation in the higher education market as the private sector becomes more involved in this area with retraining programs, continuing professional education and employer sponsored education.

The topic of library support for distance learning has a historical basis. Since 1930, the need to deliver ‘equivalent’ library services to those learners who were not attending classes full time on the campuses of conventional postsecondary institutions
has been addressed. Today, the rapid development of information and communications technologies, the increasing use of the Internet and World Wide Web for the delivery of educational programs in electronic format has had a significant effect on the literature. Astoundingly, almost as much has been written about library services for open and distance learning in the past five years as in the previous 65 years. The intention of the conference was to provide an overview of issues and to project trends for the next five years. As was true in the days of the print-based correspondence course, common denominator of terms to describe distance learning is the separate-ness of the learner from a traditional postsecondary institution. Slade notes that most recently, terms like virtual universities and virtual education have been introduced to represent the ultimate version of distance learning, where electronic resources and communication technologies replace physical campuses. This is not without problems – specifically users’ needs for print resources and inability to browse physical collections, not to mention lack of peer group support for studies. The average distance learner is an adult, often with work and family obligations, who is studying part-time. Ironically, many distance learners require more personalized library support than do their on-campus counterparts and faculty may have only a minimal concept of information literacy as a tool to reach these students. Professional isolation is a commonly reported problem of distance librarianship. Suggestions given by Slade are that librarians partner with faculty and computing science personnel to design online courses, integrate information skills and create a multidimensional program of support for remote users, such as the networked learner support featured by the NetLinkS Project. The development and expansion of library consortia and cooperative projects (i.e., Florida Distance Learning Library Initiative or Canadian Consortium for Educational Technology for University Systems) can positively influence library support for the distance learner, as will the integration of distance librarianship into the curricula of library schools.

In Chapter Three, Models for Working Together: Lifelong Learners, Library Croos-Use and Collaborative Solutions, Clare Nakivell and Peter Dalton describe the People Flows project which investigated the cross-use of libraries between lifelong learners, full-time students and non-learners. Janet Fletcher cites Christopher Bates with clarity of judgement needed in accessing the new technologies as tools of distance education. Intimidating equipment, complicated online procedures, recurring technical failures, low bandwidth, high costs, poor design and inappropriate use of online teaching tools has limited the success of distance education. According to Fletcher, “The challenge for university libraries is to provide services for distance education students that are able to support their needs when accessing academic standard resources, that utilize technology appropriately, and that provide for personal help and guidance” A well designed web interface is the first step.
Libraries Without Walls will be of lasting value to readers as a source of reference. It provides no nonsense documentation of the networked information world and the distance learner. It also looks at service delivery from a historical viewpoint, and puts the onus on the organisation’s ability to focus on actual user needs. Actual user needs may include physical campuses. The skills of a librarian in the new environments of distance and lifelong learning are again a blend of the old and new – not without special challenges. As related to organizational performance, perhaps more than any other single factor, hybrid libraries require information management skills on the part of the librarian. Heseltine, for example, predicts that in the new learning environment, libraries will focus on actual user needs and develop more extensive end-user services. However, the organizational structure must be based on functionally oriented, collaborating teams in which individual perform specific rather than generic roles in areas such as resource management, user support, document supply, network management, and external relations. The blend of digital and traditional information concerns, above all, is an inclusive design of the whole library service. An inclusive design requires knowledge, know-how and awareness of the macro dimensions affecting distance learning and libraries – without forgetting the needs of the learner.

The interest and value of this book to those involved in distance librarianship is great. The existing literature base on the subject of academic libraries in distance education will welcome the addition of this work – a much needed guide to current thought on the topic, some successful and exciting models, and an emphasis on the role of the information intermediary who merges the physical with the virtual using technology and insight.

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When I first taught academic libraries in 1994, most of the information I needed was spread in the many reports and papers that came out around that time. Thompson’s Direction in academic library management. (Library Association, 1991) was the main text, which although it covered much that was helpful, had a lot of gaps and reflected the thinking of a previous era. Line’s edited collection of essays Academic library management. (Library Association, 1990) brought together the thinking of that time.

The Follett Report of 1992 marked the beginning of a phase of rapid, comprehensive and radical change in the academic libraries of the UK. It was the first major review of academic libraries since Parry (1967). Follett provided the impetus for the
introduction of major initiatives which have changed the provision and standard of information services in higher education in the 1990’s. Brophy’s book is welcome because it charts all these changes and gives a wide-ranging overview of the current academic library environment. A comparison with the earlier volumes serves to emphasise the extent of change.

The book is arranged into 14 chapters. Each chapter is a self-contained essay on a different topic, complete with introduction, conclusion and a list of references and further reading. There is a list of acronyms at the end (thank goodness!) and an index. The link between the chapters is in their arrangement. The first three chapters set the scene – the wider context of higher education, a brief history of higher education libraries and the library within its institution. The last of these redefines Ranganathan’s rules (books become “information objects”) and proposes a new model of purpose based upon the library as a link in a wider global information network, providing a “hybrid” environment in which access is provided to collections and electronic resources. It is useful to have these ideas defined, since some have now become accepted parlance in the world of academic library research.

Chapter 4 deals with the users of academic libraries and immediately the effects of recent government policies on library services are evident – the widening of access (more part-time learners, users with special needs) the changes to teaching delivery methods (more focus on resource-based learning, the increased numbers of distance learners) and so on.

Chapter 5, the impact and opportunities of ICT, is a summary of much of the research that has been carried out under various programmes to look at electronic delivery of services (the e-lib programme). If, like me, you are a person who has been bemused by the large number of trendy sounding acronyms emanating from the e-lib projects, this is the chapter for you. Projects described include those to do with the Hybrid Library concept; Large Scale Resource Discovery bringing sharing and access to collections based on the conspectus ideas; Digital Preservation; Electronic Document Delivery and e-journals; the development of the subject-based gateways. Brophy also includes descriptions of the national data services such as MIMAS (Manchester Information and Associated Services). The chapter ends with a description of a research project yet to begin – the Distributed National Electronic Resource – “a managed environment for accessing quality assured information resources on the Internet which are available from many sources”. In many ways this chapter is the most important in highlighting the developments of the last decade. None of this work had been done at that time.

Chapters 6–9 deal with more “traditional” topics. The human resources chapter emphasises the training and development of staff – not something that academic libraries were noted for pre-Follett. Resource management looks at the development of devolved budgeting. Chapter 8 discusses the complexities of selecting, managing and providing access to a variety of hard copy and electronic resources. Nice to see some discussion of conservation and preservation issues, brought up-to-date with consideration of issues arising from preservation of electronic resources. This is an area that is important. In spite of a relatively short section about it, Brophy
helpfully directs those interested to the website of the National Preservation Office. Chapter 9 looks at the question of design of library buildings in the new educational environment. Whilst Faulkner-Brown’s 10 principles of library design still hold good, Brophy draws attention to the fact that the demands of modern service delivery lead to some areas of libraries being decidedly noisy – with machines, group seminar rooms and so on. Interestingly Brophy remains silent on the question of mobile phone use, which has become a plague of many public places. It would have been interesting to hear whether any library has considered the use of signal-blocking technology.

Chapter 10 is an examination of the state of play with regard to use of automated systems. Other than upgrades and the development of web-based interfaces, automated systems have progressed little, and are part of the fabric of the academic library. The need now is to develop a seamless interface, which allows users to access the various services without placing “endless barriers in the way of individual users” via the need for passwords. I would have liked more comment on the use of LMS in the production of statistics. Do they produce better, more accurate management information, and is there an ability to plan services better as a result?

Chapter 11 considers the portfolio of services which academic libraries now offer to their users. As well as mentioning traditional services such as reference and lending, there is discussing of subject specific services, users with special needs, and with various kinds of disability, all of which require careful thought and attention.

Chapters 12 and 13 deal with management issues (managing change, performance measurement and quality management appear here) and professional issues such as copyright and the problem of plagiarism. The last chapter looks to the future and raises questions about how libraries of the future might deal with, for example, a shift to the majority of journals being produced in electronic format; the possibility that interactive TV might be used as a means to deliver courses; the continual problem of resolving intellectual property issues; and the idea of a virtual university. Brophy ends on a positive note, suggesting that such developments will not threaten the continued existence of the academic library. Why? Because of the services which they offer, which are continually reappraised to meet user need.

I like this book. It fulfils its stated role as a textbook, and, as it claims on the dust-jacket should appeal to a wider audience. Academic library managers at middle levels will find it a useful reminder of some of the issues they are dealing with, although, of necessity, some chapters are short and do not go into the amount of depth they might find helpful. It is easy to read – I read it in a couple of evenings – so should find ready acceptance among the student population. It manages to convey some fairly difficult concepts without recourse to too much academic language. Did Brophy really write it on trains, travelling between Lancaster and London (this is mentioned in an aside)? I wish I was as efficient!

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This must surely take the record as the book published in 2000 with the least interesting title. Even the sub-heading gives no clue as to what a well written and gripping read it is. This 230 page hardback book looks at the background to the dismissal of Ruth Brown, an American public librarian who was dismissed in the early 1950s, nominally for maintaining Communist literature in her public library. The book focuses on the background to the venue (Bartlesville, Oklahoma), to the attitudes of the time, to the role of Phillips Petroleum whose “company town” Bartlesville was, and to the personality of Ruth Brown herself. (She turns out to be have been a strong willed and sometimes difficult person). Ruth Brown’s photograph is shown on the front cover. She looks, dare I say it, the archetypal middle aged spinster librarian, the last person one would expect major issues of library history and intellectual freedom to be centred on. The case led to a Supreme Court ruling, and to a famous film, Storm Center, the making of which is also described in some depth. Robbins notes that the original star, who dropped out after one day’s filming, was Mary Pickford. Bette Davis, the eventual star, was in the fact the producers’ third choice as lead. The book comprises six chapters, an epilogue, notes to each chapter, a bibliography and a good index. It is complemented by a number of period photographs.

The author, Louise Robbins, has done an amazing amount of background research, digging out old files and interviewing survivors to gain a picture of the build up to Miss Brown’s dismissal by a special committee set up for the purpose. The book therefore provides a rich and authoritative, but only partial picture of the whole story. Why only partial? This is because the author makes too many assumptions about the reader’s prior knowledge. It is assumed the reader knows about the case – the Supreme Court case is referred to, but its outcome is not reported. It is partial because although the author tells us what happened to Miss Brown afterwards, she says nothing about what happened to the other protagonists, or indeed what happened to Bartlesville public Library. The author assumes the reader is familiar with the McCarthy era and what was involved.

Despite this, the book provides a wealth of fascinating detail, not least the lengthy epilogue where the author describes how she went about the research and the encounters on the way. Furthermore, she has come up with a startling thesis. The real reason Miss Brown was dismissed was not for stocking Communist stock, but for associating herself with the de-segregationist movement of Bartlesville in a big way. She notes that even the American Library Association, as well as conventional histories of the case and the film, have ignored this aspect of the reason why the right wing establishment so loathed Miss Brown.

The clear message of the book is, of course, that librarians can never lower their guard in respect of defending intellectual freedom, and that situations that Miss
Brown found herself in can occur in the future, and indeed possibly are doing right now, for example in Cuba.

The book is strongly recommended for all those teaching or studying library history, or ethical and professional issues, with the caveat that it does not represent the comprehensive final word on this important chapter of US library history, but that general background to the case and its outcome is also needed.

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**Stanton, Theresa, ed. Distance Education: Current impact, Future trends.** *FID Review*, 1.2/3 1999.

*FID Review* is the new official membership journal of FID (International Federation for Information and Documentation). It was launched in 1999 and is based on an amalgamation of the former FID Bulletin and the International Forum on Information and Documentation.

This second issue of *FID Review* is a special double edition wholly dedicated to ‘Distance education: current impact, future trends’. The aim of this publication, as Stanton states is to ‘present a global snapshot of distance education today’. This is no easy undertaking and in order to fulfil this difficult task, the volume contains 28 papers ‘representing the views and aspirations of a cross-section of all those active in the distance education field, ranging from top management and faculty members to researchers and consumers’ (Stanton 3).

The Guest Editor is Professor Olugbemiro Jegede of the Open University of Hong Kong. In his opening address he praises the timeliness of this edition of the journal ‘when the greatest revolution in the field of education since Socrates is noticeably in distance education’, [7] Those of us who are not already open and distance learning (ODL) converts, may not be able to share this impassioned view, but as Jegede goes on to state, few will have failed to notice that ODL is now so ‘fashionable’ that even the most conservative higher education institutions are addressing it. This however is the root of many fundamental concerns and primarily the potentially questionable motivation behind many newly developed courses. Jegede fears that distance education whilst making a greater contribution than ever towards social inclusion, is becoming ‘an all comers’ business venture encouraged by economic globalization with little regard for the quality of instructional materials, and the high standard of student support which the distance education of the recent past has been known for’ [6].

To complement this assessment, Jegede therefore felt it was vital that the chosen papers reflected as far as possible, the views and opinions of all ODL stakeholders. This issue of *FID Review* has therefore been divided into four groups of contributors:
– managers and chief executives of distance education institutions
– practitioners, experts and researchers
– geographical overview
– students

Following four papers representing the top management view, the remaining 23 papers are said to explore a number of sub-themes. The papers themselves can then be divided into three broad groups:

– distance librarianship
– regional/country developments, community learning, the university of the future, online and virtual learning
– research based papers

The final section is based on a series of personal experiences from distance learning students.

The multi-layered structure outlined above is perhaps overly complex and the initial detailed contents page is perhaps the most useful form of access. In fact, one of the main strengths of a collection of this nature is the ability to select those items of greatest personal relevance, as well as to broaden the knowledge base through serendipity.

It would be inappropriate in a review of this nature to pass comment on all 28 contributions, so rather, a number of central themes will be highlighted.

Not surprisingly, a dominant theme is the acknowledgement of the revolutionary effect that technological developments have had in enhancing the flexible delivery of learning. However, this acknowledgement is qualified by a range of cautionary tales. As in other fields, a major concern is the speed of such developments and in particular the fear that theory and research cannot keep pace in order to sufficiently anticipate outcomes. [7] Similarly there is concern that the necessary distance learning based infrastructures will not be in place to support such developments. Not just the physical infrastructure but ‘the policy frameworks, organizational structures and professional relationships essential for the global development of ‘on-line’ distance learning’ [3].

Again, not surprisingly, the Internet is at the centre of many of these ICT discussions. An important distinction is made regarding the degree of Internet reliance and the difference between wholly web-based courses and web-focused ones. As Daniel comments ‘some students are voting with their feet against purely web-based courses, arguing that the web is better seen as one component of a wider teaching strategy’. [2] Coupled with the pressure to increase student numbers, there is thus a growing concern that placing a large number of courses on the web in a reactionary and unplanned way, will only lead to a loss of quality. This in turn could ‘return distance learning to the low status of its paper-based equivalent of earlier days’ [2].

Reassuringly for distance learning enthusiasts, recognition is also given to the importance of the student centred approach and nowhere is this more evident than in the decision to include a series of personal accounts from a range of distance
learning students. Much is said about what these individuals have gained from their ODL experiences, but also there is recognition that whilst ICT developments have arguably seen the ‘death of distance’, no matter how sophisticated the technology is it does not offer the ‘immediacy, the availability, nor the satisfaction of person-to-person contact’ [9]. Appropriate student support systems are therefore an essential feature of any distance learning venture. As Broad comments, not only do these systems need to be appropriate to the needs of distance learners, but they need to be ‘available on the same flexible, convenient terms as their digitally delivered courses and programs’ [3].

As well as providing a number of excellent case studies such as those by Stout [4], Naves [6] and Taylor et al. [8] this volume brings together a unique collection of papers from an impressively broad geographical spectrum. Speaking as an ODL professional in a developed country it is particularly welcome to be reminded and made aware of more fundamental threats and opportunities for distance learning. For example, as Jeevan notes, it is a sad fact that ‘most of the library science courses still teach computer related topics at the theoretical level and do not give enough practical training, due to lack of sufficient hardware and software in University Teaching Departments’ [5]. However, distance learning also has the ability to overcome significant cultural barriers, for as one student notes, ‘while living in an Asian country, where men enjoyed greater educational opportunities than women, distance education afforded me education equity’ [9].

At first glance it might be thought that only the ‘Library and information view’ section of this publication could be of direct relevance to those involved in information studies education. However, as already discussed the now all encompassing nature of ODL places this edition of FID Review firmly at the centre of all educational disciplines and it should be of interest to both service providers as well as learners and potential learners. What after all, could be more central to our philosophy than the ‘education equity’ championed above.

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Book reviews

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FID Review, Volume 1, Numbers 4/5: Special issue on competitive intelligence from the perspective of today’s information professional

The FID Review is the well known vehicle for news about the FID, and regularly carries articles written by FID members. This special issue, published at the end of 1999, is unusual because it has 10 papers on the chosen theme – Competitive Intelligence (CI), together with two “regular” articles not on this theme, one by Irene Wormell on information retrieval, and another reporting an interview with Pregen Hansen of the Swedish Institute of Computer Science. The presence of the article by Wormell is a little odd, because as the issue announces, the special theme of Competitive intelligence was achieved thanks to the efforts of the Guest Editor, Irene Wormell. One wonders if her article, which was very interesting, but is about bibliometrics, not CI, was going to be published in this issue of FID Review anyway.

The ten papers have been written by different authors from Brazil, France, India, Japan and Cuba and vary wildly. The first, nominally on the potential of theses as CI tools, in fact describes the development of software for extracting information out of theses. The relevance of theses to CI is virtually zero, and one wonders about the thinking going on in the authors’ minds. The second article, on where to place CI function in a company, is relevant and provides a useful overview of the choices available. The third article, on the risks in depending solely on the Internet for CI, is brief, well written and convincing, though I have to say it would be a very odd CI professional indeed who did rely on the Internet as his or her sole source.

The next article outlines a methodology known as scenarios for CI in the Brazilian Ministry of Finance. A rather detailed account of the software and methodologies employed is provided, and whilst the technique seems more suited for broad strategic planning than CI, it clearly has potential for application to CI. The next paper, on processes for building CI knowledge in an organisation, is an excellent review of the processes, skills and competencies required. The next paper, on risk management and the Asian economic crisis is limited in its application, although it provides brief accounts of the CI operations of some major Japanese corporations. The next paper is on the use of company directories and corporate profiles in CI, and lists a wide range of sources of company information. Although somewhat limited in scope, therefore, it does usefully provide the structure of typical CI reports. The next paper is a highly mathematical one on techniques for ranking information to suit the manager. The detailed mathematics makes this paper more appropriate for a journal other than FID Review.

The next covers the use of IT in CI. This is the weakest paper in the issue, as it simply is a reprise of basic IT, and indeed makes outright mistakes – it claims the
Internet is synonymous with the WWW, and that the WWW is free to everyone – hasn’t the author heard of Web sites where you can only enter if you have paid a subscription, or of the charges ISPs make for connections? The final paper, on the information professional in CI, provides an easy to read overview, but is basic and should really have been the first paper of the group.

Overall, then, this is quite a strange collection of papers. Some are very basic, some are genuinely useful, and some are a waste of print or are too mathematical for mere mortals to understand. I would certainly not recommend that anyone specially goes out to buy a copy of this special issue. However, if your library does already subscribe to the journal, it is worth inspecting the articles for useful ideas and background on CI, and certainly some of the articles are sufficiently good to be worth recommending to students who have to learn about CI.

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