What to Think About When We Think About Reference

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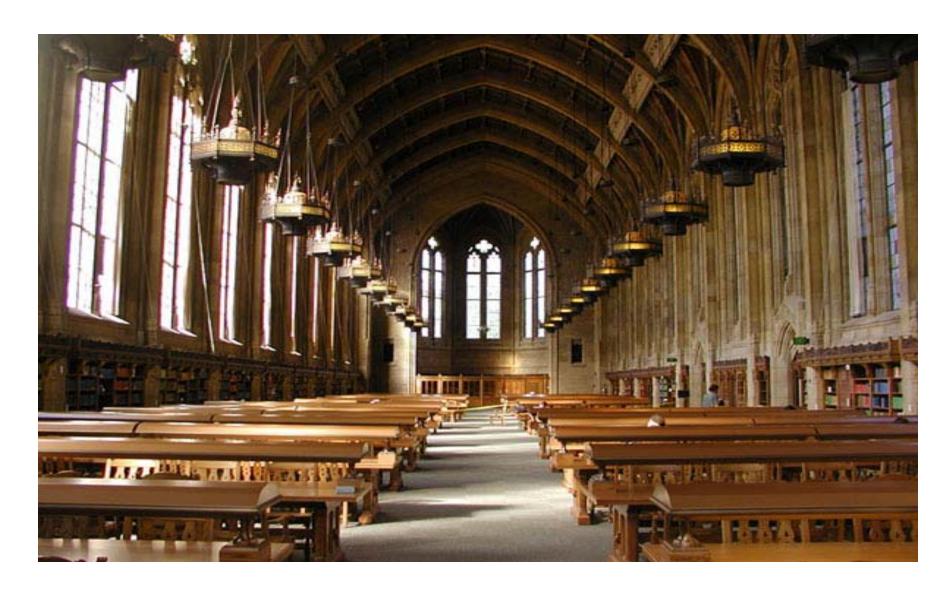# a (semi-shameless) plug

send us your best people (including yourself! WDI)

application deadlines January 15th (full time residential), March 15th (part time distance)

www.ischool.washington.edu

my libraries

my libraries

what is "reference"?

"…readers in popular libraries need a great deal of assistance…this is particularly needed by persons unused to handling books or conducting investigations."

Samuel Green *Library Journal 1* (1876)

Green (1876)

we do reference because there's too much stuff and it's hard to find

talks about database searching (really), evaluating resources, instruction, consumer info, advice, alert services, readers' advisory, medical/legal disclaimers

be pleasant, mingle freely

don't make "readers" dependent

no point of view on politics, etc.

what is "reference"?

"Reference work includes the direct, personal aid within a library to persons in search of information for whatever purpose, and also various library activities especially aimed at making information as easily available as possible."

Margaret Hutchins *Introduction to Reference Work* (1944)

reference

"[Reference] has become an indispensable public service because it saves the money of the individual…and by furnishing skilled bibliographical aid in the use of reference materials it saves the time of busy people and ensures possession of facts which by themselves they could not obtain."

Margaret Hutchins *Introduction to Reference Work* (1944)

evolving, as it always does

technology, sure——about which more soon

competitive and volatile information marketplace (publisher and consumer)——likewise

and the society changes

§ median age inc to 38.7 by '30, 69M over age 65, 20% of US population (from 39M in '10)

§ nonhispanic whites 53% of population by '50 (now 74%)

§ Hispanic, Asian growth rates 2% per year

technology

it's all on the Internet, right?

Google does just fine, right?

well, no…and yes

what's not there, what's no good, what's really great, what we pay for that's better

not to mention what we know

will continue to evolve, change, with increasing complexity and rapidity, and will profoundly affect the information environment of our communities

$ (£, ¥, €)

an increasingly complicated information marketplace

mergers, acquisitions; book and journal publishers, media companies, even system vendors

a great deal of "free" content (tho free ain't always)

are these temporary or ephemeral phenomena?

how do you beat free, easy, quick, and good enough?

privacy & intellectual freedom

increasing logging and capture functions (circulation, database searching, digital reference transactions)

side benefit of learning about users, communities, uses, needs

increasing governmental ability, willingness (?), need (?) to play in this realm [CDA, COPA, CIPA, PATRIOT Act, DOPA, beyond?]

young people seem not to care about this as much as we do in exchange for convenience

perception

place to get good books, for kids, inspire reading and learning

pornographers

place to read your email

boring

hysterical

ignored

all of these?

we are becoming increasingly marginal in the popular mind, excepting dedicated library users, even as actual usage rises (as measured by interaction with quality resources paid for by the library)

a couple of recent examples

LibraryThing

    the "social catalog"; journey more than the destination

Open WorldCat, worldcat.org, WorldCat Local, etc

    a great idea…in whose hands?

Wikipedia

    good, bad, when, how, for whom?

YouTube

    smile! *Candid Camera* for the 21st c

Second Life

    what's important about this (and things like it), if anything?

another recent example

Google Book Search, Open Content Alliance, Windows Live Books

   moving beyond the free Web

   deals with content providers, starts to look a lot more like the "traditional" content industry

   "all the books"

what about print?

in the short run, a secret weapon

in the (much) longer run, of slowly decreasing importance

think about help

support in searching, finding, accessing, using, understanding, evaluating (incl perhaps instruction where appropriate)

tech, software, hardware support, perhaps hosting?

professional advice, guidance, help

ubiquity of place and time

depth and length, unmet needs

think about place

the place(s) where you do it

the place it occupies in your community

the place in occupies in the lives of your clientele

think about yourselves

our traditional strengths

    service orientation

    determining needs & understanding context

    multiple modes of searching

    evaluation of resources

    when to stop

    education about the process

    tool-making

go with, build on these, make use of our most precious resource…and what you got into this for in the 1st place

what is reference **for**?

a better question

the circumstances which gave rise to it

    increased number, variety of information resources

    increase in complexity of those resources

    hence, increased difficulty in finding resources, information within

    increase in number & diversity of people using libraries; wider
        range of needs, enquiries, sophistication in searching

decide what kinds of things we are best suited for

and, by implication, what we're not

"right now, someone is thinking of a better, faster, cheaper way of doing what you're doing"

a few ideas

➢ articulate our strengths

➢ play up our service orientation

➢ build tools that help people without direct intervention

➢ position ourselves and our services as time-savers

➢ decide what kinds of inquiries we are best suited for

➢ or something(s) else

ideas

learn, play, succeed, fail, share, lead, innovate

ideas

learn, play, succeed, fail, share, lead, innovate

read and participate in the library blogosphere

use these tools but don't compete with things you can't beat (search tool bar)

make judicious choices based on your experience & professionalism

put creativity at the center of what you do (in both ways)

vision as a rudder for change

something, anything that advances our ability to do better, be stronger, more central to their information lives

be where they are, be relevant to what they want and want to do

stand for what we stand for

be where they are

wherever they are (physically and virtually)

and whatever they want to do, or be

we must be available, positioned, and ready to support,
   assist and participate—on their terms

presence

what to do

- be the information expert on campus
- embed in courseware and the course
- reading & literacy, incl reading advocacy, focus on services to new members of community
- technological sophistication
- advocate for intellectual freedom & privacy
- institutional repositories
- rethink priorities & assumptions
- **work together**

what to do

play to our strengths (seize value)

focus on things that we can uniquely do, that uniquely define us: quality, depth, education, instruction, literacy, community & clientele basis, tool building, and so on

and how they fit in the emerging information environment

and… what old things to give up or cede to competitors, what could other people, organizations, institutions do better or don't need to be done at all?

change will happen—will we be in charge or not?

all this implies

an extended notion of "library", "librarianship", etc

anywhere, anytime, any way in which people interact with information organized, provided, supported by their own community via their library staff

and thus…we have to be even better online than in person

in the end

this has to make sense to them

this has to make sense to us

in the short and long term environment, incl stuff and place

think about what we are for

make humanity more human

allow us to better ourselves individually and collectively

these are the goals, only one way to do it: *centrality to the information lives of our communities*

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