

## Place as Library?

Digital technology is redrawing the library's blueprint. Planners are thinking in new ways about how to design libraries as places for learning rather than primarily as storehouses of information. This thinking has given rise to much discussion—and to many publications—about the “library as place.”

But in a networked world, why not also think in terms of “place as library”? At first, this phrase might seem to reflect the simple fact that today's information-seekers get much of what they need electronically, often far from the physical library. There is more to the idea than that, however. As discussions of library as place have made clear, focusing on libraries solely as providers of information ignores much of the value that they bring to higher education today.

The phrase *place as library* was coined at a June 2005 retreat of the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors of the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) in recognition of the convergence of two developments. The first development is that libraries are taking on expanded, more collaborative roles in the creation and dissemination of knowledge. Library staff are working, often side by side, with the creators of knowledge—in labs, classrooms, faculty departments, and computing centers. In many cases, libraries and computing centers are taking on the publisher's traditional role of disseminating scholarship. Thus, on most campuses, the reach of the library already transcends both physical space and traditional roles, and library services have become more broadly woven into the fabric of the campus.



Illustration by Randy Lyhus, © 2006

The second development is that although most institutions now have the technical capacity to share the vast amount of research and information generated on their campuses, they lack the organization and structures that would allow campus departments to easily share such information. As an illustration of this dilemma, one student in biotechnology at a large research university recently lamented that while working in the lab, she had no means to access information on relevant experiments (published or unpublished) previously conducted there. How can a college or university ensure that the information resources and services available on its campus (or

through a campus agency) are available campus-wide?

For the CLIR board of directors, issues relating to place as library form the keystone of a three-year agenda that also includes scholarly communication, preservation and stewardship, and leadership. These four areas are inextricably linked, and they will have a profound impact on the degree to which we can take full advantage of information technology. To support the concept of place as library, CLIR will develop and promote intra-institutional models of a newly configured and redefined library on the academic campus.

Scholarly communication is an intrinsic

sic component of place as library. The current blurring of traditional roles in the chain of scholarly communication—the roles of creator, publisher, distributor, and steward—makes it essential that we understand how each participant in the communication process contributes to the creation, dissemination, and retention of scholarly work. Collaboration among librarians, information technology experts, faculty members, and academic executives is needed to acquire and distribute new forms of digital scholarly communication, to develop user-driven services for groups whose preferred mode of access is electronic, and to maintain and exploit the rich heritage in paper-based collections. CLIR's agenda will address issues relating to new forms of scholarly practice, the use of digital assets, ownership of scholarly work, and the functions of the library and the university press in supporting and disseminating scholarship.

To ensure that users of e-content have access to the same rich, high-quality collections that libraries have traditionally offered users of print resources, we must give careful attention to issues of preservation and stewardship—of keeping digital information “alive” and fit for use. As explained in CLIR's 2004 report *Access in the Future Tense*, preservation strategies developed for the print world are inadequate for the digital world. Libraries alone can no longer be responsible for preservation, for reasons that range from technical to legal. Thus, in the realm of preservation, as in the other areas discussed in this column, we again see a blurring of traditional roles. Planning for the long-term accessibility of a resource must begin at the moment of its creation, with its developer giving proper consideration to format, metadata, and similar matters. Publishers of digital resources must consider how, and by whom, their resources will be maintained over time.

The new preservation landscape raises a series of questions that CLIR will pursue over the next three years. For example, if managing a digital journal subscription is less expensive than managing its print counterpart, how can the saved funds be reallocated to ensure continuing access to and persistence of the digital versions? To what extent will newly digi-

tized versions of older material revitalize demand for the artifact? What bearing might the answer to that question have on the development, location, and operations of print repositories?

If place as library is the keystone of CLIR's agenda, leadership is the mortar. We need to develop leaders with broad perspectives, knowledge of user groups and their needs, the ability to work effectively across institutional units, and the will to effect change in a change-resistant environment. The effective delivery not only of information but also of services and education that will enable scholars to thrive in a virtual library requires flexible, forward-looking leaders.

In collaboration with other organizations, CLIR has launched two programs that have begun to address this need. The first is the Frye Leadership Institute, sponsored by CLIR in partnership with EDUCAUSE and Emory University. Since the institute began in 2000, nearly three hundred mid-career professionals have been trained to guide and transform academic information services for higher education. More recently, CLIR, in conjunction with a consortium of academic libraries, initiated the Postdoctoral Fellowship in Scholarly Information Resources program. The purpose of this program is to bring scholars with recent humanities Ph.D.'s into the library. The fellowships are geared toward those who believe there are opportunities to develop substantive linkages among disciplinary scholarship, libraries, archives, and evolving digital tools.

As CLIR prepares to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary in May 2006, it is armed with a blueprint for the future. Central to that blueprint is the conviction that libraries, whether physical or virtual, are more important than ever to the fundamental mission, and the very fabric, of the academic institution. The blueprint for place as library cannot be realized, however, without strong collaboration among librarians, computing professionals, faculty, and academic administrators.

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