



Abstract: Knowledge is open-ended and networked by its very nature. Libraries have traditionally been local nodes in that network, places where people can join the network, where learning is inquiring, not just acquiring. Yet the fluid, connected nature of knowledge runs counter to the current economic framework in which knowledge is given to corporations to be transformed into property, then returned to the network through a complex system of metered payments. Libraries have worked hard to keep knowledge free at the local level through negotiating licenses, implementing software to manage all the locks and combinations, and designing user interfaces that make the locks as invisible as possible. If we joined our knowhow and our fundamental values, we could collectively play a leadership role in developing an open network that is, like knowledge itself, open to change.

This is my first time being part of this legendary conference, but I've been hearing about it for years and am really excited to have this chance to be part of it. I hope what I have to say this morning won't be provoking – but will be provocative in a positive sense.

What you all do for your libraries is the backbone of what today's libraries are. You are the engineers and architects and urban planners of our campus's intellectual commons. You're the connectors between the past and the present, between the local and the global, between a bewildered student and the record of knowledge. You make stuff work, and so much of that effort is invisible, at least when it's working. You are the librarians who have the skills and the knowhow that we need to transform libraries yet again. In the 1990s, we began the shift from ownership to access. At this point in our history, we're shifting once again, from metered access to open access, from being a site for consuming information to becoming a platform for creating and sharing it. We're making a shift from serving our local communities to helping our local community members discover, connect with, and contribute to the knowledge and creative communities of their choice. And, though in many situations you are the technology experts in your libraries, the people who have done the most to further our missions by making technology work, your work isn't really about technology. It's about much more.

Some of you are old enough to remember the kerfuffle Scott Carlson caused when he wrote a cover story for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* about "[deserted libraries](#)." A few years before that, *Library Journal* published an article, "B&N: The New College Library," suggesting that the amenities of a retail operation were so superior to academic libraries that we would have to be more like a bookstore – a large chain bookstore with lots of fresh inventory, comfy chairs, and good coffee – to regain relevance. Now that Barnes and Nobles isn't doing so well, the newest thing hogging the headlines is the celebrated bookless library in Bexar County, Texas. It takes pride in looking like an Apple store, even down to having staff wear t-shirts and hoodies so they can look young and hip and relevant. But the assumption is still that retail rules.

We've so internalized this consumer-based notion of what students want that we've rewritten Ranganathan's five laws of library science.

- Not "books are for use," but "books are valuable property."
- Not "every reader, his or her book" but "Every customer, consumer choice."
- Not "every book, its reader," but "Every product, market exposure."
- Not "save the time of the reader," but "Improve the customer experience."
- Not "the library is a growing organism," but "the library must grow its market or die."

[Ithaka S&R](#) has been reporting on faculty attitudes toward libraries in recent years. The most important function of the library in every survey has been "to pay for the resources I need." And library mission statements reflect that role – that's why "provide" is such a large word in that word cloud. This function – to provide materials for consumers, to support individual productivity – grew ever more important for faculty between 2003 and 2009. Interestingly, in 2012, it fell off a bit – libraries weren't as critical to getting stuff anymore now that we #canhazpdf – but paying for stuff was still believed to be the most important thing libraries did by far. Discovery, preservation, research assistance, and student learning are nice, sure, but less important than procuring and paying for resources individuals want for their own purposes.

Interestingly, the [survey of library directors](#) just released by Ithaka shows that "purchaser" remains a major role for libraries, but in contrast to faculty perception, buying is less critical than supporting student learning. The library's role in research support trails and has dropped off since 2010. The library's ability to be the major provider of information for its scholars and support their work is shrinking along with our buying power.

Yet faculty still believe that our most important job is to buy stuff, and we try to make that stuff available as efficiently as Amazon and Google. We're on the losing end of that competition, and we know it. We don't have their deep pockets and investors, and we don't spy on people in order to "improve their search experience". Besides, Google and Amazon are massively global. We're local.

That purely local focus that we have cultivated, while it has great value, is problematic. We struggle to buy stuff on behalf of our communities, and the geographic boundaries of those communities define our dreams. In this era of electronic access, our mission extends only to the community of current faculty and staff and those students who have paid their tuition bills on time. In my library, when the registrar sends us a list of students who have withdrawn from school, instructing us to remove them from our database, it breaks my heart a little. We get those names every semester,

and then it happens on a grand scale at the end of every academic year. Here's your diploma. Say good bye to those databases we've coaxed you to use for four years. When we said "lifelong learning," we were just kidding. Good luck. You're on your own.

Scott Bennett has sketched out [a history](#) of libraries and their designs that speaks to what their dreams were at different points in our history. Early libraries were about readers, mostly solitary male readers in a monastic world where books were rare and precious. Libraries were conducive to contemplation for those who were privileged enough to participate. In the 19th century, libraries became a civic project, a monumental place where all were welcomed in an effort to improve the citizenry. There was a mixed message in the public library that welcomed all, but conditioned that message by inscribing over the door the names of people worth admiring. In addition to its iconic and liberatory "FREE TO ALL" invitation over the entrance of the Boston Public Library there is the carved statement, THE COMMONWEALTH REQUIRES THE EDUCATION OF THE PEOPLE AS THE SAFEGUARD OF ORDER AND LIBERTY. So on the one hand, we're about freedom, but on the other we're asserting that educated people will behave themselves. They won't riot or rock the boat - but presumably they will also be prepared to defend the republic against tyranny if necessary.

In the mid-20th century, about the time when we introduced Big Science to the world with the Manhattan Project, we also started a race to see who could have the biggest libraries. We measured our value on how many books we had on the shelves, and we expanded to take on more shelves. That, of course, proved to be both too expensive and impossible. Though people seemed shocked, shocked to learn that Harvard couldn't subscribe to every journal published, the rest of us spent the last four decades getting a lot of experience with journal cancellations. In the cancellation wars, big and global tends to win over small, quirky, non-corporate. And because we can't even afford that, we've taken to buying one disposable article at a time.

Currently, though Bennett points out that our spaces are turning to learning support, our collections are focused on providing globally-sourced digital information that we don't own to our local audiences. We primarily support information flowing in one direction, even as our communities send the knowledge they create out to that global system. We've taken steps to reverse that. Some librarians, such as [Eli Neiburger](#) in the public library context and [Rick Anderson](#) writing about the academic library, have told us that we should let the marketplace take care of commodity goods. We don't need no stinking bestsellers. Scholars can go online and buy the books and articles so much more conveniently than they can obtain them from a limited local library. The argument is that we can't compete with the vast and efficient global marketplace, so we shouldn't. We should instead focus on helping the world discover what our local communities can create.

As compelling as I find this notion, I think we're making a fundamental error. This local/global dichotomy only pertains if we're talking about uploading and downloading intellectual property. In reality so much of knowledge creation and creativity isn't about producing nuggets of intellectual property. It's about joining and contributing to communities of inquiry and creativity – communities that aren't defined by geographic boundaries, tax districts, or university campuses, communities made up of people who see themselves as participants rather than identifying as "consumers" or "producers." The people we serve affiliate with a diversity of disciplines and interest groups. Rather than think in terms of providing globally sourced stuff to the locals and serving locally created stuff to the world, we need to think in terms of supporting networked conversations .

We need to help people discover and connect to their chosen networks – and we need to think about how to create a free and fair infrastructure for these networks. The only way we will be able to do that is if we stop thinking of ourselves as providers of stuff to a narrowly-defined community and collectively help people in our communities connect to the networks that matter to them. As Christine Pawley has [argued](#), we need to rethink our assumptions about information consumerism and instead think about “individuals and groups of people actively shaping the world as knowledge producers in a way that renders the consumer-producer dichotomy irrelevant.” We librarians need to work collectively across our borders to put our infrastructure and our efforts where our values are.

You are the ones who have the skills to do this.

It’s not as if we aren’t already at work on this transition. Academic libraries have tried to gather and make available the work of their local community members through institutional repositories just as public libraries are beginning to provide support for local authors. This is all great, but the fact is, our community members have wider aspirations. Why publish through a local library when you can upload your stuff through Amazon like everyone else and reach a global market? Why deposit your articles in the institutional repository when your loyalties lie with your discipline? So much better to upload your papers to Academia.edu, especially given that librarians are so uptight about copyright. As much as local support is valuable, we have to stop thinking that our missions extend only to the border, because our faculty don’t recognize those borders and our students move on. We need to stop believing in the importance of information literacy while being okay with cutting our students off the minute they graduate. We need to collectively find ways to not just to negotiate better terms of service for our libraries, but to provide an alternative to the market-driven philosophies that are distorting and corrupting our information ecosystem.

Not long ago, Cory Doctorow [spoke](#) about “GLAM and the Free World,” arguing that we can’t simply work hard to adapt our local situations to this commercial way of imagining the logic of human affairs. “Our cultural institutions,” he said, “exist to tell us who we are, where we have been and where we are and where we’re going.” For that reason, he argues we have a special role in shaping what our technological future will be. “We are presently building the electronic nervous system of the modern world . . . We dwellers on the electronic frontier have it on our power to establish the norms, laws and practices that will echo through the ages to come.” This is a critical moment. If we let go of that power to establish norms, if we capitulate to a corporate mentality, if we don’t propose an alternative, the world will suffer. The world needs our grandiose values more than it needs our modest passive verbs of service and support.

Let’s compare two expressions about the purpose of libraries. The ALA has pulled together ideas from various ALA documents, including the Library Bill of Rights, into a [list of core values](#): access, privacy, democracy, diversity, lifelong learning, intellectual freedom, preservation, the public good, professionalism, service, and social responsibility. We don’t always live up to these values. Diversity is one that is particularly problematic when we consider who actually works in libraries, but this is a pretty broad yet fairly practical and uncontroversial statement of what we care about as a profession. Contrast that with a consumerist approach to what libraries are for. According to Rick Anderson, “Library collections exist for one purpose only: to connect users to the information they need.” To be fair, he wasn’t talking about everything libraries do, he was [comparing](#) the value of librarian-curated collections to patron-driven collection methods. But what he says here is a commonly held belief, one that certainly

faculty in the Ithaca surveys hold: the library's purpose is to get them the information they want, and the librarians' job is to serve that need. The rest is hyperbole. When push comes to shove, we frequently make concessions so that we can provide access and service at the expense of our other values.

This is a predictable outcome of a world view that became ascendant in the 1980s – that people's behavior is guided by economic forces, that individuals operate as rational, competitive, and self-interested beings, and that the best way for societies to thrive is to assume market forces are pulling the levers that guide human affairs and plan accordingly. Libraries have absorbed those lessons to a great degree. We market to our customers. We calculate return on investment. We're constantly challenged to explain our value in monetary terms. We can't do this in terms of library *values* because we can only represent our individual libraries within the competitive framework of our institutions. Knowledge and culture are not ours to share and preserve. It's digital intellectual property controlled by global enterprises. We are only local franchises, and our faculty are expected to be entrepreneurs who submit their work to these enterprises in hopes that they will be able to piece together a living in a competitive, precarious world. It's highly individualistic and competitive. It pits us against each other.

We need a new mindset – one that reimagines community in multiple dimensions, one that provides a vision for the future that matches our grandest values. Actually, we don't need it. The world does.

There are some wonderful things going on, partnerships in which librarians bring their skills to publishing and sharing knowledge and culture. A few examples I'm particularly fond of: [Open Folklore](#), a partnership between the American Folklore Society and the Indiana University Libraries, is premised on the belief that folklore belongs to everyone, not just scholars. Jason Baird Jackson, frustrated by a claim made by the executive secretary of the American Anthropological Association that it costs over \$5,000 per article to publish one of their journals, did a hasty back-of-the-envelope calculation that the open access *Museum Anthropology Review* cost roughly [42 cents](#) per article. He calls it a "modest demonstration that another world is possible." And it seems to be catching on. Just last month, [Cultural Anthropology](#), the flagship journal of a section of the AAA, has gone open access. It's not something the other sections can do easily, because the association is locked into a contract with Wiley Blackwell that runs through 2017. But there is movement in the right direction.

Another open access project that I find inspiring is the [WAC Clearinghouse](#), which publishes books and journals of interest to composition scholars who teach writing across the curriculum. This was started in 1991 on a shoestring and now has published over 50 books and seven journals and hosts a disciplinary database of research in the field. It relies on the labor and imagination of the WAC community and while they have come up with a succession plan for what will happen when its founder retires, they've never really bothered with a business plan. They just do it. Right now, they're working on a project to publish 25 new books in five years for under fifty grand – just to show what can be done. That's about ten percent of the cost of traditional book publishing, and these books will be available to all. One of their books has been downloaded a quarter million times. Compare that to a similar book published the traditional way that might sell 500 copies. In this case there's not much in the way of library involvement. It's just something a community of scholars wanted to do, and so they did.

I'm sure you all could come up with lots of other examples of ways that communities can reimagine how they share ideas. Some are incredibly ambitious and complex. Others are as small as something I did not long ago. I was frustrated that some of the people making decisions about my place

of work didn't seem to know much about what faculty do. So I published an [anthology](#) of faculty statements written for promotion and tenure using the [PressBooks](#) platform. These are wonderful explorations of what it means to teach and do research that deserved a wider audience, and luckily several faculty agreed to participate. It cost us nothing but a few hours of my time. When the Provost's office eventually noticed, they thought it was cool and wondered if we had extra copies. Though it was available in html, pdf, ePub, and mobi formats, but we hadn't printed any because we were showing what could be done with zero budget. But I told them to feel free to print all the copies they wanted – the faculty contributors had all agreed to a Creative Commons license.

This year we decided to annually set aside a percentage of our acquisitions budget and staff time to support open access projects. At this point, it's a tiny percentage of a small budget and small staff, but we thought it was important to try and build it into our thinking systematically. I hope, year after year, we'll be able to grow that percentage.

Some of those funds have gone to [a collaborative research project](#) with other liberal arts college libraries. Back in 2010 I sent an email to a group of liberal arts college library directors, all members of the Oberlin Group of 80 college libraries, suggesting a crazy idea: what if we jointly investigated the possibility of starting an open access press. It turned out Bryn Geffert of Amherst College was composing a similar message at almost exactly the same time. We had come at it from different directions, but with both of us believing that our libraries could contribute something imaginative to the open access movement that reflects our liberal arts perspective, our wish to bring knowledge to the world, and our conviction that even small schools like ours can make good things happen. We formed a task force to explore the idea, brought in Melinda Kenneway of TBI Communications as a consultant, and we're close to wrapping up the first stage. We decided after much debate to call this project the Lever Initiative, partly to refer to Archimedes' claim that he could move the world given a place to stand and a lever, partly because (unlike other options) it hadn't been claimed yet by another WordPress blog.

The goal is to explore "whether libraries collectively could launch a sustainable Open Access press to provide scholars editorial attention worthy of their best work in whatever form this might take – and offer it to the world." In our first phase, we held virtual workshops with library directors, conducted interviews with people who have interest in and knowledge of innovative scholarly publishing, we examined the landscape for open access book publishing, and we surveyed faculty at our liberal arts colleges and more broadly. The next step, should we decide to go forward, will be to explore what exactly we might do and how we would fund it. I'm honestly not sure which direction we'll go in. We may decide it would make more sense to put funding toward another project, something like Knowledge Unlatched. Library directors may decide they'd rather keep money in existing acquisitions lines. I really can't predict what the group will decide, but I can share some of what we've learned so far.

First, [library directors](#) weren't in agreement that there's really a problem that this project could address. Some wondered if there aren't already too many books being published, that we'd be shoring up an expensive but bankrupt system of exchanging obscure tomes that nobody reads for job security. Some thought books are not that interesting, that our efforts should focus on new formats and multimedia projects. Some felt libraries don't have any business getting into publishing except, perhaps, at a local level. Still others wondered why they should take scarce dollars that they use to support their students' research needs and put them into a project that might not benefit their students at all. From my perspective, the conversations we had were a fascinating microcosm of the profession's

ambivalence about how we can best support the creation of new knowledge – and whether that’s even something librarians should do.

The publishing experts we talked to were also ambivalent. Those with the most experience in existing scholarly presses wished us well, but warned us that it would be very difficult and extremely costly and probably not something we should try at home. Those with weaker ties to existing publishers were more encouraging. In one case, early in this project, one informant cautioned us to avoid aligning ourselves with an existing publisher because their assumptions might close off some creative avenues for exploration.

We also found, [surveying the landscape](#), that there are a lot of projects like this at the starting gate. In 2010, there weren’t so many models out there, and little urgency about setting books free. Since then we’ve been ungluing, unlatching, and launching lots of initiatives, though the United States is far behind other countries in this regard. One open access publisher that was founded since we began this project is the Amherst College Press. Bryn Geffert got the Amherst faculty and administration so fired up, they decided to get started right away. They’ve already hired a director for their new press.

The [two faculty surveys we conducted](#) gave us some fascinating results. The first was distributed to faculty at several Oberlin Group colleges and over 600 faculty participated. But since liberal arts colleges represent such a small subset of higher education we wanted to poll a broader set of subjects. The survey was distributed to a second group of faculty, mostly working at 4-year through PhD-granting institutions, with a few community college faculty in the mix. Because this second survey was a convenience sample reached by contacts within the task force’s networks, they were likely more interested in open access publishing than faculty in general, so those results need to be taken with a grain of salt. The findings were fairly consistent between groups, though our second sample was more dissatisfied with the status quo and more interested in open access options.

Faculty were relatively satisfied (or at least not as dissatisfied) with the quality of traditional scholarly book publishing in terms of selection, peer review, editing, and production as they were with the speed of getting a book to market, marketing, distribution, and price. They feel fairly well served by their libraries when it comes to getting books they want to use, with 40 percent very satisfied, another 30 percent somewhat satisfied, and less than ten percent dissatisfied – not bad, considering these are four-year institutions. Interlibrary loan was frequently mentioned in open comments as key to that satisfaction. Faculty in the second survey were somewhat less satisfied with their libraries. But generally, faculty don’t seem to express any sense of crisis in terms of gaining access to high quality books. But they were concerned that good books weren’t reaching readers because of problems with sluggish timelines, ineffective distribution, and high prices

Now the numbers get interesting. A majority of Oberlin Group faculty responding to the survey said they might consider publishing with an open access press. Over half of arts and humanities faculty said they would definitely consider it. Only nine percent said they wouldn’t. That surprised me. There was even greater interest expressed by our non-Oberlin Group respondents but remember to take those numbers with a grain of salt as they are probably not representative. Regardless, what this shows is a greater interest in publishing open access books than I would have predicted.

What respondents wanted most from a new press had little to do with technology, but rather with traditional publishing functions. They wanted editors who were more responsive and helpful. They wanted help reaching an audience. The quality of peer review was vitally important to them, and if they

were going to choose an open access publisher, they wanted to see people and institutions involved with it who they recognized as having strong reputations. Not so important to the majority were multimedia capabilities, alternative metrics, the ability to update texts or interact with readers, though some were very enthusiastic about those things. As you might imagine, criteria for tenure and promotion was invoked frequently as a factor. As one respondent put it, "It's not publish or perish, except that it is totally that."

The open comments from respondents reflect the range of attitudes you might expect. I'll start with the bad news. One respondent wrote, "I'm not convinced that scholarship isn't already open and accessible." This goes along with the general sense among many scholars that their libraries are good at providing them with books. It's hard to see the problem if you're able to get everything you need. A particularly grumpy respondent wrote "I would not support any new venture because it would mean cutting back on the purchase of books from academic presses. I would oppose it at my college, and work with other scholars at other liberal arts schools to encourage them to oppose such a venture as well." It could be the same person who commented on another question, "The faculty see through this ploy. Bring back the books [apparently referring to books at his or her institution being sent to a remote storage facility]. Do not use vanity presses, disguised as innovative online 'platforms,' to get rid of the organized content that provides the historical depth necessary for research in our libraries." That guy was an outlier, luckily.

A small handful of similarly disgruntled commenters were horrified by the idea we raised of publishing short form books. "This cheapens the book the way all electronic efforts to get into publishing cheapen and weaken the book." Another wrote, "You need at least 200 pages to analyze an important topic in detail. I want my students for be able to follow complex arguments. Why cater to shorter attention spans among students?" But far more respondents warmed to the idea, with 70 percent expressing interest. Respondents said too many books are padded and that some good ideas can be conveyed more effectively in short form – and several commented that short form open access books would be especially helpful for teaching.

Overall, the comments were divided between caution (what would tenure committees think? Would the quality be high enough?) and quite a bit of enthusiasm, expressed in comments like these:

- "Anything open access immediately gets my attention -- I want my work to be read, not to just be a line on my vita."
- "When a viable open-access book publisher appears, I'll gladly send all of my manuscripts there."
- "Cost is the biggest issue. My book with an academic press costs ~\$75, which means that no normal person will ever buy it."
- "I think Open Access is one of the most important issues of our moment in time. The changes in technology and publishers' responses (I'm talking about you, Elsevier) have created national and international haves and have nots. Information should be available to people who need it, not just to people who can pay for it . . . This is an unethical model and cannot be sustained."
- "I hope it happens."
- "Is it not obvious that we need this?"

- “Stop talking about it and do it.”
- “Let’s get started.”

I can’t predict at this point where we will go with this information, but whatever happens, it has been interesting to see such a groundswell of innovation in open access book publishing in the past two years and to get some insights into faculty perceptions, which were frankly far more positive and informed than I anticipated. What we found is that faculty want traditional markers of quality to be respected and preserved, but many of them want to do it in an open access environment.

Why would a librarian like me at a school with a tiny acquisitions budget want to spend some of it on a risky project like this? Because I believe in the transformative value of knowledge and because I believe that our students are not merely information consumers and degree seekers. They are people who are finding their place in the great conversations that give this world meaning. We need to help them develop their voice and a sense that what they think and what they can do makes a difference. Developing this voice and sense of agency transcends the technologies we use to create and share.

As I said earlier, it’s not about technology, it’s about community – networks of community much larger than our local ones. Way back in 1990, I interviewed students who faculty had identified as successful researchers, asking them to talk about their research processes. I repeated the project, using the same script, in 2002. The world of libraries seemed totally transformed over that dozen years, and I thought this would affect their research processes – but they hadn’t really changed. The things they wrestled with and their greatest insights didn’t have anything to do with how they accessed information. The most thoughtful students didn’t think of their sources as intellectual property to be gathered and synthesized. They thought of it as connecting with people with ideas who were talking to each other, forming communities around shared interests and ways of knowing. They thought of themselves as people who had worthwhile ideas, too, who could contribute something new to the conversation. It didn’t matter whether they were using print indexes or databases or the Web or index cards or computers – they thought of knowledge as a great interconnected web of possibility, not one made of sources, of things, but of people like them sharing ideas.

Likewise, we librarians need to remember what matters. I want to play a role in changing the assumptions we make about how ideas come into being and how they should be shared. We should act on our values before it’s too late to create an alternative framework for the future. This isn’t about technology. It isn’t about business models. It isn’t about managing stuff and guarding borders. It’s about people in communities sharing what they know. It’s helping students join conversations and begin to feel confident taking those conversations in a new direction. It’s about using our resources and skills and convictions to help restore the intellectual and cultural commons, which don’t end at the boundaries of our funding units. They are without borders.