

Looking Deeper and Reaching Further With Threshold Concepts

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Abstract: The new Framework for Information Literacy encourages librarians to identify and help learners across thresholds of understanding that are difficult, but can transform our understanding of the world and our place in it. It challenges us to think more deeply about what being information literate truly requires: not just the ability to find, select, and use information for a task, but to understand how each of us can interact with and contribute to complex systems of knowledge production. Though this sounds like a tall, order, focusing on these “aha!” moments offers librarians an opportunity to work together to explore what we feel matters the most as we provide an infrastructure for learning and discovery. It also invites us to engage in conversation with others who care about this kind of transformative discovery. It's an opportunity to delve into what matters to us, to see how it aligns with community-wide goals, and to make the library a place where our communities can cross thresholds together.

Good morning! Thanks so much for inviting me home to Kentucky to be with you today. I spent my high school and undergraduate years here, so this state has deeply influenced who I am and what I care about. Planning this trip brought many memories of hanging out in the old Margaret King library at UK – a maze of a building that had different levels depending on what side of the elevator you got off on. Though I still had a lot to learn about libraries when I graduated, I felt accomplished simply knowing my way around. As beautiful as the newer library is, I fear it doesn't offer nearly so many opportunities to get hopelessly lost.

I hope what I have to say this morning will be of interest to both academic and special librarians in the house. While I'll be talking about the new [Framework for Information Literacy](#), I think the implications can go well beyond instruction and challenge us to rethink how we present the very idea of libraries to our communities – in other words, how we can look in and reach out to know and grow our impact, the theme of this conference.

I've been working at a small liberal arts college since the late 1980s. Though I've been in one place all those years, the library itself has changed enormously. We went from a small print-based collection to a one that is largely electronic and far-reaching, from a world without email or Google or social media to the one we have today. A constant that I'm still wrestling with, though, has been trying to figure out how to give our students an authentic experience of research and discovery, because to me the most profound kinds of learning involves wrestling with questions of your own devising that don't have easy answers and, in the process, learning how to see oneself as a person who is capable of making meaning, a person who participates with others in making sense of the world, a person who might play a role in changing the world for the better.

Though the idea of threshold concepts is fairly new to me – I [heard the phrase for the first time](#) at LOEX in 2013 – it seemed immediately convincing because over the years I’ve noticed a kind of turning point in students. You see them go from being a person who can, at best, follow rules and assemble a package of information using the right ingredients to suddenly becoming people with a distinctive voice and something to say. They move from a position in which all authority rests in other people through a process that is essentially a black box – who knows how that stuff is made? Where does it come from? Who cares? I just need sources! – to being people who understand how authority is negotiated in a social process, who can critique powerful positions, and who become confident about assuming some authority of their own . In that process, at that pivotal moment in their development, their relationship to the world changes. They now see it as a place where they can participate in constructing understanding with others, a place where they belong and their voice and identity matters. It’s a profound change.

This isn’t just an initiation into proper academic discourse. It isn’t a civilizing mission that transforms an ignorant student into a member of a fill-in-the-blank discipline, though in my experience, it’s usually it’s in the major where this new self-understanding arises because that’s where they spend enough time in a knowledge community to see its inner workings. Rather, it’s coming to understand that ideas are created by people like them, that they themselves have agency and can act on the world. Before they get there, they may have gone through a period of mimicry and adaptation, as a student delving into the ways of a particular field learns unfamiliar words and phrases, beginning to apply theoretical lenses to the world around them, and adopting a certain set of methods and values for their coursework. But this transformation is more than becoming a good mimic and adopting the ways of an already-established community. I sense something deeper is going on when a student gets excited telling me about a novel idea they’ve had, about a project they’re doing, about something they are making and are eager to share with the world. They’ve come into themselves and can connect who they are with what they know.

How do they get to that point? What are the learning experiences that lead to that moment of self-awareness and self-confidence? How many of our students never get there? I’ve been pondering these questions for as long as I’ve been a librarian. Unfortunately, I don’t have any answers to share with you – but I think the new Framework for Information Literacy offers some interesting opportunities. What I want to do as an academic librarian is to work with other faculty on campus to make this kind of transformative learning experience something every one of our students has. And that’s why I think the language of thresholds, the idea of aiming for the most difficult, troublesome ideas, is promising – and not just for designing more effective instruction programs, but for transforming the ways our community thinks about libraries.

For those who haven’t been wrapped up in debates about the new Framework, let me give you a quick rundown, grounded in my personal experience. When I first began to work with students, we called this thing we do “bibliographic instruction.” It was an effort to make the library a site of learning and to help students understand the mysteries of library systems within the context of their courses and

assignments. This was typically through course-related instruction, more commonly known as the “one-shot” – a practice that has been widely criticized for being ineffective and insufficient for years, yet which remains the most common way in which librarians promote information literacy on campus.

In 2000 the [Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education](#) were adopted, and the discourse shifted from understanding libraries and how they work to understanding information more broadly. I was pretty happy about the Standards because they seemed to expand the conversation beyond libraries and into the classroom. They made it clear that the kind of learning we were talking about had to involve the faculty at large, because the process the Standards described was much more complex and comprehensive than developing a search strategy for information retrieval.

Soon after they were released, however, I introduced the Standards to faculty members from across the curriculum at the culmination of a weeklong summer workshop. They weren't as impressed. They felt they were too prescriptive, too focused on skills, presented too much of a Tayloristic time-and-motion approach to inquiry. They worried that students who did well on the skills couldn't necessarily put them together into a coherent process. Above all, they were dismayed that creativity and originality weren't to be found in the Standards. So we quietly put them away while still doing what we could to demystify the library so that students could do the harder work of formulating questions and constructing arguments based on evidence.

ACRL standards are reviewed every five years or so, and the first reviewers of the Standards for Information Literacy saw no reason to make changes. After ten years, however, a review committee thought a task force should be assembled to recommend changes. What the group came up with went through three public drafts and sparked a lot of conversations because it's a big change.

Members of the task force reviewed various learning theories and ultimately settled on two as guiding theoretical stances for their work. First, “metaliteracy” – expanding the idea of information literacy from finding and using information to creating it and being reflective about the process. To quote a definition from the document,

Metaliteracy expands the scope of traditional information skills (determine, access, locate, understand, produce, and use information) to include the collaborative production and sharing of information in participatory digital environments (collaborate, produce, and share). This approach requires an ongoing adaptation to emerging technologies and an understanding of the critical thinking and reflection required to engage in these spaces as producers, collaborators, and distributors.

So there's both attention to changing technologies and to the changing role of the student as a participant in creating knowledge, often working in collaboration with others. Though the word “metaliteracy” hasn't been widely embraced and it faded away as the drafts progressed, this idea that we should switch our focus from consuming information to creating it and that knowledge is a collaborative project infuses the Framework.

The other, more thoroughly embraced theoretical influence was that of threshold concepts . Two researchers in the UK, Jan Meyer and Ray Land, wanted to come up with a new way to approach undergraduate teaching that would deemphasize knowledge acquisition in favor of meaningful learning that sticks. They thought it would make sense to focus on the core concepts that are crucial for understanding a particular discipline and which are not easily grasped. They can't be memorized or tested. They have to be experienced and applied to be fully understood. If students successfully master these concepts, it changes the way they see the world. They can't go back to an earlier way of thinking about things, so these concepts become a kind of threshold, a doorway that, once passed through, leads to deeper understanding.

The act of passing through that doorway, across that threshold, can be uncomfortable because it's not easy and it sometimes challenges a habitual way of thinking. It's troublesome. Meyer and Land refer to the state students are in when struggling to grasp a concept a "liminal state." It's the place where we are between understandings. It's the borderland we're passing through as we move from a familiar place to an unknown place. It's where we are unsettled, where we might turn back because it's just too uncomfortable—or where we might feel exhilarated by the challenge, but not yet totally sure of what it all means. Working through a liminal state is good preparation for the ambiguous and uncertain places we will encounter in the future – and this actually seems a good fit for libraries. One of my colleagues once called the library "the palace of ambiguity." It's a place where you don't find the answer, you find many answers. It's a place where we have to negotiate what we believe because we're faced with a multitude of alternatives – kind of like the real world.

Embracing learners' liminal state means helping them deal with ambiguity and uncertainty. As Land put it, "Troublesomeness is less a barrier than an opportunity for learning." A [recent report](#) from Project Information Literacy found that, while recent college graduates feel their schooling has prepared them find and evaluate information and to read sources critically, they don't feel they've had enough practice formulating their own questions. Welcome to the real, the messy, the complicated world. As tempting as it may be to simplify the research process for students who are muddling through a liminal state, we're doing them no favors. The new Framework urges us to embrace the complexity of the information landscape in ways that will matter beyond college.

Since Myer and Land came up with the idea of threshold concepts, researchers in [multiple fields](#) of study have tried to identify which concepts are fundamental to understanding their disciplines. Three librarians, Lori Townsend, Korey Brunetti, and Amy Hofer, thought the idea of threshold concepts would apply well to information literacy. They began a multi-year study to find out what concepts were most significant for students based on input from experienced librarians and information scientists. Though the study is ongoing, the concepts they arrived at were folded into the new Framework and elaborated by the task force members using feedback from their public drafts. These are the big ideas that they felt are crucial for becoming information literate.

- Authority Is Constructed and Contextual: the relative authority of an information source depends on the context within which it is created and used.
- Information Creation as a Process: the way information is created reflects its purpose. The form it takes will also be influenced by the context within which it was created.
- Information Has Value: legal and economic interests influence how information is produced and shared.
- Research as Inquiry: it depends on an iterative process of asking increasingly complex questions.
- Scholarship as Conversation: scholars create information within the context of an ongoing conversation, sharing and debating new developments.
- Searching as Strategic Exploration: the nonlinear process of searching for information requires flexibility as new understanding develops.

At my library, we were taken with the [original research](#) done by Townsend, Brunetti, and Hofer, which we'd read together in a journal club meeting, but we wondered whether it was wise to ask library and information science professionals what those thresholds are. Since most of what our students learn in depth is guided by faculty in the disciplines, we thought their perspective was essential. We got [a small grant](#) from a local foundation to pull together ten faculty from across the disciplines and ask them what they thought the most significant thresholds are for students learning to handle information in their fields. Though there were disciplinary differences in the language they used and the examples they provided, what they said mapped pretty well to what the Framework task force came up with. (Interestingly, the first draft of the Framework was published just as we were talking with faculty, so these efforts to name thresholds were happening in parallel.)

The two big differences between the Framework's thresholds and those our faculty came up with were that faculty were not at all receptive to the idea that "information has value" is an important thing for students to learn. They didn't want students to think of information as a commodity, and they didn't like the idea that cost is in any way related to quality. Also, I suspect, because they are less sensitized than librarians are to the way the economics of big publishing has distorted access to knowledge – it's simply not a barrier or a problem that they encounter because we make getting information pretty easy. Had we asked scholars unaffiliated with an academic library, value might have been seen as a significant concept. It has occurred to me that there might be a learning opportunity for our faculty, here. Second, they did not put any emphasis on searching as a significant and separate concept. My sense is that they see search as an integral part of asking questions and constructing meaning with strong creative and affective components to this process. They said things like "Research is a recursive process. What you learn will lead you to ask new questions, some of which you may not be able to answer conclusively" and "Vulnerability is required. It takes courage to go 'where the buses don't run' and take risks." For them, "searching as strategic exploration" is completely inseparable from "research as inquiry."

I think this is true of our student as well. When we've studied our students and how they approach research, and we've been doing this since 1990, they think searching for information is the easy part. Formulating a good question, making sense of what they find, and putting it together with their own

original ideas is far more challenging. I think treating search separately from inquiry is a holdover, a lingering over-emphasis on procedural knowledge that doesn't entirely rise to the level of a threshold. In my own teaching, I try to deemphasize search as an activity in favor of developing a more sophisticated sense of identity as a searcher, as a creator, as a participant in a conversation.

One of the differences between the Framework and the Standards is that these concepts are big ideas, not steps to be mastered in a particular sequence. If you contrast the outline of the Standards and the six frames, you can see we're going from a very linear process model that reflects a certain idea of how students approach assignments, to a set of overlapping concepts that aren't learned in any particular order and can only be learned over time. Rather than a sequential list of tasks and skills related to finding and using information, these concepts invite students to think more deeply about where information comes from, how information is generated within social and economic systems that shape it, and how students can create it themselves. Figuring out exactly how students will come to understand these concepts – that's a challenge. But it seems as if we're finally turning toward what Christine Pawley recommended years ago when she urged us to help students see themselves as "individuals and groups of people actively shaping the world as knowledge producers in a way that renders the consumer-producer dichotomy irrelevant."

Another way to see how much more the Framework expects of students is to compare definitions. The Standards used a definition of information literacy drawn from a 1989 document, so one that was crafted in the early days of the shift from print to digital:

Information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information.

There's an emphasis here on individuals engaged in performing tasks using information, which is simply out there, discrete bits of stuff to be found and used. The new definition is both wordier and more wide-ranging.

Information literacy is the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning.

Here the emphasis is on reflectively understanding how individuals and groups work within social and cultural systems, interacting with and creating information that isn't just inert stuff out there, but is something created and shared within human social and economic systems. That's far more challenging, but also far more rewarding. It's empowering to see beyond sources-as-things, to grasp the people behind those sources and how they interact. It's empowering to see oneself as acting on those systems rather than simply using them.

On a practical level, shifting our instruction from "here's how to approach that task" to this sophisticated, critical, and creative perspective on information and how it works in society won't be

easy. The Standards were relatively simple to implement. Learning how to identify an information need (generally by reading an assignment carefully and figuring out what the professor wants), and then find and use sources seemed relatively doable within our usual constraints. We could work with first semester students on the basics and hope they could use those basics to tackle more advanced coursework – and even, fingers crossed, carry some of that experience on to support lifelong learning. But in my experience, in that first year, students aren't ready to think deeply about the big picture. They don't have the knowledge base or the experience to think about the systems that influence how knowledge is produced and shared, or about how they can become authorities themselves. They're just trying to cope. It may well be that our past emphasis on introducing students to college-level research, while arguably important, won't get us where we want to go. We'll have to work with faculty at making sure these experiences happen within the context of their majors.

The Framework is challenging, but there are ways we can rethink our teaching to help students gain a more sophisticated overview of information systems and their role in them through some moves that are, really, nothing new – these are things we've been advocating for years.

- When teaching a class, focus on a few critical, transferrable concepts rather than on how to use particular tools. Students won't remember the details of how to limit a search or use Boolean operators within a particular platform, and even if they did, there's a good chance that the interface will change tomorrow. Think about what learning will stick, and what ideas are most essential both for now but also for the future. Students can figure out the details of search when the need arises. It's the big ideas that matter.
- Collaborate with faculty, because it's in their classrooms and through their assignments that students will learn this stuff. Maybe we should rethink our priorities and spend more time talking with faculty and less talking to students. There's a good chance that an impact on one faculty member will have more reach over time than meeting with thirty of her students for an hour will. We need to think hard about what structures and practices will best accomplish the kind of learning we value, and so much of what is effective depends on relationships.
- Share with faculty our insights into students and their experiences. There's a big disconnect between how experts do research and how novices do it. One simple way I've made that point in a workshop situation is to have faculty write down a topic that a student might write about in one of their classes, then have them trade those topics with a faculty member of another department and tell them they have ten minutes to find five good scholarly articles. Though it seems sort of obvious, this brings home how challenging it is to make these kinds of choices about difficult subject matter. Where do I look? How do I know who is worth paying attention to and who's a crank? Is this a good journal or not? What I think faculty really mean when they tell students to use scholarly articles from peer-reviewed journals is that research matters, that scholars interpret the world in useful and meaningful ways, that when you're trying to figure something out, it's worth asking an expert. Unfortunately, that's not what students learn. They learn what a scholarly article looks like so that they feel safe grabbing a quote from it. It's surface knowledge, and doesn't help them gain respect for evidence-based reasoning. In many

ways as librarians, as generalists, we can help faculty in the disciplines recognize how much tacit knowledge they bring to bear when deciding on what sources are worth paying attention to and articulate more clearly what makes a source good or bad. We can also, in the process, help faculty think beyond introducing students to their discipline's assumptions about what matters and focus on what matters for students who won't go on to become professional historians or biologists or whatever the subject is. Librarians are in a very good position to remind faculty that the world is bigger than their discipline, and that the values of scholarship, of inquiry, are much bigger than the content and procedural knowledge of their corner of the intellectual world. This is a place where assessment of student learning can really be of value beyond the library. The things we learn as we talk to students, observe them as they tackle assignments, or look at their finished work can be of great interest to faculty, as can research in our field, such as the excellent reports from Project Information Literacy.

- As we're trying to get students to think about information within social systems rather than information as stuff, we need to critically examine the learning environment as a system. Where are students likely to be in a position to learn, to have a significant experience developing questions and crafting their own theories? Who's in charge of those moments? At what scale do we need to work to make this kind of learning available widely, not just for the chosen few? What structures might help us support the learning that we think matters? Are there things we do that actually get in the way? How can we find allies among the faculty? How can we work with entire departments and programs to identify the best places for this learning and develop strong support within those places? This is politically tricky and time-consuming and often frustrating work. But I firmly believe that faculty feel this kind of learning is important, even essential. There's a good chance they don't call it information literacy, but learning how to find things out, how to make up your mind using good evidence, how to discover your own authority to create knowledge is fundamental to an undergraduate education. The trick is thinking broadly about where this belongs in the curriculum and how we can make it a learning experience all students can enjoy.
- This kind of learning isn't just for college and isn't just about academic libraries. How can we help our community think broadly about developments in information policy, politics, economics, and new developments beyond scholarly communication? Are there appropriate places for us to champion intellectual freedom, privacy, equal access to information, and other core library values? Can we be advocates for a more just information environment and greater awareness of challenges to these values?

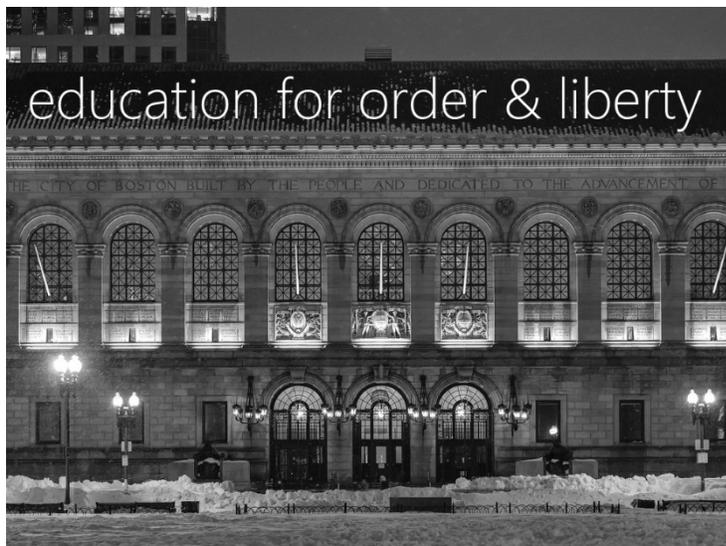
As important as our role is in providing students with opportunities to learn, the implications of these frames go beyond our role in instruction. Admittedly, I'm at a residential liberal arts college, not at a research institution, so I tend to see everything we do in the library as support for student learning. But for all kinds of libraries, there are some intriguing ways to think about how the way the Framework describes our information ecosystem and how we might reconceptualize our approach to collection development, preservation of the scholarly record, support for research and creative endeavors, and our very identity as librarians.

Let me back up for a moment to describe one significant culture shift in my library in recent decades that changed in a pretty fundamental way how the very idea of a library was defined. As I said, when I started we had a fairly limited local collection of books, journals, government documents, AV materials, plus a catalog, indexes, abstracts, and the many volumes of the National Union Catalog to help people find out what was out there. If students discovered something listed in a citation that we didn't have, they could fill out interlibrary loan forms and wait a week or ten days for those items to arrive. Faculty knew we weren't a research library. For many of them teaching was where they put their efforts, though we did support their research with interlibrary loan and a few DIALOG searches allocated to each faculty member annually. I remember anxiously trying to complete a search, knowing we were charged by the minute and by the citation downloaded, my hands shaking and my heart pounding. What a different world it was.

We began to get some article content through our shared cataloging platform, and then we installed a standalone computer for searching Infotrac and eventually our indexes and abstracts were replaced by databases and our journal collection went mostly online, primarily in bundles that can change without warning and that offer far more but are full of publications we don't need. We went from having a collection to acting as a local franchise for large publishers, renting access on an annual basis. As prices for that content have risen, we've taken to canceling subscriptions and buying access to articles on demand – something that's cost-effective, but in the long term is far from the idea of a library. From rental for the community, we've gone to paying for content for individuals, content they can't share with anyone else. That's spending that leaves us with no community assets.

You can see that faculty began to see libraries as a kind of purchasing office by looking at the [findings of faculty surveys](#) conducted by Ithaka S&R between 2003 and 2015. In all of the studies, the most important function of the library from their perspective has been “to pay for the stuff I need.” It's a very individualistic sense of what libraries are for. Helping with teaching or student learning is far less important, as is discovery and preservation. And while we think student learning is absolutely fundamental to our purpose, we've made it easy for users to think of libraries as the office that pays for stuff identified elsewhere. What's also intriguing is that, while paying for stuff remains the most important function of the library, it was less important in 2015 than it was in 2009 (see figure 45). Faculty are finding workarounds.

In the process, attitudes changed. The library became primarily a provider of stuff rather than a locally-focused collection connected through shared cataloging and interlibrary loan to other collections, part of a network of social institutions devoted to curating, preserving, and sharing knowledge. Google and Amazon came along and changed people's expectations, not just of convenience and speed but of having available almost limitless consumer choice. At the same time, faculty began to feel pressure to be more productive as researchers – not because our administration demanded it but because it's how academics see themselves valued by their disciplinary peers. Teaching remains the primary focus on our campus, but the identity faculty members have as academics is firmly tied to how much they publish in prestigious venues. We've seen enormous inflation in what it takes to claim you are a scholar, and of



course the privilege of having a steady job with a living wage in academia is growing scarcer, raising anxiety among those who want to call themselves scholars.

There is nothing inevitable about this. Libraries in the past reflected enlightenment values, with libraries as civic monuments or temples of knowledge. In the words chiseled on the Boston Public Library, a great civic monument, the library was “Free to All” but was also a guardian of social order.

Another inscription reads “The Commonwealth Requires the Education of the People as the Safeguard of Order and Liberty.” It was in society’s interest to have common access to canonical knowledge.

That common civic purpose is no longer the library’s identity. Libraries today encode in their operations a certain set of economic beliefs about what motivates human behavior that has grown more pronounced since the 1980s: that we are all fundamentally self-interested actors whose behavior is most efficiently guided by an unregulated free market system through which goods and services are improved through competition. In this framework, commons are inevitably tragic because people are inherently greedy. The library’s job is to provide access to as much information as it can afford to rent so that students can recoup their return on investment and be prepared for the workforce. Oh, and we must enable maximum faculty productivity. We provide access to information for our customers so that they can succeed – and so that we can compete with Google and avoid irrelevance. How often have we embraced solutions that make sense locally that intentionally disable our ability to share with other libraries? We do it because we think we have no choice but to support near-unlimited choice for our community members, while losing the capacity to develop a collection that reflects local needs that we can share with other communities. We have so thoroughly absorbed the market-driven philosophy of human



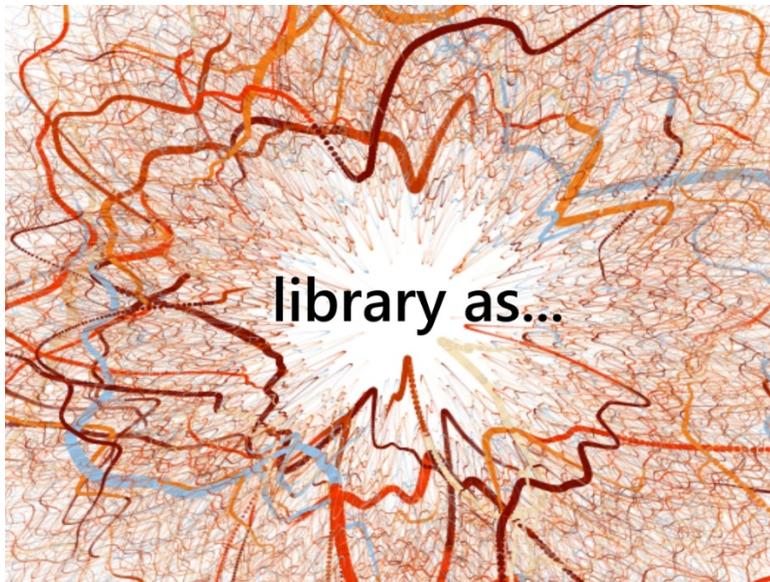
behavior that we forget that this is not the only way to be. These underlying assumptions about market

logic dictating everything have profoundly influenced our thinking about what libraries are for and how they are used.

But this is changing. The second major shift that I sense is underway is one as profound as that shift from paper to pixel, from owning to renting, from thinking about civic society to satisfying individual needs. This new shift reflects the new definition of information literacy: that information is generated and shared within social systems that are subject to critique and change, that knowledge is a collective project that involves us all. That we have the authority within ourselves to be agents of change, not helpless in the face of change that is forced upon us. Libraries are beginning to reallocate resources to support publishing, data curation, digital projects, open educational resources, and support for innovative teaching and learning. We're pushing unique local collections out rather than relying entirely on bringing external resources in. And we're helping reinvent scholarly publishing.

Open access is finally taking off in a big way, driven largely by the wishes of research funders to make the greatest impact with their dollars or pounds sterling and also by faculty who are becoming increasingly frustrated with barriers they encounter, who don't see why their work shouldn't be available to all, who are no longer content to surrender all of their rights to corporate publishers. We need to put our values forward and seize the opportunity to invest in openness. If we fail to do so, the publishers who have made balancing our budgets so difficult will make open access a new revenue stream. Just the other day, the Wellcome Trust, a major British funder of biomedical research, [examined](#) how the funds they provide to scientists to make their grant-funded work open access are used. They spent a bit over \$7 million to cover the costs of publishing just under 3,000 articles. Roughly a million of those dollars were spent on author fees to Elsevier and Wiley journals which carry a higher price than other open access options in which final version of those articles were not available online according to the terms of the grant. Only about a quarter of the articles funded by Wellcome grants were published in fully OA journals. The rest were hybrid journals, meaning libraries continued to pay for subscriptions while authors and their funders paid to free one article at a time. What a racket! But this is a call to action. If we don't take an active interest in transforming the system, the five commercial publishers that control 50 percent of all science journal publishing and 70 percent of social sciences publishing will find a way to maintain their extremely high profit margins – and we won't be much better off.

We can do better by calling on our core values, working collaboratively, and being strategic with our dollars and our labor. It's not enough to treat open access as a project to support only if we've done our "real work," if we've already paid for our subscriptions and have caught up on the job of fiddling with the locks on our walled gardens to make sure they are secure. MIT libraries moved recently to treat all of their collection development – traditional and open access – [as one scholarly communications project](#). In too many libraries, "scholarly communications" is a small, understaffed office that's trying to chip away at practices that undermine access to information, even though those practices are exactly where the bulk of their collection dollars go. MIT has decided – what a concept! – that subscriptions, databases, books, and support for open access are all part of scholarly communications, and they will make all of their decisions holistically, thinking through the ways their resources can make the widest impact, from journal subscriptions to the books published by MIT Press, which reports to the director of



libraries, to their support of open access options. They will make all of these decisions with library values in mind. I see all of this as a reflection of the shift from consumer to producer, from seeing publishing as a mysterious business over which we have no influence to being our business, from seeing the library as a shopping platform to seeing our communities connected to the ongoing conversations about ideas that are the heart of making new knowledge, a conversation that we can do much to support.

We librarians are in a liminal state ourselves, these days, trying to figure out where libraries fit in a more open, collective, networked, creative world where we aren't defined by individualism, competition, and artificial scarcity. By discussing these big ideas with others in our communities, by collaborating with other libraries and with scholarly communities embarking on opening research to the world, by making these processes visible to our students, we can step into a more vital professional role bringing forward our most valuable values while providing common ground for creativity and invention. We'll be able to reflect on our values and how they are reflected in our everyday practices and we'll be able to demonstrate our value by living up to our values. I'm looking forward to the thresholds we'll be crossing together.

Image credits

[Boston Public Library](#) – Bill Damon

[Shopping carts](#) – Kevin Lau

[National DNA Database visualization](#) – Jer Thorp