

*From Facebook to Twitter and Into the Cloud:  
Is Library and Information Science Still Relevant in  
a Googleized World?*



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# Overview



- 1. What Do I Mean by a “Googleized” World?**
- 2. Some Possible Answers to the LIS Relevance Question**
- 3. LIS as an Academic Discipline and Educational Endeavour**
- 4. LIS as a Field of Professional Practice**
- 5. Conclusions**

# Definition #1: A Googleized World is



**A world in which Google has become a dominant force in information storage, access, retrieval and delivery, and is now extending into other domains beyond the original Google search engine:**

Google Earth

Google Maps

Google Docs and Spreadsheets

Blogger

dMarc – Radio advertising

You-Tube

Adscape Media (in-game advertising)

Zynamics (info security)

Google Video

Trendanalyzer (statistical software)

LastSoftware (3D modelling)

Measure Map (weblog software)

Zagat (restaurant reviews)

Rightsflow (Music rights mgmt)

Nijinsky (travel platform)

Apture (instantaneous search)

Katango (social circles)

Punchd (loyalty program)

Clever Sense (mobile app)

Cloud computing

# Definition #2: A Googleized World is



**A world in which Google is the first choice for information searching, will (ideally) provide you with everything you need and promulgates the sense everyone is an information search expert.**

**What's so hard about finding good information?**

Study of college students (Gross and Latham 2011)

“There was little sense among (the students) that knowledge of skills in finding, evaluating and using information existed that they might not know about, or that their information seeking process might be improved. One respondent asked outright, “What is there to know? I honestly don't know how much great information literacy needs to be even on a higher research level... once you learn the basic level, there isn't a ton of room for improvement” p.

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# Answers to the “Is LIS Still Relevant?” Question



## ***The Cynical Response***

- 1. Who Cares?***
- 2. It Doesn't Matter***

## ***The Pessimistic Response***

- 3. No***

## ***The Optimistic Response***

- 4. Yes*** (with caveats)

# **1. LIS as a Discipline and Educational Endeavour**



**1a. Issues of Inter- and/or Multidisciplinarity**

**1b. Theory-Practice Divide**

**1c. LIS as an Educational Endeavour**

# 1a. Inter- and Multidisciplinarity



Weech and Pluzhenskaia 2005

**Interdisciplinarity** – Two or more disciplines that develop a shared research or subject content interest and integrate, to some degree, the methodological and conceptual view of the other disciplines into their shared efforts. *Integrative*

**Multidisciplinarity** – Two or more disciplines sharing research and subject content but not incorporating into any one of the disciplines the methodological or conceptual assumptions of the other disciplines.

i.e. disciplines working together without integrating their scholarly or professional assumptions or epistemologies.

*Additive, not Integrative*

# 1a. Inter- and Multidisciplinary



**Faculty in LIS programs** – about 43% have PhDs in areas other than LIS (ALISE 2010)

**Examine the scholarly literature** – through various types of citation studies

- Only certain fields are most likely to cite LIS research: Computer Science, Business, Medicine, Engineering and Psychology (Odell and Gabbard 2008)
- Information science researchers cite LIS literature the most and mainly co-author with other LIS scholars (Huang and Chang 2011)
- Only 34% of articles in leading LIS journals discuss theory and those articles were mostly written by scholars educated in other disciplines (McKechnie and Pettigrew 2002)

# 1a. Inter- and Multidisciplinarity



**Inter- and multidisciplinarity is growing as new hybrid areas of study emerge (nanotechnology, wetlands ecology), so being multidisciplinary keeps LIS in tune with what is occurring in other disciplines.**

**Inter- and multidisciplinarity can bring vitality to the field and ensure relevance by**

- Fostering healthy debate
- Broadening our knowledge base
- Deepening our understanding of the phenomena studied
- Promoting innovation
- Clarifying our identity as a discipline
- Clarifying our disciplinary boundaries (Albright 2010)

# Native Theory



Despite our claims to be inter-or multidisciplinary, we have not contributed what Jaeger (2010) refers to as **“native theory”**

**“LIS tends to look for well-known theories and theorists to import into the field. Rather than commit to building and promoting native theory within LIS and to other disciplines, our field seems to reflexively look for external theory to appropriate.”** (p. 206)

**“Given the centrality of information and of information and communication technologies to every interaction in modern life, LIS is a field that should be assuming a leading position in academia... However, until LIS has a viable, recognizable and widely used body of native theory, such a leadership position will likely be elusive.”** (p. 207)

# Native Theory



## **Some areas where *native theory* may naturally develop:**

- Information behavior
- Information search and retrieval practices
- Information literacy
- Libraries and the information society

## 1b. Theory-Practice Divide



### **Two common misperceptions:**

#### **1. Faculty say**

*Practitioners don't understand my research and don't want to hear about it.*

#### **2. Professionals say**

*Most research produced by LIS faculty isn't particularly useful for professional practice.*

The **expectations** of the world of academic research and the world of professional practice **are quite divergent.**

# Divergent Expectations



## **For LIS Faculty:**

- Pressure to publish
- No expectations that research needs to be immediately applicable
- The audience for a great deal of scholarly research is other academics, not professionals
- Not viewed as prestigious enough to publish in professionally-oriented journals
- Constant evaluation of one's research output – little time to really reflect.

## **Fallacy of the academic lens** (Crowley 2005)

“The erroneous assumption that a faculty member who follows academic norms for “good” research will inevitably produce findings useful to practitioners in the worlds outside the university” p. 13

# Divergent Expectations



## **For Information Professionals:**

- Pressure to perform well on the job
- May need to spend a lot of time on supervisory and administrative tasks
- Constant worries over budgets and meeting the needs of clientele
- Days are hectic and fragmented – spending time reading professional journals is often not prioritized
- Little time to read or think about new paradigms.

## **Fallacy of public expectations** (Crowley 2005)

“Only the unjustifiable intransigence of university and college faculty prevents the production of “useful” research”. p. 13

## 1b. Bridging the Theory-Practice Divide



For LIS to stay relevant, we have to continue to work on bridging the divide.

### **LIS Faculty need to**

- Present at more professionally-oriented conferences
- Write more often for professional journals
- Use the insights, tacit knowledge and written papers of professionals in their own work
- Seek alliances with local librarians and info. professionals to share successes and concerns.

## 1b. Bridging the Theory-Practice Divide



### **LIS Practitioners need to**

- Take more of an evidence-based approach to practice and problem-solving
- Attend research-oriented sessions at major conferences
- Get in the habit of scanning the research literature more often
- Consider doing research relating to their library or service
- Form alliances with LIS faculty if an LIS program is nearby.

## 1c. LIS Education



### **LIS education faces many challenges:**

- Pressure from students who want a skills-based approach
- Pressure from the profession to produce turn-key graduates
- Pressure from university administrators to increase enrolments in graduate-level programs
- Pressure from external accreditation bodies to meet their educational standards
- Curriculum that is crowded and growing more so yearly
- Schisms within the LIS community (e.g. the i-schools movement, lack of common interests between information retrieval and library science)

# 1c. LIS Education Challenges



- Pressure from students who want a skills-based approach
- Pressure from the profession to produce turn-key graduates
- Curriculum that is crowded and growing more so yearly

## **What is core and what is elective?**

## **What about research methods and theory?**

The majority of doctoral students, in the UK at least, focus on vocational questions and areas of direct applicability, such as applications of digital technologies, information seeking behaviours, or information needs analyses. While these are worthwhile concerns and interesting research areas, they also tend to neglect issues of academic discourse, focusing instead on applied research.”

(Weller and Haider, 2007)

“Education clearly offers ways to begin to build a stronger culture of theory in LIS. Doctoral students... exposed to theory would be more aware of and more likely to use theory in their own research teaching, spreading a culture of theory to the master’s level.” (Jaeger 2010, 205)

## 1c. LIS Education



**As educators, a key to the ongoing relevance of our work is in our graduates**

- Astute and critical thinkers
- Technologically adept
- Service-oriented
- Good interpersonal and communication skills
- Understand the need for context-appropriate policies and procedures
- Take an evidence-based and research-based approach
- Are leaders and are open to new ideas and change
- Understand the landscape of the profession – values, ethics, best practices, integrity, accuracy, standards of professional conduct

## **2. LIS as a Field of Professional Practice**



### **2a. The Changing Roles and Worth of the Library**

### **2b. Claiming our Professional Expertise**

### **2c. Being Technologically/Digitally Proactive**

**i. Access**

**ii. Digitization**

## 2a. Changing Roles and Worth of the Library



Bundy (2010) has compiled a list of **83 phrases used to describe the role of the public library**, including

Cornerstone of democracy

Safe place to go

Community hub

Open learning centre

Beacons of learning

Digital nerve ends

Information gas station

Ideas centres

Places of connection

Community catalysts

Local gateway to knowledge

Social capital developers

Hub for information and ideas

Knowledge warehouse

Living room of the city

People's network

Reading promoters

Street corner universities

Empowerment supermarkets

Most used public building

Places to meet, learn, grow

Community information switchboard

Must-have element in town planning

Social inclusion agencies

## 2a. Changing Roles and Worth of the Library



- Danger of loss of focus - what's really important?
- Library cannot be all things to all people, all the time
- To stay relevant, we have to choose some key roles to support our community of users and demonstrate how all our efforts contribute to those roles
- London Public Library – chose to go with the **Community Hub** role in its strategic plan
- This allowed the plan to be structured around themes in the **Community Hub** metaphor, including
  - Literacy
  - Learning
  - Culture, leisure and recreation
  - Information
  - Community meeting place

## 2a. Changing Roles and Worth of the Library



- **Community development/social capital**

“With the emergence of the Internet and search engines such as Google, the informational role of the library has diminished over the last decade. More recently, municipalities are facing extreme revenue shortfalls resulting in the closure or reduced services of library branches... If the provision of information is no longer its most important role, how should the library reposition itself to remain relevant to municipal funders? The answer ... may lie in its very position, in the heart of the community...

Openness and non-partisanship make libraries ideal places for people to gather, gain whatever information or reading resources they need, and come in contact with other people and ideas. It is out of this role as a community meeting place that social capital emerges, suggesting that libraries may be an important location for creating social cohesion and trust in the community.” (Johnson 2010, 147)

## 2a. Changing Roles and Worth of the Library



McCook (2000) urged librarians to take community building seriously. Now, librarians are more actively engaged in community development than ever before.

Hill (2009) identifies **5 themes in community development** applicable to public libraries:

Libraries

- serve as a **conduit to access** information and learning
- encourage **social inclusion** and equity
- foster **civic engagement**
- create a **bridge to resources** and community involvement
- promote **economic vitality** in the community.

## 2a. Changing Roles and Worth of the Library



London Public Library – librarians sit on the following city-wide committees:

Historic Sites

Child & Youth Network

Race Relations

All Our Sisters Committee

London Celebrates Canada

Caring Community Committee

London Middlesex Child Abuse Council

Crouch Neighbourhood Resource Centre Board

Huron Heights Literacy Working Group

South London Youth Advisory Board

Crouch Preschool Advisory Committee

Investing in Children Board

- Settlement workers in many of the library branches
- Government Employment Resource Centres in library branches as well
- Municipal literacy efforts – Literacy London
- Reading groups and Philosophical discussion circles

## 2a. Changing Roles and Worth of the Library



- **Public Space**

The library is an important place to many community members BUT it's not the same place as the library of 20 years ago.

Libraries need to

- be welcoming/comfortable yet structured
- be quiet oasis yet dynamic collaborative workplace (Cohen 2009)
- be suited to user needs and current patterns of use
- have separate spaces for young adults and for children
- be environmentally conscious
- be tied to the city – active and interesting use of outdoor spaces

## 2a. Changing Roles and Worth of the Library



**Project for Public Spaces** <http://www.pps.org>

***Hall of Shame*** - French National Library

[http://www.pps.org/great\\_public\\_spaces/one?public\\_place\\_id=350](http://www.pps.org/great_public_spaces/one?public_place_id=350)

***Great Places*** – New York Public Library, Humanities and Social Sciences Branch

[http://www.pps.org/great\\_public\\_spaces/one?public\\_place\\_id=161](http://www.pps.org/great_public_spaces/one?public_place_id=161)

## 2a. Changing Roles and Worth of the Library



Brehm-Heeger and Edwards (2010) – remaking of the **Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County**

**Used observational techniques over 33 days to see what users were actually doing**

- Computer usage was enormous (42% of users at any time)
- Using computers for things unrelated to subject areas
- Less than 10% of interactions with staff occurred in subject areas
- Teens were the second largest user group (more than children and seniors combined), despite having no real area of their own
- Reading and browsing were next highest activities after computer use
- 58% of users were browsing in fiction, young adult, films and recordings, and magazines
- 33% of users were studying, reading, sitting, or meeting with others

## 2a. Changing Roles and Worth of the Library



### What changes did they make?

- Eliminated the old subject departments and created one **Information and Reference** department
- Trained **reference staff across all subjects**
- Reorganized the adult nonfiction to run in straight DDC order, making **browsing easier**
- Created a “**popular library**” of fiction, A/V, graphic novels, large print, foreign fiction and ESL materials
- Created a new **TeenSpot** complete with vending machines and restaurant style booths
- Created a new **TechCentre** with 100 PCs offering a wide array of software, staffed with people to help with the use of technology
- Reorganized floor space with lots of **study carrels and tables** near windows on every floor

## 2a. Changing Roles and Worth of the Library



### **What advice would they give?**

“Anyone looking to reorganize their own main library must acknowledge that things have changed drastically for public libraries in the last decade. If we are to remain relevant to our customers and communities, those working in and managing main libraries must react and respond accordingly...

The benefits of the new model are impossible to miss on a daily basis... The walls and carpet were refreshed... and now the aesthetic feel of the main library reflects the dynamic service provided with vibrant paint and patterned carpet... Staff members are out roving the floors and meeting the customers where they need help. The TechCenter is busy and the TeenSpot is full of anime, teens and *Guitar Hero*. The headsets in the reference and renewal call banks are buzzing and the library’s new text-a-librarian service is hopping. The days of quietly waiting behind the desk for the subject-specific question are over – and the twenty-first century awaits.” (p. 44)

## 2a. Changing Roles and Worth of the Library



### **Academic Libraries also revamping their spaces:**

- Lounges
- Coffee/snack areas
- Opening areas to more light – redesign of “brutalist” architecture
- Learning Commons
- More collaborative work spaces for students
- Changes to service delivery desks (McDonald 2012)

## 2a. Changing Roles and Worth of the Library



### Library worth

*To stay relevant, libraries must demonstrate what they are worth in terms of **contributing to the community of which they are a part.*** (Germano 2011; Jaeger et al. 2011)

**Public libraries** – increasingly need to show **how the library makes a difference to the community** in a language that municipal politicians understand:

- the “*more books checked out than burgers bought*” model

State Library of Victoria document (2005) identified 4 major ways that public libraries made a difference to their communities:

- **Overcoming the digital divide** by making technology more accessible
- **Creating informed communities** by acting as a gateway to various sources of information
- Providing convenient and comfortable **places of learning**
- **Building social capital** through creating a welcoming environment, creating pride of place and reaching out to the community

## 2a. Changing Roles and Worth of the Library



### **Library worth**

*To stay relevant, libraries must demonstrate what they are worth in terms of **contributing to the parent body (such as a university or corporation).***

**Academic libraries** – need to demonstrate the value of the library to the university administration and faculty in terms of contributing to

- the **university's mission and strategic plan** (Franklin 2012; Oakleaf 2011b)
- **teaching and student learning outcomes** (Oakleaf 2011a)
- **scholarly research and documenting its impact** (Franklin 2012; VanDuinkerken, Coker and Anderson 2010)

## 2b. Claiming our Professional Expertise



**Librarians are highly educated professionals, yet their knowledge and work is often invisible, misunderstood and/or undervalued.**

### ***WHY?***

***Harris (1992) suggested the following reasons:***

- Media and public perceptions of a feminized profession
- Occupational stereotyping

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTuyoOyWhoc>

- Devaluation of women's work through labor force segregation
- Occupational authority – control through licensing
- Abandonment of a public service ideal – ethics of caring
- Lack of control over the subject domain

## 2b. Claiming our Professional Expertise



**Librarians are highly educated professionals, yet their knowledge and work is often invisible, misunderstood and/or undervalued.**

### ***WHY?***

- Overly identified with the institution of the library
- In our desire to be inclusive and non-hierarchical, we tend to hide or blur our expertise

## 2b. Claiming our Professional Expertise



### **How might this affect our relevance?**

- *not taken seriously*
- *not present at the policy-making or service-provision table*
- *impact on salary and working conditions*
- *ongoing image problem*
- *why support librarians?*

### **What can we do about it?**

- *be more visible in the public eye*
- *claim and be proud of our expertise*
- *get out of the library frequently*
- *resist attempts to erase the “L” word (“audience development officers” – Weihs 2009)*

## 2c. Being Technologically/Digitally Proactive



Librarians have always dealt with technology but *we cannot afford to become reactive rather than proactive*

**i) Access mechanisms** (i.e. the online catalogue)

**ii) Digitization projects**

## 2c. Being Technologically/Digitally Proactive



### i) Access – via the Online Catalogue

- Consistency and transparency – managed that with authors and titles
- Many people want to search by topic
- Research shows that this is where most catalogue searches fail
- Library of Congress Subject Headings are now too cumbersome and convoluted

## 2c. Being Technologically/Digitally Proactive



### **Topic – The economics of farming in East Africa**

Agriculture – Economic Aspects – Afghanistan

Agriculture – Economic Aspects - Africa

Agriculture – Economic Aspects – Africa, East

**Searcher types: *Economics Agriculture Africa East***

Economics - Africa

Your entry ***Economics Agriculture Africa East*** would be here

–Search as words

Economics – Alberta

## 2c. Being Technologically/Digitally Proactive



Not only is the **order of subject words** a problem, but the **length of many subject phrases** and **the language used** is often incomprehensible to most modern catalogue users.

### **Length:**

- Australia – History – Study and teaching – Periodicals
- United States – History – 19<sup>th</sup> century – Historiography - Encyclopedias
- Engineering and construction – United States – History – Civil War 1861-1865

### **Language:**

- |                            |                     |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| • Abridgements             | Handbooks, manuals  |
| • Anecdotes                | Juvenile literature |
| • Caricatures and cartoons | Indexes             |
| • Eponyms                  | Nomenclature        |

## 2c. Being Technologically/Digitally Proactive



### **i) Access**

### ***SOLUTIONS??***

#### ***Short Term:***

**Subject Keyword Searching**

**Federated search engines**

#### ***Long Term:***

**Develop a more appropriate keyword approach  
and/or devise folksonomic tagging systems**

## 2c. Being Technologically/Digitally Proactive



### ii) Digitization Projects

Special collections of local material are highly relevant to both local and distant communities

**County of Brant Public Library** – digitized historic documents of the town of Paris, Ontario

<http://images.ourontario.ca/brant/search>

Expanded to a wiki for local citizens to add their documents and memories to the collection

## 2c. Being Technologically/Digitally Proactive



### Wagga Wagga historical photographs collection

<http://203.38.125.66/libero/WebOpac.cls?VERSION=2&ACTION=DISPLAY&RSN=353550&DATA=RIV&TOKEN=yloBN07Vjz7030&Z=1&SET=8>

### Wagga walking tour

<http://waggalocalhistory.wetpaint.com/page/Walking+Tour+of+Wagga+Wagga%27s+Historic+Buildings>

# Conclusion: 12 Steps to Relevance



**LIS is very relevant in a Googleized world, but we can't become complacent. We have to:**

1. Keep up with **good research and scholarship** to advance both the discipline and professional practice;
2. Foster strengths in **interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary**, to glean new knowledge and best practices/approaches from other disciplines and professions;
3. Develop **bodies of theory and ways of thinking** that shed light not just on LIS but on the way that information creation, provision and use influence society;

# Conclusion



4. Ensure that our **LIS curricula are cutting edge, rigorous** and **stress the values** important to the information professions, including a sound understanding of appropriate research methods and the need for opportunities for ongoing study;
5. Continue to work hard on **bridging the divide** between theory and practice, and fostering better dialogue between scholars /teachers and practitioners;
6. Acknowledge and **embrace the changing role** and perceptions of libraries as they operate within their various communities;
7. Celebrate and **demonstrate the many contributions of libraries** to their communities;

# Conclusion



8. Ensure that our libraries are vibrant, comfortable and **welcoming public spaces**;
9. **Promote a positive perception** of librarianship through dynamic interactions with our clientele and organizational supporters;
10. **Demystify the role of librarians** by clarifying who they are and making them more publically accessible;
11. Use information technologies to **make information access easier**, more fun and more interesting for our clientele;
12. Use digitization and other technologies to **make local resources available** and to encourage citizens to participate in creating those resources.

# Conclusions



**Without libraries (and LIS), what have we?**

**We have the past and no future.**

**- Ray Bradbury**