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# Is There a Library in Our Future?:

## iPad and the Future of Small College Libraries

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### ABSTRACT

Print reference sources and references desks are still vital parts of reference service in some libraries, while in others innovative models such as roving reference and learning commons thrive. While undergraduate students' preferences and usage has shifted from print to electronic, students still need to learn the application of metacognitive thinking skills in library research. Updating how reference is delivered to accommodate students' emphasis on mobility and expectation of access to information has led to revitalizing reference collections, reconfiguring space as learning commons and roving reference as solutions at Taylor University and Palm Beach Atlantic University, while Whitworth University retains a more traditional configuration to meet student research needs.

When I got my first iPad I was like a kid with a new Christmas present. As everyone knows by now, with iPad – and other similar devices – you can read full-text e-books and articles, search the web, check your e-mail, post to your Facebook and Twitter accounts, listen to iTunes and the radio, play games and even watch movies and TV shows – all from a pad you can easily hold in your hand. It didn't take long before I was hooked. I discovered that I enjoyed reading books on my new iPad as much or more than reading paper books. In fact, I soon found myself wondering, "Could this be the beginning of the end of small college libraries as we know them?"

This article will explore the potential impact of iPad, Kindle, and e-books on the future of small college libraries, and provide some suggestions for survival.

### iPad and Kindle

As noted above, people use iPad for all kinds of different things but for me iPad is like my own hand-held library. The Apple iPad bookstore provides thousands of free classics (30,000, according to some sources). These free classics include ancient authors like Homer, Plato, Josephus, and Augustine, as well as more modern authors like Dante, Dickens, Shakespeare, Milton, Luther, Austen, Dostoyevsky and many others. On iPad the texts are very readable and the pages turn instantly just by flipping your finger across the screen.

The Apple iPad bookstore also makes about 200,000 e-books available for purchase. If these aren't enough, there is a free app available which allows the reader to purchase and download any of Amazon's 950,000 Kindle books.

Speaking of Kindle, as I write this article, Kindle and the Overdrive company have just

announced that it is now possible for libraries to electronically loan the e-books on Kindle. (Overdrive already makes e-books available to users of iPad, BlackBerry, Android, iPhone etc.). Under the Overdrive program a library pays an annual subscription fee to Overdrive and purchases e-books from their resources of about 300,000 volumes. Overdrive makes it possible for subscribing libraries to electronically loan the e-books they purchase from Overdrive to any students who have mobile reading devices – which now, for the first time, includes Kindle.

While I do not enjoy reading books or articles on a computer, I *thoroughly* enjoy reading them on iPad (and even more on Kindle, which is easier on the eyes because the screen doesn't constantly refresh). With iPad and Kindle, the font can be increased making them easier to read than many paper books and, unlike a computer, I can hold Kindle or iPad in my hand. The Kindle books on iPad allow me to highlight and save notes, and when reading a book that is several hundred pages long, iPad can take a lot of strain off the wrist as compared to hardback books.

One of the features I absolutely love about reading books on iPad is the ability to put my finger on a word and get an instant definition. This is particularly helpful when I'm reading non-fiction books that are outside of my field of expertise.

It is not hard to image that future generations who grow up on readers like iPad, Kindle or the Nook, might come to think of paper books as a step back into the Middle Ages.

### Electronic books

The problem, of course, is that students don't have the money to purchase all the books they need for their studies. It makes little difference that Amazon has 950,000 electronic Kindle

books available if the student can't afford to purchase the ones she needs. And regardless of all the free classics that are available, students also need current books for their research. This is one reason they come to the library.

Enter ebrary.

An annual subscription to ebrary's *Academic Complete* gives our students unlimited access to approximately 70,000 current, full-text e-books from 16,000 publishers including Brill, Harvard University Press, Johns Hopkins University Press, Oxford University Press, the University of Chicago, et al.

This subscription service is not cheap but if we annually spent on books the amount of money that we spend on our ebrary subscription, I estimate that it would take over 300 years to purchase the 70,000 volumes we get with ebrary right now. But there's more.

Our library just became a participant in ebrary's "Patron Driven Acquisition" program which makes an additional 140,000 volumes (and growing) available to our students. Under this program, we have access to the additional 140,000 volumes for no charge. We are only charged (that is, we purchase the book) if 1) a patron views more than 10 pages in a single book, 2) a patron prints anything in a single book, or 3) a patron views a book for more than ten minutes (unless the book being viewed is inactive for 3 minutes in which case it times out and there is no purchase). The first and last 5% of any book are excluded from these conditions to allow patrons to browse the table of contents and indices without charge for as long as they want.

Using ebrary, patrons can copy, print, store online notes, highlight in several different colors and save their work for later reference. Readers can also find word definitions, geographical locations and biographical information for most words in an ebrary book.

The bottom line is that our students now have access to a library of 240,000 current,

full-text ebooks (140,000 in PDA + 70,000 in Academic Complete + 30,000 free classics). This is a collection that most colleges our size could only dream about just a few years ago!

The problem is that no one wants to sit down to read an entire e-book on their computer. As I write this article, however, my ebrary representative assures me that ebrary is working on an app for iPad. I was told that it could be out as early as the beginning of 2012. In other words, all of these 240,000 volumes could be available to our students on iPad before the 2011-2012 school year is out.

Libraries are not just about books, of course. Journals are also a huge part of any academic library collection and EBSCO is already ahead of the game when it comes to mobile readers. They have an EBSCO mobile link that makes searching EBSCO databases, and reading full-text articles possible through any mobile device. EBSCO also has an iPad app which makes searching for and reading EBSCO articles on iPad easy and enjoyable. I can search through our entire collection of EBSCO databases and read the full-text articles at home on my iPad. Unfortunately, EBSCO has not yet made their e-book (formerly NetLibrary) collection easily available on iPad.

#### **Potential impact on small college libraries**

This article was not intended as any kind of technology overview – others in ACL could do that much better than me. The bottom line is that our students already have access to millions of full-text articles on iPad or any mobile device, and before the school year is out, I expect our students to have access to over 240,000 e-books on iPad also.

The point is that with information like this at their fingertips, it may just be a matter of time before students (and academic deans) start wondering, "Who needs a library?"

Fortunately for us, libraries will not go away overnight, if at all.

*Librarians need to make sure our academic deans (and accrediting agencies) understand that collection development – especially electronic collection development – is a professional function.*

*[T]he library must increasingly be seen not so much as the place to come for books, but the place to come for help.*

First, there are still a lot of paper books being published – especially books by Christian publishers – that are not available in electronic format and these will continue to be needed in Christian college libraries. This demand may not last forever, though. Christian book publishers will eventually catch up. In the meantime, Christian college libraries will still need to provide books by these publishers.

Second, in libraries we often see students with four or five (or more) books spread out in front of them on a table. Most students are not going to buy four or five iPads to study like this and toggling back and forth between e-books isn't quite the same. While iPad and Kindle make reading books easier, they do not necessarily make research easier – at least, not yet.

Third, most students do not have unlimited financial resources to purchase electronic books or to subscribe to expensive electronic databases like EBSCO or JSTOR. As long as academic deans understand that librarians, and not IT technicians, are best qualified to evaluate and select the best databases, and then to provide training on how to use them effectively, the library will still play an important role on campus.

Fourth, many people still prefer paper books over Kindle or similar readers. Increased demand for e-books is not likely to make demand for paper books disappear – though the demand for paper books may begin to decrease.

I'm sure my ACL colleagues could significantly expand this list so I'll not belabor the point. Suffice it to say that libraries have not yet been rendered obsolete by the iPad or similar devices – but such technology could have a significant effect on the future of small college academic libraries.

Just as fewer and fewer students come to the library for hardcopy journals, fewer and fewer students will see the need to come to the library for paper books, and some academic deans at smaller colleges may even begin to

wonder why they pay so much money for library staff to select, purchase, process, check in, check out, inventory and replace books – when they could just pay one much lower annual fee to have an “ibrary” that is possibly larger and more current than the physical library they now have.

For some small college libraries, all this new technology may necessitate a change in priorities and marketing.

First, the library needs to place an ever increasing emphasis on our role as *information* providers, not just book providers. Librarians need to make sure our academic deans (and accrediting agencies) understand that collection development – especially electronic collection development – is a *professional* function. All those electronic databases that we will expect students to use on iPad must be selected and purchased by those who are information specialists, who know the curriculum, who are current in the field, who remain knowledgeable about the latest information technologies and electronic research databases, and who know how to make wise budget decisions, i.e. librarians. All librarians know this, of course, but if college administrators don't know it they may be tempted someday to turn database management over to the IT department.

Second, librarians need to constantly and increasingly emphasize their role as *educators*. This includes traditional reference services as well as classroom instruction on how to use electronic resources and how to do research. Of course, we already do this but we may need to invest more effort ensuring that the faculty and administration see us as educators and not just keepers of the books.

Third, the library must increasingly be seen not so much as the place to come for books, but the place to come for *help*. For example, just last summer our college moved the campus “study lab” to the library (the “study lab” is our term for the department that tutors remedial students and helps with papers and testing). Another good option might be to do what

some larger libraries have already done, that is to create an information commons which combines the library reference desk with the IT help desk. One of our goals should be that when a student doesn't know where to go for help, their first thought is to come to the library.

Fourth, libraries must increasingly become very inviting and comfortable places to which students *want* to come to study. For some libraries, this may mean providing more aesthetically pleasing spaces furnished with comfortable overstuffed chairs, and allowing, or even providing food and coffee. Some libraries may need to create more group and private study rooms. Our library has invested significant amounts of money over the last several years providing group study rooms that look like small living rooms complete with couches, love seats, overstuffed chairs and even a couple recliners. Students absolutely love them! We need to realize that when technology makes it so students no longer *must* come to the library, the library must be a place to which the students *want* to come.

Finally, if providing outstanding customer service is not already a top priority, it must quickly become so. Unfortunately, I've been to libraries in the past where students were not treated much better than customers at the Department of Motor Vehicles. Fortunately, the image of the librarian as the stern guardian of old books is pretty much gone, but some libraries may need to consider relaxing some of their fines and regulations, adopting a little more of a "grace" attitude toward students.

In our library, students have access to nearly 100,000 physical volumes plus over 200,000 electronic volumes, but if faculty and students still can't find what they need we tell them to check with the library staff and we will download the book on one of our Kindles and check the Kindle out to them. If we run low on Kindles, we'll buy another one. If faculty or students want the paper version, we will often order it immediately from our Amazon corporate account on a two-day delivery.

When we conduct student surveys we publicize all actions we took in direct response to their suggestions to demonstrate that we really listen and take their concerns and suggestions seriously. I tell both my senior staff and student staff that customer service is our top priority. To illustrate this, I tell my student workers that if I, as the director, come to them while they are helping another student, they are to ignore me until they are finished helping the student. Students come first.

The question is, do our students view the library as an inviting place where friendly people are always eager to help them? It is worth repeating that when students no longer *must* come to the library, the library must be a place to which the students *want* to come.

These suggestions, of course, are nothing new. Many libraries are already doing these things, but as the apostle Paul wrote (albeit in an entirely different context), "we urge you dear friends, to do so more and more" (1 Thess. 4:10, TNIV).

## Conclusion

If the library is not a place where students *want* to congregate, and if administrators do not genuinely come to see librarians as educators/information specialists, and libraries as information providers (not just book providers), the iPad, Kindle and similar devices along with services like ebrary and Overdrive, may indeed eventually mark the end of small college libraries – and the end may be nearer than we once imagined.

Someone once said that the decline of railroads came about because the railway executives thought they were in the train business rather than the transportation business. Libraries that make the mistake of thinking they are in the book business rather than the information/service business may very well go the way of the railroad (how many of you took the train the last time you went to an ACL conference)? †