PRINCE OF WALES NORTHERN HERITAGE CENTRE
CONSULTATION 13 September 2013

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Disclaimer: My responses to this questionnaire are my own, and while they stem from my experience as a librarian at Aurora College, they do not constitute the official position of Aurora College.   Also, I have recently become the lead voice for College libraries; however, my responses reflect only my much-longer experience as manager of Thebacha Campus Library (with the exception of your last question), and do not necessarily pertain to the other campus libraries.   Similarly, I have considered here the role of archives, museums, or public libraries in my responses, leaving that commentary to those much more knowledgeable about them than I.

SERVICES

1. How would you describe the services Canadians, including Aboriginal Canadians and new Canadians, are currently receiving from libraries and archives in the North?

Most NWT communities have a public library and all communities have access to public library services.   Public libraries in the NWT are administered through the NWT Public Library System, headquartered in Hay River.

Aurora College is a Territory-wide college providing certificate, diploma and degree-level education, pre-employment and journeyperson-level trades education, and extensive adult literacy and basic education.   Aurora College has three full-service campus libraries in Fort Smith, Yellowknife and Inuvik, and one special library – the Aurora Research Institute library, also in Inuvik, which houses a collection of northern research documents.   The College's many community learning centres throughout the NWT also have access to College library services and resources, both electronic and print.

There are several special government libraries in the NWT, mostly in Yellowknife and the larger regional centres.

2. Libraries are currently hybrid operations, constantly pulled toward traditional services by many core users and pulled, equally, by a concern for relevancy from other users and potential users. What issues are libraries facing as they try to make the transition to new service models?

Geographic distance between libraries and users has always been a challenge.   A traditional service is mailing books and other resources to users all over the NWT.   The public library system provides this service to all NWT residents.   The College libraries provide this service to their staff and students all over the NWT, often mediated through their community learning centre adult educator. The cost of this is high and the Library Book Rate is critical to this service.

Bandwidth is a growing issue.   While many wonderful resources are now available through streaming video, most NWT communities do not have adequate bandwidth to stream smoothly.   For Aurora College, this means that instructors cannot rely on being able to show a video online when they need it at a particular time in class, and so we continue to purchase DVDs.

Rapid change in technology continues to be a challenge for small and northern libraries.   At Aurora College, we don't have IT staff dedicated only to library technology needs, and we have only enough library staff to provide essential library services (<1 PY at 2 libraries, 2 PYs at 1 library and 2.75 PYs at 1 library.   All campus libraries extend their hours by hiring student library assistants for evenings and weekends during the academic term.   So few staff means that there is not much in the way of time, personnel or IT expertise to devote to developing and piloting new technological service models.

3. How do libraries and archives measure outcomes of their service and community impacts?

We collect standard types of usage data at Aurora College libraries.

The College libraries' main community is the faculty and student body.   We are also open to the public and make our collections available to all NWT residents through interlibrary loan (ILL).

The College includes questions about library services in exit surveys of graduates.

We keep our ear to the ground.   We informally ask instructors and program administrators what they think of the library resources and services, and what feedback they're getting from their students.

We welcome feedback from instructors after library orientation sessions and research classes.   When they ask for the same or more instruction the next year, we interpret that to mean our involvement has made a positive impact on their students' learning.

4. What needs to be done to facilitate libraries in cataloguing, storing, and providing access to research data? Who would be an appropriate partner in providing these services?

We need Library and Archives Canada (LAC).   Canada needs this venerable institution to continue to be the great equalizer of access that it has traditionally been.   LAC is a huge support to, and resource for, our libraries.   The drastic reduction in funding and dismantling of core services that has begun in the last few years is a terrible blow.

- We need LAC for Interlibrary Loan. It's okay if they are the ILL source of last resort, as they have been for years - that is defensible. But it isn't defensible for them to abandon their citizenry to the regional disparity that is inevitable without a centralized responsibility for providing Canadian citizens with the resources they need. http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Pages/end-ill-service.aspx\

- We need LAC to continue to create and provide cataloguing standards, records and coordination, in Canada and internationally

- We need LAC to collect and keep our country's historical documents in their original form as well as digitizing them as time and resources allow. I applaud expanding that collection responsibility to embrace digitized and born-digital forms of the historical record, and I truly hope that it will be in addition to, and not at the expense of, the continuing preservation, authenticity and availability of the primary source

LAC is, of course, the appropriate partner – our national library leader who helps us overcome geographic and regional differences in our service to our communities. To this end, LAC and its resources and services need to remain robustly available to all Canadians – not just those who can find their way to LAC's front door.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND AWARENESS

1. Would Canadians know of, or understand the contribution you make to library/archival service in Canada?

I think that generally, people assume that library resources and services are integral to college education, though they may have differing ideas/opinions on what that entails. One constant challenge to libraries is a widespread assumption, possibly more greatly among the post-Internet generation, that the Internet makes libraries unnecessary. But my own community is one of educators (and their students), and they seem directly aware of the limitations of the open Web. They are pretty savvy about the differences between what they can google and what our libraries license for their use. And they call upon us to help them teach their students the importance of that difference.

2. Describe the services provided directly to users, and if they are consortial in nature please describe the mechanisms in place to define, refine and measure the impact of the services.

All the traditional library services: a comfortable, safe space for people to come on their own or with others to read, browse, study, write, text, etc., services such as reference, library instruction, resource packages, ILL, reserve, current awareness, purchasing upon request, mail-out, online catalogue, microfilm/fiche readers, photocopying and printing. Also, free Internet and WiFi access. Traditional resources – books, videos (VHS and DVD), periodicals, and special collections: children's lit,

adult literacy lit, Aboriginal languages lit, French language lit.   Electronic collections and resources: journal databases, e-books, mobile catalogue.   Auxiliary services: computer lab support: creating student computer network accounts, assistance logging in and setting up email; reprography and document finishing (high-volume photocopying, binding, etc of instructional material).

Other than usage data collection, we do not systematically measure the impact of the services.   See my comment under #2 regarding staff size.   Refinements are made in response to ongoing discussion among library staff about how well a service is working, what kind of feedback we are getting from our clientele, etc.

3. In the digital era, what support for researchers do/should libraries provide?

The same as they have always provided.   Only the medium has changed.   New challenges include: the increased speed of change; the incompatibility of old digital formats and the cost of migrating them; the heavy investment of money, personnel and time required to pilot and adopt each new format.

4. What in your opinion are the specific roles of libraries and/or archives and/or museums and other heritage institutions in community building and memory building?

The collection and preservation of, and provision of access to, the record of human endeavour.

NEW DIRECTIONS

Digitization
1. What are the main challenges of born-digital material for your institution?

- Finding, collecting, storing, providing meaningful access.   Providing Internet access is not enough - we need to capture and categorize it in a systematic way. Generally, we only do that with resources to which we buy access (licensed journal article databases, for example), with a few exceptions

- Bandwidth for reliable, when-you-need-it transmission

- Cellular technology access between and in small communities

3. What will be the function of a brick-and-mortar library or archive in the future?

- To continue to house the print and other non-digital-media record
- To continue to house and maintain the equipment required to access the digital record
- To continue to house the workers who create and facilitate the access that is provided to the print, digital and other-media record, both in-house and remotely

- To continue to provide individual and social space for study, leisure reading, gathering together with others, contemplation, communication, learning, recreation, enrichment and enlightenment
- The medium (print, digitized, born-digital, other) doesn't matter, it's the engagement with it that remains vital and it's the library-as-place that facilitates engagement for all people and all communities regardless of social or economic condition

Education

1. What changes, in your judgment, are necessary in the professional education and training of librarians/archivists in the 21st century?

I have been out of library school for over 20 years, so I am not familiar with what is taught now. The greatest substantive change, I would think, is the ever-widening array of digital resources and increasing variety of formats. Their selection, collection and communication will, I think, have to be a major focus (probably already is).

2. What conversations do you think need to take place with library, archival, and information studies programs about staff requirements, and have they begun?

Possibly some level of IT certification will be a necessary part of the MLIS – it would certainly be an advantage. I am not aware or part of any such discussions, though I am sure they are always going on.

Resources

1. Public libraries are primarily funded by local municipalities, with little funding from any other level of government. Most towns and cities are too small to support needed technology. How do we encourage the creation of library systems (or consortia) that can meet the increasingly sophisticated technology-driven needs and vital digital resources of libraries?

All types of libraries struggle with funding. We need to work with the vendors to find a way to keep costs of digital resources and their delivery manageable. The standard electronic licensing model, where we pay over and over for the same material, only incrementally added to each year, seems so wrong. And yet, having permitted it to evolve, we, as a profession, seem to feel helpless to put a stop to it. Digital one-time purchase seems better value, except it invokes the same limitations inherent in print – use is restricted by place. I'm aware that there are other licensing models out there, but the one I have been most exposed to is the annual license for continued access.

As a small college, we struggle with the high cost of having a community population (usually FTE count) that falls well below the ceiling of the first pricing tier for many products. And the actual user population is a fraction of that. Some years ago, we looked into the cost of licensing a suite of full-text article databases for access by both

the College community and Gov. of the NWT employees (primarily the researchers – biologists, archaeologists, etc), but it was prohibitive because the vendor would not consider a subset of the GNWT employee body as the user population.   They would only look at the total number of GNWT employees and would not consider pricing based on a target population.   This is an example of the rigidity of typical licensing options, and because we are small, even NWT-wide, we do not have much bargaining power.

2. What percentage increase to your current budget would permit you to realize the aspirations of your users? If you received an increased budget and consistent adequate resources, describe your library/archives in 2020.

I am speaking to my own aspirations... A 20% increase would permit the hiring of a full-time digital projects librarian to be responsible for electronic resource and service development and implementation College-wide, with a small budget for project-based purchase/licensing of required hardware, software, etc.

With this increase, our 2020 College libraries would be able to pilot and implement the digital media of the decade and the day, alongside the ongoing provision of non-digital resources, in its service to its primary community, the students and staff.