

LibraryCrunch

Service for the Next Generation Library: A Library 2.0 Perspective by Michael Casey

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If you believe, as I do, that there is a crisis in library education that threatens the very existence of libraries and librarianship, you are likely to draw a negative reaction from a variety of people. First, there are the millennialist librarians and pseudo-librarians who, intoxicated with self-indulgence and technology, will dismiss you as a "Luddite" or worse. They and their yips and yawps can safely be left to their acronymic backwaters and the dubious delights of clicking and surfing.

--Michael Gorman in American Libraries, May 2006

I have yet to stray into the overtly political on this blog, and I make every effort to be as open and accepting as possible with all viewpoints. I certainly understand that my enjoyment of technology is not shared by all librarians, and I make it my goal when discussing technology to do it in a way that is neither complicated nor evangelical. Mr. Gorman's words are frighteningly elitist and epitomize the arrogant and condescending parochialism that many of us are fleeing.

EDIT: As of this writing the above piece is not on the ALA American Libraries public page. However, you can read the article on [ebrary](#) if you are an ALA member. The article is also available on ProQuest Research Library.

Posted by Michael on May 11, 2006 02:39 PM | [Permalink](#)

➔ Comments

You are acting very mature about the whole thing. I' afraid (not really) that I was not so on my post about it.

<http://babyboomerlibrarian.blogspot.com/2006/05/gormans-accomplishments.html>

Posted by: [Bill Drew](#) | [May 11, 2006 03:28 PM](#)

Are you saying that Gorman is wrong? That there AREN'T "millennialist librarians and pseudo-librarians who, intoxicated with self-indulgence and technology, will dismiss you as a "Luddite" or worse"?

Such people don't exist? Do you have a link to the full article so I can read this paragraph in context? Here, it looks like he is unhappy at the growing divide between information "haves" and "have-nots", and saddened that some who work in libraries aren't doing enough to bridge the divide. Of course, in context, it may appear he's saying something else entirely.

Posted by: David Rothman | [May 11, 2006 03:49 PM](#)

David, you can read the article on ebrary (<http://www.ala.org/ala/online/onlineebrary/onlineebrary.htm>) if you are an ALA member. The article is also available on ProQuest Research Library.

Posted by: [Michael Casey](#) | [May 11, 2006 04:46 PM](#)

And yes, David, I am saying that Mr. Gorman is wrong. Of course there are many people on different points of the technology spectrum. It will always be that way. But Mr. Gorman's words are quite incendiary and unbecoming of a leader of such a broad and diverse organization. If anything, we need more inclusion and less of this vitriolic partisanship.

Posted by: [Michael Casey](#) | [May 11, 2006 05:50 PM](#)

Thank you, Michael, for such a great, detailed response. Having now read the full article, I agree that Gorman comes off quite badly. This also bothered me: "Then there are the increasing numbers of faculty in LIS schools who are, at best, indifferent to libraries and, at worst, hostile to libraries and their continuing mission. Their concerns are with 'information science' and other topics that are marginal or irrelevant to the work of libraries." I had to read that a few times. I've just started an MLIS program, but I'm alarmed that Gorman would suggest Information Science is *irrelevant* to libraries. Is it just me, or is that also absurd? The impression that I have is that the profession of librarianship is right now in an enormous state of flux, and the profession needs leaders who won't respond by trying to reinforce obsolete models.

Posted by: David Rothman | [May 12, 2006 08:52 AM](#)

I think it's a shame that Michael Gorman's lasting legacy will be his divisive term as president of ALA. He really has done a lot for our profession over the years, and he's worked on some innovative projects, but many will remember him as the man who raged an ill-timed, irrelevant, and misguided "war against technology."

Our profession needs to grow and change with the times, and so do our schools. I think that there may be a crisis within LIS education, but I certainly don't think it's the growth of information science programs. The problem is the same old theory-versus-practice argument that has likely plagued professional schools for years. Students often leave LIS programs with plenty of theoretical skills, but lacking in practical skills. I always get the feeling that Gorman's Dream LIS Program would be theory theory theory...but no practice. Theory is great, theory is important, but the one complaint I've heard over and over from early-career librarians is that they didn't get the practical skills they needed when they were in library school. And these days, those practical skills include computer skills. Information science is a major part of what librarians do these days. Is Gorman simply showing the cluelessness that is unfortunately common among upper-level administrators? Does he not know what his front-line staff is doing? Does he not understand the challenges that face librarians in the current environment?

Gorman could have really made a difference during his presidency, but he wasted time on petty arguments and bitter salvos aimed at people he's already insulted multiple times. He knows he's lost most of us, so he doesn't have a problem with continuing his insults. It seems to me that the last go-around with the unwashed, uneducated, unedited (ha!) weblogging masses must have hit home, otherwise he wouldn't still be dwelling on it several months later. If the accusations that people aimed at him really were as false as he had claimed, this whole issue would have been yesterday's news--not worth mentioning again in such a widely-read forum.

Posted by: [nanette](#) | [May 12, 2006 10:05 AM](#)

Regarding practical skills versus theoretical skills in LIS programs. For myself, I went to grad school after having worked in libraries for several years. I had racked up my practical experience already. I have found in the years since, that the theoretical and philosophical instruction I received has been the most important, and the longest lasting aspect of my formal library education. I'd have it no other way. Don't get me wrong, I got practical instruction in technology (as it was at that time when Archie and FTP were king and the WWW was a blip on the screen!) I have to constantly work at keeping my chops in the practical aspects of the job, but the foundation of Philosophy and Theory I got in Grad School by far continue to be the most valuable part. I can see a balance needed between the two - perhaps the practical instruction for your first few years as a librarian and the other for the duration of your career.

Nice podcast, btw.

Posted by: [Sandra Stewart](#) | [May 12, 2006 12:59 PM](#)

Link to whole article on the web.

<http://mg.csufresno.edu/columns/AL0506p003.pdf>

Posted by: David Rothman | [May 12, 2006 02:33 PM](#)

Sandra, it's funny because, in many ways, I agree that the theoretical and philosophical are perhaps more important at the graduate level than the purely practical. Many years ago I earned an MA in political science and the curriculum was 90% theoretical. That theory has never left me and I have often been able to apply it in my current profession. But Mr. Gorman's argument for traditional studies is not what upsets me so. It is his attitude towards those (myself included) who want to pull new ideas and new technologies into the field. But don't misunderstand, I would be just as angry with his writing were he anti-traditionalist. There's no room for such exclusionary speech in our profession.

Posted by: [Michael Casey](#) | [May 13, 2006 07:49 PM](#)

See also:

<http://www.librarian.net/stax/1751>

Posted by: Michael Casey | [May 14, 2006 07:33 PM](#)

Hmmmm. Let me frame this comment a different way...

If you believe, as I do, that there is a crisis in US auto industry that threatens it's very existence, you are likely to draw a negative reaction from a variety of people. First, there are the millennialist auto makers and pseudo-auto makers who, intoxicated with self indulgence and technology, will dismiss you as a "Luddite" or worse. They and their yips and yawps can safely be left to their acronymic backwaters and the dubious delights of hybrid vehicles and alternative fuels.

Posted by: [Eric Schnell](#) | [May 15, 2006 10:43 AM](#)

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