

2016

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Recommended Citation

Buck, Tina H. (2016) "A Glimpse into the Future of Library Research," *Illuminations*: Vol. 4 : No. 2 , Article 5. Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/illuminations/vol4/iss2/5>

A Glimpse into the Future of Library Research

By Tina Herman Buck
Electronic Resources Librarian



Doing research or helping others do research is part of daily life for many people in the university, a known and familiar activity. For a few people, though, the prospect of doing research or helping others to do so is part of the new life they are imagining for themselves after they earn their master's degree in library and information science (MLIS). The author corresponded with three MLIS students currently working at the John C. Hitt Library in staff positions to learn about the future of library research through their eyes.

Our interviewees are Lily Flick, Adjunct in Acquisitions & Collections and in Scholarly Communication; Mary Rubin, Senior Archivist in Special Collections & University Archives; and Angie Villafañe, Senior Library Technical Assistant in Cataloging Services.

Which aspect of the library/archives field are you interested in pursuing after you get your MLIS degree? What about it appeals to you?

Lily: I thought this question would become easier as I approached graduation in May 2017, but it's still difficult to choose. I enjoy aspects of scholarly communication, technical services, and reference. I can see myself advancing in any of those areas, but I expect scholarly communication to be a component of my future career even if I am not a scholarly communication librarian per se. Working with institutional repositories or research data management would take elements from all of the areas I enjoy. Research data management interests me especially because it is not fully supported at UCF. It

would be excellent if I could help fill that gap one day, and so research data management is my focus for my last semester of graduate school.

Mary: I will be pursuing multiple aspects of the library/archives field after I get my MLIS degree. My interests range from health science librarianship to digital archives to records management and more! The archives field appeals to me because there are so many different kinds of projects to work on, from processing collections to digitizing materials to curating exhibits, there is always so much to do. I also have an interest in health science librarianship since my undergraduate degree is in health sciences. It's really interesting to see that field evolve as the field of medicine as well as technology continues to advance.

Angie: I'm still in the process of solidifying that. I've had personal and academic interests in media for quite a while. I've been interested in moving image preservation (film, television, digital video, etc.). But lately, I've been considering additional paths. I've been taking a course this semester on the preservation of new media, where besides digital video, we've also explored preserving things like: hypermedia, net art, social media, virtual worlds, and video games. Many people might not think of virtual worlds or games, for example, as cultural heritage worthy of preservation, so contributing to changing that view appeals to me. Also, new media preservation is a relatively new territory in the archives field, is constantly and rapidly changing, and research seems to still be in the learning curve. The professional challenges that come with that novelty appeal to me as well.

What topic(s) are you following in the literature, via listservs, blogs, colleagues, etc? Might you be interested in researching/writing in those areas yourself at some point?

Lily: I would be thrilled to do research, give presentations, or contribute writing to the field one day.

Right now I am following:

- <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/>
- <http://databrarians.org/>
- <http://jlsc-pub.org/>
- <http://escholarship.umassmed.edu/jeslib/>

Mary: I follow records management and archival advocacy topics most often. Records management is such a cumbersome field especially in Florida, which has open-records laws, so it is important to stay abreast of the changes that are occurring. Archival advocacy is also important to stay on top of as critical issues arise. Not only do archivists often have to advocate for their value and relevancy but archivists also need to be informed on societal issues that influence what is documented. Rather than being a passive curator, archivists have a role to ensure that gaps in archival documentation are filled. On a somewhat different note, I'm also following the progress of the Twitter archive at the Library of Congress. At this point, I will not be doing any research or writing in those areas as I am not too actively involved in them; however, I hope to become more involved and once that happens, I'd love to write about my involvement.

Angie: I've only just recently began looking into this path, so I haven't really gotten to follow specific topics in depth yet. So far, I've read several of my professor's articles and some related literature on the subject. My professor is the Curator for History of Science & Technology Collections and Film & Media Collections for the Stanford University Libraries. Along with other institutions, he headed the Preserving Virtual Worlds project with support from the Library of Congress' National Digital Information Infrastructure for Preservation Program, so I've read some of the literature that has come out of that project as well. It has sparked an interest in me to conduct some research about current efforts in preserving virtual worlds and games by archival institutions.

I've also learned that Stanford University Special Collections and University Archives has established an "island" in the virtual world Second Life and uses it as an outreach tool. They've presented many virtually curated exhibits there and have also incorporated a virtual archives, where remote patrons can browse digitized materials from the closed stacks of their manuscripts and university archives division. Users can browse through exact replicas of their archival boxes, which gives them a perspective of the extent of the collection that can't be represented quite the same way with a finding aid. They also hope this virtual archives helps ease first-timers' anxiety or reservations with working with primary source materials. So I've also thought of possibly doing research and/or write about how other archival institutions have used, or could use, virtual worlds like this for patron outreach.

How do you see your work (now and future) impacting the research of your patrons and/or others in your field?

Lily: I am noticing more positions for data librarians opening up around the country, perhaps partly in response to the Open Data mandates. I expect any contributions to this relatively new area of librarianship to be a great help to researchers with difficulties managing their data or dealing with other aspects of scholarly communication. I hope to offer insights to help with the research process, whether targeted at data curation or management specifically, or with preserving and promoting discovery of scholarship (e.g., with an institutional repository).

Mary: I can only hope that my work as an archivist will enable and positively impact researchers in the future. By seeking to include diverse perspectives in the archive, I hope to help construct a more inclusive image and memory of society and its history for future researchers.

Angie: If I get to pursue new media preservation, I hope that my work contributes in some way to continuing to establish bodies of knowledge to help manage and preserve new media, since it is such new territory (whether it be through my own research, and/or my own work being a case study/example that contributes to the discussion). Also, in a field constantly threatened by technology obsolescence, I hope that my work enhances patrons' research by providing them with access to modern primary source materials that would otherwise become inaccessible in a matter of only a few years. Not to mention, it would be pretty neat to participate in developing a virtual outreach tool for patrons, such as what Stanford is doing with Second Life.