

An introduction to digital convergence: libraries, archives, and museums in the information age

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The idea for this special issue arose at the Cultural Heritage Information Professionals (CHIPs) workshop in April 2008. Supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, Florida State University, and the Ringling Museum of Art, the workshop's goals were to explore the ability of educators to meet the information needs of cultural heritage organizations, and to encourage a closer relationship between education and practice in library and information science, museum studies, and archival studies programs. This workshop provided a valuable opportunity for the deans, directors, and faculty of those programs to meet and share ideas with professionals from the nation's libraries, museums, and archives about the challenges facing information professionals as they work to transcend the traditional boundaries between libraries, archives, and museums, and meet user needs in the information age (for more information about the workshop, including the final workshop report, please see: <http://chips.ci.fsu.edu>).

Based on the outcomes of the CHIPs workshop, the editors of *Library Quarterly*, *Archival Science*, and *Museum Management and Curatorship* agreed to publish three special issues (one for each journal) exploring the shared information needs and challenges facing libraries, archives, and museums in the information age; the overlapping educational goals of library and information science, archival studies, and museum studies programs; and areas of convergence for educators and professionals working to meet user needs in libraries, archives, and museums. This “special triple issue” was driven by the idea that the increased use of and reliance on digital resources has blurred traditional distinctions between information organizations, leading to a digital convergence of libraries, archives, and museums, and encouraging more research examining how libraries, archives, and museums can collaborate and combine forces to better serve their users.

The topic of the “digital convergence” of libraries, archives, and museums has a lengthy history. Rayward (1998), for example, examined early on how changes from physical to digital media affect the traditional distinctions between information organizations in his article on “electronic information and the functional integration of libraries,

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archives, and museums.” The commonalities of libraries, archives, and museums have also served as the theme for several different conferences, including RLG 2005 (which asked, “Libraries, Archives, & Museums—Three-Ring Circus, One Big Show?”) and RBMS 2006 (which asked, “Libraries, Archives, and Museums in the Twenty-First Century: Intersecting Missions, Converging Futures?”). More recently, OCLC has published a thought-provoking study, “Beyond the Silos of the LAMs: Collaboration among Libraries, Archives and Museums,” which also wins the award for the punniest name of any article on this topic (Zorich et al. 2008).

Building on this prior work, we sought articles for this special triple issue that addressed one or more of the following three broad questions in ways that transcend the traditional distinctions between libraries, archives, and museums:

1. What are the information needs of libraries, archives, and museums in the information age, both internally and externally?
2. What are the roles and responsibilities of information professionals in libraries, archives, and museums in the information age?
3. What kinds of educational programs best prepare information professionals to meet the needs of libraries, archives, and museums and their users in the information age?

In response to the call for articles, we received 50 submitted abstracts, which resulted in 30 submitted articles, of which 14 were chosen to be published across the three journals. Of those papers, five are presented here in this special issue of *Archival Science* (Volume 8, Issue 4):

- Archives, Libraries, Museums and the Spell of Ubiquitous Knowledge, by Thomas Kirchhoff, Werner Schweibenz, and Jörn Sieglerschmidt.
- Smithsonian Team Flickr: A Library, Archives, and Museums Collaboration in Web 2.0 Space, by Martin R. Kalfatovic, Effie Kapsalis, Katherine Spiess, Anne Van Camp, and Michael Edson.
- Points of Convergence: Seamless long term access to digital publications and archival records at Library and Archives Canada, by Greg Bak and Pam Armstrong.
- Documentary Genre and Digital Recordkeeping: Red Herring or A Way Forward?, by Gillian Oliver, Yunhyong Kim, and Seamus Ross.
- iSchools and Archival Studies, by Richard J. Cox and Ronald L. Larsen.

These articles are complemented by four articles in the special issue of *Library Quarterly* (Volume 80, Issue 1):

- What’s Old is New Again: The Reconvergence of Libraries, Archives and Museums in the Digital Age, by Lisa M. Given and Lianne McTavish.
- The Convergence of Information Technology, Data and Management in a Library Imaging Program, by Fenella G. France, Doug Emery, and Michael B. Toth.
- Preservation in the Age of Google: Digitization, Digital Preservation, and Dilemmas, by Paul Conway.
- Two Librarians, an Archivist, and 13,000 Images: Collaborating to Build a Digital Collection, by Nancy Chaffin Hunter, Kathleen Legg, and Beth Oehlerts.

And five papers in the special issue of *Museum Management and Curatorship* (Volume 24, Issue 4):

- Collaboration of Croatian Cultural Heritage Institutions: Experiences from Museums, by Sanjica Faletar Tanackovic and Boris Badurina.

- Think Global, Act Local: Library, Archive and Museum Collaboration, by Günter Waibel and Ricky Erway.
- The Convergence of Information Technology and Data Management for Digital Imaging in Museums, by Doug Emery, Michael B. Toth, and William Noel.
- Sharks, Digital Curation, and the Education of Information Professionals, by Joyce Ray.
- Emerging Convergence? Thoughts on museums, archives, libraries and professional training, by Jennifer Trant.

As one might expect, these articles have much in common, with themes that transcend the functional boundaries of libraries, archives, and museums, and defy simple classification as a library, archives, or museum project.

In this issue, for example, Kirchhoff, Schweibenz, and Sieglerschmidt explore the idea that on the Internet, no one knows you are a library, archive, or museum. Cultural heritage organizations online should be as transparent as possible—people want information, and often they are not interested in knowing where that information is coming from. The authors' arguments about the need for libraries, archives, and museums to provide one central point for users to search across the collections of multiple cultural heritage organizations resonate with Waibel and Erway's arguments in their article in *Museum Management and Curatorship*.

The article by Kalfatovic et al. exemplifies the need for museums, libraries, and archives to engage their audiences, or risk losing them in the sea of web 2.0. Information professionals should take advantage of new technologies to open up information access for new users and new uses, and encourage the growth of new knowledge communities around their resources. The authors' experiences developing and working with new technologies as part of the Flickr Commons project demonstrate how museums, libraries, and archives can encourage, support, and allow for new forms of collaboration, echoing the experiences Hunter et al. describe in *Library Quarterly*.

Bak and Armstrong demonstrate the importance of improving access to collections across multiple libraries, archives, and museums. As users demand seamless access to collections, information professionals must explore new technologies and standards that improve access for researchers, scholars, students, and the general public, while simultaneously encouraging different organizations to collaborate in developing shared collections and resources. These insights offered by their experiences working with Library and Archives Canada resonate with those offered by Tanackovic and Badurina in *Museum Management and Curatorship*.

Oliver, Kim, and Ross document the importance of examining how themes and concepts from one discipline can be successfully brought to bear on others, an idea critically important as we draw connections between the fields within library, archives, and museum studies. Information professionals must consider how philosophical approaches (old and new) affect the shared work of libraries, archives, and museums, especially as new technologies offer new opportunities to explore old philosophies, or provide new ways to apply old perspectives. In this way, the article has parallels with the one by Given and McTavish in *Library Quarterly*.

The article by Cox and Larsen examines the need for educators in library, archives, and museum studies programs to embrace their commonalities and their diversities while preparing their students to work across the boundaries of libraries, archives, and museums. The interplay that exists between current educational programs prompts educators and professionals to consider the issues they have in common—issues that transcend

educational boundaries and help prepare the next generation of schools and students. An important theme for this special issue, Cox and Larsen's arguments echo those of Trant in *Museum Management and Curatorship*.

Finally, the task of assembling these articles across three special issues of three different journals illustrates the challenges that libraries, archives, and museums facing in the information age—no matter how strong the desire to collaborate, there are always barriers to overcome. Creating one unified special triple issue on this theme involved working with three different publishers, three different journal management systems, and three different publication schedules. Even with the good will and full support of everyone involved (including the publishers, editors, and authors), the act of putting these issues together was challenging. Authors whose work covers the topic areas of all three journals, for instance, had a hard time identifying the journal to which they should submit their articles; and at the last minute, we continued to shuffle articles between journals to achieve a better balance of topics. Publishing three simultaneous issues on one common topic across three different journals stands as a powerful metaphor for the opportunities and challenges that libraries, archives, and museums facing in the age of digital convergence.

In the end, the final product—one-third of which you hold in your hands, physically or virtually—is a testament to the ability of the library, archives, and museum community to overcome these challenges and to create a powerful work of unified effort. The end result gives us hope for a future where the boundaries between libraries, archives, and museums continue to melt away, and collaborative work crosses those boundaries in the same way these authors' projects cross the boundaries between these journals. It is our fervent hope that the efforts of the authors, editors, and publishers that resulted in this special triple issue on digital convergence will help shape the future of library, archives, and museum collaboration.

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