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INTRODUCTION

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, archives, and museums.' The commonalities of libraries, archives, and museums has 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 paper on this topic (Zorich, Waibel, and Erway 2008).

Building on this prior work, we sought papers 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 papers we received 50 submitted abstracts, which resulted in 30 submitted papers, of which 14 were chosen to be published across the three journals. Of those papers, five are presented here in this 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; and
- Emerging convergence? Thoughts on museums, archives, libraries, and professional training, by Jennifer Trant.

These papers are complemented by five papers in the 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; and
- iSchools and archival studies, by Richard J. Cox and Ronald L. Larsen.

And four papers 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; and
- Two librarians, an archivist, and 13,000 images: Collaborating to build a digital collection, by Nancy Chaffin Hunter, Kathleen Legg, and Beth Oehlerts.

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, Tanackovic and Badurina discuss the importance of partnerships for collaboration between libraries, archives, and museums. While their account focuses on improving collaboration among museums, their findings hold true for multiple types of cultural heritage institutions and help information professionals understand why they should collaborate and what makes successful collaborations succeed. Their experiences with building, maintaining, and supporting collaborations among different types of information professionals echo those of Hunter et al. in the special issue of *Library Quarterly*.

The article by Waibel and Erway explores the importance of collaboration for meeting user needs in the networked world of Web 2.0. They argue that meeting the rising user expectations for libraries, archives, and museums to provide one central point for searching across multiple institutions requires careful planning at the local level, where information professionals from separate units within a single organization can engage each other in a process of collaboration designed to build a single vision of the future of global networked data. Their efforts to identify catalysts for collaboration in the networked world resonate with those in the study of the Smithsonian's use of Flickr by Kalfatovic et al. published in the special issue of *Archival Science*.

Emery, Toth, and Noel write about their experiences developing digital imaging systems at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, MD. Their findings speak to the importance of new imaging technologies and data management systems for digital preservation. Their efforts illustrate how information professionals can use new digital imaging technologies to provide unprecedented access to images in ways that help scholars' access previously unattainable data, while simultaneously reducing the inherent risks involved with studying delicate manuscripts and artifacts. Their discussion of the impact of digital imaging on preservation relates to the arguments of Conway in his article in the special issue of *Library Quarterly*.

Ray details the experiences of numerous educational programs, cultural heritage institutions, and funding organizations as they work to prepare a new generation of information professionals skilled in the arts of 'digital curation.' As they prepare for careers integrating diverse digital information resources worldwide, today's students will need the ability to overcome the distinctions that traditionally have divided and differentiated information organizations. In recounting the experiences of educators and professionals as they develop a framework for supporting and encouraging expertise in digital curation, Ray echoes the arguments of Cox and Larsen as they

explore the future of the iSchools movement in their article in the special issue of *Archival Science*.

Trant examines the ability of the iSchools to educate information professionals who can work across the boundaries of different cultural heritage institutions. Her discussion of key issues that transcend educational boundaries between information science and museum studies at the University of Toronto encourages educators and professionals to think carefully about the issues library and information science, archival studies, and museum studies programs have in common. By exploring of the inherent similarities and differences in preparing students for careers in libraries, archives, and museums, historically and today, Trant draws parallels with the article by Given and McTavish in the special issue of *Library Quarterly*.

Finally, the task of assembling these papers across three special issues of three different journals illustrates the challenges facing libraries, archives, and museums 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 papers; and at the last minute, we continued to shuffle papers 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 facing libraries, archives, and museums 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.

References

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