

## THE FUTURE OF LIBRARIANSHIP: A ROUNDTABLE

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**Description:** Please join us for a wide-ranging, thought-provoking discussion on the future of our profession. The participants will bring expertise from a variety of perspectives on the innovations currently taking place and ones they envision will take place in the future. Given the rapidly changing nature of librarianship, what skill sets will librarians and information professionals need to fit this new reality? How can librarians prepare for the new changes? At the same time, how can we retain and hone our core skills in this new marketplace? How can we encourage information and cultural literacy and sustained critical analysis in the era of Twitter and apps and Internet surfing?

**David Shumaker** joined the Library and Information Science faculty at the Catholic University of America in 2006, following a career of over thirty years in librarianship. During the past several years, he has become identified with embedded librarianship. He co-authored the 2009 research report "Models of Embedded Librarianship", which was funded by a Special Libraries Association research grant; and his 2012 book, *The Embedded Librarian*, was termed "a must read for every librarian" by Maureen Sullivan, former president of the American Library Association. His work has garnered a variety of awards, including the Rose Vormelker Award of the Special Libraries Association. He earned an M.S. in Library and Information Science at Drexel University, and an M.S. in Management at UMUC. He blogs at <http://www.embeddedlibrarian.com>.

Some of you may be familiar with my work on embedded librarianship. Embedded librarianship describes a role for librarians that is closely connected with a community. It has the librarian specializing and collaborating with members of the community, adding cognitive diversity as the information and knowledge specialist, but contributing like any other member of the team. It's a dramatic transformation of the traditional access-oriented library service model. So, you may be expecting me to advocate that embedded librarianship is the future for the profession.

However, I'm not going to do that because I think the future is more complicated than that. Instead, I'll start my remarks by saying that I think that many of the questions that get debated when librarians talk about their professional future are the wrong questions.

These are the questions about:

- Are printed books going away?
- Will we still have library buildings or spaces?
- Will there still be reference librarians?
- And even: will we still have libraries?

Granted, these are important issues. But the questions are second-order questions. The answers will be derived from the answer to another more basic question: what is the relationship of a librarian or a library to the community?

We have to ask this question because the old relationship has already been destroyed. The old relationship was, we were the only game in town. Information was scarce, we had storehouses filled with it, and if somebody wanted it, they had to come to us. We provided access.

Nowadays, that's true for a few special collections but not for most libraries and most librarians. Information is ubiquitous and what's more it isn't the separate, standalone commodity it once was – it's built into daily life and a wide range of activities.

The implication of this is that to figure out our future, we have to figure out our relationship to our community, whatever community that is. We have to know who the members are, what they need, and how they operate.

I've heard a variety of ways of characterizing the new relationship:

- We're educators (Valerie Gross, Howard County, MD, Public Library)
- We facilitate the growth of knowledge in our communities (David Lankes, Syracuse University)
- We're instructional designers and teachers (academic librarians)
- We make everybody smarter (a law firm marketing director)

I like all of these. Each of them offers a productive way of thinking about our role.

There's a lot of concern about the skills and competencies we will need to succeed as our relationships and roles change. As we redefine our role in the community, it may well turn out that some of our time-honored core competencies, like knowledge of information and learning resources, information organization, continue to be the unique contributions we make – but only if we are able to connect more closely with the community. For that reason, we will need new skills too. New technology-related skills, sure, that goes without saying. But also greater depth of understanding of human information behavior, along with critical thinking, marketing, and greater domain knowledge relevant to our communities. And especially, relationship-building skills.

We may also need to re-visit some of our traditional attitudes and values. Here I'm thinking of library user privacy in particular. I believe our profession needs to have a much more sophisticated conversation about privacy than we are having. Maybe we can explore the reasons for that during the discussion.

I'll finish up with one more point. I think there are big opportunities ahead for us. But if we think the only change that matters is from print to digital, and we adopt the same set of priorities for managing digital content that we have applied to managing print content, we're going to miss them.