# The education function in a digital library environment: a challenge for college and research libraries

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### Abstract

Digital libraries have been a feature of the information arena for some time. They have re-defined the concept of “bibliographic instruction” in which the connotation “library” is implicit, but has become inadequate in a digital library context. This article relates the results of pilot studies of Internet use in academic libraries in the New York metropolitan area to the education of users in a digital library environment. It attempts to crystallize vital concepts and issues generated by interviewing users and information professionals, which could not be quantified in an earlier publication. The studies revealed an urgent need to develop user-education programs that emphasize: the nature and various types of digital collections; interfaces; hardware and software requirements; telecommunications access modes; and making such programs part of continuing education.

Article Type: Case study

Keyword(s): Academic libraries; Internet; Education; Training; User studies.

Journal: The Electronic Library

Volume: 19

Number: 5

Year: 2001

pp: 283-295

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ISSN: 0264-0473

#### Introduction

The phrase “digital library” refers to a collection of information bearing artifacts whose unit records have been encoded in electronic formats in “digital” as opposed to “analog” mode and stored in machine readable form. Library and information science literature has variations of this definition mainly because the concept has recently been grafted on to conventional libraries which have a predominant print hard copy base. As currently articulated, the concept bears several semantic connotations: electronic library – records are in electronic form; library without walls – virtual library; hybrid library – contains both hard copy and electronic formats; library of the future – hopefully (eventually) all records will be in digital form; digital library – an ambitious statement implying that all records are presently in digital form (Bowden and Rowlands, 1999). According to Stephen Griffin, manager of the Digital Libraries Initiative at the US National Science Foundation, “It is true that use of these labels is often in reference to the same sort of environments – people mean the same thing...”(Griffin, 1998, p. 24).

Such attempts at defining the digital library imply that its conceptualization, content development, and setting up of management structures, are in a state of flux. In spite of the apparent lack of an acceptable common definition, the existence of digital collections either in the library or as part of access services is a