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"Social Networking Literacy Competencies for Librarians: Exploring Considerations and Engaging Participation"
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The social networking literate librarian possesses the skills necessary providing services in and with online social networking sites.

Social networking sites are extremely popular across age groups and are central forums for accessing and sharing information. Librarians are responding to the popularity of social networking sites and their expanding role in the creation, use, and sharing of information by engaging them as a central medium for interacting with library patrons and providing services to meet their information needs.

Librarians need a new branch of skill sets specific to utilizing and leveraging social networking sites to provide quality services and maintain their role as information experts in a Web2.0 world.

The following competencies are a suggested set of skills that librarians should possess as social networking literate information professionals capable of implementing library services and utilizing information within social networking sites. These include skills for interacting with patrons within the sites, understanding and articulating the nature of social networking sites and their potential roles related to library services, creating presences and content, evaluating and applying information, and having the ability to assist patrons with gaining and applying these skills. Librarians possessing these skills are capable of efficiently and effectively navigating online social networking sites and applying their expertise to services with and within this now central realm for interacting with information.

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The following competencies, based on the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (American Library Association, September 01, 2006. http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency.cfm), are general enough to be applicable across various social networking sites and are flexible for new sites and their evolving applications to library services. They were developed by a practitioner and an LIS educator while training fellow librarians and LIS students in the use and creation of library services with social networks.

Understanding and Articulating Social Networking Sites and Their Roles

The social networking literate librarian is capable of articulating the nature and roles of online social networking sites and their importance in scholarly research and communication, and the information cycle. Librarians should be familiar with a diversity of social networking sites and social media including those most relevant to their patrons. Librarians also need to be able to articulate the importance of online social networking sites and their applications for libraries to peers, administrators, and patrons.

Creating Content

The social networking literate librarian is capable of creating, contributing, and revising content in various formats including images, text, audio, video, links, and more within and beyond the presence of their library in a variety of social networking sites with various tools. This extends to creating the library presence including pages, groups, profiles, and applications.

Evaluating Information

The social networking literate librarian is capable of critically evaluating information encountered in social networking sites on the basis of authority, currency, and bias etc. Librarians also need to be able to assist patrons in gaining and applying these skills to evaluate information they encounter in various online social networks.

Applying Information Ethically and Legally

The social networking literate librarian applies information in social networking sites ethically and legally. They respect copyright and intellectual property of information

encountered and applied in social networking sites, and conscious of the unique cultural norms. This includes applying information found in social networking sites to other media and applying information to projects within social networking sites.

Searching and Navigating

The social networking literate librarian knows how to effectively search and browse various online social networks for known and unknown contacts, and for information and resources in a variety of formats. This includes understanding the search tools available within the sites, knowledge of using outside search engines to search the sites, and an understanding of what information and fields are searchable. Skills for navigating and browsing within the sites and between a variety of individual networks and outside websites is also important.

Interacting

The social networking literate librarian is familiar with the diverse methods of communicating with social networking sites and is aware of and able to apply the unique cultural norms and expectations of each communication method. All social networking sites allow for varying degrees of interactivity that can serve as avenues for connecting with patrons. Communication channels include messaging within the sites, posts on profile walls, comments on status updates, notes, pictures, posted items and blogs, and the sites' various synchronous chat features.

Also important are the skills for interacting over the various mobile communication channels popular with some social networking sites. Librarians should posses the skills for interacting with patrons in these sites via smart phone applications, mobile webpages, email, software and third party clients, and text message.

Teaching

The social networking literate librarian is capable of teaching these skills to library patrons and peers. This includes guiding and training patrons through targeted aspects of social networking sites that arise in their use as resources and tools, teaching about the use of social networking sites for scholarly purposes, and teaching faculty and instructors about the role of social networking sites and considerations for issues affecting their students' work.

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Providing Services

The social networking literate librarian utilizes a variety of online social networking sites to provide quality library services. They evaluate social network sites and choose which are most appropriate to establish a library presence in. They are capable of building and managing the library's presence in the form of profiles or applications, developing work flows for services, marketing services, weeding spam, understanding and working with privacy levels, assessing the library's presence and services, leveraging tagging and favoriting, understanding and engaging vendor and other third party applications, and being aware of relevant security topics. It is important that librarians are familiar with the steps and etiquette for initiating and responding to friend requests in building networks.

Flexibility

Flexibility is the defining skill for librarians engaging people and information through social networking sites. Librarians must be able to apply the above skills to unique and novel social networking sites as they emerge and evolve. Familiarity with each of the above skills in multiple social networking sites will help librarians be flexible in applying these skills to future sites and services.

The most important, and possibly hardest to develop, skill is the ability to look ahead, visualize, create, and manage robust library services in full consideration of and within social networking sites. This takes vision, creativity, and a constant thumb on the pulse of the social web, its users, and their behaviors.

Training for librarians for these critical skills can be based on learning outcomes derived from the above competencies. Teaching methods should emphasize active learning because proficiency with social networking sites is most easily gained through active and personal engagement. Librarians will most easily learn these skills if they are given opportunities to play with these sites, gain personal confidence, and internalize their ease and value. Step by step training should be performed with targeted activities after buy in has been achieved.

The focus of training should be on general competencies applicable across sites that will help librarians excel at using any of them, not specific skills for specific resources.

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Professional associations, MLIS degree granting institutions, and individual library systems have important roles to play to support librarians in gaining and maintaining these skills. ALA and its divisions, can provide support and resources for its members to develop these skills through continuing education programs and resources. LIS schools/programs can help their graduates gain these critical skills by including the above competencies in their curricula with help from the ALA as the accrediting institution. Individual library systems can ensure that their new and continuing librarians possess these skills by making them required qualifications and providing continuing education and training. Every librarian has a responsibility for being aware of these important trends and skills, and should take the time to be aware of these resources, just as we do with more traditional library and information resources and trends.

The next step should be to pass these skills on to library patrons by applying them to library instruction activities. This will entail developing social networking literacy competencies for library patrons and structures for helping our patrons to learn and apply these skills.

The authors suggest further discussion into how librarians can most fully host library resources and services on social networking sites and how librarians can be supported in gaining the skills required for doing this. It is the opinion of the authors that in the near future, the evolving nature of libraries will include full integration of library services with popular social networking sites such as Facebook. This may include applications that can be integrated into patrons' online social networking experience developed by librarians. These applications would be flexible for multiple online platforms as well as smart phones such as Apple's iPhone and mobile devices that run on Google's Android software. These will serve as a library presence and a means to of access to resources and services that truly embrace social and mobile features. Librarians will need the above skills for developing and providing these services.

The above skills are designed to prepare librarians for providing quality services within and with the assistance of online social networking sites. These skills are applicable across social networking sites and are flexible enough to remain relevant in the ever changing information landscape. We can work with our professional associations to refine and support these skills as core competencies for social networking literacy for librarians.

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