



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Network: a network is formed when two or more devices (computers, printers, servers, etc.) can communicate with one another. This can be done with cabling, or it can be done wirelessly...The Internet is a very large Ethernet network.”

-From Infopeople's
Library Technology 101
online class taught by
Lori Ayres

In the last couple of months, I have taken two online courses through Infopeople (www.infopeople.org). The first of these four-week courses was called “Web 2.0” and it was free – which is how I came to be taking it. The second and current one is called “Library Technology 101” and it is \$75, which I think is a reasonable price for the amount of information that is covered.

These online courses are similar to ones I took in graduate school. There are weekly readings, homework assignments and online discussions. After the two and half years spent in library school, this is a familiar and comfortable environment for me. I like being able to do the work at odd hours and, probably since there is no grade at the end, I am not finding it as stressful as school. Although it is true I feel relieved when my weekly assignment is finished – it is always somewhere in the back of my mind until that moment.

The courses are well laid out and organized and I appreciate both of these qualities. Each week begins with one or two readings, which are much like lectures. The readings can be read online, which works well for the large number of links usually embedded in the text, however – and I know this probably dates me – I prefer to print them out and use a highlighter for the parts I particularly want to remember.

Following the readings are the homework assignments, which usually include research, such as reviewing examples of the technology. This is the most challenging part for me – what I consider the actual learning part of a class. It is where I have to go from not understanding something, such as what a wiki is, to experiencing it for myself. I have to change in some way, because I am forcing myself to let in new ideas that may not make sense yet or may appear to be more than I can possibly ever understand. At the end,

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my view of the world has expanded, not because I now have more facts, but because I have more knowledge. It is like opening the hood of my car and slowly letting myself take in what I am seeing – something I did recently. At first all I can see are unrecognizable parts, each covered with a layer of black greasy dirt. But after a minute or so, I recognize the radiator, the hoses, the spark plugs, the little bottle for the window washing fluid, the power steering reservoir and finally the brake fluid reservoir – the very thing I was looking for this time. Like a photographic print, the picture starts to make sense.

Real learning is like that for me. As I read, explore and discuss, I am piecing together a greater understanding of the topic. And the pleasure I get in this process continues to astonish me. Despite the fact that it can be emotionally exhausting, humbling and sometimes frus-

trating, I find myself looking for yet another class to take. Adding to my understanding of a topic makes me feel like an active part of the library world – or even simply the world. It is exhilarating, even as it is difficult. In fact, the more difficult it is, the more rewarding I find it. Because not only have I learned something new, but I have also challenged myself and won. It is a small victory perhaps, but it is one I treasure.