



## AT THE LIBRARY

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*“What matters is that we make a difference in everything we do, and that this difference is a positive one affecting individuals, organizations, and ultimately society.”*

-From the Vision Statement of the School of Information Studies, Syracuse University

Recently I visited the School of Information Studies at the University of Syracuse, in Syracuse, New York. One of the distinctions of this school is that they are, according to their literature, the Original Information School, now “serving as a model for other i-schools that are continuing to pop up around the globe.” Since I didn’t really have a clear idea of what an i-school is, I was glad for the opportunity to talk to students and faculty.

What surprised me most was that faculty members have PhDs in various fields, like communications, education, political science, psychology, economics and library science. They teach in all areas of the academic programs, and the students take classes together. As mentioned on the website, this “exposes them to new perspectives and broader applications information theory and structure.” In other words, they learn not only from the professors, but also from each other.

Since the School of Information Studies at SU calls itself an i-school, it is natural the description of the programs should be defined in terms of the word information. They have programs in “information policy, information behavior, information management, information systems, information technology and information services.” As a public librarian, I don’t usually step back and look at all of what I provide as information. When I hand a child a book or help someone download a résumé or set up a room for a Brown Bag speaker or order the children’s books online, I think of each of those tasks as a distinct part of my job. Yet if I look at what I am doing all day, one could say most of all I am connecting people with information.

I was interested to see that when I asked my word processing program the definition of information, there were 6 different entries. They include “the communication of facts and knowledge,” “computer data

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that has been organized and presented in a systematic fashion to clarify the underlying meaning,” and “definite knowledge acquired or supplied about something or somebody.” So, when a library patron comes up to the desk and asks me to recommend a book on grief, my answer falls into two of those categories.

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are doing it all.

On the other hand, we are proud of our personal relationships with our communities. I look forward to chatting for a few minutes about a favorite book or standing in the back of the room as parents and children sing together. At those moments, I am thinking of myself not as an

I find it both liberating and worrying to stretch my view of public librarians as information specialists. Our work really does include all of the categories listed on the SU website – we manage information, we create policy, we look at how our library users behave so we can serve them better, and we create information systems to handle everything. We are definitely involved in information technology, as we expand our offerings to include wireless Internet access, online reference and even computer gaming. We

information specialist, but as a public librarian, supported by the public and happily serving them.

Perhaps i-schools have evolved from the needs of all kinds of librarians to reexamine their roles and find new words for the work they are doing. While we used to be about providing access to books, we have become more about providing access to everything. By creating i-schools, universities like SU are creating a language to explain this expanding and critical role.