

In "Where Do We Go From Here? The Next Decade For Digital Libraries," Clifford Lynch (2005) discussed the past, present, and future of the digital library field. He started with its origins, both historically distant and relatively recent, then moving onto how past and current research could be applied to future practice. Finally, he turned to the most important section of his article: an exploration of future research directions for the digital library field. Lynch strongly believed that the main goal of this future research should be in "connecting and integrating digital libraries with broader individual, group, and societal activities," both in the short and long term (para. 21). As a "think piece," Lynch's article does not include empirical data for his arguments and conclusions, but is still persuasive, important, and relevant—especially given similar arguments from others—as a guide and argument for researchers in the digital library field and related areas of information science to consider digital libraries as part of individual, social, and cultural contexts.

Summary

Lynch (2005) started by noting the digital library field has drawn from a broad array of disciplines, and that its history—extending back to Wells and Otlet and through Bush, Licklider, Kahn, and Cerf to the 1990s—was not as short as some might argue. It had only taken off recently for two reasons: first, the Internet entering public consciousness and use, and second, "substantial programmatic funding" from research funding agencies (para. 5), specifically for constructing prototype systems (para. 9). Lynch felt that this funding "legitimized digital libraries as a field of research" (para. 5) and contributed to the formation of a community of digital library researchers who participated in the same conferences and published in the same journals, despite different backgrounds (para. 8).

However, as of 2005 that funding source had dried up, and so Lynch (2005) explored where the field and community might go next because of this change. He noted the development of real-world digital libraries in production—particularly in tandem with collaboratories, e-research, and data curation— was "one obvious place," but that these were not pure research efforts (para. 11). Other current and future applications of past research included higher education, cultural memory, digital asset management, and institutional repositories, applying the "relatively mature set of tools, engineering approaches, and technologies" digital libraries now provided to these fields (para. 13). In addition, Lynch argued that digital preservation would be "an enormous issue" that would require funding, but the amount spent on "real research" in this area would not be "terribly large" (para. 14); he also felt questions of policy, ethics, and culture relating to digital libraries deserved broad exploration.

Lynch's (2005) most important discussion was of "a handful of areas" in the digital library field that he found "compelling" and deserving of "investment and attention in the coming years" (para. 16). These included

- personal information management (para. 17), especially in relation to personal medical records, e-portfolios, e-mail, and personal collections of digital content;
- the relationship over time "between humans and information collections and systems", relating to studies of human-computer interaction (HCI) and information behavior over "long time horizons" (para. 18);

- the "role of digital libraries ... in supporting teaching, [life-long] learning, and human development" (para. 19), again stressing long time horizons; and
- "environments for computer-supported collaborative work" (CSCW) and their relation to digital libraries, with particular emphasis on "collaboration and social interactions" (para. 20).

Lynch (2005) concluded with an "overarching theme," believing the main goal of future research in the digital library field should be in "connecting and integrating digital libraries with broader individual, group, and societal activities," both in the short and long term (para. 21).

Critique

Lynch's (2005) article was clearly a "think piece," expressing what he thought of the past, present, and future of the digital library field. As such, his arguments were not often directly supported by empirical evidence. However, his overall theme and the points within it were still quite coherent and persuasive, especially to those who have knowledge of the digital library field and its research from 1994-2005 (which often focused on system development and information retrieval, especially early in that period). Lynch clearly assumed his audience, reading *D-Lib Magazine*, would be aware of this research tradition and would not need further details. He did not assume, however, that they were aware of the history of the field prior to its recent emergence, nor how its systematic funding in the late 1990s and early 2000s helped form and shape the community; thus he spent the first half or so of the article on these points. There did appear to be some slight biases in his arguments against traditional librarianship (see e.g. para. 1) and towards HCI, but this was balanced well by the future research directions he proposed, which included areas from librarianship, education, HCI, and the broader social sciences.

It is these suggestions for future research that are the most relevant portion of Lynch's article for the field of information science, and in particular the field and study of digital libraries. This is especially true since he has not been the only scholar to argue for a focus on integrating digital libraries into the individual, group, and societal context of their use; for example, Ackerman (1994), Levy and Marshall (1995), Van House (2003), and Gazan (2008) have all made similar arguments. A social approach to research in information science in general is also becoming increasingly common (Raber, 2003), and thus a social approach to digital library research in many ways naturally follows. At the same time, this is clearly a "sea change" from most of the digital library research conducted from 1994 to 2005, but—as Lynch argued—one that is necessary. His article is most important as a call to the digital library research community—formed, as he said, through ten years of funding programs—as well as the broader library and information science field to consider digital libraries in the social and cultural contexts they are naturally a part of.

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