Part III.

The Educational Dimension of Information Technology

Chapter IX

Changing Roles in Information Dissemination and Education

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The World Wide Web (WWW) is changing the face of today's academic libraries — the way we use them and how we give value to them. In this article I will explain what the WWW means to the academic library and why it has become worthy of consideration. I will show that the WWW will impact greatly upon the Library whether the Library wants it to or not, and this impact will be in large part be dictated to the Library by forces both technologically and socially based, and thus beyond the Library's overall control. Some consequences that I see of attempting to ignore WWW technology or providing inadequate resources to it will be discussed as well. Finally I will present some observations that I see on how the WWW is changing the balance between the Library as provider of information and teaching faculty as providers of education.

INTRODUCTION

It's been over five years now since the World Wide Web (WWW) became a commonly available product with the general release of the first personal computer (PC) versions of WWW browsers. Previous to this event, the WWW was a "potentially useful, some day" idea confined mainly to workstation class computers of the late 1980s and early 1990s (e.g. those from Sun Microsystems, SGI, Hewlett-Packard, etc.), usually running some flavour of the Unix operating system. The introduction of PC based WWW browsers to the mass market dramatically increased the popularity of the WWW, leading to demands for better (meaning faster, more reliable, and cheaper) computers and networking technologies to support the WWW. The continuing drop in computer hardware prices combined with increases in processing performance and faster, more reliable networks has meant that

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