



# The Next Generation

STUDENTS LOOK AT THE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION COMMUNITY WITH FRESH EYES

## 7 THINGS THEY DON'T TEACH YOU IN LIBRARY SCHOOL: A Library Science Student Rants About School and Work

We go undeluded into library school. We expect to be taught practices and skills that will make us stupendous librarians. But we also know that every detail and nuance of library work cannot possibly be taught in school. Here are a few things I have observed, some amusing, some alarming, in public libraries. Reality, in my opinion, has always been highly overrated.

**1) A public library is a very noisy place.** We all know about the stereotypical librarian who shushes down anyone who even thinks about talking above a whisper. But the shushing would go unheard in a public library where a children's sing-along program is taking place at the same time that 75 teenagers are doing a scavenger hunt assignment, on top of the hubbub of our regular clientele. On days like this, there are quieter building

demolitions. But in the big picture, is this so bad? We want young people to come into our libraries, and they might be more likely to do so if they see libraries as hives of activity. There are still quiet study places in the library for people who need them, and if these are all occupied, I usually point out that the drugstore around the corner sells soft foam earplugs.

**2) Libraries are crime scenes.** Sad but true: criminals frequent public libraries. Some are trying to reform, using library facilities to increase their job prospects, but others are there to steal anything they can get their hands on, like wallets, purses, iPods, laptops, and sellable library materials like new DVDs and CDs. And let's not even think about the flashers, vandals, and aggressive drunks who occasionally have to be escorted out of the building. This is a grim reality of the library profession.

**3) Anyone who wants to eat and drink in the library can now do so.** It was unthinkable 15 years ago. Kids now order pizzas and have them delivered to the library, or get takeout from McDonald's, and

By Marcel H. Faulkner



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eat while flipping through books. When I was a kid, you would've been severely reprimanded, possibly even executed, if you ever tried this. But the logic nowadays is that eating and drinking while reading is no worse than what the kids will do when they take the books home. Are library pot-smoking lounges next? I'm serious: if marijuana is ever fully legalized, we'll probably have to consider this.

**4) Most public library customer transactions still involve books.** In library school, we see that everything is going digital. Online databases are replacing periodicals and reference books, and some libraries, such as the Toronto, Vancouver, and Edmonton systems, already circulate downloadable e-books. Yet the paper monograph is still what a majority of library customers want. Sure, librarians must prepare for the digital future, but in doing so we cannot neglect the monographic present. The humble book will be with us for decades to come, but alas, not forever: eventually there will be a generation of library users, e-book readers all, who will find the paper monograph unwieldy, inconvenient, and posterously archaic.

**5) There are still armies of people who've never used a computer for anything.** In 2003, over 35 per cent of

Canada's population did not use the Internet, and while it's likely that this number has decreased since it still means that there are literally millions of Canadians who can't tell a search field from a cornfield. Several times a week, I have to show someone how to access Google or set up an email account. Cyberdomination is well underway but far from complete.

**6) Men seek reference desk help differently than women do.** This is an entirely unscientific observation, and a sweeping generalization to boot, but I've observed this time and again: most men want you to take them to the books on their general topic, then they want you to leave. "Thanks, chief, I'll take it from here," is fairly typical of what they say at this point. Men clearly want to do their own searching. We amateur psychologists can link this behaviour to both primal hunting instincts and the modern male unwillingness to ask for directions. One of the reasons I recognized this particular information-seeking behaviour is because I do it myself. My theory:

inside every man there lurks an inner Mongo (i.e., a little macho idiot) who he controls 99 per cent of the time but never totally eliminates. It is he who makes us act this way.

**7) Libraries are good places to meet women, but according to several of my co-workers, they are lousy places to meet men.**

The demographics explain it all: according to Statistics Canada, for every 100 women who regularly use the library, there are only 85 men. To increase the number of male users, libraries could put up more displays that somehow involve hockey, beer, mud-wrestling, or power tools. But then again, this is probably just my inner Mongo talking.

*MARCEL H. FAULKNER is currently a librarian assistant at the Hamilton Public Library, where he has also worked as shipper-receiver, clerk and delivery driver since 1991. He has also been a cab driver, steelworker, auto assembler, janitor, writer and musician. He will graduate from FIS next year or in 2007, whichever comes first.*



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