The Future of Reading: The Importance of Preserving Hybrid Collections in the Digital Age

David Durant
Joyner Library, East Carolina University
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Introduction: Libraries in Transition
From storehouse to gateway
From “P-Books” to “E-Books”

• 21% of Americans have read an e-book in the last year
• Percentage of e-reader owners went from 10% in Dec. 11 to 19% in Jan. 12
• At the end of 2011, 42 of USA Today’s top 50 bestsellers sold more e-copies than paper copies
• Amazon announced in 2011 that its e-book sales had surpassed its print sales
• In 2010, academic libraries added more e-books (32 million) than print books (27 million)
From “P-Books” to “E-Books”

• E-books are increasingly replacing print texts, not just supplementing them
• This could have major repercussions for the future of reading and intellectual life
Reading & Neuroplasticity

• Reading is not natural to the human brain
• Humans developed the ability to read due to neuroplasticity, the brain’s ability to adapt and rewire itself
• The human brain is much more adaptive and malleable than previously thought.
• The brain “rewires” itself as it engages in various activities or uses technologies
Reading & Neuroplasticity

• The more one reads, the more deeply the neural pathways that facilitate reading take hold

• The opposite is also true
Print Reading vs. E-Reading

• Reading off a screen is NOT the same as reading off a printed page

• The human brain responds differently to screen-based reading than to print reading
“Your Brain on Google”

Print Reading vs. E-Reading

• The more your brain rewires itself to accommodate screen reading, the harder it becomes to read off a printed page
“Deep” Print Reading is . . .

• Fixed
• Linear
• Solitary
• In-depth
• Requires focused, sustained attention
Online Reading is . . .

- Nonlinear (hyperlinks, etc.)
- Malleable
- Rapid decision making/filtering
- Visual ability/pattern recognition
- Immediate
- Interactive
Online Reading . . . (cont.)

- Impatience/desire for immediate gratification
- Need for constant stimulation
- Distractions/multitasking
- Absorbing information in small bits
- Browsing or skimming (F-shaped pattern - Nielsen)
F-Shaped Reading Pattern

Print Reading vs. E-Reading (cont.)

- Print reading fosters analytical thinking, focus, attention, reflection, in-depth conceptual knowledge and greater long-term retention of information.

- Online reading fosters immediate problem solving, multitasking, visual pattern recognition and short-term rapid assimilation of information.
Consequences

• If we entirely give up “deep” print reading for screen reading, we risk losing not just a format but a culture and a way of thinking

• We would gain vastly greater access to information in return for the ability to turn that information into knowledge
What About E-Readers?

• Conflicting studies on effectiveness of e-readers vs. print books
• E-reader/e-book sales have boosted the publishing industry in recent years
• Most readers of e-books tend to read print as well (among the heaviest readers)
• Unlikely that e-readers are a long-term solution
What About E-Readers (cont.)?

• Dedicated e-readers (Kindle, Nook) vs. multipurpose devices (iPad, Laptop)
• Only 41% of readers of e-books used dedicated e-reading devices (42% used computers)
• Multipurpose devices bring a variety of distractions
• Multipurpose devices tend to supplant dedicated devices (iPhone/digital camera)
The Future of Reading

• From 2002-2008, the percentage of 18-24 year olds who read a book of their own accord declined from 52% to 50.7%

• In 2010, the average 15-19 year old spent 2 hrs., 17 min. watching TV; over 55 minutes using computers/video games; and 7 minutes per day reading
• Deep, print-based reading is not likely to disappear entirely. However, it is likely to become the exclusive property of an elite “reading class”.
The Reading Class

• “The era of mass reading, which lasted from the mid-nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century in northwestern Europe and North America, was the anomaly. We are now seeing such reading return to its former social base: a self-perpetuating minority that we shall call the reading class.”

(Griswold, et. al., 2005)

The Reading Class (cont.)

• Having deep reading confined to a small elite threatens to have major long-term social, economic and political consequences.

• With many physical bookstores likely to disappear due to the spread of e-reading, only libraries will be able to provide those outside the “reading class” with the means to gain entrance to it.
What can Libraries do: Preserve Hybrid Collections

• Turning back the clock is NOT the answer
• Hybrid collections: Maintaining some print materials along with access to electronic resources
• Maintain space to facilitate deep reading
• Understand which format works better for which purpose
• Libraries that combine the virtues of both print and electronic
Why Hybrid Collections

• Not everything is online
• Preserve advantages of print monographs
• Some users still prefer print
• Publisher/copyright restrictions
Why Hybrid Collections (cont.)

- Enable broader access to “reading class”
- Preserve culture of deep reading and print literacy
Why Hybrid Collections

• If we give up print reading for the sake of e-books, we risk marginalizing an entire way of thinking

• If libraries don’t safeguard deep reading and make it available to the general public, then who will?
Questions?
Contact info:

David Durant
Joyner Library
East Carolina University
Greenville, NC 27858
Ph. (252) 328-2258
E-mail: durantd@ecu.edu