
[Remarks delivered by Winston Tabb, at Elsevier's Digital Libraries Symposium in January 2010]

Thank you very much, Daviess and Karen, for inviting me to come today and to talk about some of the initiatives that Johns Hopkins has undertaken in most recent years. In the context of rebranding or branding is really the focus that I wanted to place today on my remarks.

Clearly, when we talk about research libraries, we all may have something very different in mind, so this is a very timely kind of conversation to have, I think, about what branding really means because, clearly, research library is going to be very different to different people. And so the meaning of the brand will differ, too.

I wanted to begin, before I start talking about a few specific initiatives that we've undertaken, with this caveat, which is that I don't want you to think that I want *you* to go back and try what I'm talking about today at your place. The kinds of initiatives that help us brand ourselves appropriately at our own institutions are very much locally driven. They're not something that can be put on a thumb-drive and taken home to your USB. There isn't any one-size-fits-all, so the key to success really is in figuring out what works for your location.

I, as many of you know, worked for many years at the Library of Congress, 30 for example, so I was really clueless when I went to Johns Hopkins a few years ago about exactly what I should expect. And I do have my staff in the audience, so they can verify this very much at the interlude if you wish to. But it's very, very different, for example, to be moving from a library which calls itself "THE LIBRARY," all uppercase as if there is no other library in the world, and move into an environment where the library is very much lowercase, part of an institution with a very much more complex mission than being just a library.

So one of the things that I needed to do very quickly was to listen carefully to my colleagues and realize, what were the values that really drove this institution? What was the coin of the realm? What was going to enable us to be successful? And certainly at Hopkins it didn't take very long to realize that the coin of the realm was research. Hopkins, priding itself very much on being a research institution and one that draws many millions of dollars, always remaining for the last two decades, I think, at the top of the list of institutions receiving federal research funds from the U.S. Government.

So this meant that one of our major focuses needed to be, if we were going to be really included and thought of as fully a part of the university, was to be doing not just what we often have thought of doing, which is supporting research or supporting teaching, but actually becoming ourselves researchers.

So I want to talk now about – let's see if I skipped – four different very specific kinds of things that we've done and then at the end draw some conclusions from those. The first is The Data Conservancy. Then I'll talk about the Roman de la Rose Digital Library, a

new effort we have undertaken in conservation, and then some efforts with an African-American newspaper, which is one of our local papers.

The Data Conservancy. Many of you know that a couple of years ago, the National Science Foundation began a new program called "Data Net" with the intention of giving five grants, each of about \$20 million over a five-year period. I was very much interested in this not because of the money so much, as because the second week that I was in my job at Johns Hopkins, I was visited for the first time by a faculty member, Alex Szalay, whom many of you have met because he's presented at various programs now, an astronomer who was running the Sloan Mitchell Survey. And his basic point to me was, "I'm collecting amazing amounts of data now as part of this project, the National Virtual Observatory. At some point the project will be done, and I'll be ready to hand it over to you." How is that going to work?

Well, you can imagine that no one had an answer to the question, but I think we all knew that it was certainly the right question. And what was particularly important about, this from my point of view, was that it was acknowledgement on the part of faculty that there would be a role for the library, a traditional part of our role done in a very different way, this notion of collecting data, making it accessible and preserving it. We did some work on this with some small grants that we received separately from the IMLS and from Microsoft. I thought it was very important to solve these very grand challenges, but also really very much moved from the beginning and remained this way by the notion that it was the library that should be leading this effort. This is one of the things that's been most important to us when we're talking from a position of branding or rebranding ourselves.

As we began to get together to supply a response to this call for proposals, it seemed very obvious at our campus that the person who would lead us would be the associate librarian who's handling our digital program, Sayeed Choudhury, who many of you know, and that he would in fact become the P.I. working with seven co-P.I.s, tenured faculty from three different divisions.

This seemed obvious to us, and it seemed very obvious to the faculty who were working with him, because we had been accustomed to doing it this way. But it was not at all obvious to a number of people at our campus, most particularly to the new president and to the new provost, actually, both of the new provosts we've had in the process of doing this. So I'm speaking now more for the political point of view where, as directors of libraries, we know that one of our major efforts really is to keep the people who fund us quite happy. And there could not have been better timing for the receipt of this grant because of what it signaled to this new leadership on our campus about what the role of our library was, how we were seen, and how we were perceived by the faculty with whom we work.

The overarching goal of this project, called the Data Conservancy, now is to support new forms of inquiry and learning, very much the kind of things that Wendy was talking about earlier, through the creation, implementation and sustained management of an integrated

and comprehensive data strategy. So the key efforts really here are speaking to our professional ethos of organizing and preserving information and then seeing how we could help others to use it over time.

One of the most important aspects of this that I think affects all of the kind of efforts that we're gonna be undertaking in the future as research libraries is that no one can do it alone. It's not just a matter of the scope or of the capabilities, but the sense that we are engaged now in efforts which really are worldwide. So among our partner institutions will be some of the normal suspects, people we work with a lot. But who knew there was a National Snow and Ice Data Center, for example, or that we'd be working with the Center for Atmospheric Research and the huge number of not only partners here in the United States but partners abroad, particularly from Australia and from Great Britain.

Another very important thing I think about all of these kind of efforts that we have to be undertaking, positioning ourselves as international partnerships and as having connections that go far beyond boundaries, just as our own faculty are expected to do in their research.

There really are four basic objectives of the Data Conservancy to identify research requirements at every case. We're talking about kinds of research that need to be undertaken. What are the technical requirements, the user requirements, most particularly the educational requirements? And one of the things I think is most important, the business requirements, doing research into what does it actually take to have sustainability of a project of this sort, areas which are not typically very strong on our list of strengths or have not been so much on our list of strengths as research libraries as they really need to be.

Now the Data Conservancy project is just beginning. It actually officially began only in October, so we don't have results yet, but we're already getting into the planning and conversations with our partners to understand that there really are going to be some very significant implications for libraries. One is that we will as libraries be working as parts of distributed networks, and not only that we couldn't possibly do it all ourselves, but it's just not the scope of the work to be done, but that many of our scholars, researchers using the data will want to have it available locally. And so that needs to be considered in our planning.

Thinking about data as collections and what impact does that have on how we conceive of our acquisitions budgets and actually what collections even are in the future.

Data as services? We can't let the data be inert when we've spent this much money collecting it, so we know that there's gonna be a huge demand for services built on the data. We just don't know what all they're going to be yet, and we'll need opportunities for the libraries to become full partners in figuring out what those services are going to be.

We know that there's going to be an impact on the workforce. Part of our planning for the Data Conservancy is really a new group of people, working in the library, we're calling "data scientists." And what does this mean for what our workforce will be like and what the kind of training is that we'll be expecting to do ourselves or to have done by whom, by library schools, by discipline-specific faculty? Where are these data scientists going to come from?

And then finally this notion that the data centers really are the new library stacks and what that means for our infrastructure, for our planning, for where our dollars go and so on. So they're really great opportunities I think for us here, as we begin to understand what some of the implications may be. Old functions performed in new ways, and we're very happy to be able to bring an effort in figuring out what those are, working with so many of our colleagues.

Another project that I wanted to mention, because it reveals something slightly different, which is the Roman de a Rose Project. This began several years ago when a faculty member came to the library saying, "I want to be able to do one very simple thing, which is to have a few instances of the medieval manuscript *Roman de la Rose* digitized so that I can use it for teaching my graduate students paleography." That was the entire intent of this project, and that was done.

One might have thought it was a peculiar request to bring to a library that had no copy of the *Roman de la Rose*, but this is I think an example of talking about libraries working with others to provide services because the people who had the copies wouldn't have had a clue, I think, about how to do the project as it was defined. So this kind of collaboration between libraries who may be very strong on the service side working with libraries who may have more strengths on the content side is a very important example.

But who would've imagined? I think almost every project we get engaged in now will have these completely unimagined consequences, and so very, very quickly there became an expectation on the part of the community of medieval scholars that something like this was fine to be used to teach graduate students paleography, but wouldn't [it] transform scholarship in their area, if all instances where extant copies of the *Roman de la Rose* were made available and put online. So that's a project we're now engaged in. Fortunately, this is a known universe of roughly only 150 copies. We started with five, and with funding from the Mellon Foundation and the cooperation of the Bibliothèque Nationale of France, which of course, has the content, we expect within a matter of a year or so to have a 135 of the known 150 copies available for use.

Many of you have heard Steven Nichols, who is the faculty member who drove this research project into the library, speak at ARL about it. Well that's what I really wanted to particularly focus on, this notion of the unexpected consequence and also how libraries will have to build on their strengths to provide services that we might never have imagined doing. One of the particular outcomes of this is that working with the Walters Art Museum, which was the local owner of one of the copies of the *Roman de la Rose*, we now are engaged in a completely new project with scanning all of their Arabic

manuscripts which is one of the largest collections as well. No one ever had this in mind when we started; this is just what has happened.

Now I move to my third example, which has to do with conservation. And when Daviess asked me if I would speak on this program, I said, "Yes, if I could talk about this." And I mention that specifically because this has nothing to do with digital libraries. And I know this is a digital library program, but I think we need to be reminded, as we think about rebranding our libraries, that it worries a lot of people that we're only going to be digital, and that in fact we have many, many things we need to be doing that are traditional but need to be done in new ways as well, and this is a perfect example of this.

What we were asked to do by the Mellon Foundation was to convene a meeting of experts, scientists, conservators of the kinds of people listed here, particularly drawing people from Europe, where there has been much more focus on the research of needs within the conservation area. And as a result, we came up with a collection of 10 or 12 very specific areas of scientific research that needed to be undertaken in order to preserve our collections in ways – excuse me, I've jumped ahead – that we were really not doing because of the long tradition within our libraries and in fact within the conservators' profession, which typically continues to focus very much its efforts in a guild-like fashion to simply transfer from one person to the next techniques and methods that have been known to work for centuries and centuries.

Building upon this collaboration with scientists, conservators and people from industries and museums, one of the very most important conclusions was that we'd still need to have the hands-on skills of our conservators, but that increasingly we'd have to have help from scientists working alongside the conservator staff. So as a result of this workshop, we were able to get a grant from the Andrew Mellon Foundation, not surprisingly. But it would start initially with having two post-docs in the sciences come and be in our libraries. So what we have now, actually functioning, the first two fellows are here on the left and the right with the senior project conservator sitting between them.

Both of these post-docs have appointments in the library. This was the first time this had actually happened, and they have joint appointments with areas of engineering, particularly chemical engineering and materials of science. This was actually quite a new idea when we brought this forward to the engineering department, which couldn't imagine quite how this was gonna work but are quite happy as you can imagine to have new people working in new areas and also quite happy to have the library taking the lead in this research, because it really shows this kind of connection between individual research and how it may be applied.

So we now actually have these people working in projects like iron gall corrosion, and already based upon the strength of the outcomes so far, the clear evidence of the benefit this is going to have for the world at large in the area of paper conservation. To press ahead and to build our collaborations beyond those that you see here, not only the Smithsonian, the British Library, others of that sort but beyond. And most particularly important here has been a collaboration with industry because we think so often of what

libraries need to do, and, yes, we're used to working with researchers on our campus. But we feel very strongly, based upon the work that we've done thus far with this group, that unless some of these processes are actually commercialized and brought into development, that they will not be fully successful. So we really have a partnership that we've never had before, certainly within our libraries with the faculty, with the librarians, as well as with the private sector, focusing particularly on how to put the results of the research into operation.

Then the final example I wanted to show has to do more with teachers supporting teaching, more than research specifically. One of the things that happened several years ago is that our basically defunct Afrikaner Studies program got quite a jolt when a bright new person was hired to come and to lead this program and started, first of all, of course, working with the library to say, "Well, what resources do you actually hold that will help me work in this program where I want to be focusing on the African-American diaspora?" The answer was basically none; we didn't have any resources in that area. But we thought we know where some might be, and so just a few blocks from our library is the headquarters of this African-American newspaper which it says is the oldest family-run newspaper of its sort in the United States.

We didn't really know the people there, but we thought why not go and find whether they might have some interest in working with us and with this faculty member. This, again, is a kind of an example repeating what happened with the Roman de la Rose project, where the item was not something that we actually owned or a collection (something that we didn't own), but where the expectation on the part of faculty was that we could figure out a way to help them find it and get the resources that they need, which is exactly what we've done. So a completely different way of acquiring collections gives a different gloss on what it means to acquire something.

And so we began our project to bring all the players together in ways that built on the very strengths that they had, first strengths and the needs. The faculty wanted the content. The Mellon Foundation very much wanted to support hidden collections, exposing hidden collections. The Afro paper itself wanted to organize and modernize its own archives, and the library wanted to help the faculty who came to us in the first place. So it's really kind of a complete circle that was completed when we were able to get the grant from the Mellon Foundation and begin this work in which library staff have actually become faculty, teaching graduate students not just from our university but from associated universities around the Baltimore area, plus the University of Pennsylvania, how to do archival work. The result being that the *Afro* now has a usable archive.

We now have students that have a marketable skill who have become themselves quite interested in working in libraries and doing archival work, and a faculty that is very, very happy with the results, because they've been able not only to teach their students about the content of the African-American diaspora as they had wanted but also how they might be able to do archival work for themselves in the future.

So building on these examples, I had just a few concluding thoughts. One, as I mentioned at the very beginning, how important it is that institutional culture matters. At Johns Hopkins we could say research is us, so it was pretty obvious that research would be one of the areas that we would be having the library focus on, not supporting research, but initiating research. For you, it may be something very different. Second, how essential collaboration is, already mentioned that. Third, that libraries may lead and must lead many of these efforts, but the users must be driving them behind.

I inherited a few projects when I came to Johns Hopkins that were extremely fascinating. They were originally research, but, without faculty champions, they could not progress. This is a lesson I think all of us know but we need to remember, as we get tempted to venture off on our own in certain ways because of the exciting possibilities of the digital world. And the last is that we should really expect and even more importantly revel in these unanticipated outcomes.

I mean, it's obviously very important to plan. All of us do, and we spend a lot of time on it. We go in intentionally trying to accomplish certain objectives, but, in every one that we've been involved in, amazing things have happened that we could never have contemplated. That to me is what makes our job so exciting, so rewarding to go to work every day. That's the way I think we should be looking at the future that's before us as we work with our faculty and to undertake these kinds of research for our users.

Thank you very much.

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