Mayflower: Ode to New Beginnings — A New Column for New Times with a Positive Mission

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Winter is Coming: Post-Growth, No-Growth, and Existential Value Judgments

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The inspiration for this new column sprang from the stream from fearful expressions about existential pressures within the library profession. Articles emphasizing library defunding, layoffs, and outright closures, along with studies on the waning usefulness of libraries based on flawed quantifiables have fueled fear and dissatisfaction in the library profession.

The first article in this column frames library pressures in a context of broader trends, examines professional stewardship and the library profession’s enduring value, and portrays the wide range of skill and knowledge areas to which libraries are natural contributors. — AM

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Key knowledge needs and the library profession as strategic partner: Numerous studies across the fields of business, economics, education, and the military identify several key skill and talent shortages that harm organizational functioning, economic strength, and national security (Klein, Rice, & Levy, 2012; Manpower Group, 2012, 2013; Onsomu et al, 2010; Our Troubled Education System, 2012; Preston, 2010; Schwab & Sala-i-Martin, 2012, 2013; Wagner, 2010).

Hard key skills found lacking across student bodies and the workforce comprise content knowledge, technical skills, and industry-specific competencies. Hard skills include basic skills, literacy, numeracy including mathematical reasoning and applied measurement, academic foundations and subject mastery, and the skill of practical application of knowledge in real-world work settings. Soft skills in the analytical realm encompass oral and written communication skills, information literacy characterized by ability to locate, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources, scientific literacy, critical thinking, analysis and synthesis, interdisciplinary thinking, problem-solving and decision-making skills, innovation, creativity, global awareness, cultural intelligence, and engaged citizenship. Values-centric soft skills include ethics and character, professionalism, work ethic and motivation, initiative, flexibility, social skills and business etiquette, self-awareness, collaboration and teamwork, leadership skills, intellectual curiosity, and commitment to continuous skill development (Closing the Gap, 2012; Critical Skills Survey, 2010, 2012; Gerver & Robinson, 2010; Hart Research Associates, 2010; Hirsch, 1988, 2008; Hofman, 2008; Jacobs, 2011; Kuczera & Field, 2013; Nagle, 2010; OECD, 2012; Pohl, 2000; Plum et al, 2008; SHRM, 2008; Suárez-Orozco, 2007; Thomburg, 2002; Wagner, 2012).

These key skill families are a natural outgrowth of libraries’ instruction in research pertinent skills in information technologies, critical evaluation of information, reflection upon purpose-appropriateness of findings, and practical application of knowledge uncovered through research. The library profession can and should take a page from the business playbook and inject its expertise into the wider community — a topic covered further in the next article.

References


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continued on page 00
Mayflower: Ode to New Beginnings from page 00


Invitation to authors: In light of libraries’ strategic strengths, why does the library profession denigrate itself? Many of the above skill families globally deemed in short supply fall within libraries’ roles of information expertise. Come join this gathering place around library strategies for positive futures!

This column invites you to submit research articles, case studies, and how-we-did-it articles. Article submissions are welcome in a wide range of topics including strategic partnerships and outreach, collaborations, sharing expertise in and beyond our profession, getting out into the broader community to share our information savvy, as well as specific examples of successful library strategies with positive outcomes.