

Electronic Publications Evaluation*

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This Paper and its related electronic messages are available via *Gopher* and *ftp* from:
durak.gslis.ucla.edu

1 **Subscribe To Five Electronic Publications**

My initial subscriptions included: [arie-l](#), [advanc-l](#), [bi-l](#), [cwis-l](#), [labmgr-l](#), and [pacs-l](#), all identified using *Bailey's List Of Library-Related Lists And Electronic Serials*. I've since added an SLA job-announcement list and several Usenet Newsgroups.

2 **Select A Topic From Each List**

“Choose Policy Or Service Issues” Here are the topics I will analyze for this assignment:

CWIS-L Should we charge a student technology fee for campus computing services?

PACS-L How should we design our ‘Library of the Future?’

alt.culture.usenet Death of the Net?

3 **Track Each Topic For At Least 12 Messages A Week**

I had a difficult time finding ‘deep’ policy and issue discussions of more than a few messages in length on the six listservs I was reading and archiving. A number of interesting questions were raised, and instead of being discussed, were handled with humble netiquette— “Please respond directly to me via e-mail, and if there is interest, I will summarize to the list.” I always thought that it was polite of people to conserve bandwidth, but it sure made this assignment more difficult! I don’t want to exaggerate the or inflate the participation in these lists, so the statistics that follow might be a little low. . .

4 **Summarize And Tabulate The Discussion Activity**

Taking a mathematical look at activity in my chosen electronic publications, the threads of discussion that caught my interest all began in the middle of February. The Library-specific threads seem to have died out in about four days each, with Americans at academic institutions contributing the entire discussion. Most messages in the Library lists were of the “reply directly to me via email, and I’ll summarize to the whole list” nature, meaning that sometimes even the most interesting topics peaked at two messages: an announcement and a summary. The participants in the Library lists all appeared to be information professionals or pre-librarians of some sort.

The [alt.culture.usenet](#) newsgroup draws participants from academic, commercial, and local dial-in BBS users from around the world. The discussion of the fate of the Internet is still going strong on several Usenet newsgroups at once, and has spawned several ‘child’ threads that are

weaving themselves throughout the Usenet, fidonet, and uucp-nets. The cyber-metric breakdown looks like this:

SUMMARY	SOURCE	TOPIC	DATES	MSGS	ON TOPIC	PEOPLE	ORIGIN
<i>Should Computer Resources for students be funded by Lab fees and by Increased Tuition?</i>	cwis-l	Student Computing Fee?	group: 1/18-2/28, thread: 2/18-2/22	5	9.25%	4	New York (3), Texas, Minnesota
<i>What are your ideas for libraries of the future?</i>	pacs-l	Libraries of the Future?	group: 1/19-2/28, thread: 2/18-2/23	4	3.81%	4	California, Texas (2), Indiana
<i>Is the Internet being killed by NREN, Kids, Commercialism, & New Users</i>	alt.culture.usenet	Death of Net?	group: 1/17-2-28, thread: 2/13-2/28	75	29.53%	42	worldwide(see appendix)

5 Summarize The Content Of The Discussion

5.1 CWIS-L: Student Computer Fee?

This thread began when Dr. Phillip Long of the SUNY Health Science Center at Brooklyn wrote in to compare notes with colleagues about charging a ‘technology fee’ to students to help support electronic information services on campus (e.g. the InfoUCLA CWIS or GSLIS Gopher). It appears to be an unprovoked topic. Three people responded with explanations of similar policies at their own or neighboring campuses. One respondent from New York mentioned that entering students are required to purchase a certain model of laptop computer and software upon enrollment at the school, which they then use to search the library catalog and CWIS. Someone wanted details about this, so the final message in the thread explains the details of this mandatory-laptop policy.

I would characterize this sort of topic as a *Policy Comparison*, in which an individual or group sends out ‘feelers’ on the net, in an attempt to learn from the mistakes and successes of others before implementing their own policy. Here is a chart of current topics on the CWIS-L list, with the number of topics in each thread displayed on the left hand side of each thread title. Our focal topic is in boldface type.

```
bit.listserv.cwis-l (18T 41A 4K 0H R)                h=help
=====
 1 + 8 Complete course catalogs online via Gopher or Web?
 2 + 3 Needs
 3 + Commercial Entities on CWIS's
 4 + unsubscription
 5 + 2 subscription
 6 + News Services
 7 + 2 Gopher+ and Forms
 8 + 6 Central campus calendar/CWIS index
 9 + OS/2 Gopher Server NNTP Gateway Question
10 + Cello v1.0 released
11 + 4 Hunting for Hunt Helpers
12 + 5 Student Computer Fee
13 + January Hunt Results (at last)
14 + ASIS Mid-Year Meeting
```

```

15 +   Subscribe
16 +   Subscription to CWIS-L
<n>=set current to n, TAB=next unread, /=search pattern, ^K)ill/select,
a)uthor search, c)atchup, j=line down, k=line up, K=mark read, l)ist thread,
| =pipe, m)ail, o=print, q)uit, r=toggle all/unread, s)ave, t)ag, w=post

```

5.2 Pacs-L: Libraries of the Future

This topic was posted, out of the blue, by a husband and wife *without* net-access. I would characterize it as a ‘what would you do in our shoes?’ Request. The two are involved in the design of a new library for their small town, and asked the PACS-L list:

“What is the physical appearance of a future library going to look like?” My contention is that on one hand the funds to build could just as well go into equipping everyone’s home with a PC or interactive terminal and CD ROM and do away with the building with the books.

The message was posted on their behalf, appropriately enough, by the “Networked Information Access Coordinator” at UCSB. The first respondent appears to be a LIS student from Texas named Trudy Lamb. Her response included five key points of advice based on her recent research. Another respondent added that “the new library at IUPUI” has some interesting techno-plans worth looking into. I hope the non-net recipients of this message can decipher that acronym (I sure can’t!). To close the thread, *the* Billy Barron made a “Teleread” policy document available to members of the listserv via his ftp site. I wonder if the original information seekers will ever get to see this document. Below is a snapshot of the recent threads of discussion on the PACS-L Listserv:

```

bit.listserv.pacs-l (85T 96A 0K 0H R)                h=help
=====
 33 +   Commentary on FINS, Vol.2, No.4
 34 + 4   Libraries of the Future
 35 +   Internet Training
 36 +   Position Vacancy
 37 +   Vacancy Announcement
 38 +   New System at LPI
 39 +   Internet access using Windows
 40 +   GOPHERS & OTHER SERVERS of SCHOLARLY SOCIETIES
 41 +   ALAO Workshop on Communication Skills, 3/11/94
 42 +   International Centre for Distance Learning - Database
 43 +   New Electronic Math Journal
 44 +   POSITION ANNOUNCEMENTS- MS, IL, TX
 45 +   email to S.Africa
 46 +   Internet access for public libraries
 47 +   President’s Day Etext of FDR
 48 +   MaasInfo net-indexes&documents, what they are, where to find them
<n>=set current to n, TAB=next unread, /=search pattern, ^K)ill/select,
a)uthor search, c)atchup, j=line down, k=line up, K=mark read, l)ist thread,
| =pipe, m)ail, o=print, q)uit, r=toggle all/unread, s)ave, t)ag, w=post

```

5.3 alt.culture.usenet: Death of the Net?

This group and thread are an electronic publication that *could* play an important role in library automation. As soon as our Internet is gone, so are all of the listserv subscriptions and Internet access to library catalogs! This alt.culture.usenet group and dozens of the other 6,000+ available

newsgroups a valuable supplement the library-only e-mail lists. The Usenet groups tend to offer a wider range of topics, diverse respondents, and differing opinions.

I joined this thread of discussion, in-progress, while it was comparing the demise of public transportation in L.A. to the anticipated demise of the Internet. The gist of the conversation has ranged from: *copyright-to-kids-using-the-internet-to-Al-Gore's-speech-at-UCLA-to-Effect-of-new-users-on-the-Net-to-information-access-for-kids-to-corporate-sponsorship-of-NREN-and-last-night-it-was-back-to-the-L.A.-streetcar-analogy*. All of these messages are loosely tied to the theme of (potential) Internet demise. None of the issues are resolved. I would characterize this thread as a true *conversation*—people express much more reaction, emotion, and opinion than I observed on any of the six library listserver sources I regularly read. In addition to the original thread of conversation, several 'child' threads, tangent to this ongoing conversation, have spun off, and are *italicized* in the screen capture below:

```
alt.culture.usenet (58T 256A 0K 0H R)                h=help
=====
17 +   post Usenet via e-mail?
18 + 6   Your Help = Free Book
19 +   Reply from Andrews about C. Thomas, ex orion admin
20 +   imminent drowning of the net in sticky brown liquid
21 +   LOOKING FOR 2600 readers & PHREAKS
22 + 75  Imminent Death of the Net?
23 + 4   myth about the joys of "reference threading"
24 +   Introduction to Blacknet
25 + 5   Is personal email withering?
26 + 7   Imminent Death of the Net? (2 cheep to meter ?)
27 +   Public transport in L.A. nonexistant? (Re: Imminent Death of the
28 +   Kids on the net
29 + 36  net.bigots (was Re: Imminent Death of the Net?)
30 +   Imminent Death of the Net? was Re: wwwaaaaAAAAUUUUGGGHHH!!!!
31 +   The true dynamics of Usenet (was: no other zoos posting?)
32 +   >>dead.artist<<
<n>=set current to n, TAB=next unread, /=search pattern, ^K)ill/select,
a)uthor search, c)atchup, j=line down, k=line up, K=mark read, l)ist thread,
|=pipe, m)ail, o=print, q)uit, r=toggle all/unread, s)ave, t)ag, w=post
```

6 Does The Discussion Fit The Forum?

Yes. The intended scope of all three of these electronic serials is *w-i-d-e*, and their published and distributed purposes are *lacking*.

6.1 CWIS-L

The introductory message to this list consisted of boilerplate 'how to subscribe, unsubscribe, and get help from a listserv' text, prefaced by this one sentence:

Dear networker,

Your subscription to list CWIS-L (Campus--Wide Information Systems) has been accepted.

6.2 PACS-L

Speaking of boilerplate text... here is the welcome message I received from the Public Access Computer Systems Forum:

Dear networker,

Your subscription to list PACS-L (Public--Access Computer Systems Forum) has been accepted.

That's it. No automatically delivered Frequently-Asked-Questions (FAQ) or Warm-Welcome messages. I recall receiving elaborate and lofty 'mission statements' from some of the lists that I joined to fulfill a similar GSLIS 200 assignment in 1992. Participants appear to follow a sort of unspoken 'Robert's Rules of the Internet,' in which they politely pardon their tangents, and keep them short. The most common junk-mail I see here is the never-ending stream of 'subscribe' and 'unsubscribe' posts, from the participants who haven't had a chance to learn more about the how listserv software works.

6.3 alt.culture.usenet

Is a huge and disorganized electronic discussion. Unlike other newsgroups, this one publishes no *FAQ*, a point often lamented by the regular participants. The purpose of this forum is apparently whatever the contributors choose to make of it. An amusing antic of these netters is *cross-posting*, in which someone will publish a challenging topic in a dozen or more remotely related newsgroups, and ask all interested parties to participate in a conversation hosted by alt.culture.usenet. This often results in conversation threads that are *huge*, but not too strongly tied to their stated topic.

7 Electronic vs. Alternative Media for these Electronic Serials

Electronic lists and newsgroups make it possible for cyber-naut citizens from around the organization, country, or globe to join in discussions on a moment's notice. Every conversation mentioned in the preceding pages brought people from more than a thousand miles away *together* to share information and thought on an important topic. I believe the electronic arena is the ideal format for the important issues being raised on CWIS-L, PACS-L, and alt.culture.usenet.

7.1 How about a literature search?

A literature search can provide answers to simple *RTFM* questions or give someone good background information on an important issue. An electronic discussion of the same important issue may yield a full spectrum of opinions from working experts in the field, including the living authors of relevant literature. Many electronic messages are 'signed' with a 'signature' message that includes a phone number and invites further communication. With respect to the 'Invisible College,' information in some fields is outdated before it ever meets the printed page, and electronic serials are an ideal means of distribution and keeping peripheral scholars 'in-the-know.'

7.2 As a conference program?

Carefully prepared and moderated conference programs can (and do) take place on exactly the same topics I've selected for this report. In a formal conference, only 'important' people are asked to give presentations and share their thoughts. In an electronic discussion group, a precocious ten-year-old can participate as equally as any esteemed professor. There is no direct expense to the user who participates in an electronic discussion, while the prohibitive user-cost of plane tickets and hotel accommodations makes the formal conference option a 'disappearing' arena.

7.3 Informal conversation?

Great, especially in the case of the Usenet topic. BUT, where else can you hold an *informal* conversation in which you assemble 42 people representing unique viewpoints and levels of expertise from all over the world? How can the participants in an informal conversation have on hand and in mind in all of the inspiration and resource they can easily put into a composed electronic message that they produce at an ideal time and knowledge-state? How will the important suggestions of the shy or quiet be shared in an informal gathering?

7.4 By letter or mail?

Not likely. People are too lazy these days. With the effort required to compose, address, and post one letter by hand, A person could easily distribute the same message electronically and instantaneously to hundreds of readers around the world.

For each electronic serial discussion evaluated in this assignment, the electronic media distinguished itself from all other communications arenas by its tendency to *equalize* participants, its ability to *involve* national and international participants on short notice, its *absence of cost* to the end users, and the speed with which it can bring information to people interested or involved with the automation of library processes. That's why I use it, every day!

Appendix

Contributors to the alt.culture.usenet discussion, sorted by major domain of return address:

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