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# LIBRARY INSTRUCTION ROUND TABLE NEWS

Volume 38, No. 2

December 2015

*From the President*

## Relevance and “The Future of Libraries”

**So often** I hear librarians talk about the need to “remain relevant.” The entire profession, from the ALA down to individual librarians, is constantly on the defensive, trying to prove our relevance in the age of ubiquitous networked information. And it is a noble and worthwhile fight to reaffirm to the public and policy makers the important role that libraries and librarians will continue to play in the 21st century information environment. This being said, some of this discussion that is held internally amongst librarians, especially when framed in the context of “the future of libraries,” is misguided and disheartening. These discussions presuppose that the death of traditional librarianship has already occurred and that librarians must make drastic changes to their professional ethos to keep up with the pace of disruptive technologies. But this is only true if the core function of libraries was a repository for print collections. I would argue that libraries have always served a much larger role in their communities than simple physical spaces that house books. The core mission of libraries will remain the same moving forward. It is the methods that we use to achieve this mission that will change.



**Andy Revelle**

Before the mass adoption of the Internet as an information platform, librarians, together with the publishing industry, acted as validators and gatekeepers for information. The main way that people knew that information was valid was that it was deemed valuable enough to be printed and included in library collections. The key

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*LIRT empowers librarians, from all types of libraries, to become better teachers through sharing best practices, leadership and professional development, and networking.*

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## *From the President, continued*

problem that would-be researchers faced was locating relevant information. Now that we live in an environment where finding relevant information for any research question is no longer a challenge, the role of the librarian in this process would seem to have been eliminated. I would argue that, on the contrary, the librarian plays a more important part in the research process in the 21st century than he/she played in the 20th century. In this new environment, we are helping researchers of all types sift through the mountains of information with which they are presented to locate reliable resources. If in the past, librarians acted as gatekeepers in their roles as collection builders, we now play that same role as instructors.

Libraries are only “dying” if they perceive their core mission to be locating, selecting and archiving print collections. On the other hand, if the key role of libraries in a community is a place where people come to find assistance with locating valid information, the role of libraries is perhaps more important in the research process than it was before. If in the past librarians used the collection development process to assist patrons in locating valid resources, now we help them to locate valid resources in the sea of information via information literacy instruction.

The future of libraries is instruction!



*Andy Revelle, LIRT President*



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# From the Editor

by Barbara Hopkins



ALA's Midwinter meeting is just around the corner and LIRT has some exciting things going on! Our *discussion forum* will be on Sunday and focuses on Learning Management Systems and their uses in different types of libraries. We will also have two fabulous networking opportunities. They are *Bites with LIRT* - where you can come and enjoy lunch with us! This will be a great opportunity to find out how you could serve on one of our committees. We have one for almost all interests, where you can both share and expand your skills and knowledge. Finally, don't miss *Tech Talk* in this issue as you might be unfamiliar with "beacons," as I was. This is a fascinating new technology that definitely has intriguing uses in libraries.

So snuggle up and enjoy this latest issue of the LIRT News.



Barbara



## BITES WITH LIRT

LIRT will host *two* tasty gatherings in Boston in January, 2016! LIRT (Library Instruction Round Table) is organizing "Bites with LIRT" groups for lunch during the ALA Midwinter Conference in Boston.

This is your opportunity to meet other librarians interested in library instruction while enjoying lunch in a local restaurant. LIRT welcomes anyone who has an interest in instruction from all types of libraries. You need not be a member of LIRT to participate. We hope you will join us in this opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences about library instruction in a relaxed setting.

Enjoy a stimulating and fun lunch with LIRT—good food, good company, and interesting conversation. We will make the arrangements; all you have to do is reserve a spot and come join us!

Reserve your spot at <http://www.ala.org/lirt/bites-midwinter>

**Saturday, January 9th Noon** - Pastoral <http://pastoralfortpoint.com/>

**Sunday, January 10th 11:30 a.m.** - Barlow's <http://barlowsrestaurant.com/>

**Deadline is  
January 5, 2016**





## LIRT 2016 MIDWINTER MEETINGS SCHEDULE

### Saturday January, 9, 2016

8:30 -10:00 a.m.	Steering Committee I (LIRT).....	BCEC	102A
10:30 -11:30 a.m.	All Committee Meeting (LIRT).....	BCEC	102A
12:00 Noon	Bites with LIRT.....	Pastoral	(see page 3)

### Sunday January, 10, 2016

1:00 - 2:30 p.m.	LIRT Discussion Forum Configure, Create, Conquer.....	BCEC	151B
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### Monday January, 11, 2016

8:30 - 10:00 a.m.	Steering Committee II (LIRT).....	BCEC	151B
10:30 - 11:30 a.m.	Executive Board Meeting (LIRT) .....	BCEC	151B



## LIRT MIDWINTER DISCUSSION FORUM

# *CONFIGURE, CREATE, CONQUER:*

### Strategies for Using Learning Management Systems to Engage Staff and Users Across Libraries

Sunday, January 10, 2016 from 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm  
Room 151B Boston Convention and Exhibition Center

Are you curious about creative, non-traditional ways that academic, public, and school librarians might be using learning management systems such as Blackboard, Canvas, Moodle, etc.? If so, we encourage you to come to the LIRT Midwinter Discussion Forum.

The discussion will begin with four lightning presentations from librarians who will share information about their non-traditional use of learning management systems, followed by a brief period for questions and answers. Then we'll have some guided small group discussions, with the small groups sharing interesting ideas or challenges that emerged from the small group discussions.

#### **Lightning talk presenters:**

- **Kate Conerton**, Distance Learning Librarian, University of Wyoming (<http://www-lib.uwyo.edu/>) Information Literacy Tutorials in the LMS
- **Kim Copenhaver**, Reference, Instruction and Access Services Librarian, Eckerd College (<http://www.eckerd.edu/library/>) The Training Trifecta: Learning Management Systems, Gamification and Library Student Employees
- **Beth Hatch**, Virtual Services Manager, CLEVNET (<http://www.clevnet.org/>) Learning Management Systems Uses in Public Libraries
- **Barbara Hopkins**, District Library Media Specialist, Canyons School District (<http://www.canyonsdistrict.org/>) Learning Management Systems in K-12 Libraries

Specific details are available on the LIRT website (<http://www.ala.org/lirt/discussion-forum-2016>)





**ALA 2016 ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
ORLANDO**

**LIRT PROGRAM**

*The Wonderful World  
of Library Instruction*

**PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICES TO INSPIRE TEACHING**

Take a sneak peek behind the scenes at best practices and pedagogy designed to create magical moments in which learners explore the concepts of information literacy. Journey through the realm of threshold concepts, frameworks and Common Core to emerge with new techniques designed to ensure learner engagement and comprehension. Investigate proven teaching strategies designed to create impactful learning, inspired teaching and creative programming.

This program will feature a panel of three innovative instruction librarians from a broad spectrum of librarianship who will share evidence based instruction techniques and best practices designed to engage library users, enhance critical thinking and inspire lifelong learning.

# MERLOT

## A KEY INGREDIENT IN INTEGRATING INFORMATION AND DIGITAL LITERACIES

MERLOT stands for Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching. Established by the California State University system, MERLOT is a community-built repository of learning objects, with an emphasis on higher education resources. However, it also has thousands of learning objects for K12 (as well as many resources for pre-service teachers).

This year I am spearheading CSU's ICT (Information and Communication Technology) Literacy Project, which focuses on integrating ICT literacy into subject curricula. The main source of resources is MERLOT, to which I have added over two hundred learning objects as well as fifteen bookmark collections, and a couple of courses and learning exercises.

### VIDEO INTRO

The following video introduces MERLOT: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYj1INA6zv0>. It shows the several ways to locate relevant and developmentally appropriate learning objects: by keyword, by advanced search with its several field options, by community, and by their category index (which is their taxonomy). Users can also browse the bookmark collection and learning exercises. Searching by keyword shows results that can be narrowed down by material type, subject matter and learning exercise.

### BOOKMARK COLLECTIONS

Several bookmark collections address ICT literacy, from information behavior to social media literacy, from gender and ICT literacy to writing research papers. They are listed in the updated ICT Literacy portal, found at <http://teachingcommons.cdl.edu/ictliteracy/dlo/index.html>. As a MERLOT member, you can copy and modify existing bookmark collections for your own use as well as serving as a centralized URL for your students to access. To see all bookmark collections, go to "Add to Collection." Then click on "Browse all material." Bookmark collections is a button on the left side. As a MERLOT member, you can also create bookmark collections, which will be added to MERLOT automatically.

### WORKSHOP

To further optimize your selection and use of MERLOT, I have revised the ICT Literacy community (<http://teachingcommons.cdl.edu/ictliteracy/index.html>), providing an overview of MERLOT and how to find ICT literacy learning objects, ICT literacy standards, guidelines for ICT literacy enhanced assignments, and CSU library ICT websites. I have also developed a four-part workshop on integrating ICT literacy into the curriculum which you can do as a self-paced tutorial, and use as a framework for conducting workshops at your own site: <https://contentbuilder.merlot.org/toolkit/html/stitch.php?s=80679667629935>

### JOIN

Consider joining MERLOT (for free). As a MERLOT member, you can contribute materials to MERLOT's database, become a reviewer, join a community, and become part of a speakers' bureau. When you contribute to MERLOT, be sure to add all the possible categories that would be appropriate to search, and tag generously to aid users in locating the learning object. Because the tagging is a folksonomy, you can add tags such as CSLA and teacher librarian to facilitate users retrieving resources by these important terms.

Take advantage of MERLOT to help integrate ICT literacy – and your information expertise – into your site's and system's educational program.

Dr. Lesley S. J. Farmer  
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Librarianship Program Coordinator  
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*Editor's note:* Dr. Farmer was the 2015 recipient of the LIRT Librarian Recognition Award

# Connecting Librarians on the *High School to College Transition*

By Mark Robison

Not all seniors graduating from high school are ready for college-level research. Working together, librarians from schools, colleges, and public libraries can play an important role in empowering students for the college transition. LIRT's Transitions to College Committee is pleased to announce a new tool to help connect librarians on this very issue:

***Connecting Librarians on the High School to College Transition*** is a web portal where you can identify other librarians in your area who are interested in collaborating on this topic. Interested in bringing your high school students to visit a local university library? Curious about the IL skills being covered in high school library workshops? From instruction design to assignment design, from arranging campus visits to simply chatting about the “big picture” of library instruction, this web portal can help you connect with other librarians in your area.

Visit the portal at: <http://www.ala.org/lirt/connecting-librarians-high-school-college-transition> where you will find a map of librarians in your area, as well as instructions for adding yourself to the map. The portal also includes talking points and successful case studies of libraries that have collaborated on transitions projects.

For more information about this project, reach out to any of the LIRT Transitions working group members: Mark Robison ([mark.robison@valpo.edu](mailto:mark.robison@valpo.edu)), Becky Richardson ([richardson5@murraystate.edu](mailto:richardson5@murraystate.edu)), or Pamela Monroe ([pamela.monroe@famu.edu](mailto:pamela.monroe@famu.edu)).



# THE MIDDLE WAY:

## ACRL'S FRAMEWORK FOR INFORMATION LITERACY IN PRACTICE

### AUTHORS:

Alyssa Archer, Joe Eshleman, Mandi Goodsett, Nicole Tekulve, and Karen Tercho  
LIRT Teaching, Learning, & Technology Committee

ACRL's Framework for Information Literacy has garnered much attention and lively discussion since its introduction to the academic library world. Responses have ranged from concern over the effects of sunseting the Standards on institutions' information literacy programs, to critical information literacy voices protesting that the Framework does not go nearly far enough in addressing social inequities tied up in the production and dissemination of information (Beilin).

Nonetheless, the Framework is an exciting new perspective and is sparking curiosity in both students and librarians, helping to free us from the shackles of a "just show them where to click" existence and instead allowing flexibility and adaptability in our teaching as it drives both the conversation around information literacy and professional librarianship into the future (Swanson and Jagman). The Framework's scope and ambition are wide, with mention of semester-long lesson plans. But from a practical standpoint, especially for those of us working with students in one-shot instruction sessions, we cannot "cover everything," so it is necessary to find creative ways to leverage the expansive ideas of the Framework within one 50-minute class (Buchanan and McDonough 19-21). Thinking in terms of a "middle way," how can we ensure that students will leave the session with a firmer grasp on one of these concepts than before they walked into the classroom? In this article, we will provide outlines for how the instruction librarian can use technology as a means to present Framework concepts within one-shot instruction sessions.

### Authority is Constructed and Contextual

Information resources reflect their creators' expertise and credibility, and are evaluated based on the information need and the context in which the information will be used. Authority is constructed in that various communities may recognize different types of authority. It is contextual in that the information need may help to determine the level of authority required (ACRL).

For a teaching librarian hoping to help students with this threshold concept, the instruction session could be spent exploring what it means when someone says he or she is an authority or an expert. What does it mean when we say that authority is contextual? One response to this question is that "authority" is not a concrete term that can be applied uniformly to any resource. How "authority" is interpreted by someone using information can change based on the context of the information itself. It's important to help students understand that what is meant by authority here is not the common use of authority as power, but authority as a basis for trust and credibility. Emphasizing the appearance of the word "author" in authority should help drive this point home.

A potential assignment based on this Frame using social media could begin with this question posed to students: Are you an expert and/or an authority? Of what? And why? Students will choose their preferred social media platform (e.g. Pinterest, Twitter, or Facebook), and then "inventory" and reflect upon various social media content that they have produced. Follow-up questions to students include the following: Is there content that you have



produced, or skills or experience that you have that make it feasible that you could be considered to be an expert or an authority on a certain topic? For example, are you an expert on basketball, or how to throw a party? In small groups, students will comment on each other's expertise, and a wrap up discussion could center around discussing the use of social media as a reliable source for academic work. For students not active in social media, workarounds include asking students to look at various Twitter feeds of those considered experts in certain fields. Alternatively, discussion could center around what constitutes a "scholarly" source and analyzing the various credentials that authors present to the world.

### **Information Creation as a Process**

Information in any format is produced to convey a message and is shared via a selected delivery method. The iterative processes of researching, creating, revising, and disseminating information vary, and the resulting product reflects these differences (ACRL).

As with the exploration of contextual authority, students need room to experiment with different formats, to understand how information is created so that they can select formats that fit their needs. One lesson plan that would help librarians teach this threshold concept builds on the early childhood education concept of learning centers, adapted to higher education in a recent article by Fontno and Brown. In a learning center-oriented class, groups of students cycle through stations, each station having a specific focus. These learning centers would help students to "assess the fit between an information product's creation process and a particular information need" by encouraging them to critically examine a variety of sources.

The learning center model works best if the class has a common research topic. If not, assign a sample from current events for the whole class, or assign a different topic to each group. The students explore the following resources at respective learning centers: 1) Twitter, 2) databases with scholarly articles, 3) blogs, and 4) Flickr. Students will share their opinions about the usefulness of each type of resource via a shared Google Doc or Poll Everywhere quiz. This process could be simplified by assigning each group to a computer pod. It's important that prompt questions are carefully constructed for self-guided learning. Ensuing discussion will center around these various types of resources, how they were created, and the research process as a whole. To ground the discussion in "Information Creation as Process", the instructor could incorporate a variety of sample interrelated research topics, and ask the class to decide which of the formats they explored would be the best fit to use as sources for each of the topics. Some may need the first-person accounts provided by Twitter, and others may need the longer perspective of scholarly articles. Assessment can be implemented using the Google Doc or Poll Everywhere results collected during class.

### **Research as Inquiry**

Research is iterative and depends upon asking increasingly complex or new questions whose answers in turn develop additional questions or lines of inquiry in any field (ACRL).

There are many skills that students develop as they begin to grasp the Research as Inquiry threshold concept; these include the ability to formulate an appropriate research question, use new and varied research methods as appropriate while searching, and organize information in a way that effectively communicates with others. One way teaching librarians might begin to help students with these tricky concepts is to introduce them to a congregator Web 2.0 tool like Scoop.It. Scoop.It is a content curation tool with a social media element, and Scoop.It users can post up to ten posts or "scoops" per day to a board for free.

For a teaching librarian with an interest in using technology and only 50 minutes to teach students these complex topics, Scoop.It provides an easy-to-use, visual platform for students to develop their research questions and

collection of sources. First, students could be asked to find scholarly and popular articles relevant to a research topic and post them to a shared Scoop.It board. Each student is asked to include a comment for every source posted, explaining how the source relates to his or her thesis statement, and perhaps also evaluating the source using librarian-provided criteria. The social nature of the tool allows students to re-scoop and comment on the collected articles of classmates, which can be an especially helpful review for a class in which all the students are researching topics addressed in the course. In a reflective activity, students could be asked to identify information gaps in the literature about their research topics, and consider ways to formulate or modify a research question based on those gaps. They could also be asked to find a meaningful way to organize the information found and explain their organizational strategy. Formative assessment can be implemented in a variety of ways here, from the teaching librarian taking notes during class and adjusting the direction of the class based on what s/he observes, to analyzing the Scoop.it board after class and contributing feedback comments, to sharing and discussing the Scoop.it board with the faculty member who requested the session.

### **Searching as Strategic Exploration**

Searching for information is often nonlinear and iterative, requiring the evaluation of a range of information sources and the mental flexibility to pursue alternate avenues as new understanding develops (ACRL).

Librarians are natural information sleuths, happily mining the depths of databases to find the best sources. Students in the average one-shot classroom are not as tenacious. By exploring the "Searching as Strategic Exploration" frame, teaching librarians have the opportunity to communicate the complexities of the search process. A simple database demonstration revolving around a randomly selected student topic can illuminate common problems student face in the search process. The teaching librarian, depending on the search, may have the opportunity to show students how to mine for alternative keywords using subject headings within the result list, create new searches around related ideas, and compare items found within a result list to determine the most appropriate source for a particular topic.

Those interested in a more technology-centered approach may consider the use of mind maps to assist students in brainstorming keywords and ideas related to their topic. This approach would work especially well in a flipped-classroom environment where students would have ample time to consider their topics in advance. Mind maps can be created using a number of free online tools, such as MindMup ([www.mindmup.com](http://www.mindmup.com)), Bubble.us (<https://bubbl.us/>), or Text 2 Mind Map (<https://www.text2mindmap.com/>). For easy-to-set-up and low-tech approaches, whiteboards or easels are indispensable. Students in small groups can be tasked with creating concept clouds or mind maps, taking turns with their individual topics or all working on the same topic, depending on the assignment.

Quite often students are fuzzy in terms of their research assignment topics. The successful teaching librarian must first assess whether students have a grasp on what topics they will be researching and writing about. A classic theory in our field, Carol Kuhlthau's Information Search Process ([https://comminfo.rutgers.edu/~kuhlthau/information\\_search\\_process.htm](https://comminfo.rutgers.edu/~kuhlthau/information_search_process.htm)), describes a valuable way for the teaching librarian to determine where students are (Buchanan and McDonough 30-38). Simple, low-tech activities, such as having students pair off to explain their topics to one another and help each other generate succinct keywords, are easily implemented and very effective.

### **Works Cited**

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## **LIRT AWARD NOMINATIONS OPEN THROUGH DECEMBER**

The nominations process for the 2016 awards is now open, so we encourage you to send in your nominations now, and plan to fête the 2016 recipients in Orlando next summer.

The 2016 Library Instruction Round Table (LIRT) Awards nomination period is now open until December 31, 2015.

The Library Instruction Round Table (LIRT) is now accepting nominations for two awards created to recognize excellence in information literacy and instruction.

The LIRT Librarian Recognition Award will be presented to an individual librarian in appreciation for her/his contributions to the field, while the LIRT Innovation in Instruction Award will be given to a Library that demonstrates innovation in support of information literacy and instruction.

The awards will be presented at the ALA Annual Conference. Award winners will receive a \$1,000 cash award, a plaque, and a \$500 travel stipend to be used to attend the ALA Annual Conference. Awards are sponsored by the Library Instruction Roundtable.

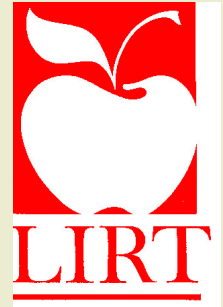
Recipients will be honored at the 2016 ALA Annual Conference in Orlando.

For full details on how to apply for or nominate an individual/library for these awards, please see: <http://www.ala.org/lirt/awards>.

Thank you and good luck!

Michael Saar  
Assistant Professor/Reference Librarian  
Mary & John Gray Library  
Lamar University  
409-880-8120

Information about the awards can be found at the LIRT website: <http://www.ala.org/lirt/awards>, and on pages 12-13.



## LIRT Innovation in Instruction Award 2016

The Library Instruction Round Table (LIRT) requests nominations for the **2016 LIRT Innovation in Instruction Award**. The Innovation in Instruction Award is given in recognition of a Library's contributions to the development, advancement, and support of information literacy and instruction. The award will be given to a library that has done one (or more) of the following:

- Revamped its public instruction program in response to a new technology, an assessment report, etc.
- Initiated a public program that utilizes best practices of instruction in combination with new methods of delivery.
- Created an original type of instruction, e.g., team-taught interdisciplinary research sessions, a novel form of outreach, etc.

This award is open to all types of libraries: Practice(s) will be examined before scholarship, with points given for low-cost and easily reproducible innovation. Only one member of the library nomination group needs to be a librarian.

### **Nomination Materials:**

To nominate a library for the LIRT Innovation in Instruction Award, please submit a nomination packet that includes the following information:

#### REQUIRED

Nominated library contact name; position; address; phone number; email address. *If the person making the nomination is not affiliated with the library being nominated*, please also supply the preceding for the nominator. Packets should include a letter addressing the specific award criteria (see bullet points above), giving concrete examples, and a minimum of three letters of support.

#### OPTIONAL

Other supporting materials that show the library's contributions to information literacy and instruction are welcome.

Electronic submission of nomination materials is expected – please contact Michael Saar to request exceptions.

Further information regarding the award and the selection process can be found on the LIRT website:

<http://www.ala.org/lirt/awards>.

Send all LIRT innovation in Instruction Award nomination materials by December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015 to:

Michael Saar

[Michael.saar@lamar.edu](mailto:Michael.saar@lamar.edu)

409-880-8120

The award winner will be notified following the ALA Midwinter Meeting, no later than January 31, 2016

The award will be presented at the 2016 ALA Annual Conference. Award winners will receive a \$1,000 cash award, a plaque, and a \$500 travel stipend to be used toward attending the ALA Annual Conference. Awards are sponsored by the Library Instruction Round Table.





## **LIRT Librarian Recognition Award 2016**

The Library Instruction Round Table (LIRT) requests nominations for the **2016 LIRT Librarian Recognition Award**. The Librarian Recognition Award is given to acknowledge a librarian's contribution to the development, advancement, and support of information literacy and instruction. The award is open any librarian who participates in instruction/information literacy activities in any type of library. Instruction does not have to be the main focus of the librarian's position.

The award will be given to a librarian who has contributed one (or more) of the following to instruction/information literacy:

- Contributions to library literature on topics related to instruction/information literacy. These contributions can consist of both formal and informal publications (peer-reviewed articles and book chapters, blog postings, newsletter contributions, etc.) Non-traditional forms of publishing will be considered.
- Creation of an instruction/information literacy program or project that has shown potential for widespread sharing and replication.
- Impactful participation within local, regional, national, and/or international level professional organizations that are devoted to the support and promotion of library instruction and information literacy in any type of library.

### **Nomination Materials:**

To nominate a librarian for the LIRT Librarian Recognition Award, please submit a nomination packet that includes the following information:

#### Required

Nominee's contact information: name, current position, address, phone number, and e-mail

Resume or Curriculum Vita

Three letters of support

#### Optional

Other supporting materials that show the individual's contributions to information literacy and instruction are welcome.

*If person making the nomination is different from the nominee*, please also supply the preceding for the nominator. Packets should include a letter addressing the specific award criteria (see bullet points above), giving concrete examples, and a minimum of three letters of support.

Electronic submission of nomination materials is expected – please contact Jonathan Dembo to request exceptions. Further information regarding the award and the selection process can be found on the LIRT website: <http://www.ala.org/lirt/awards>.

Send all Librarian Recognition Award nomination materials by December 31, 2015 to:

Jonathan Dembo, Ph.D.

[demboj@ecu.edu](mailto:demboj@ecu.edu)

252-328-2661

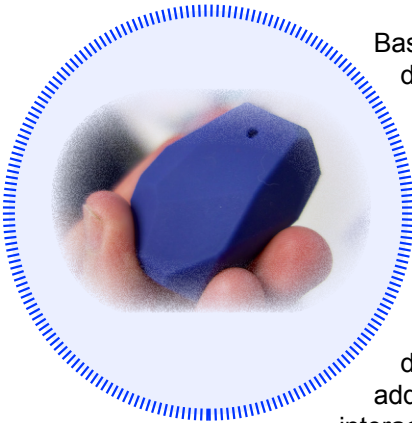
The award winner will be notified following the ALA Midwinter Meeting, no later than January 31, 2016. The award will be presented at the 2016 ALA Annual Conference. Award winners will receive a \$1,000 cash award, a plaque, and a \$500 travel stipend to be used toward attending the ALA Annual Conference. Awards are sponsored by the Library Instruction Round Table.

**Dear Tech Talk** — I have recently heard how retail stores are using “beacons” to send targeted information to customers in their stores. I’d like to know more about this technology and am curious to know if it has library applications.

– *Baffled By Beacons*

**Dear BBB** — Beacons are small battery-powered transmitters (about the size of a hockey puck) that use Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) to connect to Bluetooth-enabled mobile devices (smartphones, tablets, etc.) There are 2 significant differences between standard Bluetooth and BLE:

- BLE doesn’t require “pairing”; it constantly sends a signal to let Bluetooth-enabled devices know that it’s present; and
- BLE uses very little energy (unlike standard Bluetooth) which significantly extends the battery life for devices using BLE.



Basically, on very frequent time increments, the beacon says, “Hello, here I am”; when a mobile device, with the appropriate app installed, encounters that “greeting” and connects to the beacon, the beacon awakens an app on the device that then delivers location-specific, targeted information. For beacons to work, the mobile device must be receptive to BLE signals, have the appropriate app installed, and be within range (between 1 and 250 feet) of the beacon. However, the app doesn’t necessarily need to be active at the time the BLE signal is received.

Interest in beacons really took off in 2013 when Apple announced that their implementation of BLE technology – iBeacon – was native in the iOS 7 architecture. With this release, Apple devices running iOS 7 or higher could both detect and interact with beacons automatically; additionally, these devices could also serve as beacons, if so desired. Android devices can also interact with beacons, but it was largely Apple’s integration of the BLE technology with its operating system that stimulated the buzz around beacons.

Because the retail industry is very interested in wooing the foot traffic in their brick and mortar stores, they have interest in any technology that might enhance the shopping experience – hence their interest in beacons. Consequently, you may have already encountered beacons in major department stores. For example, as you entered a department store, the store app on your phone notified you about special sales or events taking place in the store on that day; or as you approached the shoe department, the store app notified you that the department had a special sale for preferred customers.

A 2014 report produced by Business Insider finds that “these small devices are the fastest-growing in-store technology since mobile credit card readers”. The report forecasts that the US beacon installed base will grow from something under .5 million to about 4.5 million by 2018 – with 3.5 million in retail and another 1 million in other areas (<http://www.businessinsider.com/beacons-and-the-retail-industry-2014-11>).

However, interest in beacons is expanding beyond the retail industry. Companies and organizations from across the spectrum are experimenting with beacons to provide services to their customers. In addition to retailers like Aerie, American Eagle, Apple, Lord & Taylor, Macy’s, Walgreens, and Walmart using beacons, Reddy (2014) identifies these beacon users:

- DFW Airport (American Airlines) – send notifications to help customers more easily navigate the airport, including distance to gates, boarding times, and closest security check lines;
- Hillshire Brands – send discount coupons to shoppers as they approach that part of the grocery store;
- Major League Baseball – push merchandise coupons and seat upgrades to game attendees in stadiums;
- Mingleton Dating App – “See Who’s Nearby” option in the app that “finds” other “members” who may be nearby, using the app to see what common interests are shared;
- Nivea Lotion brand – use of a “StickNFind” app to help parents keep track of children when at the beach;

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image source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dgjones/13820351975>

- South by Southwest – improve registration experiences by sending alerts with the “Registration QuickCode” as participants approach the registration area and provide “welcoming” messages at various venues;
- Starwood Hotels – greet guests by name, accelerate check-in process, let housekeeping know guests are still in the room, and in some hotels, skip check-in process and go directly to the room, opening the door via keyless entry activated on their smartphones;
- Tokyo Airport (Japan Airlines) – used by airline staff to locate staff members and assign specific tasks or obtain updates on company information and flight status to improve business processes; and
- Virgin Atlantic Airlines (Heathrow Airport) – premium passengers receive personalized notifications and offers, such as reminding them to have electronic boarding passes ready as they approach security areas, or staff receive notifications when the temperature drops so they can provide blankets to customers.

In “Five Interesting iBeacon Use Cases (Other than Retail!)” (2014), they speculate that 2014 is the “year of beacons” and more broadly identify the use of iBeacons at: events, hotels, stadiums, malls, and museums. Wait – museums? Yes – museums! Museums use beacons to enhance visitors’ experiences with physical exhibitions by providing virtual details about artifacts as visitors get within range of each artifact. The use of beacons in museums is comparable to the recorders visitors checkout at museums – except – instead of manually operating the recorder, beacons push the information to the museum’s app on visitors’ smartphones, using the visitors’ proximity to the artifact. How well do beacons work in museums? Museum personnel are still experimenting, but Robert Stein, Deputy Director of the Dallas Museum of Art emphasizes, “We have to make beacons part of an elegant experience. If we fail, then the public gets annoyed” (Cannell, 2015, p. F6). Along with Cannell, Browne (2014) and Samuely (2015) both provide more information on museums’ experiences with beacon technology.

So, museums are cultural institutions; and libraries are cultural institutions. If museums are experimenting with beacons, shouldn’t libraries be experimenting with beacons? Rob Murphy, Vice President of Marketing at Swirl, stated, “Beacon marketing is appropriate wherever digital content or services can enrich a physical world experience” (Samuely, 2015). Surely, this philosophy applies to libraries. As a point of fact, a small number of libraries are experimenting with beacons. BluuBeam (<http://bluubeam.com/>) founder, Chris Zabaleta indicates that he has signed up 30 libraries for the BluuBeam beacon service. Sarmah, Enis, Mellio, McNulty, and Swedberg each provide brief information regarding libraries that are experimenting with beacons:

- Half Hollow Hills Community Library, New York (McNulty, 2015)
- Hampton Public Library, Long Island (Enis, 2013)
- Jericho Public Library, Long Island (Enis, 2013)
- Mattituck-Laurel Library, Long Island (Enis, 2013)
- Orange County Library, Florida (Mellio, 2015 and Swedberg, 2014)
- Somerset County Library System, New Jersey (McNulty, 2015)

BluuBeam (<http://bluubeam.com/>) and Capira Technologies (<http://capiratech.com/products/>) currently market beacon technologies to libraries using somewhat different implementations. The most significant difference is that for Capira Technologies, beacons are just one segment of a suite of services they provide; and their services integrate with the library’s integrated library system (ILS), which means that the beacons can incorporate library system data – cataloging information, circulation information, etc. A couple of other companies, Cuseum (<https://www.cuseum.com/>) and NetObjex (<https://www.netobjex.com/>), are also showing interest in marketing to libraries, but right now, it appears that BluuBeam and Capira Technologies are the main contenders.

Some possible uses for beacons in libraries as described by Capira Technologies include:

- Circulation Notices – As patrons enter the building, they receive notifications about items due that day, items ready for pickup, etc.
- Event Notices – As patrons near particular areas of the library, they receive information about upcoming events happening in those places.

- Informational Notices – When within proximity of a special room or section for local history, business, or some other specialty, patrons receive information about that space.
- Shelving Notices – When browsing in certain areas of the stacks, patrons receive a list of items located in that section – new releases, for example.
- Patron Assistance – Since the mobile devices can time how long a beacon stays in range, staff may receive notifications if a patron spends quite a bit of time in a specific space without moving, which could indicate they need assistance.
- Beacon Tracking – Anonymous beacon tracking allows libraries to capture how patrons move throughout the facilities, along with time spent in each area (<http://capiratech.com/products/capiramobile/ibeacon/>).

Other uses of beacons in libraries might be:

- The automatic delivery of content (slides, handouts, etc.) to instruction or presentation attendees;
- Development of e-learning activities -- at different stations in a room or throughout the library, beacons deliver the “next steps” in a process;
- Capturing opinions regarding experiences in library spaces;
- Library way-finding experiences;
- Notifications about e-books within the same call number range as the print books located where patrons are browsing; and
- Expansion of library exhibits by providing more in-depth information on exhibited items (comparable to one of museums’ uses of beacons).

Like any new technology, jumping out to the bleeding edge of beacon implementation comes with its share of painfully sharp edges, including:

- Their placement can be challenging – too close together will interfere with the targeted proximity-based information; identifying the best location so mobile devices receive the BLE signals can also be an issue;
- Their small size makes them easy/interesting targets for theft;
- They tend to come in colors that don’t match surroundings;
- They don’t have external ID numbers on them and each beacon is associated with unique information dependent on its placement, which impacts the ease of getting the right beacon to the right location;
- If the physical layout changes, the beacon needs to be moved and/or the data connected with it changed; and
- They require regular monitoring: are they still in place; are they still sending a signal; is the battery still functioning; does the firmware need updating (Gruman, 2015)?

In addition to these caveats, in order for beacons to make a connection with someone’s mobile device, the owner of that device must download and install the appropriate app. For the most part, every store, museum, library, etc. that uses beacons, has its own app that needs to be installed on the device. That may be the biggest hurdle to overcome. How do libraries alert their patrons about this app and convince them to install it on their mobile devices? Gruman (2015) wisely counsels, “Make sure you give yourself the right resources and scope to first pilot, then deploy your beacons – going in naively could easily sink your effort.”

Another potentially significant issue deserves heightened attention – privacy. Beacons, combined with the mobile device app, enable some pretty close monitoring of patrons’ movements throughout the library, and in the case of Capira Technologies, actually use patron data obtained from the ILS. Gressel (2014) suggests, “As libraries attempt to stay relevant by keeping up with technology, they are often opening their patrons up to greater privacy threats” (p. 138). Perhaps in the day and age of social media, the notion of privacy has changed – given the kind of information individuals place on Facebook, Twitter, and other sites. But as Gressel (2014) also states, “that [decision to put intimate details in a social media setting] is a user’s personal choice, and it does not mean that they do not care about privacy in general” (p. 139).



Americans' privacy concerns are further amplified in some recent Pew Research Center surveys:

- A 2012 study (Privacy and Data Management on Mobile Devices) reported that “more than half [54%] of app users have uninstalled or decided to not install an app due to concerns about personal information” (<http://www.pewinternet.org/2012/09/05/privacy-and-data-management-on-mobile-devices/>).
- However, a 2013 study (Location-based Services) found that “a majority [74%] of smartphone owners [18 years and older] use their phones' location-based services” (<http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/09/12/location-based-services/>).
- But, one more study in 2014 (Public Perceptions of Privacy and Security in the Post-Snowden Era) finds that “the majority of adults . . . feel that their privacy is being challenged along such core dimensions as the security of their personal information and their ability to retain confidentiality” (<http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/11/12/public-privacy-perceptions/>).

Given these concerns, combined with the inclination most librarians have to protect the privacy of their patrons, enabling beacons might raise some yellow – if not red – flags. However, on the bright side, beacons don't work magically on their own. In order for them to transmit to mobile devices and enable information from an app, the owner of the mobile device must download, install, and “opt in” to the services provided. One could make the argument that this is comparable to someone deciding to post highly personal information to a social media site – or perhaps not.

There's no question about it – once the app is installed and activated, beacons transmit information to the mobile devices when they are within range. The only other solution is to turn off Bluetooth altogether, but for most people turning off Bluetooth simply isn't a viable option. Both with beacons and future developing technologies, perhaps librarians have two significant responsibilities:

- A responsibility to work with the vendors (especially library vendors) to ensure that the implementation of the technology considers the privacy issues; and
- A responsibility to ensure that patrons clearly understand what it means to “opt in” to these services, which gives them the opportunity to make an informed decision about how they want to use – or not use – the service.

Where to go from here? If you want to implement beacon technology in your library your next step – in addition to reading the resources below (and continuing to monitor for new information) – could be to contact the appropriate vendors for information specific to your library's needs. But, even before taking this step, consider Stephen Abram's (2015) admonition, “ask the right questions” (p. 9). In this case he suggests the right questions are, “What problems does this technology solve? And concerning the problems it solves: Are they the problems of real users, or the problems of institutions, librarians, or teachers” (p. 9)? Let honest answers to those questions inform your decisions about beacons and the adoption of future technologies, as well as inform conversations with vendors.

Additionally be aware that in July 2015, Google entered the beacon market, offering a significant competitor to Apple's iBeacon – Eddystone. Elgan (2015) states that Eddystone is a “big deal” because, “It's the first beacon platform done right. . . it's more capable than any previous platform as well as open source and cross-platform.” He goes on to say, “The difference between iBeacon and Eddystone is not like the difference between iOS and Android. It's more like the difference between an iPod and an Android phone; one does one small, narrow thing, and the other does everything” (Elgan, 2015). Consequently – at least for the near term – it's important that libraries deploy beacons that are compatible with both iBeacon and Eddystone.

Will beacons go the way of QR codes or other technologies that have come and gone? It's too early to say – but – beacons have a couple of truths working in their favor. The ubiquitous presence of mobile devices (in particular smartphones) coupled with the almost seamless way beacons interact with these devices has the potential to provide beacons with a viable path into the future of library services. Stephen Abram (2015) says, “Not only are beacons contextual “push” technologies that can alert me when I pass something of interest, they're also “pull” technologies: I can interact with them and discover more. . . Push and pull together create a dynamic conversation, and community learning can happen” (p. 10).

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### **Adult Learners**

This committee is charged with assisting library professionals to more effectively serve adult learners.

### **Awards**

This committee is charged with selecting the recipients for the LIRT Innovation in Instruction Award and the LIRT Librarian Recognition Award.

### **Conference Program**

This committee shall be responsible for annual program preparation and presentation.

### **Liaison**

This committee shall initiate and maintain communication with groups within the American Library Association dealing with issues relevant to library instruction and shall disseminate information about these groups' activities.

### **Membership**

This committee shall be responsible for publicizing the Round Table's purposes, activities and image; and for promoting membership in the Round Table.

### **Newsletter**

The committee shall be responsible for soliciting articles, and preparing and distributing LIRT News.

### **Organization and Planning**

This committee shall be responsible for long-range planning and making recommendations to guide the future direction of LIRT.

### **Teaching, Learning, & Technology**

This committee will be responsible for identifying and promoting the use of technology in library instruction.

### **Top 20**

This committee shall be responsible for monitoring the library instruction literature and identifying high quality library-instruction related articles from all types of libraries.

### **Transitions to College**

This committee builds and supports partnerships between school, public, and academic librarians to assist students in their transition to the academic library environment.

### **Web Advisory**

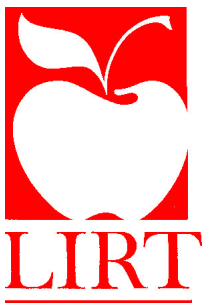
This committee shall provide oversight and overall direction for the LIRT Web site.

For more information about our committees visit

<http://www.ala.org/lirt/committees>

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### **Library Instruction Round Table News**



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