Library weighs digital book future

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A high demand for immediate access to information has made students forget researching at school libraries across the country and rely on search engines like Google or Bing.

"Google is wonderful, even librarians will admit it. We use Google all the time," said John Hickok, a communications librarian at Cal State Fullerton.

Hickok said the library still has one advantage: scholarly journals and peer reviewed information that provide accurate and professional information.

Miguel Sanchez, 23, an art animation major, said he prefers the university database, and that "the library web page has accurate information, with reliable sources that make my research papers better."

Critics of using Internet sources for research claim that quality information is difficult to find.

"Google finds garbage—trying to find good information is frustrating," said Tyler Waite, 24, a criminal justice major.

Ten years ago, students had to physically go to the library, get a CD and wade through content at different computers; however, in a digital era of information, the Internet allows students to access information anywhere at all times.

CSUF’s Pollak Library responded to the need for interactive and electronic access by creating a chat reference service.

The library chat is available 24 hours a day with a real librarian ready to help seven days a week. Students can access library pages anywhere in the world as long as they have an Internet connection.

Another resource offered by the library is the Interlibrary Loan program (ILLiad). Students can borrow books, journals and video recordings from libraries across the U.S. by filling out a form with the information of the book.

The traditional idea of a library with aisles piled up with books is shifting gears to a digital trend, Hickok said.

“We are buying e-books like crazy. Now, when students research the library catalog, they will be directed to e-books” Hickok said.

Two years ago, the library formed a Space Allocation Committee, where librarians and the dean of the library acknowledged that the future of the library will rely on digital information on mobile devices.

Computing spaces will be designed for students with laptops along with the library’s computers, and project management spaces will be workstations for students’ projects. Meanwhile, students can use the smart rooms equipped with a flat screen TV, computer and DVD-CD players.

With all the technical advances, Hickok said librarians will still be needed regardless of the information search engines provide because librarians can direct students to quality information in less time.

There has been speculation that books and libraries are becoming obsolete, but professors like Sarah Hariri, a computer science lecturer, said that is not true.

“I’m one of those people that still go to the library. I like the smell of books,” said Hariri.

She said faculty members seem to agree that the Internet is a useful resource, yet students need to learn how to use it in effective ways.

“These days, everyone knows something about anything, but people don’t go deep like in the old days for a research when you had to go to the library,” Hariri said.