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| Title | Grey Literature Past and Present – the Evolution of Library Annual Reports |
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Librarianship was professionalized in the late nineteenth century, when university-level programs of study were established to train librarians in the United States. As more rigorous practices were adopted for library management, the library annual report became a key tool for communication. Through the annual report, the managers of public and academic libraries shared information about the library's mission and accomplishments with key stakeholders, including funders (both private and governmental) and library users. Annual reports were also circulated among libraries, supplementing the fledgling professional journals by spotlighting innovative practices and enabling early forms of benchmarking against peers. So important were annual reports to the training of future librarians that schools, like the Library School at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UI), collected and preserved them. UI students in the 1890s were assigned to analyze library annual reports as part of their curriculum.

More than a century later, most American libraries still produce annual reports. However, today's reports are vastly different in form and content from their ancestors. Today's reports are typically directed at current and potential donors. They are heavily illustrated and resemble, in their visual design, glossy magazines or brochures. Although some basic performance measures may be provided (number of items circulated, for example), they typically focus on stories about treasures in the collection or innovative public programs.

Statistical data nowadays is aggregated in national-level publications from organizations like the federal Institute for Museum and Library Services and the non-profit Association for Research Libraries. But the annual reports of individual libraries remain a useful source of information on library programs and are examples of non-profits producing grey literature for outreach and fund-raising purposes. This study of the evolution of library annual reports takes as its starting point a sample of historical reports held at the UI Library in order to answer the following research questions:

- How has the content and format of library annual reports changed over time?
- Did changes in annual reports correlate with changes in printing and distribution technologies?
- Did changes in annual reports correlate with the development of alternate communication channels?
- What constitute best practices in library annual report production in the early 21st century?
- In light of the evolution of library annual reports over the last century, what predictions might be made for the future nature of this form of grey literature?

BioNote

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