From Midnight Breakfast to Facebook.com: Social Networking and the Small College Library

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Introduction

Is there a place for librarians on Facebook.com? This paper will consider the important role that active participation in social networks, both in live and virtual environments, can provide in marketing and promoting library services on our campuses. Social networking is another tool, resource, technology, and communications strategy that we can easily implement as part of our marketing plans to promote library services and programs. It's cost effective in that this is a "free" service—the investment is in human capital. It's fun—and puts a human face on our library services. Social networking can help us to increase our visibility on campus and in our communities. With steadily increasing use of our 24/7 virtual services, it may be that our presence and participation in virtual spaces, such as Facebook.com may help us promote a positive, welcoming, student-centered image of the library.

Background on Social Networking

The term "social network" is attributed to sociologist J.A. Barnes who first used the term in 1954 to describe the social relations in Bremnes, Norway. Reflecting on his original work, in 1987, Barnes commented that although he initially perceived that he was completing a "community study," he found that while "the people I worked with had the cultural values of a 'community,' their social structure was quite unlike the paradigmatic *gemeinschaft*. Their social world had an abundance of formal organizations, but most individuals appeared to make decisions with reference to personal contacts that often cut across organizational boundaries. I tried to capture this label 'network' and applied it to the class system" (Barnes 1987, 18).

A network is "a social structure made of nodes which are generally individuals or organizations. It indicates the ways in which they are connected through various familiarities ranging from casual acquaintance to close familial bonds" (Wikipedia contributors 2006). Social networks "play a critical role in determining the way problems are solved, organizations are run, and the degree to which individuals succeed in achieving their goals" (Wikipedia contributors 2006). Librarians have long been known for enjoying networking, seeking out such opportunities on our campuses, in our communities, and at professional conferences and workshops.

"There has been informal social networking on the Web since its inception, but sites dedicated to social networking have been expanding rapidly since 2003" (Barrett 2006, 8). Social networking technologies (see fig-

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Figure 1: Popular Social Networking Sites	
Bebo http://www.bebo.com/Default.jsp	**Friendster** http://www.friendster.com/
del.icio.us—social bookmarking http://del.icio.us/	**Mashable! Social networking 2.0** http://mashable.com/
digg http://www.digg.com/	**MySpace** http://www.myspace.com/
Facebook http://www.facebook.com/	**Xanga: The Weblog community** http://www.xanga.com/
Flickr http://www.flickr.com/	**YouTube** http://www.youtube.com/

ure 1) enable "people to connect, collaborate, and form virtual communities via the computer and/or Internet. Social networking web sites are those that provide this opportunity to interact. Sites that allow visitors to send emails, post comments, build web content, and/or take part in live chats are all considered to be social networking sites" (YALSA: Young Adult Library Services Association 2006, 2). Social networking technologies include blogs, wikis, rss feeds, podcasts, tagging, chats, and discussion boards. These "social technologies…facilitate information sharing and online community formation" (Lamb and Johnson 2006, 55). Social networking sites typically provide members with the ability to create profiles, share information, interests, photos, music, and video. One of the first social networking sites, founded in 1995 is Classmates.com, which connects "millions of members throughout the U.S. and Canada with friends and acquaintances from school, work, and the military" (Classmates.com, December 30, 2006).

In recognition of the explosion of social networking sites in 2006 and the Web 2.0 phenomenon, both *PC Magazine* and *Time* named "You" as the person of the year. "You're the ones creating MySpace pages, rating YouTube videos, posting links to stories on Digg, building towns and products in Second Life, creating and editing stories in Wikipedia, and so much more. The people creating their own blogs, podcasts, and Web pages, linking them together and commenting on them, have created the sense of community that people are calling Web 2.0….What each one of you does is helping everyone else" (Miller 2006, 59).

The Person of the Year *Time* cover includes a reflective Mylar surface framed in a computer screen so that you will see You when you stare into the screen. The cover caption reads "You. Yes, you. You control the Information Age. Welcome to your world." Lev Grossman remarked in *Time* that "It's a story about commu-

nity and collaboration on a scale never seen before. It's about the cosmic compendium of knowledge Wikipedia and the million-channel people's network YouTube and the online metropolis MySpace. It's about the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes… Silicon Valley consultants call it Web 2.0, as it if were a new version of some old software. But it's really a revolution" (Grossman 2006, 40).

On December 18, 2006, BBC News recently reported that the "social networks Bebo and MySpace were the two most searched for terms of 2006 using Google…The top 10 searches were dominated by Web 2.0 developments" (BBC News 2006). Metacafe, Radioblog, Wikipedia, video, and Wiki were all included in the Top 10 Google searches. Millennials are "particularly drawn to social technology because it meets many of their socialization needs" and they "want to be involved with the world beyond the local community. They want to share…[and they] seek ways to help the environment, become politically active, and build international connections" (Lamb and Johnson 2006, 55–56).

What is the role of the library in a world that is always on and always connected? "Emerging forms of online collaboration and social networking foreshadow an always-connected future and perhaps the biggest change in communication in a century" (Salz 2006, 24). As more libraries develop and implement an information commons model, they increasingly become *the* gathering place for the campus community. While students, faculty and staff continue to come to the library to use all of our various services and resources, they also come to meet people and to work collaboratively on projects, to be part of their communities. Stephen Abram remarks that "these social networking personal Web sites are not a fad but a strong, long-term trend… These social creations on the Web are evolving quickly. Sometimes it seems that new manifestations of Web phenomena trot out every day" (Abram 2006, 22). As early adopters of new and emerging technologies and "given the popularity and reach of this powerful social network, libraries have a chance to be leaders on their college campuses and in the larger community by realizing the possibilities of using social networking sites like MySpace to bring their services to the public" (Evans 2006, January 8, 2007).

Figure 2: COLLIB-L Informal Facebook.com Survey Responses (September 28, 2006).
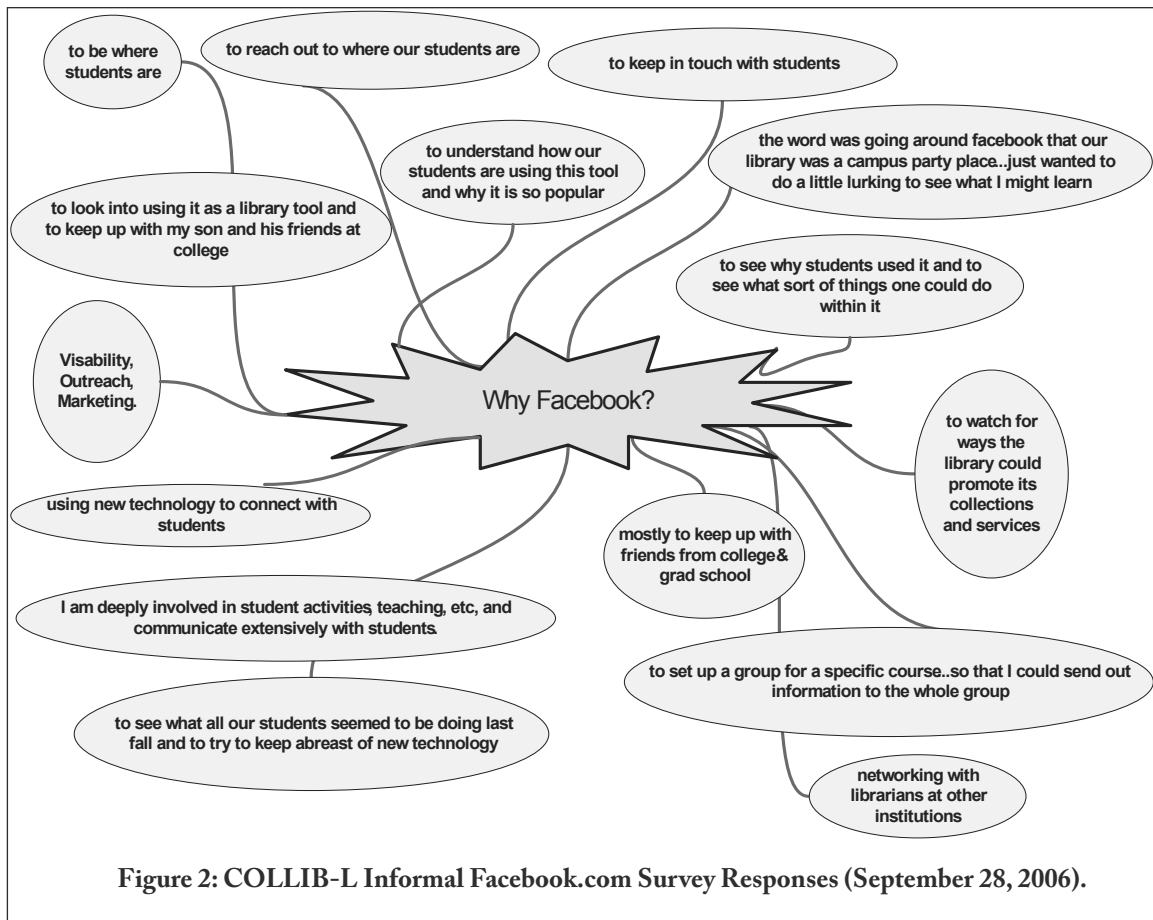
In my informal survey of the COLLIB-L community on September 28, 2006, on the use of Facebook by librarians there were 24 total respondents, with 18 reporting they are members of Facebook and 6 reporting that they do not use Facebook or other social networking technologies. Respondents offered similar responses to questions of why they created a profile and use Facebook (see Figure 2), the benefits of using Facebook and the use of Facebook to promote their library. One librarian respondent noted the "general observation that such social networking tools as this are becoming important mediums of human communication. Obviously, where human communication takes place there is a role for libraries and librarians in that mix." The most frequent response was that social technologies place us where our students are. "To serve Millennials, we have to reach them where they are, in Facebook or other virtual spaces." Facebook and other social networking technologies provide a method to extend the relationship that our libraries have fostered with our campus constituents. (Wavle 2006, 1–5)

Social Networks and the Small College Library: Elmira College

Founded in 1855, Elmira College is a small, liberal arts college located in the Finger Lakes Region of New York State. Elmira College's mission is to offer its students, in a supportive and collaborative environment, both liberal and professional education of sufficient breadth and depth to enable them to become more responsible and productive in society. Our 1,200 students receive a *very* personal education. Average class size is 16 students. 90 percent of our classes have fewer than 25 students. Thirty-five percent of our classes have fewer than 12 students enrolled. Every first year student is required to take College Composition I and II, distinguished by the a private, weekly 30 minute tutorial with the instructor throughout the year and Saturday morning classes during the fall term.

Known as the "mother of women's colleges," Elmira College was the first college in the United States to grant baccalaureate degrees to women that were equivalent to those granted to men. Elmira College received its Phi Beta Kappa charter in 1940. Elmira became co-

Figure 3: Fall 2006 Orientation: Barbecue and Celebration at the President's Home.

educational in 1969. The college celebrates its distinguished history by continuing to celebrate and honor its history and traditions. For generations, Elmira College students have sung the college songs and experienced Freshman Orientation wearing a college beanie (see figure 3), Octagon Fair (Homecoming), Parents' Weekend, Mountain Day, the Holiday Banquet and Ball, Midnight Breakfast, Fall and Winter Convocation, May Days, and, Candlelight and Commencement.

Elmira College students are required to live on campus all four years. Co-curricular activities are equally important to its rigorous academic program. The college sponsors over 100 student clubs and provides opportunities for participation in a variety of Division III athletic teams. Students are challenged in and out of the classroom. We foster the development of leadership skills and a strong sense of community. Faculty and administrators' frequent, positive interaction with students (social networking) is noted as one of Elmira's key strengths. Our faculty provides students with their home phone numbers. I provide students with my mobile phone number. It is not unusual for a student to chat with a professor via IM at midnight, or to talk with a professor or administrator outside of class, at a club meeting, at lunch in the dining hall, at a performance in the Gibson Theatre, or in the stands at a basketball or ice hockey game.

Our library services are designed to help our students succeed. When I meet with orientation leaders, new students, and new faculty at the beginning of each academic year, I tell them that my message is really

quite simple: We are here to help you succeed. We offer personal assistance and supportive, responsive services. Working closely with our Freshman Writing Program, we spend time, one-on-one with each of our freshman. With an average of 7,500 visits per week and escalating gate counts, the Gannett-Tripp Library is a central hub for campus activity. In addition to the library, the Nathenson Computer Center and Computer Labs, the Tutoring Center, English as a Second Language, and the Mark Twain Archive are housed in the Gannett-Tripp Library. Students come to the library to meet people, study alone, work collaboratively, use our collections and the services housed in the library, watch foreign language programming via the Dish network, check out books, and "rent" free videos. In observing students' behavior in the library, clearly the library as social space is becoming increasingly important. Several students have commented to me that "it's cool to hang out at the library" and that they "love coming to the library."

As is typical at most small college libraries, everyone on the staff wears multiple hats and juggles multiple responsibilities, in the library and on campus. Librarians are expected to serve as an advisor to a student club(s), serve on committees, attend campus events, and participate in our traditions. My own social networking activities include playing the clarinet with the Concert Ensemble and Pep Band, cheering enthusiastically in support of our athletic teams, flipping burgers on Mountain Day, attending Encore (performing arts) events, selling books and food tickets at Octagon Fair, running games at May Days, carving the turkey

and serving the fixings at the Annual Holiday Dinner, performing for the Annual Encore Staff Recital, serving coffee at Midnight Breakfast and Final Countdown, judging the annual drag show—in drag—and advising P.R.I.D.E., VOX (Voices of Planned Parenthood) and the Gender Issues Group. I am a Freshman Faculty Advisor and I volunteer in the Office of Admissions, interviewing prospective students. I serve on the Educational Standards Committee, the Graduate and Advanced Studies Committee, the IT Steering Committee, A-Team (Academic Administrators), and INFOE. Each of our librarians teaches a 3-credit course Core course in either the fall or winter term. All first year students are required to take Core in both the fall and winter terms as part of the freshman experience at Elmira College.

I would argue that in order to increase the visibility of the library and to affirm the central role that the library plays in the academic enterprise, it is imperative for the library staff to actively engage in activities that support and foster learning, study, and discovery, as well as to be highly visible and active on campus. Certainly there are many important factors in considering the role of the library in the academic enterprise and the notion of library as space and place. Contacts made through social networking can only help students and faculty understand and come to know the library and the library staff as central and essential to attaining success. In an environment such as that at Elmira College, where community and personal interactions are highly valued, social networking technologies have the potential to extend the idea of community in a complimentary manner.

Social Networking Technologies: Facebook

Facebook.com was launched in February 2004 for Harvard University students. Created by then 20 year old Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg, the social network soon expanded to include Ivy League institutions, followed by Boston-area universities, other colleges and universities, and high schools. In September 2006, Facebook opened to all Internet users with a valid email address. The website currently has over 13 million registered users in 40,000 regional, work, college and high school networks around the globe. "According to comScore, Facebook is the seventh-most trafficked site on the web and is the number one photo-sharing site." Facebook describes its site as

a social utility that helps people better understand the world around them. Facebook devel-

ops technologies that facilitate the spread of information through social networks allowing people to share information online the same way they do in the real world. Facebook is made up of many networks—individual schools, companies or regions—each of which are independent and closed off to non-affiliated users. To join Facebook, people can authenticate into a school or work network, or they can join a regional network. They can then create profiles to connect with friends, share interests, join groups, send messages, write notes, and post photos. (Facebook.com, January 3, 2007).

Like MySpace, Friendster and other social networking sites, Facebook members create and connect through their online profiles. Once a person joins Facebook through an institutional or regional network, the next step is to build his or her profile. Facebook provides several privacy controls which govern the profile sections that others in the network may view. No one outside of the selected network(s) can view a profile without the member granting access. This exchange occurs by inviting a member to become a friend. These privacy controls and network limits distinguish Facebook from MySpace, in particular. In its Privacy Overview, it is noted that "Facebook wants you to share your information with exactly the people you want to see it" (Facebook.com, January 3, 2007). Members have the option to "Block People" and to present a "Limited Profile" only to designated individuals.

Facebook profiles have a uniform appearance—the Facebook look. Members build their profiles by providing as much, or as little detail, as desired in several categories in the profile, including birth date, hometown, political and religious views, gender, relationship status, contact information, personal information including activities, interests, favorite music, books, movies, TV and quotes, and education and professional information. In addition to personal information, each profile contains The Wall (a place for friends to write public notes), Notes, Courses, Mini-Feed—"Liz joined the group American Library Association Members," Network Friends, Friends in Other Networks, Groups, Photos, and Status—"Liz is at the Library."

The Elmira College network, which currently includes 1,753 students, staff, administrators, faculty, graduate students and alumni, was launched late in the spring in 2005. I created my personal profile on January 19, 2006, several months after receiving a Facebook invi-

tation from a library student assistant. Within a matter of minutes of creating my profile, I received emails initiated by several students asking me to be their Facebook friend. While I initially assumed an unobtrusive (lurker's) approach with a non-informative profile, it was not long before I too was adding friends, inviting colleagues to join Facebook, joining and creating groups, sharing photos and information about my favorite pastimes, books, movies, politics, and music. Students are enthusiastic about Facebook and I have had more than one student greet me with a "hey, we're Facebook friends" when I see him or her on campus. Anecdotally, it has been reported by several students that they spend several hours, especially over the weekend, checking out profiles, adding (and removing) friends, and adding photos and notes. I have also observed on numerous occasions that it has become the norm for our multi-tasking, always-connected students to go to Facebook, email, and play an occasional game, all while researching and writing papers, listening to music on their ipods, and waiting for their cell phones to vibrate.

While I have been exploring the use of Facebook's many features to promote the library and market library services and resources, I believe first and foremost that if one is going to participate in a social network, it is important to be social and have some fun, while also using common sense and good judgment. Balance the personal with the professional. Our students want to know the details—who we are—and for the most part, they tell it all in their profiles. They form connections and communities through their common interests. You are putting a face on the library but you are also letting your students know that you are part of their community.

Social Networking Profile Tips
Be real. Be authentic. Include personal and professional information. My Facebook profile includes my birthday, AIM screen name, cell phone number, clubs that I advise, my interests, favorite music, favorite books, and favorite quotes, as well as education and professional information. Include photo albums—let your network members know a little more about you.

Tell your story. What is your message? I have used the "My Notes" feature of Facebook to post our message "we are here to help you succeed," provide lists of new DVD releases, and to publicize the new, longer student hours that we established for the fall term, based on student requests for the library to be open longer.

Make friends. Ask Facebook members to be your friend and respond positively to friend requests. I invite

my freshmen advisees, members of clubs, students in my classes, librarians at other networks, people that I meet on campus, and faculty and staff colleagues to be my friend. I have also invited colleagues who do not have a profile to join the network. Post birthday wishes on your friends' walls.

Join groups. At the center of our social networking communities, this is how we connect with community members who share our common interests. I have joined forty-six groups at Elmira College, mostly for fun, including Squirrel Enthusiasts, Mamma Mia Lovers, EC Concert Ensemble, Cat Lovers, Central New Yorkers, The Notebook, Poli Sci, Go Gay, and Sweet Southern Lovin'—Diehard Fans of Aunt Mabel and Chanel. When the Concert Ensemble traveled to New York City last spring, I uploaded photos from our trip to the Mamma Mia Lovers group. When P.R.I.D.E. sponsored its Annual Drag Show, I uploaded over 150 photos of the show for the Go Gay group members and others in our network to enjoy. A student assistant at the library created the GTL Circulation Desk Union, which all of our student assistants and several library staff members have joined. From the Union's description:

> If you know the fear the name Liz strikes into the hearts of employees, pray that the toner doesn't need to be changed, have learned to ignore students bitching about their late charges, the joys of shelf reading and shelving books, and the hell that is working at the library...this is the place for you...

Create groups. I have created a group called "What's new at the GTL" (see figure 4). Much of this information that I have included for the group is redundant with information that I include on my profile. I have posted a "Talk Back Live: We Want to Hear From You, Please Tell Us What You Think" discussion thread for this group.

The group is an excellent way to introduce the library staff to the college community. I have also created two other groups, Sudoku Solvers Unite, for pure fun, and Grrl Talk as a group to bring together a meeting place and communication center for our women's studies clubs and honor society. Groups provide the ability to message the entire group and if someone is no longer interested, they can simply leave the group. Students have also created groups about the library, including Sat in the GTL for Hours and all I Did Was Surf Facebook and Check away Messages:

Figure 4: What's New at the GTL Group

have you ever just sat in the GTL and tried to accomplish some homework and all you did was like play around on your computer and look at facebook for like 200 hours? yeah join this group.

What are Others Doing

The library at CUNY's Brooklyn College has a page on MySpace (http://www.myspace.com/brooklyncollegelibrary). Scott Carlson reported in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that "Beth Evans, a librarian who specializes in electronic services at the library, says she set up a place for the library on MySpace after her 16-year-old daughter told her that she doesn't read e-mail anymore." Instead, Evans' daughter reads the comments that her friends send her on MySpace. The "College uses MySpace mainly as a way to stay connected to students and to send out announcements about events, workshops, and work opportunities in the library" to its 1,700 plus members (Carlson 2006, A.33). Evans states

that "beyond outreach and general interaction with students, a presence in MySpace can also offer libraries the advantage of special interest groupings that can facilitate messaging and instruction. Special interests often define how we socialize, and this is no less true for social web sites than it is for live social encounters" (Evans 2006, January 8, 2007).

There are several global (open to anyone) librarians' groups available on Facebook, including Librarians and Facebook, American Library Association Members, Friends of Alkek Library–Texas State University, Library 2.0 Interest Group, Libraries and Librarians, Library Workers are the Best, and the Houston Cole Library Users Want Answers. Some groups border on the absurd, but are fun, including: Akron Bierce Library would be an awesome place to play PAINTBALL!!!!!, DANCE PARTY IN THE LIBRARY, I fell asleep in the library, I Would Totally Have Sex in the Library, and Abusers of Whispering in the Library.

Lisa A. Ancelet, a reference librarian at Texas State, includes a colorful Ask A Librarian flyer in her profile, with information on how to Instant Message a librarian. She also includes a photo of the reference librarians. Bill Drew at SUNY Morrisville has used his Facebook Notes to update his network about service interruptions and his Wall to provide a link to the unique SUNY Morrisville College Library Toolbar. David Ward at the University of Illinois, Urbana Campus sent a Facebook invitation to his friends for a night of mayhem at the Undergraduate Library Gaming Night on October 21, 2006. He has responded to students who have asked library questions on his Wall. Paula Barnett-Ellis at Jacksonville State includes information about new resources, links to items of interest such as the Surgeon General's report on Secondhand Smoke and FEMA's Hurricane 2006 report.

What are the (Few) Limitations and Concerns? A Cautionary Word or Two

Like all other things that live on the World Wide Web, it's the web! Despite privacy controls and network affiliations, those who want access to your profile will creatively find a way to gain access. Facebook survey respondents voiced concerns about privacy and the fact that there is potentially too much personal information. One respondent noted "I see stuff that I'd prefer not to have seen, but nothing huge—just images of my student drinking." Another commented "I don't want students to think I'm a creepy stalker librarian guy on Facebook…the stupid new feed feature gives too much information."

Several libraries represented by "personal profiles" on Facebook were surprised to learn that Facebook was removing library profiles during the summer 2006. Facebook takes their Terms of Use (Facebook is a social utility that connects *you* with the *people* around *you*) quite seriously. Over 100 of my libraries friends lost their profiles and the time they had invested in creating the profile. Several abandoned Facebook in favor of MySpace. Others created Library Groups.

Finally, today's profile is yesterday's news. Your profile is out-of-date as soon as you save it. It takes only a few minutes to update your profile, invite a few new friends, send an invitation to a library event, write a birthday message on a Wall, upload photos or add new releases to your notes. Members of social networks are eager for the latest news. Facebook recognized this when they added a Mini-Feed feature in the fall that feeds information from your Mini-Feed to all of your friends' News Feeds. While *we* may consider mini-feeds to provide too much information, our students enjoy the minute to minute late breaking news. It's important to keep your profile and group content updated—frequently.

Conclusions

Is there a place for librarians on Facebook.com and other social networking sites? Absolutely! While librarians don't appear to be rushing in droves to join Facebook and/or MySpace, it is important that we recognize that Web 2.0, with its focus on social networking technologies, is here and, at least for the immediate future, will impact us in ways that we cannot even begin to imagine. From podcasts, wikis and uploading videos to Facebook, MySpace, and Xanga, Millennial students have claimed social networking technologies as their own and they have run with it, demanding that our campuses keep up the pace with infrastructures that can support an always on and always connected community. It is imperative that librarians be part of this important community conversation. Active participation in social networks, both live and in virtual environments, can help us to promote a positive, welcoming, student-centered image of the library. The library is more than the sum of its collections, resources and services, at the heart of the library is people. Social networking technologies can help us bring people-recognition to the community of learners and scholars that

we connect with. While this Baby-Boomer is not likely to accept the invitation I received today to participate in Jello Wrestling at Club Chill on Friday, I welcome the opportunity to form connections and participate in communities in this brave new world.

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