Art Museum Libraries: Automation and Services to the Public
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Introduction

As the sole librarian at the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art in Indianapolis, Indiana (and a part-time volunteer in that position), I often, indirectly, encounter the information needs of the public. Questions submitted by e-mail to the museum's Web site are routed to the appropriate staff members by the Manager of Technology. The telephone switchboard and the Admissions Desk receive requests for information that can be answered only on a limited scale by curatorial and other staff. The library is presently not open to the public; such service awaits the completion of the planned expansion of the museum and possible staff enlargement.

Confronted with this situation, I became interested in the possibilities for outreach to the public that the development of new technologies seemed to offer and I started to wonder to what degree American art museum libraries presently make use of the new technologies to serve the public. A conversation with a colleague, who stated that in recent years art libraries have made themselves more accessible to the public than they used to be, provided an additional incentive to commence this study.

Few studies have been published on museum libraries. Even less scholarly research has been done specifically on art museum libraries. None of this research has been done in the past ten years. As a consequence not much is known about the organization, services, resources, and needs of art museum libraries, or for that matter, museum libraries in general. A few studies can be cited that relate sometimes directly, but more often only indirectly, to the present research. A common thread through these studies is the conclusion that museum libraries are "under-financed, understaffed, and underutilized." In 1991 Annette J. Oren conducted a survey among the head librarians of 118 art museum libraries throughout the United States to determine the nature and extent of the services offered by these libraries to the public. She drew the general conclusion that the attitude of the museum libraries regarding service to the public was rather passive: public use of art museum libraries was usually permitted but was not actively encouraged.

Methodology of the Present Study

This study was developed as a follow-up of the exploratory study by Annette Oren. It was designed to gather data to compile a picture of services presently offered to the public by art museum libraries in the light of the development of new technologies, and to determine whether art libraries now make themselves more accessible to the public than in the past. Based on the sample size and time constraints, a mail survey was chosen as the instrument for gathering data.

From the art museums in ten midwestern states, listed in three standard directories, art museums and art centers were selected that fulfilled the criteria of the AAM definition of a museum plus the following criteria:

1. self-described as solely an art museum or art center (i.e., cannot be a combined art and history museum);
2. a fine arts museum (i.e., not limited to decorative arts; however, contemporary art or American art museums are included);
3. not part of a larger educational institution, such as a university;
4. not a corporate collection;
5. listed as a library among institutional facilities in at least one of the three sources;
6. having a collection of at least 1,000 volumes.

This selection process resulted in a sample size of fifty-three institutions.

Since my study is a follow up of Oren's study, my survey instrument was based on the one used in her study. However, to limit the length of the survey, not all questions contained in Oren's survey were repeated, and new questions were added. Responses were received from thirty-six (68%) of the fifty-three institutions, a satisfactory response rate when compared with other studies. Time constraints precluded further follow-up of non-responding institutions. The data provided in the returned surveys were entered into a Microsoft Access database.

Of the ten midwestern states surveyed, Ohio (22%), Indiana (17%) and Illinois (14%) provided the largest number of respondents, Kansas and Kentucky the smallest number (3% each). Four of the returned surveys indicated that the library contained fewer than 1,000 books. The data that were provided in these surveys were nevertheless included in the study to extend its scope and to furnish a more complete picture.

Findings

Size: The responding art museum libraries varied considerably in size. As in Oren's study, smaller libraries outnumbered...
larger libraries. The categories used to describe the data that were gathered in this study, small, medium, and large, are based on the number of volumes held by the responding libraries. Thirteen responding libraries in the small-size category reported holdings of fewer than 5,000 volumes, the thirteen libraries in the medium-size category had 5,000 to 35,000 volumes, and the ten libraries in the large-size category had 35,000 volumes or more. The results of the database reports, based on the above size categories, indicated that new category groupings in the sample were necessary. These ‘new’ groups made the study more logical in varying contexts: for instance, paid library staff found in all libraries with 5,500 (not 5,000) volumes or more, or computers found in all libraries with 6,000 volumes or more. Furthermore, access to online and electronic art indexes was found to exist only sporadically in libraries with collections of fewer than 10,000 volumes, while 90% of the libraries with collections larger than 10,000 volumes had access to these databases.

**Staff:** The data gathered in this study suggest that small libraries and medium libraries with holdings of 5,500 books or fewer are staffed quite differently when compared with medium and large libraries with holdings of more than 5,500 books. Many smaller libraries (most libraries with collections of 5,500 books or fewer) have no paid library personnel. They depend on volunteers and are usually supervised by other museum staff. All medium-sized libraries with more than 5,500 volumes have paid library staff and they are mostly one-person libraries. The larger libraries usually employ several librarians, as well as other full- and part-time staff members. While the majority (54%) of staff in art museum libraries are still not professional librarians, the percentage of professionals is now considerably higher than the 35% that Oren mentions. (Even if all part-time staff is included in the tabulation as non-librarians, the percentage is still 42%). It seems, therefore, that the “disturbing trend” toward fewer professional art museum librarians that she detected in her study, has been reversed, possibly under the influence of organizations such as ARLIS/NA and the Special Libraries Association.

**Levels of Automation**

**Access to computers:** In this sample, all libraries with a collection of 6,000 volumes or more have computers for their staff. Twenty-four libraries with computers (67%) had a median of two computers, with a minimum of one and a maximum of forty workstations. Computers at nineteen of these twenty-four libraries (79%) were part of a local area network (LAN). Half of the twenty-four libraries (33% of all libraries) provided public access to one or more of the computer workstations. By comparison, B.J. Irvine reported in 1986 that two out of thirty-three art museum libraries (6%) granted public access to computer terminals. Of the large libraries, 70% provide public access to one or more computer workstations, which are always part of a LAN. The number of computer terminals ranges from two to forty, with a median of 6.5. Of the medium-sized libraries with 6,000 or more books, 67% (6 of 9) have terminals that are part of a LAN, and 33% (3 of 9) provide public access. The number of workstations ranges between one and three. Only 29% (5 of 17) of the libraries with fewer than 6,000 volumes have computers. Only one of these libraries has more than one computer. In three of the five institutions with computers (60%), these are part of a LAN and in two cases (40%) they are available for public use.

**Library software/bibliographic utilities:** Among the large libraries, 90% use software for cataloging, 70% use software for circulation, and 60% use software for acquisitions, while 90% are members of a bibliographic utility. Sixty percent of the five libraries with computers and collections of fewer than 6,000 books use software for cataloging. One also uses software for acquisitions. Only three (18%) of the seventeen libraries with fewer than 6,000 volumes are members of a bibliographic utility. Out of the total of thirty-six libraries, fourteen (39%) are members of bibliographic utilities.

**Online catalog:** Eleven of the twenty-four libraries with computers (46%) have an online catalog (OPAC). Ten libraries (91%) have OPACs accessible throughout the museum, while seven (64%) are accessible from outside the museum. Thirty-one percent of all the libraries in the sample have an OPAC, and 19% have an online catalog that is accessible from outside the museum. E.G. Bierbaum reported in 1996 that 13% of museum libraries had an online catalog. Seven (70%) of the large libraries have OPACs. These are all accessible within the museum and all but one are also accessible from outside the museum. Of nine medium libraries with 6,000 volumes or more, one-third have an OPAC that is accessible throughout the museum, and one of these is also accessible externally. Of the seventeen libraries with fewer than 6,000 volumes, only one has an online catalog, and that catalog is only accessible within the library.

Almost half (17 of 36) of the libraries still use card catalogs. Four libraries indicated that they have both card and online catalogs, which may indicate that they have just completed retrospective conversion, but are keeping their card catalogs as back-up catalogs; two of those card catalogs are closed. Of the four small- and medium-sized libraries that have OPACs, two are members of a bibliographic utility. Six of the seven libraries that have OPACs accessible from outside the museum are members of a bibliographic utility as well as some kind of formalized cooperative arrangement such as a consortium.

**Online and electronic indexes:** Fourteen (39%) of the 36 libraries have access to these types of indexes. With a few exceptions, libraries with fewer than 10,000 volumes do not have access to online or electronic indexes. The level of access to print indexes for this group of libraries is not high either. Thirteen of these twenty-two libraries do not possess indexes at all. In strong contrast, the majority of libraries with 10,000 volumes or more (fourteen libraries) have access to online and/or electronic indexes.

**Other online and electronic databases/e-journals:** Twelve libraries (33%) provide access to databases on CD-ROM, six (17%) to WorldCat, four (11%) to RLIN and three (8%) to AMICO and/or other online databases. Four of the ten large libraries provide access to electronic journals. Some reasons CD-ROMs are not provided include the following: vulnerability to theft; budget constraints; and moving directly to the online format, or replacement by the online format. One respondent reported ‘a strong aversion’ to the CD-ROM format. Absence of illustrations, budget constraints, accessibility to online sources via membership in a consortium, and the absence of computers were offered as reasons for not subscribing to electronic journals. As might be expected, the large libraries provide the most online and electronic databases. Seven out of ten provide databases on CD-ROM, four subscribe to electronic journals, four provide
access to RLIN, three to AMICO and one library provides access to WorldCat and RLIN. The ten large libraries together reported access to a total of eighteen online databases, with a median of 1.5. (One library reported access to twelve additional indexes.)

Half of the four medium-size libraries with 10,000 volumes or more provide access to WorldCat, none to RLIN or AMICO. Half provide databases on CD-ROM. One has access to, but does not subscribe to, electronic journals. No access to other online databases was reported. Of the twenty-two libraries with collections of fewer than 10,000 volumes, only three reported having databases on CD-ROM, none have access to WorldCat, RLIN, or AMICO, and not one subscribes to electronic journals. Nineteen (53%) of the thirty-six libraries have access to databases online and/or on CD-ROM (including the indexes). By comparison, Irvine reported in 1986 that 45% of the art museum libraries in her sample performed in-house database searching. Godlewski reported in 1989 that 17.5% of art libraries did online searches for the public, while Bierbaum reported (in her 1996 study) that 37% of the art libraries provided online services. Bierbaum also reported that 60% of the art museum libraries had CD-ROMs, far more than the other museum libraries, while fifteen (42%) respondents in the present study reported having CD-ROMs (indexes and other databases).

**In-house databases:** Eight of fourteen libraries with 10,000 volumes or more (57%) and six out of twenty-two libraries with fewer than 10,000 volumes (27%) are involved in the development of an in-house database.

**Web pages:** Fourteen of the responding libraries (39%) have a presence on the Web site of their parent institution. Three do not have their own separate page and are only mentioned, six have one page, and five, all large libraries, have several pages. Only three of the twenty institutions that did not report a presence on their museum's Web site provided an explanation. Five (14%) of the thirty-six libraries, all large, make their OPAC and/or reference services via e-mail available on their Web pages. Four (11%), again all large libraries, provide access to in-house databases (such as exhibition histories and journal holdings). Three large libraries (8% of the total sample) provide links to other useful Web sites, and two (6% of the total sample) provide useful tips for art research. Only one small library is mentioned on its museum's Web site. Of the thirteen medium-size libraries, only one is mentioned, and two have their own page on their institution's Web site. All the large libraries have a presence on their parent institution's Web site; however, one library is only mentioned and does not have its own page. Half of the large libraries make their OPAC accessible on the museum Web page and/or provide access to e-reference; four provide access to in-house databases. Four of the large libraries have only one page on their museum's Web site. One institution provides access to its OPAC on that page, and another provides access to e-mail reference and a telephone number to call for reference, but no other information. The other two institutions have extensive Web sites with access to OPACs, e-mail reference, tips on art research, etc.

**Services to the Public**

**Access:** Of the total of 36 libraries, 21 (58%) have regular hours during which they are open to the public, while fourteen (39%) are open by appointment, and one does not provide access to the public. One library has regular hours during which it provides access to a specific category of members ("upper level members"), while other users may have access by appointment only. In Oren's study, these percentages were 60%, 34%, and 6%, respectively. Fewer than half (46%) of the small and medium libraries have regular public hours, whereas nearly all (90%) of the large libraries do. Of the four largest libraries, all provide access during regular hours to at least certain segments of the public. Twenty-one libraries open to the public with regular hours range from three to fifty-four hours of access per week for a mean of 30.4 hours. Oren reports a mean of 27.8 hours and Hull and Fearnley, thirty-five hours. Nine of the ten large libraries have regular hours during which they are open to the public; seven of the thirteen medium-sized libraries are open by appointment only.

Only twenty-one (58%) of the 36 libraries answered the question about the number of patrons who use their libraries per week. No conclusions could therefore be drawn from these data. Of the institutions open to the public during regular hours, the median was 25 users per week, while for the other four institutions the median was 10.5. For the large libraries the median was 121 users, for the medium-sized libraries 7.5 users, and the small libraries five users per week.

**Types of users:** Of the thirty-five libraries that allow public use (either through regular hours or by appointment):

1. 32 (89%) reported use by museum tour guides (docents);
2. 27 (75%) by museum members;
3. 26 (72%) by college/university undergraduate students;
4. 21 (58%) by graduate students;
5. 19 (53%) by artists and art students;
6. 15 (42%) by visiting scholars;
7. 15 (42%) by schoolteachers;
8. 13 (36%) by others in the general public (Seven libraries did not specify).
9. Appraisers were mentioned twice, also mentioned were Art League members, tour participants, museum staff from other art museums, media, genealogy researchers, and casual readers; and 9.7 (19%) reported use by schoolchildren.

Oren's rank order according to frequency of use of the libraries by the various segments of the public is only slightly different. Artists and art students are fourth in use, ranking before graduate students, others in the general public are in fifth place, before graduate students, scholars and teachers, who come in the sixth, seventh and eighth place respectively.

**Circulation:** In her study, Oren concluded that "the vast majority of museums do not permit any type of borrowing. Those that do tend to have restrictive policies limiting either the types of materials that may be borrowed and/or the categories of individuals who may exercise borrowing privileges." She reported that 27% of the libraries permitted the circulation of books to the public.
The data gathered in the present study on the circulation of materials show that this situation has not changed. None of the three library categories permit public checkout of materials in large numbers; only eight out of the total of 36 libraries (22%) allow circulation of materials at all. Of these eight, three mentioned restrictive policies, permitting the checkout of slides, “teacher resources” (prints, slides, videos, etc.), or only one part of the collection (to museum members and students of the adjacent art academy). By comparison, Hull and Fearnley reported that 24% of the libraries in their sample lent materials to the public. Bierbaum noted that circulation was reported “sparsely.” Irvine reported no circulating art museum libraries in her study.

**Reference:** One service that art museum libraries can render, even when they are only accessible to the public in a limited way, is answering reference queries. These queries reach the museum library in various ways: by telephone, by mail, through personal contact, and these days via e-mail and fax. The data that were gathered in this study on the ways that libraries provide reference services show that of the large libraries, 100% answer telephone reference calls, and 90% perform reference services via mail and e-mail. Medium-sized libraries are somewhat less likely to accept calls, written requests and public e-mail queries. Ten of thirteen (77%) provide reference services by phone or mail, and eight of thirteen (62%) via e-mail. Small libraries are even less likely to accept calls, written requests and e-mails from the public; five out of thirteen (38%) do not report any reference services whatsoever.

The data that were collected by Oren also suggested that larger libraries are more willing to answer reference calls by telephone. She attributes the hesitancy on the part of smaller libraries to answer calls to a lack of enough volumes of suitable reference materials and also suggests that smaller libraries simply may not have the staff to answer such calls. She reports that 98% of the larger libraries and 66% of the smaller libraries answered telephone reference calls. Irvine reported that 100% of the art museum libraries in her sample provide reference in person and by phone. Godlewski reported that 91% of the art museum libraries in her sample provide reference services. In this study, almost all of the medium and large libraries with a collection of over 5,500 volumes that had paid library personnel reported providing reference services in person, by phone, and through the mail. A total of 83% of all the libraries conducted reference services in person, 72% provided services by phone, 61% by mail, and 56% by e-mail. Only five libraries (14%) do not provide reference service. The data collected on reference services suggest that the larger the library, the greater the number of queries the library receives from the public. A correlation also appears to exist between size of library and number of hours spent each week on answering questions. For example, for the eight small libraries that accept queries from the public, the median is 2.5 questions per week, while the median for the ten large libraries is forty questions per week. Staffs in large libraries devote a median of twenty hours per week to answering reference questions compared to a median of five hours by staff in medium libraries. Oren reported similar findings. For the whole sample of thirty-six libraries the median for reference queries by mail, by phone, or in person is nine, while for e-mail it is three per week. Medians of six and 2.5 hours are spent to answer these questions.

It seems that at the moment, therefore, e-mail still plays only a minor role in the overall picture of reference services in museum libraries. From the data collected, it may be concluded that the relatively new option of e-mail reference is not generally employed to provide more reference services to the public. E-mail is never cited as the only form of reference services. Although this type of reference service would be easier to provide for libraries that are only staffed part-time, e-mail reference only seems to supplement services already provided. It should be remembered, however, that only five of the fourteen library Web sites provide access to e-mail reference and these Web sites all belong to large libraries. Since the information on e-mail reference provided by small- and medium-sized libraries is rather spotty, no definitive conclusions may be drawn with respect to this type of reference.

**Additional services:** Fifteen (42%) of the thirty-six institutions (mostly the larger ones) indicated that they perform additional library services. Bibliographic instruction was reported in fourteen (39%) libraries. In contrast, Godlewski reported in 1989 that close to two-thirds of the art museum libraries provided bibliographic instruction.

Four institutions (11%) offer a reader’s advisory service. Only two large libraries mentioned “other” services: one provides instruction on artist research, the other teaches methodology in art history to the incoming art history graduate students of a local university. In this context, it should be remembered that two large libraries provide tips on art research on their Web sites.

Only one of the thirteen small libraries offers bibliographic instruction (“very rarely”). Of the thirteen medium-sized libraries, only four offer bibliographic instruction and only two offer readers’ advisory services. In contrast, 90% (9 of 10) of the large libraries offer bibliographic instruction, and 20% offers readers’ advisory services.

**Promotion:** Another service that a museum library may provide to the public is to publicize its presence. The responses to the survey’s question on publicity have been tabulated under appropriate categories in the following table to present the data in a summary format. Twenty-three institutions provided forty-six responses.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Percentage of sample (n=36)</th>
<th>Percentage of total responses (n=46)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Museum publications (a)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Museum Web site</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visiting the museum (b)</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>Local schools (c)</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Programs (d)</td>
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<td>Directories</td>
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<td>Tours of museum</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Telephone inquiries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media (e)</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Referrals from other area libraries</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>OPAC of consortium</td>
<td>1</td>
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(a) Mentioned were such publications as newsletters, membership brochures, pamphlets, bulletins, and museum calendars.

(b) Visitors may see the library or hear about it from guards, information desk personnel or other staff.

(c) Includes all levels of schools; “college teachers,” art history professors, etc.

(d) Includes docent training and workshops by head librarian.

(e) Television was mentioned.

The table shows that according to the responding libraries, the public most commonly learns of the museum library and its services through word-of-mouth (28%) and through museum publications (25%). An interesting fact in this respect is that only five of the fourteen libraries with a presence on the museum’s Web site mention the Web site as a source of public knowledge about the library.

**Future services:** Of the sixteen libraries that offered access for a few hours a week or by appointment only, five (31%) would like to expand their public hours. Of the twelve libraries without computers, only one would like to offer computer access to the librarian and the public. Two (29%) of the seven respondents from the small libraries (the libraries without professional staff, except one, and with few computers) listed, beside additional services, a need for more staff or expanded cataloging operations. The data on additional services this group of libraries would like to offer have been summarized below. (Please note that respondents could list more than one service.)

- Two (29%) listed initiating or expanding public hours;
- two (29%), publication of library hours and services;
- two (29%), the initiation of circulation or expansion of the library;
- one (14%), computer access for librarian and patrons;
- one (14%), the upgrading of computer systems and services; and
- one (14%), establishing a Web site with online resources.

However, only one-third of these suggestions pertain to automation.

A different pattern emerges from the responses given by ten of the medium and thirteen large libraries with 6,000 or more books. These libraries all have professional staff and computers. Many strive for a higher degree of automation:

- Four would like to add more databases;
- three would like to have an online catalog;
- one would like its catalog to be accessible on the Web site;
- one would like to improve its Web site; and
- one would like to offer additional reference services.

The four largest libraries seem to be content with their level of service to the public (except the one institution that can only provide limited access to the public). No suggestions for additional services were listed.

**Consortia:** In this survey, respondents were asked whether their library participates in some formalized cooperative agreement with other institutions. Fifteen (42%) indicated that they do participate in such arrangements. Only three of seventeen small and medium libraries with fewer than 6,000 volumes belong to a consortium.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

The data gathered in this study draw a picture of art museum libraries rather similar to the picture drawn in Oren’s study of ten years ago. Nearly all (97%) libraries are open to at least certain segments of the public, such as museum guides and members, either through regular public hours or by appointment. Fifty-eight percent have regular hours during which they are open to the public, for an average of thirty hours per week. Larger libraries are more likely to have regular public hours than smaller libraries.

Among the public, museum tour guides (docents) visiting the libraries still outnumber by far patrons that make use of the libraries’ resources via telephone or e-mail. Museum members and college/university undergraduates also use the libraries heavily. Graduate students continue to be less likely museum library users than undergraduates, probably because services such as access to OPACs, electronic and online art indexes and other databases still are not very common.

The present study also indicates that museum publications and word-of-mouth continue to be used most frequently to promote services. Promotion via the museum Web site comes in at a distant third place. It seems logical, therefore, as Oren already noted, that “those segments of the public that have the closest ties to the museum are the most likely to know of a library’s existence.”

Interestingly, the responses to the survey indicate that museum librarians very often are not aware of the promotional value of their presence on the Web; only a little over one-third of the institutions that were presented on their museum’s Web site mentioned that Web site as a source of public knowledge about the library.

With respect to the circulation of materials, the user patterns have not changed. Fewer than one-fourth of the responding libraries permitted public checkout of materials. Almost half of those do have restrictive policies that limit either the types of materials that may be borrowed and/or the categories of users who may borrow.

While Oren reported that 98% of the larger libraries and 66% of the smaller libraries answered telephone reference calls, 83% of the respondents in the present study conducted reference services in some form. Larger libraries are still the most willing to answer reference queries. This is probably related to the fact that smaller libraries do not have enough reference materials or staff to answer such queries. Almost all of the libraries with paid library personnel provide reference services. E-mail reference services play only a minor role. While it would, for example, seem easier for libraries that are staffed only part-time to provide this kind of library service, so far e-mail reference only seems to supplement the services already provided and is not exploited to
increase services to the public. In this study e-mail is never the only medium through which reference services are provided and small- and medium-sized libraries seldom mention e-mail reference as a service that they provide. Obviously, to be able to provide e-mail reference service, access to a computer is mandatory, and fewer than one third of the respondents from small libraries have access to a computer in the library itself.

Fewer than half of the respondents answered the question about additional services performed for the public. As a contrast, Bierbaum reported in 1996, "a wide range of services to museum staff, members and visitors." The services mentioned consisted mostly of bibliographic instruction. Although under-reporting might play a role here, two institutions were found to provide tips for art research on their Web sites without reporting it. The findings of this study are not different from Freiband's and Oren's findings in that most art museum libraries are not very pro-active in reaching out to users from the public sector. Although most art libraries are willing to serve the public, they are not actively exploiting the possibilities for outreach that the new technological developments offer. While half of the large libraries promote their reference services on their Web sites, only one of the small institutions that did not report any reference services has a very limited presence on the Web. Another opportunity to serve the public with relatively little investment of human and fiscal resources is 'lost'!

Approximately one-third of the libraries that have a presence on the Web site of their parent institution make an OPAC and/or e-mail reference services available. Less than one-fourth provide access to in-house databases and/or provide links to other useful online resources. Only a few provide tips for research. Asked about additional services they would like to provide in the future, only two respondents listed the creation or improvement of a Web site. The libraries that are not represented on the Web unfortunately did not provide an explanation as to why they are not represented. This picture challenges the hypothesis that art libraries have made themselves more accessible to the public than heretofore.

In addition to services currently provided to the public, determining the level of automation in museum libraries was another primary research goal of my study. All libraries with 6,000 or more volumes have computers. Fewer than half of these provide public access to workstations and have online catalogs accessible through the entire museum. Access to online and electronic art indexes exists only sporadically in libraries with collections of fewer than 10,000 books, while 90% of the libraries that are bigger have access. Half of those libraries also have CD-ROMs, one-fifth subscribe to electronic journals and a little over half have access to in-house databases. Large libraries with collections of 70,000 volumes or more have reached relatively high levels of automation. They all have computers and online catalogs that are accessible from outside the museum, and they all have CD-ROMs and access to online databases. Three-fourths subscribe to electronic journals and one-half have developed in-house databases. In contrast, fewer than one-third of the libraries with fewer than 6,000 books have a computer and fewer than half of those are accessible to the public. They very seldom have an online catalog or access to electronic indexes, online databases and CD-ROMs. While Bierbaum reported in 1996 that 60% of art museum libraries had CD-ROMs, presently only one-third of all respondents in this study listed them as part of their collections. It appears that online databases are preferred and that CD-ROMs are being phased out.

Of all respondents fewer than 14% have an OPAC and provide e-mail reference, and 11% have access to online resources and in-house databases. Almost 40% are to some extent represented on their parent museum's Web site, but fewer than 10% have a Web site of more than one page. Only one small library reported a presence on the museum's Web site. Of the medium-sized libraries, less than one fourth have a separate page on the parent's Web site, and half of the large libraries have an extensive Web site. The technological developments of the last decade are clearly reflected in the responses pertaining to services to be offered in the future. In my study, many of the responses referred to various facets of automation, such as adding databases and creating an online catalog. The respondents in Oren's study listed, in addition to online reference services, traditional services such as bibliographic instruction and interlibrary loans.

In the context of the continuing fiscal crises in which many art museums find themselves, and the resulting shortages in staffing and funding of their libraries, electronic reference services and museum library Web sites offer the potential for increasing the libraries' visibility in the community by expanding services to the public with relatively little investment in staff and funds. At the same time they may help the museums fulfill their social responsibility for access to their cultural product, i.e., the body of knowledge that develops in the museum, and to serve a wider audience, something American museums have strived for since the early seventies. This potential is presently not being exploited to the fullest. It is also unfortunate that less than one-fourth of the smaller libraries in this survey take part in potentially beneficial partnerships with other libraries within the community. Lack of networking caused by lack of professional staff and not being able to reciprocate are possible explanations for the low participation levels of this category of libraries.

Although no definitive conclusions may be drawn from this study due to the limited sample size, some trends do seem to emerge. A larger, more representative sample should be surveyed in future research. A study exclusively focusing on outreach efforts by museum libraries might also be valuable. The current survey has provided a snapshot of services provided by a selection of art museum libraries in the midwestern United States.

Notes and References

1. I would like to thank Dr. Betty Jo Irvine, School of Library and Information Science at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, for her critical comments on this study that was undertaken in the Spring of 2001 for her "Seminar in Art Librarianship." I also want to thank Jean Ritsema, M.A., M.L.S., for her assistance with the database.

In facilitating the response of the museums to social change. In social changes that were occurring at that time, plus staff views United States analyzed the museums in their response to the background, and training of librarians, size and type of collections, patrons, staff salaries, and budgets. Freiband’s case study of four art museums and their libraries in the northeastern United States analyzed the museums in their response to the social changes that were occurring at that time, plus staff views about museum functions and goal priorities. It described the actual and potential function and role of art museum libraries in facilitating the response of the museums to social change. In 1976 Hull and Fearnley studied a random sample of 856 of the then existing 3,000 historical, art, science, and other museum libraries in the United States. The primary objective of their study was to present a general picture of the condition of museum libraries in the United States; 374 museums responded to their survey. In 1982 Bierbaum surveyed a randomly selected sample of 160 out of a total of 369 natural history and science centers and had 142 respondents. The Bierbaum study was published in 1984 and investigated in particular the correlation between the number of various types of non-exhibit related educational programs and the organization level of the museum library. Bierbaum’s 1996 study was largely a follow-up of her 1982 survey; but this time she also included art, history, and general museums in her random sample of 350 museum libraries of which 152 responded. Finally, Godlewski in 1989 surveyed a group of 50 art libraries representing museum, academic, special and public libraries to analyze the levels of reference service provided and had 23 respondents.


5. “Public” being defined as any individuals who are not museum staff members.

6. Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Because of time constraints, the size of the sample had to be limited, therefore only the museums listed in these states were reviewed, and since I work in a midwestern state, I chose the midwest.


8. The American Association of Museums defines a museum as “…an organized and permanent nonprofit institution, essentially educational or aesthetic in purpose, with professional staff, which owns and utilizes tangible objects, cares for them, and exhibits them to the public on some regular schedule;” H.J. Swinney, ed., *Professional Standards for Museum Accreditation* (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1978): 9.

9. These criteria were chosen in collaboration with Dr. Betty Jo Irvine. Criteria numbers 1 and 3 were criteria that Oren used in her study. To increase the size of the sample, Oren’s second criterion was expanded from ‘general’ art museum, which excludes, for example, contemporary art museums and American art museums, to ‘fine arts’ museum. For the same reason Oren’s fourth and last criterion—the museum’s accreditation by the American Association of Museums—was eliminated. To increase the homogeneity of the sample, the criterion that excludes corporate collections was added.

10. Oren, 27.

11. The size categories used in this study were chosen in consultation with the instructor, Dr. Betty Jo Irvine, Indiana University, Bloomington. They deviate from the size ranges used in ARLIS/NA, *Standards for Art Libraries and Fine Arts Slide Collections* (Tucson, AZ: ARLIS/NA, 1983. Occasional Paper no. 2).

12. Oren, 35.


15. In addition to the one small library that provides access to the *Art Index* in all three formats, one small library has paper versions of the *Art Index*, the *Bibliography of the History of Art* (BHA), and *ArtBibliographies MODERN* (ABM); two small libraries and five medium libraries possess the *Art Index* in paper, one medium library also possesses a paper *BHA* and CD-ROMs of *Art Index Retrospective* and ABM.

16. Of all 36 libraries, 64% (23) provide access to *Art Index*, 36% (13) to BHA, 28% (10) to ABM, 25% (9) to *Art Index Retrospective*, and 8% (3) provide access to other indexes in some form. In 47% of the cases (11 out of 23) access to *Art Index* is provided in online and/or CD-ROM format (7 online, 5 as CD-ROM); access to the *Art Index Retrospective* is provided in six cases online and in three cases as CD-ROM; seven (54%) of the libraries that provide access to the BHA do so online and/or electronically; another seven (70% of all libraries with this index) provide ABM in either online (three libraries) and/or CD-ROM format (four libraries).

17. Nineteen (53%) of the respondents (among them respondents who did not have indexes in their libraries) answered the question on preferences for a particular format. Most respondents (15) indicated a preference for the online format. Reasons for this preference were frequency of updating and time efficiency. Ease of access was mentioned as the advantage of the CD-ROM format. Nineteen (35%) of the 55 indexes are owned in paper format, 33% (18) are accessed online, 18% (10) as CD-ROMs, 5% (3) are accessible in CD-ROM, paper and online format.


21. Of the three Web sites whose URLs were not provided, one could not be located, and one did not represent the library.
One library was present on its parent museum's Web site although this was not reported.

22. Oren, 40-41.
23. Oren, 41.
24. Hull and Fearnley, op.cit., 97.
25. Oren, 48-49.
27. Hull and Fearnley, 297.
30. Oren, 37.
33. Godlewski, 67.
35. Godlewski, 68. This disparity might be explained by the fact that Godlewski surveyed a group of art libraries that represented museum, academic, special, and public libraries. More bibliographic instruction would likely be offered in academic libraries than in other types of libraries.

36. Oren, 56.
37. Through personal contact, by telephone, mail, e-mail or fax.
38. Oren, 37.
41. Oren, 10.