Good morning. I'm the ghost of Christmas present. I'm going to talk about the libraries of today.

Basically, we order or subscribe to materials, the materials come to us in some way, and we provide access to our patrons.

Obviously, we select materials that we think will most benefit our patrons, but we're not actually interacting with or enhancing material.

The Internet has really changed all that, though, because now we have the opportunity to interact with sources. We're not just providing access -- in a lot of situations we're providing content.

Let's start with the always controversial Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia anyone can edit. And let's start with a definition of negro, that states:

> Mentally the Negro is inferior to the white. The remark of F. Manetta, made after a long study of the Negro in American, may be taken as generally true of the whole race: "the Negro children were sharp, intelligent and full of vivacity, but on approaching the adult period a gradual change set in. The intellect seemed to become clouded, animation giving place to a sort of lethargy, briskness yielding to indolence."

That's a pretty obscene definition right? Don't blame Wikipedia, though. That's from the 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica "Negro" entry. It was written by Walter Francis Willcox, chief statistician of the US Census bureau and a professor at Cornell.

Back in the 1900s, librarians who disagreed with that definition didn't really have a mechanism to correct it. Now, in the electronic arena, someone seeing something like that on something like Wikipedia can simply fix the statement.

We're not just consuming reference, but we have the opportunity to correct it.

But for me, this ability to fix mistakes is not the value of Wikipedia, since you can just as easily argue that the ability to quickly induce mistakes cancels out that benefit.

For me, as a librarian, I love Wikipedia because it makes the collaborative process transparent. Before so much information migrated online, pretty much all we ever saw was a final product. Obviously, the final products varied in quality, but we could never show our students how that quality came about. We could guess where things might have gone wrong or might have gone right, but there was no way to know, unless another work about the process involved in the first work was released and purchased. While these types of works are relatively common for music, movies, and seventies sit-coms, there aren't a lot of them that deal with reference works.

Process is huge in terms of evaluation. Because if you can see the process, you can better evaluate the source. And what better way to learn the writing and research process then to see the research process?

Say what you will about the quality of Wikipedia, but the process there is transparent. Perhaps even too transparent. But by looking at the history of an entry, you can see all the changes that were made, often with an explanation. Many pages also have a Talk/Discussion area, where people can post information about the creation of the article, as well as suggestions for future directions.

Does the average user make use of this information in evaluating Wikipedia entries? Probably not. But that's our fault, because it's an amazing evaluation edge we're not cluing our students into. By reading through the discussions, we can actually see how entries were constructed and are in a better position to judge their accuracy. It's an edge

we've never had before. In the past, we could always find a book and read the reviews ,

but this lacked discussion from the actual people who constructed the work.

Transparency, as seen in Wikipedia, is like access to someone's papers without waiting

for them to die and donate them to a library, albeit on a much smaller, less historically

significant scale.

This is why I believe this is truly a magical time to be a librarian. We've never had so

much transparency at our fingertips. The collaborative nature of the Web is made for

evaluating. It's made for truly deep information literacy. This goes beyond looking at if a

page resides on a dot edu or a dot org or if the URL has a tilde or a slash. This is about

teaching our patrons how to look at the entire body of work of the author, regardless of if

it's a dot-org or a dot-edu or even, gasp, a dot-com. It's about teaching patrons to

construct their own authority now that they have the tools to do that right at their

fingertips.

We can no longer afford to paint sources as merely good or bad. The information

landscape has become way too complex. Can we in good conscience call the New York

Times a reputable source knowing how Jayson Blair tricked the entire institution? Can

we call any newspaper reliable knowing the massive cutbacks and layoffs going on

throughout the industry? And can we call a blog unreliable simply because it is published

electronically by an individual rather than an institution or media conglomerate? There

are no simple rules or checklists. The best way to begin to evaluate a source is to

understand the process that led to its creation. Sources like Wikipedia let us see the

process, so that whatever quality and/or reliability is lost in terms of openness (and

Wikipedia is not quite as open and collaborative as they would have you believe), is gained back and perhaps surpassed in terms of transparency.

Now make no mistake, the Discussion area of Wikipedia is a mess. It's fighting and name-calling and arguments. People responsible for editing certain areas feel a certain sense of ownership that often precludes rational discussion. People disagree about which facts are pertinent and where in the article they should appear. People even disagree about the nature of Wikipedia, as an entity. Is this unique to Wikipedia? Of course not. It's the editing process, an ugly, often obnoxious sequence of egos clashing. Until now, it's been hidden, giving students the impression that works just effortlessly come together, with perhaps writers standing in front of the printing press, directly inputting the text to then be printed, with no one else editing or commenting. This discussion or Talk area presents an opportunity to show the vulnerabilities not just in Wikipedia, but within any publishing process. We cannot take it for granted that students understand the publishing process is subject to human frailties. When we present a source as reliable, as in, anything you find in CUNY+ is reliable, then we create this monolithic authority structure that discourages challenging the authority. What collaborative, transparent sites do is allow us to teach students to challenge the authority, and hopefully, to even construct their own.

And think beyond information literacy. Mark Liberman, director of the Linguistic Data Consortium at UPenn recently lobbied for the release of raw data with scientific and technical articles, allowing readers to not only read the compiled data, but to also manipulate it themselves. Even scholarly literature could be moving in a direction where authority is imply no longer a given.

Now, in the spirit of transparency, I'd like to announce my deviation from the theme I discussed with Daisy and Beth. I was supposed to discuss how librarians collaborate with people outside the library, but I'd like to take a small detour and talk about a possible future direction not just for interlibrary communication, but perhaps for scholarly communication.

Dave Shields works for IBM, within their Systems & Technology Group. He has always worked within the world of open source, open source being the umbrella concept to describe the idea of freely releasing source code to developers so that they may improve upon it. In other words, rather than keeping code hidden, open source developers let the collective mind try to improve a piece of software, with certain restrictions on what may be done with the finished product and how it may be sold and/or distributed.

Shields' latest project involves reaching out to the open source community to give open source software development more structure, connecting developers with projects and giving companies the chance to support these initiatives with funding and/or release time. Basically, Shields is trying to shift open source from an off-time activity to a full-time activity, funded not by one corporate body, but by many.

But his project isn't even that important to our discussion. It's how he's organizing this project that's so interesting. Shields is using a blog to publicly organize the initiative, so that it's a comprehensive repository of all discussions. To that end, he's flirted with the idea of banning email communications, since those aren't truly public.

Now the project doesn't always execute. Shields is a person and subject to the same distractions any normal human is. His blog often veers away from project management into more traditional blog-like dissections of news events, but the concept is still worth

investigating. Namely, does this sort of collaborative space present a future for scholarly communication? Shields originally started this project behind IBM's corporate firewall before realizing it had more value in a public space, allowing for more exposure and the opportunity for give-and-take with people outside of the insular IBM world.

As academics who similarly often publish behind a subscription firewall, perhaps it is time to venture outside and begin sharing our ideas with a larger community. Obviously, there are complications with this sort of initiative, the impact upon tenure perhaps being the most significant one. If we publish and it is not peer-reviewed, did we really publish? That is a question for another day, but for now, I just want to leave you with the idea that transparency is a two-way street, and just as we and our patrons can use transparency to understand authority, as scholars we can also be transparent to allow people inside of and outside of the Library community to understand our internal processes and to contribute. This can meet a lot of things, from collection development to Web design, but specifically, I'd love to see more academics, across the various disciplines, make more of an effort to exchange ideas with each other. The scholarly publishing process is so closed-off and so insular and while I realize it is unrealistic to get feedback from the world as a whole, perhaps it is the best interest of the work if we begin to think about scholarly communication as a cross-discipline process not merely tied to librarianship and its core values. Maybe it's time to fold other scholarly voices into our own work, finding new angles we can use to tackle old questions.

Now this is not merely a librarianship issue, but why shouldn't we be the first ones to add some transparency to our process. There is everything to be gained from sharing pre-publication ideas with a community of scholars outside of librarianship, thus bringing in

the ideas of not just our editors and perhaps a few trusted colleagues, but the perspective of different disciplines. And if other disciplines were to begin to engage in this kind of idea exchange, imagine the contributions we as librarians could make to other disciplines. And yeah, I know community of scholars is a CSA product, and no, I'm not happy they took such a cool name for it.

It cracks me up when people say that too many cooks spoil the broth. Anyone who's ever been in a professional kitchen knows you really can't have too many cooks. The more cooks you have working, the more they can concentrate on their individual pieces and the quicker they can turn out bowls of soup. Maybe it's time for librarians to push for more cooks in the kitchen that is scholarly communication.

Finally, in the spirit of peer-review, I'd like to thank Jill Cirasella and Mariana Regalado whose comments on an article I'm working on helped to sharpen some of these ideas.