Book Review: *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide.*
By Henry Jenkins (New York University Press, 2006)

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Until relatively recently, if you loved a book, hated a journal article, or came up with a better ending to a movie, the opportunity to widely circulate your thoughts was limited. Sure, you could talk to your friends or write a letter to the editor (and hope it got published), but it was likely your opinions or ideas would not be widely disseminated. However, with recent advances, particularly in technology, it is now much easier to get involved and also potentially create something different, but related, for others to see.

Henry Jenkins, Professor of Humanities at MIT, provides a comprehensive look at "convergence culture." Convergence, he says, "describes technological, industrial, cultural, and social changes in the ways media circulates within our culture." The circulation of media content must have the active participation of consumers. We're now in the transition stage where media producers are looking at ways to deal with demands by their audiences for greater participation. This participation is often enhanced by the "flow" of stories, images, and files that can exist across multiple platforms – such as books, movies, fan fiction, and blogs. Current technologies provide the means necessary for the involvement of fans, customers, and patrons in communicating, rewriting, defining, and gaining assistance or providing assistance in a wide-array of venues.

Jenkins devotes one chapter each in *Convergence Culture* to describing phenomena from popular culture: the obsessive "spoiler" fans of the television show "Survivor" who gathered information trying to determine the outcome before the show aired; "American Idol" fans and their interaction with producers; the active participation in the fictional world of "The Matrix"; and the online communities that have developed around the "Harry Potter" books.

The skills we learn from play, he says, may have implications for how we learn, work, and participate in the political process, and connect with other people around the world. Certainly the "Survivor" spoiler community

that developed used very sophisticated methods in their attempts to find out who was booted off first, where the location of the next season would be, and other secrets of the producers. Some of the methods the "location spoiling" group used were the development of contacts with "travel agencies, government officials, film bureaus, tourism directors, and resort operators." This group researched climate, latitude, political stability, population density, road system, ports, and proximity to past "Survivor" locations. They also looked at demographic maps of population, agricultural areas, national reserves, tourism destinations and even city lights seen from satellites at night. All this effort and use of resources seems quite excessive considering the focus, but the skills these participants learned during the process may be put to valuable use in other areas as well.

Jenkins makes some very interesting observations about "participatory culture," and the possibility for greater creativity with less centralized control by the media institutions. He wants "the power of participation" to be recognized as "writing over, modifying, amending, expanding" thus "adding greater diversity of perspective, recirculating it, feeding it back into the mainstream media." If fan contributions were more readily accepted by those in control, he says, ideas generated by fans could result in more creative media products.

The concluding chapter switches from "popular or consumer culture" to "public or civic culture" and gives examples of political activism aimed at gaining greater participation. Jenkins says, "The question is whether the public is ready to push for greater participation or willing to settle for the same old relations to mass media." The early returns on the answer to this question seems to be Yes. Many people, particularly the young and tech-savvy, are ready based on the popularity of political blogs, YouTube, and Meetup groups.

The question for librarians is whether we want to be a "participatory culture" and encourage "grassroots experimentation" or continue to be the "sage on the stage" with minimal participation from our "fans." Carol Tenopir, Professor, School of Information Sciences at University of Tennessee, says that academic librarians can use a number of sites and books to become familiar with ways new technologies can best be used in libraries. Among these are:

- Five Weeks to a Social Library, http://www.sociallibraries.com/course,

- Library 2.0 A Guide to Participatory Library Service by Michael E. Casey and Laura C. Savastinuk at http://books.infotoday.com/books/Library20.shtml,

- Web 2.0 for Librarians and Information Professionals by Ellyssa Kroski at http://www.neal-schuman.com/db/7/617.html.

Professor Tenopir quotes Ellyssa Kroski, "Librarians shouldn't focus on implementing technology for cachet alone but to make librarians' lives easier or to serve patrons better." Resistance to change, especially if it will add new duties to already full schedules, will need to be overcome. Providing readings and information about new technologies that have been successfully implemented should help dispel concerns.

Reading *Convergence Culture* makes one aware of the worldwide use of various means of interaction and the idea of "participatory culture" being a means of greater diversity. In public (civic) culture greater interaction in the political realm can lead to better informed voters and politicians. "Popular (consumer) culture" will hopefully lead to better media products. The outcome remains to be seen and we are in on the ground floor.

Many librarians are already using Instant Messaging, Blogging, Wikis, and other ways of interacting with students. At Abilene Christian University Library, many librarians are using Instant Messaging, Google Chat, and Blogging to interact with students. All ACU librarians provide research assistance by email, by telephone, and at the Research Desk. Plans are to include students in interaction through a blog now being used to engage librarians

in discussions, to inform of library news, and elicit comments on issues important to library work. Ways to gain comments from students are under discussion and will be a challenge, but one that needs to be undertaken.

Most libraries are still looking for the best ways to use the new technologies, hoping to make librarians' lives easier and serve patrons better by encouraging greater participation by students. The hope is that providing more ways for student interaction and creation will result in more usage of all the library has to offer.

Mark your calendars!

Librarian as Architect: Planning, Building & Renewing