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Internet Filters in Schools: A Representative Annotated Bibliography

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Abstract

This paper offers a selected bibliography of representative resources on the topic of Internet filtering in schools. A brief contextual analysis of the bibliography is provided, which gives background on the 2000 Children's Internet Protection Act, which mandated the use of filters in schools, and explains that pre-CIPA sources analyzing filters have been largely excluded from this bibliography, since it is intended as a collection of resources for pragmatic school use. The contextual essay mentions the author's indebtedness to the American Library Association website as a tool for identifying important sources, but, in keeping with the bibliography's intended use, favors sources focused on the practical, rather than the rhetorical or abstract. Like most of the available material, the thirteen citations in the bibliography are divided between foundational sources, legal analysis, current best practice, and future concerns.

In December of 2000 Congress passed the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA), it's **customary to cite the public law** and the Neighborhood Children's Internet Protection Act (NCIPA). As the FCC has interpreted this legislation, any library receiving federal funds, which can come through the E-rate program or through Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grants, must install some sort of filter or blocking technology on any computer with Internet access (Bocher, 2004). In 2003, unfortunately, the ALA was unsuccessful in challenging CIPA. In *United States et al. v. American Library Association Inc., et al*, the Court held 6-3 that the CIPA filtering requirement was constitutional for public libraries. School libraries were not part of this suit—the necessity of screening and regulating material presented to students seems to be assumed by most parties to the public discussion, which only leaves educators the incidental task of determining what content is protected, where, how, and by whom it can be accessed, and who will make these decisions. Mandated filtering, as is the case with many externally imposed controls, has only made those determinations more problematic. **The purpose of this bibliography is to provide educators with a representative selection of material for use in making informed decisions about school Internet filters and filtering.** Great you state this Those charged with purchasing, installing, and calibrating such systems have a great responsibility—certainly to protect students from egregiously inappropriate online content, but perhaps more importantly, to safeguard the intellectual freedom of their students and school site. These school personnel should have a working knowledge of the history, context, legal requirements and feasible best practices for implementing required filtering systems; I have tried to choose documents which will be useful in that process.

There are many useful resources available on the subject of Internet filters, but there is not a great deal of variety in their topic or focus. The literature to date grows broad, but is not

deep; pieces can be generally classified by period and a limited number of focus areas. Before the CIPA court case there are many works debating the best practice for regulating Internet use by children. A representative example which continues to be useful is *Youth, Pornography and the Internet*, a massive report released by the National Academy of Sciences, which ultimately concludes both that Internet pornography is a genuine threat to the well-being of our youth, and that education, rather than mechanical regulation, is our best defense (Thornburgh and Lin, 2002). In this bibliography I have not included literature which debates filtering options but predates the restrictive reality of CIPA. Current literature on filtering in school libraries tends to be divided among 4 subjects: the legal ramifications of *US v ALA*, how CIPA undermines intellectual freedom in both theory and practice, the actual legal requirements for federally funded schools under CIPA, and best practices for implementing required filters. ‘Best practices’, of course, varies according to the priorities of a particular author or school, and could range from ‘most economical’ to ‘most protective’ to ‘least restrictive’.

In choosing within these topic areas I have given extra consideration to material listed or linked to on the American Library Association website, and to those whose names recur in various resources on the subject. Lori Ayre, for example, has articles posted on the ALA website (American Library Association, 2008, *Issues and Advocacy*), is listed in the “References” section of our class text (Rubin, 2004), and is reprinted in our optional text (Ayre, 2005). She is also the main author of *Library Technology Report’s* special issue on filtering. Since my purpose is to give pragmatic support to working educators, in general I have given priority to authors whose methods and priorities I thought were useful for practical application, rather than declamatory and rhetorical pieces reminding us all of our Bill of Rights heritage. In this category I would place many of ALA’s policy statements (ALA, 2008, *Filters and Filtering*). Such writing is

stirring and inspirational, but in a post-CIPA world, while we wait and hope for a legal climate more sympathetic to intellectual freedom, what school employees need most is clear information on the currently inescapable mandates of this legislation, and on the best practices for ameliorating their damaging effects. It's a sad fact that many of the articles and policy statements which are most bracing in their call to action were published before the 2003 Court decision, and yet they remain on the ALA website, along with a lot of sad dead links to outdated intellectual freedom material, almost as if the ALA is in a state of denial about their unexpected defeat in *US v ALA*. These articles are also less useful now because they predate the explosion in social technology, which has turned the Internet into a resource not just for information, but for collaboration, socializing, and analysis. As the Internet evolves to become not just an adjunct to education, but perhaps the process for education itself, I conclude with samples of material educators need to examine current filtering policies as they interact with the new realities of Web 2.0.

Annotated Bibliography

Background and Basics

Lukenbill, B.W. & Lukenbill, James F. (2007). Censorship: What do school library specialists really know? A consideration of students' rights, the law, and implications for a new educational paradigm. *School Library Media Research*. Retrieved from http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/slmrb/slmrcontents/volume10/lukenbill_censorship.cfm%20

In the battle for intellectual freedom at school, librarians, teachers, and students in search of ready-to-use ammunition would do well to look at the web pages of the American Association of School Librarians, a division of the American Library Association, on whose website the AASL pages can be found. A centerpiece of the *Issues and Advocacy* page is the link to this study by two Lukenbills of unexplained relationship (American Association of School Librarians, 2008). This is a dense, encyclopedic article on the topic of school library censorship in general which provides a variety of information: an overview of relevant court rulings, a discussion of issues relating to the rights of youth, an abbreviated literature survey of the topic, and, most intriguingly, a study of school librarians' knowledge and attitudes in regard to intellectual freedom issues in school libraries. The article considers Internet access among many other problems of intellectual freedom, but gives foundational information for educators new to the topic.

The authors developed a questionnaire, sent out to hundreds of librarians in Texas, designed to test school librarian's knowledge of Supreme Court decisions relevant to

intellectual freedom and students' rights. This study found conclusively that, though school librarians were, in general, in support of the Court's protection of youth intellectual freedom rights, they were only vaguely aware of what those rights might specifically be, and what actions on their part might be required to protect them. This is especially important information in the filtered library, where only the librarian's ability and willingness to override the filter provides student access to protected speech overblocked by pre-set filters.

Rubin, R. E. (2004). *Foundations of library and information science* (2nd ed.). New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers.

For those just beginning to become familiar with the issues and challenges involved with Internet filters in libraries, pages 194-201 of the "Information Policy as Library Policy" chapter provide a useful overview. Rubin gives a succinct background of the filtering requirement, and a very helpful breakdown of the types of filters available with explanation of their methodology. He shares a list of strategies for regulating content which can, by libraries not receiving federal money, be used in place of automatic, installed filters. This chapter also summarizes many of the policy statements available in their more useful entirety on the ALA website.

Legal Aspects

Bocher, Bob (2004, February 19) FAQ on E-rate compliance with the Children's Internet Protection Act and the Neighborhood Children's Internet Protection Act. Retrieved October 20, 2008 from Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Division for Libraries, Technology, and Community Learning: <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dltcl/pld/cipafaq.html>)

The prominent link to this article on the AASL *Issues and Advocacy* web page is a clear

endorsement of its useful breadth and clarity (AASL, 2008). The unassumingly named ‘Bob’ is pictured in his shirtsleeves as the Library Technology Consultant for the Wisconsin Department of Education (Wisconsin, 2008), and his twelve pages of answers to crucial questions about the effects and requirements of the Child Internet Protection Act are equally straightforward. Bocher is on the ALA’s E-rate Task Force, on the Office for Information Technology Policy Advisory Committee, he chairs the subcommittee on Telecommunications, and was a primary author of the ALA *Internet Access Principles*. Although the ALA deserves unparalleled respect for their long labors to protect intellectual freedom, many of their documents on Internet filtering seem more rhetorical than useful. This document is a great exception. All schools receiving federal funds through the E-rate program or LSTA grants are required to be compliant with the Children’s Internet Protection Act; Bocher’s article gives expert, specific information about how those requirements may be met. For example, though CIPA requires a ‘TPM’, or Technology Protection Measure, be installed on every computer in a school, any authorized school or library staff may disable the TPM to allow adults to have unrestricted Internet access for any lawful purpose. Also, the law specifically states that the content to be filtered is “visual depictions”, though currently CIPA is used in schools to justify blocking of many sorts of text. This is article is crucial reading for school personnel attempting to define the parameters of required filtering. When it comes to dealing with IT staff, who, regrettably, will use legislative requirements to justify the broad, indiscriminate blocking which is easiest to administer, knowledge is certainly power. Bocher’s FAQ will give educators that knowledge.

Peltz, R. (2005, June). Pieces of *Pico*: saving intellectual freedom in the public school library.

Brigham Young University Education & Law Journal, Retrieved from

<http://web.ebscohost.com.libaccess.sjlibrary.org/ehost/pdf?vid=9&hid=116&sid=01651d0f-af2c-4deb-b1a8-95469bf52442%40sessionmgr108>

This article provides a concise overview of the history of school libraries, and of the US legal decisions which affect them. Peltz traces the bifurcated mission of the school library through history, and demonstrates how the basis of the *Pico* decision in 1982 upholds this distinction, while subsequent decisions and legislation disregard it. Peltz argues that school librarians in support of Internet filtering undermine not only the personal liberties of students, but also the mission and authority of their own profession.

Author Richard Peltz, a law professor at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, specializes in First Amendment and Freedom of Information Law (UALR). Strangely, he has recently been in the news, as he is suing for defamation two of his students who accuse him of racism (Browning). Peltz advocates with lucid passion for the legal preservation of the school library as a resource for students' personal inquiries, and extends this doctrine from text sources to unfiltered Internet access. Though carefully acknowledging that school librarians face many challenges when supervising unfiltered Internet use, discussion of acceptable alternatives is outside the scope of this article. Some current controversies are not addressed, as the article predates by a few crucial years the explosion of social networking websites.

Issues and Problems

Brown, T. (2006, July). Culture, Gender and Subjectivities: Computer and Internet Restrictions in a High School Library. *Journal of Access Services*, 4(3/4), 1-26. Retrieved September 21, 2008, doi:10.1300/J204v04n03_01

Tara M. Brown, Assistant Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Minority and Urban Education Graduate Program at the University of Maryland, conducted an ethnographic study of information and computer technology use at a large urban Northeastern high school. This article details her findings on the experiences of a group of thirteen low-income twelfth-grade students of mixed gender and ethnicity, whose library access is controlled by an Internet filter and three white female library staff members. Brown finds that the exclusions of both the officially 'excluded' websites blocked by the school district-wide filter, and the 'ad-hoc' restricted websites labeled "inappropriate" by the staff, unduly affected the computer access of students of color, boys, and especially boys of color. Though her study involves a very small group, her observations are compelling, especially when quotations appear to reveal the underlying prejudices of the white, middle class staff, who, for example, allow girls to comparison-shop on-line for prom dresses, but forbid the boys access to very popular athletic shoe and NBA websites. The interviews conducted by Brown show that the boys consider these restrictions to be racist, based on stereotypical preconceptions. The staff also outlaws any use of the school computers for gaming, regardless of the extent of other demand for the equipment. Various ethnic social websites, such as AsianAvenue or Cade?, are blocked for fear of email-carried viruses, though on Yahoo and MSN, the email function alone is blocked, and the other features can be accessed.

Brown does not attribute all over-blocking to racism. She acknowledges the difficulties faced by the staff, which the proscriptions are intended to mitigate. A school is legally responsible for ensuring the “Internet safety” of its students, and in this case three women are made responsible for implementing a school district Internet policy in a large library used simultaneously by very large groups of students working on curricular assignments and other large groups of students pursuing personal interests on lunch break. However, her study indicates a serious need to examine the role of cultural assumptions and bias in regulating information access, and to consider the impact of Internet restrictions at school on the lives and learning of students who may have access nowhere else.

Schrader, Alvin M. & Wells, Kristopher. (2005). Queer perspectives on social responsibility in Canadian schools and libraries: Analysis and resources. *School Libraries in Canada*, 24 (4), 9-47. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com.libaccess.sjlibrary.org/ehost/detail?vid=30&hid=16&sid=01651d0f-af2c-4deb-b1a8-95469bf52442%40sessionmgr108&bdata=JmxvZ2lucGFnZT1sb2dpbi5hc3Amc2l0ZT1laG9zdC1saXZl#db=aph&AN=19812850>

This excellent Canadian article, which looks at library use as one aspect of the LGBT experience in school, finds, as might be feared, some unfortunate effects of homophobia on library practices. Much of the article details the ongoing challenges to material, both non-fiction and fiction, which deals with gay concerns, and the varied difficulties of providing useful and representative material in school and public library collections. The article also describes a study in which a teen “mystery shopper” library patron asks

reference librarians for material on gay-straight alliance groups, gay fiction for youth, and other relevant school and community issues. The study found “definite censure” in the behavior of only 3 of the 20 Vancouver librarians accessed, but found very poor levels of awareness and knowledge on the part of the majority of the librarians.

A substantial segment of the article looks specifically at Internet access and the effects of filters for gay teens. The Internet is now the preferred, primary method of acquiring new information for all teens, but, as Schrader and Wells point out, for gay teens, who may be isolated from supportive community by rural geography or hostile family environment, access to Internet information on sexuality and health may be a matter of life or death. One reason filters are problematic is that they frequently screen material by key word. The article cites a Kaiser study which found that even when set for maximum flexibility, most common filters blocked at least 10% of sites that conveyed legitimate information related to condoms and safe sex. At the most restrictive settings, the content related to sexual health could be blocked at rates as high as 50%. As bad as this sounds, there are topics discussed in the article of even greater concern. Some research has claimed to uncover links between certain of the filtering systems available for purchase and groups which have a strong Christian agenda. I am still researching in this area and need more information, but Schrader and Wells give examples of selection criteria which seem specifically to target “Sexual minority sites and information”. For example, one of CyberSitter's filtering categories is "sites promoting gay and lesbian activities and lifestyle.” The authors also present a provocative discussion of available large search engine filters, such as Google’s SafeSearch. SafeSearch publishes “explicit sexual content” as its only criterion for exclusion, but studies cited in the article show

arbitrary and systematic blocking of LGBT websites and search terms unrelated to this basic criterion.

Though the situation depicted for LGBT youth is horrific, this article actually offers hope for the future legal demise of mandated filtering. The obvious chilling effect of the need to request a blocking override, combined with the clear legitimate need for frequently blocked, appropriate information, seems to offer an obvious opportunity for a new legal challenge to CIPA. At any rate, this article should effectively raise the concern level of school administrators charged with protecting LGBT students from discrimination and harassment.

Practicalities

Ayre, L. B. (2005). Libraries and Internet filtering, 2005. In G.M. Eberhart, *The whole library Handbook* (pp. 441-445). Chicago, American Library Association.

This short article provides an introduction to the work of Lorie Bowen Ayre, who is an expert on the various Internet filtering systems available for purchase. Similar to the approach of Bob Bocher, whose entry follows, her passionate advocacy for free speech manifests itself in pragmatic examination of strategies for mitigating the ill effects of required filtering systems. She differentiates among different types of filters, and dispassionately describes the ways in which filters can be “good enough”, relieving librarians of the burden of patrolling for porn, and, with use of the “best practices” she recommends, be adjusted with an easy override and reasonable parameters.

Ayre, L.B. (2008, November 20). Internet safety and kids - Finally something that makes sense! Message posted to http://www.galecia.com/weblog/mt/archives/cat_filtering.php

Although messages have become less frequent, there are still many useful postings on Lori Ayer's blog page. This particular short entry is representative: Ayer succinctly shares both basic information and her own position on the Broadband Data and Improvement Act (S.1492), part of a new and welcome federal acknowledgement that education for Internet literacy is a more effective protection for youth than mandatory filters.

Ayer, L.B. (2005). Library software filters. Retrieved November 12, 2008 from <http://libraryfiltering.org/>

Lori Ayer is my favorite practical source on source on filters. This invaluable website belongs in the hands of any librarian or teacher who wants to influence school or district policy on Internet filters. The pages provide a comparison chart listing all the major filtering technology providers and the features and drawbacks of each. Some of the systems, for example, can be deactivated at individual workstations using a password; others can only be deactivated from a management console. Some can be deactivated for as long as the user chooses; others have a short time limit, after which the filter reactivates. Some systems allow administration at school level to customize the blocked sites list, adding or removing sites; most require the list to be modified by the filter provider. As long as filters are required, those choosing among available options should acquire the information which allows them to make the least repulsive choice.

Schneider, Karen G. (1997) . *A practical guide to Internet filters*. New York, Neal Schuman

This is a very good book—concise, lively, insightful, with coverage of all the right topics. It's exactly the book a school site or district should have when making filter decisions, except for one thing: like many of the books available on this topic, it's too

old! It predates CIPA, there's no way to compare the 1997 descriptions of available filters to their current incarnations; the links she gives for updates only take me to pictures of Karen Schneider with a koala. I include the book because her discussion of the procedures which should be followed before choosing a filter are still great—including one of my main obsessions: why would we leave the decision about what sources come into the library electronically to a tech person? Do we let the truck driver who delivers the books decide which books go on the shelf? (I do read that some libraries are turning over collection decisions to vendors; that may be the horrible real-world analogy.) Her even-handed examination of the legitimate uses of filters also needs acknowledgement. Karen, you should revise your book!

What Now?

Lamb, A. (2007, November-December). Intellectual freedom for youth: Social technology and social networks. *Knowledge Quest Web Edition volume 36(2)*. Retrieved from http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/kqweb/kqarchives/volume36/362/KQW36_2Lamb.pdf

This article, a feature in an expanded edition of Knowledge Quest, subtitled “Intellectual Freedom 101”, is available as a PDF file. Illustrated with crisp, current photos of engaged young students, it is attractively laid out in a very accessible format, and seems designed to be reprinted as a countertop handout for concerned parents or administrators. The article lists “Eight ways to take action” for school librarians, offering a thumbnail summary of relevant law, ideas for educational use of social sites, and reasonable suggestions for protecting students’ safety online. Most

importantly, Lamb emphasizes the importance of Internet literacy instruction for improving students' ability to evaluate online content, and hence, protect themselves. A positive step toward increasing current knowledge of "social technology" for school library staff and involved adults, at the same time, in its elementary content, the article highlights a real problem.

The "Intellectual Freedom" Issue surveys a variety of challenges to freedom in school libraries. It reprints the Bill of Rights, revisits techniques for responding to challenges to ban or remove reading material, and supports school librarians as champions of students' rights to read with stirring calls to action. It is difficult to be critical in any way of material which is so well executed and so laudable in its intent. It's also deeply uncomfortable to align in any way with the forces that attack the central role and fundamental value of the printed word. However, librarians cannot turn away from reality. Online content and, especially, social networks, are the main sources of information for most American students today. Rather than being addressed in a handout-formatted 'feature', the growing movement to block school access to social technology should be the primary concern of the AASL. In the Lukenbill study annotated earlier in this bibliography, analysis revealed school librarians to be supportive of intellectual freedom, but limited in their knowledge of students' rights as delineated by the courts. In Tara Brown's study, also annotated here, the class and cultural biases of school library personnel were examined as they controlled students' access to online content. A cruise around the blogosphere certainly reveals that there are many librarians on the cutting edge of 'Web 2.0'—I fear however, that most of these are not school librarians. Many students today are not going to feel personally

affected by the removal of books from the school library; a visit to many school libraries today will reveal the shelved books area to be undisturbed by users. This is a deplorable state of affairs which school librarians should be passionately determined to change, but for now, the true forum for the battle over free access to protected content is the computer terminal on the other side of the room.

Willard, Nancy (2006, May 15). Nancy Willard's take on DOPA. Message posted to <http://doug-johnson.squarespace.com/blue-skunk-blog/2006/5/15/nancy-willards-take-on-dopa.html>

DOPA, the Delete Online Predators Act, a piece of legislation which has passed the House but continues to sit in the Senate, would specifically require schools to filter out all online social content, because of the fear of sexual predators who may lurk in the shadows of sites such as MySpace. Nancy Willard, whose byline frequently appears when issues relating to social networks and children are discussed in the popular media or educational journals, does a great job here eviscerating this legislation. Coming from her this condemnation is especially effective, since she does in general advocate very careful supervision of Internet use in schools and at home. Here Willard observes that any legislation which juxtaposes children and a proposal for sexual protection is always accompanied with political panic. She points out that no politician wants to turn up characterized by an opponent as the man who voted against protecting little children from perverts. Willard attributes the passage of CIPA to this sort of political fear, and has concern that support for DOPA will be motivated by similar concerns. Considering their role under the proposed DOPA, Willard makes very strong points about the weaknesses of filters in general, and specifically about

their weaknesses if we depend on them to protect children from sexual predators. She cites the 2002 US National Academy of Sciences report mentioned earlier in this bibliography, emphasizing her agreement with their assertion that school officials, parents, and law enforcement agencies are living in a dream world if they imagine that a surrogate adult in the form of a machine can substitute for supervision and education. Nancy Willard expresses concern, but she is not a fear monger. She admonishes adults who, through simplistic solutions, seek to avoid the difficult responsibilities inherent in the valuable use of a diverse and complex resource like the Internet.

In a portion of the article, Willard addresses a topic schools now need to address every day: the use by students (and teachers!) of proxies to circumvent blocking software. It was very enjoyable to learn in this article that the US Government itself actually funded the creation of an easy and effective proxy system: Circumventor, which was developed through the Voice of America for use by the citizens of oppressive regimes elsewhere, is now often needed and commonly used by high school students right here at home.

Stephens, M. (2007). The ongoing web revolution. *Library Technology Reports*, 43 (5), 10-14.

Retrieved August 23, 2008 from

http://slisweb.sjsu.edu/courses/restricted/Stephens_web2.pdf

This article, which I read for the prerequisite Library 203 technology course, does not focus on Internet filters, but illuminates the reasons for concern about the restrictions and limitations imposed by them. In this article from an issue of *Library Technology Reports*, Stephens discusses how filters now go beyond the current problematic over-

blocking of appropriate and protected content. Some school districts now block all social networking websites, denying students and teachers access to resources with enormous potential for changing the way students learn, think, and participate in the world. He makes an eloquent plea for trust as a crucial component driving technological and educational change. The issue of trust is a thorny one for those dealing with adolescents—sometimes, though we may admire and respect our students, it would have to be said that the one thing we can always trust them to do is the forbidden thing. Trust between teachers and their administrators is also often in short supply. However, those involved in mediating between the Internet and students at school can't ignore the content of this article—the world has changed. New forces are unleashed as the walls between creator and consumer crumble. This particular genie is very large--he is not going back in that little bottle in fear of our ineffectual filters; schools need to harness these forces for good use.

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American Library Association (2008). *Filters and Filtering*. Retrieved November 5 from <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oif/ifissues/filtersfiltering.cfm#alapolicies>

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Bocher, Bob (2004, February 19) FAQ on E-rate compliance with the Children's Internet Protection Act and the Neighborhood Children's Internet Protection Act. Retrieved October 20, 2008 from Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Division for Libraries,

Technology, and Community Learning: <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dltcl/pld/cipafaq.html>)

Browning, L. (2008, May 1). Law professor accuses students of defamation.

[electronic version] *The New York Times*

Rubin, R. E. (2004). *Foundations of library and information science* (2nd ed.). New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers.

Thornburgh, Dick, & Lin, Herbert S. (Eds.). (2002). *Youth, Pornography, and the Internet*.

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http://books.nap.edu/readingroom.php?book=youth_internet&page=committee.html

UALR William H. Bowen School of Law Richard J. Peltz. (2006). Retrieved October 2, 2008, from <http://www.law.ualr.edu/faculty/bios/peltz.asp>

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2008). *Bob Bocher—Library technology consultant*. Retrieved November 19, 2008 from <http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/libtech.html>

The subheadings are really useful Great job all ‘round. You must have experience with bibliography! 20