Wikipedia, all of it, is on display at the School of Library and Information Science, allowing researchers to see patterns and relationships among the online encyclopedia’s millions of entries

In the Know With SLIS

As a species, we know a lot. And keeping track of it all can be a problem. Victor H. Yngve Professor Katy Börner at the IU School of Library and Information Science is a leading researcher in the study of science using scientific means and novel ways of representing complex information in graphical, user-friendly forms. Her work is just one example of the research conducted at SLIS, a school dedicated to helping us know.

Da Vinci and Wikipedia

“IT used to be that one single person could understand and make major contributions to several areas of science,” says Börner. “Someone like Leonardo da Vinci is an example. Today, our collective scholarly knowledge is much larger and we all are much more specialized.”

Consider Wikipedia, with its nearly 3.1 million articles. How many of these cover science or math? Börner and her team at the SLIS Cyberinfrastructure for Network Science Center took that data and mapped it. The process, including algorithms and gathering the data, is complex. The result, however, is an elegant solution: a 6-foot diameter mosaic of topics covered by Wikipedia articles with overlays of the topical coverage of the articles, burst of article edits,
and more. In science, medicine, history—any field—the ability to understand a large volume of information is invaluable. And that mission is at the core of information science.

**Light Bulb Moments**

It’s no surprise this research is conducted at SLIS. After all, librarians have the answers. “Students here are passionate about ensuring that information is widely available,” says SLIS Dean Blaise Cronin, the longest serving dean on the IU Bloomington campus. “Whether they are studying library or information science, they feel their studies serve society and the health of our democracy.”

Rachel Slough is an example. This Fulbright recipient taught in Chile at the English pedagogy department of the Universidad Católica de la Santísima Concepción. There, she helped young people find what they wanted to know by teaching them how to look for it.

“One of my most rewarding experiences was with fourth-year students and seeing the ‘light bulb moment’ when they realized the quantity and quality of information that is available to them,” she says of her experience in Chile. “They were thrilled, and it was exciting to see.”

**Very Big and Very Small Libraries**

SLIS students have interned at such institutions as the U.S. Library of Congress. They have gone on to work with specialized and complex collections, whether in a law, medical, historical, or science library. But most of us still think of librarians as the people who lend us books.

“Serious and complicated issues surround libraries and how you provide access today,” notes Cronin. “Security and access are big concerns. What do you digitize? How do you get it to people? Today, the library is moving toward the palm of the user, literally, in the devices that people carry in their hands.”

**What Would You Like to Know?**

That’s why a gift to SLIS matters. When you support a fellowship or research at SLIS, you support everyone’s ability to know. That’s a smart investment for today and for tomorrow.

For more information, contact Vicky Martin at 800-558-8311.

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