

Personal Information Management Literacy

Judith H. Van Alstyne

jvanals2@u.rochester.edu

My name is Judith (Judy) Van Alstyne and I am very much hoping to attend the PIM Workshop at the ASIS&T Annual Meeting this Fall. I optimistically have already registered to participate in the in-person workshop.

My current position is as a doctoral candidate in Teaching & Curriculum at the Warner School of Education, University of Rochester. I received an MLS from Simmons University and worked for several years in public libraries, including teaching beginning computer classes, often for older adults. However, it was working over twenty years as a NS-12 librarian in an independent school that spurred my interest in digital literacies. Wanting to help elementary-school children keep track of their online sources, I thought surely someone else had already come up with good solutions, maybe even some kind of curriculum. My investigations into the matter led me to discover the field of Personal Information Management (PIM) as "the practice and the study of the activities a person performs in order to acquire or create, store, organize, maintain, retrieve, use, and distribute the information needed to complete tasks (work-related or not) and fulfill various roles and responsibilities" (Jones, 2007, p. 453). Unfortunately, I also learned that no "PIM curriculum" existed, and research with students at the time was scant and mostly with college-aged students. I became excited about the possibility of conducting my own research. Serendipitously, I met a digital literacies professor at the University of Rochester (Dr. Jayne Lammers) who encouraged me to pursue a doctorate and subsequently became my advisor.

My dissertation research—currently in the data analysis phase—examines the PIM Literacy of secondary school students with a descriptive phenomenological approach (Giorgi, 2009). I am defining personal information as documents (Buckland, 2018)—manipulatable items which have the capacity to inform—and not knowledge (Jones, 2010). Although I focus on the digital realm of students' information, I do not limit the context to only academic digital information, but also seek to understand students' extracurricular information practices. I employed mixed methods with an online survey (n=99), screen recordings of guided tours of students' personal information places (n=6), and participant-drawn representations that I call

Information Places Maps (n=5). I will be sharing my findings to date in Paper Session 12: Youth Information Behavior and Practices (10/31/22, 2-3:30 pm) and welcome any feedback.

Regarding the information created by K-12 students themselves, although most of their digital schoolwork is transactional and not prioritized for future needs with good reason, students should not find themselves as adults with zero documentation of their childhood scholarship. I believe they (and their parents, not to mention educators) would benefit from understanding some of the issues regarding format longevity, curation, and archiving, long before students graduate from high school.

As for PIM Literacy, it is considered one of the seven new literacies described as necessary for success in the 21st Century information society (Mioduser, et al., 2008). For high-school graduates who enter college, the PIM demands will increase considerably (Mizrachi & Bates, 2013), and will likely continue to do so if they go into any kind of knowledge work. For college students and employees, there may be tangible incentives for figuring out both effective and efficient systems for PIM. Ideally, PIM Literacy principles would be addressed through K-12 education before the introduction of adult-level information demands.

For those who did not learn PIM Literacy at any stage of school or through employment, public libraries may provide the best outlet to reach those who need support with PIM. In fact, Cushing (2016) found that public librarians are routinely sought by adult patrons for assistance with managing digital personal information. Literature suggests that the general population increasingly relies on "help from information professionals when it comes to organizing, preserving and curating their digital assets and memories for life; and will do so in the future, especially in the context of creating great amount [sic] of data on a daily basis" (Mičunović et al., 2016, p. 126). According to the Pew Research Center (Horrigan, 2016), 46% of the Americans they surveyed say that the statement, "I sometimes feel stressed about all the information I have to keep track of" describes them "very well" or "somewhat well" (p. 9). Information gathering that institutions (e.g., schools, banks, agencies) require is noted as especially burdensome. Those who struggle the most tend to have "lower levels of household income and lower levels of education" (Horrigan, 2016, p. 10). These statistics serve to emphasize that PIM Literacy may be most needed by those without college degrees.

I am currently researching in the secondary school context, where I believe it is imperative to start PIM education before more students graduate from high-school without

familiarity with PIM issues. Although most of my professional experience and doctoral coursework has been centered on youth, I am fascinated with the PIM practices of individuals at any age. In addition, I am concerned about how all of us will be able to successfully manage our increasingly digital personal information. There is no denying that for truly personal information including health and financial documentation, as well as sentimental items such as photos, videos, emails from loved ones, or digital creations, the incentives for management are diffuse and easy to delay. I am excited to learn from PIM scholars and hope to contribute to the collective effort towards assisting people's development of PIM Literacy.

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