

Community Informatics in the Tik Tok Trump Era: Up to the Challenges (and Opportunities) of LIS Education & Workforce Development?

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ABSTRACT

The eponymously titled, *Journal of Community Informatics*, recently celebrated its twentieth anniversary, and shares a clear definition of community informatics: “the study and practice of enabling communities with Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs)” (“About the Journal”, 2024, 1). Examples of ICTs included the ubiquity of computer labs in public libraries, the international adoption of cell phone as a major communication tool, and the emergence of interactive Web 2.0 sites like Craigslist. Traditional measures of impact such as noted researchers, highly cited publications, and large sources of funding might suggest that the hightide of community informatics in the library and information science (LIS) field was the late 1990s/early 2000s with Internet access expanded, the interaction of analog and digital worlds became increasingly important, and social justice was beginning to appear more concentratedly in LIS research and practice (Williams & Durrance, 2009; Winberry & Bishop, 2021).

But time marched on, ICTs did as well—and global society adjusted to innovation and changes. Social media boomed and became a daily avenue for social engagement. The first iPhone arrived in 2007. The early 2010s saw digital activism grow around the world. In 2016, TikTok—one of the most popular and controversial social media platform currently with billions of users creating and/or consuming media—was born mere weeks before Donald Trump was elected the 45th (and

presently 47th) President of the United States. But the challenges and opportunities to combat them did not stop at misinformation, deep fakes, or tech-restrictive, nationalistic information policies. Not everyone “Zoomed” through the height of the Covid-19 Pandemic—and many still suffer the social and health consequences for it. In 2022 artificial intelligence (AI) became a familiar topic of conversation following the premiere of ChatGPT; and, by 2025, the arrival of DeepSeek put the financial, technological, and geo-political world on alert as to how quickly developments in AI (and imminent technologies) impact daily life, scramble political power, and put the very future of our planet and way of life to the ultimate test.

Against the backdrop of a chaotic and ever-changing information and communication landscape, this panel asks about the current relevance and future possibilities of community informatics in the library and information science field and broader society. With consideration of the ALISE 2025 conference theme, *Decolonising Pedagogies: Agency, Identity, Practices*, and their own recent and ongoing scholarship, panelists will share perspectives on how community informatics can be channeled towards the success of our students, information professionals, researchers, and communities—in all its forms—now and into the future.

Joseph Winberry, Assistant Professor, UNC Chapel Hill, School of Information & Library Science

*Community Informatics as Information Advocacy:
Encouraging Students, Educating Employers, and Transforming Our Training*

Community informatics is a concept which inspired me throughout my Master and Ph.D. programs. Now an assistant professor, time spent teaching and leading student projects has led me to uncomfortable questions about the roles that community informatics can offer current students. For instance, there is much emphasis today in our field on user experience design of system interfaces and ICTs. This seems to be driven in part—understandably enough—by the belief that these skills will lead to lucrative careers in the private sector. But recent contracting in the tech sector aside, it is concerning to me that a field often defined as the intersection of people, information, and technology cannot articulate beyond (if including) librarianship a people-and-community-centered type of position that would offer students a living wage while providing much needed support in the efforts of improving information access, literacy, and justice. My panel contribution will be about how our field could support and educate society about this information advocate position in government, non-profit, and potentially for-profit sectors.

Eric Ely, Assistant Professor, University of Central Missouri, Department of Educational Technology and Library Science

"Emergent Bedfellows: Community Informatics as Professional Matchmaker in the Library and Information Sciences".

My professional development during my Ph.D. program, and as an early-career professional, reinforced my advocacy for the “L” in Library and Information Studies. In the context of community informatics and ICTs, the work of adjacent fields (e.g., computer, data, and/or information science) is crucial, and in some ways overlaps with librarianship; however, the roles, scope, and skills make these careers discrete. Librarianship is, fundamentally, about people. Libraries leverage technology to empower individuals and communities to support social, cultural, and economic needs. Focusing on people – not products – contributes to more informed individuals, builds social capital, and contributes to greater understanding. With a background in the humanities, social sciences, and LIS, combined with experience in UX research, I grapple with the (primarily) economic benefits that drive students to library-adjacent professions. Given my transition from an “I” to an “L” school, my contribution to this panel centers the education of future librarians regarding industry and UX professions, mindsets, and, most significantly, library-industry collaboration to best serve individuals and communities in an ever-changing technological landscape.

Abigail L. Phillips, Associate Professor, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, School of Information Studies

Transforming Information Spaces:

Neurodiversity-Affirming Environments for Advocacy, Inclusion, and Community Mental Health Support

Motivated by my background in public librarianship and community engagement, I will explore the intersection of community informatics, disability, and neurodiversity advocacy, examining how information spaces can be transformed. Spaces such as public, school, and academic libraries can amplify neurodivergent voices, access needs, and lived experiences. Drawing from interdisciplinary scholarship from LIS, disability studies, social work, and education, my contribution will share how information spaces can evolve into neurodiversity-affirming environments which further support advocacy work, create inclusive and empowering programming and collections, and serve as points of access to community mental health supports.

Particular attention will be given to how community informatics can challenge dominant neurotypical and ableist standards while fostering authentic support networks and avenues for connection among neurodiverse individuals. My approach for this panel aligns with an urgent need to destigmatize and reimagine mental health support within information spaces. By doing so, those seeking aid are offered a path forward that prioritizes neurodivergent agency, identity affirmation, and collective care.

Colin Rhinesmith, Associate Professor, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, School of Information Sciences, and Co-Editor-In-Chief, *The Journal of Community Informatics*

Community Informatics as Engaged Scholarship:

Designing Mutually Beneficial Partnerships to Advance our Relevance Today

In 2011, *The Journal of Community Informatics* published a special issue, titled "Research in Action: Linking Communities and Universities." In it, the issue featured nine articles from leading community informatics (CI) scholars that showcased meaningful partnerships between communities and universities around the globe. In his contribution, Day (2011) highlighted a CI learning model that engaged students and staff at the University of Brighton and community practitioners and citizens from communities in England and Kenya. The example shows what's possible when higher education and community members work together to advance community development through CI projects. In this panel contribution, I will introduce the newly launched Engaged Information Sciences Network (EISN) in the iSchool at Illinois. EISN builds on this rich history of engaged scholarship at Illinois. The goal of the talk will be to encourage attendees interested in CI as a type of engaged scholarship to join the network.

Bharat Mehra, EBSCO Endowed Chair in Social Justice & Professor, University of Alabama, School of Library and Information Studies, and Series Editor, *Advances in Librarianship*

Hits and Misses in LIS Education from the Perspective of a Community Informatics Scholar and Social Justice Activist

In this panel, I briefly trace the influence of community informatics upon my professional journey as an educator, scholar, and social justice activist in LIS over twenty-five years from digital divides research and community networks development in the 1990s to the current resistance in a neoliberal academy and a ubiquitous political manipulation of news and social media (Buschman, 2017, 2016; Mehra, 2023, 2021). In the process, I identify hits and misses in the past, present, and future of community informatics within LIS and beyond illustrated during key milestones in my academic career (Mehra, 2024). I conclude with more a relevant and strategic approach integrating community informatics in LIS education moving forward as a counternarrative to recent political attacks against diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility and toward educational and cultural memory institutions (such as universities, libraries, and others) in the aftermath of the 2024 Presidential Election (Cooke, 2017; Hughes-Hassell, 2013; Mehra, 2025).

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Community engagement; Information rights; Sociology of information.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Community informatics; Information and communication technologies; Workforce development.

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