



Libraries, Access to Information and Artificial Intelligences in Argentina and Latin American and the Caribbean

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To cite this article: Pablo Bruno D'Amico & Ariel Vercelli (31 Oct 2024): Libraries, Access to Information and Artificial Intelligences in Argentina and Latin American and the Caribbean, International Information & Library Review, DOI: [10.1080/10572317.2024.2413775](https://doi.org/10.1080/10572317.2024.2413775)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10572317.2024.2413775>



Published online: 31 Oct 2024.



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GLOBAL POSTCARDS



Column Editor: Jacqueline Solis, Director of Research and Instructional Services, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, USA

COLUMN EDITOR'S NOTES

From the column editor: After nine years as editor of the Global Postcards column, I am turning over the column to Stephen Bales. It has been an absolute honor to work with all the authors who have so generously shared their work through the Global Postcards column. I have learned so much from you all. I'm also grateful to my past co-editor/coeditor Robin Kear, who contributed so much to the column.

To all of you wonderful, hard-working, and innovative LIS professionals: Please share your work with the world. Don't hesitate to reach out to Stephen at sbales@exchange.tamu.edu to ask if your idea for an article is a good fit for the column.

For this issue, we have contributions from Argentina and Bulgaria that look at professional training experiences.

Libraries, Access to Information and Artificial Intelligences in Argentina and Latin American and the Caribbean

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the experience of the course "Libraries, Access to Information, and Artificial Intelligences", offered by the authors in March and June 2024 in Argentina. The course was organized by the Association of Graduated Librarians of the Argentine Republic/Asociación de Bibliotecarios Graduados de la República Argentina (ABGRA) and taught virtually to professional colleagues from across the country and Latin America. The initiative was endorsed by the Library of the National Congress and the Latin American section of IFLA. In the next lines we share some of the lessons learned at the beginning of 2024, where we will be presenting the course in the second part of the year and how we are thinking about its continuity for 2025.

KEYWORDS

librarianship; artificial intelligence; professional development; digital literacy

Artificial intelligences (AI) are generating profound changes in our societies. They challenge the foundational and relational bases: among others, commerce, inclusion, education, human rights, democracy, public policies, culture, and art. AIs are facilitating radical changes in relation to access to information/data and knowledge management. Undoubtedly, these are key technologies for the present and future of libraries and other public institutions (such as museums, archives, galleries). However, beyond their benefits, these technologies also pose a latent danger: far from being neutral, transparent, or universal, they are developed for profit and are not characterized by guaranteeing

universal access to information or being oriented to protect human rights. In fact, their massive and uncontrolled use is fostering the emergence of new and serious problems that librarians and other public servants shall not be aside.

To promote knowledge of AI and provide opportunities for discussion about these technologies for LIS professionals in Argentina, the authors developed a course called "Libraries, Access to Information, and Artificial Intelligences", which was presented in March and June 2024 in Argentina. The course was organized by the Association of Graduated Librarians of the Argentine Republic/Asociación de Bibliotecarios Graduados de la

República Argentina (ABGRA) and taught virtually to professional colleagues from across the country and Latin America. The initiative was endorsed by the Library of the National Congress and the Latin American section of IFLA. The general objective of the course has been to critically analyze what is happening in libraries and other public institutions in relation to the imminent incorporation of AI into their daily activities. In turn, among the specific objectives, we aim for our colleagues to be able to analyze this relationship through at least three factors: universal access to information/data, the incorporation and development of AI, and finally, the future scenarios that libraries face due to these technological changes. Among other questions that we address: How are access to information, AIs, and libraries related? To whom do these scientific-technological developments belong? Are there AIs designed for the management of public-communitarian libraries? Will the incorporation of AI require more librarians or fatally generate unemployment?

These and other questions guided both courses' sessions, each consisting of four synchronous meetings, which covered theoretical framework and debates on practical issues. The course also required the completion of a final project by the students based on applying some of the relevant categories of thought or tools to analyze their own activities, an analysis of the use of AI services, or an analysis of a national or regional case. Some key aspects we discussed were:

- Libraries Facing Technological Change: exploring the relationships between libraries, access to information, and AI. Unveiling both the significant benefits and emerging challenges posed by AI integration;
- Public Policies and Regulations on AI: delving into the regulatory frameworks surrounding AI, alongside global perspectives from documents issued by IFLA and United Nations and regional level with regulation on AI in Latin American countries;
- Universal Access to Information: examining the intersection of freedom of expression, information and state policies in the context of AI-driven data flows. Discussing the imperative of protecting personal and population data rights against data extractivism;

- Library and Information Science Careers in the AI era: reflecting on the evolving roles and responsibilities of information professionals in light of AI integration. Identifying opportunities for synergistic partnerships between human and machine learning;
- Developing AI for Libraries: Addressing the specific challenges and opportunities in enhancing connectivity, infrastructure, open-source software, and information literacy within our libraries.

One of the main theoretical-methodological proposals was to explore these issues through a layered approach (Vercelli, 2023, 2024). Specifically, considering that AI are complex assemblages with, at least, eight layers to deserve analytical attention: (a) infrastructure; (b) connectivity layer; (c) logical/software; (d) machine learning and algorithms layer; (e) data/information; (f) results layer; (g) the user/environment layer; (h) the environmental sustainability. We also gave special attention to the digital divide problem, still prevalent in our region (D'Amico, 2020). This proposed list is not final, but we believe it is a good first approach. Through this comprehensive exploration, we tried to equip participants with the critical insights and analytical tools necessary to navigate the complexities of AI integration in libraries in Argentina and our region.

Finally, toward the end of 2024 the course will be offered in person (in a short version) as an introduction to the workshop on libraries and AI at the 55th National Librarians Meeting to be held in the city of Mar del Plata, Argentina [<https://abgra.org.ar/55rnb/>]. On that occasion, some of the best final works from the courses described above will also be presented. By 2025, we are very excited to be able to develop a complete, self-managed version of this course that all librarians in Argentina and Latin America and the Caribbean can take for free. We hope that this brief description of our work excites you, serves you in your libraries, and also serves as an invitation to the international community to join forces to develop better AI tools for our libraries.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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