My purpose here today is not to bring the technological good news to this audience. I am neither qualified nor inclined. Rather, I want to very quickly illustrate three service capacities which, not long ago, were very new, very expensive (in terms of both investments and personnel), and therefore almost completely limited to the largest libraries with the budgets and technology infrastructures to produce and support them. They are all now easily within reach of almost any library:

1) The first example is the suite of affordable tools through SpringShare’s ubiquitous LibGuides. [Show Lock Haven http://ask.lhup.edu/]
   Note: Chat, FAQ, E-mail, platform for txt & Facebook.

2) The second example is Jing – the free version is unsupported, but there is a robust user community. [Show Illinois State LibGuide http://ilstu.libguides.com/jingvideos]
   Note: Most simply, the process of answering a question can be captured and e-mailed to a user whether in-person or at a distance, obviating one of the barriers that has bedeviled reference librarians about dispersed and distance services.

3) The third example is the ability to record image and sound, screen capture, and edit a customized short video learning object with the tools available on all Macs – very easily. Macs are famously intuitive – this example took less than an hour to plan, record, and edit. [Show GUL video]

I’m not really showing you anything unfamiliar, and my primary point is that, again, not very long ago these were premium services and projects done at great expense by a small subset of libraries. But I’m not here to merely make that simple point. Rather, the question is why these practices are not more
widely dispersed and more standard since they are so affordable now. Clearly there are more libraries taking advantage of these tools, but we fall far short of the ubiquity of printing or scanning services, the internet or databases, or even the loaning of games, I’d bet. The question is: why? In an age when users want targeted help at the point of need wherever they are and however they are using library resources (not to mention the growth in online courses), why haven’t these tools been exploited much more? The whole point of these tools is to make our help easier, cheaper, and much more widely dispersed, and they can be customized and community specific. My essential argument boils down to the axiom that if the tools are simple, the management process to deploy them is complex. The last thing I wish to do is to disparage librarians and library workers. The era of hortatory and change-or-die management rhetoric is a threadbare meme of longstanding, an excuse for not thinking more deeply about the profession and the people that populate it. The meme should have died a long time ago. Rather, I’d like to take a bit of a left turn here, and use Peter Laslett’s 1960 description of a London bakery 500 years ago¹ to characterize library workplaces. I know this may sound strange or even a bit satirical, but I do so not as an exercise in humor, but for the insight we can glean from Laslett.

Obviously I’m doing a selective reading here, but the first thing that pops out from Laslett is that, though libraries are clearly a place of work and a form of business, people who work in them often inhabit those spaces as a community or a quasi-family (86-87). That is, libraries quite often have a clear sociology – a demarcation of who-works-where-on-what and how they relate to other clearly demarcated areas. There are hierarchical divisions, and they are sometimes unfair, even exploitative, but the library workplace is experienced as stable, knowable, and durable: work relationships are personal relationships, and personal relationships are often work relationships. As Laslett put it, “in a [place] organized like this, everyone belongs, everyone has his [or her] circle of affection, every relationship can be seen as a … relationship” in fact (88). People who work “very close together and for a very long time indeed … generate … emotional power” in the form of attachments or dislikes (88). The scale of a library workplace is very

often negotiable, of human scale and much of it is still quite tactile and familiar (89) – that is, after all, why people love libraries. Groups of a dozen to about forty people are, by today’s standards, quite intimate and knowable. And to add flavor to our mix, frequently in libraries the sexes and many different ages of people are freely mixed together: libraries are quite “balanced” and “healthy” social units, and very interdependent (90). Laslett is not overly-sentimental: the “world [of the bakers’ families] we have lost … was no paradise, no golden age of equality, tolerance, and loving-kindness”: the exploitation then could be every bit as brutal as the unregulated capitalism of 19th century Manchester or Lowell, Mass. Nor are libraries work paradises – but if this brief characterization even partially rings true, then therein lies a key to understanding why these simple forms of technological service-provision are not more widely adopted:

- First, the stability and know-ability of library work and the library workplace is a pleasant, nice thing. It is not wrong for people to want – even expect – a modest amount of predictability in their daily existence, and one with familiar, personal connections and artifacts is not one they are likely to give up happily for good reason. As the historian E.J. Hobsbawm\(^2\) put it when describing the breakup of the kind of social and economic arrangements Laslett describes, what is being taken away – the ability to draw on familiar sources of assistance, stable routines, relationships, resources and tools – “seem[s] a distinctly hard bargain” for a very uncertain set of outcomes (191). I am suggesting that, while this world is shrinking – and has been for some time, it has a long history that people value for reasons that are not irrational.

- Second, to add to this sociology, library administrators almost always oversell these changes and what they will accomplish. (It is here that, with all due respect, I’d like to push back at our keynote speaker, Michael Edson. I think what he had to say was interesting, but easily fell into the patterns I am about to describe.) I chronicled these in my 2003 book, *Dismantling the Public Sphere*, but a few examples of hyper-rhetoric bear repeating: “Are we the last generation of a profession being swept away by the rising tide of technology [and] will we be relegated to dealing

with the great mass of print-on-paper [in] a gigantic mausoleum of old information? Or do we have the courage to enter into a deliberate metamorphosis and forever transform ourselves and librarianship” – from 20 years ago (Jerry Campbell, 4), and “What’s going to happen is pretty straightforward: as a device for supporting undergraduate students in their coursework [the library] will fade away” – from 13 years ago (John Lombardi, 5). If you place yourself inside the sociology I just described above, this kind of hyperventilating – almost always wildly inaccurate – generates a kind of folk-skepticism, and rightly so.

- Third and finally, we have all been wailing and gnashing teeth about budgets for some time. The sociology I have described knows, understands, and has experienced this too. But when, in reaching for the “cutting edge” or the kind of public splash that generates overreach and hyperventilating rhetoric, leaders tend also to overspend, and justify it with overpromising of results – generating another dollop of folk-skepticism in the process. (Jacob Berg’s paper and comments at this symposium about his experience at Trinity made just this point.)

In other words, I am arguing that we don’t do ourselves any favors by ignoring the sociology of libraries, what is pleasant and positive about them, introducing in these environments a needlessly-disruptive mindset that is too easily discredited by every day, lived experiences in our libraries. I would urge everyone here to read my friend Gloria Leckie’s 1996 article “Desperately Seeking Citations” (Journal of Academic Librarianship, 22, no. 3, pp. 201–208) for a sobering confirmation that the issues facing us when it comes to student research really do persist much more than we’d like to admit. I don’t want to suggest that there are not recalcitrant foot-draggers in the profession, but a rhetorical approach that focuses on that aspect of our work and profession only empowers them beyond what they could normally do. In the end, I’m suggesting that:

- realistic expectations
- realistic investments
- realistic follow-through and demonstration of results
• willingness to cut one’s losses and make experiments and failures productive

• and sustainability through integration into and among a library’s portfolio of services

are what will lead to wider adoption and sensible, creative deployment of useful, affordable tools of benefit to our publics. And I would argue that ignoring my rather off-beat sociology of many library workplaces puts many of these initiatives at risk.

Thank you.