Books – A Pro/Con Perspective

Pro:

- Books have been, for centuries, the **best way to gain a thorough understanding of a topic**.

- **Professors love books.** They know that the more time you spend reading about a concept (going deep!) the greater your comprehension and understanding.

- Lots to choose from. **Rod Library offers you over 1 million books.** Google Books and HathiTrust offer you many millions of complete online books.

- **The power of full text searching.** Google Books and HathiTrust allow you to quickly search through the entire contents of millions of books in just seconds.

- **HathiTrust, the U.S. Government, and public domain.** Books published by the U.S. Government are often in the public domain (not restricted by copyright). HathiTrust offers you many of these public domain books.

- Studies show that **reading fiction increases empathy** (compassion, sympathy, and human understanding). Studies have also shown that people with **greater empathy** have **greater career success**. So **read fiction**! Perhaps also read the Week 4 Read, Reflect, Cite article “Harry Potter Readers and Fans of Fiction are Empathetic and Use More Regions of Their Brains.”
Con:

- **Reading a book is time consuming.** Some think that because we are spending so much time on the Internet our brains may be rewired so we can’t concentrate and can’t read multiple pages of text (see “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” – Week 1). Others claim we are simply too busy in our modern world to read anything lengthy (see “The Plague of tl;dr” – Week 7).

- **Books, especially textbooks are becoming more and more expensive.** (Note there is a new movement called open access textbooks that hopes to counter this problem).

- **Copyright in the U.S. is simply too long.** U.S. Copyright keeps more than ninety years of published books out of the public domain, out of archives, off the Internet, and out of the hands of millions.

- **Google Books and Partial View is not enough.** While Google Books will show portions of some books published after 1923 – many or perhaps most books scanned by Google do not allow partial view – and most of the pages in a partial view book can’t be seen.

- **Most books are slowly disintegrating!** The majority of books have been printed on acid based paper which, over time, disintegrates. For more on this, see the Library of Congress website “The Deterioration and Preservation of Paper: Some Essential Facts”.

- **Self-publishing and the decline of quality.** It is becoming easier to self-publish a book and sell it on sites such as Amazon. Without editors the quality of these self-published books can be a problem.

- **Publishers publish books that they think will sell. Could that lead to bias?** (What types of bias?). One alternative is for authors to publish with small publishing companies, but then their books may not reach a wide enough audience (perhaps Google Books might help here). Alternatively, authors could self-publish but ...