A couple decades ago, who would have believed that the UM School of Library Science would be the School of Information. And that something called Google would provide access to millions of library books on the internet?

At our Feb. 4 Living Room Chat, University Librarian and Dean of Libraries Paul Courant explained how this current technological age has changed our libraries and how they are used.

In outlining the process begun by Google to digitize university libraries – UM was the first--he explained how copyright laws affect our ability to reprint--or digitize--our collections. The US Laws allow volumes to be in the public domain and digitized that are 70 years more than the life of the author, and UM can even copy and print those as if they were new. Books less than that can still be cataloged and used or taken out from the library, and limited texts can be read online but cannot be digitized because of the copyright laws.

Prof. Courant explained that 95 % of UM libraries' 7.3 million volumes in its print collection are out of print, with 28.4 % in the public domain, and so are available online. He also explained how the UM has partnered with other universities to form the HathiTrust for a rich collection of online viewing of more than 3 million volumes (out of more than 10 million volumes) that are in the public domain.

Now, he said, it is technically possible to get almost everything into the hands of almost everyone. We just need to make that happen. One drawback, he lamented, is that many of the newer books we purchase on our e-readers cannot be shared, so many of these digital books may be lost in the future.
People won't know what they are missing.

A lively discussion on the pros and cons of the digital library followed.

To thank him, Prof. Courant was given the lovely Dudersdadt photo book The University of Michigan, A Seasonal Portrait, which he did not have in his personal library. Also, because of his admiration for Jackie Robinson's breaking of the color barrier in baseball—in fact his son is named in Robinson's honor—we gave him a framed collector's 1951 out of print magazine, Quick, with Robinson on the cover.

Jean and Bill Gosling hosted the chat - appropriate because Bill preceded Paul Courant as University Librarian. Thanks to them, Carol Kaplan for her help, and to all who brought treats to share at the reception that followed.