Lost in Austin -- The Golden Age of Librarianship

Thomas W. Leonhardt
St. Edwards University, thomasl@stedwards.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg
Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5523

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.
University Libraries, was equally eloquent as he spoke about “Collaboration by Cliché: The Radicalization of the Academic Library Commitment to Cooperation and the “Two Cool” Initiative.” “Two Cool is a play on the 2CUL partnership between the libraries of Cornell University and Columbia University.

“Over the next two years, 2CUL will explore ways to improve the quality of collections and services offered to campus constituencies, redirect resources to emerging needs, and make each institution more competitive in securing government and foundation support. The relationship could also provide a new blueprint for broad, non-exclusive partnerships between other academic libraries and other parts of the academy.” [From the Cornell press release, http://www.library.cornell.edu/news/091012/2cul]

Dennis Dillon, Associate Director for Research Services at the University of Texas at Austin Libraries and Allen Powell, President of EBSCO Information Services talked about changing business models, one from a major supplier’s perspective (libraries have less money to spend, and we have less revenue) and the other from a major consumer’s perspective (do we need selectors, and does our traditional warehousing make sense?).

Joan Giesecke, Dean of Libraries, University of Nebraska — Lincoln Libraries talked about “Finding the Right Metaphor: Restructuring, Realigning, and Repackaging Today’s Research Libraries.” Her advice, or admonition, if you will, applies to most academic libraries where, as she notes, we are no longer collections-centered but user-centered. You can choose your own apt metaphor, but the one I liked and that seems to fit my library is “Library as Living Room.” Not only do we serve free coffee (and doughnuts on Wednesdays), but we also have an area with a couch, a settee, and two bean bags where regular naps are the norm.

The presentation that I most enjoyed (all of the above were exceptional conference papers) was by Carla Stoffle, Dean of Libraries, University of Arizona. She points out that the current crisis for academic research libraries has been predicted since 1995. She talked about what the University of Arizona Libraries have been doing since the 1990s (she became dean there in 1992), much of which involved a total reorganization and restructuring of the way staff (librarians et alia) are used and described in their titles. Below is a Google search result on “University of Arizona Libraries Functional Teams.” There were many results but the one that gave me what I was looking for was a snapshot (more of a panorama, actually) of the UA Libraries mission, organizational structure, and more. The MSWord document is aimed at prospective employees and states that each new employee will be assigned to a team whose assignment could change quickly, as needed.

For many years, I saw the changes being made in libraries as the automation of repetitive, labor-intensive tasks and never considered those changes to be fundamental. In fact, we did not always use our new tools to drastically alter how we do things (we all still do the same copy cataloging with a staff that might serve us better doing other things — this a point made by more than one speaker). Even the OPAC was basically a glorified, albeit more efficient, version of the card catalog. The options available today go far beyond the card catalog and the Kardex and are not necessarily library-driven. We are now using tools (Web 2.0) that stretch our limits far beyond what I could have imagined when I began library work four decades ago.

These are exciting times, even for old-timers, old-timers who should be more comfortable with change than those younger than we are. We have seen what good can come of change and understand that we recover from disruption and discomfort in short order and that even the changes we introduced are transitory. What remains a constant is change, and the older I get the clearer that becomes. Change is good! 🌟