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For Your Information/ ALCTS Reorganization

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For Your Information

FYI — ALA, ALCTS and ALLTHAT

by **Arnold Hirshon** (Wayne State University and President, ALCTS)

[This was distributed over Acqnet several weeks ago regarding the reorganization of ALCTS. Arnold graciously gave us his permission to reprint it here. It raises some very important issues --Ed.]

You ask for further discussion about the reorganization itself. I would now like to make some general clarification's and observations that might be useful to readers. I hasten to add that these are personal observations, and do not represent any official position of ALCTS.

I will try to answer four different questions:

1. Why should we reorganize now?
2. What is the future of collections and technical services in libraries?
3. How should we create an empowered organization?
4. Why is ALA important to ALCTS?

1. WHY SHOULD WE RE ORGANIZE NOW?

There were at least two major reasons why ALCTS needed to undertake a reorganization now. First, the information world is changing. For libraries to survive they will need to adapt to these changes. Our professional associations must also adapt to change. If we waited five more years to undergo this exercise, rapidly changing events would overtake us. We should be planning for and shaping what we want our professional organization to be rather than simply reacting to events as they occur. Given the time required for a reorganization (originally projected at three-to-four years!), we must act now if we are going to develop an organizational structure relevant to the already emerging "electronic library," the "library without walls," or whatever other term one uses.

The other major reason for the reorganization was to develop a structure flexible enough to accommodate future changes. Our current structure is flexible in the way that a card catalog was — i.e., when you needed more space, you added another cabinet. But eventually the size of the catalog made it unwieldy, and just as the card catalog gave way to the automated catalog, we needed a new more flexible structure built for today's information environment. In our current

system when a new area of interest emerges, we just add to the bureaucracy with more sections or committees. While a flattened organization does not necessarily improve efficiency, a bloated bureaucracy or a bureaucracy tightly held in the hands of a few doesn't necessarily improve efficiency either. Recently some sections of ALCTS have found it extremely difficult to identify someone willing to run for elected office, and other sections "recycled" people who either had been on the ballot in previous years or who had already been an officer in another section of ALCTS. These are not signs of an open system that is encouraging fresh involvement.

Another problem with adding new sections is that we generally failed to take on the political ramifications of eliminating or merging existing sections. Each section has its own bureaucracy, and each bureaucracy has a strong tendency toward self-preservation. As a result, it was easier to add one more section than to deal politically with the reality that it is time for another section to go. Yet it is the people who are currently in power who have tended to be the one who have spoken up about the reorganization. However, those who are controlling the power often cannot see that there are others who are clamoring to come aboard. And so I am glad that you are among those asking everyone — not just the enfranchised, but also the quiet members and the non-members — to speak up and say what ALCTS needs to do to move ahead.

2. WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF COLLECTIONS AND TECHNICAL SERVICES IN LIBRARIES?

The reactions thus far about the Organizational Restructuring Task Force report are preliminary report mostly have focused on the question of whether to organize by section or by interest group. I would suggest that this issue is really quite secondary. As long as there is an ALCTS, the good and interested mem-

bership will find a way to be active and to make a contribution to the profession. However, what I have seen little of thus far in the debate is "in what direction will library collections and technical services move during the next five-to-ten years, and how can ALCTS position itself to be a leader in those developments?" A few years ago, I posited during a speech at Resources Section Acquisitions Committee meeting that over the past few millennia, librarianship (and collections and technical services librarianship in particular) has been based upon a model where the information source (e.g., the book) was separate from the access source (e.g., the acquisitions order or the library catalog record). Therefore, our job was a secondary one: to procure materials and create our own catalog to provide access. However, today the information source and the access mechanisms are becoming virtually one. Client-servers on the Internet (with access mechanisms such as Gopher, WAIS, and Archie) are the first embodiment of this paradigm shift. Unfortunately, I see in our profession not only a lack of recognition that this is occurring, but that we are trying to embalm our present system so that we don't have to cope with the future. The present ALCTS organization chart, with its tightly defined sections and pre-defined specializations, was relevant in its day. But if left as is in the emerging information world, it will over time become so constricted that we will choke on our past success.

The current organizational debate has become stagnant because too many responses are focusing first HOW we will get things done rather than WHAT we need to do. Here are but a few sample questions that we ought to be asking (and answering!) for ourselves:

•Should our concern be with the "reproduction of LIBRARY MATERIALS" or with new methods to provide "information DELIVERY on demand?"

•If future information sources are more likely to be accessed than acquired will the need for "cataloging" be for material contained in static physical FORMATS (books, tapes, etc.) or will it be to control INFORMATION in electronic form over networks?

•Will we be more concerned about the INFLATION of printed serials or the ECONOMICS of electronic information? If the latter, what are the organizational implications?

•If the future of preservation of library materials is tightly aligned with access, how can we best bring together in ALCTS the individuals who preserve with those who will provide the access?

•If libraries are becoming less concerned with OWNERSHIP than with ACCESS, what should ALCTS role be in developing the access mechanisms?

3. HOW SHOULD WE CREATE AN EMPOWERED ORGANIZATION?

I agree with your statement that we need a more "empowered" membership organization. I also believe that this is what the Task Force is after. Some have imagined that the Task Force recommendations would leave us with a tightly run Board where only a few people control all of the power. On the contrary, I believe the Task Force envisions a loose "coordinating" committee that keeps the work of the membership flowing at a healthy pace. I therefore have to disagree with your comment that "it's not necessarily the structure that needs changing, but the decision-making process." Decision-making occurs within a structure, and the two are inseparable. I do not see how we could change on without affecting the other.

4. WHY IS ALA IMPORTANT TO ALCTS?

I could write another long essay on the direct benefits that accrue to ALCTS as a division of ALA, but I will leave that discussion to another day. As with the "ALCTS is a cataloger's division" misconception, I think that there are many benefits of ALCTS alignment with ALA that may not be fully understood by many (most?) of the membership. To cite just a few, ALA has been instrumental in publishing ALCTS monographs, in securing changes in legislation that ALCTS de-

sires, in helping us secure a grant for programs on preservation, and in providing many forms of indirect support.

CONCLUSION

The proposal the Task Force floated at Annual Conference may not necessarily be the best one. I do believe that they have set forth a very workable and flexible plan that will be adaptable to the changes that our profession is about to

undergo. I am also sure that whether one agrees or disagrees with the report, the Task Force had some us all a great service by generating as much discussion and interest in the future of the division as they have. We must remember that a road map is of little use if we don't know our destination.

For now I hope we can encourage as much discussion on the where we are going as we have had on which road to take. ☛

And They Were There

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The Frankfurt Book Fair

by Daniel Halloran

(President, Academic Book Center)
Barry Fast (Vice President, Academic Book Center)

Our purpose in spending four days at the Frankfurt Book Fair was to meet with the major publishers and some of our customers in Europe. We divided the task between us: Dan focused on the publishers, seeing as many as ten a day, and he discussed our plans as well as theirs. As part of setting our own agenda for the year ahead, it is important for us to know how the publishers are reacting to the changes in the American library book market. Barry concentrated on our library customers in Europe, as well as some distributors with whom we work in the emerging democracies of Eastern Europe. We learned quite a bit in our travels around the Bookmesse halls, and some of the information would be of interest to librarians. We thought it worthwhile to share this with you.

The great advantage of Frankfurt is that the top people at the larger publishers make themselves available to talk with customers from all over the world. Dan met with presidents, marketing VPs or CEOs of such publishers as Van Nostrand, Westview, Mosby, Greenwood, Dekker, Pergamon, Kluwer, Wiley, Cambridge, VCH, Gale, Oxford, Springer Verlag, CRC, Taylor & Francis, Karger, Peter Lang, Elsevier, Academic and St. Martins. While there were many different views and strategies discussed in these meetings, a summation of the publishers' attitudes and plans is possible.

No one is holding out hope that the

American library budget crisis will be ameliorated any time soon. Publishers have come to accept the fact that libraries cannot buy books in the quantities that prevailed even two or three years ago. Many publishers expect a continued decline in the market through the 1990s. But only a few publishers plan to cut back on their output. Instead, they will publish better books, more targeted and marketed strongly. The presses will tend to narrow the subject spread of their list, concentrating their efforts in market segments that they know well. Some publishers are looking for new market segments, or broadening their output in portions of the market where they have been experimenting. A good example is Wiley's foray into trade publishing, where they had always maintained a presence but are now more fully exploiting.

Some publishers are making stringent cost cutting moves. Both Pergamon and Elsevier, for instances, are doing all of their US fulfillment directly from Europe to save the cost of an American warehouse. Others are combining warehouse operations to share costs. The market difficulties are forcing some publishers to raise prices as fewer units are sold, but there is a real sense that their higher priced books in certain subjects just won't sell. The bigger price increases seem confined to journals, where some publishers are projecting 12% increases in their own currencies (translating to the mid 20% in dollar prices, due to currency weakness).

On the subject of publisher/book-seller cooperation, we were pleased to note how many publishers want to enlist our aid in marketing their books. They need information on who is buying their books in order to improve their