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The Meyers Connection

Barbara Meyers

Meyers Consulting Services

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THE MEYERS CONNECTION

Lightning Rod or Peacemaker?

by **Barbara Meyers**, President, Meyers Consulting Services

This CONNECTION focuses on the recent Top Management Round Table sponsored by the Society for Scholarly Publishing (SSP). Held September 12-14 in Alexandria, Virginia, the meeting was small but covered a lot of very important ground as might be suspected by the intriguing title: "What We Worry About At Night Scholars, Librarians, Publishers Discuss Concerns for the 1990's."

Organized by Paula Kaufman, Director of Libraries at the University of Tennessee, and Herb Morton, Consultant located in Bethesda, Maryland, the Round Table ran the gamut across the larger environmental issues from forecasts for the economy to predictions of technological developments on this decade's horizon to an outlook for higher education. These broad-scope sessions were followed by discussions focused on the specifics of: scholars' access to information, services, and funds; the role of libraries in the process of scholarly publishing and new systems of library collaboration; and publishers' worries and opportunities when they reconsider print and electronic media at the outset of a new decade.

The Round Table closed with a view from NCLIS (National Commission on Libraries and Information Services) about current and potential government policies concerning access to information and copyright followed by a discussion of positive outcomes from the meeting led by Robert Shirrell of the University of Chicago Press, who is current SSP Vice President. I provide for you

now highlights from each speaker's presentation — some which may cause you relief, while others may create new concern. I'll let you be your own judge.

William Y. Arms, Vice-President, Academic Services, Carnegie Mellon University

Bill Arms took a look at where computing technology was in 1980 and where it is today in 1990 in order to assess where it might be in the year 2000. His conclusion was that eventually it will be cheaper to store information on computer than in print and university libraries must begin planning for this.

Arms cited two major barriers to whether or not technology will be properly used over the next decade. The first is technical. A screen is a poor substitute for a book and systems (software) are crude. The second is in business. There is no mechanism for change, for getting people to alter their expectations.

He also provided three pressures that will force change. First, journal publishing is approaching a financial crisis (if, in fact, it isn't already there). Second, new technologies are changing the creation of scholarly information. And, third, new technologies will allow individuals freedom to innovate.

His tentative conclusions: For 400 years, one technology — print on paper — dominated scholarly information. New technologies are challenging that dominance. Our organizations and economic

frameworks will change to use the new technologies. Arms' thinking is that "if organizations don't accept new things, individuals will."

Alice M. Rivlin, Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution; former director, Congressional Budget Office

The first question posed by Alice Rivlin was: "What is a functioning economy?" Her definition is that it is sustainable growth in which all groups share.

Capably covering a large amount of territory, Rivlin then went on to point out how growth occurs, how it is sustained, and what is the result of such growth. She emphasized the need to find policies to move forward several goals at once in order to achieve her definition of a functioning economy. Those goals are:

- substantial increase in individual productivity
- consume less income and invest in equipment, personnel development, R&D, and knowledge at the public and private levels —improve public schools and universities —aim improved education at the less skilled to narrow the current disparity in the population
- make the economy more energy efficient with less dependence on foreign oil and less damage to environment —energy should get steadily more expensive over time
- increase national savings rate
- create a multi-year agreement to get the budget down over time and no longer use the excuse of the moment

--states must think together about revenues rather than competing for it in terms of federal or foreign dollars.

Russell Edgerton, President, American Association for Higher Education; formerly Deputy Director, Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare

Edgerton believes that there are three key challenges for academic officers in the 1990s. The first is concern about money and enrollments. The second is faculty recruitment. And the third is concern about the quality of academic programs, especially for undergraduate students.

The major question that should be of overriding importance is: what are students learning? Not, how many PhDs are on campus or how many books are in the library as a measure of quality. State legislatures want new measures of assessment from the academic community. By 1995, assessment will be institutionalized, but curriculum concerns will continue.

He recommended reading the report entitled: "Higher Education in America's Future The New American Scholar" in order to understand the need for a new vision of what a scholar is all about — more than research, the scholar embraces synthesis and teaching as well. Edgerton closed with the recommendation that states become more creative in their funding of higher education in order to replace federal funding, suggesting that a competitive grant system may be one way to accomplish that goal.

Philip H. Abelson, Research Scientist, former president of the Carnegie Institution; former editor, Science Magazine

The typical meeting luncheon was not existent at this Roundtable with Phil Abelson presenting his "Reflections of a Scientist and Editor." Reviewing the evolution of the scientific enterprise from the 1930s to the present from his own personal perspective, Abelson shared with us the dramatic changes that have occurred over six decades.

In the 1930s, science was an individual enterprise with a limited number of scientists who did it all, including making their own equipment. This carried over into how they edited their limited number of journals as well with editors who read the proofs as well as the manuscripts.

In the 1960s and later, the creation of instrument companies speeded up scientific research results and the entrance of the government into science doubled the monies (grants) and created new vehicles to speed it. The number of academics increased along with the number of articles. Page charges began because members' dues couldn't cover the cost of the rising number of manuscripts. Here entered the commercial publishers.

Today, in 1990, the scene has changed considerably. The global competition in science, the new phase of computers plus instrumentation sets researchers in the direction of complex phenomena and interdisciplinary activity. Things have gone sour in the grant business with the whole spirit at universities low because without grants there is no tenure, thus creating a very competitive (versus collegial) situation. There is an excessive amount of literature (Abelson referred to "fractional publication" which is equivalent to what many of us call "salami science" or "salami publication") and this literature is not being read or referred to thereafter.

Abelson commented that all professors think they must publish, the government thinks they must fund it, but it's not high quality and it's all gone sour. We need to change our criteria of success. Creativity comes from a single human mind. Our objective is to increase the number of independent thinkers. In closing he said: "The most valuable thing I dealt with was the peer review system. I still have faith in the peer review system as being the best thing we have."

David Hoekema, Executive Director, American Philosophical Association

The first panel discussion about "What Users Worry About and Want," was led off by David Hoekema who highlighted the great impact of technology that has occurred in such a short period of time by saying: "A typewriter looks to most children like a computer that has lost its screen."

Hoekema believes that the use of technology, such as electronic processing of text, electronic data access, and electronic networking has greater potential in the area of instruction than in research.

In viewing conventional book publishing, Hoekema noted that the market for scholarly books is the junior faculty, not their senior fellows, but junior academics are not as well funded, so they will rely on the library and photocopies. Also, the careerist trend is to only follow what is in their own prescribed area with a declining

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sense of commitment to the academy and the discipline.

One creative option for consideration from Hoekema was to have deep discounts afforded universities by book publishers, e.g. \$100 worth of books for \$30 to be given to each new faculty member, with the presumption that volume will win out.

Anthony G. Coates, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research, The George Washington University

Coates made a series of observations about the scholarly community as it presently stands from his perspective.

First, the current relationship developing between libraries, scholars, and private publishers is detrimental to the scholarly community as it based on giving a good product and price to the individual but skyrocketing the cost to the library.

Second, as more people do research there will be an increase in the level of mediocre research based on a bell curve. This increases the need of ordinary faculty to look like they are publishing significant research when all that is created is less and less meaningful research in order to add to the c.v.

Third, there is a need for evolution of more sophisticated systems, referencing the Sharon Rodgers article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Merrily Taylor, University Librarian, Brown University

Merrily Taylor led off the panel presenting the librarians' perspectives with five major points:

1. The library of the 1990s is just as concerned with access as with ownership. Witness the commitment to shared resources which is written into Brown's collection development policy.

2. Scholars no longer look for the traditional book or journal to do their research.

3. Rising costs demand that libraries look at alternate ways of purchasing.

4. There are almost no trade-offs in alternate information products as many regions of the world cannot use or produce electronic information.

5. Disincentives on electronic products get in the way of their adoption, e.g. pricing tied to print/high licenses for LANs.

Electronic product monies are carved out of acquisitions budgets at the expense of traditional formats and equipment/maintenance budgets don't go up sufficiently to properly sustain these new products.

Unfortunately, libraries lack the money necessary for experimentation or modelling on cost effectiveness. Merrily's bottom line harkened back to an old joke that goes something like this: We've been squabbling over the meat for years. The meat is gone. A motion is made to squabble over the bones.

Barbara Brown, University Librarian, Washington and Lee University

After providing us with all the facts and figures of Washington and Lee University, Barbara Brown outlined the three-year plan for her library. It centered on five main areas: space; creation of a new science library; staff positions (service); automation; and, equipment (CD-ROMs and

telefacsimile).

They exercise a lot of control over their serial publications and review the titles every other year with an eye that the serials and monograph budgets be kept fairly equal.

William P. Sisler, Director, Harvard University Press

Leading off about Publishers' Worries and Opportunities, William Sisler began his remarks with the question: What books are we supposed to publish? He then reviewed how the total university press book publication has grown, mainly in history and literature. This prompted more questions: should university presses compete with the big players? Should university presses publish textbooks to gain surplus funds to offset monograph publishing deficits? How trendy can one be and still be a scholarly press?

Quality is a not isolatable perception by those capable of ascertaining value to pay a price and receive value to offset the cost. Quality is in the mind of the consumer.

Richard Wood, Senior Vice President for Business Development, UMI

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Dick Wood observed the recent phenomena of the blurring of the lines between the various groups within the information community. Everyone wants to be in everyone else's box. Therefore, the creeping instability in the marketplace is due to a competition for resources with technology bringing in another new arena of competition. UMI has installed a Quality First Program in an attempt to maintain its market position.

Dick posed several questions that management must answer in order to deal with the decade of the 1990s: in managing change itself, speed is geometrical so what is the timing of success? How do we husband investments? Can management be patient and maintain a steady hand? Will SGML ever become a reality?

William V. D'Antonio, Executive Director, American Sociological Association

After reviewing all the vital statistics on ASA's membership and publishing program, D'Antonio admitted that the ASA "can publish a very nice book but we don't know how to market it." The Society has a university press perform most publishing functions. ASA is concerned over the price of textbooks which has doubled over recent years.

Karen Hunter, Vice President and Assistant to the Chair, Elsevier Science Publications

While moderator of the publisher panel, Hunter did "add my own 2 cents to the discussion." During that time, Karen stated that this (1991) would be the last year of the large price increases in journals and that there is a real need to create a model for pricing

of networking and resource sharing.

Lee Edwards, Vice Chair, National Commission on Libraries and Information Services (NCLIS)

Last, but not least, Lee Edwards addressed the roundtable about the struggle that has been going on between the White House and Congress on what should be the direction of U.S. information policy. Lee posed three questions that are at the heart of that debate:

1. Should electronic information products be treated like paper?
2. How should the price of good information products be determined?
3. Should individual agencies versus the OMB have the final say about government information policy?

Lee noted that U.S. policy formulation will impact ultimately on the policies of every other nation as the U.S. is the single largest producer of information in the world. Information may very well be our most valuable national resource.

NCLIS believes that a philosophical framework is needed to formulate an information policy and has created a set of principles for guidelines. Briefly, those eight principles are:

1. The public has the right of access to public information.
2. The Federal Government should guarantee the integrity and preservation of public information, regardless of its format.
3. The Federal Government should guarantee the dissemination, reproduction, and redistribution of public information.
4. The Federal Government should safeguard the privacy of persons who use or request information, as well as persons

about whom information exists in government records.

5. The Federal Government should ensure a wide diversity of sources of access, private as well as governmental, to public information.

6. The Federal Government should not allow cost to obstruct the people's access to public information.

7. The Federal Government should ensure that information about government information is easily available and in a single index accessible in a variety of formats.

8. The Federal Government should guarantee the public's access to public information, regardless of where they live and work, through national networks and programs like the Depository Library Program.

As you might imagine, the 1990 SSP Management Roundtable was filled with information and opinion. It was also filled with a very positive and upbeat attitude among the participants. All I could provide you with here were each speaker's major points. What's lacking are corridor conversations and dialogue between speaker and audience. Perhaps you'll come to the next one and experience all that for yourself. If this Roundtable is indicative of things to come, I heartily recommend it. ☛