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And They Were There — Reports of Meetings

IFLA Library Consortium Preconference and ACRL Tenth National Conference

Column Editor: **Sever Bordeianu** <sbordeia@unm.edu>

IFLA Library Consortium Preconference

Boston Public Library, August 16-17, 2001

Developed and Sponsored by NELINET, Co-sponsored by the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) and the IFLA General Research Libraries and Management and Technology Divisions of IFLA

Report by **Penny Bealle** (Collection Development and Management Librarian, Adelphi University, Garden City, NY 11530; Phone: 516-877-3522) <bealle@adelphi.edu>

Diversity Reigns but A Common Goal Prevails

Merryl Penson, (Executive Director for Library Services, GALILEO, Georgia), noted that consortia are as diverse as snowflakes. Diversity definitely reigned throughout the preconference. Attendees hailed from about twenty-five countries (including Uzbekistan, Finland, and South Africa), and included librarians, consortia employees, publishers, and vendors. Consortia types ranged from coordinated national efforts to regional concerns, and from consortia that serve all types of libraries to those that serve specific communities such as law libraries. The programs ranged from discussions of administrative issues to technology issues, and from licensing concerns to the challenges faced by consortia in new democracies such as South Africa and Eastern Europe countries. Whether you sought a better understanding of how to improve your consortia, efficiently license electronic resources, or effectively market to consortia — this preconference offered something for everyone, including delicious lunches that satisfied diverse tastes!

Even in this diverse landscape the programs were linked by a common goal: How can library-consortia-vendor networks provide increased access to electronic resources in an economically sustainable manner? To accomplish this feat consortia finesse their way through a jungle of cost, technology, and intellectual property issues. Considering the current emphasis on electronic resources, it is not surprising that, although library consortia provide diverse services, the topic that dominated this conference was consortia as they relate to electronic resources.

During the opening talk, "Library Consortia: How Did We Get Here? Where Are We Going?" **Arnold Hirshon**, (Executive Director, NELINET), pondered if the library-consortia-vendor triad was a Bermuda Triangle or a ménage à trois. Libraries require favorable prices, services, and licensing agreements; consortia must negotiate these terms with vendors, which are often operating in a for-profit environment. In addition, **Hirshon** believes that consortia should expand their role by offering more value-added services, such as electronic serials management.

Hirshon and other speakers discussed administrative issues such as governance, management, budgets, and funding. **Kate Nevins**,

(Executive Director, SOLINET), identified three main types of consortia: 1) loosely federated groups; 2) highly organized consortia with formally defined missions; and 3) government consortia with mandated missions. Although **Hirshon** had described consortia in terms of these three types in the past, he currently views consortia as organisms that continually evolve depending on membership needs and other variables. Of course, these variables include aspects of governance, funding, and membership, so the ideas of **Nevins** and **Hirshon** have significant overlap.

Other speakers analyzed how political and social landscapes influence consortia. **Joan Rapp** (Executive Director, University Libraries, University of Cape Town, South Africa), explained that although South Africa's apartheid political system was gone, numerous social structures, including the education system, still reflect apartheid. In addition, the extreme currency fluctuations in South Africa have significantly diminished the buying power for all goods, including information resources. **Rapp** seized the opportunity to urge vendors that if they wish to participate in the potentially huge South African market, they must devise a pricing standard that relates to the pricing realities there.

Licensing options, just like governance and funding, are also closely wedded to social and political structures. Canada and the United Kingdom, nations with strong traditions of government funding for social programs, each reported successes with national licensing initiatives. **Warren Holder**, (Electronic Information Resources Coordinator, University of Toronto), and **Deb deBruijn**, (Executive Director, Canadian National Site Licensing Project), described some successful provincial and national licenses for electronic resources. While consortia licenses are often cost-effective, **Holder** emphasized that they are time-consuming and some institutions license independently to gain quicker access to electronic collections. **Alicia Wise**, (Assistant Director, Distributed National Electronic Resource-DNER, Joint Information Systems Committee-JISC), described aspects of licensing national electronic collections in the United Kingdom. **DNER** licenses many international electronic resources and **Wise** shared her "pet

peeves." She stated firmly but kindly that vendors need to understand that certain conditions are absolutely required in today's information landscape. For example, licenses must allow access for walk-in users and accommodate international differences in education and legal systems.

Tom Sanville, (Executive Director, OhioLINK), reported that the usage statistics from electronic journals at OhioLINK demonstrate that the availability of a wide-range of titles stimulates use. Therefore, the desire for more access is well documented, but more access is not economically sustainable because prices are currently increasing faster than inflation rates and library budget increases. **Sanville** therefore advocates that if prices continue to increase beyond any reasonable measure, libraries and consortia may need to cancel subscriptions to emphasize to the sellers that the current model of price increases is unsustainable.

Margaret Landesman, (Head, Collection Development, University of Utah), also stressed that libraries need to promote economically sustainable models. She described how current procedures send the wrong message to publishers. Consortia prefer to negotiate deals with big publishers, because it is more cost effective than negotiating deals for lower priced items. Libraries also often find it more efficient to work with one consortium that can license many products than with numerous small publishers. Therefore, we erroneously send the message that high prices are better. **Landesman** proposed not only that we support smaller publishers and alternative efforts such as

SPARC (Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition), but also that the speed at which

the pool of information is growing needs to slow down. Can the tenure process be re-evaluated so that faculty are encouraged to publish fewer high quality items rather than numerous items of mediocre quality? See **Margaret Landesman** and **Johann Van Reenen**, "Consortia vs. Reform: Creating Congruence." *The Journal of Electronic Publishing*, December 2000, vol. 6, issue 2. <http://www.press.umich.edu/jep/06-02/landesman.html>.

In addition to cost and intellectual property issues, technology issues were discussed. **Dan Iddings**, (Executive Director, Pennsylvania Academic Library Consortium, Inc.-PALCI), asked, "Why is it easier to create a CD off of Napster than it is to use (fill in the blank) database?" His screen captures demonstrated how online library catalogues and database systems are not as easy to use as Napster or google.com because no two systems are very much alike. To emphasize his point he pro-

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vided an entertaining demonstration of inconsistencies in some library catalogues. He identified this as one of several technology hurdles to be crossed as we strive for an information environment with cross-domain searching and linking. **Andrea Volgin**, founder of **Adamant Media**, (www.elibron.com) discussed another technological issue that concerns library consortia—e-book technology. **Volgin** earned his free advertising with a provocative presentation. Citing inefficiencies in the print-then-sell orientation of the book trade, **Volgin** views e-books as an opportunity to revolutionize the book industry. He believes that the winning technology will be print-on-demand, not e-books that are read with an electronic device. To this end, he envisions a future with printing booths, which could be installed

for about \$25,000 each, in locations such as libraries and airports. Rather than purchasing, processing, and storing books, libraries could reallocate some costs to a print-on-demand service. With his entrepreneurial panache, **Volgin** therefore provided a partial answer to **Hirshon's** opening question, "Where Are We Going?"

David Kohl, (Dean and University Librarian, **University of Cincinnati**), the last speaker, provided a broader answer. He explained how the library-consortia partnership has effectively addressed the cost, technology, and intellectual property problems facing libraries. He therefore urged that libraries continue providing the steadfast support that is necessary for consortia to craft creative solutions to these central problems.

For information on the speakers and conference presentations see the **NELINET** Website: <http://www.nelinet.net/conf/ifla/ifla.htm>.

ACRL X National Conference "Crossing the Divide" Denver, CO, March 15-18, 2001

Report by **Virginia Seiser** (University of New Mexico)

The *Association of College and Research Libraries* held its tenth National Conference in Denver on March 15-18, 2001. The theme of the conference, *Crossing the Divide*, was a play on the phrase "digital divide" juxtaposed with the conference location, near the geographic continental divide. However, whereas the Rocky Mountain crest separates the headwaters of great rivers flowing toward opposite coasts to empty into different oceans, the digital divide concerns the merging of two mighty streams of data, electronic and print, into one seamless sea of information. Libraries have spent the last forty years automating their operations, keying in their databases, and digitizing their collections. Perhaps the crossing envisioned by the conference title is that of an advance party, having blazed the trail, come back to lead their constituents across as well. Coaching the tenderfeet in the skills needed to make the journey (information literacy), and maintaining communications with outlanders (distance education) are major concerns. Raising funds to finance the expedition and calming the fears of traditionalists reluctant to leave behind their bulky wagons (and dusty tomes) are part of the story. Fending off attacks by hostiles (in these case, rapacious vendors) by circling the wagons (**SPARC**) adds to the drama.

There wasn't much programming at this conference for the technical services librarian. Of the forty-two contributed papers listed in the Proceedings, over half (24 papers) were on User Services, Information Literacy, and Distance/Distributed Education. Almost a third (13 papers) were on Leadership and Management, or Advocacy, or Collaboration and Partnerships. The remaining five of the forty-two papers were grouped under the topic Collections. The conference schedule punctuated paper sessions with presentations by invited speakers, billed as

"leaders in higher education."

The opening keynote address Thursday night, titled "The Technological Revolution," was presented by **Michael Hawley** of the **MIT Media Lab**. He began by looking at experiments grafting computers into everyday objects. I was on the verge of shrugging off the presentation as a diverting glimpse of privileged techies at play in the groves of academe, when **Hawley** began describing an ongoing project to integrate computers into third-world classrooms, accompanied by slides illustrating the direct impact of the project on individual students' lives. The integration of work/play and the merging of classroom/library are parallel developments in the virtual world. (It would have been interesting to compare **Hawley's** vision with "The Future of Alternative Education Models" as envisioned by **Jorge Klor de Alva**, former President of the **University of Phoenix**, but the latter was unable to appear to give his scheduled talk due to a late season storm which grounded his flight.)

Western historian **Patricia Limerick** was an entertaining choice for the Friday keynote luncheon speaker. She had done some homework, scanning recent professional journals to see what librarians were up to. **Limerick** declared herself surprised that the literature of librarianship did not contain more expressions of anguish at giving up the bookish life for the manipulation of bits and bytes. She likened our plight to that of forest rangers who enter the profession because of a love of the outdoors and now find themselves spending forty hours a week at a computer terminal, doing "resource management" in a virtual world. Had she gone back to the library journals of earlier decades, she might have found more of the angst she sought. Librarians, at least those at the confer-

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ence, are past that stage. The Saturday session was bracketed by two speakers, both of whom examined the future of libraries. Harvard Professor **Eileen de los Reyes** opened the day's proceedings with a challenge to academic libraries to become "Pockets of Hope." The closing speaker for the day, **Clifford Lynch**, Executive Director of the **Coalition for Networked Information**, conducted what was billed as "a conversation" on "Emerging Technology and Policy Trends." After two days of listening to people read, **Lynch's** ability to speak off-the-cuff on complex topics was refreshing. The ballroom-sized hall would not seem to lend itself to "conversation," but **Lynch** held his audience for an hour and a half. **Lynch's** mapping of technology trends brought another historical simile back to mind, that of the surveyor/explorers who mapped the uncharted west and reported their findings so vividly to the rest of the country. Go West, young librarian!

David Lankes of **Syracuse University** opened the final conference session on Sunday morning by asking the audience to think about "what niche may be available for librarians." What do librarians offer that Internet services cannot replicate?" His proposal to link academic libraries around the world into a 24/7 digital reference service, while it was global in scope, seemed to fill a rather narrow niche. It brought to mind the ballad about **John Henry** "the steel driving man" challenging the steam-driven hammer. The Closing Keynote Speaker,

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Sense & Sensibility — Multi-volume reference sets - have they a future?

by **Margaret Landesman** (Head, Collection Development, Marriott Library, 295 S. 1500 E. University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT 84112; Phone 801-581-7741)
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For the past few years, I've felt bad about the sales representatives from major microform publishers who come to visit hoping to sell microform collections to the library. It seems a cruel thing for a publisher to do - to send a representative out in this day and budget to pitch microfilm to libraries. Libraries admire and praise the products, but in my experience, an actual purchase order is forthcoming less and less often.

While sifting through snail mail, I have recently had unquiet feelings of the same sort about the many glossy brochures for multi-volume reference sets. Are we going to buy these? Is anybody going to buy them? Their publication represents huge multi-year investments of scarce resources and the time and effort of many very talented people - but is this a format that will compete a few years down the road? In print? Electronically? Both? Neither?

Microform collections and multi-volume reference sets would seem to have very little in common. Why am I bracketing them in my mind?

Perhaps because what print multi-volume sets and microform collections have in common is the way we fund them. They compete along much the same decision paths and for much the same pot of money.

Library funding, as far as splitting up the money is concerned, has a certain doomed inevitability to it. First the bill for serials and electronic purchases has to be paid. At the beginning of a given fiscal year, there is almost no way to shrink the size of this year's bill. If you don't have a cancellation list in hand, you are stuck with paying costs as they come in. So that gets done first.

Then you buy some books - especially ap-

proval plan books. Approval plans build a consistency in collection coverage that libraries are loath indeed to fiddle with. Cutting back when funds are tight creates a collection with visible gaps. Users experience difficulties finding materials they have come to expect will be part of the collection. So approval books tend to stay high on the totem pole.

What's left after these core expenses gets divided up to make the allocations for each subject, as well as the allocations to audio-visual materials, rare, documents, maps and so forth. These allocations haven't gone up at my library in some years. Nor have they gone down. But at many libraries they have.

So what happens when we get an announcement of a new multi-volume reference title? It doesn't come on approval, so it misses the obvious route into research collection. The brochures and email go to our subject selectors. They tend to respond favorably. But they frequently balk at paying for such a large purchase on their book allocation. Such a set is likely to make a hole the selector judges unacceptable. Faculty, when asked, tend to be less interested in reference titles than in monographs and journals. And a reference title which is available only in print - meaning a walk to the library - seems to be falling rapidly on their radar. The most frequent destination for a new high-quality reference set request is the wish list.

This is similar to what has been happening with microform sets. Visiting publishers' reps canvas subject selectors and come back to Collection Development to report a high level of interest in certain titles. The literature selector liked this and the history selector was highly complimentary about that. They have promised to be in touch with Collection Development about funding. But, aside from certain

topics which are hot for us - so high priority that we find money no matter what or fields in which we have donor funding set aside or are actively working on building a stronger collection - I seldom hear from any of the selectors because they know that we don't have funding set aside for large discretionary purchases. And they don't want to use up their credibility for emergency requests till they are sure they know what is most urgent for their subject area.

Multi-volume reference sets, at this point, compete better at my library for one-time dollars than do most microform sets. Librarians value these tools highly and put them toward the top of the list of desirable purchases. But a fair part of the time, much in this category goes unfunded.

As reference sets become available online, will they compete better?

Many of them will. But online versions of monographic sets almost always mean the conversion of monographic costs to serials expenditures and libraries are understandably wary of placing subscriptions, however worthy, which they may not be able to support in the future.

And expectations are high. Librarians think in terms of paying for content. If paying every year, they expect new and updated content. They don't give a lot of thought to the ongoing costs for a publisher to maintain an online product. This is ironic, given that libraries suffer on a daily basis from the same problem. Finding the money to pay the infrastructure costs of technology and its staff is probably the number one stress on library budgets, but we don't think much about the same factors in publisher budgets.

Online reference works which make it onto the serials and electronic budget will presumably be judged on use and quality data like other electronic resources. Some will do well - others may not.

But if the acquisitions budget does not go up adequately - and there seems little reason to suppose it will - it will hold fewer titles. Libraries will buy the most critical titles, the ones they can't live without, and probably some of the niche titles for underserved fields, or for fields in which the school has distance ed programs or several campuses. It is difficult to see how collections can offer the breadth of title selection that they did in print. Foreign titles, out-of-print titles, and titles from smaller publishers have suffered in print collections and, as on-going costs for serials escalate, libraries fear they are producing "vanilla" collections which are very similar to each other. The same may well be true for electronic research collections.

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Claire Gaudiani, President of **Connecticut College**, took a rather larger view of the academic library's role in "societal improvement" through its impact on students.

While not billed as such, the capstone of the conference proved to be an invited paper presented by **Michael Ray** early Saturday afternoon. The title fit the conference's western theme: "Shifting Sands - The Jurisdiction of Librarians in Scholarly Communication." Based on **Ray's** dissertation for a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration, the paper had strong theoretical underpinnings from the fields of sociology and organizational development.

In it, he touched on the topics presented in almost every one of the other conference presentations, and brought these pieces together in a comprehensive whole. In his paper, he managed to discuss the librarian's professional role, the impact of technology, collaboration with teaching faculty, relations with university administration, funding, outsourcing, occupational status, library organizational structure, the commercialization of higher education, gender roles, information literacy, **SPARC**, the Web, fair use, digitalization of collections, journal price increases, and more, with conclusions and recommendations for action. Get the published conference proceedings specifically to read this paper. Or go to the Website <http://www.ala.org/acrl/denver.html> for the PDF file.