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Lost in Austin — The Golden Age of Librarianship

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This column is about the **American Library Association's Committee on Accreditation (COA)** and not about me, and I do not mean to be self-serving when I talk about the duties of a **COA** member. I have no doubt that those reading this could do the job but would you choose to? There are several reasons for writing about this topic and one is to draw attention to **COA's** work and encourage others to seek appointment to **COA** and another is to show how important we all are to **LIS** education and to the 62 accredited **LIS** programs in 57 institutions in the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico.

The **COA** charge reads as follows: "To be responsible for the execution of the accreditation program of **ALA**, and to develop and formulate standards of education for library and information studies for the approval of Council." (p. 14, *ALA Handbook of Organization* 2006-2007, Chicago: **American Library Association**, 2006).

The charge is brief but two other documents guide the work of **COA**:

The Standards for Accreditation of Master's Programs in Library & Information Studies (Chicago: **ALA**, 2008) and *Accreditation Process Policies & Procedures* (AP3), 2nd edition, Chicago: **COA**, 2006. Both documents can be found at <http://www.ala.org/ala/accreditation/accreditation.cfm>.

From 2004 to 2008, I served on the **American Library Association's Committee on Accreditation**. Ask current or former members about **COA** and they will tell you that it is the hardest working and most rewarding committee in the **American Library Association**. I have not served on all **ALA** committees but based on the several that I have served on, not to mention elected offices, boards, and editorships, I have to agree.

COA meets four times a year, once each at **ALA** Annual and Midwinter and twice a year at **ALA** headquarters in April and November. Before each meeting there is reading and preparation that is required. The reading, study, and close analysis is most demanding (at least a week's worth of work and sometimes more if there is a particularly complicated program being reviewed) prior to **ALA** Annual and Midwinter. Each **COA** member receives at least four and sometimes more Program Presentations (often called self-studies in accreditation parlance) and accompanying External Review Panel Reports plus correspondence logs and statistical trend reports.

The notion that **LIS** education and the **Committee on Accreditation (COA)** somehow fail to meet the needs of students and employers has been explored in recent years and despite evidence to the contrary including the study done by **Renee McKinney** (http://www.ala.org/ala/accreditation/Core_Competencies_Comparison.pdf) and the **KALIPER Report** (<http://www.alise.org/publications/kaliper.pdf>), continues to be an issue to what appears to be a vocal minority.

Two questions come to mind regarding this issue. How can we tell, **COA** aside, if the accredited **LIS** programs are succeeding? And what role can we practitioners play in **LIS** education?

To answer the first question, I suggest that you look around your workplace, the conferences you attend, and look at your own career.

As I look around the library where I work and as I look back on the past 35 years since I began as a librarian I marvel at how well we old-timers have kept up with technology but at the same time, I am in awe of the facility that recent **LIS** graduates have with that same technology. I thought that we, at **St. Edward's University**, were keeping up in decent fashion but recent hires and interns and capstone students from an **LIS** program near us has convinced me that the curricula offered by **LIS** programs now and

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their emphases (not just technology but the users for whom we use technology in improving and expanding services) are providing fresh approaches to how we serve our public and each other, fresh approaches, in other words, to how we do our jobs.

Do the new graduates bring the experience of 35 years? Of course not, but many bring diverse life experiences that serve us all well and we all have to gain experience on the job where our real education begins.

In addition to empirical evidence gathered in the workplace, I have learned a lot about LIS programs by visiting them on external review panels that COA appoints to be its eyes and ears during re-accreditation cycles and by serving for four years on the **Committee on Accreditation** and reviewing each of the 62 programs annually through statistical reporting and through biennial reports. In addition, a four year term means a full review of more than half of the 62 programs (at least 32).

I learned that all programs are not equal in quality just as all universities are not equal in quality but quality is fleeting and subjective. It is risky and wrong-headed to judge individuals by their institutions even as we make broad assumptions and accept, if we are the recipients, the various ranking of schools and programs that continue to be used as marketing devices no matter how spurious they are.

LIS programs reside within institutions whose missions are greatly disparate, hence disparate LIS programs. When the **ALA Office for Accreditation** is consulted by prospective students wanting to know which is the best library school, they are told that the best program for them depends on many factors and that they need to enquire directly of the programs to see how their needs can be met.

How can you help maintain high quality LIS education? You can volunteer to serve on an external review panel (<http://www.ala.org/ala/accreditation/accreditation.cfm>), you can fill out an ALA volunteer form to serve on COA, and you can contact your own LIS program and ask to serve on its advisory board or serve in some other capacity to stay in touch and suggest ways of keeping up with changing times.

Education does not end with the awarding of an accredited master's degree. There is on-the-job training, there are continuing education opportunities (for teaching and learning) at national, state, and regional conferences, and there is professional reading and writing that let us learn while sharing ideas and experiences.

A couple of years ago I was a participant in a forum on education where the theme was "The Crisis in Library Education." No evidence whatsoever was introduced that justified or explained this battle cry because no hard evidence exists. On the contrary, based on what I have seen of programs and program reviews that include assessments from students, graduates, and employers, we may be in a golden age of library education but are too close to it to see it. 🐻

Rumors from page 82

Talk about resourceful and "green" (not just a name!) — Look at what **Kingsley Greene** <green@sage.edu> (Director, Libraries, **Sage Colleges**) has done with some NUCs! Made a loveseat. See his interview, this issue, p.58.

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Bet You Missed It

Press Clippings — In the News — Carefully Selected by Your Crack Staff of News Sleuths

Column Editor: **Bruce Strauch** (The Citadel)

Editor's Note: Hey, are y'all reading this? If you know of an article that should be called to **Against the Grain's** attention ... send an email to <kstrauch@comcast.net>. We're listening! — **KS**

SOCIAL NETWORKING THRU WRITING PULP by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

The group-written potboiler *Naked Came the Stranger* was a best seller in 1969. Now **WEbook** is going to specialize in collaborative novels. They hope to capture 5-10% of the \$50 billion a year US publishing market. They have 700 members working on 58 projects. And with novels pecked out and read on cell phones becoming best sellers in Japan, who knows where this could go?

See — **Daniel Lyons**, "Byte-Size Books," *Forbes*, May 5, 2008, p.52.

PLUTOCRACY AND CONSOLATORY DEBAUCHERY by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Bad boy publishing mogul **Felix Dennis** is the creator of all college guys' favorite reading *Maxim*. He began his lucrative career with *Oz* which got him brief jail time for obscenity; cashed in on the death of **Bruce Lee** with *Kung Fu Monthly*; before concocting the formula for the lad magazine that soared beyond the languishing skin magazine standards.

He sold *Maxim* for \$240 million, but still owns *The Week* and 50 other titles among which are a slew of computer magazines.

The London *Times* estimates his wealth at \$1.5 billion, but he says it's much less due to his LST or Lifetime Spending Total. He says his pursuit of vast wealth "led me into a lifestyle of narcotics, drink, and consolatory debauchery."

See — **Jon Fine**, "How to Get Rich — and Notorious," *Business Week*, June 9, 2008, p. 85.

WILL LEGAL RESEARCH BECOME EASY? by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Lawyers prepare cases by searching old cases for precedent. Circa 1800, **John West** founded **Westlaw** to compile US cases into "reporters." Today, big law firms will shell out \$4 million a year for **Lexis** and **Westlaw**.

Then young lawyers, **Philip Rosenthal** and **Edward Walters** noticed that courts were posting filings online and decided to found a rival. Eight years later they have **Fastcase**, an online legal-research service. They only have \$10 million a year in revenue, dwarfed by **Lexis Westlaw's** \$6.5 billion, but they have found a niche serving small firms that can't afford the big guys.

But at the same time, others are on the same mission: **PreCydent**, **Public.Resource.org**, and **Collexis Holdings' Casemaker** division. **PreCydent** is using software algorithms to replicate human research analysis in the same fashion of **Google's** software.

See — **Daniel Fisher**, "Open-Sourcing The Law," *Forbes*, June 30, 2008, p. 70.

MAKING ACADEME PAY OFF by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Kenneth Thygeson had a high flying career in finance but finally got worn out by quarterly reports and the push to perform. He hit on the idea of online training for corporate employees and launched **Digital University** in 1998.

Turn-over is high in entry level jobs and companies need inexpensive training. His school charges from \$5 to \$60 per employee and the 170 course offering includes everything from stress management to advanced financial math. Classes run from 30 to 90 minutes.

See — **Dennis Nishi**, "Trading the Finance World for Academia," *The Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 5, 2008, p.D5.