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Lost in Austin -- The Golden Age of Librarianship

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Lost in Austin — The Golden Age of Librarianship

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On March 3, 2010, I flew to Oklahoma City to attend the **27th Annual Conference of the University of Oklahoma Libraries** hosted by **Sul Lee**, Dean of Libraries at **OU**. This was my seventh of these conferences including the one in 1987 when I spoke on "Approval Plans In Times of Austerity." Austerity was not the theme of this conference. It was "Climbing Out of the Box: Repackaging Libraries for Survival," but the messages from the speakers used austerity as a starting point, complete with statistics that showed just how hard the current recession has hit **ARL** libraries and, by implication, academic libraries of all stripes.

For those of you who do not know about this conference (the proceedings are published each year by **Haworth**), there are about a hundred attendees from all over the U.S. with two from other countries this year, Canada and Japan, who gather to hear about collection development issues and current trends and challenges in academic librarianship. The format is simple and compact, and it works well. The conference begins at 1 p.m. on the first day and goes until 5 p.m., followed by a reception consistently delivering good food and drink and the opportunity for attendees to share ideas with one another and the speakers. The meeting resumes at 8:30 a.m. the next day and adjourns at noon. All of this takes place on a Thursday and a Friday, leaving the weekend free.

The **Association of Research Libraries** has been polling its members to try and establish some budget trends that show the effects of the recession and that predict the short-term future. **Charles Lowry**, **ARL's** executive director titled his talk "Year Two of the Depression — North American Research Libraries in Fiscal Crisis." **Lowry** cited **ARL** surveys and suggested that, "It is anticipated that the steep decline in institutional revenues will continue throughout the Fiscal Year 2009-2010 with repeated reductions and cyclical need to constrain expenditures. The necessary cutbacks are having an impact on all segments of **ARL** member library budgets — operations, staff, and acquisitions."

James Neal, Vice President for Information Services and University Librarian **Columbia 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 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! 🌳

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and it gets old after a few days. Here's hoping that this ordeal ends soon.

This got **Buzzy** remembering back to January 1978 when several people leaving **ALA Midwinter** went out to the O'Hare airport only to learn that their flights were cancelled! They had to go

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[DOC]

Compensation and Recognition at the University of Arizona Library
 - 1:37pm
File Format: Microsoft Word - View as HTML
The University of Arizona Libraries and Center for Creative Photography advance .... The use of cross-functional teams ensures broad-based involvement in ...
intranet.library.arizona.edu/teams/hroe/.../JoiningLibraryPacket0210.doc