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Acquiring Minds Want to Know: How Many Librarians Would It Take...

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And They Were There — Reports of Meetings

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74th Annual Meeting, PTPL (Potomac Technical Processing Librarians) George Mason University, Johnson Center — October 23, 1998
Report by Kathy Miraglia (Catholic University of America) & (PTPL Treasurer) <miraglia@cua.edu>
See PTPL Webpage (http://www.lib.virginia.edu/ptpl) for Keynote Address and information about PTPL.

Technical Service Librarians from Washington, D.C., Virginia, and Maryland attended the 74th Annual Meeting of the PTPL (Potomac Technical Processing Librarians) held at George Mason University, Johnson Center on Friday, October 23, 1998. The early part of the morning was spent on tours of the George W. Johnson Center which provides a non-traditional housing of library materials (videos, CD’s, books, serials, etc.). The open library stacks mix with a variety of services—banking, food court, bookstore, copy center, computer storage, offices, study areas, and more. The official part of the program opened with the introduction of Keynote Speaker, Janet Swan Hill, President of ALCTS and Associate Director for Technical Services at University of Colorado, Boulder. Her entertaining and interesting speech, mixed with humor at times, gave insight into the role and image of technical service librarians and their contributions to librarianship. Ms. Hill has allowed us to reproduce her speech, in its entirety, on the PTPL Webpage.

Acquiring Minds Want to Know — How Many Librarians Would It Take ...

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I thought for a change I would add a little humor to my column and play around with a variation of the old joke “how many librarians does it take to change a light bulb.” The impetus for this came when I was writing a presentation on integrating electronic materials into library collections and was pondering the complexity of this process.

So bear with me and have a little fun with this. I would love to hear variations from our readers. In this version the joke doesn’t hinge on the characteristics of the librarian, but rather on those of the light bulb.

If a light bulb were an electronic resource, how many librarians would it take to change a light bulb?

☐ One to teach people how to use the bulb. ☐ One to advertise the existence of the bulb. ☐ One to see if anyone is using the light and how.
☐ One to describe the bulb. ☐ One to manage authorized access to the bulb. ☐ A committee to write the RFP to acquire the light bulb.
☐ A committee to review the effectiveness of the bulb and decide when to change it. ☐ A committee to write policies and procedures for changing the bulb.
☐ A consortium to provide widespread and remote access to the light.
☐ A committee to manage the consortium. ☐ A committee of consortia to share information and help each one be more effective.
☐ Well, you get the idea!

If you want to read a serious article about the complexity of managing electronic resources, go to Ellen Finnie Duranceau’s excellent article, “Beyond Print: Revisioning Serials Acquisitions for the Digital Age.” The Serials Librarian 33 (1/2): 83-106, 1998, which is based on her experience at MIT.

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