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And They Were There-Reports of Meetings-ACRL and IFLA Library Consortium Preconference

Sever Bordeianu

University of New Mexico, sbordeia@unm.edu

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Diversity Reigns but
A Common Goal Prevails

Merrill Penson, (Executive Director for Library Services, GALILEO, Georgia), noted that consortia are as diverse as snowflakes. Diversity definitely reigned throughout the conference. Attendees heralded 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 maelstrom. 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 Nevin, (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 Nevin 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 Debbe Brulkin, (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 quick 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 that beneficial agreements 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 demonstrated 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 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 of Napster than it is to use (fill in the blank) database?” His screen captures demonstrated how online library catalogs 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 proposed continued on page 81

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vided an entertaining demonstration of inconsistencies in some library catalogues. He identified this as one of sev-
eral technology hurdles to be crossed as we strive for an information environ-
ment with cross-domain searching and linking. Andrea Volgin, founder of
Adamant Media, (www.elibrum.com) discussed another technological issue
that concerns library consortia - e-book technology. Volgin explained her free ad-
vertising 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 stor-
ing books, libraries could reallocate
some costs to a print-on-demand ser-
vice. With his entrepreneurial panache,
Volgin therefore provided a partial an-
swer to Hirshon’s opening question,
“Where Are We Going?”

David Kohl, (Dean and University
Librarian, University of Cincinnati),
the last speaker, provided a broader an-
swer. He explained how the library-con-
sortia partnership has effectively ad-
dressed the cost, technology, and
intellectual property problems facing li-
braries. He therefore urged that libraries
continue providing the steadfast support
that is necessary for consortia to craft cre-
ative solutions to these central problems.

For information on the speakers and
conference presentations see the
NELINET Website: http://www.
nelinet.net/conf/ifa/ifa.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 headwa-
ters of great rivers flowing toward opposite coasts to empty into different oceans, the dig-
tal divide concerns the merging of two mightystreams of data, electronic and print, into one
seamless sea of information. Libraries have
spent the last forty years automating their op-
erations, keying in their databases, and digitiz-
ing their collections. Perhaps the crossing en-
visioned by the conference title is that of an
advocate, 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 outliers
(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 cases, victorious vendors) by
maneuvering 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 pa-
ers) 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 academic, when Hawley
began describing an ongoing project to integrate
computers into third-world classrooms, accom-
panied by slides illustrating the direct impact
of the project on individual students’ lives. The
integration of text, video, and the merging of
classroom/library are parallel developments in
the virtual world. (It would have been interest-
ing to compare Hawley’s vision with “The Fu-
ture of Alternative Education Models” as en-
sioned 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 home-
work, scanning recent professional journals
to see what librarians were up to. Limerick de-
clared 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-
ence, are past that stage. The Saturday session
was bracketed by two speakers, both of whom
examined the future of libraries. Harvard Pro-
fessor Eileen de los Reyes opened the day’s pro-
ceedings with a challenge to academic li-
braries to become “Pockets of Hope.” The clos-
ing speaker for the day, Clifford Lynch, Ex-
cutive Director of the Coalition for Networked Information, conducted what was
called as “a conversation” on “Emerging Tech-
ology 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 audi-
cence for an hour and a half. Lynch’s map-
ing of technology trends brought another his-
torical smile 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!

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 aca-
demic 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,
continued on page 82

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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)
<mlandesm@library.utah.edu>

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 representatives 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 approval 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 to 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 them. 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 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 to 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 reference 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 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, digitization 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.

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