

## The upside of downsizing: Using BI to cope

By Cheryl LaGuardia

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### *A report on the UC-Santa Barbara conference*

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**T**he Upside of Downsizing: Using BI to Cope," a conference sponsored by the University of California-Santa Barbara (UCSB) Library and the Friends of the UCSB Library, was held March 24–25, 1994, at the Hotel Radisson in Santa Barbara. Nearly 150 participants from 30 states and Canada gathered at this first-time national conference.

The conference theme of using instruction in libraries to cope with a downsized environment was touched on and developed in several ways by three all-conference speakers. Each of these individuals noted variously that the changes downsizing has wrought are not all bad: downsizing is forcing us to work smarter, one way or another.

### **A fundamental change in focus**

The keynote address by Carla Stoffle (University of Arizona) put the new downsizing into context: she emphasized that higher education is not just experiencing a temporary shifting of funds, but a fundamental budget restructuring which requires an accompanying restructuring within the academic library for what we do and how we do it. Public support for education is changing along with changing public attitudes: higher education is under fire as the perception of educational institutions' wastefulness grows. Public funding support is disappearing and costs are shifting to students themselves; although private giving has increased, it cannot fund basic library operations. So "waiting out" downsizing is not a viable option: the good times as we knew them will not soon return.

Stoffle went on to say that the enormous new technological needs of libraries, plus dramatic increases in serials prices, has created an even larger academic library budget crisis. Services, personnel, and supplies are being cut, units are being combined, and we are tinkering with the organizational structure of our libraries—but few have undertaken the fundamental changes needed to maintain or improve service within our new operating circumstances. She supports a fundamental change in focus: away from staff needs to customer needs. This means focusing on delivering information rather than owning collections, eliminating unnecessary programs and redundancies within our systems, and placing the power for decision-making and problem-solving with staff teams at the point of expertise and need, rather than in a hierarchical management structure. She advocates opening up the library organization, moving more staff into public contact areas and out of "the back rooms," and removing patron barriers to information (especially when those barriers are outdated library procedures!).

Stoffle finished her talk with a discussion of user self-sufficiency: what it is, and how libraries can be designed to help them achieve it. She predicts that instruction librarians will lead the way in transforming libraries into user centers because we have the skills and experience to create and apply newly emerging knowledge-management activities.

### **The needs of users**

In her speech, Janice Simmons-Welburn (University of Iowa) recommended the reconsideration of the pedagogical models libraries use. She discussed a "post-bibliographic instruction" model that focuses on the needs of the user and encourages independent information seeking. She also discussed differences in ap-



Attending the conference were four past-presidents of ACRL: Joanne Euster (1987–88), Carla Stoffle (1982–83), Joseph Boissé (1988–89), and Hannelore Rader (1986–87).

proaches to information-seeking, learning styles, and instruction, covering three broad areas of instructional users: on-site groups, point-of-need individuals, and remote users (either in groups or individually). She described the kinds of information management and development techniques instructional librarians will have to employ to carry out our work in the 1990s and beyond.

### The new information instruction

Barbara Quint (*Searcher Magazine*) discussed the progression we have made as instructional librarians from BI (bibliographic instruction) to LI (library instruction) to DI (document instruction) and advocated advancing to the next logical phase, II (information instruction). In the process of outlining how we can focus on delivering the information to our customers, Quint touched on a number of issues affecting academic librarians working in downsized circumstances: extraordinary pricing structures and steady increases for both print and computerized resources; increased user needs, expectations, and wants (to paraphrase: "Let them know how

much you hate the print, too—but show them how to use it when it's the only game in town!"); and the debate over subject headings vs. keyword computerized searching (her discussion of "Bill, Buffalo" and a short disquisition on indexers meeting "somewhere in the Azores" to develop such headings almost brought down the house).

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Eighteen breakout sessions and a series of poster sessions rounded out the program. These went into greater detail than the all-conference program was able to do on several issues, including: achieving user independence, dealing with and overcoming techno

stress, designing library online instructional systems, building instructional teams, working with and designing programs for multicultural learners, providing Internet training, and teaching librarians how to teach (both in library school and on the job).

The conference was very well-received, and discussion is taking place for another meeting in two years. Those interested in a copy of the conference proceedings may order them from Neal-Schuman Publishers later this year. ■