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The future of reference III: An introduction

*A panel discussion held at the University of Texas at Austin,
Spring 1990.*

A third program on the future of reference, "Paradigm Shift for Information Service; Business—But Not as Usual," was held at The University of Texas at Austin General Libraries during the Spring of 1990. Where the previous program (see *C&RL News*, October 1989, pp. 780–799) examined an expansion of reference services to include an entirely new paradigm, or model of service, the third program considered the structure

of services and the changes in organizational experiences in the electronic environment.

The program was sponsored by the General Libraries' Reference and Information Services Committee. The attendees included academic librarians and administrators from the General Libraries and the Tarlton Law Library, librarians from the Central Texas area, faculty and students of the Graduate School of Library and Information

Science, paraprofessionals, and general faculty and students. Special invited guests were the assistant/associate directors of public services and heads of reference departments at the University of Texas System libraries.

The keynote address was given by Pat Molholt, associate director of Institute Libraries, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Her remarks were followed by responses from Cynthia Kehoe, librar-

ian, Balcones Library Service Center, and Dennis Trombatore, librarian, Geology Library, both at the University of Texas at Austin. Their presentations were followed by a discussion between members of the audience and the panel. The three addresses and a summary of audience comments by John Tongate, 1989/90 chair of the Reference and Information Services Committee, are presented here.

The future of reference III: A paradigm shift for information services

By Pat Molholt

*Associate Director of Institute Libraries
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute*

Business—but not as usual

This will be a talk about walls, not necessarily walls that divide, but ones that provide structure, definition, and containment. I will talk about learning to detect them by means other than bashing into them, and I'll talk about relocating, repairing, and removing them. I'm going to begin by throwing up a new wall that blocks your usual paths.

Tomorrow is a new day

I have been authorized to make an announcement: When those of you who are reference librarians on this campus leave this meeting today, I want you to take a good look around this library because it's the last time you'll see it as an insider. Starting tomorrow you are being relocated to the Graduate School of Business building. The terms of your employment are changed—you are being given three months of salary and the opportunity to become an Information Entrepreneur. There will no longer be a reference department inside the library. For the next three months you will be allowed into the library free. After that an hourly rate will be charged. The clock will start when you enter the building and stop when you exit. The rate will be \$100 per hour with rate adjustments made every six months.

You will be charged for loans at \$25 per item per day, photocopies will be \$10 per page plus royalties, and access to the online catalog will be \$100 per hour.

Undergraduate students will be given electronic pass cards credited with the equivalent of one free hour per day of classes (if a semester is 120 days long, the student will have 120 hours of free library use). It is likely this will more than meet their needs, since reserve room activities will be entirely restructured; much of the material will be scanned into online files, the remainder will be relocated outside the library. Undergraduates will be charged for loans and photocopies at the above mentioned rates.

Graduate students, faculty, researchers, staff, and administration will have to obtain information services from the Information Entrepreneurs or pay the same rates as you do. Their inadequate information-seeking skills will come to the fore immediately, creating a quick business opportunity for the displaced reference staff—the Information Entrepreneurs. By the way, the libraries will be open from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

How did this happen? I, an alumna of 1970, bought the library. In the budget crunch I proposed to take the library off the university's hands and run it like a business—it seemed like a better deal than donating a million dollars. The university, I must say, jumped at the chance to get rid of this sink hole of resources. After all, selling the library really only follows patterns already established—grounds keepers, food services, cleaning services, printing services, media services, repairs, and construction services are no longer part of the university's overhead on many campuses. Their fees are