

# Provosts, libraries, and electronic information

## Reports from AAHE and CNI

by Althea H. Jenkins, Laverne Simoneaux, and William Miller

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### Taking learning and libraries seriously

"Taking Learning Seriously," the American Association of Higher Education's (AAHE) 53rd National Conference, held March 21–24 in Atlanta, Georgia, brought together college and university personnel to discuss the ways student learning is at the center of institutional missions and programs.

In an effort to help identify ways in which academic libraries can and are helping their respective campuses with student learning and information issues, ACRL and AAHE jointly sponsored a lively discussion, "Forums on Information Issues facing Higher Education," held Monday, March 23.

Twenty provosts from all over the United States provided rare glimpses into their concerns and their campuses. Community, state and private colleges, as well as, state and Research I universities, were all represented at the forum. Additionally, six librarians were present, including W. Lee Hisle, ACRL president.

Earlier this spring, in preparation for the forum, topics were identified, researched, and incorporated into a document created to guide the discussion. Topics included: fa-

cilitating student retention, enhancing the quality of the teaching and learning environment on campus, preparing students for lifelong learning and career changes in the information age, ensuring access to the full range of print and digital scholarly resources in the future, addressing intellectual property issues on campus, and assuring quality in distance education. The document was distributed to each participant prior to the session with the final report from the Task Force on Institutional Priorities and Faculty Rewards, "Academic Librarianship and the Redefining Scholarship Project." It was obvious as the session opened that most of the provosts had read the materials and were prepared for the lively discussion that followed.

After some brief introductions, Hisle welcomed the provosts and shared the essence of coming together for the Provosts' Forum. Cooperation and collaboration were the cornerstone of his welcome. Hisle hoped the forum would serve as an impetus to build new working relationships, to create a healthy and vigorous dialogue between academic administrations and academic librar-

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#### About the authors

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ians, and to forge alliances, and thus, new programs in today's colleges and universities. Next, Lou Albert, vice president of AAHE, spoke of the timeliness of the Provosts' Forum. His recent work with Patricia Breivik and the National Forum on Information Literacy, and the growing importance of information literacy as stressed by both the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges have made him an ally of the modern library and its importance in today's college or university experience.

### **Technology, libraries, and partnerships**

As the discussion started, Elaine Didier kept the session moving by clarifying and probing issues throughout the forum. While the hopes had been that the discussion would follow the materials and perhaps visit all the issues outlined, three major themes were important to the provosts in attendance and continued to resurface. They included the following: How to continue to pay for information and information technology; What should a library look like today?; and How to increase partnerships between librarians and other faculty.

The first issue addressed was the overwhelming concern of provosts regarding the cost of information resources and information technology in academia today. The provosts were keenly aware of the issues concerning cost and access to information facing libraries: print versus electronic resources, access only to resources versus full ownership, and the provision of information resources for distance education, to name a few. The various ways colleges and universities were handling the cost of information in their respective universities included resource sharing, consortia membership, alternative funding through grants and sponsorships, and technology, and library fees. It was clear to all present that many colleges are feeling the pinch and technology was partially to blame.

On an up note, the majority of provosts echoed a reliance on skilled library faculty and staff making the best use of resources to enhance student learning.

A second area of interest that surfaced during the discussion was what libraries should look like. Several provosts spoke to

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what they believe the academic library should be like in the future. As distance education becomes increasingly important to universities, many provosts spoke of a reliance on electronic resources with the importance of remote access being foremost and, thus, physical location taking a back seat. Dane Ward, coordinator of the information literacy program highlighted Wayne State's new undergraduate library, the David Adamany Undergraduate Library which contains state-of-the-art technology and information resources.

The last item addressed was the importance of collaboration between librarians and university faculty and improved learning through these efforts. Provosts have seen librarians come out of the library to support learning in new ways. Three ways that librarians are collaborating on a number of campuses were discussed. First, the provosts agreed that librarians are providing a necessary service by instructing all, from students to administration, to critically evaluate and choose sources from the wealth of information available. Information literacy competencies and the idea of instructing all to "separate the wheat from the chaff" was a recurrent theme.

Another idea that was addressed several times was the importance of librarians serving on instructional teams. An administrator from Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) spoke of the automatic inclusion of librarians in three-member teams, which also include the professor and a computing services or technology member. Through the librarian team members, the faculty are advised of resources available for subjects and disciplines that may have otherwise been overlooked. The importance of librarians being given instructor-of-record status was also noted.

When librarians are given this status, their contributions tend to be given more credibility and wider acceptance.

Lastly, in this era of explosive technologi-

cal advances, on many campuses librarians have been asked to take on an instructional role to the faculty. Whether instructing faculty to use databases or e-mail or bringing their expertise concerning intellectual property to a variety of committees and projects, academic librarians are rising to meet the challenge.

As the session ended, the group was thanked and asked if similar sessions should

be scheduled in the future. The response was a resounding yes. At that point, it was suggested that faculty and student groups be present at the table for these discussions. The provosts appreciated the opportunity to discuss topics related to the library in a way that they could never do in other forums.— *Althea H. Jenkins and Laverne Simoneaux*

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## CNI spring task force meeting

ACRL continues as a member of the Coalition for Networked Information (CNI), which offers a variety of programs about members' activities and national initiatives regarding the provision and organization of electronic information. This spring's meeting in Arlington was followed immediately by the Educom Net 98 meeting and an Internet2 conclave, which enabled attendees to take in several events, including a joint reception sponsored by IBM.

The keynote speaker, Michael Lesk, is the recently appointed Director of Information and Intelligent Systems at the National Science Foundation.

Lesk, who is on leave from Bellcore, presented a panoply of digital facts and wondered what humans will make of all of our information capacity. Dialog's databases contain 9.2 terabytes, Lexis 5.9; the Library of Congress contains 20 terabytes worth of books and 3,000 altogether when graphics are included. Amateur photographers create 520,000 terabytes each year, or 520 petabytes. If we saved all phone calls in the United States, there would be 4,000 petabytes each year.

On the other hand, the average human has a memory of about 200 megabytes and could take in 2 gigabytes of information during a lifetime, assuming that nothing was forgotten. How far should we go in archiving, and how will we use it all? Most of the data sent back from space flights sits forever unused. Librarians, Lesk says, are more important than ever as we attempt to organize masses of information and help people to use it.

The heart of CNI is the multitude of small

breakout sessions. In addition to the obligatory Internet2 updates, there were a variety of breakout sessions covering activities at individual institutions, such as the University of Michigan's Digital Library Initiatives program—an integrated activity of the library and campus information technology services with 18 full-time employees—and the University of Southern California's reorganization of library and information technology services under the leadership of Jerry Campbell; group activities, such as digitizing college archives at the Five Colleges Consortium of Western Massachusetts; and reports on a variety of CNI-related projects, such as the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC), which is trying to provide alternatives to high-priced traditional publishing in ways that suit scholarship and intellectual property rights, and CNI's "Assessing the Academic Networked Environment" project, which is looking for assessment measures in areas such as user support and network use.

One interesting aspect of the sessions was the number that focused on humanities activities—such as the Art Museum Image Consortium (AMICO), a network of large art museums formed to build a large, digital multimedia library of documentation of works of art for educational use—and the Arts and Humanities Data Services project (AHDS), the British government-funded project which collects, preserves, and encourages the use of digital resources in the humanities. Such sessions indicate clearly that CNI, and networked information in general, is now of equal importance in all areas of scholarly activity.— *William Miller*