

The President's Discussion Forum at Midwinter

Exploring a world of values

by Pamela Moffett Padley

A CRL President Helen Spalding's theme, "New Realities, New Relationships," invites the exploration of educational and research challenges across borders. The President's Discussion Forum at the Midwinter Meeting brought together a panel of three librarians, representing Canada, the United States, and Mexico, to examine the major issues facing academic and research libraries in their prospective countries.

Concerns of academic library administrators

Bob Seal, university librarian at Texas Christian University, began the discussion by offering four issues of concern to those in academic library administration: 1) assessment; 2) a new model for the college and university library; 3) support for distance and online education; and 4) the role of the academic library in its parent institution.

Assessment, whether through homegrown questionnaires, focus groups, or a standardized instrument like LibQUAL, must include follow-through and reporting to stakeholders in order to be truly effective and to improve user satisfaction and perceptions.

The new library model includes an information commons, cybercafé, noisy zones for group study, and staff who consider that students and faculty are not an interruption but rather their reason for being there. Successful

academic librarians in the new model are innovative, risk-taking, enthusiastic, and "impatient," questioning traditional methods. He encouraged us all to "not only think out of the box, but get out of the box."

The Internet and advances in computer technology have propelled e-learning to the point that entire degree programs are now available via the Web. Libraries are expected to provide equal or comparable services to all students, yet institutions do not always enlist the library's help or even inform the library when a new distance education program has been initiated. It is critical for the library to take the initiative, serve on campus curriculum and e-learning committees, and partner with faculty and administrators to ensure the success of new programs.

Lastly, Seal asserted that the library staff must become more visible and engaged on campus in order to enhance the institutional role of the academic library. He urged library staff to attend convocation, march in graduation exercises, eat in the faculty-staff dining room, and volunteer for charitable events. He stressed that "this is not just the director's job," but something that all librarians and many staff can do.

Librarianship in Mexico

Alvaro Quijano, director at Biblioteca Daniel Cosío Villegas El Colegio de México, offered a general overview of Mexican librarianship,

About the author

Pamela Moffett Padley is senior catalog librarian at the University of Maryland-Baltimore County, e-mail: padley@umbc.edu

which illustrated challenges far different from those faced in the United States and Canada.

In a country of 100 million inhabitants, less than 1 percent are students in higher education. Less than 1 percent of Mexico's population has Internet access. Eight colleges provide library education at the bachelor's level; an MLS is not required to serve as a librarian. Of approximately 1,000 Mexican librarians, less than 100 hold an MLS and around ten have Ph.D.s. Only two schools in Mexico offer graduate programs in librarianship—one public (MLS and Ph.D.) and one private (MLS only). Most library degrees are conferred in the United States, while some are from the U.K. and Spain. There is no national bibliography and no union catalog. The Internet is the first choice for research sources. Recruitment to the profession is a key challenge.

Quijano observed that Mexico's long-shared border with the United States offers opportunities for collaboration, technology, and information exchange. Collaboration with the United States and Canada is now critical as Mexico seeks to develop standards for librarianship and to enhance the visibility and role of librarians and libraries in Mexico. "We need to share for our users," concluded Quijano. "We need to share with our partners, we need to share materials, but mostly, we need to share knowledge."

The challenges of Canadian libraries

John Teskey, director of libraries at the University of New Brunswick, described very dif-

ferent geographic, economic, legislative challenges. With 32 million citizens spread over 9 million square kilometers, Canada has been described as having "too much geography and too little history." Budget constraints and geographic distance have necessitated collaboration. With the exchange rate near \$1.52 Canadian to U.S. dollars, Canadian libraries' purchasing power has dropped sharply. Eighty percent of material purchased is either priced in U.S. dollars or originates in the United States. These limitations present challenges in collecting a full range of material.

Teskey described the legislative landscape and how Canadian academic and research libraries are joining to compete on a larger scale for limited federal funds. In Canada, education is a provincial responsibility, with funds coming from the federal government. One new federal program, the Canada Foundation for Innovation, funded \$20 million for a collaborative proposal signed by 64 university presidents across ten provinces with the goal of providing researchers across the country with unfettered access to the research literature. Negotiating as a national body has enhanced the four regional academic associations' ability to effect change.

Questions and comments from the audience focused on several themes, including diversity rates, language barriers, multicultural communities, cross-border security, hiring and exchange programs across borders, and resource sharing. ■

("Who's afraid . . ." continued from page 248)

of information literacy 'remains confined within the LIS discipline.' High-quality, course-integrated, curriculum-wide information literacy will not come from guarding the territory of library instruction . . . but rather from approaches that empower faculty, 'teach the teacher,' and cause librarians to 'break out of the library building and socialize with the faculty' wherever they teach."⁷

The act of "building coalitions for information literacy" should mark the first step in developing successful information literacy programs. However, a coalition is by definition a temporary alliance initially brought together for joint actions or goals. A coalition for information literacy is a partnership that needs to evolve beyond its founding objectives to meet expanding and sometimes permanent needs. The

success of the collaboration will depend on whether or not *all* the voices involved in the collaborative process are heard and respected.

Notes

1. Cerise Oberman, introduction to *Information Literacy Instruction Theory and Practice*, by Esther Grassian and Joan Kaplowitz (New York: Neal Schuman Publishers, 2002): xxix.

2. Jean Caspers and Katy Lenn, "The Future of Collaboration between Librarians and Teaching Faculty." *The Collaborative Imperative: Librarians and Faculty Working Together in the Information Universe* (Chicago: ALA, 2000): 149.

3. *Ibid.*, 151.

4. ALA. "Special Presidential Committee on Information Literacy Community Partnerships

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