

Larry Hardesty

Stranger in a promising land

An ACRL liaison at work

Having attended almost all of the ALA and ACRL conferences over the past quarter century, seldom do I get on an elevator or ride up an escalator at one of the conferences and not see someone I know. In attending the National Resource Center's recent "25th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience" held in late February in Atlanta, however, I had a much different experience. From the more than 1,650 attendees, representing 575 institutions and four foreign countries, I knew only a handful of people. Time after time I walked into a session and found myself looking around for a familiar face and not finding one. I definitely felt like a stranger.

Nevertheless, I found the conference extremely interesting and the presenters and attendees most receptive to this "lonely" librarian. Alan Guskin (distinguished university professor and president emeritus from Antioch University and former president and chancellor of that institution) set the welcoming tone in his opening address, "Facing the Future: Creating a Vital Campus in Time of Restricted Resources."

Librarians are the key

Academic librarians should recognize Guskin because he spoke at both the 13th and 14th ACRL National Conferences. This time he spoke not to an audience of librarians, but to an audience largely consisting of student affairs staff, classroom faculty members, academic administrators, enrollment managers, counselors, and a few students. The audience contained probably at most a half a dozen librarians. Nevertheless, near the end of his talk, Guskin told the audience that in recognizing the need for new roles in the

face of restricted resources and opportunities presented by technology, "The library is one of the keys to all of this. Librarians are way ahead of the rest of you!" John Gardner (founder of the first-year experience movement) told me later that he thought that was the quote of the conference.

It only gets better! At a plenary session later in the conference, Susan Komives, (program director of the College Student Development Graduate Program at the University of Maryland) spoke on "Transitions, Learning, and Leadership Identity" and mentioned the "wonderful role of librarians" in working with their colleagues in fostering student development and achievement. She said, "What would we do without them [librarians]?"

The praise for librarians continued even to the end of the conference. The conference ended with a town meeting of the participants in which they discussed ideas and information presented at the conference. During the dialogue, a student attendee spontaneously volunteered, "Librarians do work hard for us, and we don't always appreciate the hard work."

I am most grateful to the late Ilene Rockman, who recommended John Gardner as a speaker at the 13th ACRL National Conference. At the end of his talk at that conference, Gardner offered to have the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition publish a book on the integration of the library in the first-year experience. I am currently editing that book. Many of the chapters are coauthored

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by librarians and classroom faculty members, and other chapters are by such individuals as George Kuh (developer of the National Survey of Student Engagement), John Gardner and Randy Swing (First-Year Experience), and Leticia Oseguera (The Higher Education Research Institute). Guskin has agreed to write the foreword. The book will be distributed both by ACRL and the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, and it should be available sometime next fall.

Opportunities for collaboration

For those librarians who wonder what others think of us and our efforts, I can tell you that our colleagues involved in the first-year experience value our contributions and are very interested in working with librarians. They are an exceptionally diverse group of individuals who share an interest in the academic success and personal development of students.

Example sessions that caught my attention include: “The Librarian Commons: Student Success through Institutional Collaboration,” “Understanding Millennial Students and Educational Resources for Them,” “Teaching Critical Thinking in the First Year as a General Educational Attribute,” “Assessment of the First College Year: A Dozen Easy Ideas,” “Doing What You’ve Always Done, but Not Getting What You’ve Always Gotten,” “From Theory to Practice: Teaching Strategies for

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the First-Year Seminars,” and “Collaboration Across Campuses.” These are only a few of the more than 200 presentations and poster sessions at this conference.

I only wish more librarians had attended the conference to not only hear the comments made, but also to make the connections for further collaborations with the participants. By my count, librarians offered only two poster sessions and one presentation, which is the typical number for the first-year experience conferences, according to conference organization. The first-year experience conference is an opportunity to listen, learn, and share with our colleagues. Guskin had added provocatively to his remarks, “They [librarians] do not share what they are doing because they don’t think we care.” Well, the attendees at the first-year experience do care. I found it a very promising land for librarians, and I encourage librarians to attend and to participate.¹

Note

1. For further information, see www.sc.edu/fye/center/index.html. *zz*

Council of Liaisons: A rich tradition of external relationships

ACRL’s Council of Liaisons carries out a program of in depth liaison activities with targeted nonlibrary professional associations. Organization relationships illustrate how library resources and services can contribute to external organization mission and goals and assist ACRL leadership by bringing information and higher education issues of other associations to the attention of the ACRL Board and membership. In addition, liaisons assist ACRL Board and membership by developing strategies on issues of significant importance to the profession

and implementing them among the various liaison groups and by advising the Executive Director on desired changes in the target association list or needed changes in the direction of the program.

The council is accepting applications for organizations and individuals to serve as liaisons. For a current roster of liaisons, liaison activities, “job descriptions,” and criteria for selection, interested applicants should visit the Council of Liaisons Web site at www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlissues/councilofliaisons/liaisons.htm.