Editorial

Trend Spotting

When you look at library job advertisements you often come across the boilerplate requirement: "awareness of latest trends in academic librarianship." We want to hire knowledgeable librarians who are up-to-date on issues, best practices, and the major challenges of our field. In the course of an interview, candidates will likely display their currency about academic librarianship by answering job-related questions and discussing their skills and experience, and that may be enough.

But what if we, the hiring agents, decide to be more direct and ask candidates to list and describe trends, and what if we had our own list to check candidates' answers against? What would these lists look like?

I have been in the candidate's seat as well as the hiring agent's seat many times. On my list of major trends, I would include managing during times of economic constraint, offering digital repositories and preservation services, designing new kinds of library facilities and print storage, reforming scholarly publishing, progressing from collection to knowledge management, developing library leaders, and rethinking information literacy education. (By the way, information literacy is the most popular topic in our field judging from the number of manuscripts *C&RL* receives.) This list, of course, reflects my own experience and professional preoc-

cupations. How does my list compare to yours?

Understanding trends helps us set better strategic directions and make intelligent resource allocation decisions for our academic libraries. We can learn about trends by reading the literature of librarianship, and we can actively contribute to this literature through our own research and publications in trend identification and analysis.

Our journal recently accepted an interesting trend report entitled "Constrained? An Analysis of U.S. Academic Library Shifts in Spending, Staffing and Utilization, 1998-2008" by John Regazzi of the Palmer School of Library and Information Science. You might ask, why the question mark after "constrained" in the article title? I worked hard as a library director throughout this period, and I remember my libraries often felt economically constrained. And ACRL's 2010 top trends report places "budget constraint" high on its own list. I do not want to give away Regazzi's findings, so read his article in full online to find out why he questions the "constrained" trend. It is available on the *C&RL* prepublication web site, as are all our articles shortly after acceptance.

One of my all-time favorite books in academic librarianship is about trends: Charles Osburn's *Academic Research and Library Resources: Changing Patterns in America* published in 1979 by Greenwood Press. Osburn was a humanities bibliographer who went on to be the dean of libraries at the Universities of Cincinnati and Alabama from 1980 to 2001. His trend report, articulate and convincing, is now over thirty years old, but still provides a model for such reports and many insights into what shaped academic libraries in the last half century. Osburn identified and analyzed changing patterns in higher education in the United States that began after World War II. Massive infusions of federal money for research, the growing dominance of the sciences, and the decline in foreign language competencies were, according to Osburn, affecting the ways

libraries were being used. This changing use called for a new approach to library content building—a shift from collection development to collection management, where currency, responsiveness, and focused attention to the needs of users were emphasized. Looking back at the last decades, I am impressed with Osburn's prescience. I was a humanities bibliographer too just a few years after Osburn's time. Now I direct a library in a purely science-oriented university where English is the dominate language of research even though it is not the native language of the community.

Recent trend reports pay more attention, as they must, to new patterns of information discovery and use brought by digital technology. The trend description and analysis work done by Cathy De Rosa and Roger Schonfeld and their colleagues at OCLC and Ithaka respectively seem to me essential reading as well as good starting points for future research and publication. The OCLC series of trend reports began in 2003 with *Environmental Scan: Pattern Recognition* and their most recent report is *Perception of Libraries, 2010: Context and Community*. Ithaka has been issuing research reports, case studies, and faculty and librarian survey results since 2004. Their latest report is *Library Survey 2010: Insights from US Academic Library Directors* by Schonfeld and Matthew Long. Both OCLC and Ithaka reports are freely available from their web sites, thank you.

While Osburn looked primarily within the scholarly and scientific realm to document trends affecting the academy and its libraries, De Rosa sees the most important trends today emanating from the consumer internet, whose origins can be traced back to the scientific research community, but which has now has stunningly extended itself to Main Street communications, commerce, and entertainment. As I read the OCLC reports, their main message to academic librarians is that we must now serve – and compete for—"online information consumers" who have a bazaar of e-resources and

information services at their disposal over the Internet.

Ithaka looks more inward to identify trends through case studies and surveys of faculty and librarians. I am a bit skeptical about this approach to identifying future trends. Can you really trust faculty and librarians in general to identify new trends? I remember conducting a faculty survey back in the late 1980's, asking if faculty members at my institution would use a new technology called "e-mail." The answer was a resounding "no." Fortunately, the Ithaka researchers are more sophisticated and give us a useful description, if not a future prediction, of what our leaders and library users are currently thinking. Ithaka notes that faculty have moved quickly to online discovery and digital resource use, which is often "disintermediated" from the library.

Faculty, however, have been less quick to move away from the traditional publishing practices of the proprietary and closed scholarly information system. From the Ithaca survey of library leaders we learn that administrators are shifting their priorities away from collections acquisitions and preservation to library facilitation of research and teaching.

At *College & Research Libraries*, we welcome all kinds of articles on academic librarianship, ranging from the micro-analysis of library processes to macro-level trend reports of the type I have just described. We especially like variety, and for that we would welcome more macro-level studies.

What about the trends on your list? With good research, analysis, and writing, they might lead you to a publication in our journal.

Joseph Branin, Editor