

The International BOBCATSSS Symposium

Shaping the knowledge society

by Lester J. Pourciau

The sixth International BOBCATSSS Symposium was held January 26–28, at the National Szechenyi Library situated on the hills above the river Donau in Budapest, Hungary. The five previous symposia were arranged and organized by students from the Hogeschool van Amsterdam, but in 1998, this challenge was taken over by students from the Royal School of Library and Information Science in Copenhagen, Denmark.

BOBCATSSS is an acronym for an association of European educational institutes in Library and Information Science. The name is derived from the names of towns where the founding institutes are situated (Budapest, Oslo, Barcelona, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Tampere, Sheffield, Stuttgart, and Szombathely). Since its founding, the Institutes of Kharkiv in Ukraine, Moscow in Russia, Sofia in Bulgaria, and Tallinn in Estonia have joined the association. BOBCATSSS aim is to cooperate, to exchange educational and research assistance, and to build a network beneficial to students and lecturers.

The theme of BOBCATSSS '98 was "Shaping the Knowledge Society," with paper presentations made on topics subsumed by human resource development, democracy and information literacy, quality, knowledge management, and future roles for the information specialist.

Approximately 275 scholars and students from almost 30 countries and three different

continents were in attendance at the symposium. Presentations were grouped according to the topics subsumed by the overall theme of the "Knowledge Society" and were presented simultaneously throughout the three days of activity.

Assessment and the learning society

Mary Rowlett, head of Information Services at the Essex Libraries in Chelmsford in the United Kingdom, spoke very directly to the symposium theme by pointing out that "... little has been written about the Knowledge Society, and even less [about] the future role of libraries and librarians in such a society." She went on to point out, by way of contrast, that the concept of Knowledge Management has generated a significant amount of the debate and body of literature and is beginning to be taken seriously in the business world.

She then described how the Essex Libraries were restructuring themselves to react to the challenges of the Knowledge Society. Speaking to a different facet of the same subject, Maria Burke of the Department of Information and Communications of Manchester Metropolitan University, in the UK, spoke about the assessment of professional capability beyond the millennium. She described a course module that has been developed in her department to help students consider their own professionalism. This module takes

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the form of "Learning Development Reports," which are completed at the end of the students' final year. In this report, students come to a full realization that ". . . the ability to reflect upon one's own development is seen as a desirable quality in modern professionals."

Clive Cochrane, a lecturer at Queens University of Belfast in Northern Ireland, presented "Information Professionals and the Learning Society," in which he characterized and described the Learning Society in terms of economies in rural markets and the impact of this on society, the educational training and business sector recognition of the significance of learning, and the role of library and informational professionals and learning in the Learning Society. Cochrane managed very well a discussion of the overall transition from ". . . a society where education is important to a society where learning permeates life."

One of the last presentations made during the symposium was by lecturer Pieter Penning of the Department of Information Science at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. Penning spoke about future roles of information professionals with specific reference to the role of the information intermediary in South Africa. In his remarks, he assessed Africa's access to and resulting participation in the information society. He offered the fundamental hypothesis that current initiatives to stimulate Africa's participation in the Information Society focus primarily on access to information through technological infrastructures and do not take the accessibility of that information content into account. He argued that "the accessibility of information content is the pivotal point that will ensure or negate success of current and future development initiatives in Africa."

BOBCATSSS '99

BOBCATSSS '98 was a very well organized symposium, and credit for this must be given to the BOBCATSSS team. Plans are already well underway for BOBCATSSS '99, which will take place in Bratislava on the Danube River in Slovakia. It is being organized as a project of students from the Fachhochschule Darmstadt and the Hochschule fuer Bibliotheks- und Informationswesen Stuttgart. Further information can be obtained at <http://www.fh-darmstadt.de/BOBCATSSS/conf99.htm>. ■