

# The Associated Colleges of the Midwest Conference

## Information literacy and liberal education

by Elizabeth O. Hutchins

The Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM) held a highly successful conference on "Information Literacy and Liberal Education," March 9–11, 2001, at Lake Forest College in Lake Forest, Illinois. Launching a strong ACM literacy initiative underwritten by a major Mellon Foundation grant, this conference brought together representatives from 13 ACM colleges who met to "contemplate new ways of student learning, different approaches to pedagogy and curriculum, and new ways of structuring collegial relationships."

Particularly noteworthy was the broad representation of various college constituencies, including academic deans, disciplinary faculty, librarians, and instructional technology specialists. Other participants and observers included members of the Mellon Initiative Team and ACM staff. Seldom, if ever, could participants remember a conference that included all the "players" involved in curriculum change and pedagogical discourse. This weekend offered a unique opportunity, enthusiastically embraced by participants. With more than a hundred educators sharing a wide spectrum of ideas, it is anticipated that these two days of meetings will serve as a springboard for ongoing collaborative activities

to enhance information literacy on each of the participating campuses and across the ACM.

### Information theory and practice

Mary Jane Petrowski (head of Library Instruction, Colgate University) opened the conference with a keynote address on "Finding Common Ground: Information Theory and Practice," in which she reviewed and reflected on information literacy through the lens of Christine Bruce's *The Seven Faces of Information Literacy*.

She was joined in this plenary session by David Spadafora (president, Lake Forest College) and Kim Tunnicliff (president, ACM), in setting the tone for subsequent discussions on the ways technology is impacting pedagogy and what it means to be truly literate in a discipline.

### A discipline-based approach

Five sessions followed the keynote address with each one building on previous discussions, broadening the interdisciplinary discourse, and providing a spectrum of models for promoting information literacy at liberal arts colleges.

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#### About the author

Elizabeth O. Hutchins is coordinator of library instruction at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, e-mail: [hutchine@stolaf.edu](mailto:hutchine@stolaf.edu)



ACM conference attendees (left to right): Jim Cubit (Lake Forest College), Joy Pike (Center for Educational Technology), Mary Jane Petrowski (Colgate University), Karen Williams (Ripon College), and Sarah Lohnes (Center for Educational Technology).

Session I, "Being Liberally Educated in the Digital Age: A View from the Disciplines," featured three presentations by professors of English, biology, and communication studies. Gina Hausknecht (associate professor of English, Coe College) jump-started the conversation by exploring the challenge inherent in developing a critical pedagogy for teaching the humanities online. Participants were challenged with queries of: How might we develop a critically engaged technological pedagogy? Is the Internet a mall or a library? Do hot links, in making all information equal, discourage independent thinking?

Issues of evaluation and intellectual property were raised and continued to be topics of interest and concern during the weekend. Subsequent presentations by professors of Biology (Robert Wallace, Ripon College) and Communications Studies (Adrienne Christiansen, Macalester College) addressed "Promoting Scientific Literacy Among Undergraduates in the Age of Electronic Information" and "Information Literacy Through Teaching Argument Analysis."

The second session, "Information Literacy at ACM Colleges: Meeting of the Minds," offered discipline-specific break-out sessions that provided participants with the opportunity to exchange views on the challenges and opportunities embedded in promoting information literacy. These were lively interchanges that allowed for in-depth discus-

sions on the different ways in which information literacy may be implemented. There was also a clear commitment to having the librarians and IT specialists as part of these conversations.

### **Faculty/librarian/IT partnerships**

Naturally these discussions led to the third session's emphasis on partnerships among disciplinary faculty, librarians, and instructional technologists. Spanish, history, and education professors demonstrated ways in which collaboration with IT staff has enabled the incorporation of innovative uses of tech-

nology into curricula.

Projects were wide-ranging, including research on 200 years of American urban growth (Michael Ebner and Diane Snedden, Lake Forest College), production of multimedia casebooks by students teachers (Jean Ketter and Alex Wirth-Cauchon, Grinnell College), and innovative uses of software in Spanish (Sylvia Lopez, Beloit).

In addition, a panel of four St. Olaf faculty—two librarians (Elizabeth Hutchins and Kris MacPherson) and two psychology professors (Charles Huff and Bonnie Sherman)—traced the evolution of a 20-year partnership between the College Libraries and the Psychology Department, a collaboration that has incorporated team-teaching, shared curriculum development, and joint participation in grants.

### **The role of the college library**

This session's panel of four library directors (James Cubit, Lake Forest College; Samuel Demas, Carleton College; Jean Dohham, Cornell College; and Jeff Douglas, Knox College) addressed the future of ACM libraries and what each deemed the appropriate roles of libraries on college campuses. There was a general consensus that libraries were significant in offering cross-disciplinary gathering places; supporting a culture of inquiry; maintaining quality resources frequently unique to individual campuses and curricula at a time when the digital culture may be

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come "the unexamined norm"; and focusing on the process of learning through the lens of information literacy. Cross-campus collaboration was considered critical.

With many of the stimulating sessions raising more questions than answers, brainstorming roundtables in the evening focused on the question of "What are the necessary conditions for a college to successfully implement a strategic plan for an information literacy campus?" There was a general agreement that it was important to have campus-wide support for information literacy so that it may become an institutional priority with strong administrative backing.

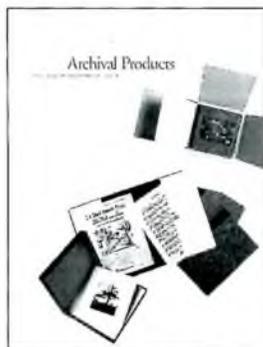
### **A 21st-century liberal education**

Future collaborative efforts with information

literacy will be a natural outcome of this conference. Session V's panelists Elizabeth Hayford (president, ACM); Mary Jane Petrowski librarian, Colgate University); Susan Perry (Mt. Holyoke College/Mellon Foundation consultant); Brian Rosenberg (dean, Lawrence University); and James Schwartz (dean, Grinnell College) offered a vision of a shared future as they explored what it means to get a liberal education the early 21st century.

The conference's unique exchange of knowledge across disciplines and areas of expertise will serve as a model for future conversations among ACM disciplinary faculty, librarians, and instructional technology staff. It is anticipated that with Mellon Foundation support, ACM colleges will be involved over the next three years in a series of information literacy workshops addressing institutional and pedagogical issues. Also, with Mellon support, ACM and Great Lakes Colleges Association (GLCA) will be establishing a Midwest Technology Center, which will advance an understanding of the use of technology for teaching and learning. ■

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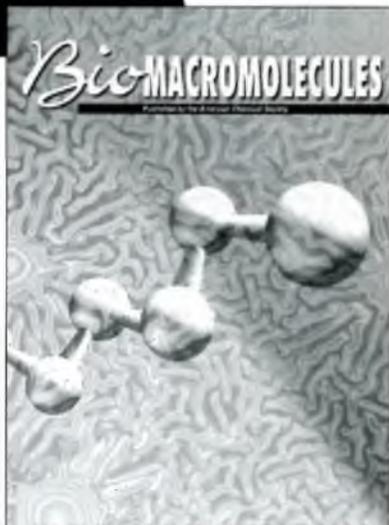
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