

"LOEX" goes west!

By Mary I. Piette and Deleyne Wentz

"Teaching and learning in a climate of constant change"

At last a library user education conference in the West! Linfield College, Oregon State University (OSU), and Willamette University picked up the challenge and provided an opportunity for Library Orientation and EXchange (LOEX) in the West.

"Cultivating the Electronic Landscape: Teaching and Learning in a Climate of Constant Change" was the theme of the conference and a call for papers attracted an enthusiastic response. A gathering of nearly 140 instruction librarians met at Willamette, June 10-11, 1994. The organizers of the conference—Loretta Rielly of OSU, Susan Barnes Whyte of Linfield College, and Jan Davis Tudor of Willamette—planned an exciting program offering new solutions in a "climate of constant change."

Betsy Wilson (University of Washington) set the tone of the conference in her keynote address called "Glacier or Avalanche: Shifts in the Electronic, Education and Library Landscape." Teaching, she observed, in this fast-changing environment, was indeed wrought with slides, falls, and "top of the mountain" views. Including breath-taking slides of Mount Rainier and the flat landscapes of the Midwest, Wilson aptly illustrated the changes instruction librarians face. She noted that technology is changing not only how we find information but also the information and the people who use it. We greet new users with diverse backgrounds, different needs, and demands. Wilson urged her audience to break

with old paradigms and take some time for "visioning." Libraries must be part of the "new, learning communities." Librarians will be consultants, designers and educators—"the value-added librarian."

Value-added librarians

Many "value-added" librarians and consultants continued to extend the theme of Wilson's presentation through their workshops. Such titles as "King Kong vs. Godzilla: A Team Approach to Training on Internet Resources," "The Internet, the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly," "Grace under Pressure," and "But How 'Ya Gonna Make 'em Drink," all reflected the conference theme and concerns. All addressed instruction and just how to teach in the midst of dynamic chaos. Suggestions and examples were many—workshops for faculty; presentations made to the university's presidential council; and classes, classes, classes. The message in many sessions was to limit the size of the class, provide hands-on training, and recognize that instruction will be labor-intensive. Teach flexibility and problem-solving skills to cope with change, for there will be change.

Above all—teach evaluation skills. While students and faculty will be able to join the networks for gophering, discovery, and exchange, many speakers reminded their audiences that there is the good, the bad, and the ugly and students need to know that. The Internet provides much, maybe too much—current reports, cutting-edge news, facts, discussions, and much that is "spotty" and often undocumented. It was noted that "an overload of undigested facts is a sure recipe for mental gridlock."

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Peaks and pitfalls

With much sharing of the "peaks and pitfalls" of the electronic environment, practical and innovative solutions were offered. OSU's Gateway guides the researcher online. The University of Montana partners a librarian and a computer services person to instruct the Internet. Multimedia classroom presentations using Macromind Director can also lead to better instructional materials. Addressing different styles of learning was also stressed. The key ingredient is respect for the learner. Lectures were termed ineffective and more hands-on practice, and cheerleading were strongly recommended.

"Isn't it time to stop confusing teaching with learning?" began the Saturday morning session by Mary Ellen Litzinger (Penn State University) and Randall Hensley (University of Hawaii). Litzinger reviewed theories of learning and especially emphasized that each learner has his/her own learning style. She recommended building a repertoire of choices for each class and trying to vary instruction within the class for more than one learning style. Most important is creating a socially engaging environment where learners can feel comfortable and able to learn. Designing classrooms where terminals are in "pods" instead of rows, encouraging participation, building team-based exercises, and providing materials that allow the students to review another time—all are musts.

Are there any right answers? There are probably many. But being aware and being challenged to consider instruction from a new perspective leads to innovative solutions. The information highway will become navigable as all of us learn to change and try new patterns of instruction.

Having a western "LOEX" conference diversified attendance with more community college librarians and public librarians participating. Our electronic environment is building new partnerships.

Several themes emerged from the conference. First, plans for another "LOEX of the West" in 1996 are a must. Second, Betsy Wilson's phrase, "teach as though people are important," reverberated throughout the sessions. The electronic universe brings challenges and even avalanches, but people are the users and they are the key.

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