# ACRL programs inspire excellence

## The President's Discussion Group at Midwinter

### by Susan Barnes Whyte

Mary Reichel's theme for ACRL focuses upon learning communities. Midwinter's President's Discussion Group underscored that theme as four librarians demonstrated how ACRL-sponsored programs affected their institutions' commitment to fostering information literacy and standards for assessing academic libraries.

Martha McCormick from Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) highlighted IUPUI's efforts to establish some of ACRL's best practices. She recognized professional inertia due to overload, but suggested ways to "push through obstacles to excellence."

Examples of IUPUI librarians' commitment to excellence included participation in the ACRL Institute for Information Literacy during the summer of 2001 and the library's recent reorganization and newly created client-based teams, rather than function or department-based teams.

During this reorganization, the instructional team was dissolved as "an intentional way to spread instructional responsibility" throughout the organization. With instruction more decentralized, there is the opportunity for enhanced collaboration with faculty through the Center for Teaching and Learning, which is conveniently located in the library.

Kathryn Crowe from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) described how the ACRL Competency Standards

helped the librarians there persuade faculty that an information literacy standard belonged in the general education program. Interestingly, librarians decided not to use the terminology "information literacy" on this campus; rather they chose "library research skills instruction" as a better fit with their curricular vernacular. Librarians at UNCG have written sequenced objectives for library instruction for both first-year and upper-division undergraduates.

Jane Bradford from Stetson University outlined the "tangible and intangible effects that have radiated out" from her participation in the ACRL Institute for Information Literacy. Stetson University librarians have accepted "the challenge of being a teaching/learning library." They are working more closely with faculty and with each other, have coupled their mission statement with the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards, and are working on assessing their total library. The Stetson librarians received a commendation from their accrediting agency for the "efficacy of the librarians' efforts to bring information literacy into students' learning."

Bill Nelson from Augusta State, the final speaker, shifted our attention from information literacy to the new ACRL College Library Section (CLS) Standards. CLS was the first section to incorporate outcomes assessment into its standards. Now the University Libraries

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tion of the course. Typically, in course-related library instruction, the librarian has no role or a limited role in the development of the course syllabus and assignments. Perhaps the most important difference is in the nature of interaction with the faculty member and the students. The librarian is a part of the community, not an adjunct expert or guest lecturer. He or she is part of the give-and-take of the class and becomes a learner as well as a teacher. The librarian can shift the focus from explaining library resources to meeting the ongoing information needs of the students in the broad information environment.

## Opportunities for an expanded teaching and learning role

Involvement in learning communities can provide academic librarians with a window into the thinking of students who have grown up with technology and who regularly use the Web to locate all kinds of information, from registration information to airline schedules to recently issued government reports.

Many librarians are aware that this new generation of students prefers using technology in a multitasking mode, listening to music via their computer while instant messaging friends as they write a course paper, but those realizations have not had much impact on the way that academic libraries structure their information or services for students.

We need to learn from students as well as have them learn from us. The learning community concept fosters collaborative teaching and learning, where the faculty member can learn from the students as well as the students learning from faculty. We can also discover a whole range of information needs in a course and opportunistically introduce students to new sources, new search techniques, and critical ways to evaluate information.

While the time commitment that involvement in a learning community requires limits the number of such courses that librarians can participate in, librarians who have had the experience feel empowered and connected to the educational process in new ways and discover new understandings about students, faculty, and the use of information.

## Notes

1. Barbara Leigh Smith, "The Challenge of Learning Communities as a Growing National Movement," *Peer Review* 3, no. 3, 4, no. 1 (Summer/Fall 2001); http://www.aacu-edu.org/peerreview/pr-fa01feature1.cfm.

2. *Learning Community Commons: Sustaining Learning Communities Work.* Online at http://learningcommons.evergreen.edu/, and Kris Bosworth and Sharon J. Hamilton, *Collaborative Learning: Underlying Processes and Effective Techniques.* New Directions for Teaching and Learning No. 59. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994).

3. Sabine Seufert, "Virtual Communities," EDUCAUSE NLII Annual Meeting, January 27–29, 2002.

4. For more information on CNI's New Learning Communities project see http://www.cni.org/projects/nlc/ and Philip Tompkins, Susan Perry, and Joan K. Lippincott, "New Learning Communities: Collaboration, Networking, and Information Literacy," *Information Technology and Libraries* 17, no. 2 (1998): 100–106. ∎

Section and Community and Junior College Libraries Section are revising their standards, as well. Moreover, Nelson remarked that common standards for academic libraries are springing forth from this effort. These common standards will provide a "flexible framework for any academic library."

Mary Reichel summed up the program by touching on a few of the issues framing the conversation about the academic library. A theme that echoed around academic libraries last fall was the perception that libraries are devoid of people. Many librarians disagree with this perception. ACRL and its programs can go a long way to refute the empty library scenario.

Reichel also touched upon other issues raised during the program, such as burnout for teaching and reference librarians, the need for continued funding for travel to professional conferences for intellectual resuscitation, and ACRL's absolute dedication to working with academic libraries in all areas, from information literacy to common standards. ∎