

ACRL/Harvard Leadership Institute

Highlights from the fourth annual institute

by Charles Gilreath

"I am leaving a place to think and returning to a place to do."

"I am leaving the seedbed and returning to the garden."

"I am leaving an intellectual vacation and returning to work with new tools."

These statements are from the responses to the wrap-up session of the fourth ACRL/Harvard Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians, held August 4–9, 2002. They reflect well both the special, affirming nature of the week-long experience and the real world environments from which the 95 participants came and to which they were about to return.

The participants were seasoned library administrators—mostly directors, assistant directors, or department heads. Their responses, therefore, to the questions posed at the end of the institute, "What are you leaving behind, and what are you returning to?" reflected an understanding that the problems and challenges that they had left at home would not suddenly have disappeared during their absence. The experience of a week spent with colleagues under the tutelage of gifted and committed teachers, however, equipped them with some new tools and fresh perspectives to use in dealing with day-to-day issues.

The 2002 institute was the fourth offering of the program, jointly sponsored by ACRL and the Harvard Graduate School of Education (GSE). This is the first year that registration reached its maximum capacity of 95, a number constrained by the GSE facility in Cambridge. Institute participants represented the broad range of academic institutions, from directors of community and technical college libraries to mid-level administrators at research universities. Participants came from 35 states, two Canadian provinces, and one U.S. territory. Faculty for the institute included James Honan, Robert Kegan, and Joseph Zolner from Harvard; Joan Gallos from the School of Education at the University of Missouri-Kansas City; and ACRL Past-President Maureen Sullivan.

Following a now well-established curriculum, the institute provided participants with an opportunity to work through Bolman and Deal's *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership*.¹ Under the direction of Joan Gallos, students explored four conceptual frames for analyzing leadership strategies in organizations: structural, human resources, political, and symbolic. Using the work that he and coauthor Lisa Lahey have published in their book, *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way*

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We Work,² Bob Kegan led sessions that challenged the students to explore how transforming the language(s) we use in the work setting can be an effective means of stimulating change and improving organization effectiveness. Throughout the week the theory-rich sessions were interspersed with a number of case study analyses. The assigned cases were not “library” situations, so participants were challenged to broaden their perspectives to institution-wide issues. Students had the opportunity to meet in small group settings to explore more fully questions arising from readings and lectures and they worked together on case studies that each of them had prepared from their own work experiences.

The quality of the teaching was excellent. Institute faculty clearly were masters of their content, but they also were excellent in the skills of classroom interaction. With an audience of middle- and upper-level managers—people used to having (and sharing) opinions— instructors are often especially challenged to make sure that “air time” is fairly apportioned among students. Despite the fully subscribed registration, institute faculty were able consistently to make a room full of 95 students feel very much like a seminar. Discussions were well managed, lively, and fun.

Harvard staff encouraged participants to disengage themselves as much as possible from their work environment and to come to the institute prepared to focus on their learning—to be, if you will, “just students.” This was excellent advice. The amount of material covered in the institute sessions and the collateral

reading necessary to stay abreast were substantial and provided participants more than adequate mental exercise for the week.

Most out-of-town participants opted to stay in one of the Harvard residential college facilities, which were pleasant if somewhat Spartan. While days, and a good deal of the evening hours, were filled with institute content, there were many opportunities for pleasant social interactions, including three evening reception/meal events hosted either by the institute itself or by the Harvard University Library. Catered lunches in the Gutman Library were provided each day of the institute, which provided participants yet another relaxed opportunity to reflect on and share what they were learning. There was general agreement that the content, variety, and pacing of the institute was just about perfect.

While many of the participants enjoyed and joined in the expected running jokes about our careers at Harvard, the experience was clearly something special for most participants. The institute provides a week apart from the day-to-day challenges we face in the normal workplace in a setting that encourages re-creation. It is an experience that library managers who want to be intentional about their work and their careers should consider.

Notes

1. Lee G. Bolman and Terence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 2d ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997).
2. Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001). ■

Harvard Leadership 2003

Academic libraries exist in a constantly changing environment with many new challenges and many available opportunities. New demands on academic libraries call for fundamental shifts in leadership know-how. In response to these challenges, ACRL is collaborating with the Harvard Institutes for Higher Education to offer its popular ACRL/Harvard Leadership Institute.

At the ACRL/Harvard institute, you will be among your fellow leaders in academic librarianship. The institute is designed for directors of libraries and individuals in positions such as associate university librarian, assistant dean,

vice president of information resources, university librarian, and college librarian. The institute would also be useful for individuals regularly involved in decision-making that affects the entire library operation and that involves other important relationships on campus.

The ACRL/Harvard Leadership Institute will be held August 3–8, 2003, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. For complete information, go to: <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ppe/programs/acrl/program.html>.

Questions about this institute can be directed to acrl@ala.org; (800) 545-2433, ext. 2519.