

# Information literacy and the technological transformation of higher education

ACRL/IS Think Tank III discussion to continue  
with an online forum in October

by Allison Level and M. Kathleen Kern

Continuing its tradition of bringing together experts to predict and plan future developments, the Instruction Section organized and held Think Tank III, a lively discussion regarding future directions for information literacy initiatives in higher education.

Held during the ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans, Think Tank III brought together six librarians and six educational technologists from around the country to develop and present papers on critical information literacy issues at a day-long working session. Support for the working session was provided by both the ACRL Initiative Fund and netLibrary, an Internet-based distributor of electronic books marketed specifically to libraries.

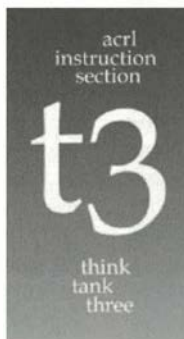
Think Tank papers and discussions incorporated themes regarding trends in technology, information literacy, collaboration, and scholarly communication:

- *Defining Moments: The Role of Information Literacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Construct of Education.* Mark Donovan and Anne Zald (University of Washington) discussed how the

challenges posed by an information-driven society demand a rethinking of higher education, as well as how instruction librarians and teaching faculty will be affected by institutional efforts to prepare active, critical, and information-literate students.

- *Our Future Revisited: Redefining the Teaching Role of Librarians on the Wired Campus.* Elizabeth Dupuis (University of Texas at Austin) and Margit Misangyi Watts (University of Hawaii at Manoa) revisited William Miller's Think Tank II paper (*The Future of Bibliographic Instruction and Information Literacy for the Academic Librarian*) in order to reexamine the teaching role of academic librarians in light of the major information literacy initiatives witnessed in higher education in the past ten years and the widespread integration of technology into the daily lives of students.

- *Deep Impact: Changing Technologies and the (R)evolution of Information Literacy.* Judith Swanson (California Polytechnic State University) and Dane Ward (Wayne State University) examined the impact of technological changes



## About the authors

Allison Level is head of reference at Southwest Missouri State University, e-mail: [allisonlevel@mail.smsu.edu](mailto:allisonlevel@mail.smsu.edu); M. Kathleen Kern is project leader/reference librarian at Iowa State University; e-mail: [kkern@gwgate.lib.iastate.edu](mailto:kkern@gwgate.lib.iastate.edu)



Kathleen Kern (Iowa State University) served as recorder of the event and worked throughout the day keeping detailed notes on the presentations and discussions.

While initial Think Tank III participation was limited by necessity to a relatively small number of individuals, both the participant papers and the ideas that emerged during the working session demand discussion by a much broader audience. Therefore, the Think Tank III Task Force has announced plans for a month-long online discussion forum set to begin on October 18 (see sidebar on next page).

Think Tank III participants in New Orleans during the ALA Annual Conference. Front row (l to r): Ree DeDonato, Elizabeth Dupuis, M. Kathleen Kern, Anne Scrivener Agee. Middle row (l to r): Dane Ward, Judith Swanson, Margit Misangyi Watts, Karen Williams, Patricia Iannuzzi, Craig Gibson. Back row (l to r): Anne Zald, Mark Donovan. Not pictured: James Austin.

and an increasingly "technologized" student population on the design and delivery of campus-wide information literacy programs.

- *Lessons Learned: Computer Technologies as Teaching Tools and Their Applications to Library Instruction.* Karen Williams and James Austin (University of Arizona) reviewed current research regarding the successful use of computer technology as a teaching tool and explored how this knowledge can best be applied to the teaching of information literacy in academic libraries.

- *Justify Our Love: Information Literacy, Student Learning, and the Role of Assessment in Higher Education.* Anne Scrivener Agee and Craig Gibson (George Mason University) explored how information literacy efforts affect student learning and examined relevant issues regarding the measurement and assessment of information literacy outcomes in light of the demands being placed upon higher education for increased accountability.

- *In Search of Common Ground: the Information Literacy/Computer Literacy Connection.* Patricia Iannuzzi (Florida International University) examined why the teaching of information literacy in higher education seems not to have received widespread acceptance and enthusiasm to the same degree as the teaching of computer or technology literacy. She also explored what opportunities may exist for collaborative partnerships between proponents of these two skill areas.

Ree DeDonato (Columbia University) participated as Think Tank moderator and led participants through the group discussions.

### IS Think Tanks: Historical overview

It has been 18 years since the tradition of focused deliberations on the direction of library instruction began with the first Think Tank, sponsored by the ACRL Bibliographic Instruction Section (now the Instruction Section).

In 1981, six library leaders were convened for a day-long discussion to identify key issues shaping the future of library instruction; recommend a program of research and action to enable the profession to overcome obstacles and seize opportunities related to library instruction; and stimulate professional discourse.<sup>1</sup>

In 1989, a second Think Tank focused on the educational roles of academic librarians. Ten distinguished academic librarians were selected to consider a number of issues, including: 1) the state of information literacy; 2) the evolution of new service roles to effectively meet the needs of the academic community; and 3) areas for concerted future effort. Teams presented working papers on such topics as information literacy, higher education curriculum reform, the challenge of changing user groups, and educating a second generation of instruction librarians.<sup>2</sup>

### Think Tank III: Continuing a tradition

In 1998, Randy Hensley, Instruction Section chair, submitted an ACRL Initiative Fund proposal to bring together leaders in the fields of information literacy and educational technology to examine current trends in higher education affecting academic libraries and to identify critical issues and concerns of information literacy relating to technological change.

Think Tank III was intended to develop an agenda for information literacy that reflects the transformative impact of technology on the field and establishes goals for innovative development to meet that transformation. Shortly after ACRL approved funding, the Think Tank III Task Force was appointed to plan and define the event.<sup>3</sup>

The Task Force solicited team applications from educational technologists, librarians, and individuals. Participants were selected on the basis of: 1) research publications or presentations relating to the impact or use of technology on teaching and learning in a higher education environment; 2) innovation or creativity involving the incorporation of information technology into instructional design and development; and 3) demonstrated campus involvement in collaborative projects incorporating information technology and teaching and learning. An effort was made to include individuals from geographically diverse locations.

Once participant teams were in place, each team was assigned a topic and asked to develop a relevant working paper. Working papers were posted on the Think Tank III intranet so that participants and task force members could read and comment on the papers before meeting in New Orleans.

### **Setting the stage for the New Orleans event**

Think Tank participants and invited guests attended an evening reception in New Orleans on Thursday, June 24 to get acquainted. For some team members, this was the first face-to-face meeting, since all prior contact was via telephone or computer. Reception highlights included short oral histories by previous Think Tank participants Paula Walker, Shelley Phipps, Betsy Baker, and Betsy Wilson.

Randy Hensley reflected on the visioning efforts of the previous Think Tanks by observing that Think Tank I determined that instruction is important to libraries; Think Tank II determined that instruction in libraries is important to the educational process; and Think Tank III would hopefully determine how librarians who teach can move into the realm of partnership with faculty to transform higher education.

### **Major themes of Think Tank III**

Discussion in the morning sessions centered

around the appropriateness of technology, collaboration, scholarly communication and a discipline-based research process, interpersonal communication beyond the barriers of organizational structure, and the nature of change in everything from institutional environments to instructional options.

Participants felt that communication comes naturally, but that collaboration is more difficult to establish, especially when organizational environments may not support collaboration across departments. Librarians need to communicate with faculty about information literacy in the context of teaching and learning to get beyond the boundaries of information literacy as a library-only issue. Participants had different opinions about just how transforming the impact of technology is on education.

Afternoon sessions focused on issues of assessment and the role of information literacy within the academy. Assessment was considered with respect to measurement of student learning and assessment of information literacy programs. A recurring theme that emerged was that information literacy needs to be integrated across the curriculum.

Patricia Iannuzzi led participants through a series of activities that examined the relation-

### **After Think Tank III: Continuing the conversation**

Librarians, educational technologists, students, and other interested professionals are invited to take part in the next phase of Think Tank III by joining the dialogue during the upcoming Think Tank III Online Forum on October 18.

This "virtual" think tank experience will make use of a variety of Web-based communication technologies, including threaded discussion forums and real-time electronic discussion rooms. Draft copies of the Think Tank participant papers will be available for public review and comment, and summaries of public comments obtained during the online forum will be included with participant papers in the official record of Think Tank III, to be published next year.

More information about the Think Tank III Online Forum is on the ACRL Instruction Section Web site at <http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/is/projects/thinktank/>.

ship between computer literacy and information literacy and the roles of various stakeholders (librarians, faculty, students, teaching centers, and computer centers) in the teaching of information literacy. Much discussion focused on the partnerships needed to make information literacy a part of the curriculum. Participants also discussed the need for librarians to continue marketing the issue of information literacy outside of librarianship through attendance at higher education conferences.

When asked to identify key conclusions at the end of the day, participants mentioned that:

- librarians and educators need to develop tools of collaboration in order to transform higher education;
- the Think Tank process should be replicated within universities as a way to continue the conversation about information literacy and collaboration and bring it before a wider audience;
- librarians are still struggling for validation in our roles as educators, both within and outside of our profession; and

*(Immersion '99 continued from page 726)*

### **A break from our work**

In addition to our strenuous academics, several terrific social activities were held. We had a lovely reception on Friday evening to kick off the program and meet our Immersion colleagues in an informal setting, and we all enjoyed a wonderful "indoor" picnic at the Valcour Educational Conference Center on the shore of breathtaking Lake Champlain. To celebrate our last evening, many of us treated ourselves to a fabulous dinner cruise with delicious food, live music, dancing, and a splendid sunset and brilliant full moon.

### **In conclusion**

I hope that this was the first of many similar Information Literacy Immersion Programs. Being the first Immersion Program, there were of course some suggested changes. Beth Evans from CUNY, Brooklyn College, noted that she and her colleagues felt that a Track 1.5 would be quite useful, and that more sessions mixing the two tracks could be very beneficial. Several Track II participants mentioned that because of the amount of information given, discussed, and debated, another day would have been valuable to give us more time for absorption and reflection.

- technologies are secondary to the education process; people drive transformation not technology.

Librarians and educational technologists need to move far beyond their own jobs and think about what it is to educate and to be an educated person. Information literacy needs to be a pervasive part of the learning environment. The evolution of higher education demands the reconsideration of all of their roles.

### **Notes**

1. American Library Association, Association of College and Research Libraries, Bibliographic Instruction Section, "Think Tank Recommendations for Bibliographic Instruction," *College & Research Libraries News* 42 (1981): 394-98.
2. The working papers for Think Tank II were subsequently revised and published as *The Evolving Educational Mission of the Library* (Chicago: ACRL, 1992).
3. Task force members were Charlotte Crockett, Keith Gresham (chair), Rebecca Jackson, Allison Level, Cindy Pierard, Laverne Simoneaux, and Beth Woodard. ■

Immersion '99 was grueling, intense, and reminded me that I'm grateful not to be a full-time student again living in the dorms and eating dorm food; it was also an absolutely wonderful experience.

I agree with Martha Perry when she commented, "I would heartily encourage all instruction librarians to apply for admission to future IILs—you won't regret it!"—*Madeline Copp* (Note: Many thanks to the following people for their comments: Linda Fritz (University of Saskatchewan), Jerilyn Veldof (University of Minnesota), Martin Raish (Brigham Young University), Martha R. Perry (Bellarmine College), Beth Evans (CUNY, Brooklyn College), and all the other Track II participants I met at Immersion '99.

### **Note**

1. Many thanks to the following people for their comments: Linda Fritz (University of Saskatchewan), Jerilyn Veldof (University of Minnesota), Martin Raish (Brigham Young University), Martha R. Perry (Bellarmine College), Beth Evans (CUNY, Brooklyn College), and all the other Track II participants I met at Immersion '99. ■