

J. Michael Thompson

Reflections on the progress of the age

The University Libraries Section at ALA's 2006 Midwinter Meeting

That the modern academic library exists in a highly dynamic environment should hardly come as a shock to anyone in the library community. The technological innovations of the digital age have permitted substantial changes both in libraries and in the academic community as a whole. However, the changes that libraries are experiencing extend beyond the incorporation of technology into our services. In fact, the academic library is currently evolving from a traditionally inwardly focused institution to one that is expanding its role and influence beyond its own walls.

This shift in the focus of academic librarians was apparent as the various University Library Section (ULS) committees and discussion groups met at the ALA Midwinter Meeting in San Antonio last January. The conversations and agendas tended to center on the changing missions of academic libraries and the expanding definition of what constitutes library service.

As groups across ULS met, the theme of redefinition was demonstrated in discussions of library outreach and instruction programs, campus advocacy initiatives, the development of partnerships with external parties, and various forms of nontraditional communication and collaboration. Likewise, in an effort to keep up with the needs of its membership, the groups within the section itself are incorporating forward-looking technologies and initiatives to connect better with their current, former, and potential members. This report includes summaries of a selection of the

Midwinter activities of these groups, as well as additional information regarding upcoming ULS events and other items of interest to the ULS membership.

Executive Committee meeting

The Executive Committee meeting began with Sandy Yee (Wayne State University) delivering an update on the current status of the ACRL strategic initiative funding for 2006 and 2007. Specifically, the committee is requesting money to support a grassroots advocacy initiative scheduled to begin at the ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans. At the Annual Conference, ULS will be cosponsoring a lecture/workshop on the promotion of campus-level advocacy.

The program entitled *The Power of Personal Persuasion: Advancing the Academic Library Agenda from the Frontlines* will consist of two parts: a one-and-a-half-hour presentation given by author Robert B. Cialdini (*Influence: Science & Practice*) followed by a free two-hour-long advocacy workshop. The event is being cosponsored by the ACRL Presidential Task Force on Grassroots Advocacy. The program is scheduled from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on Saturday, June 24, 2006 (location: TBA).

The Executive Committee hopes to receive ACRL funding to expand the advocacy workshop into a sustainable grassroots

J. Michael Thompson is copy cataloging manager and acting coordinator of acquisitions and collection development at the University of Houston, e-mail: jmthompson@uh.edu

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program. The proposal includes an additional conference workshop planned for the 2007 ACRL National Conference followed by a series of workshops and training sessions to be held at the local chapter level.

Yee announced the upcoming availability of the ALA Online Community software package. This product will have a functionality that is similar to that available in the Blackboard content management system. It is hoped that, once in place, this software will assist ALA members working together on collaborative projects. The ULS Executive Committee plans to have a version of the software available for testing this spring.

Yee reminded the committee of the ongoing environmental scan being undertaken by the ACRL Research Committee. This survey has been designed to identify trends and emerging issues facing academic libraries. The Research Committee is hoping for broad input from the membership. The deadline for survey submissions is May 15, 2006.

Yee finished her report with a request from the ACRL Council of Liaisons. The Council of Liaisons presently has a few vacant membership slots and is hoping to attract individuals who are involved with nonlibrary professional organizations. Interested individuals should visit the group's Web site for additional information.

The focus of the meeting then shifted to reports from the section's committee chairs. Cory Tucker (University of Nevada Las Vegas) reported that the merger of the Organization and Bylaws Committee with the Policy and Planning Committee appears to be moving forward. The merger now needs to be approved by the ULS membership. It is proposed that the new committee be called the Bylaws & Procedures Committee.

John Lehner (University of Houston) discussed the updates that are currently being made to the ULS Web site by the Communication Committee. John related that the committee has recently been joined by two new members who are interested in working with the Web site, but stated

the group is interested in recruiting additional members with Web development experience. The Executive Committee also discussed several possible ways in which the section newsletter might be used to attract new members and retain current members.

Marilyn Hankel (University of New Orleans) and Bruce Henson (Georgia Institute of Technology) reported on a survey of former ULS members that was recently conducted by the Membership Committee. The survey asked former members why they had dropped their membership in the section. The reason given by respondents included: retirement, increased dues, altered job responsibilities, conflicts due to other ALA responsibilities, and unintentional membership lapses. In an effort to combat the unintentional lapses, the Membership Committee is planning to draft a dues renewal notice. It was agreed that while such reminders can be beneficial, the notices need to be carefully worded in an effort to avoid offense. The group also discussed the need to attract the next generation of librarians to become section members, though no definite action items were put forth.

Rita Bullard (Eastern Michigan University) reported on the upcoming program that will be sponsored by the Conference Program Planning Committee. The program, which will be held at the ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans, is entitled *Use What They Own Go Where They Are: Plugging the Library into Student Gadgets and Habitats*. The program will address a variety of strategies that librarians can use to connect with students via popular digital technologies. The program is scheduled for Saturday, June 24, 2006 (location: TBA). A section social and poster session will follow the program.

The ACRL Executive Board Liaison Janice Simmons-Welburn (University of Arizona) informed the group of the latest division-level activities. She reported that the ACRL Executive Board is reviewing the organizational structure of the division to ensure

that it is in line with the intended strategic direction of the organization. They hope to begin using online communities as a means of bringing more people into the division (for example junior librarians, paraprofessionals, and others who may not be able to attend conferences). Simmons-Welburn also mentioned that the Board is considering the creation of Board interns as a method of developing future board members.

Discussion groups

The Urban Libraries Discussion Group met to review some of the innovative ways that libraries are reaching out to their external communities. Connie Vinita Dowell (San Diego State University) was the first of two scheduled discussion leaders. She spoke of her library's cosponsorship of a 2004 event entitled Spirit of the Land. This two-day series of workshops and lectures brought together individuals from both inside and outside of the university community to discuss the future health and sustainability of the natural environment. The event's cosponsors were the Viegas Band of the Kumeyaay Indians.

In order to encourage as diverse a view as possible, discussion panels were formed with scientists, authors, poets, and artists as well as members of the local business and environmental communities. The event was highly successful and eventually garnered the library a 2005 John Cotton Dana Library Public Relations Award. Dowell explained that the event put the library at the forefront of the university community and showed how a library can use its resources and facilities to become an active participant in the community at large. Additionally, the event served to highlight the libraries environmental collections.

Jeffrey Trzeciak then spoke about the collaborative digital projects that have been undertaken at the Wayne State University Library in Detroit. These projects have teamed the library with other university departments, local heritage societies, and museums. The projects are designed to digitize images and

texts that focus on the culture, history, and prominent citizens of Detroit. Federal and corporate grants have funded a large part of the work that has gone into these projects. The library, which has no traditional special collections of its own, has enhanced its collection as a result of the projects. Trzeciak finished by saying that he would like to find other individuals and institutions that are willing to collaborate on future projects related to the history of urban communities.¹

The Directors of Public Services in Large Research Libraries Discussion Group held a lively discussion centering on the top trends in public services. During their 2004 Annual Conference in Orlando, the group developed a ranked list of the top ten trends in public services. In San Antonio, the group revisited this list and discussed whether or not these were still the top trends. As the discussion progressed, the group moved beyond the individually listed items to a general conversation of the ever-changing role of public services. The comments spanned a wide range of topics, including customer definitions, new areas of service, external partnerships, campus politics, staff mentoring, and performance standards. The conversation was highly informative and truly showed the breath of the issues and concerns facing today's public services professionals.

In the end, it seems that this discussion group is facing many of the same issues facing academic libraries as a whole in the modern age, how do we best position our library and its services to serve our institutions and the community at large? It will be interesting to investigate further the progress our profession is making on these issues when the ALA reconvenes in New Orleans in June 2006.

Note

1. Those who are interested in the Wayne State digital initiatives can find additional information about the collection at www.lib.wayne.edu/resources/digital_library/index.php. *zz*