In a rapidly changing information environment, the need for library staff training has never been greater. Access to expansive information resources is no longer dependent on geographic proximity to large libraries. For library users, access is increasingly dependent on the expertise of library staff in navigating online resources. In this environment, equity of access to information means reliable access to an informed library staff. We cannot depend on the serendipitous sharing of Internet expertise.

Education, Training, and Professionalism
WLA’s Commitment to Education and Training

by Cindy Cunningham, WLA President

In the fast-paced information world, there is nothing more important than staying in a cycle of constant learning. In this issue, you will read about innovative programs and initiatives to offer education and training to members of the library community.

William Bridges, in his book *JobShift* (Bridges), talks about the importance of thinking like a contractor—of approaching each position you have in your library with the broadest, most encompassing mission, so the library will be able to do everything necessary to provide its services. He advocates position descriptions without specified tasks, to enable employees to take the initiative to define what is needed to get the job done. For example, if you are a reference librarian, your mission is to serve the public and make sure patrons know how to use the collection and find what they need. Your position isn’t necessarily to offer 40 hours a week of reference desk coverage and to write bibliographies. In looking at the pattern of library usage and the profile of your users, you may find that you could better serve your public with fewer desk hours, a more interactive Website, and an emphasis on a digital collection. Or you may decide that public instruction and story hours are the services most in demand; then staffing should reflect this fact. If you think like a contractor, you look at what you’re offering, decide where the next trends will take you, and anticipate what your next job will be. You keep yourself informed and trained, so you are ready to convert to a digital collection, develop a Website, establish a latch-key program with homework helpers, or do whatever is necessary.

The key is to stay educated and informed so your institution stays relevant and responsive to its users.

The Washington Library Association takes its role in developing library professionals seriously. We have a budget for continuing education, and we encourage our interest groups to tap into that fund to provide programs that fit the needs of their constituencies. Throughout the year, WLA offers programs on children’s services, intellectual freedom, technical services, collection development, and computer skills. In addition, our two yearly conferences—the general WLA spring conference, and the Washington Association of Library Employees (WALE) fall conference—concentrate on relevant and cutting-edge programming to develop skills and a professional outlook on library-related issues. People who volunteer for WLA and participate in interest groups or the board—working with membership, doing strategic planning, resolving conference planning issues—get a significant dose of professional training in leadership, planning, and team-building. And developing a network so that local issues, personalities, and institutions are known to you is indisputably valuable in being a professional.

I hope this issue of *Alki* inspires you and reminds you of the importance of training and education—it’s the most important habit you can develop as a leader and path-finder in the information industry.

Reference


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INSTRUCTIONS TO CONTRIBUTORS

*Alki: The Washington Library Association Journal* is published three times per year (March, July, and December). Each issue is centered on a theme relevant to Washington libraries. Unsolicited contributions are welcome and encouraged, but will be published based on the needs of specific issues. All submissions may be edited. The Editor and the *Alki* Committee reserve the right to make the final decision on any submitted material.

**Deadlines**

For submissions are January 15 for the March issue, May 15 for the July issue, and October 15 for the December issue.

**Format:** Submissions should be in electronic form, if possible. The preferred formats are Word for Windows or ASCII text transmitted as an e-mail message or attachment (in rtf format), or submitted on a PC-formatted 3.5-inch disk. Hard copy will be accepted if the author does not have other options. Photos should be black-and-white. The Editor should be contacted before submitting artwork. Photographic prints and artwork will be returned, if requested. Otherwise, they will not be returned.

**Articles** typically range in length from 1,000-5,000 words and need not conform to the issue’s theme, although theme-related articles are more likely to be published in the corresponding issue. Unsolicited articles unrelated to the theme, if they are selected for publication, will be published on a space-available basis. Articles should be in-depth examinations of issues of importance to Washington libraries. *Alki* publishes news and announcements in a column format.

**News** of personnel changes, professional organizations, awards, grants, elections, facility moves or construction, and/or establishment of newsworthy services can be submitted, and may be edited and included on a space-available basis. Items that require a timely response should be submitted to *The WLA LINK*, instead.

**Columns** appear regularly and cover specific areas of library service or operations. Columns typically are pre-assigned in advance, and may be written or administered by a designated person. Anyone interested in submitting material for a specific column should contact the Editor.

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Cover by Dawn Holladay.

Cover quotation from “Equalizing Access: Staff Training in the Internet Era,” by Mary B. Ross.
“Is librarianship a profession?” This was a hot question during my library school days in the early 1970s. Positive responses pointed to the difficulties of library work, the wide-ranging skills and knowledge required. Negative responses centered around our working in structures perceived as bureaucratic, and in groups rather than as independent practitioners. We just weren’t enough like doctors! If we would regularly use calculus in our work, opined one of my professors, we could be real professionals.

Times have changed. The independent Web entrepreneur is now our society’s professional icon (though most people—including many physicians, these days—work for organizations). There’s been some democratization of the concept of “profession,” and perhaps there’s more cynicism about the traditionally recognized professions. Rather than referring to specific types of work, the word professional has shifted in meaning to refer to quality of work, and attitude toward work. This is all to the good in libraries, where people at many levels—librarians, library technicians, trustees—are doing a professional job for their communities.

Regardless of nuances in definition, what does it mean to be a library professional in an Internet environment, when everyone who gets on the Web has access to expert information (if we can find it and recognize it, that is)? And if library professionals still have roles to play, how do we become educated to fill them? What continuing education and training will enable us to continue in these roles? The contributors to this issue, “Education, Training, and Professionalism,” have a number of interesting and provocative responses, some contradictory of one another. The pithy quotation on the cover is from the article by Mary B. Ross.

I am grateful for the wonderful submissions we received on this theme—so many that we couldn’t include them all in this issue. Consequently, the next issue of Alki will feature a group interview with faculty members at the University of Washington School of Information, conducted by Laura McCarty. This interview is a follow-up of Laura’s article on the iSchool’s new initiatives, in this issue.

Assistant Editor for Alki

Speaking of professionalism in another context, most Alki editors have been library professionals, not professional editors. We learn “on the job.” And while learning to edit WLA’s journal is a wonderful experience, it can be a startling one, too. Therefore, the Alki Committee proposed, and the WLA Board approved, a new position—Assistant Editor. The person in this position will help the editor, learn the process of compiling an issue, and later become Editor. For the full job description, see the WLA Website, www.wla.org/jobdescr; or contact Louise Saylor (phone 509-747-5307; email 71077.2772@compuserve.com).

Education and Training for Library Professionals

As some readers requested, here’s the Tacoma conference photo of the Alki Committee again, this time with members identified. Thanks again to our conference photographer, Dale Goodvin.

Alki Committee Photo

As some readers requested, here’s the Tacoma conference photo of the Alki Committee again, this
Is library professionalism dead?

This issue was raised several years ago by Blaise Cronin, Dean of the School of Library and Information Science at the University of Indiana. “The forces which control the information marketplace are vitalistic,” said Cronin in his book Post-Professionalism. “They are little concerned with anachronistic professional structures and values” (Cronin and Davenport, p. 279). “Professionalism will be gauged in terms of demonstrable competencies, track record, educational attainment and other empirical measures. Possession of an embossed certificate from a professional association will no longer suffice to convince employers of a candidate’s suitability. We have entered the age of post-professionalism” (p. 281).

Cronin, now a regular columnist for Library Journal, says the economics and technology of the Internet render obsolete such professional values as information as a public good, and service to all. He contemptuously compares professionalism to a whalebone corset, “which confers an appearance of order on a flabby mass” (p. 279). His tables, graphs, and diagrams tell him that the humane profession of librarianship is archaic. He would certainly mock the idea of librarianship as a calling. He claims that we need to put aside our professional pretensions and sell ourselves as human assets to the highest bidder.

Cronin is arrogant enough to predict a future where knowledge has value only as a commodity.

Other observers of society see Cronin’s projections as outmoded and simplistic. Researchers in the fields of sociology, psychology, linguistics, media, cognition, cybernetics, computer science, and semiotics say we exist now in a technically mediated environment where language has lost meaning and is now used primarily to punctuate images, create momentary impressions, promote consumer lifestyles, and manipulate opinions and desires. We live in a world where superficiality and illogic dominate.

What it all means is that boundaries are being violated like a body of work active not passive, a canon not frozen in perfection but volatile with contending human motives. Lanham argues that the Internet has returned rhetoric and restoration of rhetoric to public esteem changes the pestle where public belief is ground out. The rock is ground out. “In a print society, a person has to read and write well in order to gain full access to the society’s stock of knowledge,” Meyrowitz says (p. 75).

Whereas Meyrowitz focuses on digital imagery, classicist Richard A. Lanham, Professor Emeritus of English at the University of California-Los Angeles, directs our attention to the democratizing effect of digitized text. Lanham says that the ready manipulation of text in its digital form—font changes, global replaces, the shifting of blocks of text with the stroke of a key—involves readers of such text to comment on it, change it, or dispute it, yielding “a body of work active not passive, a canon not frozen in perfection but volatile with contending human motive” (Lanham, p. 51).

Lanham sees this engagement with text by readers as a democratizing force and a historic reversal of the canonization of the “great books” and the social structures they maintained. Lanham argues that the Internet has returned rhetoric and orality to their rightful role as the mortar and pestle where public belief is ground out. The restoration of rhetoric to public esteem changes the rules for librarianship. “Librarians of electronic information find their job now a radically rhetorical one—they must consciously construct human attention-structure rather than assemble a collection of books, according to commonly accepted rules. They have, perhaps unwillingly, found themselves transported from the ancillary margin of the human sciences to their center” (Lanham, p. 134).

Cronin sees change, but doesn’t value social changes that fall outside technology and economics. Other observers see broader forces at work, forming a new society that is inclusive, leveling, and self-creating.

Joshua Meyrowitz, Professor of Communications at the University of New Hampshire, elaborates on the leveling tendency of media communications. Image-based, networked communications demythologize powerful people and institutions by allowing us to see their hidden or private aspects. “The more a medium of communication tends to separate what different people in a society know ... the more the medium will allow for many ranks of authority: the more a medium of communication tends to merge information worlds, the more the medium will encourage egalitarian forms of interaction” (Meyrowitz, p. 64).

In other words, changing from typeset print to digital print and imagery opens up public discourse to people who have been shut out by the barrier of illiteracy. “In a print society, a person has to read and write well in order to gain full access to the society’s stock of knowledge,” Meyrowitz says (p. 75).

Cameron A. Johnson is a reference librarian at Everett Public Library.

Our job is to supply meaty material, in good abundance. When we are able to see all material as alternative, we are postmodern librarians.
The play and contention of the ideas expressed by millions of people using textual arguments, images, rants, word play, sound files, film clips, and other digital effects create a migrating public opinion that passes for truth in the absence of a written canon, according to Darren Tofts. Senior Lecturer at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne, Australia. He compares this digital Internet arsenal with sounds, fragments of disconnected texts, internal dialog, and leaden puns of James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*. "... [The *Wake* is, in fact, a single, elaborate feedback loop, beginning and ending in mid-sentence, forever feeding back into itself ... the *Wake* works and re-works themes and motifs throughout its overall structure, deriving virtuosity, as well as contextual meaning, from the protean repetition of a limited number of key figures" (Tofts and McKeigh, p. 110). Tofts postulates a new kind of global consciousness, realized through the Internet, in which "truth" is determined by a vast rhetorical exchange by millions of connected people.

If we accept these postmodernist explanations of the social effects of digital technologies, what does it mean for the library profession? Here is what the terrain looks like: The knowledge contained in hoary books is being splintered into a million pieces: disconnected phrases, arguments, theories, references. These are being combined with video clips, images, song snatches, etc., to form a gist for a new consensus-making mill through the medium of the Internet. "The traditional logical mode of reasoning is now understood (deconstructively) to be a special sub case of the larger ‘illogic’ of common sense" (Tofts and McKeigh, p. 118).

Anyone who has ever worked on a reference desk in an urban public library knows that the postmodern library is here. The trivial and profound have equal status. But what librarian wouldn’t rather introduce a line of Tennyson to the soup than the refrain from a toothpaste jingle? “Push off, and sitting well in order smite the sounding furrows.”

"The librarian’s job now becomes more one of interpretation, filtering, and evaluation," according to Gary P. Radford, Associate Professor in the Department of English, Communication and Philosophy at Fairleigh Dickinson University. “What is being ‘interpreted, filtered, and evaluated’ is not which specific text is required to meet a specific need but, rather, on which collection of texts, and the explanation of a criteria which relates them as a coherent set. ... The librarian’s role becomes that of a guide, not only to the pre-existing order of the library that comprises its catalogs and indexes, but to the creation of new orders developed and made possible by the capabilities of computer searching. The experience of the multicursal maze does not lead to a particular answer located in a specific text but rather the creation of new rationalities that define the usefulness or worthlessness of any specific text” (Radford).

In the emerging reality of postmodern culture, librarians who want to can reclaim the professional territory set out for us in the 19th century—being a resource that anyone can use to contend for power. Our job is to supply meaty material, in good abundance. When we are able to see all material as alternative, we are postmodern librarians.

In what used to be called “library school,” we are told that we do not need to know the content of books, that we need not understand what is being said, only how to handle it. But now we must adapt ourselves to this world where the canon is thrown down, where fragments of arguments could be important, and where cross-disciplinary connections could be crucial.

As knowledge and information guides, we must read widely, because we cannot make cross-disciplinary connections without cross-disciplinary knowledge. While it is impossible to master all areas of study, I believe that librarians must have a strong grounding in the forces that shape society today. We are already aware of pop culture; but we also must attend to trends in the arts, and should have general knowledge of economics, political science, sociology, philosophy, science, technology, and history. Of course we must also stay current in the fields of study relating to information and how it affects people. We must see all this as our professional responsibility.

Our classicist, Lanham, says the place for librarians in the information-overloaded postmodern world is in creating “attention structures”—the focusing of scarce human attention in an information society. “Shouldn’t we be after a generalized ability to manipulate symbolic reality? In our society, this symbolic reality depends on precisely the rich signal of mixed word, sound, and image we have been considering ... teaching us how to live within this reality will be the job of a new kind of humanistic education” (Lanham, p. 229). In a world full of claims, deception, propaganda, and ambiguity, arguing effectively and sorting sense from nonsense are crucial abilities.

Despite Cronin’s graphs and tables and determinist, free-market faith, the postmodern era defies reductive analysis. Our society is rather like that predicted by chaos theory, in which complex patterns emerge unpredictably from apparently chaotic conditions. As Internet society rolls and changes, structures and attitudes are already emerging that defy prediction and logic. While the future is not clear, dedicated librarians can find a way to flourish in the postmodern turn.

References
What is the role of education in your pursuit of happiness in library employment? I suggest that you can arrive at your own answers to this question through a process of personal mapping for your expectations and a look at some of the current thrusts from the forces of evil in the educational arena.

**Personal Mapping of Your Library Education**
I am writing this article as a practitioner of community college-level library education and will put most of my thoughts in that arena. Several dimensions of educational activity, however, deserve to be mentioned. First is your personal motivation. Where is this library job in the meaning of your life? It is quite ok to have a life the heart of which is focused on writing poetry, teaching Sunday school, or racing monster trucks. Your library job may provide enough salary and off-time to support those interests. If the library is your job but your calling is elsewhere, it is fine just to partake of enough training to keep up with what your job demands and to put your serious efforts elsewhere. If, on the other hand, you find the library work worth some investment of your soul, if you see it as a possible career rather than just a job, you need to look a little further.

Check out your corporate environment, from your immediate supervisor to your governing body. Are they providing an encouraging environment? How high need you get to be encouraged? If you want to take a class or go to a workshop or conference, can you go on your dime and your time, can you go on make-up time, can you go on the company dime, or on company time?

You should also check out the rewards. Is education considered to be its own reward? (Some of the best is.) Is a training activity required or expected for your next advancement? Do you find you respect the positions your educational activities can qualify you to assume? In your present institution, do you find you respect the vision articulated by its leadership? Given those considerations, will your family deal acceptingly with your efforts even if it leaves less time for them?

Once your map has those environmental contours, it is time to look at your learning opportunities. Degrees are wonderful. Degrees open the doors to many positions that are written up so as to require them. Degrees express other people’s confidence in your abilities. And, most wonderfully, degrees remove the defensiveness expressed by people who, regardless of their excellent knowledge and abilities, do not have degrees. Your learning activity, however, does not need to contemplate degrees at very many points.

You can start learning just by doing what you are told. Doing what you are told from Monday through Wednesday may well let you predict what will be needed the rest of the week. From doing what you are told and exercising a little curiosity (and there are employees who do not) you can move up to on-the-job training. Training, like direct supervision, is aimed at getting you to do what the supervisor wants done. We all need some training. We want to do the job and do it well. Most of us, however, do not want to stop there, where we are inside the job. We want to be free to see what needs to be done ourselves and take the steps to do it. For that, we need education. Education is what sets us free to look at the work from the outside and freely select and perform appropriate actions.

While a good mentor or supervisor may be able to provide much significant education, it is going outside the institution that makes significance most likely. I suggest that the most powerful sources of genuine education are the professional associations. From Washington Association of Library Employees to the Washington Library Association to the American Library Association to the International Federation of Library Associations, there are opportunities to become larger than the space in your own office will allow. From workshops to conferences, from contacts to networking, the associations provide a ready mechanism to become more than a victim of your local circumstance.

A final and major source of education is formal coursework. In formal courses you should expect to confront the contemplation of truth and the exercise of technique in an atmosphere that is knowledgeable and rich in expertise but largely devoid of political concerns at either the interpersonal or institutional level. Further, it is formal education that leads to the certificates and degrees that credential you with third-party judgments of being qualified to move more freely within the activity of the job at hand.

How do you know, when you sign up for a course or enter a degree program, whether you are getting education or mere training? It is not easy to know. The discussion that follows is a response to the issue of technology reducing educators to mere employability.

**Technology and the Commoditization of Students: New Thrusts from the Forces of Evil**
The role of teachers in community colleges has changed not at all in the last three and a half decades of my involvement. Some of the idealism of the sixties is a little muted now, but even our younger teachers are still trying to fulfill a role that may have been constant since before Socrates. Our professional life, however, has changed a bit over the last few decades. The education predators have a few new weapons, resulting from a decline away from academic values—beauty, truth, and especially freedom—towards mere employability, and from the rise of technology that we all actually need in order to function in today’s world. (Your students can show you how to build your Web site. They know it can be both vital and fun. They never bothered with any of the audiovisual nonsense administrators liked to show off in the sixties. Has anyone ever seen a campus-wide wired-in-to-each-classroom television in use?)

(Continued on next page)
Let's look at what for this discussion are the major factors, values, and entities affecting the professional lives of educators as shown in the figure.

First is the largely dichotomous set of values between Education and Training. Personalizing these as Educators and Trainers, we can look at their loyalties and objectives. An educator's first loyalty is to the discipline. The discipline is where he has his access to beauty and truth. It is the gateway to freedom, which he can open for his students. His second loyalty is to his students. The students have to be second because, without the discipline, the teacher would have nothing of character to offer. His third loyalty is to the local department, his most intellectually congenial nest.

An educator's objectives are to set the student free in the field, to transmit an expertise that frees the student to surpass the teacher, to make his mark, to individualize himself forever in the history of the pursuit.

Trainers, on the other hand, are here defined as having a primary loyalty to Big Brother, the institution that pays. Their second loyalty is to the commoditized student who can become a replaceable, retrainable soldier for Big Brother. Their third loyalty is to survival in departmental politics. Their last loyalty is to the discipline to the extent that it supports the other priorities.

Tenure frees educators to do what they do best. Lack of tenure helps trainers keep their priorities in line with those of the predators.

A third group is the predators. They often wear suits, have abandoned their discipline if they ever had one, and are in the dark about the function of the educators. Being in the dark about educational values, they are drawn toward the rational, linear, and measurable values of the trainers and their loyalties. It is hard to measure freedom; but there are lots of ways, including war, to measure whether training has led to obedient efficiency.

A fourth group is the students. While they may be modest and malleable, they are most comfortable as consumers. As consumers, they do not expect to have to change themselves. As consumers of educational credits, they will politely listen to your lectures on how to swim and pass a multiple choice/true false test on swimming but will not be eager to get wet. An educator will lead them to become aspirants, to set them free in the academic water and aspire to swim like dolphins (and where possible, to surpass the teacher).

A trainer will make sure the swimmers can deliver welding rod or explosives without opening the employer to censure by OSHA.

The predators may not go as far as the trainers, but will want some kind of reform to measure swimming ability and its relevance to modern technology.

The interdisciplinarians abhor the cradle-to-grave control and tutelage by Big Brother and the trainers, but they counter it with cradle-to-grave management by themselves as controllers of their interdisciplinary courses. Some serious and talented educators find this approach very rewarding. The students find enjoyment and pleasure as consumers, but are denied their role as aspirants.

Our final component is technology itself. Even serious educators have been enticed to give up perfectly adequate $200 overhead projectors for $10,000 computer projection set-ups. And why not? Technology is a lot of fun. PowerPoint and Visual BASIC are fun. If you don't know how to use your technology, you can ask your students. (And do ask your students, lest predators subject you to the trainers.)

Technology can be an end in itself, much as people enjoy driving or hiking even without a destination. Technology can be used when it is fun, satisfying, and/or educationally appropriate. Technology can also be virtually forced on everyone, and the failure to use it can be construed as failure to teach. Once that happens, the predators have a lever to push educators toward training. Technology forces a linearity and specificity which obscures the most needed "secret oral teachings" that actually transfer expertise and freedom to the student.

We need the evil ones. Any of us may, from time to time, opt for training instead of education. Without evil there could be no good. However, if we are to keep any real education in the community colleges, we cannot let the forces of evil win. Eternal vigilance is necessary in many arenas, including ours. Already my college is giving credit for a course not in a subject or a skill, but for College 101—how to be a student. How many weeks will it be before one of our colleges announces its desire to become a portal, a permanent rest-of-your-life vendor of all your cultural and vocational needs? No longer will we set you free. For only $500 a quarter the rest of your life, we will make you a member of our permanent learning community and show you how to succeed on our terms. I'd be tempted to sign up myself at the first college that has the sensibility to insure it provides certain courses that are purposely kept technology free.

Summary

Look around. Look in the mirror. Do some mapping of your world. From where you are, do those things that will move you toward where you want to go and how you want to feel.
What Kind of Librarians Do We Need in the Future?
Youth Services Librarians!
by Neel Parikh

During the University of Washington Information School colloquium in October 2000, a panel of five public library directors from Washington and Oregon were asked this question: “If you were hiring an entry-level librarian, and one candidate had good people skills while another had good technology skills, which one would you hire?” We all answered, “Good people skills!”

I would go on to add that one specialty we are clearly going to need is youth services librarians, and that youth services (YS) experience fosters and develops good people skills.

While YS programs seem to be diminishing in importance in library schools across the country, the need for them is increasing. And it is becoming increasingly clear that YS will remain one of the core services for public libraries in the future.

Youth—A Public Value

As the roles and perceptions of public libraries continue to change, savvy directors are becoming more and more aware that youth services is an essential core service. The public sees the public library as an important institution for youth. In fact, recent data shows that most library users were introduced to the library as children, and return as regular library users when they become parents. The public may go to the Internet for answers, but they come to the public library with their kids!

Youth services in public libraries are an important and valuable asset in building healthy communities and developing competent citizens. Recent brain research shows that early introduction of language and story is important in the actual physiological development of a child’s brain. Libraries are the only free literacy service available to parents of young children. Preschool story time, book delivery to child care programs, and baby story time enhance child development and contribute to success in school. Once in school, children need to read for pleasure in order to effectively develop their newly acquired skills. Summer reading programs and readers advisory by a well-trained YS librarian support acquisition of reading skills. Computers do not reduce but instead increase the need for literacy; studies have shown that operating a computer requires a high level of reading ability.

Youth are good politics. We are always told by the public that libraries are needed to serve children. Communities want new buildings for their children and fight the closure of libraries for the children. Time after time, libraries survey voters, to ask what will make them vote for bond measures. The answer is always the same: more services for the community’s children. The Oakland (California) Public Library, for example, once passed a funding initiative based on a survey indicating that voters would fund the library to increase YS. The successful tax initiative guaranteed an increase of children’s librarians in every branch. Successful tax measures are promoted to insure the future of our children!

An Important Professional Skill

Beyond the public image of libraries, YS skills and experience are good for management of the library and for responsive customer service.

Library school advisors wisely assured me that YS was a great career for young women who wanted to get married and have children. However, I found that YS was a terrific career for a young woman who became a library director! I know I would not be a director today without the skills I developed as a children’s librarian.

In library school, YS librarians develop a passion for our chosen profession. We learn everything we need to know about working with a particular population: marketing, outreach, public relations, mission, vision, and values. Oh, I know the classes were called children’s literature, library work with children, and storytelling—but they were really about the skills and attributes necessary to be a successful librarian and library manager.

In my first job, I was the only librarian straight out of library school who was responsible for independent outreach, public relations and public speaking, managing a budget, planning a program of service, developing effective community relations, and evaluating program effectiveness. Usually the only way children can come to the library is when a parent or caregiver brings them. I had to make the library so exciting and inviting that they would beg to come! Story times, school visits, and book talks helped me develop and hone my public speaking skills. Or as I always said, I served a population that, if they didn’t like what I did, would leave, make loud noises, or punch their neighbors. Under these circumstances, you learn very fast what to do to be a success!

Many library directors (Deborah Jacobs at Seattle Public is only one example) and upper-level library managers began as children’s librarians. One director commented to me that all of us became managers because we had such outstanding public speaking, outreach, and community relations skills, learned through YS experience. YS skills are also important for those who do not work with youth.

Former American Library Association President Regina Minudri used to instruct interview panels that a candidate who could not work with children was not suitable for work in a public library!

Perhaps an indicator of the value and importance of youth services is the need for more YS librarians. Library directors regularly report how difficult it is to find good children’s librarians, yet they still plan to add more YS jobs!

In a recent Urban Libraries Council study, directors identified 249 new YS positions that they planned to add in the future. Seventy-seven major

Neel Parikh is the Director at Pierce County Library System. She was formerly Coordinator of Children’s Services at San Francisco Public Library, and taught ‘Managing Children’s Services’ at the former School of Library and Information Studies at the University of California-Berkeley.
urban libraries responded to a 1999 ULC survey identifying the anticipated demand for MLS staff members by 2005 (Urban Libraries Council). Data from these libraries showed that they anticipated increasing MLS-holding youth services staff by the largest percentage of all categories of librarian positions: they estimated an increase of 22% of all added positions would be for YS (the next highest increase was for public services staff at 13%). Youth services staff made up fully 26% of all new MLS positions the libraries anticipated. These estimates were born out by the recent job listings at the 2000 American Library Association Annual Conference. The highest shortage of applicants, as in the past, was for youth services positions. Only 43 librarians applied for 160 advertised vacancies.

The ULC data also gave some indication of the difficulty of filling youth services positions. Among MLS vacancies, youth services positions had the second highest number of positions that remained vacant for more than two months for want of qualified applicants (public services was first). YS positions made up 55% of entry-level MLS positions and 21% of experienced MLS positions held open longer due to the lack of qualified applicants. Salary does not appear to be the reason. In fact, the ULC survey and the recent Library Journal library school graduates survey showed that the entry-level YS salary is slightly higher than public services salaries.

Where Are Library School Programs?

So why is it that today’s schools of Information or Informatics or Library Science don’t seem to be teaching about children or youth and graduating YS librarians?? Beats me! But I have a suspicion ....

Probably the biggest problem is that those who work with children are undervalued in our society. It costs less to pay your childcare provider than to have your house cleaned. In the library, those of us who work with children are often treated as lesser librarians. It was always fascinating to me that children’s librarians were expected to work effectively on the “adult” desk—but some reference librarians would rather die than enter a children’s room.

Where are we going to get qualified YS librarians if graduate schools refuse to provide the programs? Library schools across the country are diminishing or eliminating YS programs, a decrease in programs reflected in the ULC study. The University of California-Berkeley’s erstwhile Information School, for example, proudly does not offer YS. Also, it is difficult to find a good program in which to earn a Ph.D. in youth services in libraries. Library graduate schools need to include the study of youth information needs, youth information-seeking behaviors, and youth services. More research is needed to support today’s services for youth. Probably due to the weak programs in library schools, YS training constitutes the highest percentage (54%) of on-going training provided by libraries.

Sometimes the academic institution encourages the school to eliminate the program. At Berkeley, I heard a professor on the committee assigned to reconstitute the school say that there was certainly no reason for a school at Berkeley to teach children’s work. The youth services program must be supported and defended well by the faculty of library schools, if the program is to continue and prosper.

Clearly, the romance of technology is attracting many students and detracting from more mundane work with people. But students interested in youth services need to be accepted into library school and be valued by the school. Students in library school need to be encouraged to be YS librarians or to take YS courses. This means that the schools themselves, the faculty, and the school leadership must value youth services! Often faculty are derisive and condescending to the program, referring to “kiddie lit,” etc., etc. This attitude must be discouraged.

A program in library work with children is an essential piece of a rich library or information program. Children are a special and often more challenging population needing information. And children in public libraries are a key population needing service. The public firmly believes that the library is important for the children of the community. We need to insure that well trained librarians are available to provide the quality youth services our libraries and communities need in the future.

Reference


Youth Services at the University of Washington iSchool:
A Word from Director Mike Eisenberg

The Information School is firmly committed to offering a substantive program for students who wish to work with young people in school and public libraries. These students find training and support through a number of classes tailored for them:

- Children's Materials: Evaluation and Use;
- Young Adult Materials: Evaluation and Use;
- Storytelling: Art and Techniques; and
- Public Library Services for Youth Administration of the School Library Media Program.

In addition, for the past two summers, there has been a special topics course in “Library Services to Young Children and Their Parents.” Other special topics courses are anticipated. The School also has a well-established certificate program leading to state endorsement for library media specialists, accepted in all states in the Pacific Northwest.

The faculty of the Information School has been growing, from six full-time members just three years ago, to twenty today. I myself have a school library background. Two other full-time faculty, Sharyl Smith and Lorraine Bruce, work in the children’s and school library areas. There are plans to raise funds to endow a chair in honor of Beverly Cleary, a move that would bring a children’s services specialist of national renown to the School, and further add to the richness of our programs in children and youth services as well as in school library media.
Equalizing Access: Staff Training in the Internet Era

by Mary B. Ross

Mid-afternoon, a reference librarian who works at one of Seattle Public Library’s medium-sized branches stopped by my office. She had just completed one of our advanced Internet reference classes. Taught by a librarian in the Business and Technology department at the Central Library, the class focused on significant changes in search engines and search technologies over the past year.

The reference librarian told me how valuable these advanced classes were to her, in keeping her Internet reference skills current. She appreciated the fact that all reference services staff have access to regularly scheduled training on Internet sources. Before this training program had started, she said, her skills in using the Internet were dependent on whether she had worked with colleagues who were willing to share their expertise with her.

In a simple but profound way, she was articulating the goals of the Internet Information Services Training (IIST) program, implemented in 1998 at the Seattle Public Library. Through the IIST program, we hope to ensure that all reference services staff have training in the same set of Internet searching skills and that, once trained, they have access to regularly scheduled workshops on more advanced skills. Librarians in the smallest branch libraries receive the same training as the subject specialists working at the Central Library.

As a result, reference services staff in all sizes of libraries are skilled Internet searchers, and are able to keep their skills up-to-date. A librarian at the tiny High Point Library, for example, is comfortable with answering a wide range of questions using Internet and other online sources, and with calling a subject specialist at the Central Library for help in a more complex Internet search.

In a rapidly changing information environment, the need for library staff training has never been greater. Access to expansive information resources is no longer dependent on geographic proximity to large libraries. For library users, access is increasingly dependent on the expertise of staff in navigating online resources. In this environment, equity of access to information means reliable access to highly trained library staff. We cannot depend on the serendipitous sharing of Internet expertise among colleagues.

Critical to establishing a base level of expertise at SPL was the development of a set of staff competencies for using the Internet to answer reference questions. From these competencies, we created a self-assessment tool, to determine who needed training, and to identify the learning objectives for the IIST classes. The class content is designed as instructor-led training, with emphasis on lots of hands-on practice to reinforce the concepts and skills demonstrated. A team of six librarians, who are highly skilled Web searchers and have library instruction experience, taught the classes.

Beginning in June, we trained over 200 staff members in four months. The start-up effort required strong administrative support for initial funding, for setting up a computer lab, and for adjustment of work schedules. I applaud the dedication of the other trainers—Craig Kyte, Pat Grace, Tom Horne, Francesca Wainwright, and Pamela Wilkins—who had their regular jobs to do in addition to the training sessions.

To maintain this high level of staff expertise, we schedule Internet training once a year for newly hired reference services staff. There are also quarterly workshops on changes in search engines, subject-specific resources, and use of online databases. These are open to any reference services staff, and there are frequently waiting lists for the classes. The search engine update class was particularly popular, with over 100 people attending. It is clear from the response to these workshops that our reference services staff are highly motivated to keep their Internet searching skills current.

During the start-up period, Mary Moore, training coordinator at the Washington State Library, visited and observed one of the IIST classes in progress. She immediately saw the possibilities for taking this training beyond the Seattle Public Library. In 1999-2000, SPL contracted with the State Library to provide “Expanding Your Resources: Using the Web in Library Reference Services,” a modified version of IIST, for library staff throughout the state, with costs covered by LSTA funding. Craig Kyte, Pamela Wilkins, and I taught fourteen classes in Spokane, Yakima, Pullman, Tacoma, Everett, Bellingham, and Vancouver, in addition to classes in Seattle.

Demand for “Expanding Your Resources” clearly exceeded supply. When online registration for the classes opened, most sessions were full within four days. The State Library staff estimate that for every two people registered for the training,
there were three people turned away. Some participants traveled great
distances (Everett to Spokane, Vancouver to Seattle) because a closer
session had already filled.

This enthusiastic response demonstrates the broader need that
exists for training in using the Internet for reference. SPL's com-
mmitment to training staff in even the smallest branches is a model that
must be extended statewide. Equity of access to information means access to highly trained
staff, whether those staff work at the University of Washington, a school library in Pullman, or the
Kalama Public Library.

There are wide disparities in local training resources. Predictably, only the largest library
systems have training departments or staff whose sole job is to coordinate training. Many small to
medium-sized libraries have training funds that are barely adequate to cover conference attendance for a
few people, much less any kind of systematic, regular training on Internet information sources. Still more
libraries have minimal or no budgets for replacement of staff who are attending training sessions.

Recent collaborative efforts show that limited resources can be leveraged to broaden staff training
and development opportunities. The Washington Area Library Trainers (WALT), a network of training
coordinators from Seattle Public, King County, Kitsap, Everett Public, Pierce County, and Sno-Isle
Libraries, jointly sponsored a workshop on online real-time reference that was attended by over 550
people at four Puget Sound locations. Speaker honorariums, printing, and registration costs
were split between four of these libraries. KCLS has opened vendor training that it schedules on
statewide licensed databases to any library staff who want to attend.

The virtual library erases differences between types and sizes of libraries, and equalizes the
competencies required of staff. With widespread access to the same Internet resources and licensed
databases comes the ability to create staff training programs that can be shared statewide. "Expanding
Your Resources" is an example of locally developed training content that is easily adapted to the needs
of any library staff. In California and Florida, staff from all types of libraries have access to a wide range
of workshops, coordinated and funded through the state libraries. California's InFoPeople Project offers
a full schedule of classes, including classes on how to teach the public to use the Internet, at locations
throughout the state. The Florida State Library has an extensive continuing education calendar, with
classes on Internet resources, software applications training, and database searching.

New technologies for distance learning give us tools for providing staff training and continuing education. The State Library is already using teleconferencing and satellite television to bring presenters and participants together for continuing education programs on a variety of topics. We must also develop online training opportunities that are both time and location independent. Used extensively in the corporate world, Web-based training is a viable tool for reaching geographically dispersed learners and for delivery of content that requires frequent updating. Public librarians in Canada have free access to The Internet Guide (TIG), a self-paced Web-based course on basic Internet skills, produced by the Faculty of Information Studies at the University of Toronto. The Internet is the medium and the message.

Despite the strong commitment of the Washington State Library to funding continuing education, their resources are no match for the level of need. This information environment will dictate the need for continuous training and staff development. Strategic planning by the State Library, the University of Washington School of Information, library administrators, staff training coordinators, and other stakeholders throughout the state is needed to leverage LSTA funds, local staff development budgets, and grants, in order to create a regular schedule of training opportunities geographically dispersed throughout the state and available online. An example of the kind of planning required can be seen in the Idaho State Library's strategic plan for 2000-2002, "Library Training and Continuing Education for the New Millennium."

Equal and continuous access to Internet training for library staff depends on statewide planning, such as the CE networks that exist in other states. Equal access to training depends on collaboration and sharing of training opportunities among neighboring libraries. It will depend on more distance learning resources, especially in online formats. Washington citizens in urban, suburban, and rural areas already perceive the Internet as an equalizing source of information. The librarian makes that resource a reality.

Exhibits are an important part of WLA's Annual Conference. Here is an exhibit from the 2000 conference in Tacoma. Photo by Dale Goodvin.
Continuing Education, Compensation, and Career Ladders: Issues of Concern to Library Support Staff

by Martha Parsons

The ALA Support Staff Interests Round Table (SSIRT) has recently released three task force reports on issues of concern to library support staff. These reports are the culmination of almost four years of work resulting from the SSIRT Strategic Planning process that began in 1996. Following a nationwide survey in 1997, with over 2000 responses, the top three issues of concern to library support staff were determined. The issues are:

- access to continuing education and training opportunities;
- compensation not appropriate to level of education, experience, and responsibilities; and
- career ladders (few opportunities for advancement).

Three task forces were set up, each to address one of the issues. The charge was to determine how the SSIRT Steering Committee could address each issue and determine the most effective solutions that could be implemented. The task forces’ final reports were accepted by the SSIRT Steering Committee at the ALA 2000 Annual Conference. All three reports, as well as the strategic plan, the survey, and survey results, are on the SSIRT Web site at http://www.ala.org/ssirt/. Among all the Task Force recommendations, there are a few consistent themes that show up in all three reports:

- the need for training;
- the need for funding for training;
- the need to consult with and educate library managers about staff training needs; and
- the need to investigate the feasibility of a certification program for support staff.

The next step for the SSIRT Steering Committee is to analyze the reports and decide what steps SSIRT can take to begin to implement the recommendations of the Task Forces. There are other ALA Committees and other organizations that are also interested in and already working on some of the issues.

So, what are the implications of these reports for the Washington library community? The most important implication is that although SSIRT is working towards recommended solutions to the issues of concern to support staff, nothing will change if the library community does not recognize the issues, and begin to work on solutions. It will be up to the local library or library system to decide whether the recommendations can or should be applied. The value of the reports is that they are based on input from library staff (professional and paraprofessional) from all types and sizes of libraries and are an attempt to come up with reasonable, positive, and implementable solutions that will benefit the library community as a whole. SSIRT is also keenly aware that these issues are concerns of many professional staff as well, so seeing improvements for everyone would be an added bonus.

If you have thoughts or comments for the SSIRT Steering Committee, the members would like to hear from you. You may address your comments to me at parsons@halcyon.com or to any of the SSIRT Steering Committee who are listed on the SSIRT Website at http://www.ala.org/ssirt/board.html.

Besides myself, there were two other Washington library staff involved in producing these reports. Holly Blosser from Fort Vancouver Regional Library was the Chair of the Continuing Education Task Force, and Ginny Rabago from City University was also a member of that Task Force. Thanks to both of them for their time and commitment to this important project.

References and Works in Progress

The Council on Library/Media Technicians (COLT) is working on a plan to implement skill certification for support staff. Their “Position Paper on Skill Certification for Library/Media Support Staff” [http://library.ucr.edu/COLT/coltcert.html] gives a brief history and overview of the plan.

The Task Force for Review of the “Criteria for Programs to Prepare Library Technical Assistants” [http://library.ucr.edu/COLT/alaedu.html] outlines a plan for reviewing LTA programs. It was presented to the ALA Committee on Education at ALA Midwinter 1998.

The ALA Library Career Pathways (LCP) Task Force is responsible for determining the levels and skills necessary for employees at all levels within libraries. The group is considering what are the most appropriate educational backgrounds at each level of library work. Initial work of the group has focused on revising the “Library Education and Personnel Utilization Document,” which was approved by ALA Council in 1970. The original document is available at the Library Support Staff Resource Center web site at http://www.lib.rochester.edu/ssp/overview/lepu70.htm. [Editor’s note: See the summary of the LCP Task Force’s work in progress, by Paulette Feld, on page 14.]


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In spring 1999, the American Library Association held the first Congress on Professional Education. A result of the Congress was the identification of several areas that needed to be investigated in more depth. These areas of concern were divided among four task forces: Core Values, Core Competencies, External Accreditation, and Career Stratification, now referred to as Library Career Pathways.

The Library Career Pathways (LCP) Task Force is responsible for determining the levels and skills necessary for employees at all levels within libraries. The group is discussing what are the most appropriate educational backgrounds at each level of library work, including support staff and paraprofessional positions. The LCP Task Force is comprised of a cross section of the ALA organization and includes librarians, library educators (both at the MLS and LTA levels), support staff, former support staff who have become librarians, and library human resources staff (non-librarian), as well as ALA staff members.

The LCP Task Force has met three times so far in 2000, and an additional retreat is scheduled for early November to continue working on the group’s charge. A brief preliminary report was presented to the American Library Association Board in July 2000. The preliminary report discussed the name change, intended to provide a more accurate and descriptive term than “stratification.” Initial work of the group has focused on revising the “Library Education and Personnel Utilization Document,” which was approved by ALA Council in 1970. This document discusses the range of personnel utilization, including support staff; suggests a stratification, including responsibility levels; and recommends a lattice structure. LEPU is an extremely interesting document; and although it was written in 1970, it is pertinent, with minor revisions, to the library world of today. The original document is available at the Library Support Staff Resource Center Website at http://www.lib.rochester.edu/ssp/overview/lepu70.htm.

Two elements have been the primary focus of the discussions in the Task Force: achieving a diverse staff, and identifying the roles of support staff in the library structure. There have been discussions about what the qualifications for various support staff levels should be and what type of education or certification would be appropriate for each level. LTA education programs have been discussed; and the group reviewed several documents in this area, including the “Library Technician Skill Standards” developed by Highline Community College in Des Moines, Washington. Among the concerns regarding LTA programs is the lack of national standards. In relation to those concerns, the group will look at the ALA Committee on Education’s “Review of the Criteria for Programs to Prepare Library Technical Assistants.” Further discussion has included the possible revival of the bachelor’s degree in library science. Is that degree useful at some level on the modern library? What role would individuals with this level of education assume in the structure of a modern library?

Many of the issues and documents that the LCP Task Force has reviewed and discussed should be familiar to library support staff. The fact that this task force is focusing so closely on support staff is a prime example of the way these concerns are moving into the wider library world. The work of the ALA Support Staff Interests Round Table (SSIRT) proved extremely valuable in bringing these issues forward, as were the documents that support staff have collected and assembled on various Websites. The results of the 1997 SSIRT survey were used by the LCP Task Force to identify issues important to support staff and librarians during our discussions. Results of the SSIRT Task Force Reports on Career Ladders, Continuing Education, and Compensation have been shared with the LCP Task Force, and will be useful to the group as it continues its work.

Further work of the LCP will include continued discussion of the LEPU document and the relationship between LCP and the work of the other education task forces. After the November retreat, we hope to have more detailed information. The goal of the LCP Task Force is to get feedback on our recommendations from a wide group of constituents. If you have questions or comments regarding the work of the LCP Task Force, please contact Paulette Feld at feld@uwosh.edu.

Paulette Feld, past President of ALA’s SSIRT, is on the staff of Forrest R. Polk Library, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh.

Martha Parsons, WLA Web Coordinator, at the 2000 Annual Conference. Photo by Dale Goodvin.
Education for Library Boards:
A Library Manager’s View

by Carol Gill Schuyler

“In a world that seems increasingly to be spinning out of control, a fine, well-run public library is more than a respite from the meanness and the madness—it is a sign of opportunity and hope.” --Bob Greene.

Good boards mean good libraries; outstanding boards mean outstanding libraries. The members of a board of trustees are advisors to and advocates for the library. They envision the library’s future, monitor the administration of the library for effective use of library funds, approve policies, oversee the budget, defend intellectual freedom, and work with city, county, and state officials to ensure that all understand the value of the library and its services. And all this is in addition to their day jobs!

The difference between a good board of trustees and an outstanding board of trustees is training, both formal and informal. Although a library’s board of trustees delegates the actual day-to-day operation of the library to the staff, it never relinquishes the ultimate responsibility for the success of the library. Every member is accountable to the citizens that they represent for the library’s product during their terms on the board. They take this role seriously and want to perform it well. Most trustees accept board appointments because they believe in libraries and library service and because they want to be involved in their community. Most trustees, when they are appointed, do not have an in-depth knowledge of the library world. Board members have voluntarily taken on another job for their terms of office: and, as with any job, there is a learning curve. The library must commit to easing or flattening that curve as much as possible.

Training of trustees can take many avenues. At Kitsap Regional Library, director Ellen Newberg always includes a “service presentation” on the monthly board meeting agendas. The service presentation can be a puppet show, a demonstration of new online databases, new additions to the collection, titles that could bring potential intellectual freedom problems, processing of materials, information on how filters work, or a tour of a branch library. New handouts and summer reading program materials are in the board members’ packets. Patience Rogge, Jefferson County Rural Library Board member, has brought in speakers with expertise in areas that are of timely interest to their trustees. Study sessions on particular topics can also be connected to a board meeting. These are an effective way to have both a presentation and a discussion on a specific subject in which the board is involved. Trustees are a vital link to the community, and they need to be informed about the inner workings and current events in the library. Whether they are at work, in church, or participating in a civic organization, board members are the library.

At Kitsap Regional Library, Library Council (the library’s management group) attends one day of the Board’s annual planning session. This is an excellent opportunity for the exchange of information between staff and trustees. The planning session offers a longer presentation and discussion time than a tight monthly Board meeting agenda does. The atmosphere is relaxed, and ideas flow freely. This venue allows the trustees to get the information that they need to make recommendations for the library’s preferred future and to share their visions and valuable “lay” points of view. The second day of the planning session, the Board and Ellen spend alone, further discussing the agenda items of the previous day, prioritizing goals and objectives for the coming year, and identifying areas where they feel that they want more education or need more information.

Another way that Ellen keeps the Board of Trustees informed about the daily workings of the library without overwhelming its members with detail is with annual work plans. Each department, branch, and division develops an annual work plan prior to the annual budgeting period. The board members receive the work plans in their pre-meeting packets and vote for the ones that they consider the best for the coming year. A plaque is then rotated among the winners. In this way, the board gets an annual snapshot of the goals of the individual cogs of the system, as well as of the total wheel.

Regular communication is also an important training tool. The board of trustees cannot operate in a vacuum and should never be blind-sided by a lack of information. They need information about current projects and issues. There is, however, a fine balance between enough information and information overload. Trustees who have the information needed to respond confidently to an irate citizen, a questioning customer, or the press are the best representatives that the library can have. Trustees do not need commas, semicolons, and exclamation points on a daily basis. A quick telephone call or email can give board members what they need to be effective. As advocates for the library, they deserve that support.

Trained trustees also know the balance between thinking globally and counting paperclips—and they are, ultimately, responsible for both. With the staff, they plan for the library’s future; and they monitor the expenditure of the library’s budget. They understand revenue trends and patterns, impacts of initiatives, “educated guesses” about proposed projects, and when a budget line is “front

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(Continued on next page)
loaded” versus heading toward being overspent. This is not an intuitive process. Without training, a budget spreadsheet can be daunting. With training, the board knows which lines to focus on at which meetings. Those of us who are dependent on property taxes as our main revenue source know when the peaks and valleys of revenue are received. Before the board approves the library’s annual budget, it needs to ask the question, “Why this amount?”; and staff need to provide the answer. The board needs history as well as current information in order to make wise decisions. Trustees are the representative stewards of their constituency and accept this responsibility seriously.

Training for board members on intellectual freedom issues is vital and should begin before a confrontation arises. Trustees have the responsibility of supporting intellectual freedom and fighting censorship. This can be a difficult and uncomfortable responsibility. It requires courage. A board that has discussed intellectual freedom, that has seen materials censored elsewhere, and that understands the library collection development policy and/or Internet policy is much better prepared to work with citizen complaints. Intellectual freedom is an especially emotionally charged issue. Survival training is essential.

In addition to in-house or in-library training for board members, both the Washington State Library and the Washington Library Association offer training for trustees. The Workshop in Library Leadership (WILL) is sponsored every other year by the State Library. Last year, the conference offered sessions on legal issues, Internet policies, technology planning, and use of statistics; on property tax, initiatives, and budget impacts; on reaching out to diverse populations, and on planning and capital facilities areas. Presenters were able to share in-depth knowledge with the trustees on this wide range of topics. Trustees asked questions, related personal anecdotes, and shared their library experiences. One of the values for trustees in attending this conference is meeting other people in similar positions. They learn from each other as well as from the conference sessions, and can return to their own libraries with expanded views on the business of managing a library.

The Washington Library Friends and Trustees Association (WLFTA), the interest group in WLA that focuses on supporting both friends and trustees, sponsors workshops and conference programs. Topics can include “nuts and bolts” information for new trustees, strategic planning, and the art of conducting the public’s business. At the annual conference, a Saturday morning program is presented specifically to support members of this group. Information and training are combined with networking opportunities. It is always impressive when busy trustees are willing to give up even more of their personal time to attend workshops and conferences to develop their skills as board members. This further demonstrates their commitment to being library trustees.

At the last WLA Board meeting, Bob Evans, a trustee from Tacoma Public Library, expressed his commitment to the concept of libraries in general, as well as to his “own” library. His words held pride, support, intense interest, knowledge of what it takes to make a library really work, and the realization of the impact of his role as a board member. Although WLFTA has a voting representative on the Board, rarely does the Board have the opportunity to hear directly from other trustees at its meetings. During a discussion on planning for next February’s library day in Olympia, Bob addressed the necessity for both friends and trustees to attend and to meet with their legislators. Legislators want to hear from these groups because they are highly respected representatives of their library communities. In order to present library issues well and respond to legislators’ questions, trustees and friends need to have background information and training on specific issues. That is the responsibility of both WLA and individual libraries.

Grassroots!, the WLA interest group that tries to connect libraries with legislators and legislative issues, has encouraged libraries and their trustees to invite legislators to presentations on current topics of interest. For instance, Kitsap Regional Library has invited its district’s representatives and senators for presentations on the Internet and filtering, online databases, and its funding dependence on property taxes. Careful planning needs to go into the program development, but it is worthwhile because of the library/legislator connectivity that is established. Trustees trained on the subjects under discussion are a vital part of this connectivity. They are the hosts, and the legislators listen to them carefully because they are members of their communities—the same communities represented by the legislators.

Every year, WLA honors both outstanding boards and individual trustees. Over and over, the statements can be heard: “It was so difficult to choose ... There were so many wonderful nominees ... They went beyond the ‘call of duty’ ... He is superb ... She is an astonishing leader.” Trustees have taken on building projects, intellectual freedom issues, and passage of bond measures. They immerse themselves in these undertakings. They look for knowledge and training so that they can be successful. They commit time and energy beyond what is expected, and they do it gladly because they care about their libraries.

“Trust”: firm reliance, confident belief, custody, to rely on, to depend on, to believe. Ideally, the board of “trust”ees and the library have a symbiotic relationship based on “trust.” Board members come to their positions bringing personal qualities such as open-mindedness, curiosity, courage, devotion to the community, service commitment, vision, and energy. With the support of on-going training and information about the library and its services, they can develop a trust with the staff. They grow in their positions on the board because they are devoted to the wise governance of the library. This is the difference between a good board and an outstanding board, as well as between a good library and an outstanding library.
Trustee Education: A Trustee’s View

by Patience Rogge

Gone are the days when all that was required to be a library trustee was a love of reading. The modern library is a high-tech business, and the trustee must have the savvy to deal with its demands. To insure that a library board functions effectively, it is crucial for the board to maintain an on-going program of trustee education.

The process of trustee education should begin even before an individual is appointed to the board. Applicants should be supplied with orientation materials, such as the library’s mission statement, history, long-range plans, and copies of its policies and procedures. Once appointed, a new trustee should receive an orientation from the director, the board chair, and a trustee emeritus. The neophyte should tour library facilities and be introduced to staff. A regular education session should be set for each board meeting. These sessions can be devoted to internal education. For example, sessions might include a demonstration of how materials are processed, an explanation of how an Information Services Librarian tracks down answers to patrons’ questions, and a hands-on introduction to using the Internet. Some external education is useful, as well: for instance, how the County Prosecutor’s office acts as legal counsel to the library, how the County Treasurer handles library investments, or what programs the local arts commission has that can mesh with the library’s role as a community cultural center.

The responsibility for maintaining the trustee education program rests upon the board itself, either the chair or a designee. There are many resources available for trustee education:

- the director and staff, who can explain the often esoteric inner workings of the library;
- professional literature, including the publications of the Washington Library Association, Washington Library Friends & Trustees Association, American Library Association, Public Library Association, and American Library Trustees Association;
- attendance at conferences, especially the Workshop in Library Leadership (WILL) sponsored by the Washington State Library;
- electronic sources, such as the Websites of library professional associations; and
- myriad local officials and experts in every field who can share knowledge the board needs to provide the best possible library service to its community.

Patience Rogge, who holds an MLS from the University of California, Berkeley, is chair of the Washington Library Friends and Trustees Association, and a member of the Board of Trustees of Jefferson County Rural Library District.

Ballard Carnegie Library Building in Seattle

Seattle had several Carnegie libraries. One was the Ballard Library, which opened in 1902 and served its community as a library for six decades. Then, in the early 1960s, the library moved to a new building a few blocks away. The Ballard Carnegie building still stands, but now it houses shops and offices. The picture on the left shows the building during its library days; the picture on the right shows it now. Submitted by Marilyn She.
Library Education at a Distance: The University of Illinois LEEP3 Program

by Karen A. Buxton

Getting an education over the Internet is becoming an accepted practice; but in the summer of 1997 when I first started my master’s degree program at the University of Illinois, it was exciting new territory.

When I decided to pursue a master’s degree in library science, I knew I would need to find a distance education program. I loved my work as a full-time solo-librarian, and I wanted the degree so that I could be more effective in my position. I did not want to give up my job to attend library school, and my family needed me at home. I have friends who earned their degrees by attending summer school or by leaving their families for the time required to complete their degrees, but these options were not practical for me.

The University of Illinois attracted me because its Library and Information Science program had been rated first in the nation by U.S. News and World Report (http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/beyond/gradrank/gbinsfos.htm). The faculty is top notch, and the University is known for its expertise in computer and World Wide Web technology development. I wanted to be trained in a program that would prepare me for a future in the rapidly changing development. I wanted to be trained in a program that expertise in computer and World Wide Web technology is top notch, and the University is known for its

The University of Illinois LEEP3 Program

What is LEEP3?

The distance program at the University of Illinois is the brainchild of Leigh Estabrook, the Dean of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science. The program is called LEEP3 because this is the third iteration of the Library Education Experimental Program. However, neither students nor faculty consider the program experimental any more, because it has been such an unqualified success.

The success of the program is a result of the combination of a technically savvy faculty, terrific technical support from the graduate school, and hands-on training using the educational technology before online classes begin. The best LEEP3 instructors are comfortable with the multitude of teaching technologies available through the program and use them effectively.

Students learn to use LEEP3 technologies during the first course of the program, offered only on campus. This two-week session, fondly known by Leepers as “boot camp,” combines the first half unit of credit with training in program tools and technologies. Students also learn basic HTML coding, since assignments throughout the program are usually turned in as Web documents.

After the initial on-campus session, students return to campus each semester for one full day per class. Although this was a significant time and financial investment, I valued these on-campus days. They gave me face-to-face contact with my professors and fellow students. On-campus sessions are a time to get reacquainted with classmates and graduate school staff and faculty. Students are also offered professional workshops, opportunities to meet and mingle with on-campus classmates, and time to meet with advisors and faculty in individual conferences.

The program requires 10 units of credit to complete. I started by taking two courses each of my first two semesters, but found that they consumed all of my time. After taking 1 1/2 units my first summer, I decided to cut back to one unit per semester. I transferred in one unit of graduate credit from another university and finished the program in two years. I did this while working fulltime and raising four children. Some students worked fulltime and finished in 18 months. A few finished in just a year.

To say that the men and woman in the program were focused and determined was an understatement. My classmates were some of the most inspiring and dedicated people I have ever met. I value the personal and professional relationships I developed with faculty and students during the program.

Distance Education Technology

Online classes meet in a Web-based virtual classroom that bears a close resemblance to a chat room. Lectures are delivered in real-time via Real-Audio. Professors showed PowerPoint presentations, Websites, or other digitized materials such as book pages from the virtual classroom. We could collaborate in class on a virtual chalkboard. Although the instructor has voice contact with students, students must send typed questions and comments into the virtual classroom to share with the entire class. I’m not a great typist, so this was sometimes embarrassing; but many of my classmates weren’t either. We learned to be forgiving of typos. Students can also “whisper” in class by sending private messages to each other. I confess to carrying on more than one private conversation during my classes.

Of the LEEP program technology requirements, two of the most critical are an up-to-date computer and a reliable Internet connection. Although my home ISP tried to help me, I regularly lost my connection and missed parts of class. Many of my fellow students also experienced this frustration; and as a result, the LEEP technical support made audio archives of the classes so that we could listen to the parts we missed. This was great, but it was not the same as participating in class discussions or asking questions as the professor lectured. Later my employer allowed me to attend class at work, where I had access to a T1 line and a reliable connection. Under these circumstances, I enjoyed classes much more.

Classes meet weekly or biweekly, or have irregular meeting times. Reading and written assignments are usually due on a weekly basis. Class discussions often go on for a week or more as topics are posted, debated, and discussed in a bulletin board format.

Regardless of how often the class meets, instructors are usually available online during “office hours” to answer questions about reading or homework assignments. This allows students

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The University of Washington Law Librarianship Program: 60 Years of Excellence

by Mary A. Hotchkiss

In July 2000, the Law Librarianship program at the University of Washington celebrated its 60th anniversary! This vibrant program has its roots in both the University of Washington School of Law and the University of Washington School of Library and Information Science. The Law School, founded in 1899, initially built its library collection by asking practicing attorneys for books. This collection was informally cared for by the Law School faculty until 1922, when Dr. Arthur S. Beardsley, a lawyer and a historian, was appointed the School’s first Law Librarian. Dr. Beardsley established the law librarianship program in 1939; and the first degree, a Bachelor of Arts in Law Librarianship, was awarded in 1940. In 1944, when Marian Gould Gallagher replaced Dr. Beardsley as Law Librarian, the University of Washington Law Librarianship program was reintroduced as a graduate program. It is still the only specialized library program in the United States to require the law degree for admission. After successful completion of 45 quarter credits, lawyers enrolled in the current Law Librarianship Program earn the Master of Library and Information Science degree with a Special Certificate in Law Librarianship.

Through the years, the Law Librarianship program has increased in size from two or three students a year to eight to ten students a year. To date, 185 students have graduated from the program. The current program is designed to prepare lawyers to serve as information professionals in diverse settings, including courts, federal and state units of government, county law libraries, law schools, corporations, and law firms.

The impact of the University of Washington Law Librarianship program is widespread. Sixty-one of the program graduates have been or are academic, firm, court, state, or county law library directors. Two graduates have served as the Washington State Law Librarian. Of the 101 graduates who are still practicing law librarianship, 62 graduated since 1990. Eight graduates have served as President of the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL); over a dozen graduates have received significant awards from AALL. While many graduates of the program are library directors, others are leaders in the specialties of library technical services and public services. Across a diversity of settings, program graduates work to ensure the accessibility of legal information to members of the legal, business, and academic communities and the general public. Over the years, non-lawyers enrolled in the MLIS program at the University of Washington have taken courses in the law librarianship curriculum. These students recognize that legal information needs are not restricted to law firms and law schools—all information professionals today need to know about legal materials!

For further information about the Law Librarianship Program and careers in law librarianship, see http://www.ischool.washington.edu/mlis/law.htm; or contact Professor Penny Hazelton, University of Washington School of Law, 1100 N.E. Campus Parkway, Seattle, WA 98105 (206-543-4089); email: pennyh@u.washington.edu.

LEEP3 Program (Continued from previous page)

Program Strengths and Weaknesses

Among the most useful skills I learned was virtual project collaboration. Several of my classes required a group project. This required chat-room meetings with group members in different time zones to carve up responsibilities, report on progress, and discuss strategy. We posted our HTML documents, discussed the project structure, integrated our pieces of the assignment, and produced a group project. The first group project was really tough, but by graduation I came to enjoy this type of collaboration.

The first on-campus class followed by the real-time online class format fosters a sense of community among class members similar to other university classroom settings. Although similar, it isn’t quite the same because the nuance of body language is missing in the online class environment. The program made me sensitive to the effect of abrupt written responses since so much of our discussion took place in chat rooms and on “Web Boards,” class discussion bulletin boards. One of my classmates was dismayed when she was accused of “flaming” people; that was never her intention.

As part of the program, students learn a host of new skills, including HTML coding, new software applications, and Web presentation skills, not to mention the multitude of software applications used in course delivery. Most students are attracted to the program because they are already technically competent and feel they will enjoy the format. A few were initially overwhelmed by the technology. The LEEP technical support helped students overcome the obstacles. Two of my classmates moved to campus and became graduate assistants providing technical support to LEEP students. People really understand the problems—they’ve been there.

The cost of the program is no small consideration. Out-of-state students pay about $18,531 in tuition if they complete the program in two years as I did. Add books, five air fares to Champaign-Urbana, room and board for on-campus stays, and a new computer if yours isn’t up to the challenge; and you have a significant investment. Is it worth all that? I think so. I took a new job with a 14% pay increase over what I was making, and I’m not looking back.

Reference

For more information about the program and faculty, see the LEEP3 home page: http://leep.lis.uiuc.edu/
Students entering the University of Washington Information School (iSchool) master of library and information science (MLIS) program in summer quarter of 2000 or later will follow a brand new curriculum and take classes from mostly new faculty in a new building in a marquee location on campus, Mary Gates Hall. This program joins two other new programs at the iSchool, a doctorate in information science and a bachelor’s degree in informatics, all of which are the outcome of an over-five-year process to radically reorganize the university’s library and information science programs. A “Futures Committee” report issued in 1996 outlines the strategy and educational market positioning that the UW administration adopted and followed to reach this milestone (“Recommendations for the Future ...”).

This article takes a peek at our regional master’s degree program for training the generalist and specialist librarian. It sketches the broad features of the master’s curriculum, as described in readily available program literature (see the iSchool’s Website at http://ischool.washington.edu). The article contrasts selected structural features with those of the old curriculum in place at the same academic institution since the 1970s, and comments on these curricular and program developments and trends. Readers who attended the UW library school are invited to do comparisons on their own by drawing upon memories of their days as library school students.

Nationwide Trends in LIS Education

A large-scale research project named KALIPER that examined LIS curricular change at schools across the nation helps put in perspective the curriculum changes at the University of Washington’s iSchool. Some final reports that provide details of the research methods and data have been released just this year in the *Bowker Annual 2000* and elsewhere.

The KALIPER study (Kellogg-ALISE Information Professions and Education Renewal) was a two-year project funded by the Kellogg Foundation and the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) “to analyze the nature and extent of major curricular change in LIS education” in the United States and Canada. KALIPER’s main finding was that indeed “a majority of schools are undergoing significant change” (Pettigrew and Durrance; see also Wiegand).

Using data collected by means of surveys, interviews, case studies, and documents analysis, five teams of university faculty and doctoral students analyzed the curricula of 33 library schools (26 intensively and 7 corroboratively), and were able to characterize the changes in terms of six themes:

1. broadening of various aspects of LIS programs and curricula;
2. dominance of the user-centered perspective in LIS research and teaching;
3. infusion of information technology into the curriculum;
4. rethinking of professional specializations;
5. adapting program and instructional formats; and
6. expanding variety of academic programs and degrees offered.

This list of trends shows that library schools are taking advantage of opportunities to survive and thrive, and to develop the prestige and political clout that comes with having a high positive profile in the university community. They are adapting to the life circumstances of students, listening to the hiring needs of local employers, and responding to various statements made by professional and other groups regarding “competencies” that program graduates are expected to have acquired. This could be good news for practitioners who are concerned about issues such as building communities. Anne C. Petersen, Senior Vice President for Programs at the foundation that provided funding for KALIPER, notes, “Communities are essential ... for insure[ing] a balance of human priorities relative to powerful interests such as those of commerce” (Peterson). As the schools’ status goes, so goes the future of the profession.

Behind these changes, and beyond the immediate focus of the KALIPER study, are many larger issues concerning the changing work of the library profession that not only have direct bearing on the nature of LIS education but also are, or at least ought to be, pressing concerns for students in LIS programs and for practitioners. Andrew Abbott tells us that powerful contextual forces have been changing the work of the library profession irrespective of the desires of individual librarians or library educators. These forces include broad social and cultural changes that create competition among occupations as sources of expertise, the rise of new organizational forms, and the competition between commercialization and professionalism in library organizations (Abbott). Rigorous education for practice could be more important than ever.

Back to the UW iSchool

On the whole, results of recent efforts to reorganize the UW’s library and information science programs appear to reflect many of the trends identified in the KALIPER study.

The exit requirement is a five-element portfolio demonstrating that the student has “developed a number of the qualities and skills essential to his or her future success as an information professional” in the areas of teaching or training, leadership, service, argumentation, and information technology. For example, the information technology element will consist of evidence of participation in the “design and development of a significant project or product involving information technologies.”

The emphasis on user-centered approaches in the curriculum core appears to be much stronger and clearer than it was before, and the concepts appear to be introduced much earlier and simultaneously to each annual cohort of students. Also, there’s

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more in the core. For example, strategies for teaching and for designing, developing, and evaluating information literacy programs are considered to be core. In the past, a student could exit the program without having addressed this specific topic in coursework, although a student might elect to take the teaching strategies course offered through the school by adjunct faculty. Now, this is no longer possible.

Consistent with two of the trends itemized earlier, the hard-working director, staff, and faculty will have, by autumn quarter 2002, increased the number of programs offered at the iSchool from one to five. Coursework for a mid-career Master’s of Information Management is planned for autumn 2001, and an eagerly awaited distance Master’s of Library and Information Science is scheduled to commence in autumn 2002. “Educational institutions will become increasingly irrelevant if they fail to seize the technology as a major educational vehicle. The opportunities of information technology for education have been recognized by the private sector, and by specialized not-for-profit institutions. The hard market realities are that these programs will increasingly compete successfully with traditional educational institutions” (Petersen).

The MLIS has retained its status as a two-year program (a “sixth-year degree”), a form that library educators first experimented with in the 1890s, to allow for advanced study in a professional specialization (Rubin, p. 359). What has clearly changed is that the number of courses that every student is required to take (the “core”) has been upped from four to nine (fully half of the credits needed to obtain the degree), with stronger requirements in place for completing the core courses in a specified sequence. “All core courses will focus on concepts, processes, models, theory and research, using skills and practice as exemplars to illustrate concepts. They are not intended as skills-development classes in their own right; this is the proper role of specialized and elective courses” (“Basic Requirements …”). The pedagogical advantages of the sequencing are clear, although some students may have a harder time fitting the coursework in with work and family life than before.

The sketchy description given here cannot really hope to do full justice to the new program, which will likely graduate its first batch of students in the summer of 2002. However, the reader should be able to get a flavor of the changes that have occurred and the target for which the iSchool MLIS curriculum’s designers have been aiming.

COPE

During April 1999, the KALIPER teams were still hard at work collecting and digesting data. The American Library Association meanwhile convened 150 delegates to the first Congress on Professional Education—an “education summit”—in Washington D.C. (American Library Association). A second congress was scheduled for November 2000.

Traditionally, communication between the community of library practitioners and the community of library educators has been ineffective in producing a common vision. In fact, ALISE is an association whose formation was propelled by a falling out between these subgroups of the library world. “The reluctance of [ALA] to endorse the library schools as the only appropriate form of library education led the library schools to form their own organization … in 1916” (Rubin, p. 361). A century later, in the report prepared by the first ALA Congress on Professional Education (COPE) steering committee, we are still reminded that ALA equivocates on what is required preparation for professional practice: “[T]here are two ALA-approved routes to professional preparation: the ALA accredited graduate programs in North America and the graduate programs accredited by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education” (American Library Association). Another shot, this time lobbed at two targets simultaneously:

Practitioners have a romantic view of the LIS curriculum. They see it as a giant salt lick created by Mary Poppins where students partake and get just what they need while LIS educators are supposed to pump into it solid nourishment in individualized doses packaged to make transcripts attractive. I see it as a cafeteria where those who offer it labor, or even fight, over its content and presentation, and then have to deal with the student customers who eat the desserts first, don’t want the beans until an employer tells them they are good, and are usually unhappy with the prices (Sullivan, p. 15).

This pattern of conflict between educators and practitioners of librarianship is recapitulated in the hallway debates in which library students regularly engage. The gulf that separates theory from practice is very real, however, particularly for students, one of whose primary albeit implicit tasks is to build a personal theory of practice. The best faculty can utilize practice to shape a student’s theoretical knowledge of a subject, make theory inform practice, and otherwise guide students on a path to becoming competent practitioners. Sometimes hallway theory-or-practice debates are an indication of something else, such as faculty being given teaching responsibilities for which they are unprepared, in which case things really are not okay. Faculty who are competent scholars and librarians who are expert practitioners can be poor teachers if they are unable to skillfully negotiate the terrain of theory-in-use for their students or those whom they are mentoring (Argyris and Schon, p. 176).

As mentioned in the KALIPER report and readily verified by polling students at UW, the demands of students also help to shape curricular change. In complex ways that tend to defy generalization. Students of librarianship who have not yet been fully folded into the profession’s ranks can also have eccentric views of the profession’s traditions unless somehow they internalize these traditions before they ever attend library school.

A group of students at the University of Washington library school during the 1997-1998 academic year drafted a proposal that made specific recommendations concerning the contents and structure of an information studies curriculum. Some in the group declared that they had no intention of going into practice in a traditional setting, whereas some of the others saw themselves heading straight for jobs in public or school libraries. The main impetus for the proposal was concern about the slow pace at which the transformation of the school’s curriculum was proceeding. After being formally adopted by the student chapter of American Society for Information Science and Technology, the proposal was presented to the library school faculty in May 1998.

The main recommendation in this student proposal was for a broadly inclusive program: “there is no real split (either book people OR computer

(Continued on next page)
people) among us. We are ALL ‘information people’ (‘SLIS/GSLIS Curriculum Revision...’). The proposal called for a dramatic increase in the number of information science and information technology (IT) courses offered within the library program. Data developed by the students showed that the proportion of IT courses offered at the UW library school was relatively low compared with comparable programs elsewhere. (Compare the students’ data, presented fully in Appendix A of “SLIS/GSLIS Curriculum Revisions,...” with a concept intensity map of subjects being taught in LIS programs developed by Jamshid Beheshti, who concluded that “Technology is by far the most intense concept covered in all LIS programs.”) Also, a basic computing proficiency requirement for entry to the program for all students, a broadening of fieldwork possibilities to encompass a practicum in a “non-traditional” environment with supervision by a “non-librarian,” and a variety of other suggestions to strengthen the IT focus were made. None of these was represented in the student proposal as elements of a specialization within librarianship; rather, the manner in which these would be incorporated into a curriculum was left open.

“My overall impression of the [old] curriculum was that it lacked academic rigor,” says one of authors of the proposal who now works for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “There were hardly any theoretical classes. However, many students objected vociferously to what little theory there was in the curriculum” (Thompson). The theory-practice tensions that already existed in Melvil Dewey’s day continue into the present and are likely to continue indefinitely. We should only start worrying if we see the quality and volume of the complaints diminish.

Tie It Up

Library schools need friends as well as customers to keep them firmly committed to serving all their constituencies. “Librarians have a generally low opinion of their clout as alumni,” says Leonard Kniffel. Here is another tradition that could ultimately work against us. But reinventing library school alumni associations is not totally impossible. It does require someone with a vision and time to work on making it a reality. Alumni representatives already sit on some of the faculty committees at the UW library school. The Washington Library Association and other ALA chapter associations in the northwest region might already be playing a part as well if they became aware of and acted upon a suggestion made recently to hold local “education summits” to decide what the consensus of the association members was: what do the members want their library program to be? (Crowley et al.). WLA goals that follow up on or tie in with library education issues brought forward by a Student Interest Group would also harness some of that eccentric but vibrant energy and help clear the communication paths between library educators and library practitioners.

Recently I had a conversation with someone who works for a public library system in central Washington. What this librarian said to me was, imagine how tough it can be to have to make this choice: should we hire a degreed librarian who is not from around here but whose knowledge we really need and are even willing to pay for in salary, or should we hire someone with no professional knowledge who grew up here and can make advantageous connections with the members of this economically depressed community that the other person simply has no chance of making? The librarian I was talking to agreed that the UW’s distance MLIS program slated for rollout in 2002 could be one solution to this dilemma. How the curriculum will be shaped by the distance ed format, including how distance students will access the marvelous equipment and resources in the iSchool’s computer lab, is just one of the questions that will have to find answers in the interim.

Members of the profession who hire for libraries probably have the strongest immediate incentive and therefore the greatest responsibility today to advocate improvements in library education. As one hiring librarian has said, we must “lead the squawking and insist that we address the powers that be and not simply each other” (Kniffel, p. 52).

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One of the buzzwords in public institutions these days is "assessment." Government officials and taxpayers want to know that academic and other publicly supported organizations and institutions are worth their support. Accountability is being demanded—are the services being offered efficient and effective? In the library world, what better way to assess an important part of any library’s services than to collect information on the usability of the library’s online catalog? One well-known way to collect this information is through analysis of transaction logs. Another way to assess the library’s catalog is through usability testing.

Usability testing has been around the computer industry for nearly a decade. Just what is it? Usability testing is the method of observing individuals actually using a product or service and recording the users’ experiences, in order to determine their successes and failures in using the system under investigation. Advocates of this type of testing agree that eight users will bring out 80% of the problems inherent in the system. While those not familiar with usability testing may be skeptical, experience shows that this 8/80 theory does indeed work. In fact, by the time one observes the fourth and fifth user in a test, one can already see problem patterns emerging.

Organizations doing usability testing can build a high-technology, sophisticated laboratory for doing testing, or use a test site as simple as an office. The high-tech end is exemplified by OCLC, with a three-room lab that includes a control room, a test room and an observation room. In this facility, a glass window separates the control room and test rooms, so the test coordinator can observe the test participant. Two video cameras record the users’ experiences—one camera focused on the computer screen and the other on the person. The observation room is equipped with closed circuit TV, so software developers and others can observe the test, talk freely about what they are seeing, and perhaps begin to develop solutions to problems the test participant is having with the system. The opposite end of the set-up spectrum is an office with a computer, room for two observers, and a tape recorder. This simple arrangement is decidedly low cost and low tech, and is therefore appealing to those who wish to do usability testing but who lack budgetary support for the process.

Purpose Statement
The first step in developing a usability test is to prepare a purpose statement. This statement will drive the ensuing process. The purpose can be broad, such as finding answers to the question, “Can library users navigate and understand the library’s online catalog?” A more focused statement—such as “Can library users find and understand information on serial publications in the library’s online catalog?”—will help ensure that results will be specific and helpful. From the purpose statement, a series of tasks should be developed: how will you go about testing to get the information you need, to gather information related to the purpose statement? The task list will ultimately develop into the questions you will ask in the usability test. A well-focused test should be limited to 12-15 questions.

Participants
How do you find people to participate in usability tests? Recruitment can be done via flyers in the library, advertisements in student or community newspapers, etc. If you offer an incentive, you will likely attract more potential participants. A modest cash payment, photocopy credits, and other appropriate library service rewards will not only help attract students and other community members, but will also lend a sense of authenticity to the project. (After all, businesses pay for product testing.) From the list of volunteers, you can select a pool of diverse users that will reflect the diversity of your library users. A simple volunteer profile will enable you to assess volunteers’ gender, age, user type (student, staff, faculty, community member), and computer/library experience. Since your library users probably represent a diverse community, you will want your test participants to reflect that community as much as possible. For academic libraries, this will include the traditional 18-22 year-old students and the growing population of older students as well.

Setting Up the Test Session
Planning for the test session includes obtaining and setting up a computer, a tape recorder, a clock, and three chairs (one for the participant and two for observers). The tape recorder is a back-up device that helps the observers in case their note taking is inconclusive. Two observers are superior to one, since having two observers makes it less likely that something will be missed. The observers watch and record everything that the user does during the course of the session. To record their observations, develop a form that includes the following: the question, whether the question was successfully answered, whether there were false starts in the user’s process, how long it took the participant to complete the question, and what steps the user took in trying to answer the question.

An opening statement should be prepared and read to participants, so they understand the process and the context; this practice also sets a level playing field for each participant. The opening statement explains the role of the observers; explains that it is the system that is being tested, not the person; and thanks the participant for his/her time and effort.

The Test Session
So, now the test. Encourage the participants to verbalize their thought process as they work their way through the test questions. What are they thinking, and how are they going about trying to answer the question? Participants’ comments
Debriefing

Part of the testing process includes debriefing at the conclusion of each test session. Debriefing can take the form of a brief summary questionnaire that gathers general impressions of the system that was being tested, or can take the form of a dialog between the test participant and the observers to review troublesome areas the participant experienced during the test. Students seem to appreciate the opportunity to learn more about the system for their later use, so debriefing can be an informal chance to do some bibliographic instruction. After the test participant leaves, the observers need to debrief, too: discuss the test experience to see if there were areas where their perceptions of what occurred varied, and briefly identify what was learned. There may be differences in perception as to whether or not a test question was answered successfully, since a user may sometimes complete a task, but do so in such a convoluted manner that it seems questionable to call it a success. These differences between observers’ perceptions need to be resolved.

Analysis

After the tests, the data collected must be analyzed, and solutions to problems developed. Whether test participants successfully answered the questions, how long it took them, what steps they took, and any comments they made are pulled together. It is not just a case of looking at success or failure. The time it took for people to complete a given task is also valuable information. Steps taken are also important to evaluate: are steps logical and efficient, or do people have to “stumble around”? Analysis of the problems will ultimately lead to recommendations for changes in the system. In addition to changes that can be performed in-house, there may be issues that need to be taken to the bibliographic instruction librarians or to the system vendor.

In order to know whether changes have been effective, you will need to retest. The retest should include the same tasks as the initial test, so you can see if users now have an easier time.

Usability testing can be an inexpensive way to assess important library systems and products. The results bring credibility to the process of making the library’s OPAC, Websites, etc., more user friendly.

WSU’s Experience

At Washington State University, we have conducted several sets of usability tests. The first test focused on Griffin, the Innovative Interfaces Web Public Access Catalog that includes WSU Pullman, Spokane, Vancouver, and Tri-Cities holdings as well as the holdings of ICNE, the Intercollegiate Center for Nursing Education. (Griffin is also a shared catalog with Eastern Washington University.) The initial tests were done at WSU Pullman and at Vancouver. At Pullman, a second round of tests was done, to focus on the Article Index and Full Text component of the Online Catalog. Subsequent tests were done at Vancouver and Pullman to focus on the libraries’ Websites. Test results have been used to try improve the usability of each of the components. We have not yet performed retesting, but fully intend to do so.

Given the relative simplicity of the process, WSU librarians who have been involved in usability testing have become true believers. The results have earned credibility with our colleagues. We have expanded the number of librarians involved, and it is gratifying to see those who have joined the original team quickly become enthusiastic about the process. The more people who are involved, the easier it will be to commit to the process—to do more testing and to do the necessary retesting.

Although the main focus of this article has been the process of usability testing, readers may want to know a bit about results of the initial usability test that focused on the Griffin OPAC. We found that users generally had little trouble navigating in the OPAC. They did have trouble with concepts—for example, what is in the catalog, and what differentiates the catalog from the Article Index. Despite a sophisticated serials system that gives the user all kinds of up-to-date information, the typical user does not understand serials terminology and cannot locate information on current receipts. Users do not understand how to limit searches. They do not understand the various call number schemes (Dewey, LC, SU doc, local); but since students don’t often use call number searches, this may not be especially important. Another feature that escapes student understanding is cross-references: they don’t understand what they mean or what to do next.

Usability testing can be an inexpensive way to assess important library systems and products. The results bring credibility to the process of making the library’s OPAC, Websites, etc., more user friendly. Remember, all the bells and whistles in the world are not going to help if the user cannot easily locate or understand what he/she is seeing in standard library tools.

References and Notes

For more information, sample forms, etc.,: http://www.wsulibs.wsu.edu/usability/index.htm

Two good sources of information on usability testing:


WLA 2001 Conference to Feature Program by Philip Bereano

by Dolly Richendrfer, Spokane Public Library

WLA 2001 Conference Program Co-Chairs V. Louise Saylor and Claudia Parkins have announced that the Association’s 2001 Conference, “convergence,” to be held April 4-7, 2001, at the WestCoast Grand Hotel at the Park in Spokane, Washington, will feature a special program by Philip L. Bereano, Professor of Technical Communication and Adjunct Professor of Women’s Studies and American Ethnic Studies at the University of Washington. Bereano holds a law degree from Columbia Law School, and in 1989 was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Paris. He will present “Open Information and Privacy: Trying to Resolve the Conflict,” on Friday, April 6, from 3:45 until 5:00 p.m.

Professor Bereano’s presentation will examine privacy issues related to databases and civil liberties. He will consider the growing real-world dilemma facing governments, commercial enterprises, academic researchers, and other non-governmental enterprises that have needs to collect, maintain, and use some personal information in order to function efficiently, address security concerns about data, and still conform to laws that require open government records and protect the public’s right to information. He will discuss value conflicts and explore attempts to reconcile differences between businesses and citizen organizations.

Professor Bereano is recognized internationally as an expert on the ethical and social considerations of genetic engineering. In addition, he has been an outspoken defender of civil liberties with respect to information technologies and computer databases, and has helped to frame public policy debates involving privacy, discrimination and equitable access, and the Bill of Rights. He chairs the American Civil Liberties Union’s National Committee on Databases and Civil Liberties.

Complete program information will be available on the 2001 Conference Web page, which is accessible from the WLA Website. A conference registration form and fee information will be mailed in the near future.

WLA Conference 2001 committee members include the following WLA members: Merri Hartse, Conference Coordinator; Louise Saylor and Claudia Parkins, Program Co-Chairs; Mike Wirt, Local Arrangements Chair; Konny Thompson, Treasurer; Joy Neal, Preconference Chair; Lynn Red, Exhibits Chair; Bruce Ziegman, Underwriting Chair; and Dolly Richendrfer, Publicity Chair.

For more information, contact Merri Hartse, Conference Coordinator, at (509) 444-5376, or Dolly Richendrfer, Publicity Chair, at (509) 444-5312.

Washington State Library Diversity Initiative

by Eileen Simmons, Everett Public Library

To help libraries respond to the growth of minority populations in the state, the Washington State Library is sponsoring a Diversity Initiative. The initiative is on a three-year time table, beginning in 2000 with planning and needs assessment, and culminating in 2002 with a Library Services and Technology Act grant cycle. An Advisory Group consisting of librarians from many parts of the state and from various types of libraries began meeting this fall. Advisory Group members have been sharing information about existing programs, discussing needs, and researching programs in other states. Planning is currently underway for a series of workshops to be held throughout the state. Topics covered will include cataloging and collection development of foreign language materials, outreach and programming, and public services. The workshops will also include a session on recruitment and retention of minority staff.

The group hopes to have a Website soon to keep everyone informed about its activities, and to provide access to resources that will help libraries serving diverse populations. Until the site is available, anyone interested in the initiative should contact Susan Barrett of the Washington State Library at (360) 704-5206 or Karen Goettling, also from WSL, at (360) 704-5205.

The Friends of the Republic Library accept a donation from Back Country Horsemen for the library building fund. The Republic FOL was awarded the 2000 WLFTA Distinguished Service Award to a Library Friends Group. Photo submitted by Sandra Sweetman.
Earlier this year, the National Advocacy Honor Roll, sponsored by the American Library Association and the Association for Library Trustees and Advocates, announced that more than 300 honorees, representing 40 states and the District of Columbia, had been named to the first-ever National Advocacy Honor Roll. The Honor Roll recognizes those who have actively supported and strengthened library services at the local, state, or national levels over the last 100 years. At the 2000 Annual Conference of the American Library Association last summer, advocates were recognized at an Honor Roll Banquet. Each state library received a plaque listing their state’s members.

Ten of these individuals represented Washington State. Living members included Bill and Melinda Gates, Sharon Hammer, Lethene Parks, Amory Peck, and John Vehlen. Posthumous honorees included Eleanor Ahlers, Margaret Chisholm, Gladys Lees, and Irving Lieberman.

Eleanor Ahlers was a guiding light for Washington librarians working with children. A professor at the University of Washington and the University of Oregon during the 1960s and 1970s, Ahlers was Washington State Supervisor for School Libraries, and later was the first person to serve exclusively as the Executive Secretary of the American Association of School Librarians. She cared deeply about her library students, taught them how to link young people to books, and stressed the importance of outreach.

Margaret Chisholm made exceptional contributions as a library leader, educator, administrator, and author, and served as a mentor and role model to countless students and library professionals. After service at the library schools of two other universities, she returned to her alma mater, the University of Washington, as Vice President of University Relations. Subsequently she became Director of the University of Washington School of Library and Information Science, a position she held from 1981 until her retirement in 1992. Her distinguished career included election as president of the American Library Association, 1987-1988.

Gladys Lee became the Director of Libraries for the Tacoma Public Schools in 1950, a position she held until her retirement in 1970. Lee carried her commitment to and vision for school libraries beyond Tacoma and Washington. She served on many committees of the American Association of School Librarians and on the Council of the American Library Association, was a consultant to several national publications, and was president of the Washington State Association of School Librarians.

Irving Lieberman led the University of Washington’s School of Library Science from 1956 until his retirement in 1979. During his tenure, over 2000 professional librarians were graduated. A visionary and advocate for the library profession, Lieberman directed exhibitions at two world’s fairs, published in many journals and encyclopedias, consulted internationally, served as Library Chief of Staff for the Armed Services during World War II, and was instrumental in shaping library policy during his tenure as a commissioner for the Washington State Library Commission.

As co-founder of Microsoft Corporation, Bill Gates changed the world with his software innovations. In 1997, Bill and Melinda Gates changed the library world by establishing the Gates Library Foundation to address the problem of the “digital divide” between those who have and do not have access to computer resources. Since its inception, the Foundation has made grants to over 1300 under-served public libraries in 28 states, for the purpose of purchasing computers and hardware.

Sharon Hammer has been a model of library advocacy for many librarians. As Director of the Fort Vancouver Regional Library District since 1988, she successfully faced many intellectual freedom challenges, showed great commitment to equal access for all library clients, developed a comprehensive Vision Statement, and spearheaded a successful levy campaign. She was president of the Washington Library Association and active in many other organizations. Her breadth of experience, vision, and conviction have inspired and motivated the state library community.

Lethene Parks has been a strong advocate for libraries for four decades. For many years a librarian in the Patients Library at Western State Hospital, she became nationally known as a proponent of library services to the mentally ill. In the early 1970s, she served as Head of Outreach Services at Pierce County Library, where she advocated for services to many groups. During the 1980s, she oversaw the institutional library service programs for the Washington State Library. Following her retirement, she moved to rural Stevens County in eastern Washington, where she participated in the successful campaign to establish a county library, and was appointed to the library district’s first Board of Trustees.

Amory Peck served as a trustee on the advisory board for her local library in Tumwater for many years. Her dedication to library principles and her insight into library issues were so highly valued that she was subsequently appointed as a board member of Timberland Regional Library. Here, she provided excellent guidance to local and regional libraries, and almost single-handedly revived the Washington Library Friends and Trustees Association. Having retired and moved north, she is now trustee for the Whatcom County Library.

John Vehlen was a trustee for the Seattle Public Library in the 1970s. A tireless advocate for libraries, he was active in the development of Washington’s first Governor’s Conference on Libraries in 1978. He also represented trustees at the White House Conference on Libraries.
1) Never answer the phone.
You do not want to get a reputation as someone who answers the phone, or before you know it you will be functioning as the unofficial department secretary. Conduct all of your correspondence by e-mail. Cultivate a puzzled expression to accompany, "Didn't you get my e-mail?" (For more sophisticated audiences, amend this to, "Couldn't you open the attachment?") If you simply cannot stand the sound of a ringing phone, develop an alter ego, preferably with an unidentifiable but foreign-sounding accent. If questioned too closely, you can always make beeping noises and hang up.

2) Learn to feign attention during faculty assemblies.
Elaborate sexual fantasies are ideal for this. Let your imagination run wild! The president of the faculty senate will think you find him/her fascinating, and your colleagues will believe that you not only understand the latest arcane assessment proposal but also see the exact point at which it subtly goes wrong. No one will even notice if you giggle at inappropriate moments. While anything you might actually say would immediately be pounced upon and deconstructed, the small smile playing about the lips says volumes in the language of the observer's choice. Besides, if you don't fantasize in meetings, you'll never find the time.

3) Learn to feign attention in administrative meetings.
Practice deanometrics. Write "tradition," "hierarchy," and "procedure." (Or, if you're at a small school, "community," "co-equality," and "collegiality.") You will look as if you are really getting the point. Now count the number of times the dean uses each term. Compare notes with your colleagues. Chart. Graph. Regress (but not too far). Optional: Footnote. Query. Enter on c.v. as a "work-in-progress."

4) Avoid the cafeteria.
This probably needs no elaboration—we are, as you will recall, talking about survival. Another caveat, however: confine your professional complaints to the interior of the car en route to the restaurant. You may think it statistically unlikely that the president's pool guy is going to be sitting right next to you at lunch (you are wrong, by the way—he makes as much as you do), but are you willing to stake your career on it?

5) Become a sartorial analyst.
Train your finely honed powers of observation on what your students wear. Try to do this without staring. Now close your eyes and visualize all of these articles of clothing hanging on rack after rack in a store called TOO YOUNG FOR YOU. Repeat this meditation as often as necessary.

6) Control your cybermanic impulses.
Block-forwarding e-mail to long lists of colleagues is the office equivalent of an obnoxious Christmas form letter (only more frequent, and usually considerably less interesting). The only people who don't hate it are the ones who are going to turn right around and gang-mail your item to a hundred other people—at which point you will undoubtedly receive it again, probably several times. (See how annoying it is?) The same goes double for electronic masterpieces that you have written yourself—except that when they come back around, they will be stripped of your signature and attributed to someone else (either "real first-graders" or "signs in a Bulgarian hotel"). This should be punishment enough, but some people never learn.

7) Know thyself—and hide this knowledge from others.
You can't please everyone. (If you don't know that, you haven't been through graduate school and are clearly an imposter.) But it helps to be aware of what might work against you when your contract comes up. It's never too early to start putting the spin on your faculty review dossier. "Strong communication skills" sounds much better than "chatters all day long," and "effective interdepartmental liaison" has it hands down over "chatters all day long down the hall." Never address anticipated criticism or give the slightest hint that you don't believe that everyone loves you. There is always the possibility that your colleagues will finally start taking their medication, and all of your dreams will come true.

Angelynn King is Reference & Bibliographic Instruction Librarian at the University of Redlands in Redlands, California.
“When you try to ban books, it’s like trying to get rid of kids’ imaginations.”—Billy Smith, 11-year-old selected as one of four ALA Banned Books Week Heroes (“Boy Shared Chapter, Verse…”).

**Harry Potter and the Circle of Censors: The Continuing Importance of Celebrating the Freedom to Read**

He was a publishing phenomena—that little guy with glasses, Harry Potter, the young wizard-in-training, the hero of J.K. Rowling’s wildly popular fantasy series. Kids, parents, and teachers, all seemed to love him. His adventures topped the New York Times bestseller list, with each of the subsequent books being more eagerly anticipated than the last. But what many saw as a whimsical fantasy for all ages and a tremendous advertisement for the occult. Thus, despite of or possibly because of his popularity, Harry became a target—a target for the censors.

Spearheaded by Family Friendly Libraries, the national conservative organization that advocates a good dose of censorship as the antidote for what it sees as the anti-Christian, anti-family policies of American libraries, the campaign against Harry has gone nationwide—but with surprising results.

According to the American Library Association, the Harry Potter series topped the list of most-challenged books in 1999 and was 48th on the list of most-challenged titles for the decade of the 1990s. Harry has been challenged in at least thirteen states. But the little guy also has some friends. As it turned out, there were a lot of kids, parents, educators, and librarians who saw the attack on Harry for exactly what it was—an extreme reaction to a very popular book that didn’t fit neatly into the conservative Christian canon. So they started to fight back.

In November 1999, the school superintendent in Zeeland, Michigan announced restrictions on the classroom use of the first three Harry Potter titles in grades five through eight, ordered the books removed from displays in school libraries, and stated that the school system would not purchase the eagerly awaited fourth book in the series.

Local opposition surfaced immediately, led by a group called Muggles for Harry. (Those of you who have read any of the HP series will know what a “muggle” is. Those of you who haven’t—get with it!) The battle went public, and Zeeland became the center of the battle to unshackle Harry. In January 2000, the American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression wrote to School Superintendent Gary Feenstra to protest his actions. But they did more than that. Along with the Children’s Book Council, the Freedom to Read Foundation, and a number of other national organizations, they created a national arm of the group Muggles for Harry. Using a Website (www.mugglesforharrypotter.org), the group has worked to publicize attempts to restrict access to the HP series and to organize national efforts to fight those attempts.

Meanwhile, back in Zeeland, opposition to the restrictions on Harry led the local school board to set up a committee to review the actions. Based on the committee’s recommendations, Superintendent Feenstra announced on May 11 a lifting of most prohibitions.

But what appeared to be an almost complete victory for the Muggles and their freedom-to-read supporters was tempered by the realization that the series continues to be challenged around the country (“Free Expression Groups…”; “Zeeland, MI: The Harry Potter Debate”). The attack on HP also served to remind us of the on-going efforts to restrict kids’ access to many other great books in America’s classrooms and school libraries.

Every year in September, a coalition of groups led by the American Library Association celebrates Banned Books Week. This year’s celebration, the first of the New Millennium, was highlighted by the honoring of four individuals who put their belief in the principle of freedom to read into action. Two of these banned Book Week heroes were directly involved in efforts to support the rights of kids to read and enjoy Harry Potter.

It is important for libraries and librarians to continue to support Banned Books Week—an activity that has been continually attacked by Family Friendly Libraries—by setting up displays of challenged titles, reading and sharing these books in programs, and working with schools and other local groups to promote discussion and support for the freedom to read. After all, that is what Banned Books Week is about: the freedom to read. That, and the realization that whenever anyone’s freedom...  

... Anyone who reviews this list [of challenged materials] cannot escape the conclusion that the censors are attacking the right of adolescents to use their imaginations.

(Continued on next page)
to read or express opinions is abridged, everyone’s freedom to read is in danger.

**List of Challenged Books Reflects An Attack on Kids’ Imaginations**

What do the Harry Potter series, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the Goosebumps series, *The Giver*, *A Wrinkle in Time*, and *The Witches* have in common? Each is among the top 50 books on the list of “The 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of 1990-1999” ([www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/top100bannedbooks.html](http://www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/top100bannedbooks.html)), as reported to ALA’s Office of Intellectual Freedom. Yes, the number of reported challenges has decreased in recent years; but the censor’s reach remains extremely broad. Moreover, while most of these books were challenged because of sexuality, violence, or language, anyone who reviews this list cannot escape the conclusion that the censors are attacking the right of adolescents to use their imaginations.

A majority of the books on the “Most Challenged” list are published for either kids or teenagers. Many are classics and are regularly used in the study of American literature in secondary schools. These are the books that adolescents should be reading to learn and grow into creative adults. The censors accuse librarians of being anti-kid and anti-family. The truth, as reflected in ALA’s “Most Challenged” list, is that it is the censors who don’t have enough faith in our children to let them experience the best of American literature.

**American Family Association Says Libraries Provide “Excess Access”**

While data from ALA indicates that challenges to library materials are made by individuals and groups across the political spectrum, it’s very clear that a number of conservative groups are actively leading the censorship charge on the national stage. One of these is Family Friendly Libraries, the Virginia-based group that regularly attacks ALA and that provided a report card on Harry Potter that warned parents about the dangers of having the series in schools. Another such group is the American Family Association.

Can libraries provide too much access to information? According to AFA, the answer is yes. Evidence for this view is presented in a new AFA information packet on how to promote Internet filtering in your library. The lowlight of this packet is a video called “Excess Access: Are Your Children Safe in the Public Library?” This video purported to show how libraries with policies that reflect such anti-censorship documents as “The Library Bill of Rights” are actively allowing pornography to be disseminated to kids. Rabidly anti-ALA, the video trotted out a number of supposed experts—people like filtering advocate David Burt and FFL’s Karen Jo Gounaud—to denounce libraries, the Internet, and such (supposed) ALA dictates as “The Library Bill of Rights” (Schneider, p. 72).

Oh, and irony of ironies, AFA even sells its own filtering product.

Does that surprise you? It shouldn’t. To groups like the American Family Association, censorship is not only a good idea; it’s also a money maker. And along with ideology, the major driving force behind the effort to see that all library computers are shackled by filters is the growing filterware industry.

**References**


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**Mysterious** *(Continued from page 31)*

repaired it. Now we’re going to lay some carpet in the other room. We’d love some help, if you can spare the time.”

I stayed and helped lay the carpet. We painted some new bookshelves. Then I asked Emily how I could get a library card. “It’s easy,” she replied, and handed me an application.

“Can I really borrow up to forty books?” I asked.

“As long as you carry them out yourself!” she retorted. Knowing that I could come back on any Thursday or Saturday and check out more books, I decided to take home only fifteen this time.

I never found out who Iva Riddle is or why she sent me that note. But I’m so glad she did, because visiting the new library down in the old Northport City Hall made me realize what a great resource we have in our community. Through books, I can learn so many things, visit such exciting places, and have adventures without ever leaving my house. I love to read; and I wish everyone in Northport did, too. Even though it can be hard to learn at first, the more you read, the better you get at it. And if we can come up with that secret potion—or even if we just put our minds to it—we’ll find we can truly say that NORTHPORT WOULD RATHER BE READING!
I’d Rather Be Reading . . .

The Mysterious Letter

A Work of Fiction by Hilary Ohm

It was an ordinary Saturday morning. All around Northport, Washington, kids were glued to their TV sets, watching cartoons.

I needed to mail some letters, so I drove to the post office. Only four more days before the new post office would be opened. This little old building in front of me would soon be gone.

I got out of my car, and passed Ralph Pierce talking to a guy in a green pick-up. I heard Ralph say something about a carburetor. Mrs. Wilson emerged holding a package. It contained a part for one of the washing machines at the laundromat. She was planning to return home by 5 o’clock, she said, in order to cook dinner for twenty-three people! And she wasn’t going to let the fact that she was running a fever stop her. “I just hope I have time to correct all my papers after my guests leave,” she added.

I shook my head, and stepped inside the post office. I heard Mr. Sayles ask Patrick the postmaster what team he favored to win the Superbowl the next day. Patrick said he was rooting for the underdog, and hoping for an upset. “Remember when Joe Namath and the Jets did the impossible and beat Johnny Unitas and the Baltimore Colts in the 1960s?” he asked. “I predict the Titans by seven points. Unless, of course, the Rams win; in that case, I’d say Rams by seven. In any event, it will be a close game and will probably be decided with the last two or three minutes.”

I smiled to myself. The Superbowl stirs so much passion in the souls of 90% of American males (and about 2% of American females). What I’d give to be able to bottle up that passion! I’d add a secret extra reading ingredient, and give the potion to Dena and Kim at the school cafeteria, to put in school lunches. And then all Northport students would love to read! Maybe those kids in the Odyssey of the Mind program can figure out how to do it . . .

I headed back out the door, and turned to say good-bye to Patrick. He held out a letter and said, “This was found on the ground out front this morning. The postmark is smeared, but I think it says it came from Clueville. It has your name on it, but it’s marked ‘Address Unknown.’”

I thanked him and stared at the letter. The return address was smeared as well, but it seemed to be sent by a Mrs. Iva Riddle. “That’s funny,” I thought. “I don’t know anyone by that name.” I opened the envelope and pulled out a single piece of lined notebook paper. On the paper was written in perfect cursive writing, “Mrs. Plum, In the Library, With the Wrench.”

What could this mean, and why was it sent to me? I suddenly got a queasy feeling in the pit of my stomach. Could Mrs. Plum be in trouble? I remembered that she had mysteriously disappeared last year, and came back with a new baby. But this note just didn’t make any sense.

I rushed to the pay phone and dialed the Plums’ number. Only an answering machine replied. I called everyone, but no one knew where Mrs. Plum was. Just then I saw Carol Jean Broderius drive by. “If anyone can solve this, it’s Carol Jean,” I thought. I jumped in my car and followed her. She stopped in front of the new library. Of course!

I rushed inside and stopped dead in my tracks. “Look at all these books!” I shouted. There were books about horses, tornadoes, dinosaurs, and bugs. There were novels, biographies, books about cars. I couldn’t believe it! I had been meaning to come to the library ever since it opened, but had never managed to get around to it. For a few seconds I was mesmerized, but then I remembered why I had come.

I looked around. There seemed to be no one there. I went into the Children’s Room, where there were lots of children’s books and a bed. I noticed some books on display that looked like ones the kids in the Washington Reading Corps might like. There was a book about Amelia Bedelia, a book about Buzz Lightyear, one entitled Slamdunk Saturday, and a whole series about the Little House on the Prairie. I grabbed a book about a girl who gets locked in a haunted house, and was about to sit right down and read it—when I remembered Mrs. Plum. Where could she be?

The place seemed deserted. Then I remembered that Carol Jean had come in before me. Where did she go? Slowly I crept toward the back rooms. I heard voices coming from the bathroom. I was petrified, but I pushed open the door. Emily, the librarian, was standing in front of the sink. Surrounding her were Carol Jean and other friends. “What’s everyone doing here, and has anyone seem Mrs. Plum?” I asked.

They all moved aside. There, crouched under the sink, with a wrench in her hand, was none other than Mrs. Plum! “Hi, Hilary,” she said cheerfully. “We’ve volunteered to help fix up the library today. The drain got clogged, and we just

(Continued on page 30)
WLA Thanks 2000 Sustaining Members

Minolta Business Systems, Inc. ... SIRS, Mandarin, Inc. ... Washington Coalition Against Censorship

2000 Friends Members

Friends of Aberdeen/Timberland Library ... Friends of Jefferson County Library ... Friends of La Conner Library ... Friends of Manchester Library ... Friends of Mid-Columbia Library ... Friends of Orcas Island Library ... Friends of San Juan Island Library ... Friends of Seattle Public Library ... Friends of Whitman County Library

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