

## Crystal Clear? Today's Libraries, Tomorrow's Library Users

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By: Christine Fischer with John M. Saylor, contributor, and Susan Davis, column editor. Reports of Conferences, Institutes and Seminars. *Serials Review* 32.3 (2006): 210-212. Report of the 15th North Carolina Serials Conference.

The Fifteenth North Carolina Serials Conference, hosted by the North Carolina Central University (NCCU) School of Library and Information Sciences (SILS), was opened by Carol Nicholson (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill). Dr. Irene Owens, Dean at the School of Library and Information Science (NCCU), welcomed attendees. Evelyn Council (Fayetteville State University) presented Dr. Benjamin Speller (NCCU) with a plaque in recognition of his service and support as “the drive behind the conference.” A visiting team of academics in information technology was introduced by Dr. Emmanuel Oritsejafor (NCCU); the group from Moldova was in the state looking at best practices in distance education. Eleanor Cook (Appalachian State University) introduced the keynote speaker, Marshall Keys of MDA Consulting.

### Keynote Address

Looking for trends in technology and culture that will affect libraries, Keys explained that he reads widely as a means to scan the environment. In his presentation “How Today’s Trends Affect Tomorrow’s Libraries and the Next Generation of Library Users,” Keys pointed out that the future of libraries depends upon their ability to meet emerging needs of users. The challenge is that we don’t know what those needs will be, so planning for them is difficult, and we don’t know how they will differ from current needs and current users. What seems clear is that customization is becoming more desirable with different groups expecting media packaged for its members. Keys pointed out that a number of demographic changes are significant factors for libraries to consider. Aging baby boomers, who have high service expectations and may be heavy library users, range in technical skills from savvy to naïve. Immigration and ethnicity influence libraries both from the user and the staff perspectives. He asserted that multilanguage collections and catalogs are essential to support the user community, while an understanding of cultural differences can improve staff relations in the workplace. Further, Keys recommended a language requirement for students earning library science degrees – not literary study of the language but study that could be practically applied to typical conversational interactions. Recognizing African-American diversity requires that assumptions within libraries change. The creation of satisfying careers for minorities in this field, according to Keys, demands that racism must be fought absolutely. The final demographic group Keys described was people aged 13-30, emerging users who value community, personalization, and portable, ubiquitous technology.

To respond to these various influences, libraries will need to consider the ways that their users access and gather information. Keys remarked that use of commercial services indicates that users are willing to pay for information. People are no longer bound to computers when locating information, but they employ a wide range of devices that vary in size and portability. As a means of meeting those changes, Keys highlighted reference services available through

voice or text messaging and via camera phones. Perhaps less clear is the effect gaming, 3-D images, and the graphical world beyond browsers will have on the catalog specifically and library services as a whole. The provocative perspective detailed by Keys was a thoughtful view of the evolving library environment.

A panel of practitioners responded to Marshall Keys' remarks. Kathy Winslow (North Carolina Wesleyan College) pointed out the significance of the library as a center of the community with users multitasking by researching, writing, and socializing. Physical space needs are evolving, according to Dianne Ford (Elon University); group study spaces and multimedia group spaces are being incorporated into the library to accommodate user needs. Linda Martinez (Duke University) described the planning process of a library renovation to which student groups provided input. After the project was completed, library usage increased significantly. Other comments included the concern of some technical services staff members that choosing to provide more electronic resources while reducing the physical collection could result in job loss and the fact that librarian participation in campus life, lunching with faculty, and communicating how the library contributes to the education of students all help to inform faculty and upper administration of the library's role.

The final session on Thursday, "Academic Summit: A View from the Top," provided leaders of North Carolina library schools the chance to share information and to hear from librarians and paraprofessionals. Among numerous topics addressed, Jose`-Marie Griffiths (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) pointed out that the number of faculty at library schools who are retiring or eligible to retire is growing, while those earning doctorates in library science tend to move into academic or public library directorships. O. Lee Shiflett (University of North Carolina at Greensboro) urged attendees to encourage individuals to join the profession. The library can facilitate its patrons' production and construction of knowledge by providing tools and space, but we may need to be more aggressive in the application of newer technologies such as blogs and wikis, according to Robert Sanders (Appalachian State University). Irene Owens (NCCU) advocated involvement in research within the library as well as interdisciplinary activities that reach across departments. A concluding comment from the audience highlighted the importance of mentoring on the job, particularly for paraprofessionals and for new librarians.

## **General Sessions**

The second day of the conference began with Evelyn Council (Fayetteville State University) who presented a historical view of the conference in her talk, "Back to the Future: A Retrospective of Past North Carolina Serials Conferences." She highlighted the contributions of Duncan Smith who was instrumental in organizing the first meetings and Dr. Benjamin Speller (NCCU) who saw the need for continuing education opportunities for those in serials. The success of the conference was linked to the value of the knowledge shared through formal sessions as well as informal networking.

David Goble (Central Piedmont Community College) provided an in-depth look at the "Financial Viability of Vendors." Remarks were based on a prior ALA presentation by Goble, James Gray (Coutts Information Services), and Dan Tonkery (EBSCO Information Services). First encouraging attendees to think like bankers as they manage risk, Goble discussed various common risks faced by library serialists: third party payments, prepayments, and service

dependencies. Those risks need not be eliminated but need to be recognized. Goble went on to share financial research techniques that can help libraries evaluate their vendors from a business perspective.

## **Concurrent Sessions**

Conference participants were able to choose from a number of concurrent sessions. Rebecca Kemp (University of North Carolina at Wilmington) and John Kiplinger (JSTOR) presented “Print Backfiles in the Age of JSTOR.” Kiplinger highlighted the importance of maintaining original print copies of digitized content to preserve the format and context and to allow for rescanning as electronic standards evolve. JSTOR can not maintain its own paper repository, so coordination with libraries is essential. Kemp further emphasized that libraries must collaborate as they establish consortial depositories, consider ownership issues, and remain vigilant about legalities regarding copyright and contracts.

In a complementary session, Yvette Diven (CSA) discussed “Accessing Yesterday’s Information for Tomorrow’s Research: The Growth of Electronic Backfiles.” Diven provided an overview of the digitization process, identified the groups involved in creating and distributing the backfiles, and described format, content, and pricing options. Diven suggested that collaboration between end-users, librarians, publishers, and other stakeholders will build trust as best common practices are established.

“The Shift in the Currency of Scholarly Information – Implications for Library Collections and Acquisitions” was presented by Hilary M. Davis and John N. Vickery (both of the North Carolina State University Libraries). They described various indicators that suggest that the dataset is replacing the article as the unit of information currency in current research.

Tim Bucknall (University of North Carolina at Greensboro) suggested a means to providing additional resources for library users by taking advantage of available Open Access and free journals in his discussion, “How Libraries Provide Access to Free and Open Access Journals: Are We Doing Enough?” Bucknall pointed out reasons that free e-journals are becoming more highly regarded and thus valuable to library collections. They are being included in scholarly indexes; faculty increasingly publish articles within the publications because of high impact; quality control has improved with more being refereed; publications are covering subjects beyond the initial science and medicine focus; and backfiles are being established.

In a session that generated much discussion, Michael A. Arthur and Tonia Graves (both of Old Dominion University) shared their library’s experience in “Developing a Crystal Clear Future for the Serials Unit in an Electronic Environment: Results of a Workflow Analysis.” Arthur and Graves described the serials unit’s analysis of team functions and the preparation of print and online serials workflow charts which led to recommendations for changes in staffing and training as well as in claiming, check-in, and print title selection procedures.

Randall Watts (University of South Carolina at Aiken) led attendees through his library’s process of removing materials from the collection in his presentation, “‘Yes, As a Matter of Fact, We Are Throwing Those Away’: A Small Public University Library Deals with De-Selection.” Space constraints, patron use of electronic resources, and journals outside the scope

of the curriculum were contributing factors that Watts and colleagues considered when developing a plan to remove and recycle unwanted material.

### **Closing Keynote Address**

As an introduction to the final address, Christie Degener (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) discussed the role the North American Serials Group (NASIG) has played in the history of the North Carolina Serials Conference by helping to finance the conference and by assisting with organizing the meetings with a balance of theory and practicality. Degener expressed her thanks to NASIG and then introduced Denise Novak, the closing keynote speaker and incoming president of NASIG.

Novak (Carnegie Mellon University) addressed the topic “Are We Dinosaurs Who Eat Serials for Breakfast?” After sharing the career moves that led her to become involved with serials, Novak discussed the role that NASIG plays for practitioners intent on learning more about the field. The organization has a commitment to continuing education, and it supports serialists by sponsoring scholarships, grants, and awards. Novak went on to discuss ways to make the profession more attractive and responsive. She suggested being proactive in educating new librarians by creating field placements. Continuing education, she asserted, should emphasize electronic and digital work in serials. Novak considers paraprofessionals an untapped resource in the profession, and she encouraged the recruitment of young people into serials work. Being open to change is one aspect of supporting and retaining young professionals as those currently in serials invite new librarians to “join the club.”

Following Novak’s comments, attendees joined in a thoughtful discussion recognizing the contribution support staff make in every library. Several paraprofessionals shared factors that helped them determine whether or not they would consider attending graduate school in librarianship. Whatever that decision, libraries can enrich the work life of paraprofessionals by providing training and continuing education opportunities.

### **Wrap Up**

Carol Nicholson (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) introduced her colleagues on the conference planning committee and thanked them for their efforts. The conference concluded with a special presentation by Selden Lamoureux (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) who recognized Evelyn Council (Fayetteville State University) for her many contributions as the “public face” of the conference on this Crystal Anniversary of the North Carolina Serials Conference. The 16<sup>th</sup> NCSC will be held at the William and Ida Friday Continuing Education Center in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, on March 29 & 30, 2007.