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ACRL 2007 Report

Thanks in part to LIBRAS funding, all six full-time professional librarians from Elmhurst College were able to attend ACRL again this year. While I enjoyed many parts of the conference, as a technical services librarian I had a hard time finding sessions that really addressed many of the things I do at Elmhurst.

That said, one session that particularly held my attention was “Who Do You Trust? Wikipedia and the Authority of Anonymous Strangers,” presented by Dan Ream from Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries and Lucretia McCulley from the University of Richmond Library. Their session was great in part because of the interaction between the presenters and the audience. An informal poll of the room revealed an interesting paradox: more people in the room were Wikipedia editors than would recommend the use of Wikipedia by their patrons. (I hate to admit I’m one of those people – as the Elmhurst College Archivist, I keep an eye on the Elmhurst College wikipedia entry but don’t normally recommend the use of Wikipedia for research purposes.) We learned terms such as *wikiality*, coined by Comedy Central’s Steven Colbert as “truth by consensus;” and *wikimbacking*, a game in which one tries to find a search term in Google that does NOT result in a Wikipedia entry within the first five search results. The structure of Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org>) entries was explored in great detail, which I found quite helpful in evaluating the credibility of particular entries. When looking at a Wikipedia entry, there is the content tab with the actual entry, but additionally there are tabs showing any discussion about particular edits and a history of all edits made to a particular entry. I also learned that at the bottom of each entry is a list of all external links and references, which can help identify more in-depth or “authoritative” resources. The presenters also shared two encyclopedic entries on an American sculptor, and facilitated a discussion on recognizing a Wikipedia entry versus other online sources. Finally, the presenters shared interview clips with students, faculty and staff from their universities, in which participants shared their views on Wikipedia and researching in general. I enjoyed this session immensely and have a much better-informed view of Wikipedia.

For me, the most useful part of the ACRL conference in 2007 was the exhibit hall. I learned about several companies doing new and exciting things that Elmhurst needs to start thinking about. First, after the LIBRAS Collection Development SIG program in February on weeding collections, we have been interested in pursuing avenues for selling some of our un-needed donation materials in order to clear space for additional donations coming down the pike. On the first day of the conference I discovered Better World Books (<http://www.betterworldbooks.com>), a company that sells libraries’ unwanted books. What’s neat about this company is that they recycle books that cannot be sold, and in addition to a commission to the libraries who send their books to Better World, the company also donates a portion of the proceeds to several literacy initiatives both domestically and abroad. They provide cartons and pay for the shipping as well. We’re excited to begin working with them.

My other goal in the exhibit hall was to find a company that could assist us in digitizing the College’s newspaper, which dates back in various forms to 1920. I was quite pleased to talk to representatives from Northern Micrographics and OCLC, who both have the ability to digitize old newspapers and

provide Web-based searching capabilities for the papers once they're done. I'm looking forward to exploring this further in order to move this project forward.

Overall I found ACRL 2007 to be a pleasant experience – I enjoyed seeing Baltimore for the first time, the keynote speakers were entertaining, and as always, the poster sessions were full of valuable information from the folks working in the trenches. I am glad that LIBRAS is able to support so many of its members' attendance at this premier national conference for our profession.