

ACRL 13th National Conference,

This was my fourth ACRL meeting, and I was happy to see a slight shift in subject matter. In the past, the content seemed to be so heavily concentrated on various aspects of “information literacy.” Although I am a reference and instruction librarian, I considered not going to this year’s conference.

Although information literacy was discussed, I was able to attend sessions on library marketing, personnel issues, collection management, design, and institutional support. I enjoyed a broader range of subjects, especially those that reached outside of the standard, internal functions of the library. Other than the functions of liaisons, I feel that library conferences and literature sometimes reflects a lack of connection and mutual understanding of the larger academic institution.

The following sessions reflect the expansion in subject matter at this year’s conference:

Library Marketing:

“Will it Make my Teeth Whiter? Selling the Library Without Selling Out.”

Issues discussed:

- The difference between advertising vs marketing. (goal of sales vs. information.
- Integration of mission and ethics in library marketing
- Marketing libraries actually fulfills their ethical responsibility to provide information about services to its potential users.
- The importance of creating trends rather than following them

Strengths of the session:

- Challenged stereotypes, images, and perceptions of what we do and who we are.
- The presenters delivered their material in a way the embodied their message; the ability to convince through belief and excitement in the content.
- Brings the librarian out of the ‘standard’ realms of librarianship

Personnel Issues

“Recognizing and Deflecting Toxic Personalities in the Library Workplace”

I was drawn to this session in large part because one of the presenters was from a CARLI institution. Again, I was drawn to topics outside of information literature. This lecture was disturbingly popular. I believe the hall was more packed than any other presentation. The session began with a presentation of results of a survey of librarians about personnel issues. The results were sometimes humorous, and sometime frighteningly negative. I was particularly surprised by the negative comments in the open-ended questions. Many of them wrote things about working with women.

Library Design

“Designing a Library Environment That Promotes Learning” “Measuring the Implementation and Outcomes of an Information Commons”

Modern “industrial,” architectural, and product design were my research areas as an art historian before I began my M.L.I.S. My current research focuses on library design. These presentations were particularly interesting to me.

Issues discussed included:

- Library design that reflects use of wireless laptops, and the student preference for individual space. Although North Park’s library is new, and has always had wireless access and individual study rooms, this presentation addressed our need to keep pace with trends in physical space that keeps pace with technology.
- Librarians’ observations of the link between physical space and learning outcomes and success.

Institutional Support

“Education Without Boundaries: The Goucher Experiment”

I feel that all too often, librarians and their scholarly publications make negative comments about the administration at their universities. I feel that these issues often stem from a lack of communication between the two parties. I was pleased to see that the president of Goucher College was the speaker at this session.

Issues included:

- Goucher implementation of a foreign study requirement for all students. Integration of library services for students abroad was particularly interesting to me. North Park’s study abroad programs are expanding quickly, and we are exploring ways to give access to students abroad, and stress their importance to faculty involved. North Park recently drafted a proposal form that all faculty must complete to implement new programs. The library was able to add a sentence in this form that requires that faculty member to speak with a librarian about our resources if they want to add a foreign program to the curriculum.
- The president also discussed the new campus “athenaeum.” The building unites several aspects of the campus experience in mission and physical design. Functions of the building are social and academic. Because North Park is a small university, there is pressure to serve many functions including space that doubles as a computer lab, conference center, etc. Discussion of multi-use campus buildings is particularly interesting to me.
- The possibility of keeping the library open 24-hours a day. North Park’s library users include “traditional” on-campus students, commuter undergraduates, seminary students who are writing theses, and undergraduate adult students, and evening “professional students. The broad range of library users creates concerns about the times that the library should be open. Late night and weekend need for reference librarians is also a concern when considering Goucher’s policy.

Keynote Address:

I thought the content of Dyson's talk was very disappointing. Although his speaking style is excellent, the lecture was clearly a "canned" book tour talk with an occasional sentence about librarians (who he called "scary" at one point!), and books. Because his talks were clearly taken from his book tour, I was not surprised that it ended with an announcement that his books were for sale at the conference. Unfortunate, as he was clearly a promising speaker!