

LIBRAS Continuing Education Report
Access2005--Jeff Beard, Wheaton College

Since 1993, the Access conference, hosted in Canada by college and university libraries, has proved a premiere watering hole for library technologists. Access 2005, sponsored by the University of Alberta Libraries, and convened in Edmonton, Alberta, upheld and extended that tradition.

Talks at Access conferences tend to fall into one or a couple of a few categories. There are State of Technology (non-library-specific talks) addresses, State of Library Technology addresses, and the occasional State of Library Something Non-technological addresses. The types of talks are typically either an introduction to something new, a case study, a report, or prophecy, in the double sense of both surveying the current landscape and predicting what could happen in the future. In this brief report, I intend to highlight and respond to some of the primary themes from the perspective of what we at Buswell Library could learn from, change in response to, etc. Presumably some of the things that are applicable to Buswell Library are equally applicable at other Libras libraries.

As I reflect on the discussion of technology at Access conferences, it is somewhat amazing to note that, increasingly, the internet has replaced the library catalog as the center of the library technology universe. This is exemplified by the lack of time spent discussing library catalogish things at Access. At Access 2005, there were no talks directly discussing the library catalog. This in contrast to previous years in which people at least complained about their library catalogs. MARC, likewise, may someday find itself withering in the shade of indifference, as it has to share shelfspace with XML and its derivatives and the infinite possibilities they offer for metadata creation, organization and extraction. Neither were there any talks at Access 2005 dealing specifically with MARC.

One of the things that *was* talked about at Access, and tends to be talked about frequently there, was how the library may prove serviceable in an era in which our patrons are quite adequate consumers of information from non-library sources, and tend therefore to regard library information as mostly irrelevant. The most comprehensive treatment of this was given by Lorcan Dempsey, head of OCLC research in his talk, "[The Library and the Network: flattening the library and turning it inside out.](#)" A related hurdle for libraries, which is, perhaps, also

a way to address the problem of patrons taking all of their information needs to the arms of Google and Amazon, is how to get the data hidden in our library data silos out into the interfaces which our patrons are comfortable using when they seek information. Most of the talks dealt with addressing this problem from one angle or another: specifically, Bill Moen's, "A Radioactive Metadata Record Approach for Interoperability Testing Based on Analysis of Metadata Utilization," a report on Z39.50 and connectivity between disparate data sources; Glenn Newton's "Federated Searching in an Age of Web Services," a case-study which addressed reimplementing the library catalog with an AJAXish interface and combining catalog searching with metasearch functionality; Ross Singer's well received, "(Grease)Monkeywrenching the Library: utilizing the sloppy underbelly of the web to expose our collections and services," which reported on the use of library-specific extensions and toolbars for the Firefox browser; Lorcan Dempsey's talk, again, which proposed a third-generation of web services connectivity, built on standards such as OpenURL, to provide library data to patrons in their familiar working environments, such as their Windows desktop or Microsoft Office environment; Art Rhyno's and Peter Binkley's "As we may link: Building Memex with XML pipelines," which prototyped a Firefox browser extension built to support Vannevar Bush's Memex idea in today's webspace, something which would enable an expert researcher to follow and record a trail of research; and, finally, Dan Chudnov's and Jeremy Frumkin's "Digital Library Dialtone: Bootstrapping with Service Registries and Autodiscovery," which called for library technologists to build systems that are agnostic about what interface library patrons will want to use to access them, with the expectation that we cannot predict what patrons will want to use next year, much less five years or so in the future.

Implications for my department, Systems and Technological Services, at Buswell Library, of the trend that patrons don't frequent the interfaces we've built for them unless they absolutely have to, are numerous. As a department focused on technology, we need to keep pace with how our patrons, mostly undergraduates, are using the internet. We need to try to tailor our services to fit our data into their practices and favored environments. In terms of time

allocation and priorities, with the limits of current staffing, we need to use what others, such as Ross Singer, have built and customize it for our setting (the need for this was especially emphasized in Roy Tennant's, "Breaking out of the Box: Creating Customized Metasearch Services using an XML API," in which Roy outlined the pitfalls of trying to write a system from scratch). Finally, we need to be willing to be more committed to meeting the information needs of our patrons than we are to sustaining the interfaces we have previously created for them. Buswell Library will have an opportunity in the next semester to test out some of these ideas, as most of our web traffic will not originate at the library's homepage, but at the new campus portal, which intends to be a catch-all for student web needs on campus.

One other common theme at Access conferences is how library technologists may aid expert researchers in their research tasks. Several talks at Access 2005 focused on this area. I always leave Access inspired for the possibility of focusing similarly at Buswell Library—building tools that can truly make a difference in the research of internet-savvy faculty and grad students.

Thanks to Lisa Richmond, College Librarian at Wheaton College, and Libras, for providing the funds for my attendance at Access 2005.