Racing toward tomorrow: ACRL’s 9th National Conference

By Carol Pfeiffer

Six subthemes will explore creating and channeling change

Change is the only constant and its pace is speeding up.” “The future is here already; now what do we do?” “How can we move from accepting or even anticipating change to seeking and creating it?” “What about the ‘dark side’ of change, as it is so tellingly portrayed in Dilbert?”

These and other comments filled our flipcharts as the Detroit ’99 ACRL National Conference planners brainstormed at Midwinter and Annual. We marveled at the extent to which we have already transformed our libraries and ourselves. We were equally awed by our sense that more extensive and more fundamental changes are ahead. We noted that the 1999 conference is scheduled for the brink of the 21st century—an appropriate time to maintain our focus on the future. And we talked about the excitement of Detroit and about the automobile.

From this mix emerged the theme for the Detroit conference: “Racing toward Tomorrow.”

Conference planners agreed that we and our colleagues are on the fast track for change. To keep pace and to stay on course, we need the best ideas of our profession and of related professions on how to create and channel change. We need the best crystal balls that we can find (or invent) to understand and anticipate revolution in the financial, technological, sociological, and political environment for higher education. We need to put our chosen future into action.

One conference planner summed it up gently: “We need to change the tires on the car while it is racing full speed ahead.”

The conference committee chose six subthemes to stimulate thinking and discussion, each of which is sketched out below. The Detroit ’99 program will include a “Conference within a Conference” that will provide an opportunity to invite teaching faculty and academic officers from your institution to attend the conference with you.

Shifting gears: Environment in flux

As highlighted by Barbara Ford’s ALA presidential theme, globalization of the economy has significant impact on library programs and services. Another trend affecting libraries and campuses is the growing presence and voice of previously underrepresented groups. The philosophy of students and taxpayers as the “customers” of higher education is a catalyst for institutions to rethink services and finances. The fiscal outlook is constrained and the call for measurable learning outcomes is urgent. Technology is more accessible and more pervasive and the choices, more complex. How can we hone our ability to scan the environment, to interpret and anticipate changes, and to respond with new and improved services and collections? What can we learn by listening to experts outside of libraries? How can we not only respond to but also shape this changing environment?

Shifting gears: Multiple roles

While the fundamental mission of the academic library has not been altered much, the roles librarians play in carrying out the mission have changed significantly. Our role as educator is more important and more prominent than ever. Librarians collaborate with faculty, computarians, instructional designers, and others to transform the teaching and learning process. As campus leaders, we advise students, tutor athletes, teach...
technology to faculty as well as students, and participate vigorously in other academic support functions. Library directors must be fundraisers as well as managers, and often direct many units in addition to the library. Support staff take on responsibilities previously handled by librarians. How can we keep and project a clear professional identity while assuming so many new roles? Which roles (if any) should we discard and which roles must we preserve? How can we move flexibly from one role to the next and allocate our time among so many demands?

**Shifting gears: A new kind of learner**

At the heart of these changes is the mandate to prepare students of all ages and backgrounds as the workforce of the 21st century. We must ensure that students do not simply acquire a body of facts or even assimilate knowledge but instead learn how to learn. Citizens, schools, and governments seek to create a seamless, lifelong learning process—one that starts before and continues beyond formal education. Technology is one key to success in this venture; is it sufficient? The "Conference within a Conference" will focus on the development of the new learning communities within higher education.

For the first time at the national conference, ACRL is designing a program to facilitate dialogue among librarians, faculty, academic administrators, and other campus personnel around the theme “Student Learning in an Information Age.” Opening with a stellar panel of higher-education leaders after the opening reception, the "Conference within a Conference" will provide plenty of opportunity for interaction among the participants the following day. To encourage team attendance, discounts will be available for faculty and others who come with a librarian.

**Shifting gears: Different players**

Within and outside the academy, new partnerships form and old ones disappear. Business and industry collaborate with higher education to redesign the curriculum to prepare students for the workplace and to retrain employees. Competitors to traditional higher-education programs seek a growing portion of that training market. Colleges and universities collaborate with K-12 educators to ensure that students leave high school ready for college—perhaps with a number of college credits already earned. New multitype library consortia emerge to purchase electronic resources. How can librarians most effectively network with new players? What are the benefits and risks of partnerships? What do we as librarians bring to the playing field?

**Shifting gears: Alternate resources**

As taxpayers, parents, and students question the cost of higher education and as governments seek to limit or reduce public funding for higher education, institutions must find new revenue sources. In addition to the growing emphasis on private giving, colleges and universities look to new fees and to corporate support. What revenue opportunities have entrepreneurial libraries identified? How can we stretch our buying power through consortia? How can business and industry partner with higher education to use human and technology resources in innovative ways?

**Shifting gears: Expanding knowledge base**

Last but perhaps most important, our own knowledge base and abilities have expanded dramatically in the past decade. We are more comfortable with and expert in the use of technology. We know a lot about how to manage change. We understand the teaching process at a deeper level and we teach in new and more effective ways. What new frontiers of knowledge are on the horizon? Despite our demonstrated success in acquiring new knowledge and skills, many of us are anxious about our ability to learn all we need to know for the new roles we are taking on. How can we alleviate these fears and build confidence? How can we create and sustain learning organizations that will carry us into the 21st century?

We know that adults learn best when the educational program meets a current, pressing need and when the learners are actively engaged with the material. The Detroit '99 planners will design a conference with maximum opportunities for participation and engagement. A centerpiece of this active learning will be the “Conference within a Conference: Student Learning in

**Save these dates**

April 8–11, 1999, are the dates of ACRL’s 9th National Conference which will be held in Detroit, Michigan. The call for participation will be published in the January 1998 C&RL News and on the ACRL homepage. The deadline for submitting panel and paper proposals is June 15, 1998.
an Information Age," which will model in its
design some of the learning techniques that will
be discussed at the conference. Look also for
opportunities to participate before the confer­
ence even starts in postings on the ACRL Con­
ference Web site, (http://www.ala.org/acrl.html)
listserv discussions, and previews of papers.

Join the race
Tune up your carburetor, open the throttle, and
plan ahead now to join your colleagues at the
1999 ACRL National Conference as we race to­
gether toward the 21st century. Detroit is a vi­
brant city and epitomizes our focus on change
by the ways it has transformed itself in recent
years. City officials are eager to welcome ACRL
to Detroit and will go all out to assist conference
planners in ensuring that you have an enjoyable
as well as an educational visit to a flourishing,
attractive, and culturally rich conference site.

Look for the call for participation in the Janu­
ary 1998 C&RL News and on the ACRL hom­
page, and send in your best ideas. Talk with
colleagues to encourage them to attend. We’ve
revved up our engines and are raring to go!

(Health statistics cont. from page 630)

Transplants

- Health Resources and Services Ad­

ministration (HRSA), HHS. This Web site
links to solid organ and bone marrow trans­
plant statistics and delineates transplants and
bhrd/dot/dotmain.htm.

- UNOS: United Network for Organ Shar­
ing. UNOS administers the Organ Transplan­
tation and Procurement Network, and mem­
bers include all U.S. transplant programs, organ
procurement organizations, and tissue typing
laboratories. This site contains detailed statis­
204.127.237.11:80/.

Women’s health issues

Women’s health Web pages focus on diagno­
sis and management of conditions but do not
concertedly present statistics on women’s health
topics. Therefore, the searcher should go to
topical sites for women’s health statistics. For
example, go to the National Cancer Institute’s
Cancer Statistics Review page for data on breast
cancer incidence (Access: http://www-
seer.ims.nci.nih.gov/Publications/index.html),
and to NCI’s Fact Sheet for breast cancer data by
ethnic group (Access: http://www.feminist.org/
other/bc/bcnci1.html).

- Women’s Health Data Book: A Pro­

file of Women’s Health in the United States.
While not available directly online, the print
publication can be ordered through this Ameri­
can College of Obstetrics and Gynecology site.
Access: http://www.acog.com/catalog/
professional_publications.htm.

Discussion lists and groups

- EDSTAT-L. This mailing list addresses
educational tools for statistics and issues re­
lated to the teaching and learning of statistics.
The list’s archive is at gopher://jse.stat.ncsu.edu/
11/edstat. The corresponding newsgroup is
sci.stat.consult. Subscribe: listserv@jse.stat.ncsu.edu.

- STAT-L. A good forum for statistical con­
sulting issues; questions arise on the list about
methods for statistical studies in health sciences
and biomedical fields. The corresponding
newsgroup is sci.stat.consult. Subscribe:
listserv@vml.mcgill.ca.

- teaching-statistics. This UK list is con­
cerned with the initial teaching of statistics in
all phases of education and follows the objec­
tives of the journal Teaching Statistics. The list’s
archive is at http://www.mailbase.ac.uk/lists/
teaching-statistics/1997-02/index.html. Subscribe:
teaching-statistics-request@mailbase.ac.uk.

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