



## Editor's Keyboard

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The current issue of *LA&M* is particularly interesting because it brings together writers who have very different opinions about what constitutes a professional librarian. Like all of us, they are struggling to balance

the traditional core competencies that stand at the center of our profession with the realities of an increasingly competitive environment among nonprofit and commercial information providers. Is the card-carrying model of professional librarianship still relevant, or should it be replaced by a more fluid—and perhaps more practical—description of job responsibilities? Does a business model actually help or hurt the public library in its dealings with its user base? Should academic libraries be subsumed into larger information services divisions, or does a traditional structure of operations continue to provide value today? These are some of the lively discussions in the following pages. I hope that you will find ideas that you both agree and disagree with, and I encourage you to continue this dialogue with the authors at the e-mail addresses they have provided.

The topic of professional change and growth is a thread that runs throughout the career of Maureen Sullivan, the library leader featured in the latest installment of our *ChangeMasters* series. Sullivan's career began in earnest in the 1980s, when as the head of library personnel services at Yale, she first "recognized the interdependency among the work we do in libraries—from selection to the shelf." This observation led to the establishment of some of the first self-managing teams in libraries and also taught her the valuable lesson that "changing the structure enables people to change their behavior. It becomes a means for people to think in different ways about the work and their contribution to the work. It allows them to see that there is meaningful work beyond what they have been doing in the past." Sullivan has made a career of fostering organizational change.

Library director Robert Renaud has had extensive experience in reshaping the operations of academic libraries, first as associate dean of information services at Connecticut College and today as vice president of library and information services and chief information officer (CIO) at Dickinson College. In both cases, Renaud was brought in to oversee a merger of the library and IT divi-

sions. His article, "Shaping a New Profession: The Role of Librarians When the Library and Computer Center Merge," describes the latter merger and reports on how the library is functioning today. Renaud sees immense opportunities for librarians in such an environment, noting that "librarians who succeed in merged organizations thrive on rapid change and enjoy working across organizational and professional boundaries." He frankly discusses the merits and difficulties of instituting such a reorganization and the effect it has on library compensation, professional status, and job responsibilities.

"CIOs and Academic Research Libraries: A Selected Review of the Literature" provides extensive background information on the relatively new phenomenon of the CIO position at academic libraries. Carolyn Snyder, professor of library affairs and director of foundation relations, Southern Illinois University–Carbondale, has assembled an excellent literature review that complements information provided in Renaud's article. Most importantly, her study shows the hesitation of the academic community towards the merging of IT and library services. As Renaud notes, this kind of merger has been most frequent in libraries that have the Carnegie classification "Baccalaureate Colleges, Liberal Arts" and whose library staff are nontenure track.

Surely, the piece that will cause the most comment is Bill Crowley's article, "Suicide Prevention: Safeguarding the Future of the Professional Librarian." Crowley, professor at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Dominican University, is well known for his outspokenness on the issue of library professionalism. He has written extensively about what he views as a series of disastrous moves on the part of directors to turn the public library away from its traditional mission as a community educational resource. His vision of the "new" public library is one in which "public library professional librarians are educated and employed for the primary purpose of facilitating the ongoing self-education, defined in the broadest possible terms, of a spectrum of community residents ranging from preschool children to senior citizens." Crowley views the master's degree from an ALA-accredited institution as the gold standard of the library profession and urges administrators to support this qualification in their hiring practices. In thinking about this topic, readers

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inclusive and safe, but non-users just do not see it that way. If non-users in the future radically outnumber or out-influence users, how will we attract the best and the brightest to work in libraries and how will we fund collections and services?

As we learn more about users and try to adapt our services accordingly, how does this change the roles and responsibilities of professional librarians? This issue of *LA&M* contains several articles about major changes in library organizations and their leadership, including the relationship of computing services to libraries and the wisdom of adopting the corporate model for public libraries. These articles help raise awareness about the need to re-evaluate and redesign libraries to enhance services and collections.

As a profession, we are very risk-averse. We hesitate to change what we do and how we do it. We fear breaking the traditional attachment users have to libraries without a guarantee that users and non-users will respond positively. As 2006 unfolds, we need a sense of urgency about our professional roles. We should heed the survey advice and market

our services to actively update the library brand. If we do not, our libraries will be increasingly pushed to the margin of the information-seeking world or forgotten altogether. This issue of *LA&M* and the OCLC and the United Kingdom reports challenge us to think differently about users and ourselves, and this seems to me to be a fine way to celebrate the New Year.

## References

1. OCLC, *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources: A Report to the OCLC Membership* (Dublin, Ohio: OCLC, 2005), [www.oclc.org/reports/2005perceptions.htm](http://www.oclc.org/reports/2005perceptions.htm) (accessed Feb. 2, 2006).
2. *Ibid.*, 6-6.
3. Catherine Shovlin, *Increasing the Attractiveness of Libraries for Adult Learners* (London: Museum, Libraries, and Archives Council, 2005), [www.mla.gov.uk/documents/id2100rep.pdf](http://www.mla.gov.uk/documents/id2100rep.pdf) (accessed Feb. 2, 2006).
4. *Ibid.*, 3.

may want to refer to Bonnie Osif's "Manager's Bookshelf" column in this issue. Osif has done a splendid job exploring the current literature on the role of professionalism in librarianship.

Lastly, Antonia Olivas, reference and instruction librarian, and Henry McCurley, cataloging department chair, have provided a wonderful analysis of cross-training and cooperation at Auburn University Libraries. This particular model, unlike that in effect at Dickinson College, was developed in an ad hoc manner by staff at the university library. The authors note that a great deal of miscommunication had occurred in the past among different divisions simply because of the sheer size of their institution. "Working across Divisional Lines: How One Large University Library Cross Trains and Works As a Whole" describes how reference and technical services librarians decided to cross-train and work in a cooperative, nonhierarchical manner—truly a form of self-management that readers of John Lubans's column have been accustomed to hearing about. They write that:

What has made the experiment both possible and successful is the support of the library adminis-

tration, the willingness of the various unit and department heads to allow such working across administrative lines on an informal basis, and, most of all, a certain kind of library culture that caters to and nurtures experimental working environments. It is a culture based on mutual respect, willingness to teach and learn, and an implicit understanding that, while administrative units may be necessary, they should not be allowed to get in the way of devising ways to improve service.

### **Erratum:**

*In the last issue, Peter Pearson's e-mail address was incorrect. He can be reached at [peterp@thefriends.org](mailto:peterp@thefriends.org).*

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