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A Conference Report

Ellen T. McGrath

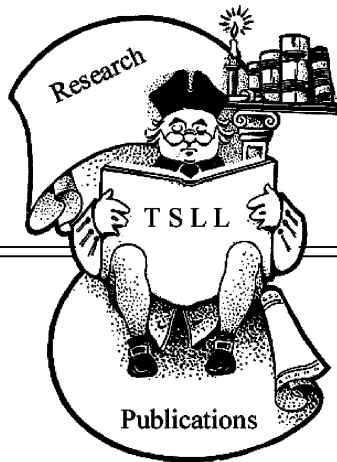*University at Buffalo School of Law*, emcgrath@buffalo.edu

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The agenda at the Research Roundtable for the AALL's annual meeting in Orlando includes
* Introductions
* Publishing or research projects colleagues are thinking about doing, or are doing, or have recently done
* Update on the OBS & TS SIS Joint Research Grant Committee (JRGC)
* Handouts of Brian Striman's Publication "Kit" for anyone who wants one
* Reminders of grant availabilities in AALL for research
* Sharing the results of Larry Dershem's work that resulted from his grant award last year of the JRGC
* Any other advice or discussions that are raised during the Roundtable discussions
* Chance to meet a potential co-author for that article or book you need to write, or want to write.

Finally, we will need a reporter at the roundtable. This is a good publishing opportunity if you've never contributed anything to *TSLL*, this a good time to jump in, but not get too wet.

Ellen McGrath has volunteered to contribute her notes on a program she recently attended. Thank you so much Ellen! So here's a fabulous idea, which I've mentioned in previous columns: If you have recently attended a program at your institution, or some regional library event, or just read an excellent article or book about research or publishing that you think you'd like to write a review on, PLEASE consider using this R&P column as a vehicle to

share your comments and what you learned. Before we get to Ellen's report, I have a URL to share with you— <www.lita.org/manual/publish.html>— go there and read through the screens. It has some good information about publishing opportunities for you. It also has information that their Publishing and Publications Committee requires of their authors. It's a good place to start. LITA is Library and Information Technology Association and is a division of the American Library Association. If you are not familiar with it, go to their main homepage and investigate the work they do. It's amazing! <www.lita.org>

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A Conference Report
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The spring conference of the Western New York/Ontario chapter of the ACRL (Association of College and Research Libraries) was held on May 3, 2002 at the beautiful White Oaks Resort and Conference Centre in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. It was called "Becoming Visible, Staying Viable: Researching, Publishing, Mentoring." This program was interesting and inspiring and I was very glad I had taken the opportunity to attend it.

The first speaker was Dr. Gloria Leckie (Faculty of Information and Media Studies, University of Western Ontario) and her presentation was entitled "The Importance of Being Earnest: Librarians and Their Scholarly Role in Academe." She began by describing the nature of the university where scholarship and learning are important in their own right; advances in knowledge will come through research and study; the university must have control over

academic matters; and the faculty are best placed to exert their control through collegial governance structures. To become a member of the professorate requires a long process of acculturation which places emphasis on certain values such as research as the primary focus of the university, an in-depth knowledge of a discipline, awareness of important scholars working in the discipline, and participation in a system of formal and informal scholarly communication.

Dr. Leckie next turned to the question of how academic librarianship differs significantly from other types of librarianship. The reasons for this are reflected in the institutional context: being surrounded by those in pursuit of knowledge; there is a strong sense of institutional history and tradition; and faculty self-governance occurs through the Faculty Senate. The institutional values also have an effect on academic librarians: in-depth knowledge is respected; collegiality and respect for peer judgment is integral; and autonomy, self-governance and academic freedom are highly valued. She pointed out that the acculturation of academic librarians is at odds with that of the non-librarian university faculty. Librarianship is a service profession and as such, stresses the values of professional ethics, a priority on relationships with clients, equity and fairness in the practice of librarianship, and a commitment to equitable access to information. Dr. Leckie characterized academic librarianship as being marginalized, specialization is discouraged. Little original research is required and there is little understanding of the politics of the academic or the librarian within the academy. Ultimately, research is viewed as a burden by the librarian, not as an

essential part of one's career. These were thought-provoking observations, especially given the presenter's statistic that approximately 60% of college and university librarians have faculty status.

Dr. Leckie tracked some historical trends in academic libraries. In the 1980s, she noted declining budgets, downsizing and structural reorganizations, collection constraints, and a decreased staffing complement. This was followed in the 1990s by a spread of personal computers, the arrival of electronic databases and the Internet, and the rise of information literacy instruction. All of these trends resulted in what she characterizes as the repurposing of academic librarians. She posed the question: How do academic librarians perceive themselves? This is where her catchy presentation title came in and she made a comparison to Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. In her view, academic librarians have a dual identity: "Jack" is the consummate professional and "Ernest" is the invisible scholar.

The next question posed was: How do the faculty perceive academic librarians? Dr. Leckie proposed two identities: the older identity ("slaving over a hot reference desk") or the newer identity ("expert navigator in a sea of electronic resources"). Whichever identity the faculty perceive along that continuum, her conclusion is that academic librarians are not perceived as scholarly colleagues engaged in active research. So what are the barriers to the development of a scholarly identity for academic librarians? A lack of knowledge and confidence, a lack of institutional support, a lack of peer support, and job descriptions and performance reviews. Suggested strategies to deal with these barriers were outlined.

Strategies to bring down the barrier of the lack of knowledge and confidence:
♦ Have in-house workshops on research methodologies
♦ Develop research partnerships with faculty members
♦ Start small—try to get something published

♦ Take a study/research leave
♦ Undertake a Ph.D.

The lack of institutional support was addressed by saying that most faculty collective agreements suggest institutional support through the availability of sabbatical and other leaves. However, the reality for librarians contradicts this:
♦ Librarians do not have flexible working arrangements
♦ Librarians are discouraged from taking sabbatical or study leaves
♦ Librarians are not eligible for internal university research money
♦ Librarians do not have access to research assistants

So how can we overcome these realities and encourage institutional support? There must be a collective rethinking of the roles and responsibilities of academic librarians; we must be clear about terms and terminology when negotiating contracts; we must insist on the same support as for faculty, including sabbaticals and access to research and travel money; we must publicize our scholarly activities within our institutions. Some specific ideas concerning the last point were to establish a colloquium series, participate in research seminars in academic departments, and announce our accomplishments in campus publications.

Strategies to address the lack of peer support are:
♦ Foster an atmosphere of collegiality—work together to identify areas needing further study and to develop research projects
♦ Support colleagues who are eligible for sabbatical or who are attempting to conduct original research
♦ Celebrate the research successes of colleagues
♦ Form a research and discussion group

Dr. Leckie noted the tension between the regulatory vs. reflexive aspects of job descriptions. Regulatory refers to the fact that there is a need to be accountable for ongoing library processes and work. This contrasts with the reflexive aspect, which focuses on time to read, study, learn, and contribute to the knowledge of the discipline. The tension between prescribed time vs. flexible time is accompanied by a tension between the authoritarian vs. mentoring aspects of the performance review for librarians. The authoritarian calls for a policing of performance based on certain prescribed indicators, while the mentoring strives to foster and support an interest in research. Dr. Leckie encourages a movement toward a more reflexive and mentoring model and she suggests a few ways to achieve this. We should move toward more generic job descriptions for faculty librarians, in which the specific components of positions are downplayed and emphasis is given to research and service. The activities of individual librarians can be examined to see if there are duties that could be rotated and thus taken out of individual job descriptions. More should be left to the individual discretion of the librarian. We should strengthen expectations for scholarship and service and support that through appropriate performance reviews. Mentoring committees should be set up for new academic librarians. It should be made a strategic priority for librarians to take a greater role in campus governance and politics.

There are many advantages to be gained if changes can be made to the

scholarly identity and role of academic librarians:

♦ It will add knowledge to the discipline of library and information studies

♦ It will contribute to the solution of real pedagogical problems in higher education

♦ It will increase the visibility of academic librarians as colleagues and partners in the academy

♦ It will increase job satisfaction for librarians (This point was supported by research results listed by Dr. Leckie: librarians with faculty status were the most satisfied; librarians at institutions where the faculty status model was the most rigorous, were the most satisfied; librarians who were involved in a collegial model of governance were the most satisfied.)

The second session was a panel discussion moderated by Amanda Wakaruk (York University). The panelists were Inga Barnello (Le Moyne College), journal editor of *College & Undergraduate Libraries*; Rea Devakos (Gerstein Science Information Centre, University of Toronto), a librarian who conducts original research; Carroll Klein, managing editor of Wilfrid Laurier University Press; and Cathy Matthews (Ryerson University), a librarian who has been awarded numerous research grants.

In answer to the moderator's first question How do you develop research ideas? there were many good suggestions. Be curious about things, read the literature, let your daily decision-making events produce ideas, collaborate with others, force yourself to reflect, go back for another degree, let your need to achieve tenure motivate you, follow your passion, attend conferences and read electronic lists. The discussion flowed on to many other topics. Collaboration or partnering is often actually sought out by an editor. In co-authoring situations the shared expertise and skill sets can be very advantageous. One panelist specifically described the process that

she feels works well for co-authors: chunk the paper into parts and divide up the research and writing; have one person do the "slaughterhouse" edit (first edit, putting the chunks together, not focused on grammar, etc.); integrate changes and solicit comments; have a different person do the second edit; integrate changes and solicit comments; then do the final, "finesse" edit. She described the process as "read—write—consult." Ms. Matthews focused on grants. She said it is necessary to do your homework in

advance. Find out what grants are out there and what other grants the funding body has awarded. Be thorough in your proposal, detail all costs, and complete all paperwork carefully. Ms. Barnello, speaking in her role as a library journal editor, said she does sometimes get unsolicited submissions that are very well done. But she prefers to have the author contact her in advance so that the author doesn't waste time or tailor the submission to her journal's style unnecessarily. Ms. Barnello said she rejects a submission most often because the topic has already been handled recently. Other reasons are that the article is not substantive enough ("too fluffy") or that the writing is poorly done. She will work with the author if she feels the piece is salvageable.

There was a discussion about just getting started and writer's block. It was acknowledged that everyone has problems getting going and has a level of anxiety about writing. Suggestions were to block out a time period every day, even if only for 30 minutes or so. More than one panelist emphasized just getting something, anything down on paper. Let if flow and capture it all, even if you think you might end up cutting it later. Don't try to make it perfect when you are starting. In terms of writer's block, some ideas were to set it aside for a day or two (but not for too long), focus on the issues you are blocked on and build a "to do" list around them, schedule small periods of time and force yourself to work on it, and consult a colleague if you are really stuck. Of course you cannot expect someone else to do your work for you, but if it is a really tough part you are stuck on, a fresh perspective may help. One of the panelists pointed out that research is basically about project management and active learning, skills that come naturally to librarians.

The final session speakers were Michael Cook and Angela Horne and their presentation was called "Mentoring Matters: The Re-Invention of the Cornell University Library Mentorship Program." They described their program at Cornell in detail, focusing on the pros and cons and how the program is being tweaked so that it will be more successful. Their presentation and mentoring bibliography is available on the web at: <http://www.library.cornell.edu/pdc/Mentor.html> so I will not go into detail here. I will focus instead on some of the points they made that particularly struck me. It is essential to profile both the mentor and mentee thoroughly and to make sure that they are matched carefully based on both their expectations. It is important to follow-up with mentors and mentees, in order to determine why the match was successful or not. It is not a one-way match, mentors can get a great deal out of the relationship too. Cornell's current program is for librarians new to Cornell. However they are considering

extending the program to librarians that have been there a while, but need slightly different mentoring through the mid to late stages of the tenure process.

Much of what I have reported should sound somewhat familiar to regular readers of this column and to those who have attended the OBS/TS Research Roundtable. But I feel it is always helpful to be re-energized by hearing it again and in fresh ways. The mentoring piece may not be as familiar, but it too is an integral part of the big "Research & Publications" picture. I am thinking about mentoring a lot these days as I begin to train our new cataloger, who has faculty status, and as I embark on a dialogue with my newly-matched mentee, courtesy of the AALL Mentoring Committee. One other point that lingered with me after this conference was the mention of the importance of reflection by a number of the speakers. I think that is one of my biggest challenges: How do I make the time for reflection? It is so essential to problem-solving in our daily tasks, as well as in the process of choosing a topic, doing research into it, and then writing about it. Yet I don't think I am alone when I say that I feel rushed much of the time and it is the reflection part of my day that usually gets short shrift. Do you have any ideas about this? If so, I would love to hear them <emcgrath@buffalo.edu>—thanks!