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Instruction vs. information on demand: How can academic and public libraries work together?

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Elizabeth Mannarino, reference librarian at Corvallis-Benton County Public Library, Ruth Vondracek, coordinator of reference services at Western Oregon State College, and Shirley Williams, reference librarian at Chemeketa Community College were panelists for the September 1994 Reference Roundtable at Lane Community College in Eugene. With 19 reference librarians from public and academic libraries in attendance, an animated discussion of the responsibilities of academic and public librarians to their patrons ensued.

Instruction vs. Information on Demand

*How can academic and public
libraries work together?*

*by Barbara Valentine
Linfield College*

Elizabeth began the program with a literature review that analyzed how college students use both academic and public libraries in their communities. (Bibliography included below.) Several surveys have been conducted among college students to determine how often they use public libraries, their primary reasons for using them, and the extent to which public library collections are used for course-related purposes.

A New York study showed that more than 75% of college students use public libraries to supplement the resources provided at their academic institutions (Haas 1962). A figure nearly as high (67%) was reported in a similar study done in Australia (Grosser 1988). Reasons typically cited include perceived inadequacy of their home institution's collection, geographic proximity, convenient hours, skill of staff, and comfortable surroundings of the public library. Liberal arts and education students use other libraries more frequently than do students in engineering, business, and other professions (Haas 1962, Grosser 1988).

The three panelists then discussed the ways in which academic and public libraries can cooperate more effectively in Oregon to serve their patrons. Elizabeth noted that Corvallis-Benton County Public Library serves many of the students who attend Oregon State University (OSU) and Linn-Benton Community College (LBCC). LBCC students use the public library because it has more open hours. Some of the reasons university students give for using the public library are its proximity to OSU, crowding at OSU's Kerr Library, and a general perception that OSU's collection is "difficult to use."

While reference librarians at the public library try to give all patrons good services, Elizabeth said that rather than simply answering a question, they tend to teach students how to use the resources more often than they do with other patrons. She concluded by suggesting several ways in which the public and university libraries can cooperate to better serve their mutual clients: cooperative collection development, participation in the regional reference referral program (a.k.a. Oregon Reference LINK), and familiarity with each other's resources, hours, and services.

Ruth Vondracek shared a college library's perspective on service to its clients. Western Oregon State College Library has a strong commitment to teach students how to conduct library research. The six professional librarians share reference desk responsibilities in addition to their other duties. All public service staff, including Access Services staff and student workers, receive some reference training in order to provide a higher level of public service. The library emphasizes one-on-one reference service, course-related instruction, and specialized faculty and staff instruction.

Students and faculty are the library's first priority, but reference service is extended to everyone. Efforts to serve the community include issuing guest cards and cooperating with other regional libraries. Western is engaged in several cooperative projects. One is Valley Link, a consortium of mid-valley public and academic libraries, created to facilitate interlibrary loans among participating libraries. Valley Link reference libraries meet regularly to discuss reference issues in an effort to improve reference service for their mutual patrons. Western's collection will also be included in the Orbis union catalog, along with the University of Oregon, and five other academic libraries.

Shirley Williams, reference librarian at Chemeketa Community College (CCC), articulated the advantages and disadvantages of membership in the Chemeketa Cooperative Regional Library Service (CCRLS), a library consortium in which Chemeketa is the only academic library along with the seventeen public libraries of Marion, Polk, and Yamhill counties. Advantages include a shared online catalog, reciprocal borrowing, and a two-day courier delivery with all collections easily accessible to students. In addition, there is a gateway providing Internet access to other library catalogs, including Western Oregon State College, Oregon State University, and the University of Oregon.

Chemeketa's library is small, both physically and in terms of staff. It is just 18,000 square feet and has a collection of 50,000 volumes and 800 periodicals to serve the 9,000 FTE students who attend classes. Three reference librarians cover the desk for the 63 1/2 hours a week the library is open. There is little off-desk time. The library's philosophy is lifelong learning, so the librarians spend most of their time teaching library research, both in formal course-related classes and individual instruction. The scheduled classes fluctuate during the year with the majority at the beginning of each quarter. During the first month of the fall quarter, two librarians completed 53 classes, reaching a total of 1,154 students.

Shirley contended that there are many advantages in working with students. They want to learn, they are familiar with computers, they can come back, and they are usually tolerant and appreciative. The college librarian is familiar with the assignments, the collection is already geared to the curriculum, the required texts are on reserve, and the instructor can be called for help. She admitted, however, that expensive books are often requested by faculty and

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In defining cooperative collection development, it is well to keep our goals in mind. The Collection Development Committee of the Oregon State System of Higher Education libraries has stated that their mission is "to facilitate cooperation in collection management and development and to share information in order to maximize the value of OSSHE resources." Periodic meetings for discussion provide a setting for sharing information among the eight OSSHE libraries. Similar arrangements among groups of libraries exist throughout the state.

If you have a comment on the work of the Statewide Collection Development Steering Committee or ideas for projects, please let a member of the committee know. Co-chairs are Deanna Cecotti of the Multnomah County Public Library (248-5123 ext. 4885; e-mail deannac@nethost.multnomah.lib.or.us) and Karyle Butcher of Oregon State University Library (737-7300; e-mail butcherk@ccmail.orst.edu). ☐

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then hardly used and that courses are changed before the library is prepared.

Shirley reiterated the advantages of belonging to CCRLS: the shared collection, shared expertise, mutual checkout and interlibrary loan services, and a speedy delivery system. Problems do arise, however, when libraries have different hours (CCC is seldom open on the weekend), when unprepared students descend on the public libraries, and when public patrons expect to find popular fiction at the academic library.

In conclusion, Shirley offered some encouragement for all of us. Accept our differences and do not try to do it all. Concentrate on what you do well. The key is in finding information whether by instruction or information-on-demand. ☐

Adapted from minutes prepared by Diane White for the Reference Roundtable. Contributions by Elizabeth Mannarino and Shirley Williams. Edited by Ruth Vondracek and Barbara Valentine.

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