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Library continuing education challenges: Beyond the summit

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Addressing the subject of library continuing education challenges in Oregon presents the chance to look back and summarize a recent effort to focus attention on the state of continuing education and to look forward to advancing continuing education opportunities into the new century. This article will review the Oregon Library Association's effort to concentrate on continuing education challenges begun at the "Continuing Education (C.E.) Summit" in 1994, recap the findings from the summit, update the list of challenges developed at the summit, and attempt to climb past the summit by offering recommendations for planning library continuing education in the future.

THE C.E. SUMMIT

On April 9, 1994, the Oregon Library Association convened the C.E. Summit at its annual conference in Sunriver. Participants included providers of library education programs in Oregon, library managers with staff development needs in mind, staff members seeking more continuing education opportunities, OLA committee members, the State Library, and other interested persons or organizational representatives. A motivating force for the summit was the knowledge that the continuing education grant for library personnel, funded through the Library-Services-and-Construction-Act and administered by the Division of Continuing Education at Western Oregon State College (now the Division of Extended and Summer Studies at Western Oregon University), was in its third and final year. OLA wanted to consider the possibilities for coordinated continuing education beyond that grant.

FINDINGS

Library education service providers presented evidence that more library education opportunities of different types existed in the state than typically thought. The 49 participants at the summit identified what was missing:
- a shared mission and vision for library continuing education
- a coordinated process for content input regarding future offerings from Western's Division of Continuing Education library personnel education program and into other courses and workshops from education providers (This includes a lack of

a process for addressing affordability and access issues statewide.)
- statewide calendar to publicize all C.E. opportunities

At the continuing education summit, the State Library committed to scheduling a follow-up meeting. The OLA Continuing Education Committee actively helped in planning the agenda. Invitations were sent, and the meeting publicized. February 13, 1995 dawned to wild weather that caused unsafe traveling conditions. All parties agreed to postpone the meeting. Timing and conditions never came together, and the various parties never gathered for Part 2 of the C.E. Summit.

THE CHALLENGES UPDATED

The findings from the C.E. Summit remain as current challenges, and they can be expanded from today's perspective.

Shared Mission for Library Continuing Education

Updating the list of library education providers from the C.E. Summit still leads to the conclusion that ample opportunities for library education exist in Oregon. Following is a list of library education providers, each followed by abbreviations for the type of education that each typically provides (C.E.: continuing education; D.P.: degree program; B.L.S.: basic librarianship skills):
- Library professional organization conferences and workshops like those of the OLA and the Oregon or Pacific Northwest chapters of national library organizations, such as the Medical Library Association and the Special Libraries Association (C.E.)
- Workshops offered by regional library organizations such as the Southern Oregon Library Federation or the Eastern Oregon Library Association (C.E.)
- Staff development activities planned by individual libraries (C.E.; B.L.S.)
- Western Oregon University (D.P.; C.E.)
- Portland State University (D.P.; C.E.)
- Portland Community College (D.P.; C.E.)
- Marylhurst College's Library Information Management Program (C.E.)
- Oregon State Library (C.E.; B.L.S.)
- Oregon State System of Higher Education's Online NW conference (C.E.)
- Public Library Director's retreat (C.E.)
- Community College Library Director's retreat (C.E.)
- Valley Link, PORTALS, Orbis, Chemeketa Cooperative Regional Library Service, and other consortia (C.E.)
- Emporia State University's School of Librarianship and Information Management (D.P.)
- Oregon Educational Media Association (C.E.; B.L.S.)
- Clackamas Conference (C.E.)

No single Oregon library organization, agency, or institution holds the responsibility to coordinate con-

tinuing education. Would continuing education in Oregon be more effective if all of the above educational opportunity sponsors carried out their planning with the guidance of a shared mission and vision statement? The necessary research to answer that question has not been carried out. Many library organizations are undergoing organizational change because of property tax limitations or the desire for improvements. Trends in organizational change include building team-based organizations, implementing quality initiatives, and creating continuous learning organizations. These efforts must be supported by readily available educational opportunities as the organizations strive to provide just-in-time training for staff, a key success indicator. Responding to these trends in organizational change can be suggested as a reason to continue on the path

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From the Front Lines of Library Education

OLA Library Support Services Round Table:
"I'd say the biggest challenge for continuing education is funding and employers releasing staff from work duties for educational purposes."
Maresa Kirk, Hatfield Library, Willamette University

Eastern Oregon Information Network, Oregon Reference LINK:
"Eastern Oregon has a very low per capita rate of M.L.S. librarians, and ability levels among library staff are extremely varied. Some are quite savvy about research techniques, and some have no experience with the reference process. When that is the case, designing effective instructional programs is very difficult."
Leah Starr, Pierce Library, Eastern Oregon University

Marylhurst College, Library Information Management Program:
"Marylhurst College will begin the fall 1997 academic year with a full program of continuing education courses for librarians, staff, and trustees, several of them new course offerings. Shoen Library at Marylhurst has a newly-designed and upgraded pc computer lab ready to accommodate many electronics-oriented courses, and the College has also entered the online course offerings arena with one (so far) in the Library Information Management (LIM) Program. Courses will be announced on LIBS-OR, and individuals who would like to be on the LIM mailing list should contact Kirk Howard at 503-699-6261, ext. 3375. Non-credit costs for courses at Marylhurst are low, between $70 and $120."
Jan Fortier, Shoen Library, Marylhurst College

Valley Link:
"I have most recently been involved with providing continuing education for Valley Link, a multi-type group of libraries in the middle of the state. An issue which we on the Valley Link C.E. Subcommittee felt was most important was paying a stipend to librarians for the research and delivery time they put into their presentations. All of the Valley Link libraries concurred and contribute annually to the C.E. fund. Each speaker is now paid.

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toward coordinating library continuing education and creating a shared vision for it.

Coordinated Input Process
All how-to guides for training adult learners stress the importance of input from potential learners in developing course or workshop content. The C.E. Summit participants felt that a coordinated method of providing such input would improve the quality of presentations and workshops in the state. They also identified a need for a method of suggesting ideas to be developed into workshops by some service providers.

This mechanism must work well enough in advance so that continuing education providers have time to develop courses and advertise. At the same time, the mechanism must anticipate urgent information needs, particularly as demanded by technology, with some quick-response predeveloped workshops lined up.

The July 25, 1997, Intellectual Freedom workshop sponsored by the OLA Intellectual Freedom Committee provides a good example of workshop content development. The committee has been working on a train-the-trainers approach for intellectual freedom continuing education and public relations presentations. Potential trainers, called together by the committee, gave input at a meeting on a first draft of the training tool kit (handouts and overheads). Based on comments from librarians who would actually use the materials in the field, the committee revised the materials and presented the improved tool kit to essentially the same group of potential trainers in a workshop format on July 25. The committee invited a panel of library and legal experts on intellectual freedom to answer questions, further enhancing the educational opportunity. Finally, the panel of experts presented a second workshop in the afternoon, focusing on current topics in library intellectual freedom. The committee gave input to the panel about hot topics to cover, but serendipity also played a role in affecting workshop content. The date of the workshop (set months ago) occurred one month after the Supreme Court declared the Communications Decency Act unconstitutional and less than one month after the American Library Association passed a resolution against Internet filters in libraries. What topics could be hotter?

Access and Affordability
The circumstances that prevented the second C.E. Summit from taking place are representative of logistical challenges faced in presenting continuing education in this state: gathering people together across long distances; the effect of weather on planning and implementation; and scheduling issues—what else is happening on any given day, week, or month? Library Development staff at the State Library recently asked the last question over the LIBS-OR listserv. There were eight responses that provided a mixed bag of best- and worst-day suggestions. Three preferred not to meet on Mondays, but two indi-

cated Mondays were better. Four indicated Fridays as preferred days, but two clearly did not prefer Fridays. One response indicated all days are difficult because of tight staff scheduling. Obviously, the final choice of a specific day for continuing education will not please everyone!

Ed-Net workshops, other distance education teleconferences, video training, and Internet online courses are more common types of continuing education in 1997. They alleviate many of the logistical challenges in library continuing education while presenting other issues. Can effective learning be provided by a "talking head?" Should discussion leaders onsite at downlink locations be a given? What is the quickest way for an institution to identify co-sponsors to host an expensive teleconference? What is a streamlined way to notify the library community that certain satellite offerings can be downlinked by any interested Ed-Net site?

Costs for library continuing education in Oregon range from free to high, with some level of cost recovery common. Some level of subsidy is usually a factor when costs are lower. For example, the State Library has used federal funds to keep workshops free or low-cost; a regional library or consortium may use operating funds to sponsor a workshop, not expecting full cost recovery from other participants. The 1997 update on costs is intertwined with the recent property tax limitation. Will libraries still be able to sponsor staff development days, co-sponsor teleconferences, and plan needed conferences? Library Information Network of Clackamas County's decision to postpone its Network Conference (see sidebar on page 8) may be an early indicator of a decline in locally planned continuing education activities. In addition, property tax limitation threatens already slim travel and training budgets and discourages library staff from attending any workshop that requires a registration fee.

COORDINATION OF A CALENDAR
Marketing library education opportunities is a continual challenge, but it is necessary to guarantee that learners will attend. Identifying the target audience, describing the workshop content fully and accurately, and getting this information into the hands of potential participants are basic components of the activity. In 1994, C.E. Summit participants felt that a coordinated calendar was critical. A noticeable gap in information then was widespread knowledge of the course offerings from the degree programs in the state (Western Oregon University, Portland State University, Portland Community College). An improvement since 1994 is that more and more libraries are connected to the Internet, and we are reaching a critical mass on the Oregon library listserv, LIBS-OR. Savvy workshop planners are posting continuing education opportunities to that listserv. Between May 20 and June 25, alone, I noted six messages about library conferences and workshops posted to LIBS-OR.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Setting forth continuing education challenges after the C.E. Summit without offering solutions calls to mind the myth of Sisyphus. Rather than making the effort of getting to the summit only to repeatedly roll backwards, I offer suggestions that may generate discussion and action for advancing library continuing education in the future:

- Reactivate efforts to call together key library education providers to create a shared vision and mission for library continuing education.
- As preparation for such a meeting, compile a list of all known library education opportunities during the coming year. Identify gaps in that curriculum. Ask education providers to fill in the gaps. This effort should be repeated annually.
- Develop a means of communicating with library education providers so that urgently-needed training can be provided quickly, especially training related to technological changes or current library issues.
- Develop a means of facilitating focus groups that provide content input to workshop presenters. The method should be widely communicated and used.
- Research distance education techniques (teleconferences and online courses via the Internet) thoroughly and report recommendations widely so that such educational opportunities are as effective as possible. Develop a means of communicating with a network of education providers and library organizations to streamline communications about sponsoring and co-sponsoring teleconferences.
- Use partnerships and subsidies if possible to keep continuing education affordable. Publicize information about scholarship opportunities widely.
- Create a virtual calendar for continuing education:
  1) Continuing education planners post announcements of all opportunities and activities on the LIBS-OR listserv.
  2) Each library designates a person to forward the messages on his or her own network, print out these announcements to route to co-workers, and post them in a C.E. notebook or on a bulletin board.
  3) Online and print newsletter editors copy email announcements to include in their newsletter calendars.
  4) Workshop planners back up email announcements with a printed brochure or program announcement as can be afforded. A different sort of interest in a workshop can be raised through well-designed hard copy. Use the listserv for quick reminder announcements as the date approaches.
  5) The OLA Continuing Education Committee coordinates contact with education service providers to obtain course offerings in machine-readable format to publicize on the listserv. Differing lead times for planning at each institution would have to be accommodated for this effort to be successful. ◙

Front Lines

Despite the fact that the stipend is not large, the professionalism and the contribution of the presenter is recognized."
Paula Hamilton, Mount Angel Abbey Library

**Library Information Network
of Clackamas County:**
"Clackamas County (through its cooperative Library Network) has made a commitment to providing continuing education for library staff for 15 years. The annual 'Clackamas Conference' has been an inexpensive one-day conference that has always been aimed primarily at paraprofessional staff. Attendance at the conference has varied over the years but is generally around 300 attendees.

"Unfortunately, the Clackamas Conference will not be held in FY 1997-98. Budget cuts triggered by Measure 47/50 have eliminated all administrative clerical support in the LINCC Network office and the staff person used to provide all of the administrative functions for the conference. If alternative volunteer support from area libraries can be recruited (a la the OLA Conference Committee), then the conference could return.

"The tremendous success of the LSSRT conference has both confirmed an ongoing need for a continuing education event directed at paraprofessional staff and removed some of the necessity for our conference. It remains to be seen if the energy will be there to re-create the Clackamas Conference next year. One of the program changes that has occurred in the last few years of the Clackamas Conference has been an increasing focus on technology workshops, especially Dynix-related training since the great majority of attendees use that system in their libraries. Certain topics such as dealing with difficult patrons and basic Internet-related training seem to be popular every year, so long as the approach is slightly different.

"The cost of this conference has been kept at around $25 for a full day, which just about covers the luncheon and printing expenses, with a little left over for small speaker honorariums. The heavy labor subsidy provided by LINCC also kept the costs low. But it was the low cost that was particularly attractive to many folks who often paid for the LINCC conference out of their own pockets."
Joanna Rood, LINCC

Southern Oregon Library Federation:
"Librarians in the Southern Oregon Library Federation region (Coos, Curry, Douglas, Jackson, Josephine, Klamath, and Lake counties) find that the continuing education offerings in our region are infrequent, and our perception is that most are held in other parts of the state, particularly in the Willamette Valley and the greater Portland region. In this era of tight budgets, particularly travel budgets, it's difficult for many librarians here to take advantage of workshops in Eugene or Portland.

"The Southern Oregon Library Federation presented an Internet workshop led by U of O's Sara Brownmiller in June as part of a regional C.E. effort. It was very popular and well-received. SOLF also sponsored two scholarships for the July 18 LSSRT conference in Portland.

"We will try to offer workshops at least once or twice a year, in an effort to improve workshop access in our region. The challenge for our group will be to maintain adequate funds for these much-needed C.E. projects in our region."
Gary Sharp, North Bend Public Library

Douglas County Library System:
"One of the issues I see facing the Oregon library community is continuing education for library support staff. Much of the continuing education in this state is targeted to the degreed staff, and many libraries plan to send degreed staff to training but not always the support staff. Support staff needs vary, and I see that workshops for public services could easily incorporate support staff. Many support staff have very specific training needs such as acquisitions, which are harder to do because of the small number of potential staff who would be interested. I'd like to see workshop organizers plan workshops for the broader audience of both degreed librarians and support staff. I'd like to see a broader scope of workshops for all areas of the library instead of the workshops on public services issues."
Carol McGeehon

Central Oregon Community College:
"Winter travel for C.E. or other work issues may have to allow for two nights' lodging to allow day-time travel on winter roads—the night prior and the night after meetings. That is mighty expensive and certainly limits options with travel budgets shrinking and the cost of motels increasing."
David Bilyeu