

## Members Council    May 2003

### Name of Group: Private Academic Libraries Discussion

**Attendees:** Michael LaCroix (chair), NEBASE; Ed Barry, Board of Trustees; Rhoda Channing, SOLINET; Greg Cotton, BCR; Bruce Crocco, OCLC; Rich Doyle, BCR; James Estrada, NELINET; Frank Hermes, OCLC; Debbie Hysell, OCLC (recorder); Michael Kathman; MINITEX; Lynne King, NYLINK; Tom Kirk, INCOLSA; Kathy Schneider, WILS; Kristin Senecal (PALINET); Jim Simonis, NYLINK.

### How can Members Council most productively provide OCLC with future environmental trends for various types of libraries?

1. **Environmental scans.** OCLC should conduct environmental scans of non-library trends—technology, services, user behavior/interests, and publishing—and share these with member libraries. The scans could be similar to the quarterly trend reports that M.E. Jacob (OCLC) used to prepare or the format trends report that Cathy DeRosa provided. Even what's expected in the next 24 months would be helpful. OCLC member libraries need more information from people outside libraries—publishers, readers, and leaders such as Steve Jobs. OCLC might also find out what novel things libraries are doing to solve problems and share that with the membership. These environmental scans would help librarians to understand changes and adopt new means of serving their patrons. The scans might help library staff understand the future role of libraries. Library directors could use such scans to get funding for new initiatives (“OCLC says this is one of the major issues facing libraries in the next three years . . .”).

A possible source of input to the environmental scans and to the OCLC strategic planning process is to collect the strategic plans of members and assess the environmental factors reflected in these plans. OCLC could possibly make libraries' strategic plans available as a collection to the membership. OCLC is in a good position to provide comparisons of what peer institutions are doing.

Changes take place from the margins of activity. One needs to look at outlier solutions to problems. One problem in getting input from library professionals is that they often have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Libraries are often measuring the past instead of looking forward to see what they should be doing.

EDUCAUSE does a good job of providing environmental scan information. For example, the recent article, “Top 10 issues facing IT managers” identifies issues, how they rank, and how they have changed from last year. <http://www.educause.edu/issues/ciprogram.asp>

2. **Combined use of tools for getting diverse input.** Use a combination of tools (focus groups and surveys) aimed at different staff levels. Useful questions to include are what are 2-3 things your library wants to accomplish in the next few years and what are your nightmares. There is some value in using the OCLC Web site to gather library input via a bulletin board discussion of assigned topics, in that the discussion is democratized (reaching out to all staff levels) but the input would be qualitative and not statistically valid as questionnaire input (surveys should be sent to a specific persons). It seems that OCLC gathers most of its information from management levels of academic institutions. OCLC needs to mine down to get responses from other levels of staff and other types of libraries. One method might be to obtain input from the director level on the conceptual level (e.g., is this service of value to you) and from staff on the operational level (e.g., how should this service work).

In addition to surveys, focus groups should be used to obtain data on problems facing libraries, issues and vision.

Keep surveys short. The recent survey from the e-learning task force was too long and too complex for some to answer. Such surveys should be fragmented to ensure participation. Be careful of terminology in surveys; students often have difficulty distinguishing between print and printable and between the Web and library Web-based services.

In obtaining input from libraries, be sure to share results so that libraries are encouraged to contribute their effort to this.

3. **Network input.** Talk with network directors to identify libraries that are leaders—with whom to talk. Network directors can also help OCLC to ensure that all levels of staff are included.
4. **Members Council input.** Members Council is an important source of input too. Members Council delegates are well known for being innovative and engaged in issues. However, Members Council is somewhat management top-heavy, and this homogeneity limits the usefulness of some of its input. Use the Members Council to try out conceptual surveys—are we on the right track and would you respond to this survey?

Note on marketing: Because librarians tend to be risk-averse, it is important that OCLC focus its marketing efforts on risk takers, evangelizers who can move acceptance of new innovative services forward. Marketing to consortia is also helpful—this forms a support group for those implementing the service and helps directors in overcoming staff inertia.

### **What are the key trends affecting libraries on a national, regional, and local level?**

The group identified the following trends as the most significant:

- **Age.** A lot of people are reaching retirement age. The next-generation librarians do not appear to have a strong appreciation or understanding of cooperation. Recent statistics suggest that the shortage of librarians may be turning around due to librarians' delaying their retirement and libraries gearing up to find replacements. Some see the loss of staff through retirement as a significant loss of expertise/experience. Others indicated that younger assistants are in the wings eager for their chance and that the value of the MLIS is somewhat debatable since any staff member starting out is going to require much training by the library. Some skill sets, such as management and acquisitions, do not come with the MLIS. Many libraries are too far from library schools to send staff for training.
- **Staff development.** Libraries are spending more and more money on training. Libraries have to invest in staff and be as assertive as IT in getting training.
- **Electronic monographs.** Libraries are not as close to being successful with electronic monographs, as they would like to be. Experiments indicate that students do not like e-books so well as printed ones. If the price is reduced, at some point the electronic monograph will be more attractive. Many companies are selling e-books to individuals. netLibrary could handle university press books. Libraries can buy more e-books with the same dollars. A problem with books is storage. Students do not want to wait for print book to be available. However there is very little use of e-books; one large consortium has 1 copy of every netLibrary book but that's quite enough. People prefer printed books but they want them right away and do not want to wait for ILL. Libraries need a different way of packaging books. You have to look differently at books—if a library has two books on the same subject, student will take either one. E-books do not replace but complement printed books.

What's enough? For many students, electronic access to articles is enough. Their research needs can be met without going to books. Bibliographic instruction classes help faculty to know to put books on reserve. Statistics for use of reserve materials are high. Libraries need a different way of packaging journals too; if only an article is needed, why buy the entire journal. Sometimes the individual departments will buy access to scientific journals; for example, Biology Department bought BioAbstracts as a teaching aid.

- **More and more multi-type consortia.** Libraries that are members of such multi-type consortia often have little in common with one another. There is more and more sharing and fewer go-it-alone libraries. Sharing builds trust and builds more cooperation. There is more consortial implementation of products like QuestionPoint.
- **Reluctance to drop services.** Libraries have difficulty dropping services. Libraries need to stop counting what they count. For example, regional, cooperative storage of materials has obvious advantages but it is hard to get beyond objections related to convenience and collection comparisons. As use of certain materials declines, libraries experience the "death by a thousand

cuts” phenomenon. Instead of making the decision at a single time to divert funds used to buy materials with low-volume circulation to materials/programs serving a greater number of users, libraries make the decision incrementally which allows them to re-allocate funds only incrementally.

- **Emphasis on instruction and faculty.** At one time, libraries had no competition. Now they have many competitors and are in danger of being marginalized. Libraries need to re-assert themselves as central in the educational process—in providing instructional materials and the cooperative development of courses.
- **Distance education and course development.** Tools are outside the library’s control. Sometimes the institution has duplicate resources.
- **Funding problems**

**What are the 2-3 most significant issues discussed in this meeting?**

1. Need for environmental scans from outside the library world
2. Need for OCLC’s help in marketing/branding the library and its resources