

The Second National Conference on Information Literacy

User instruction and new educational models

by Hannelore B. Rader

Approximately 50 participants from Mexico attended the Second National Conference on Information Literacy: User Instruction and New Educational Models, held at the University Autonoma in the City of Juarez (UA) in Chihuahua Province, Mexico, October 7–9, 1999.

Participants included Adolfo Rodrigues Gallardo from the National Library of Mexico and librarians from the University of Texas, El Paso. At the opening of the conference, held in the newly remodeled university library, the President of the University, Maestro Ruben Lau, stressed the importance of information services and libraries for education and learning and that libraries are definitely underused in Mexico.

I was one of two keynote speakers from the United States who addressed information literacy. My presentation was entitled "Preparing for the 21st century: Educating students and citizens for effective use of information," and it addressed educational needs for the 21st century, especially in terms of information skills, and defined information literacy in terms of information competency standards for higher education. I outlined the higher education environment and curriculum re-

form in terms of opportunities for academic librarians to integrate information literacy into the curriculum.

Betsy Wilson, from the University of Washington (UW), addressed "Information literacy: Fluency across the community." She explained that students must have sophisticated information and technology skills to function effectively in the future knowledge-based environment. She explained that many educators must collaborate to ensure that students become information and technology literate, and she presented several best practices of information fluency across and beyond a particular institution.

Of particular interest was the program UWired, developed at the UW libraries. Since 1994 this successful program has effectively integrated information literacy and technology into teaching and learning.

Applications and practices

Sixteen librarians from public and private colleges throughout Mexico discussed applications and practices related to information literacy in a variety of academic settings. Topics covered included education and training for the use of electronic databases, using soft-

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ware to train students for information use, basing tenure decisions on the success of professors in helping students acquire information habits for lifelong learning, integrating information literacy into a master's program, and providing details of various user instruction programs at public and private universities throughout the country.

Electronic brainstorming sessions

An electronic brainstorming session was conducted after the presentations each day. The following seven issues were discussed in these sessions:

- challenges librarians face in newly developing educational models for learning;
- alternatives for contributing to the generation of investigative habits and self learning;
- the role of librarians in the formation of self-learning habits of future graduates;
- benefits for students;
- impact on the country;
- identification of strategies; and
- strategies for strengthening the educational role of librarians.

The two brainstorming sessions resulted in a draft statement prepared by a working group of seven participants from the conference.

The final declaration, "The Role of Librarians in the Developing Educational Models for Learning," will be shared with Mexican librarians. Participants committed themselves to take this statement to various Mexican library groups during the next few weeks to obtain consensus and acceptance.

The conference, conducted in Spanish with provision for translations and organized by Jesus Lau, academic vice president at UA, and his team, was one of the most successful ones I have ever attended in terms of organization, content, and, especially, outcomes. Information content, technology, media, and handouts were well balanced. The conference facilitated information sharing between

librarians from the United States and Mexico in the area of library services and the changing role of academic librarians as they prepare for the new millennium; and it became obvious that information literacy is of much concern among Mexican librarians and there are numerous programs in academic institutions already in place to teach students information skills. Exhibits by vendors and libraries were varied and educational. Sessions for socializing offered cultural programs, great food, and ample opportunity to exchange information.

The City of Juarez, Mexico, is across the Rio Grande from El Paso, Texas. It has ap-



Rader discusses educational needs for the 21st century with participants at the Second National Conference on Information Literacy.

proximately 1.5 million inhabitants in a valley close to the Sierra of Juarez mountain range and was first explored in 1581 by the Spanish. New hotels, fine restaurants, malls, entertainment centers, museums, and historical sites make this city a good place to reside.

UA has approximately 10,000 students, 8,500 under-

graduates and 1,500 graduates, with a wide range of programs (including doctoral programs) and shares information and students with the UT.

UA has libraries in two locations and contains 120,000 volumes, as well as access to a variety of electronic databases. The libraries have been totally renovated and updated in the last two years and are technologically on the cutting edge.

There is a wonderful atmosphere of welcome in the libraries and many excellent services and electronic information access are provided. Lau is also responsible for the libraries, administered by Jesus Cortes.

The library staff is comprised of 65 staff, including 9 librarians. This is somewhat unusual because most academic libraries in Mexico have fewer librarians. There are only 2,700 librarians for more than 10,000 libraries in the whole country and only a percentage of the librarians have an MLS; many have an undergraduate degree in library science. ■



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