
Oberlin Group meets for the fourth time

Fifty-two librarians from liberal arts colleges whose graduates receive an unusual number of science doctorates had their fourth annual meeting at three colleges in Southern California: the Claremont Colleges, Whittier College, and Occidental College. The hosts were Eleanor Montague, acting library director and vice-president at Claremont, Phil O'Brien, library director at Whittier, and Jackie Morris, library director at Occidental.

The program centered on the topic of planning. Two futurists, Bob Olsen from the Institute for Alternative Futures (Virginia), and Paul Saffo, Institute for the Future (California), made key presentations. There were two panel discussions, one on aspects of planning and one on staffing. These featured librarians from the group and other speakers.

Social events incorporated personal recognition by the presidents of each of the institutions, an address by Robert Skotheim, librarian of the Huntington Library, tours of the libraries and campuses of the three colleges, three most elegant dinners, and many opportunities for informal communication, including lengthy bus rides from one location to another!

Bob Olsen's presentation on Saturday afternoon addressed aspects of planning. He suggested that one ought to start with the best view one can get of the circumstances one is facing, create alternative scenarios of the future and hypothesize about how the institution could react to each. He advocated creating a strategic vision of the future and letting it drive one's goals. Olsen made a number of predictions about the information technology of the future, and indicated some of the problems and challenges such changes might bring. He endorsed a process of constant environmental monitoring, leading to review and reformulation of one's plans, but suggested this could not be done at the institutional level, urging that library associations, among others, might provide this service.

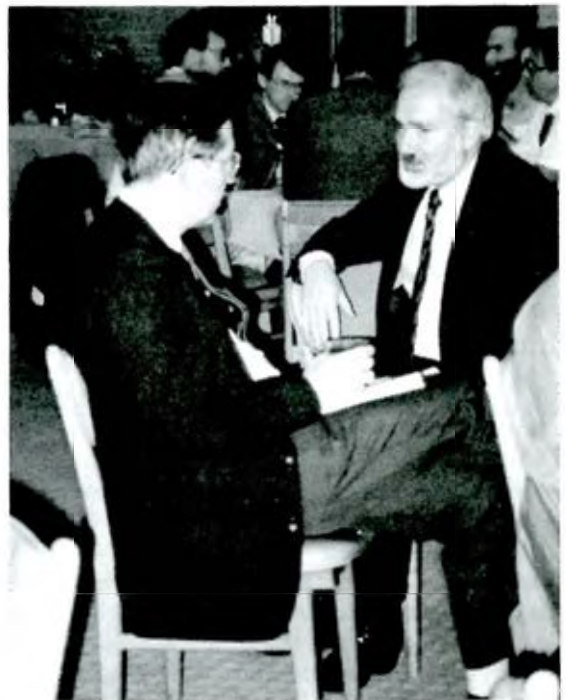
Olsen worked with the group, asking people to identify their worst fears and fondest hopes for the future. This exercise involved people intensely, generating large numbers of elements for alternative scenarios of the future.

On Sunday morning, Saffo offered his exciting slide show and narrative on information technology change. He speculated that the greatest changes to libraries will come from far outside and compared the period in which we are living with the period between the invention of printing (about 1457) and the development of the octavo book format by

Aldus (about 1501). Likening the transition to the electronic information age with the transition of the late 15th century, he pointed out the analogous elements of the two eras. For instance, he cited inferior new works, replacement of one form of information storage (human memory then, print media now) for another (print media then, electronic media now), the need for constant learning of new skills, and social and economic changes brought about by the technological developments.

Saffo repudiated the idea of a paperless society; we are replacing paper as a storage medium, but using more and more of it in a transitory manner, with storage in electronic form (the "electronic pinata"). He related "paperless" and "horseless"; we still use horses, but less for transportation than other applications.

Having made an extensive study of large-scale social changes, Saffo has concluded that the introduction of something new moves rather slowly at first and then accelerates. This leads to an overestimation of the short-range impact of an invention, followed by an underestimation of the long-range impact. He described us as being in the eye of the hurricane and therefore having an impaired ability to perceive what is happening. He used historical



Willis Bridegam (left) and ACRL president William Moffett (right) confer at the fourth Oberlin Group meeting.

photographs, cartoons, advertisements, and newspaper clippings to illustrate his point that major inventions are rarely used for the purpose anticipated by their creators and quoted from Marshall McLuhan: "Whoever discovered water, it wasn't a fish."

Technology *enables* change, Saffo asserted; it is the cultural response to the technology that *drives* the change. Giving examples from the past, he wondered aloud with the audience, "How are we misinterpreting the future of information technology?" He referred to today's developments as "electronic incunabula" and suggested we must all learn to live with a constant state of incompleteness, an ever-evolving concept of things. He closed by citing his own concept of "information surfing," or learning to be selective about information. One is successful at this if one no longer feels guilty about all the books and articles one has begun, skimmed, and never finished!

Planning panelist Ed Wall (Pierian Press) addressed the group on Sunday afternoon on the topic of environmental monitoring. Suggesting that it is absolutely necessary to keep ahead of progress, to keep abreast of enabling developments, to keep updated on issues with an impact on planning, and to maintain the lead time needed for decision-makers to become champions of our objectives, he handed out a list of literally hundreds of organizations whose work is having an effect on the information environment and thus, potentially, on libraries.

JoAn Segal's "Doing the Planning" segment gave participants some nitty-gritty advice on how to go about a planning process. She told the audience, "we *must* change," supported planning as necessary and beneficial, described a model planning process, asked those present to make a commitment to take the first step in planning on their return home, and announced a major planning activity by ACRL's College Libraries Section in conjunction with the Office of Management Serv-

ices of the Association of Research Libraries.

On Monday morning, the group heard from a panel of their peers on staffing aspects to be considered in planning. Michael Kathman, Ann de Klerk, Richard Werking, and Suanne Muehlner identified key topics. Kathman asserted that library schools could not possibly carry out all the training needed by librarians, and advised that on-the-job training and staff development activities are of prime importance (he ventured that we might compare the 15% requirement for equipment maintenance with the need for staff development). Werking cited the work of several recent ACRL task forces in drawing a picture of future public service staffing needs, mentioning new formats, translocal collections, user expectations, and added responsibilities. He compared staff growth in liberal arts college libraries over a twenty-year period, showing a total increase of about 25%, but slowed increases between 1977 and 1987, with a zero increase in nonlibrarians during that period. He also compared job requirements as found in classified ads of 1978 and 1989, looking at criteria such as the second master's degree (little change) and suggesting possible reasons for this. For instance, the person who has had an unsuccessful career experience in another field and has made a career change may not be a more valuable librarian than one who is committed to librarianship per se.

Muehlner concentrated on job broadening in her presentation. She described some changes made in staffing patterns in her library that have encouraged librarians to take research project leave, have brought them closer to strict faculty comparability in length of contract, and have concentrated professional work on student interaction.

At a business meeting, members of the group agreed to hold their next meeting at Rollins College in late February 1991, to design a statistical survey, to afford non-directors at their libraries the opportunity to meet together, and to consider criteria for membership in the group. ■ ■

ACRL executive summary

Fall came to Chicago very gently this year. Many groups held meetings around the country in which ACRL members and staff participated. Much agitation surrounded LC's threat to license the MARC database in a restrictive fashion. Although a moratorium was declared, the issues will need to be openly debated; a start will be made at Midwinter at the ALCTS forum on Saturday afternoon.

Many of ACRL's chapters met in October. Three sites hosted visits from the ACRL Speakers Bureau: the Oregon/Washington joint meeting was

addressed by Bill Moffett, who also went to Louisiana; and the Georgia Chapter speaker was JoAn Segal.

Copies of three ACRL standards: for university libraries, college libraries, and two-year institutions, were mailed to all members of the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation.

The H. W. Wilson-funded study on Alternative Sources of Funding for Academic Libraries began with a meeting of the Advisory Committee, chaired by Anne Beaubien, at which the group worked with