

# Living the Future<sup>4</sup>: Collaboratively speaking

## A library conference on organizational renewal

by Raynna Bowlby and Maureen Sullivan

*The sense of danger must not disappear:  
The way is certainly both short and steep,  
However gradual it looks from here;  
Look if you like, but you will have to leap.*<sup>1</sup>

—W. H. Auden

With these words, Carla Stoffle, dean of libraries and Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona (UA), welcomed more than 160 colleagues to “Living the Future<sup>4</sup>: Collaboratively Speaking, a Library Conference on Organizational Renewal.”

Sponsored by the UA Library in partnership with the Association of Research Libraries Office of Leadership and Management Services (ARL/OLMS), and ACRL, four full days of learning took place in the beautiful setting of Tucson.

Participants from academic libraries of all sizes, with staff from larger public libraries and from library systems from the United States and Canada, gathered in late April for the fourth conference on organizational change.

The UA Library took its “leap” towards the future more than eight years ago and now has a national reputation as a leader in organizational change initiatives. The UA experience was related during a day of presenta-

tions from staff members of various teams in the library. Even a small sampling of the 18 Arizona sessions demonstrates that the library is active on many fronts:

- Strategic Planning and Critical Processes
- Performance Effectiveness Management System
- The Scholarly Communication Project
- Customer-Oriented Library Alignment: Re-engineering the Organization: Accommodating New Work in a Team-Based Organization
- Librarians as Partners: Services to Help Faculty and Departments Develop and Assess Information Literacy Skills.

### The UA Library tour

A highlight of the conference was the tour of the UA Library and the university’s new Information Commons/Integrated Learning Center. Built below the campus main green and connected to the library, this center focuses on providing an improved experience for undergraduates, particularly freshmen, and recognizes the library’s critical role in this endeavor.

Architect Jim Gresham, the conference keynote speaker, described his inspiration for the center’s below-ground design, with its origins coming from the stepwells of India, which

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were designed and used for water storage between the 5th and 19th centuries. Water was collected during the monsoon season; then, to retrieve water during the hot summer months, the stepwells were approached by a long flight of steps that become cool, quiet subterranean retreats.

The university's subterranean Learning Center presents the same inviting graduated entry, while the inner spaces are suffused with natural light. Tours of the interior, proudly led by UA Library staff, demonstrate a space that is responsive to today's action-oriented learner. Two hundred and fifty workstations are placed to enable students to collaborate. Small group study rooms are abundant and casual seating is wired for laptops (plus room for the ubiquitous coffee cup). Central to all is a multi-directionally oriented information desk, which is staffed by the library 24 hours a day during the week and during daylight hours each weekend.

Other aspects of the library tour were also impressive, but more so in their statement about Arizona's organizational development than in its architecture. A walk around the staff work areas gave attendees a real appreciation for the leap that the UA Library staff has made in the achievement of customer-centered quality standards.

Imagine attaining such success in the organization and efficiency of library work that no item waiting to be processed had been in the building more than five days. Imagine a streamlined shelving operation that averages 4.5 hours to return used materials to the shelf.

## More leaps

One day of the conference showcased other libraries that have undertaken significant organizational renewal and redesign efforts. Colleagues from ten libraries shared insights and learnings about their leap towards the future:

- Brown University engaged the attendees in process mapping and described Brown's vision for redesigning the organization around user-centered processes and outcomes rather than around library functions.

- Emory University discussed its "team start-up," a component of the library's reorganization that facilitated team effectiveness.

- The Gelman Library System of George Washington University described some of the

steps on their journey towards becoming a Learning Organization.

- Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) relayed its experiences working in a team-based organization, focusing on the impact the library has on technological developments and student success.

- North Suburban Library System (Illinois) showed a staff-made video of a learning organization in action, with vignettes of many of its workers describing the tools and techniques that have enhanced their success.

- The Tri-College Consortium (Bryn Mawr, Haverford, and Swarthmore) described the design of individual learning plans that engage staff in self-assessment and outline a shared (individual and library) responsibility for career development.

- The University of Connecticut discussed its use of cross-functional teams as a strategy for improving library communication and effectiveness and outlined the roles and responsibilities of team leaders.

- The University of Maryland described the development of a ten-module learning curriculum addressing needed library skills, such as customer service, leadership, measurement, evaluation and continuous improvement

- The University of Nevada-Las Vegas demonstrated the integration of new library priorities—such as the creation of an information commons, support for multimedia services, and the construction of a storage facility—with existing library services and staffing.

- The University of Virginia shared its experiences in flexibly redeploying staff and in implementing the Balanced Scorecard as an approach to assessment within the libraries.

To complement specific organizational developments, four outstanding pre-conferences launched the event:

- "Advanced Facilitation Skills Lab," facilitated by Melanie Hawks, ARL.

- "Conducting User Surveys in Academic Libraries," facilitated by Jim Self, University of Virginia; Dan Lee, University of Arizona; and Julia Blixrud, ARL.

- "Constructive Dialogue," facilitated by Michael Ray, University of Arizona.

- "Library Project Planning," facilitated by DeEtta Jones, ARL.

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“hot link” that became a key contribution to the usability of the Web. Materials in the collection, which include working papers, correspondence, manuscripts, and other related items, span his entire career, beginning in 1968 with his graduate studies at SUNY-Stony Brook and continuing to the present.

**The U.S. Naval Academy’s Nimitz Library** has received a generous gift of two 18th-century letters relating to John Paul Jones from Faith McCurdy of Cold Spring Harbor, New York. One letter is from George Washington to John Paul Jones, dated July 22, 1787, during the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. The other letter is from John Paul Jones to the editor of the *Gazette de Leyde*, written “On board the Bonhomme Richard’s prize the late British Ship of War Serapis Texel November 11th, 1779.” McCurdy gave the letters in memory of her late husband James Arrison McCurdy, naval architect and designer of the sail training vessel known as the Navy 44. Her daughter, Sheila McCurdy, is a member of the Fales committee, which advises



Sheila McCurdy and Faith McCurdy present Vice Admiral John R. Ryan, superintendent of the Naval Academy, with letters from George Washington and John Paul Jones, during a ceremony at the Nimitz Library on April 24, 2002.

the Naval Academy about its sailing program. The letters were presented during a ceremony in the Nimitz Library’s Special Collections and Archives Division on April 24, attended by faculty, staff, administrators, and other friends of the Academy. ■

*(“Living the Future4” continued from page 512)*

Throughout the full conference, participants experienced a continuous and active learning process. The format was purposefully designed to encourage meaningful dialog and collaborative learning, recognizing that all participants contribute to the learning of the whole community. Even the breaks were scheduled to provide participants with ample time for conversation with colleagues or simply time for the opportunity to reflect.

Is the way people work in academic libraries really changing? Is there a payoff for the effort involved in organizational change? Living the Future confirms that libraries can articulate future-oriented priorities and express ambitious quality standards based on the needs of users and that staff can develop work styles and organizational structures to meet these goals. These libraries have taken the leap—applause all around!<sup>2</sup>

## Notes

1. “Leap Before You Look” by W. H. Auden.
2. The LTF4 Conference Web site provides links to both the UA team projects and to other initiatives at <http://www.library.arizona.edu/conference/>. ■

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