

Chapter Topics

ACRL chapters provide forum for electronic information discussions

By Gail Junion-Metz

Cleveland State University

and Ray E. Metz

Case Western Reserve University

Over 40% of ACRL's chapters have held programs on access to electronic information, networked information, new technologies, faculty expectations relating to new information resources, and how libraries will respond to the challenges these new resources present. Much has been written in the professional literature and recent ALA, EDUCOM, and CAUSE meetings have devoted many hours to discussions on these and related issues.

Many of you who attend national meetings probably feel that that's where the definitive discussions of electronic information and networking occur. However, after reading and publishing chapter meeting reports in *Chapter Topics* since 1989, it's clear that the ACRL chapters are also holding important and practical discussions on these topics. Rather than merely following the lead of the national meetings and replicating discussions initiated at the national level, chapters have been holding meetings which bring new ideas on electronic information and networking forward for discussion, while at the same time bringing awareness of the basic issues to those unable to attend national meetings. (Something we feel the chapters do unbelievably well.)

By looking at chapter meeting reports dating back to the fall of 1989 (when ALA was starting to feature more discussions of networking, databases, and the information society) we found that the 41 ACRL chapters held more than 17 meetings on such issues as the relationship between libraries and computer centers (3 meetings); electronic links between libraries and publishers, linked systems, and hypermedia (4 meetings); and a number of others including scholar's workstations, the future of print, how the copyright law needs to respond to electronic information availability, and the Internet.

There were at least 13 chapter meetings during 1991 on the topics mentioned above, but also

meetings on the creation of an information elite, the need for a national information policy, access to government information, NREN, and campus networking planning. Nationally known speakers—Paul Evan Peters, William A. Moffett, Sally McCallum, Evan Farber, Sharon Rogers, Patricia Glass Schuman, Thomas Michalak, Rebecca Lenzini, and Rick Weingarten—spoke and led discussions at chapter meetings. (These are also the same people found leading discussions at national meetings.)

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Interest in electronic information and access was apparent when we surveyed the chapters to see which topics they were most interested in presenting to their members. When the results were tallied, campus networking, hypertext, artificial intelligence, expert systems, and CD-ROM networking programs were top vote-getters in a list of over 50 program titles. (The top vote-getter, by the way, was faculty views of the academic library, a topic that ties into networking and access to electronic information more each day it seems.)

One high-quality program on this topic was organized by the Metropolitan New York chapter and held on November 14, 1990. The title of the program was "Access to Excess? Issues of the Information Explosion." The program featured ALA Presi-

dent Patricia Glass Schuman and the title of her talk was "The Information Explosion: Fantasies and Realities." She characterized as "myth" some common beliefs of the information age: that widespread use of computers will mean the end of paper, books, and libraries; that the confused patron will be replaced by the well-defined end user with a well-defined information need; that technology will be usable, affordable, desirable, and accessible; and that technology is our best hope for improving and equalizing access to information.

Schuman was concerned that technology may, in fact, be widening the gap between the information-rich and the information-poor. She questioned whether the explosion of data constitutes a growth of information or a growth of knowledge. As an analogy to the "information oligopoly" we live with, she quoted B. Begdikian's article, "The Lords of the Global Village," (*The Nation*, June 12, 1989) in which he says: "Neither Caesar nor Hitler, Franklin Roosevelt nor any Pope, has commanded as much power to shape the information on which so many people depend to make decisions about everything from who to vote for to what to eat." Schuman concluded her talk by stressing the need for librarians to forge their own agenda, not as business people, but as service professionals using creativity,

synthesis, judgment, and technical knowledge to solve information problems.

Nancy Kranich, director of public services, New York University, examined the future of public access to government information if turned over to the private sector, where the marketplace and profitability will become a determining factor in availability. Mary Biggs, director of libraries, Mercy College, suggested that publishers practice "bibliographic birth control" and that the information glut may be temporary, a symptom of the early stages of the information society. Biggs then asked why more academic librarians are not working on these problems. She stated that most librarians are not trained to conduct original research, and to communicate their knowledge to others both within the profession and to other professions.

One chapter program idea seems worthy of replication and distribution by ACRL National. The Illinois chapter has organized and is currently holding a series of regional hands-on instruction sessions to teach academic librarians how to use and access the various information resources available on the Internet. Hands-on sessions on this topic would be easy to plan, teach, and simple to package for distribution. They could also be sponsored by ACRL as "drop-in" sessions (hands-on poster sessions if you will) during upcoming AIA meetings. ■■



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