

Rebecca Blakiston, Constance S. Weatherford, and Michael Schor

## Living the Future 6: Wow—Where next?

### Student reflections on a professional conference

Once again, the University of Arizona (UA) Libraries provided an opportunity to network, collaborate, and participate in peer-to-peer learning at the sixth biennial Living the Future conference in Tucson, Arizona. The beautiful and sunny locale provided a relaxing backdrop for the rigorous intellectual pursuits of the 172 participants who came from across the continent and as far away as Ireland to attend Living the Future 6: WOW—Where Next? April 5–8, 2006. The conference was cosponsored by the UA Libraries, Association of Research Libraries, and ACRL, as well as being generously supported by various vendors.

The intimate setting and scale of the conference was the perfect opportunity for students from the UA's School of Information Resources and Library Science (SIRLS) to begin learning and practicing their professional development skills. The Living the Future 6 conference planning committee encouraged students to attend at a discounted rate in exchange for helping with the conference by introducing the speakers, time-keeping, and presenting gifts. This gave the students a way to interact personally with many of the participants, thereby creating unique networking opportunities. This also gave the students a taste of what it is like to present at a conference, something that will be essential in their upcoming careers. Seven students from SIRLS attended, and for most this was their first opportunity to attend a professional conference. For them, this was a fascinating introduction to the many issues faced in the library profession

and the transforming role this profession has in the information world.

#### **Wow—Where next?**

Carla Stoffle, dean of the UA Libraries and Center for Creative Photography, began the conference with a presentation filled with visions and advice for the thriving academic library of the future. Key points included the importance of embracing change and allowing flexibility, bringing as many services as possible to the desktop, and partnering with other organizations, the community, and the campus.

Another presentation by the Director's Panel (comprising Paul Gherman, university librarian at the Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Vanderbilt University; Duane Webster, executive director of the Association of Research Libraries; and Brinley Franklin, director of libraries at the University of Connecticut) provided responses to three important questions:

What are the three critical opportunities for libraries that we must pay attention to in the next five years?

What are the characteristics of strategies that we need to learn in order to be successful?

What are the risks we need to be ready to take?

---

Rebecca Blakiston is a library information associate at the University of Arizona Libraries, e-mail: blakisto@email.arizona.edu; Constance S. Weatherford is a library associate with the Tucson-Pima Public Library system, e-mail: con.weatherford@cox.net; Michael Schor is a project director at the Analytical Group, Inc., in Scottsdale, Arizona, e-mail: mikeschor@cox.net

© 2006 Rebecca Blakiston, Constance S. Weatherford, and Michael Schor

Several of the insights the panelists shared focused on the need to transform library environments and to reinvent the traditional roles of libraries and information professionals. The discussants encouraged librarians to embrace change during this transformation and start using the process of beta testing new ideas to create opportunities in areas such as social computing, rather than continuing to strive for perfection. The panel



(left to right): Lindsay Wyatt, Rebecca Blakiston, Michael Schor, Gabrielle Sykes-Casavant, and Coni Weatherford (all SIRLS students) attended Living the Future 6 in Tucson.

of experts encouraged librarians to become political advocates for many of the issues facing libraries today, such as fair use and first sale, relating to intellectual property. The panelists also discussed digitization as a matter of course for collections, repositories and archives, suggesting that libraries ought to embrace these new technological opportunities as a premier service for their users.

“Reframing Work through Language”—presented by Maggie Farrell, dean of libraries at University of Wyoming; Barbara Hutchinson, the assistant dean and team leader, Digital Library and Information Systems Team, at the University of Arizona Libraries; and Barbara Preece, the executive director at the Boston Library Consortium—examined workplace and personal transformation using an exercise from the book, *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work: Seven Languages for Transformation*, by Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey. In this exercise, the presentation participants moved through the seven languages to understand what may be holding them back from real change. This exercise demonstrated how a person or organization can move from complaint to commitment, and from blame to responsibility—examining the assumptions that have been preventing true transformation from taking place. This exercise enabled

participants to learn the skill sets necessary to embrace change by understanding the underlying causes of resistance to change.

Gene Spencer, associate vice president for information services and resources at Bucknell University, explored the empowering nature of the *upside-down pyramid* organizational structure. Spencer suggests that in this type of structure, leadership is based on “authority rather than power.” In this collaborative work environment employees are encouraged to step forward and take appropriate leadership roles supported by all other employees in order to meet the needs of the customer. This is made possible by building an environment of trust in which initiation is encouraged, supported, and rewarded. Spencer suggests that this type of environment in the workplace will take an organization and its employees from the mundane to the visionary.

Closing speaker Richard E. Luce, the research library director at Los Alamos National Laboratory, said, “We cannot experience the future until it becomes the present.” The Los Alamos National Laboratory is host to the largest digital library in the world, containing nearly 2.5 terabytes of data. Luce discussed such concepts as Web 2.0, Science 2.0, Library 2.0, and wiki science. He also spoke about the Berlin Declaration on Open Access, which

is supported by approximately 140 countries, unfortunately none of which are from North America. Luce pointed out the troubling fact that the United States is far behind other nations in the next generation of science or e-science. To prepare for this new future, Luce suggested that we must not only learn to use the new and emerging technologies available to us in our professions, but also study our customers and observe what they do and how they do it. In other words, we must discern the patterns they follow to gather knowledge and learn to adapt to their wants and needs in order to succeed in our chosen profession. As Luce put it, "Success is our own fault."

Delivering the closing plenary presentation, John Perry Barlow, cofounder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation—known for its staunch advocacy of open-access and digital rights, engaged the audience with his highly progressive views on such topics as copyright, freedom of information, and the role of the librarian of the future. Referring to librarians as "real warriors on the barricades of freedom," Barlow shared humorous and controversial insights with a captivated audience.

### **Experiences beyond the presentations**

While providing many structured intellectual opportunities, Living the Future 6 also included social activities that fostered networking and

brainstorming among attendees. The poolside Mexican buffet dinner with entertainment provided by the Tortolita Gutpluckers provided one such opportunity. Another one presented itself when SIRLS students still in attendance on the final day of the conference were invited to lunch with members of the event's planning committee and other distinguished guests, which included Lorrita Ford, director of library and learning services at San Mateo College; Deborah Turner, research investigator and Ph.D. candidate at the University of Washington Information School; and John Perry Barlow. This important opportunity allowed the students to engage in high-level networking, while enjoying the company of powerful representatives from around the nation.

### **Final reflections**

At this conference, we were reminded of the transforming role of librarians and the library environment. We were encouraged to embrace these changes and create new opportunities through collaborations with other libraries, as well as with other community partners. If we choose to embrace these transformations, the collaborative results could be amazing. As Maureen Sullivan, consultant with Maureen Sullivan and Associates, pointed out, the most powerful recurring word she heard at the conference was *we*. *~*

## **Registration for October e-Learning seminars opens September 18**

ACRL e-Learning offerings will get back into swing in October, with registration opening for two online seminars on September 18.

**Creating a Comprehensive Plan for Information Literacy** will guide you through the process of developing a comprehensive plan for information literacy using worksheets developed by the presenter, participating in weekly online chats, and comparing examples of completed plans from a variety of institutions. October 16–November 4.

**Designing Web Sites for Academic Libraries, part 1.** Participants in this seminar will learn how to plan, design, and develop content for Web sites in an academic setting. XHTML and CSS (external) will be introduced. At the end of the session, participants will have a completed Web site plan and design. October 16–November 11.

Other seminars being offered this fall include, "Assessing Student Learning Outcomes" and "Electronic Collection Development for the Academic e-Library." Webcasts on leadership and combating plagiarism will also be offered. Visit [www.acrl.org/e-learning](http://www.acrl.org/e-learning) for details.