

edited by Jessica Albano and Elinor Appel

Pushing the edge: Explore, engage, extend

The 14th National Conference wrap up

The ACRL 14th National Conference, “Pushing the Edge: Explore, Engage, Extend,” was held in Seattle, March 12–15, 2009. On day one attendees (at least those of a certain age) were humming “the bluest skies you’ve ever seen are in Seattle”; on the last day of the conference, Seattle was suddenly blanketed in white by an Ides of March snow fall. The eco-friendly conference itself, however, was the “greenest green” yet.

Seattle Conference Chair Betsy Wilson (University of Washington) and the conference coordinating and component committee members produced a conference filled with informative keynote and invited papers, panel sessions, workshops, roundtable discussions, preconference workshops, Cyber Zed Shed presentations, and much more. Rounding out all of the excellent programming were several exciting events, including gaming night and the all-conference reception at the world-famous Experience Music Project/Science Fiction Museum.

The committees’ efforts were greatly appreciated by the more than 4,300 library staff, exhibitors, speakers, and guests from every state and 22 countries who gathered in Seattle. Combined with the more than 350

online participants in the ACRL 2009 Virtual Conference, the Seattle conference had the highest combined registrant participation ever for an ACRL National Conference, with 3,263 face-to-face and virtual attendees, including approximately 1,150 first-time attendees.

Despite an uncertain economy, the unprecedented number of scholarship winners was another first this year. Thanks to generous donations, 110 awardees were able to attend ACRL 2009 (some virtually).

Several scholarship winners contribute their highlights of the conference in this report.

Conference themes

Conference programming was divided into five different themes: “Cast a Net” (outreach and collaboration), “Feel the Buzz” (emerging trends and assessment), “Get It to Go” (new technologies), “Harvest and Sustain” (conservation, preservation, and digitization), and “Scale the Heights” (library leadership and professional development).



ACRL President Erika C. Linke, Seattle Conference Chair Betsy Wilson, and ACRL Executive Director Mary Ellen Davis at the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

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Each theme featured programming in a variety of formats including workshops, panel discussions, contributed papers, poster sessions, and roundtable discussions.

“Cast A Net” featured sessions such as “Twitter for Libraries,” “Studying *Your* Students: Adapting Research from the University of Rochester Study,” and “Outreach Inside the Library.” Trends highlighted in the “Feel the Buzz” theme included “Subject Librarian 2.0,” “Reference Area Redesign,” and “Whose Line Is It: The Business of Improvisation Applied to Library Instruction.”

“Get It To Go” included information on LibGuides, data literacy, and tracking student reactions to emerging technologies. Attendees

at “Harvest and Sustain” themed programs learned about topics including “How to Green a Library Conference,” “Understanding the Integrative Role of an Academic Library for Undergraduate Library Student Workers,” and “Electronic Resources Management in Today’s Library.” “Gender, Generation, and Toxicity,” “Mapping Your Path to the Mountaintop,” and “Where Have All the Librarians Gone?” were featured in the “Scale the Heights” theme.

Keynote speakers

Rushworth Kidder

The opening keynote address was given by Rushworth Kidder, author and founder of the Institute for Global Ethics. Kidder began by

Going green



This year everything was a little more sustainable—from the shower timer

in the recycled-fabric conference bag, to the bamboo utensils at mealtimes, to the paper handouts that were probably not distributed at all! If you attended the conference, chances are you heard about some of the ways we “greened” things this year, and chances are you helped us do it.

Conference Planning Chair Betsy Wilson kicked things off in 2007 by charging a new Green Component Committee with a mission to reduce waste and raise awareness of the environmental impact of the meeting. The committee polled ACRL’s membership to find out what we thought were the most important issues. Waste paper reduction was a clear winner, along with overall reduction of energy, materials, and resources.

Membership got behind the green initiative in a big way. More than 80 percent of the 3,263 participants (virtual and on-site) signed the Green Pledge, agreeing to reduce, recycle, and learn more about sustainable practices. One member commented in the virtual conference, “The ACRL’s Green Component Committee for the 14th National Conference makes me proud to be a librarian!” Someone else noted: “One thing I did not come away with is a big pile of stuff. . . . I

have a hunch that there was a lot less paper this year than there has been at past conferences and this is in part a reflection of the greening of the conference.”

It’s true, we saved a lot of paper. We estimate over 236,000 pages were saved by using more electronic communication. And what if you didn’t want a coffee mug at all? ACRL staff helped route lots of extra materials to worthy charities. At the end of the day, 500 coffee mugs were donated to food bank Northwest Harvest and community-building organization Solid Ground. Packaged food and unconsumed nonpackaged food was donated to FareStart, a job training and placement program for Seattle’s homeless. More than 500 show bags went to Treehouse.org, a support organization for foster children, and 1,000 exhibitor bags went to Northwest Harvest. Books were donated, too. More than 1,000 books were donated to Better World Books and other charities. The book drive raised almost \$1,000 in commissions that went to the National Center for Family Literacy. Even our signature ACRL raven signs were donated to a local theater group, where they’ll be used as props.

It was a good year to be green at ACRL, and we’re looking forward to 2011, which we hope will carry on the tradition of a vibrant, engaged, and sustainable conference for all. —Karen Munro, *University of Oregon*



Opening keynote speaker
Rushworth Kidder.

stating that we are not only in an economic recession, but also in an ethical one. He pointed out that what started out as a financial problem has proven to be one of lies, deceit, and overall lack of integrity, resulting in general moral outrage. Kidder proclaimed that we are in clear need of an “ethical bailout,” and that we need to rebuild our moral culture and recreate a culture of integrity. He called for moral courage, which he defined as the willing endurance of significant danger for one’s principles to do what is right. Acknowledging that ethical choices are often between “right and right,” rather than between right and wrong, he said that the task is to find the “higher right.” Kidder lauded librarians for already creating havens of principle and recalled Winston Churchill in urging us to “never, never, never, never, never give in.”—*Jade Albuero, University of California-Los Angeles*

Sherman Alexie

American Indians are not always what you expect. They can be many things, even contradictory things. This was one of the many subtle points Sherman Alexie made using

stories, a sprinkling of poems, and a heavy dose of humor during his keynote address on the second day of the conference.

Alexie told the story of how, as an adult, he learned that his grandfather was a war hero and had earned numerous medals in World War II. While a member of Seattle’s Anti-Iraq War Planning Committee, Alexie applied for, claimed, and passed these medals on to his father. Native Americans are often patriotic, despite the fact that America has not been good to them, Alexie pointed out. Alexie also acknowledged that most stereotypes are based on truth. He then asked those in the audience who love an alcoholic or drug user to raise their hands. It was a powerful moment for the audience to view these raised hands all around them. While alcoholism is a problem in many Native American communities, it is also a disease that has touched many. This is the genius of Alexie—the ability to relate to



Keynote speaker Sherman Alexie.

a wide audience while portraying contemporary Indian life in realistic terms.—*Sandy Littletree, North California State University*

Ira Glass

The closing keynote address began with the unmistakable voice of *This American Life*’s Ira Glass filling the pitch-black ballroom. Although Glass jokingly stated that he’d requested to do his entire speech without being seen, the stage was eventually illuminated, revealing him sitting behind a sound mixing table wearing black frame glasses and a well-worn hoodie. Looking more like a DJ than a conference speaker, Glass captivated an audience of hundreds of librarians as he discussed and demonstrated the art of story telling.

All stories, in their most basic form, are essentially a sequence of actions. The challenge is to make people care about the story they hear. Central to every narrative, Glass claimed, is a universal human experi-

ence, “something at stake” that makes people stop and pay attention. Armed with interview clips from his radio and television show, Glass replicated this powerful narrative technique. Each interview had its own unique message, but all were engagingly honest and stripped of the “fake gravitas” that, according to Glass, plagues contemporary journalism.

The stories, like the people telling them, spoke for themselves. True to fashion, Ira Glass’s closing keynote address was storytelling at its best: intimate, honest, touching, and funny.—*Veronica Arellano, University of Houston*

Invited papers

On Friday Marilee Bresciani (associate professor of postsecondary education, San Diego State University) discussed her paper “Confronting the Business Lens for Accountability of General Education,” which she cowrote with Megan Oakleaf (assistant professor of library science, Syracuse University). According to Bresciani, the business approach to accountability is to first define the product and then determine how to best organize the business to deliver the highest quality product at the most cost-effective price. Consumers can then easily compare similar products and their prices. If we consider learning outcomes to be the primary product of higher education, very little is being done to communicate to our consumers how our product differs from those of our competitors.

By not providing this data, we both force consumers to make an uninformed choice and remove the motivation for higher education to organize in the most efficient way. Bresciani recommended that librarians work toward creating a scoring system that would allow consumers to easily compare institu-



Closing keynote speaker Ira Glass.

tions’ information literacy learning outcomes.

The presentation ended with a spirited question-and-answer session. Some in the audience applauded the idea of greater accountability, while others expressed their deep dissatisfaction with the idea

of moving higher education further toward a business model.—*Ben Hunter, University of Idaho*

In his presentation “What Really Are Student Learning Outcomes?” Peter Herson (Graduate School of Library and Information Science, Simmons College) clarified the differences between student outcomes and student learning outcomes. *Student outcomes* are classified as institutional accomplishments, such as retention rates, graduation rates, and year-to-year measurements of a university’s performance. In libraries, these translate to circulation statistics, reference counts, and resource access, to name a few. *Student learning outcomes*, on the other hand, are the abilities, such as analytical thinking and civic engagement, that students gain as a result of their college experience. These abilities are not easily measured using the statistical tools traditionally used in the accreditation process. What does this mean for the library? Herson suggested that accountability to student learning outcomes touches the library and the university as a whole and should be

Join us in Philadelphia

Mark your calendars! Join your colleagues March 30–April 2, 2011, in Philadelphia for ACRL’s 15th National Conference “A Declaration of Interdependence.” Pam Snelson (Franklin & Marshall College) chairs the ACRL 15th National Conference Executive Committee. The Call for Participation for ACRL 2011 will be issued this fall.

clear in the mission statements of both. In addition, libraries have an important relationship with their university and should be profoundly involved in the accreditation process. Librarians have the unique opportunity to be more involved in this process by developing partnerships with faculty to embed library services into instruction on campus, impacting attitudes toward research and scholarship on an institution-wide level.—*Cass Plater, North Carolina Agricultural and State University, and Amy Roberson, Graduate Student, School of Information and Library Science, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill*

On Saturday Lynn Silipigni Connaway (senior research scientist, OCLC Research) presented “I Would Sort of Appreciate a Little More Understanding: Engaging Net Gen Students in Virtual Reference.” Her talk focused on the information-seeking behaviors of the Net Generation, those born between 1979 and 1994 and living in a socially networked environment. Her study focused specifically on Net Gen users and nonusers of Virtual Reference Services (VRS).

Highlights of the study: the Net Gen population associates libraries with books rather than electronic resources; these users would most likely use VRS when recommended by someone they trust; they prefer instant access to information; and they find VRS to be less intimidating than other types of reference services. The study also found that this population is deterred from using VRS by experiences with nontech-savvy librarians because they can find information elsewhere, because they want 24/7 access, and because they often don't know the service exists. According to Connaway, information professionals must modify their services and attitudes in order to accommodate this new population.—*Michele Alaniz, College of San Mateo*

Gaming night

The buzz of excited conversation and the beat of rock music greeted all who came to ACRL Gaming Night. Thanks to coordinator Jenny Levine, academic librarians had the opportunity to be rock stars, belting out *Rock Band* tunes

in one corner; to show their moves in a *Dance Dance Revolution* in another; and to duke it out with the Mario Brothers in yet a third. Levine also supplied more traditional board games such as *Apples to Apples*, *Ingenious*, *Don't Stop*, and *Hamster Wheel*. While having fun, participants engaged in new learning opportunities (some of those games are hard!) and met colleagues from all over the country. Conversations about budgets, instruction, and organizational issues were interspersed with dancing and laughter, snacks and drinks (provided by University of Pittsburgh). The success of this event provided a promising beginning to the conference.—*Carole Svensson, University of Washington*

Cyber Zed Shed

The popular Cyber Zed Shed returned to ACRL 2009 after its successful debut two years ago in Baltimore. These sessions focused on technology-related innovations and were tasty bite-size morsels, easy to digest, and chock full of great ideas for attendees to try in their own libraries. The two-day sessions ran for 20 minutes: 15 minutes for the presentation and 5 minutes for questions from the audience. This format proved to be very effective. Presentations were very lean, providing basic information while whetting the appetite for more. After the sessions, interested attendees could meet with the presenters to get further information. The sessions were scheduled one after the other, making it easy to stay and listen to the next presentation, but making it harder to catch up with the previous presenter. Cyber Zed Shed sessions were so popular, that often seating was tight and people ended up sitting on the floor, myself included. Despite the standing room only conditions, Cyber Zed Shed sessions were a big hit.—*Junie Hayashi, Leeward Community College*

Poster sessions

With a total of 150 posters presented over two days, viewing all the presentations at conference was like professional speed dating for academic librarians! As always, instruction-related content was well represented and a

big draw, and it was nice to see discipline-specific examples of information-literacy efforts. The use of multimedia in instruction keeps generating an increasing number of interesting projects, and my only regret was that the poster sessions didn't include video to showcase some of these. Another exciting presentation was on institutional repositories, and I imagine that we'll see more on these in Philadelphia, as libraries continue to lead the charge on scholarly communication issues for campus constituents. Mobile devices are also on the horizon for an increasing number of libraries, as the smattering of posters in Se-

attle testified. Probably the most innovative poster, in my opinion, was Indiana University's "Depicting Faculty Impact: Visualizing Contributions to Research with Dossier Inserts." Robert Noel and Peter Hall have been helping faculty create inserts for their tenure and promotion files that visually showcase their research influence through cited reference counts and journal impact factors. Now that's serving your users!—*Rebecca Metzger, Lafayette College*

Roundtables

Roundtable offerings were plentiful and engaging. Librarians tackled a wide variety of topics, including but not limited to outreach to online learning, using social networking tools, diversity and pedagogy, and collaboration with faculty and community members. LibGuides (a popular topic across the programs) was the theme of two roundtables. I attended a packed session led by Jennifer Corbin (Tulane University), "Beyond Subject Guides: Using LibGuides for Information Literacy Instruction."

Participants ranged from librarians who have used LibGuides since 2007 to those thinking about implementing LibGuides at their institutions.

The majority of the discussion focused on how librarians are using LibGuides in instruction and liaison work. Attendees exploring LibGuides were interested in how students and faculty react to the guides and whether they



The All-Conference Reception at the Experience Music Project and Science Fiction Museum and Hall of Fame

were easy to set up and use. They were also interested to learn about the Web 2.0 features, such as online polls, comment boxes, and chat widgets. Two larger issues were raised during the discussion—

consistency among guides from a particular institution and whether LibGuides deter students from using main library Web site. The overall opinion of LibGuides: they are a simple and inexpensive way to disseminate information and make library workshops fun.—*Lyda Ellis, University of Northern Colorado*

All-Conference Reception

By Saturday night the rainy weather that Seattle is known for had made its appearance. However, it could not dampen the enthusiasm of librarians who gathered at the Experience Music Project and Science Fiction Museum and Hall of Fame (EMP/SFM) for an evening of networking and socialization. Upon entering the building, guests were directed to ascend the stairs into the Sky Church. There, they were greeted by the sounds of Wo-Pop, as spun by Seattle's own DJ Darek Mazzone, and treated to a wide variety of desserts, drinks, and, of course, Starbucks coffee. In addition, the entire building was open for librarians to explore and enjoy at their leisure. Given the

EMP/SFM's dedication to showcasing creativity, innovation, and the exploration of ideas, a better venue could not have been chosen. The relationship between the mission of the EMP/SFM and librarianship was seen throughout the night as librarians were overheard instructing their colleagues about museum exhibits or were seen in the Sound Lab trying to teach a certain uncoordinated librarian how to work a turn table (some of us need to keep our day job). Hats off to ACRL for hosting a spectacular event that was both fun and educational.—*Nicole Morello, Baton Rouge Community College*

Virtual conference

ACRL 2009 Virtual Conference featured both synchronous and asynchronous events. The live online events occurred March 13 and March 14. On each day, there were two live events: "Can't Get There from Here: Achieving Organization 2.0" and "The Web is My Library: Undergraduate Students and Their Research Behaviors" on Friday and "Cultivate Your Bottom" (empowering librarians and staff who are

lower in the organization) and "The Impact of Data: Analyzing Book Use to Test Assumptions" on Saturday. The Webcasts included an introduction to the Virtual Conference and a discussion board area enabled participants to introduce themselves and connect with other attendees. Orientation was available on March 11 to those attending the virtual conference for the first time.

The virtual conference also offered dynamic screen captures (audio of the session synched with PowerPoint) of more than 80 conference sessions, Second Life library tours and speaker materials. All materials, including the virtual conference Webcasts, are archived. Access to the virtual conference community is provided for free to all ACRL conference registrants for one year so they can look back on any sessions they may have missed. Blog and Twitter posts from attendees, along with links to Flickr photos, helped to provide a sense of being there for those only attending virtually.—*Sara Rofofsky Marcus, Queensborough Community College* ☞

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