

APPENDIX D to the Minutes of the ACRL College Libraries Section Executive Committee Midwinter Meeting, 2004

Virtual Meeting
ACRL/CLS Standards Committee
11:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., November 3, 2003

Meeting Attendance & Format:

Seven Committee members attended. There were no guests.

The meeting was conducted in a “virtual classroom” via Blackboard course management system at Manhattanville College. The meeting was hosted and arranged by Rhonna Goodman, and chaired by Bill Nelson. As prescribed by ALA, the meeting announcement was posted more than 10 days in advance of the meeting. Committee members were notified by email of procedures for attending the virtual meeting. Any interested ALA member was invited to attend; the meeting announcement on the ALA webpage explained the procedure to be followed.

Before the call to order, preliminary greetings were shared among attendees as they logged into the virtual classroom. Two members had conflicts; another member did not take part in the meeting.

The meeting was called to order and the members were informed that committee documents had been posted to this site in advance, and are located under “Course Documents.” The same documents and others had been sent out in advance by the chair via email. Since only committee members were in attendance, all had this material in hand. Attendees were instructed to transmit a “?” when wishing to address the group; after being recognized by the chair, they could then type and send their comments.

At the end of the one and one-half hour meeting, the chair requested member reaction to this meeting format via email to provide feedback to the CLS Executive Committee and to improve future virtual meetings of the committee.

Attendee Comments:

I asked three multiple-part questions of the attendees following the meeting. Here are the questions, with replies slightly edited:

1. Did this seem to work for you? What were the advantages and disadvantages?

The biggest problem for me was the time it took for people to respond. However, I think the chair was right to keep it in control with the “?” That way we were not all over the place.

The option of virtual meetings instead of midwinter meetings is a great idea. I wish other sections would adopt the same.

I thought the leaders did a great job on the meeting today. This was my first virtual meeting and I really enjoyed it. Some complex issues were brought up and I think the chair gave some good answers as well as did a good job trying to coordinate everyone's responses.

One thing that I did notice, and I am not sure there is a better solution, is that the fact of having to put a "?" out every time a person wanted to speak was a bit constraining. I understand that it is necessary to do this in order to "organize" the meeting virtually, but I do think that it limits free expression to a certain extent. However, I'm at a loss as to whether or not there is really any better way to do it. Without using the "?" format, I think a lot more could presumably be accomplished; however, it might be chaotic and hard to follow.

Blackboard did not provide the ability to draft comments in a text file and then be copied and pasted to the comment box. In fact, within Blackboard the copy and paste functions did not work at all. Otherwise, Blackboard was very easy to use...

2. How could this process using a "virtual classroom" be improved? Is there another method of meeting virtually which might prove better for our purposes?

I think Blackboard was a good way to meet; although the requirement to be authorized through the BB administration system makes it difficult to be a purely open meeting as drop-ins are unintentionally discouraged.

Synchronous chat is much preferred over an asynchronous email or bulletin board system. As you know, I had problems on my end. The frustrating thing on my side was that I never received an error message or even a message that I was disconnected. I would just sit and wait for the next message I would eventually decide I was not connected so I would close down blackboard and log back in. It was never hard to get back in. I was never able to determine my problem.

Blackboard did not provide the ability to draft comments in a text file and then be copied and pasted to the comment box...

If it were affordable, a conference call/with speaker phone would have helped a lot. I missed the real interaction that takes place in a face-to-face meeting. That being said, we got a lot done.

3. Did the actual procedures employed by the chair help or hinder the process? How could the advance planning and actual conduct of the meeting be improved?

I'm not sure; it was a tradeoff. The procedure of having the chair recognize individuals before they made comment definitely resulted in a more orderly meeting, but it may have slowed down the discussion. Overall, it was a successful meeting.

It's too bad some folks did not seem to understand that agenda items needed to be completed before the next one was taken up. Because there were long periods between most of the postings, I suggest that next time, the "?" be followed by the text of the question/comment in the same transmission...preferably with Agenda number inserted between.

I thought that the chair sending us the documentation by email made us look at it before the meeting. The planning and advance were quite good.

Chair's Comments:

This format, to be successful, takes an extraordinary amount of the chair's time. It appears that advance posting of relevant materials helps to expedite the meeting. Although successful overall, some persons missed live personal interaction. Some had long distractions during the meeting. It is hard for the chair to achieve a difficult balance between control and a free format, which can often be quite chaotic.

I did find that one could have something composed in advance in a separate Word document, then copy and paste it into the "text entry" window of Blackboard during the meeting. There may also be different issues, based on the web-browser used.

The control of the meeting was mentioned by several people. I have never conducted one of these synchronous virtual meetings before, but it was suggested in advance that the chair first recognize "speakers" in order to avoid chaotic and overlapping questions and replies. The time it took for responses was a problem; I am sure the way it was handled made it take longer. However, I have no real measure of comparison, just the advice of someone who has been involved in there before.