

Messages from MARS, the Newsletter of the RUSA Machine Assisted Reference Services Section, Laura Woodruff and Hui Hua Chua, Editors

August 2007

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From the Chair

Dear MARS Friends,

First, some congratulations are in order! Congratulations to Leilani Freund of the University of Florida who received the MARS Achievement Recognition Certificate during the ALA annual meeting in Washington. Also congratulations to the new MARS officers: Rosemary Meszaros from Western Kentucky University and Bowling Green Public Library, vice-chair/chair-elect, and to Carolyn Strickland from Lake County Public Library in Indiana, who becomes a member-at-large on the Executive Committee.

The ALA annual meeting in Washington proved to be very successful for MARS. Immediate past MARS chair Kathleen Kern and program committee chair Jana Ronan worked with their committee to plan an exciting program that attracted several hundred conference attendees for a standing-room only event. "Harnessing the Hive: Social Networks and Libraries," featured three informative speakers with very interesting presentations: Matthew Bejeune, MARS member and coordinator of digital reference services at Purdue University, Meredith Farkas, Distance Learning Librarian at Norwich University and founder of the Library Success Wiki (www.librarysuccess.org), and Tim Spaulding, bibliophile and founder of Library Thing, (www.librarything.com). Spaulding also joined us for the traditional MARS Happy Hour, so we felt as though a web celebrity was in our midst. Thanks very much to the Outreach Committee for your usual fine planning for the Happy Hour.

In addition to the chair's program, the Public Libraries Committee provided a well-received program on models for database training. The MARS Hot Topics Discussion Group focused on handhelds and reference services. Hot Topics was also notable because the co-chair was a live virtual participant who joined the discussion through Skype, and was seen and heard by all on the "big screen." MARS also announced the winners of its first-ever virtual poster session sponsored by the Management of Electronic Resources and Services Committee. Of very special note, the joint MARS/RSS Preconference, "Reinvented Reference 3: Emerging Technologies," had nearly two hundred participants who heard several notable speakers. Many thanks to Carole Pilkinton, the MARS Pre-conference committee co-chair, and to the entire committee for their service. You can read more about all of these events elsewhere in *Messages*.

I look forward to my year as chair, which began immediately after annual. Please do not hesitate to send e-mail to mmintz@american.edu if you have questions or suggestions for MARS. One of the questions that I hope many of you will consider in the coming year is the very identity of our organization. Is Machine Assisted Reference Section still the most appropriate name to describe our mission and activities? We have had a lot of fun with our acronym for thirty years and would not make a name change without a great deal of thought, as the MARS name has become synonymous with a cutting-edge approach to reference activities and associated electronic resources and services.

All the best,

Mary Mintz
mmintz@american.edu
MARS Chair

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Executive Committee Annual Conference Summary

Section Review

Thanks to the leadership of Linda Friend the MARS section review is proceeding well. Each committee has responded to a set of questions designed to elicit not only reports about MARS activities over the past five years, but also to help us look toward the future of the organization.

All-Committee Meeting

MARS held its second all--committee meeting during annual. The Executive Committee remains enthusiastic about this format for bring all MARS committees together in one space. Visitors interested in MARS activities and in MARS services can easily table hop to learn which committees may interest them.

Other Business

MARS now has guidelines for committee Web pages. These templates standardize the presentation of committee information and make navigation easier for those exploring MARS service. Thanks to the Publications Committee for their work on this project.

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General MARS News

LeiLani Freund Chosen My Favorite Martian for 2007

LeiLani Freund, Chair, Humanities and Social Sciences Services, University of Florida, George A. Smathers Libraries, Gainesville, is the 2007 recipient of the MARS

Recognition Certificate, also known as the 'My Favorite Martian Award.' MARS Chair, M. Kathleen Kern, presented the certificate to LeiLani at the Annual Conference in Washington, D.C., on June 24, just prior to the Chair's Program.

The award was presented to recognize LeiLani's dedication to MARS and RUSA through both membership and leadership roles for over a dozen years and for her mentorship of newer members.

Congratulations, LeiLani, and thank you for your service to MARS!

MARS Achievement Recognition Certificate Committee:

Rosemary Meszaros, Chair
Kelley Lawton
Debbie Bezanson
Doris Ann Sweet

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Annual Conference Committee Reports

Electronic Databases: Training That Works

The "***Electronic Databases: Training That Works***" program was very well received. The audience consisted of one hundred and twenty-five attendees from different types of libraries along with representatives from several database publishers.

Speakers Michelle Y. Roubal, Marty Onieal, and Margaret Mohundro presented samples of their libraries' training programs. Attendees heard about drop-in training sessions, Tuesday Track Training, "train the trainer" programs, vendor training, and statewide training clearinghouse programs.

The question and answer period following the presentations allowed the audience to participate and have specific questions answered.

PowerPoint slides will be posted on the MARS Website.

Upcoming events:

2008 Midwinter Discussion Forum: "Who's Using Our Computers" Discussion Forum with MARS Local Systems & Services Committee

2009 Program Topic: "Marketing Online Resources to Our Users"

If you are interested in working on any of these events, please join us in Philadelphia in January 2008.

Carolyn Strickland
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Chair, MARS Public Libraries Committee

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Library Services via Handhelds: Another Winning Program by MARS Hot Topics!

The MARS Hot Topics Discussion Group has always brought cutting-edge ideas about technology and services to our annual and midwinter conferences, and this last June in Washington, D.C. was no exception. Though our chair, Mark Dehmlow, could not physically attend the annual conference because his wife was due to have their baby, we used technology to bring Mark to the audience. A webcam and Skype internet phone connection via laptop allowed Mark to appear and speak to the audience on the conference room's large projection screen. From his library office in Indiana, Mark delivered a very insightful introduction to the topic of handhelds and introduced our speakers.

The Discussion Group titled the presentation, "Libraries2Go: Library Services for Handhelds" to highlight how library services are becoming mobile and how they can be delivered in new ways. The 125 librarians attending heard three trail-blazing panelists speak about what they are doing to deliver library services via these devices.

Bradley Faust, Assistant Dean for Library Information Technology Services at Ball State University, spoke of the Mobile Computing Project at the library and how a grant-funded project enabled librarians there to deliver key services to patrons in new ways. Bradley gave our audience an excellent orientation to the types of devices students and faculty are now using such as PDAs, smart cell phones, and ipods. Markus Wust, Digital Library Initiatives Library Fellow at North Carolina State University, discussed their library's project known as "MobilLib" and the many services they designed especially for handhelds. Our last panelist, Michelle Jacobs, delivered a very informative and entertaining presentation about her life as the "on the go" librarian at University of California, Merced campus library using a cell phone and portable keyboard to respond to reference questions and chat with students.

MARS Hot Topics looks forward to more brainstorming sessions about the next "hot topic" at our January conference in Philadelphia.

Nancy A. Cunningham

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MARS Hot Topics in Electronic Reference Discussion Group

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Management of Electronic Resources and Services (MERS) Committee

Members of MERS announce the winners of our first ever [Virtual Poster Session on the Evaluation of Virtual Reference Services](#). The authors of these posters discuss how libraries evaluate the effectiveness of Virtual Reference services and how they use that evaluation to improve Virtual Reference service.

["Are You A Robot?" And Other Serious Questions](#), by Sean Eads & Karen T. Pardue of

AskColorado, examines how AskColorado's Quality Assurance and Evaluation Subcommittee [QA&E] combines statistical analysis, patron surveys and transcript reviews to evaluate and improve the quality of virtual reference. With whom or what do patrons expect to interact? Do they expect detailed help or just a referral? How are patron expectations discovered, and how are they met? What are proper standards for expectations, and how are they maintained?

[Measuring Instruction at the Virtual Reference Desk](#), by Stephanie J. Graves & Christina M. Desai of Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, discusses instruction as a goal for good reference practice in Virtual Reference (VR). The authors outline and compare the methodologies used to evaluate reference services, which are provided via three different types of VR software. Consistency of service can be hard to measure since these mediums differ in how and how much statistical and evaluative information can be collected.

[Truing the Wheel: Designing a refined taxonomy for virtual reference services in academic libraries](#), by John Dorr & Janelle Ruswick of the Illinois Institute of Technology, looks at how traditional taxonomies and classification schemes of reference questions do not work with the kinds of questions most often asked via Virtual Reference services. The authors propose changes to the Katz and Sears taxonomies to reflect information needs which are met via email and IM services more effectively.

[Virtual Reference, Real Evaluation](#), by Donna Goda & Corinne Bishop, University of Central Florida Libraries, describes evaluation of chat in a shared VR service in which reference assistance is provided by four types of staff with markedly varying backgrounds (local librarians and paraprofessionals, consortia librarians and MLIS students). The authors explain how they compile, evaluate, and use data in planning hours, staffing, training, and other aspects of managing a VR service.

Martians are invited to join the authors, MERS members, and interested others in discussing the posters and the topics they raise on [the RUSA blog](#).

Much of our committee's attention this year has focused on this project, calling for submissions, evaluating and selecting winners, and working with the authors to revise their drafts, and so forth. We plan a second virtual poster session in conjunction with next year's ALA meeting, and welcome proposals (which will be due in late fall), topic suggestions, and feedback about whether the format of a virtual poster session works well to provide librarians with inspiration, ideas for projects, and other helpful information.

Other plans for the future include drafting an article about having a committee collaborate to run a virtual poster session or other new project. We welcome potential new members interested in projects like these!

[Kathryn Courtland Millis](#)

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Chair, MARS Management of Electronic Resources and Services Committee

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MARS/RSS Preconference “Reinvented Reference 3: Emerging Technologies”

The joint MARS/RSS Preconference “Reinvented Reference 3: Emerging Technologies” took place Friday, June 22, as a full day event. 190 registered attendees (!) enjoyed a continental breakfast, box lunch, and snack breaks along with a powerful, dynamic program.

Keynote speaker Michael Stephens (Assistant Professor of LIS at Dominican University), better known as ‘Tame the blog’ librarian, was a popular presenter and creative advocate for bringing new technologies to public services. Michael gave an energetic presentation on the topic “Web 2.0 Technologies and Reference Services.” Other speakers were:

David Ward, University of Illinois Champaign Urbana - “Implementing, training, and marketing for IM services in new user spaces.”

David Free, ACRL Marketing and Communications Specialist, and editor of *College and Research Libraries News* - “The World of Podcasting--Implications for Libraries.”

David King, Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library -“Videocasting for Public Outreach.”

Karen Coombs, University of Houston - “Blogs for Reference Services, Outreach and Marketing.”

Committee member Jami Haskell has summarized highlights of the presentations and included speaker PowerPoints on her excellent “Librarian like me” blog (<http://librarianlikeme.wordpress.com/2007/06/22/reinvented-reference-iii-emerging-technologies-for-reference-services/>). Jami’s blog includes highlights from many ALA Annual Conference programs.

Committee members are Co-chair Nancy Huling (RSS, University of Washington), Joe Thompson (RSS/MARS, Baltimore County Public Library), Mark Dehmlow (MARS, University of Notre Dame), Jami Haskell (MARS, Washoe County Library), Valli Hoski (RSS, Amigos Library Services), Garrett Montanez (MARS, Indiana University, Bloomington), Anne Cooper Moore (RSS, University of Massachusetts), Mary Pagliero Popp (MARS, Indiana University, Bloomington), Co-chair Carole Pilkinton (MARS, University of Notre Dame). Tanya Prokrym (University of Notre Dame) was podcast and technical liaison. Members spent over a year planning the preconference, relying especially on tools such as PBWiki (thank you Garrett), conference calls arranged by Nancy Huling, and the invaluable assistance of RUSA liaison Mary Popp and Eileen Hardy from the RUSA office.

Carole Pilkinton

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Co-Chair, MARS/RSS Preconference Planning Committee

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