

Partnerships for Instruction

Summary by Anne Houston, Loyola University -- Mallinckrodt Campus
Member of the LIRT 2001 Program Committee and LIRT Vice President/President Elect

About 130 people attended the LIRT program at the ALA Annual Conference on Sunday, June 17, at the Moscone Convention Center in San Francisco. This year's program was titled "Partnerships for Instruction," and featured two knowledgeable speakers as well as eight poster presentations following the talks.

The theme Partnerships for Instruction focused on ways that different types of libraries can collaborate to provide instructional services. The first speaker, Lisa Rosenblum, Manager of Adult Service and Training at San Jose Public Library, addressed the unique collaboration between her library and San Jose State University Library. The two institutions will combine their libraries in a single new facility in 2003. The new MLK Library will be staffed by librarians from both institutions, and many key services will be merged, including instructional services.

Both institutions currently offer instructional services, though of somewhat different kinds. The public library teaches classes on basic Internet skills including e-mail, and topics such as genealogy; the university library offers course-integrated instruction and faculty development. Both libraries participate in K-12 outreach, and are offering more instruction via the Web.

Rosenblum stated that combining instruction programs could result in a dynamic new level of excellence, or "synergy." New opportunities will be created by the merger, such as the opportunity to create new types of learning communities. The emphasis on information competence and web-based instruction will be heightened, and evaluation methods can be strengthened. As they move towards the merger, librarians at both institutions will prepare by observing each other's instruction; developing similar evaluation methods; developing materials together; and cross-training librarians. After the merger, services will have to be evaluated rigorously and adjustments made if necessary.

The second speaker, Patrick Jones of the consulting firm Connecting Young Adults and Libraries, spoke about the outreach that public libraries can do to connect with schools. Jones started off by describing his experiences with different public libraries around the country, in which instructional programs were offered to the local schools. Programs included outreach to 9th and 10th grade students, and training for public librarians about how to offer instruction.

Jones offered several thoughtful definitions of "young adult": a young adult is "a work in progress"; "someone who no longer wants to be a child but is not yet considered an adult"; and a "person who will be in academic libraries in a few years." The key to reaching these teenagers is to be responsive and respectful.

Jones outlined some reasons why public libraries should care about training information-literate young adults. Information literacy can have direct outcomes for youth; it encourages independent, lifelong learning; it creates "raving fans" of libraries; and partnerships with schools

can pay off for public libraries. According to an AASL document, information literacy creates "students become independent, ethical, lifelong learners who achieve personal satisfaction and who contribute responsibly and productively to the learning community and to society as a whole." Information literate students can access information efficiently; and evaluate the information they find and use it properly.

Among the groups that public libraries can reach out to are: public and private schools, parents, home schoolers; local groups such as Boy's Clubs and YMCAs, museums, and after-school programs. Good times to approach these groups include special events such as Kids' Online Month or National Library Week; when term papers are due; and after school.

Jones talked about the importance of teaching the "Big 6 Skills," an information-finding process defined by Michael B. Eisenberg and Robert E. Berkowitz. The six steps are defining the problem; determining sources; locating sources; extracting the relevant information; synthesizing; and evaluating.

The PowerPoint presentation from Jones' talk is available from his Web site at <http://www.connectingya.com/lirt.ppt>. He also mentioned that two good models for outreach are the CLASP program from New York Public Library (<http://www.nypl.org/branch/services/clasp/clasp.html>) and the School Corps program from the Multnomah, Oregon County Library (<http://www.multnomah.lib.or.us/lib/schoolcorps/index.html>).

A series of poster presentations on related topics followed the speakers. Topics and presenters were: Jane Bradford and Barbara Costello from Stetson University, outreach to local high school students in IB (international baccalaureate) programs; Lorraine Bruce from University of Washington, the Rapid Library Transformation Initiative which offers technology workshops to local school librarians; Vanessa Burford and Angela Dunnington from University of Texas San Antonio, College Success Seminar program to enhance the transition from high school to college; Ginny Cunningham, Jana Futch, Matt Torrence, Jim Vastine from University of South Florida, teaching research skills to local high school IB students; Marian C. Hampton from University of Pittsburgh, the Investing Now program offering research skills instruction for African American students in Pittsburgh Public Schools; Paula McMillen from Oregon State University, a program to teach bibliotherapy to graduate counseling students; Ann Viles from Appalachian State University, collaboration among librarians and faculty for instruction for a music appreciation course; and Raymond Wang from SUNY Rockland Community College, evaluation of Web-based instruction for ESL students.

The 2001 annual program was well-received and left attendees with many new ideas to ponder, and projects to try.