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Moderators: Tony White
Recorder: n/a

Carol Terry:

Art & Design School libraries: Challenges and Opportunities in the second decade of the 21st century

So how does this apply to art & design school libraries now and over the next decade? (I'll be sharing just a few of the photos that I got from colleagues this week and want to express my appreciation to them in advance.)

The numbers of transactions at Columbia overwhelm the combined resources of all 40 US and Canadian libraries in AICAD, the Association of Independent Colleges of Art & Design, so how do we begin to talk about our collections and services in comparison?

I am reminded of a story told me some time ago by a library director of a small library. She recalled sharing a cab at ALA with an ARL director, a big name like Jim Neal. She felt that her work was insignificant in comparison, and certainly her days were completely unlike the days of the director with whom she was sharing a ride. She made a comment to that effect, and was reminded, as I do myself on a regular basis, "what is important is this: Are you doing what you ought to be doing?"

Art & design school libraries have their own challenges and differences, but all share that close relationship to the work of the faculty and students in the studio. While we support liberal studies as well, it is that studio environment which informs our collecting, our services, and our teaching. Many library staff, like these at the California College of the Arts, are involved in their own creative work and relate on a personal level to the art and design students.

The focus of the institution on that studio environment means that it is difficult even in the best of times to feel that the library is funded at a level commensurate with the expectations, certainly of the librarians, for what should be done. As college libraries, most provide all of the services, including all aspects of technical services, interlibrary loan, visual resources, digital imaging, archives and special collections, not to mention circulation,

reference, e-resource management and instruction. As such staffing is stretched and all staff wear multiple hats.

Art & design school libraries, therefore have been ahead of the curve in many aspects that larger academic libraries are now trying to respond to. Most have "librarian role diversification," simply because there are so few staff; we have always integrated media formats with print, not just videos, but most libraries support slide and picture collections, posters, music and other formats and provide these services to the whole of the community; our libraries are purposely student-centered, welcoming student projects and student input, and we make the library a space for social activities, browsing, drawing, video viewing, technology, collaborative work and exhibitions.

Now budget cuts are real for most of us, and we are forced to make choices. As Jim mentioned, do we simply do less with less, or do we find ways to rethink the whole paradigm? I have been asked the same question by my administration.... how to completely rethink what the library is and how it functions. From my experience, I don't see that complete paradigm shift, at least not yet. I don't see that we are willing or interested in changing our mission that much. I do believe that there is change within that framework of building collections and providing access and support for the use of those collections. Change, so far at least, is on a continuum.

Some of the priorities I see in art & design school libraries are a new focus on the methods of instruction, use of exhibitions as teaching and public relations tools, the development of digital collections, and increasing emphasis on consortial agreements.

[Instruction and outreach] Librarians are teaching more than ever to help students navigate the array of digital resources that are available, and to introduce them to the novel idea that there might be some resources in print that could be useful. At RISD, the librarians, working with faculty, are teaching the first year art history classes and have introduced the model of concept-mapping, as they make assignments to groups of students who then crit each others' research path. [introduce Ellen Petraits] Classes with Special Collections and Artists' books bring another dimension that is more than show and tell, but creates a context in which students can see original materials and their overlapping influences. One on one instruction, especially with the faculty as they learn to teach with new technology, is particularly important.

[Exhibitions as a teaching and public relations tool] Art & design school libraries, like all art libraries, have the benefit of wonderfully visual materials in their collections that are conducive to exhibition. Libraries of all sizes have found places to display materials, and these displays are often used as teaching resources. They also make a statement to the larger community of the riches available in the library and thus serve an important public relations role.

[Developing digital collections for teaching and research] Art and design school libraries join their counterparts in the academic library arena in a focus on building the digital collections needed for teaching, and at the same time, finding materials unique to each institution that can be digitized for preservation and teaching purposes. Some of our colleagues, I can name specifically Otis and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, have made impressive efforts in this regard and have much to share.

[Re imagining/re negotiating the benefits of consortial arrangements] None of the art school libraries has all of the resources onsite to support the full range of the curriculum. Consortial agreements with similar libraries are helpful, but of particular importance are those relationships with academic research libraries and with statewide consortia offering electronic resources. One new direction being explored in AICAD visual collections is the possibility of developing a shared site for digitized images of faculty and student work.

How does new technology fit into all of this? This is a huge challenge. On one level, librarians are trying different things to see what grabs their students. Some examples: robust websites, library tours on You Tube, twitter accounts about new videos, Facebook pages, Flickr, blogs, wikis and more. That's a different session. The only sure thing is that there will be new things we can't even imagine.

But is any of this a radical departure? Not really. We are still building collections, providing services that support teaching and learning, and making spaces that contain both.

I want to spend the remaining minutes that I have talking to those of you facing budget cuts. The best a library director in an art & design school can hope for is to be part of the conversation when the budget talks happen; to have the opportunity to understand the scope of the issue and to see the library as part of the whole picture. Some may not have this dilemma yet, but it is unlikely that many will be spared. In the face of cuts, one can only hope that the decisions are left to the library, and not made by someone else. Here are a few ideas:

Look at staffing with an eye toward cross-training, understand fully the job descriptions and actual work of each staff member. Take advantage of naturally occurring vacancies to re-examine staffing structures and job duties (whether you can refill the position or not.)

Market the library, especially the instruction part.

Involve the faculty in decisions regarding the collection, should you need to cut periodicals and databases.

Don't shortchange your supply budgets, and pretend you can get by with things that you must have just for day to day operations.

Allocate some of the budget for unique and special books. You'll be glad you did and so will your successors.

Don't take your budget shortfall out on the students. Keep their experience foremost in your mind and your mission statement at hand.

And I would add, protect your travel and professional development budget as much as is reasonable.

So the question is this: What is it you ought to be doing?