Meetings and Conferences

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Future of Area Librarianship Conference (Bloomington, IN : 13-14 July 1995)

On July 13 and 14 Indiana University (IU) hosted the Future of Area Librarianship Conference, sponsored by a grant from the Department of Education and IU’s Title VI programs. Fifty participants attended representing libraries, Title VI Centers, and library education. Members of the Indiana University Conference organizing committee, most visibly Hillary Jolly, coordinator; James Neal, currently Dean of Libraries; Nancy Schmidt, African Studies Specialist; and Mary Krutulis of the School of Library and Information Science, served as facilitators for the sessions. Five Council on East Asian Libraries members participated in the Conference. Several other notables in the field of area studies also attended: Gayle Williams, Guillermo Nanez, Dan Hazen, Mark Grover, and distinguished speaker, Debbie Jakubs.

Patrick O’Meara, an African Studies scholar and Dean of Indiana University’s International Programs, gave a keynote cum scholar’s perspective address that presented a number of insights into the nature of changes in area studies research and administration. He expressed dissatisfaction with methodologies that stress comparative perspectives for their own sake, noting that too often information was extracted from highly nuanced sources with little consideration of context and meaning. He reminded the audience that a firm base in language and culture will always provide the foundation for area studies. At the same time he introduced evidence that traditional disciplines, especially in the current U.S. political climate, are losing their influence in the debate over the direction of area studies. He revealed that in the recent Title VI reauthorization hearings, outreach—especially to business and the media—and the newly-authorized international business centers had proved decisive in the lobbying effort with Congress.

The conference organizers had circulated a series of survey instruments in anticipation of the meeting and, as a preface to the day’s discussions, they presented preliminary results to the participants. My own, admittedly idiosyncratic, summary of the major findings is as follows:

Area Librarian Survey (45 percent response rate, U=187)
1. Respondents (presumably the librarians themselves) included all world areas with Latin America the modal case, followed closely by African, East Asian, Middle East/Near East, and Western Europe.
2. History predominated area studies training.
3. A measure of professional experience showed 48 of 176 respondents (24 percent) with over twenty years, data which at first suggest a large number of impending vacancies until they are amplified by some sort of labor force survey measuring trends in the library job market.
4. A need for professional development in electronic resources, languages, and grant writing/fund raising.

Library and Information Science Dean’s/Director’s Survey (response rate unknown, 35 respondents)
1. Very little awareness or interest in area studies; few courses in the curriculum, few potential students, even fewer known graduates.

ARL Library Director Survey (86 percent response rate, U=90)
1. Seventy-six percent reported area studies positions in their libraries; 43 percent reported recent recruitment, with East Asia the mode, followed by Latin America, Slavic, and Southeast Asia.
2. Although directors (or their delegates) desired larger pools of applicants for their positions, their reports also noted that for 27 of the 42 positions for which the number of applicants was known, between 11 and "over 30" candidates identified themselves.
3. Seventy-four percent of directors reported training priorities as being information technologies, language, book trade/acquisitions strategies, and grants/fund raising.

Title VI Director Survey (22 percent response rate, U=58)
1. Responses represent all world areas with Latin America the mode and Russia/East Europe, East Asia, International Studies and Western Europe immediately following.
2. Minuscule rates of area studies training for students identifying themselves as librarians.
3. Library support from Center budgets was widespread, with acquisitions funds and staff support comprising the bulk of this aid.
4. Area librarians were reported to have strong links with programs (15 of 37 serving on Center advisory boards).
5. Priorities for librarians, from the directors’ perspective, were expertise in the use of electronic resources, developing cooperative collections with other libraries, language training, expertise in grant writing and fund raising.

The first break out session considered the education and preparation of area librarians. Group summaries stressed that, to date, most area specialists came to the library with their language and subject skills in place and suggested that this was likely to be the future pattern as well. There was consensus also that the training of area librarians would likely take place outside library schools which had different constituencies and different research agendas. However, the possibility of niche courses in library schools as well as formal instruction from the profession, such as the CMDS Collection Management Institutes, was seen as viable preparatory alternatives. Participants also mentioned the importance of encouragement of graduate students to consider librarianship as a natural progression from their academic training, to be placed alongside consulting and working for agencies and think tanks—the career possibilities mentioned by Professor O’Meara. Finally, all seemed to agree that the future of area librarianship was inextricably linked with that of area studies.
scholarship and that the preparation of specialist librarians would naturally parallel, and need to keep abreast of, scholarly focuses.

The second break out considered the role of cooperation and technology in building area collections and services. These are topics with a great deal of currency; technology has catalyzed a new round of cooperative enterprises and many of the participants are involved in current cooperative and technological initiatives. However, while the virtues of cooperation (access to a richer array of materials within the collective) were clear and accepted, the means and modes for reaching a higher level of cooperation were not. Many felt hampered by the competitive ethos that pervades academia, citing chapter and verse in the contradiction between Title VI regulations that simultaneously encourage broader, deeper collections and increased cooperation. Resonating with the view of area librarians as serving area research and instruction, others reasoned that a change in emphasis from access based on local ownership to access from a distance would have to be vetted by faculty (educated by librarians). There was some discussion of recent cooperative initiatives, especially those developed by the Association of Research Libraries and funded by the Mellon Foundation. These "demonstrations" will set a number of benchmarks for, among other things, levels of activity between partners, for the resources that must be devoted to their start up and maintenance, and for the ways in which technology has changed the potentials for cooperation. Discussion of the group reports mentioned the need to search for funding beyond traditional sources, with the fate of the National Endowment for the Humanities hanging in the balance as we spoke, with international agencies such as the International Federation of Library Associations and Unesco mentioned as possible untapped sources. But the real challenge of cooperation lies in institutionalizing it, making the activities facilitated by granting agencies a part of normal operations, and this, it seems to me, implies a reengineering of the library, not just area studies librarianship.

Thursday's conference dinner featured a talk by Patricia Oyler of the School of Library and Information Science at Simmons College who provided perspectives on the past, present, and future of area studies librarianship. Charting trends in the library literature, Oyler suggested the 1960s marked the apex of professional interest in area librarianship, citing conferences dedicated to the topic, a spate of publications, and some scrambling in library education to meet a perceived shortage of trained professionals. Oyler's present is not so involved. She generally agreed with the summaries of the Library School Directors, presented earlier in the day, fleshing out the skeleton with descriptions of pressure from both administration and students to present a more technological curriculum and the lack of awareness of the issues and training requirements of area librarians. While she cited the possibility of niche courses to meet demand, when it was present, and the prospects of distance education for pulling together a viable class, I remained unconvinced that what we have generically called professional schools of library (but many soon call "information") education will meet either the current or the emerging needs for preparation of area studies librarians.
Friday's half day began with a "librarian's perspective" from Deborah Jakubs, Ibero-American Bibliographer from Duke University who framed a necessity or luxury dichotomy for her talk. Jakubs cited what seems a growing dissatisfaction with bibliographers in research libraries stricken by demands for cost cutting and increased production, the "once and future dinosaurs" described by one critic. While conceding that personality and location at the top of the bibliographic food chain make area librarians vulnerable to charges of elitism and aloofness, she emphasized the centrality of collection development to library operations, but stressed also that we will have to work at it. The possibilities for area librarians' involvement includes the full range of collegial and functional activities. We should be prepared to assert our position in an environment in which new arrangements are afoot and where much is up for grabs. Jakubs also pointed out that, even in times of retrenchment, specialization has its advantages. It is the area specialists, after all, who have been at the forefront of recent cooperative ventures. She implied, however, that if area librarians are unwilling to become more involved, they will become the marginalized ciphers that our current critics imagine.

After Jim Neal's brief recap of the first day's conclusions (that print would dominate publications in the near term, that inflation rates for library materials would remain above the CPI, that preservation would become even more imperative, that digital resources would increase, that cooperation will thrive but, for this to happen, technological potentials must be utilized and copyright must be shaped, new funding sources must be identified), break out groups considered an action plan. Again, my notes admittedly reflect what caught my attention and do not reflect the entire discussion.

On Educational Preparation:
1. that a labor-market survey, perhaps an extension of the preliminary questionnaire, directed to library directors and Title VI Center directors would establish a measure of opportunities for employment and an inventory of skills for area librarians;
2. that educational programs, perhaps within the curricula of library schools but more likely organized by the profession, would meet the "library" component of the skills inventory;
3. that internship possibilities, such as those of the Library of Congress, be brought to the attention of people interested in a career in area librarianship.

On Cooperation:
1. that the results—successes and failures—of current projects should be widely disseminated to the library community for comment and modeling,
2. that networked resources (especially non fee resources) be identified and evaluated by area librarian experts,
3. cooperating with faculty to produce a plan that would allow a division of responsibilities for library collections, and
4. promoting cooperation beyond the boundaries of the United States.
On Technology:
1. that this group somehow promote the institution of area-based technology fairs, attached to library and area professional meetings;
2. prepare inventories of uncataloged information sources for posting on the Internet;
3. establish digital stores of information for public display on the Internet.

(David Block, Cornell University)

Detailed results of the IU surveys will be published as the first major survey of area librarianship conducted in recent years. For further information on this project and to inquire about availability of the published survey results, contact Denise Gardiner, IU Russian and East European Institute, Ballantine Hall 565, Bloomington, IN 47405 or e-mail: dagardin@indiana.edu.

(From an e-mail message sent by Denise Gardiner 12 September 1995.)


The fourth International Conference on Japanese Information in Science, Technology, Industry and Business was held at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom, on 5 to 8 September 1995. The first of these conferences was held at Warwick in 1987, followed by meetings in Berlin in 1989 and Nancy in 1991. This conference was organized by the Library of Japanese Science and Technology (LJST) with the cooperation of Japanese information organizations in the United Kingdom, the USA, Japan, and France. The total number of participants was ninety, including twenty-six from the USA, twenty-nine from the United Kingdom, thirteen from Japan, and twenty-two from other countries.

The aims of the conference were: (1) to bring together specialists involved in the collection, evaluation, and utilization of Japanese information; (2) to provide an open forum for the exchange of ideas, new developments, and problems and solutions in all aspects of technical and industrial information from and about Japan; and (3) to examine the possibility of establishing international networks for the dissemination and application of Japanese technical and industrial information.

The LJST prepared a 500-page volume of preprints containing all of the papers presented at the conference.

(Eizaburo Okuizumi and Scott Edward Harrison)