Reports on Small Group Discussions

Education and Preparation of Librarians

1. How can we encourage interest in area librarianship among library and information science students, few of whom are aware of the existence of such positions (particularly in view of the fact that such positions are not ordinarily entry level)?

    This question generated quite extensive discussion of exactly what constitutes area librarianship, the fact that area librarianship is not monolithic, the need for a list of basic competencies for area librarians, whether area librarianship as we know it would continue if there were no Title VI centers, the need for more information about career paths so we know why people become area librarians, the financial and other rewards of area librarianship, and the need for a market survey. There was considerable disagreement among participants about the present and future needs for area librarians and the kinds of roles they will fill.

    There was consensus that area librarians need to market themselves by making their activities more visible on campus. They also need to make area and research librarianship a legitimate academic career path, and publicize it starting at the undergraduate level. Undergraduate job fairs could be held and student employees in libraries could be encouraged to become area librarians. Area studies programs will probably be more appropriate for recruiting area librarians than library schools, which currently focus more on theoretical background than content. Mentoring is very important.

    There was concern that the trend toward less funding at the national level for students will have a negative impact on recruitment of area librarians. Scholarships and fellowships are important: FLAS fellowships could be given and universities could develop programs based on LC's junior fellows program. Area studies and library associations can promote area librarianship by providing funding as well as information.

    It also was suggested that talented para-professionals be encouraged to become area librarians.

2. How can we encourage interest in area librarianship among library and information science educators, few of whom are familiar with the requirements of such positions? (Of all educators listed in the most recent ALISE (Association for Library and Information Science Education) Directory, only two list area studies among their top five areas of expertise/interest -- one a Senior Fellow at Rosary; one an Associate Professor at Western Ontario).

    A speakers' bureau of area librarians to meet with and provide outreach to library educators was seen as the primary means of communicating about area librarian positions. Trying to develop teaching partnerships with SLIS faculty to provide hands-on experience in area librarianship would be possible in those institutions with library schools.

    On a more general level by more effectively projecting what they do, area librarians can make SLIS faculty, as well as others, more aware of area librarianship. If there were more required area studies bibliography courses for graduate students, and possibly undergraduates, this also would raise awareness of area librarianship.

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3. In which LIS courses could/should area librarianship be presented and discussed? (Collection Development and Management, Basic Reference, Advanced Reference, Academic Libraries, etc.)

The marginal role of area librarianship in library schools was widely acknowledged and felt to be becoming worse with the increasing emphasis on information science in library schools.

This question stimulated a general discussion of skills needed by area librarians in the changing and increasingly electronic environment, rather than specific answers to the question. For example, what skills do bibliographers need when vendors and approval plans are being more widely used? What is the reference role of the area librarian when more questions are being managed by electronic tools? What roles will area librarians have in processing with the increased use of outsourcing?

4. Are dual masters (MLS/Area Studies) or specialization programs at the Master's level the best preparation for area librarianship (again taking into account that most such positions are not entry level)? If so, what elements should be present in such programs? If not, what other options are there?

It was generally agreed that area studies training is more important for area librarians than library training. The library degree helps one apply knowledge, area studies provides the knowledge. Distance education is a possibility as part of and as a supplement to the dual degree program. This would address the problems of critical mass and physical proximity for viable dual degree programs. Because area librarian positions are multi-faceted and diverse, there will not be one kind of degree program that will fill all needs. Summer institutes, senior fellows programs, and other forms of continuing education will be necessary.

Continuing Education and Professional Development

1. What are the topics requiring priority attention in continuing education programs for area librarians?

There are many areas in which continuing education and professional development are needed. One of the most important is language training, including the maintenance of language skills and the expansion of language skills to meet multi-lingual needs and basic vocabulary in areas other than the social sciences and humanities.

Area librarians need to maintain and expand knowledge of area studies as traditionally defined, and become familiar with other fields including law, business, the applied sciences, and interdisciplinary areas. They also need to become computer literate at a general level, familiar with the content of online databases, be able to navigate the Internet and create Web tools, understand the impact of electronic resources on publishing, and apply new technologies in collection development, technical, and public services. The acquisition of grant-writing and fund-raising skills also are high priority. For some area librarians management and cross-cultural communication skills are needed.

2. How should continuing education programs for area librarians be organized and delivered? Should general programs for all area librarians be the priority or should the focus be on activities in world area specializations?

There was consensus that individuals and library and area studies organizations share responsibility for continuing education and professional development, and that library schools are not providing and will not provide relevant programs. A variety of approaches were discussed and need to be utilized, including summer workshops, pre- and post-conferences, on-campus library and area studies association programs, a senior fellows program, internships, foreign travel, teleconferencing, and independent study. In general, basic technology training can be provided on campus, while content-oriented training needs to be provided by library and area studies associations. ALA, ARL, ACRL, and area studies associations were mentioned as appropriate for providing programs.

3. What continuing education opportunities would enable a librarian to prepare for a move to an area specialist position from another assignment?

There was agreement that more data are needed to answer this question. Skills associated with existing area studies positions and their impact need to be enumerated. A market survey of area librarian positions is needed. The focus of discussion was on the first and second questions, rather than this one.

4. What incentives should be implemented to encourage participation in professional development activities by area studies librarians?

There was consensus that the primary incentives include released time, funding to support professional development, professional advancement, such as promotion and tenure, professional recognition, and support from area studies centers. There also was consensus that the current organizational culture in research libraries does not provide these incentives.

Area Programs and Funding Issues

1. What are the main priorities for future cooperation between area programs and libraries? What steps can be taken to meet these priorities?

   Since most of those who participated in the discussion were librarians, the library perspective is dominant in the ideas presented. There is need for more discussion of these questions with area program faculty. There was considerable overlap in the discussions of the four questions, but ideas have not been repeated in the summaries.
   It was acknowledged that area studies programs and libraries have different agendas, so we need to find common interests and work together on these. Funding, strong collections, and effective communication and working relationships between area programs and libraries are high priorities.
   Librarians need to be willing to become involved in the administration of area programs by participating in the writing of grant proposals, planning program activities, and discussing the curriculum. Librarians need to be involved in and informed about new directions planned by area programs. Librarians should support area studies programs by teaching bibliography and area studies courses, and helping interns in the library. Area studies programs need to approach business and the sciences and libraries need to provide parallel support. Libraries and area studies programs need to work with disciplines to increase the visibility of area studies in the curriculum, extra-curricular activities, and library collections.

2. How can area programs, libraries and area librarians work together to most effectively build cooperative collections for both local and national consumption?

   Area studies faculty need to understand that cooperative collection development is a part of the current academic environment. Good communication between libraries and area studies is essential for cooperative collection development. Faculty can help identify subjects and collections for cooperative collection development, and identify "outreach" communities that can benefit from cooperative collection development. An official liaison between an area program and the library would facilitate working together.

3. What strategies can area studies programs, libraries, and area librarians adopt in anticipation of future changes in federal funding for international education and research?

   Existing library funding needs to be formalized at an administrative level and area programs need to support area librarians in obtaining library funding. Area programs need to work more closely with library development officers. Area centers and libraries need to work together to identify corporate sources of funding and private foundations at the local and national level which can be approached for ongoing and project funding.
   More collaboration across areas and institutions for such activities as outreach and cooperative collection development need to be explored.

4. If shrinking budgets necessitate a further streamlining of programs and collection across institutions (for instance, consolidating the study of a particular world area to only one of a group of regional universities), how can both academic priorities and collection development

Library impact statements are needed as a basis for decision-making. Sunset protocols may be necessary. Including smaller libraries in cooperative projects should be explored in order to share costs more widely. Multiple strategies should be used rather than a single strategy. Many ideas mentioned for the previous questions also are relevant for this one.

Cooperative Efforts and Technology Issues

1. How can area librarians share knowledge of and build on existing cooperative arrangements to: a) acquire/deliver electronic resources b) build monograph collections c) coordinate serials cancellations and new subscriptions?

One of the discussion groups focused on general issues pertaining to cooperation that are relevant for all of the questions discussed in this session. Primary motives for cooperation are usually budgetary and to gain access to materials. Trust is basic to all successful cooperative programs. Commitment to cooperation should be obtained by thoroughly exploring possibilities for cooperation and obtaining ongoing administrative support so that projects can be carried out. Successful projects are ones that start small, rather than being "massive" in scope, and which are integrated to include the acquisition, cataloging, and delivery of materials. Ultimately the success of cooperative projects depends on the people involved in each project.

There was consensus that a white paper on cooperative activities that surveys current and past cooperative projects would be useful, so that successful ones could be used as models for future cooperation. Cooperative projects have existed on the national and regional levels.

When developing cooperative programs international organizations should be taken into consideration and good working relationships should be maintained with the traditional disciplines. It was suggested that a rolling plan rather than one plan for the future might be more appropriate.

It was pointed out that existing library consortia do not coincide with area studies. There is a basic infrastructure for cooperative area studies programs at the Center for Research Libraries in CAMP, SAMP, SEAM and the other cooperative microform projects. Can this infrastructure provide the basis for additional cooperation? Can the area studies projects at CRL cooperate with each other?

To acquire materials overseas the use of in-country staff to identify and acquire materials and the use of one area librarian to acquire materials on behalf of several institutions which would then be centrally stored should be considered. Individual libraries need to be willing to change collection development priorities in order to participate in cooperative collection development projects.

Digitizing materials at the source needs to be explored, keeping in mind the great differences in technology in different world areas. Cultural restrictions in source countries and copyright restrictions need to be explored. There needs to be a cost assessment of sharing resources electronically and an assessment of institutional changes that will be required. To share materials electronically major changes in attitudes will be necessary regarding access and ownership.

2. What strategies can area librarians use to cooperatively select materials for preservation in hard copy, microform, digital, and other forms, and how can arrangements be made to cooperatively share preservation copies?

There was consensus that the mechanisms for cooperative preservation projects are already in place. As with the acquisition of print materials, there is the need to move beyond an institution-by-institution approach. There is a need to preserve rare endangered collections abroad and unique collections not in libraries in the US and abroad. International projects, such as the European Microform project, should be considered. It was noted that commercial preservation projects tend to be prohibitively expensive and that possible reductions in NEH funding may jeopardize existing preservation projects. It was suggested that microform be reconsidered as the preferred means of preservation now that electronic access facilitates distribution of digitized materials. The need for developing a framework for handling digitized materials was acknowledged.

3. How can area studies librarians and area studies faculty establish a cooperative forum for evaluating Internet resources for area studies and disseminating critical evaluation of these resources?

A number of different approaches were discussed but there was not consensus on which were the most appropriate. Some suggestions were laissez-faire: let people do their own evaluations or rely on the eventual "shakeout" from the proliferation of websites. There was considerable discussion of area-by-area and university-by-university approaches to evaluation. The development of home pages that evaluate Internet resources would be appropriate.

There was consensus that area librarians should provide workshops and instruction for faculty and students in the use of Internet resources. Making faculty and students aware of electronic access to the catalogs of peer institutions will facilitate sharing resources institutionally and cooperatively acquiring materials.

4. What should be the role of the World Wide Web in disseminating information about cataloged and uncataloged area studies collections?

There was consensus that there is a need for more publicity about library collections in general, and that Web pages are appropriate for this. Since there is increasing interest by users in electronic information and some users reject print finding aids, providing information about uncataloged collections on Web pages might be especially appropriate. It was noted that there may be some local opposition to publicizing uncataloged special collections. Providing guidelines for Web page development to publicize uncataloged collections, or for other specific purposes, would be helpful.

Other Issues

In the discussion of these four questions, some general issues were raised regarding how area librarians' positions are being reshaped by technology, the need to deal with both print and electronic cultures, the need to deal with new attitudes toward information as a commodity, and the importance of developing "impact statements" on how technology has influenced the acquisition and processing of area studies materials and the reference roles of area librarians.