

ALA Conference in New Orleans (June 22-28, 2006) Report

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The American Library Association Conference in New Orleans was a valuable and memorable experience. Being the first major conference in New Orleans since hurricane Katrina, the librarians were especially welcomed. At the opening session, Mayor C. Ray Nagin of New Orleans and other Louisiana officials welcomed ALA; later, talks were given by Laura Bush, Anderson Cooper and Cokie Roberts.

With the funding given to New Orleans libraries by The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Laura Bush Foundation, ALA, and other organizations, it is hopeful that the restoration of libraries will be a priority in post-Katrina New Orleans. Anderson Cooper spoke sensitively about the victims of Katrina while reflecting on his reporting while at the Morial Convention Center last August. He spoke of the essential role of libraries as New Orleans struggles to be rebuilt, stating that "New Orleans is a city of memory...librarians are keepers of our collective memory." Cooper commented on how the focus on the devastation of Katrina has faded from public interest, and must be kept alive since the recovery of New Orleans will take many years, concluding that "New Orleans needs you to keep the memory alive....Do not forget what happened here."

We paid a visit to The New Orleans Museum of Art, including the impressive sculpture garden which was not too badly damaged. The Museum currently has a major Katrina exhibit.

One didn't have to go far to be impacted by the extent of boarded-up neighborhoods in New Orleans. Law enforcement presence was everywhere, including LA state police and the National Guard which had been called in just before the conference began in response to recent gang-related murders. We felt safe, and the Warehouse District, French Quarter and Garden District seemed quite normal and festive, but clearly things will not be back to normal in the near future.

The Morial Convention Center looked remarkably restored, and the exhibits in the "stacks" and readings by various authors and poets were excellent. I particularly enjoyed Robert Pinsky, Poet Laureate of the U.S., reading from his 2005 book, *The Life of David*. Programs were also held in several of the hotels in New Orleans that participated in the conference. With New Orleans temperatures of about 92-102F and high humidity daily, the air-conditioned programs were the most comfortable places to be.

My own efforts were concentrated on the ACRL programs which relate most directly to my work, as well as a program which spoke directly to children's materials (I order the children's collection at Concordia for our education curriculum) and one on immigrant New Orleans collections, sponsored by ACRL's Western European Studies Section. I also attended the pre-conference ACRL College Library Section dinner at the Bourbon

House Restaurant in the French Quarter, meeting college librarians from all over the country and the new officers.

Following are some experiences that I found most noteworthy:

ACRL—Model Programs from the Immersion Experience: Successes and Challenges

Alumni from the Immersion Institute for Information Literacy who have been meeting for several years shared their experiences in developing programs for information literacy for their libraries, including poster materials and handouts. Since Concordia University Chicago is in the process of developing bibliographic instruction at both undergraduate and graduate levels, including a large number of distance education classes, I found their insights to be most helpful. Some points that came out of the presentations are the following:

- Faculty are essential to literacy training. It is, in fact, important to train faculty to do their own literacy training. ACRL Standards for Information Literacy may need to be translated into a useful format for professors, e.g., creating inquiry-based questions for students. A rubric using ACRL Standards should be designed by faculty, being assignment specific and relating directly to specific courses.
- Librarians have an important role to play in curricular transformation, affecting change and the overall culture of academic institutions. Faculty and librarians must work as partners.
- Flexibility is important: if one method of instruction in reaching students doesn't work, try another. This sounds self-evident, but often is not.
- Know what outcomes you are seeking: there is power in “articulated outcomes.”
- Christine Bruce, Australian educator, developed a learner-centered approach in her 1997 work titled “Seven Faces of Information Literacy,” and developed the idea of the “collective consciousness” in information literacy in several published works.
- I have received email attachments from one of the immersion graduates on information literacy for international graduate students (including bibliography), a bibliography on creating a graduate and faculty outreach program, a “force field analysis” and “ease/impact model” for developing literacy programs. Please contact me if you would like information on these materials.

ACRL-CLS—Big Ideas, Small Staff: Successful Tactics for College Libraries

Thirteen academic librarians spoke about the specific approaches they used in their unique positions at their college libraries to develop programs and relationships with other libraries. Accomplishments include the development of literacy programs and videos, collaborations with public libraries to establish authors' readings, creating a database-driven research portal with linked subject-specific resources that are tailored to

academic programs, establishing paid internships, training students to do outreach to other students in information literacy, and advocacy for college libraries. These innovative as well as practical ideas can be utilized by other libraries, designed according to specific environments and populations.

ACRL-WESS (co-sponsored by History Section of RUSA)—Immigration, Ethnicities and Historical Research in New Orleans

An exceptional panel of scholarly speakers presented their work on the ethnic origins of New Orleans and the research materials available in New Orleans collections. John Magill from the Historic New Orleans Collection focused on the British and Scottish influences, while Wilbur Meneray from Special Collections at Tulane University spoke about the Irish, Sicilian and Jewish immigrations, and Emily Clark, professor in the History Department, at Tulane, presented the backgrounds of her dissertation on the New Orleans populations of African descent. Her research emphasized the French Ursuline Sisters' conversion of the free and enslaved African-American populations, creating an early, largely black, Catholic Church in New Orleans which remained influential for centuries. Fortunately, extensive archival sources and sacramental and notarial records were mostly unharmed by Katrina.

ACRL-IRRT—Intellectual Freedom: Views through a Cross-cultural Lens

Information experts from the International Relations Round Table addressed the specific situations of freedom of access and availability to information as currently exist in China, the United Arab Emirates, and on the continent of Africa as a whole. The issues of basic human rights as defined in The Helsinki Accords and by the IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) Committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) were viewed in a global context.

ALSC--May Masee: Pioneering Editor of Youth Literature

Sharon McQueen gave an excellent and entertaining talk (including visuals) of her research on the influential children's book editor May Masee during the "pivotal period in the field of children's publishing" from the years 1919 through 1933. Masee was responsible for forming separate children's divisions for two major publishers, and was editor of award-winning classics in children's literature such as Robert McCloskey's books and Ludwig Bemelman's Madeleine titles. It was fascinating to learn how children's publishing developed in this period as a unique genre largely through the pioneering efforts of one woman, and to understand some of the historical development of awards for children's books and illustrations. A historical collection developed by May

Massee's authors of her manuscripts, art, first editions, and other memorabilia, are held in a special collection at Emporia State University KS.