

OLA

Quarterly

In this Issue

***Special Focus—
Library Support Staff***

Since 1992, the Library Support Staff Round Table (LSSRT) has given a voice to library support staff throughout the state.



**What a Long, Strange Trip it's Been
LSSRT – Wind on the Buffalo Grass?**

The MLS in Perspective

Do Crabs Have Favorite Colors

... and more!

*Spring 1997
Vol 3 • No 1
Oregon Library
Association*

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!



LSSRT Annual Gateway Conference
Portland Oregon July 1997

LSSRT's annual day-long conference, *Challenges and Solutions*, will be held Friday, July 18 at the Portland Airport Sheraton. LSSRT will be hosting an early registration and hospitality room Thursday night.

Keynote Speaker
Kathleen Weible

Lunch Speaker
Marge Boulet

A few sessions being offered this year:

Stop the Whining: How to Complain Effectively

Vision, Value and Voice

OCLC Custom Holdings

Hiring and Training Student Employees

Preservation for Penny Pinchers

Children's Ready to Read

Things that Go Numb in the Night

Internet Bootcamp

Author Talks

If you are an LSSRT member, watch your mail or the OLA web page for conference information. If you aren't and would like more information, tune in to the online newsgroups Libsup-L or Libs-or, or read about it in *Associates* or *OLA Hotline*. Or you can contact Katherine Stevens, LSSRT Chair, PCC Sylvania Campus LRC 104, PO Box 19000, Portland, OR 97280; or Maresa Kirk, LSSRT Vice-Chair, Hatfield Library, Willamette University, 900 State Street, Salem, OR 97301; or any other LSSRT Steering Committee member.

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OLA QUARTERLY

Library Support Staff

When LSSRT was asked to edit the OLA Quarterly we jumped at the opportunity, choosing a theme, however, was a dilemma. Support staff responsibilities span every facet of library responsibility and there is no way to squeeze it all into one issue. We wanted to illustrate the complexity of our jobs, how we got here, how our jobs are changing, and why we stay.

Libraries are changing at an explosive rate, and everyone who works in a library is in a state of rapid transition. OLA/LSSRT is responding to these changes by providing a forum for support staff to exchange ideas, solve problems, act politically, and work side by side with their librarian colleagues.

We hope that you will enjoy this issue of OLA Quarterly. It examines our responsibilities, challenges and changes, what we care about, and how we see ourselves in the library mosaic.

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Larry R. Oberg

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“Over the past quarter of a century, vast numbers of support staff have been pressed into service ... at reference desks across the country. ... What remains to be debated and resolved, in my opinion, is not whether paraprofessionals should or should not be used at the reference desk—the troops have voted with their feet on that one—but rather how they may best be utilized and what can be done to assure the conditions necessary for their success.” — *Larry R. Oberg*

Do Crabs Have Favorite Colors?

A Look at Reference Service at a Small Library

by *Susan R. Gilmont*
Oregon State University Libraries

With these words, Larry Oberg raises a clear challenge to all of us who care about the role of paraprofessionals at the reference desk. I'd like to talk about my experiences doing reference work at a small, specialized academic library. I believe that staff members at small libraries grow in ways that their peers at larger institutions do not simply because they have nobody to fall back on.

My experiences describe one approach to using paraprofessionals, and I hope these observations will be useful to others.

BACKGROUND

I'd like to begin by explaining my situation. I'm a library technician III at the Guin Library at the Hatfield Marine Science Center on the central Oregon coast. The Guin Library is Oregon State University's only branch library. The main and branch libraries are 56 miles apart, a degree of separation common for marine libraries. Our library is small but active. We have 2.5 FTE permanent staff and about .5 FTE student workers. Our collection is small, around 28,000 volumes with about 300 active serial subscriptions. The Guin Library serves Oregon State University staff and students, federal and state agencies located at the center, and the nearby Oregon Coast Aquarium. Our core constituency is diverse but primarily concerned with marine science issues.

I came to the Guin Library seven years ago, after more than nine years of experience in the serials department at our main library, the William Jasper Kerr Library in Corvallis. I'm the interlibrary loan clerk, the serials control clerk and the binding clerk. I assist in supervising circulation and shelving. Before we added a half-time technician, I also did the accounting and resource sharing with our main library. I have always had plenty to do without helping with reference, but I found myself doing it.

THE TRIALS

At first, I only dealt with reference questions when the librarian was gone. And she was gone a lot. During the first six months, she was gone for six weeks. As the only other staff person, I was responsible for

keeping things going in her absence. I was unaware that she was nearing the end of a period of remission from cancer and was packing the experiences of a lifetime into the time she had left. After my first six months, we picked up a temporary half-time librarian, which was a blessing because the cancer came back, and the librarian died that year. In so small a department so great a loss had a huge impact. My first eighteen months on the job were a difficult and painful time. Despite it all, I would not trade that time, because I count myself lucky to have worked with a great librarian and an extraordinary human being.

Needless to say, I never attended a formal training session on reference. I believe this is called the throw-her-in-and-see-if-she-floats theory of orientation. We reviewed what happened during the librarian's absence, so at least I got the benefit of hindsight. One of the few disadvantages I can think of to working in a small library is that the learning environment is not rich. In a large department, information is exchanged all the time: It's almost a background noise. You model, you pick up things from your peers. But I didn't have any peers, and because the librarian was gone so much, the one-on-one attention that normally would have made up for environmental deficiencies was often unavailable. I did learn, but the process was slower than it would have been with training.

One thing I needed to learn about was the referral. A major objection to using support staff at the reference desk is the complaint that "paraprofessionals often do not make referrals or do not recognize when to make referrals to a professional. ... Other librarians believe that paraprofessionals can be so eager to help that they will not refer to or consult with a librarian." (McDaniel, 1993) I want to be honest now and say that I did these things. I have to admit that I did spend hours I couldn't really spare trying to answer questions I probably should not have tackled. I was untrained, alone, and desperate to prove myself. Just as I had to learn to identify the best tool to use in answering a question, I had to learn how to identify the best person to answer it. Another way I overcompensated in those early days was to drown the patron in information, out of a need to prove I could do the work. As I gained familiarity with the collection, learned to use our library's reference tools, and experienced success in helping patrons, my insecurity diminished, and so did the overkill. I got better at conducting reference interviews and at identifying librarians and researchers to refer appropriate questions to. I came to see that placing a good referral was as much a mark of my professionalism as answering the question myself.

I suspect that many people starting reference work experience the anxiety and insecurity that I felt. I was seeking what some psychologists call "self-efficacy," a belief in my ability to perform a specific task, in this case, frontline reference service. If

supervising librarians want to minimize these natural overcompensatory behaviors in support staff, then I believe they should provide systematic feedback to paraprofessionals, and create a work environment rich in learning resources such as orientation programs, desk manuals, and subject-oriented workshops.

MATURING

In speaking honestly about how my performance at the reference desk suffered from a lack of training, I don't want to imply that I came to the desk with empty hands. I had college credits in geology and botany and other coursework in invertebrate zoology. I had collected fossils for fifteen years, and been a birder for almost as long. My personal library contains many of the standard works on the natural history and history of the region. And I had nine years of invaluable experience at our main library. I was familiar with the workflow and the personnel there and could provide better general service because I was cross-trained in the work of many departments.

The review process has helped me feel better about my performance. A review is not the best way to initiate training, but it works in a small library after the staff is trained. To this day, the librarian is often gone one or two days a week, and we have to work at keeping each other up-to-date. When the librarian is absent for extended periods, I keep a running FYI file in my computer. I consult with her, telling her what happened during her absence, and she makes recommendations on how to handle ongoing situations. We meet once a week for team meetings at which we share information. An advantage to working in a small library is that the staff gets more one-on-one interaction with the librarian, and in a one-librarian library, you don't worry about getting mixed signals from different supervisors.

Another factor that helped me mature as a worker was the environment. My supervisors were remarkably patient with me as I learned, and they set great examples of a high standard of service. When I was one member of a crowded department at the main library, I didn't really know what librarians did or what was expected of them. In my current position, I've been fortunate to work under two remarkable librarians. The closer I've gotten, the more my respect has grown. I can't help thinking that some of the distance between the two classes of employees is unnecessary and detrimental. Possible ways to narrow the gap between paraprofessionals and librarians include serving together on committees, working together in a team setting, and pairing at the reference desk.

EXPERIENCES

The librarian is often gone attending meetings, so there are many times when I am the senior staff person, or indeed the only staff person on hand to help patrons. Remote assistance is available from our main library, but I still have a lot of responsibility. If a person has driven 150 miles to use our collection,



Susan R. Gilmont

I can't say "I'm sorry, but the librarian is gone." I must try to help that person. My most memorable experiences in reference have taken place when I was alone and in charge of the library. An incident that stands out in memory occurred when I helped a retired librarian who had missed the computer revolution. She was taking a class at a community college in a nearby county and drove to our library for help on a paper about earthquakes and tsunamis. I showed her how to use the CD-ROM databases, and she enjoyed exploring our library's resources. When she left, she asked whether I could give her something with our library's name on it, and I offered her the librarian's card. I felt good about the transaction, because I thought I had been able to slow myself to her pace and that I had empathized with her and shared in her pleasure as she mastered the new technology. But I was astonished the next week when a fifty-dollar check for the friends of our library came in the mail from her.

The most common ready-reference questions in our library concern the tides and the weather. The most often asked reference questions are about whales and dolphins, but other creatures get their share of questions, too. One such question came from a business gearing up to manufacture miniature crabpots designed to be cast from fishing poles. The crabpots were made of molded plastic that could have colored dyes injected into it, and the manufacturer wanted to know whether one color was more appealing to crabs than another. A review of the literature revealed that while crabs do have sophisticated vision, and do seem to see in color, foraging behavior of crabs revealed that, "No, feeding crabs do not have favorite colors."

See Crabs page 18

PARAPROFESSIONAL VS. PROFESSIONAL

If you are a member of the library staff and don't have a master's degree, you are a support staff member, or a paraprofessional. Webster's *College Dictionary* says a paraprofessional is someone trained to assist a professional, and a professional is a person who is expert at his or her work. Wow! What a nice black and white picture!

The most efficient, organized, enthusiastic, intelligent person in the world without a master's degree may run your library. The most stubborn, dull, narrow-minded, non-people person with the MLS may run another library. Who is the professional? Who is a credit to the profession?

If we focus on a specific person and make a judgment of professionalism based solely on education level, the judgment may be neither accurate nor fair.

But when trying to establish a professional status for a specific job field such as librarian, we must look for an overall evaluative method. A higher degree seems acceptable.

ANYONE CAN SHELVING BOOKS

In the opinion article in the March 1996 issue of *American Libraries*, Mark Plaiss maintains that there is no argument for a higher degree in librarianship. (Plaiss works in a medical library in an education foundation. Because of his environment, I excuse a lot of what he writes about librarians.) It is true that much of what we do is task-oriented, especially in small and mid sized public libraries. The tasks are not life-saving in most cases and probably not life-fulfilling either. You might agree with Plaiss; most of academia does. Academics often regard the MLS with so little value that they require a second master's in another field just to get a library job. Plaiss says that "we give the commodity we handle—information—to anyone free of charge. If librarians do not place a value on their services, why should anyone else?"

Good grief! Plaiss has obviously worked within the medical profession too long, and he's lost his awareness of what librarians are made of. Of course librarians place a value on themselves and their services, and they know that their commodity, information, is invaluable. However, the commodity is not ours; We merely provide access to it. It belongs to the world. Librarians above all know the importance of providing free access to information to prevent discrimination based on a patron's ability to pay.

SETTING THE PROFESSIONAL STANDARD

There is much more to being a librarian than checking books in and out and running a summer reading program. To talk about this I must sink to what Plaiss

calls "the prattle." We are the guardians of intellectual freedom and the freedom of information. Librarians are the keepers of civilization's ideas, history, accomplishments, thoughts and feelings.

Technology may aid us in some of our tasks. There will always be someone who wants to take away knowledge from those without power or education, and it is up to us librarians to ensure that that doesn't happen. (Computers will never take our place.) We must be educated to provide the philosophical defenses of the freedoms to read, to think, to speak, to learn and to listen. We can't learn it all during a one-day workshop on book repairs. We can't learn it all at graduate school either, but there is more time in grad school for thought and discussion and the formulation of beliefs.

For the world outside the library, standardized criteria must assure our employers that we represent a certain quality in the profession of librarianship, that we have moved above the task-accomplishment level and are prepared to act as guardians of intellectual freedom. Earning a master's degree from a school accredited by the American Library Association is one criterion. I believe the MLS can be a condition of our being recognized as professionals.

YOU CAN SHINE RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE

It is enough to be a paraprofessional. Anyone who approaches work with honesty and enthusiasm deserves respect, regardless of job or position. But the MLS can help if you want to boost your self-esteem, get a ticket out of where you now are, or if you want to stay and seek promotion.

Do you want to be considered a professional? Is it worth it to leave your job and physically move to a campus and get the MLS? Is it worth it to overextend your bank account and the hours in a week to take night and weekend courses while you still maintain a family and work life? It's not easy, but it's not all bad if you're looking to gain professional status, get on a career track, or make more money. After all, if you don't do it, you must ask whether you will be happy with where you are five years from now.

WHY I DID THE MLS

A library-related career came late in my work history. Circumstances moved me from an entry level position to library director in 18 months. There I was, a library director who had never purchased a book, worked on a budget, developed a policy, or used a computer, and I didn't know the meaning of bibliographic instruction.

I started work in the library in 1982 and I earned an MLS in 1990. For five years I was a paraprofessional as I budgeted, hired and fired, automated the library and ran a successful new building campaign. I also shelved books, wrote media releases, and set the lawn sprinklers—everything expected of an entry-level library director at a small public library.

The MLS in Perspective

by MLou Williams

Director, Hermiston Public Library

I didn't know what I was doing. Determined not to cheat the people of Hermiston, I learned on the job and on my own time, through reading, workshops, and conferences. I sought mentors and asked questions of other librarians, who were wonderful about sharing their knowledge. The State Library staff was very patient and supportive.

As my experience grew, so did my awareness of the gaping holes in my knowledge. Through participation in OLA, I began to think of more education. I was on the Continuing Education Committee back when the committee actually generated workshops. Everyone else on the committee had a master's degree; some had two. I kept my mouth shut (those of you who know me now, know how difficult that must have been!) and I listened, becoming more and more impressed with the quality of those people.

My enthusiasm for more education blossomed after Mary Ginnane organized the first Basic Librarianship Institute. During a period of days, a group of us paraprofessionals stayed at Marylhurst campus and shared a sampling of graduate school. We attended half-day classes led by genuine professors flown in from library schools. The classes were challenging, the environment stimulating, the camaraderie encouraging. It was a relief to find that my brain still functioned in a formal education setting. After all, it had been more than 15 years since college.

As we completed construction of the new library in Hermiston, the city acquired a new city manager. He was intelligent, efficient, and career oriented. He had definite goals and objectives, one of which was to establish pay equity among city personnel. He offered me a leave of absence to earn a master's degree. He felt it would justify increasing the librarian's salary to a level on par with the other department heads.

What a chore it was to empty my home of 12 years, to rent it out, store everything and drive across country to northern Pennsylvania in steamy August to scrounge on a limited budget and live without my teenage cat for a year. I wiped out my accumulated sick leave, vacation leave, and life savings. But I know going back to school was the right decision.

THE REWARD

That year was a sabbatical from my life. It was my first time east of the Mississippi River. I got to know Chinese students and share their heartbreak at the Tiananmen Square massacre. I heard the campus rejoice when the Berlin Wall fell. I spent a glorious autumn in Leaf Festival country, taking hundreds of photos on sunny, class-free afternoons. Because of a Greyhound strike, I was able to travel expense-paid all over the east, while taking graduating students to job interviews. I visited Punxsutawney on Groundhog Day, ate a real Philly Cheese Steak, spent a free week in Washington, D.C. as the cherries blossomed and heard Niagara Falls roar. Despite hardships, it was a lovely year.

Besides all that, I acquired new knowledge about children's and young adult literature, collection development policies, statistical research, original cataloging and more. Now I understand how in the world Hermiston's books on the Donner Party came to be classified under Description and Travel.

The demeanor of graduate school encourages growth. Professors of any substance enjoy the challenge older students provide and appreciate the true-life experiences of a practitioner who can balance theory with realism. They smile, learn your name, write comments on your papers, and even take time to discuss those papers with you.

APRÈS-MLS: IS THERE A DIFFERENCE?

Do I view my job differently? I feel more confident, having the formal education to guide me in formulating my opinions. The knowledge I acquired has helped me establish and follow a collection development policy, handle censorship issues, extoll the library's place in the community, and earn respect in the community. When high school students asked, I could show them where to find the price of gold and how to read the stock page—such simple things, if you simply have the knowledge.


Getting the MLS gave me the option to move onto a career track, and that allowed me to accept staying where I was without feeling trapped. Personal conditions require that I stay, but it was encouraging to know I could leave if I wanted to. The most measurable payoff was just that — the payoff. I'm now making more than twice what I made when I left for graduate school in 1989.

Do I view the staff differently? I have always valued people over machinery. I learned early in working that no matter how glorious your working environment, if you don't have people who get along with each other, bring out the best in each other and give the best they have to the public, everyone gets

See **The MLS** page 20

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BACKGROUND

Most of us in libraries understand that our profession's future lies in its ability to anticipate and act upon the changes taking place in our environment. How a particular library responds to change will, of course, vary with the organization and with the forces internal and external that drive it. At Oregon State University, one campus response to change was to accept recommendations of a 1992 study by management consultants KPMG Peat Marwick that called for combining

University Computing Services, Libraries, and Communications Media into a single Information Services unit headed by an associate vice provost for information services (IS). A faculty review of the report added Telecommunications to the new unit.

In early 1995, in an all-staff meeting of the newly reconfigured unit, the associate vice provost said that her goal for IS was to have a truly integrated unit that would leverage

resources efficiently. To accomplish this task, several work groups were appointed to review the current organization to see where duplication of efforts was taking place. After several months of study, a report was put forth to the associate vice provost for information services recommending that IS be reorganized into a team-based organization. Originally five teams (later six) that seemed most likely to succeed were designated as formal teams, meaning they would be provided with team building skills that would help them to become self managed. These teams would be a model for the rest of the IS organization.

The teams and their managers (now called sponsors) participated in team training programs led first by an outside consultant and later by a team trainer employed by IS. It was during these early sessions that the team based organization of IS was articulated and refined. A new vocabulary was instituted where terms such as "sponsor," "team boundaries" and "handoffs" were defined as a means of clarifying roles and expectations. Thus a sponsor was that person who was responsible for coaching the team, for imparting the vision of IS and the campus to the team, for bringing work to the team and for helping the team become self managed. Boundaries identified the area within which the team had full decision-making authority and hand-offs described how responsibility was transferred from the sponsor to the team.

WHERE ARE WE TODAY?

The road from 1995 to today has been bumpy and winding, with false starts, set backs and confusion. The plan to stay with six teams went awry because

several people were on two or more teams, making it difficult to remember when to practice team skills and when not to. Within the year, most IS staff were meeting as teams and were doing their best to practice team skills. Other difficulties arose when learning what it meant to be a team. Did being on a team give each member equal voice in all decision making? What about individual expertise? What about decision making – would consensus rule? And finally what was the role of support staff in a team environment.

This last question is perhaps the most interesting. What does it mean for an organization when librarians and support staff come together as a team to make decisions affecting the library. Will each individual's knowledge be valued? Although most libraries rely on a committee structure with both librarians and support staff serving together, these are frequently short-term committees charged with recommending a solution to a specific challenge. How would this change when departments were eliminated and replaced by teams who had responsibilities for not simply recommending solutions but for implementing them as well? Finally, how would questions of equity—especially salary equity—in a team based environment be dealt with?

The experience at IS is still too recent to provide definitive answers to any of these questions. However, some trends are emerging. One clear trend is that while training in team building skills benefits everyone in the organization, many of the support staff are embracing the training with enthusiasm. Although the OLA has a long tradition of providing continuing education, many library support staff in IS were reluctant to take the time away from work to attend such sessions. Today, team training is required of all formal teams, and it is available to everyone else in the organization. The training, which includes such topics as learning to provide feedback, learning to manage meetings, learning to achieve win-win solutions and learning to resolve customer satisfaction, is providing support staff with developmental opportunities they might not normally receive in a traditional organization.

On the down side, many support staff and librarians believe that training and team meetings are taking too large a percentage of their work day and are preventing them from providing the quality service that IS values. However, as an organization, IS continues to support the view that an investment in team training will result in a healthier and more flexible organization, one that will be better equipped to handle changing customer expectations.

Participation on a team where librarians and support staff are working to identify and solve problems has enabled some staff to find a voice that might not be heard in a more hierarchical organization. This is true partly because of the team training, but also because working as a team sets an expectation that anyone willing to contribute will be heard. To help ensure that this is true, many teams have used out-

The Team Environment at Oregon State University


by *Karyle S. Butcher*
Oregon State University

side facilitators to ensure that no one person or group dominates discussion. Moreover, since many support staff have volunteered to serve as facilitators to other teams, they are not only improving their skills but they are learning about parts of the organization with which they may have been less familiar. This is particularly true in IS because many library staff members (and librarians) were uninvolved in the work taking place in the other IS units.

Another benefit of the increased contact between librarians and support staff is an increased understanding and appreciation of the work done by each group.

This is not to say that the library is one happy family and that the us-and-them syndrome has disappeared, but there appears to be a growth in mutual respect and the realization on the part of everyone that leadership exists throughout the organization. There are two aspects of the new organization that cause equal conflict for support staff and librarians, and this has to do with the use of authority and with peer evaluations. In an effort to put more responsibility into the hands of the front-line worker, IS is committed to an organization that will result in self-managed teams. This means team members will take on increased responsibility for decision making and

for participating in peer evaluations. This can be an exciting time for some team members but frightening and confusing for others. Team members (either support staff or librarians) may choose to avoid assuming new responsibilities because they feel they are not paid to do so. Similarly, team members may be reluctant to participate in peer evaluations because they feel unqualified to do so. In each of these situations, the organization must have clear guidelines from its human resources department in order to reassure the team that they can indeed take on these duties.

Working for a team-based organization provides opportunities and worries for everyone in the organization, support staff members and librarians. For the organization, teams provide a way to ensure that decisions on how a task should be undertaken are determined by those closest to the work. As the teams learn to function efficiently and believe they are responsible for their work, decisions should be made more quickly and with greater customer awareness than is frequently the case in many libraries. For individuals, whether support staff members or librarians, teams offer an opportunity to exercise greater responsibility over their work environment and realize some of their own hopes and ideas. It is not an easy road but it is worthwhile. 



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*Sometimes the light's all shining on me,
Other times I can barely see.
Lately it occurs to me
What a long, strange trip it's been.
-Grateful Dead*

In November, I reached my 20th anniversary as an employee of the Oregon State Library. The staff celebrated with a party that included more than enough chocolate to satiate ordinary mortals, the traditional OSL pen and mug, and the non-traditional Dilbert calendar, complete with a Dilbert mask and cardboard tie.

What a Long, Strange Trip It's Been

by Jey Wann
Oregon State Library

It's hard to reach a milestone like this without contemplating on the achievement. After all I have spent nearly half my life here. Maybe, as one colleague quipped in my anniversary card, it's "time to get a real job." Maybe there is a reason that old

college chums I have not seen for a long time always say, "Are you still at the library?"

Last spring, I attended a conference for library and media technicians in Portland. It was my first national conference, and I enjoyed meeting library paraprofessionals from around the country. One day at lunch we got on the topic of how long we'd been either at our libraries or in our jobs. I noticed that folks seemed a bit defensive about their length of tenure if it was more than a few years. People would say things like "Well, I've been there eight years, but ...", and then give some justification for not having gone elsewhere.

Ever since then, I've been wondering whether paraprofessionals tend to stay in their jobs a long time

and whether they tend to be defensive about it. In December, I posted the following questions to lib-sup-1 (the listserv for library support staff) and libs-or (the listserv for Oregon libraries):

- How long have you been in your present job?
- How long have you been at your present library?
- How many other library jobs have you had?
- At how many other libraries have you worked?
- What is your job?
- At what kind of library do you work (e.g., public, academic, special, school)?
- What reflections or observations do you have about the length of time you've been in your job, in your library, in working in libraries in general?

I expected 30 or 40 people to respond. To my amazement, more than 130 did. With this number of responses, it was interesting to look at the data, but keep in mind that this isn't a random sample of library paraprofessionals.

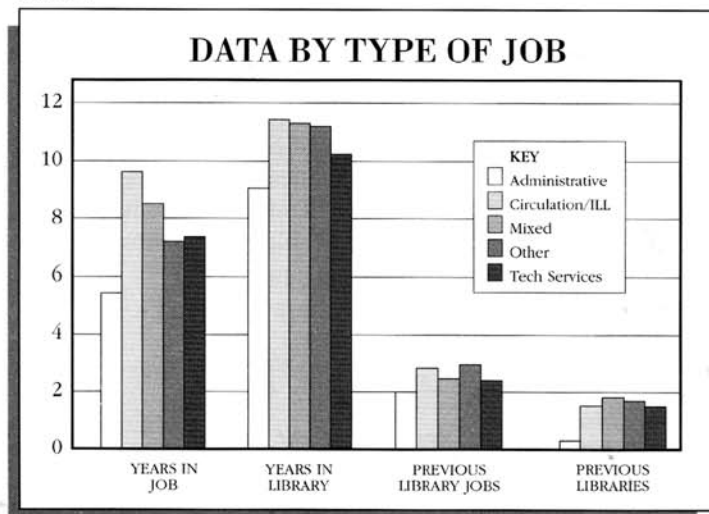
I divided the responses by job type, by residency (Oregon or non-Oregon), and by library type. For job type, the circulation/ILL and technical services categories are self-explanatory. Administrative jobs include any that fell outside the usual library functions (e.g., accountants, office managers, and assistants to the director). The "mixed" category was truly a mixed bag, composed of jobs with functions in at least two traditional library areas, like circulation and cataloging. Many of the respondents in this category had major duties in virtually all areas of their library. The "other" category was for job types for which there were only one or two respondents and included reference, media, stack supervision, youth services, and bookmobile.

In 1995, *Library Journal* conducted a survey of paraprofessionals in libraries (St. Lifer, 1995). It found that the average paraprofessional had been in his or her job seven years eight months (compared to eight years for librarians). My data was very similar: Overall, my respondents had been in theirs an average of 7.8 years. An earlier survey of academic libraries reported similar results, with most paraprofessionals staying in a job six to 10 years (Oberger et al., 1992).

Figure 1 shows the data by type of job. I was not surprised that administrative jobs showed the shortest stay in their positions (5.3 years), since those general skills may be more transferable to non-library organizations than library skills. The longest-lasting types appear to be circulation folks (9.7 years). Judging from specific jobs that respondents reported, this could be because circulation has traditionally been a paraprofessional field, and support staff are more likely to have supervisory, better-paying jobs in circulation than in other areas.

Figure 2 shows the data by residency. Oregonians appear to stay in their jobs a bit longer (8.8 years compared to 7.5 years), but not to have been at their libraries as long (10.3 years compared to 11.7

Figure 1



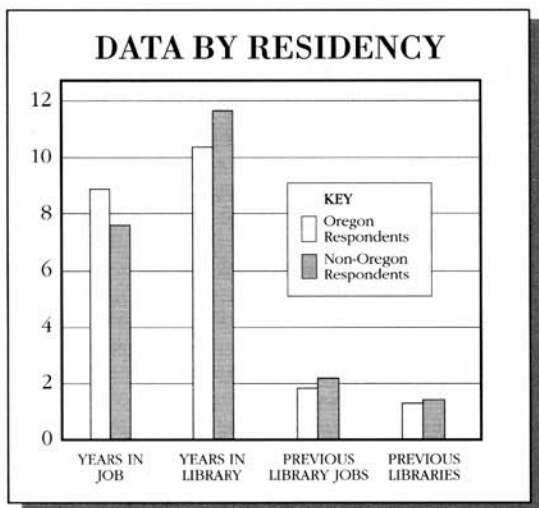


Figure 2

years). The higher number of previous library jobs (2.8 for non-Oregonians compared to 1.9 for Oregonians) may offer a partial explanation. Perhaps non-Oregon libraries in the survey were either larger on average, or for some other reason offered more opportunities for paraprofessionals to transfer to different jobs or be promoted to higher levels. One non-Oregon respondent reported that her library gives a 5 percent pay raise to any paraprofessional who transfers to another job in the library; the only stipulation is that he or she must remain in the job for at least six months.

Figure 3 shows the data by library type. Public library paraprofessionals stay in their jobs longest, at 8.1 years. Comments tended to report more stress in academic libraries than in public because of campus politics; this could affect how long staff members stay.

Looking at the data, I saw an eight-year gap between the highest (30) and next-highest (22) years in job, and a five-year gap between the two highest values for time at library (30 years and 25 years). These were the only such gaps in the data and could cause skewing toward the higher values. So, for those inquiring minds who want to know, Figure 4 shows responses to Years in Job by five-year intervals, and Figure 5 does the same for Years at Library. The grouping shows that more responses came from people who had been in their jobs or at their libraries less than the average.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 1991 the median time with one employer for all Americans was 4.5 years. The median for time in one occupation was 6.5 years. Librarians stayed longer: 7.3 years with one employer and 7 years in one occupation (Maguire, 1993). Although economists do not agree whether U.S. jobs are becoming shorter and less stable, most citizens expect to make several employer and career changes during their work life (Zachary, 1995 and 1996). I've certainly seen my

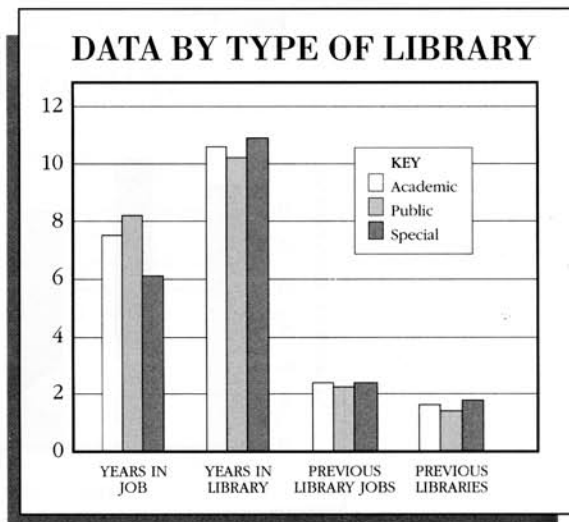
share of headlines announcing how often the average American will change jobs. If library paraprofessionals stay with their employers and in their careers longer than average, maybe the comments from respondents can show why.

Getting the data from the survey was great, but the real fun was reading people's reflections on their years in libraries. "Sorry if I rambled on too long" was the most common last line. Obviously, the folks who responded to my survey had thought about the issue.

Some of the respondents were planning to leave their jobs, their libraries, or the library field. Low pay and lack of promotional opportunities were common themes, and some mentioned disrespect from, or conflict with, librarians. Many of those planning to leave their jobs were doing so to pursue an MLS or because they had received their MLS. A few reported that they were planning to leave the library field for another where they felt there was more opportunity for advancement. Interestingly, while at least one respondent wondered whether library skills were useful in the non-library world, another proposed that library paraprofessionals recognize their skills and act as entrepreneurs, realizing that they could work in a variety of fields.

The issue of working relations between paraprofessionals and librarians is an important one. Respondents from all types of libraries reported feeling that librarians looked down on them, did not respect their work, or didn't include them in the planning process. Respondents from academic libraries were most vocal on the subject; this may result from pressure that faculty status has put on academic librarians (Ober, 1992, and Voelck, 1995). However, some in academic libraries spoke in glowing terms of their working relationship with librarians. A few mentioned team management as helping bridge the gap. And faculty status for librarians has opened areas of library work formerly done solely by librarians, like original cataloging and reference work, to paraprofessionals.

Figure 3



Although respondents reported a number of reasons for staying in their jobs, many said essentially the same thing: They love working with books and information, and they love seeing what they do help the patrons they serve. They are proud of their jobs, and glad to be in a field with high ethical standards and ideals. One person in an Oregon



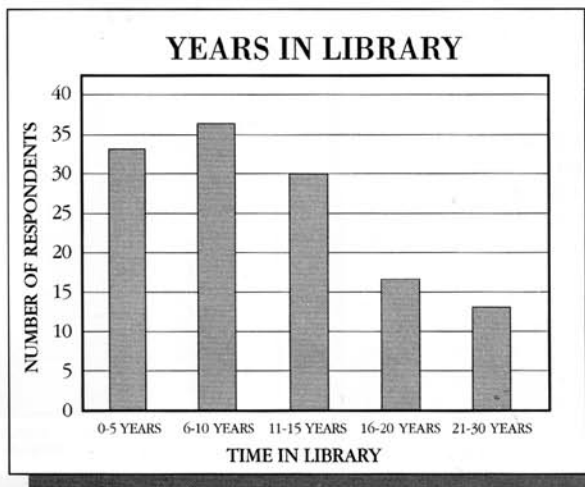
Figure 4

academic library wrote, "This job is one which doesn't make you ashamed to come to work. You're not selling people another hunk of useless plastic junk, you're filling a real need, and you don't parcel it out based on how someone looks or what their income is."

I know that I feel privileged to do some of my job duties, particularly cataloging unique scrapbooks and manuscripts or rare publications in the Oregon State Library's Oregon Collection. To handle and peruse these items and feel a connection with the people that made or wrote them is a wonderful experience. It's the kind of thing that Susan Gilmont of the Hatfield Marine Science Center has referred to as "a great gift" (Gilmont, 1996).

Many mentioned low pay as a drawback to their jobs, but some said at least the pay "isn't bad." Good benefits, sick leave, and vacation packages make a big difference. For staff who work in academic libraries and have college-age children, tuition waivers are a major financial incentive.

Figure 5



Some of those not going for an MLS commented on that decision. For some, the expense of going back to school was a factor, especially if they were already making a comfortable salary. Others were happy with their jobs or the kinds of jobs available to them and didn't find librarian jobs attractive.

How respondents ended up in libraries is also interesting. I had assumed that most, like me, came to libraries by serendipity, not conscious choice. Several originally got into libraries as work-study students in college or as student assistants in public libraries, worked up to full-time employment, and stayed. At least one respondent at an academic library did so before completing her degree. Then there was the respondent at a public library in Iowa who figured "The money I invested in the mandatory retirement plan would make a good savings for a trip to Hawaii. I loved the job so much I'm still in libraries 18 years later and still haven't been to Hawaii."

The important thing that stood out in the survey responses, is our love of and dedication to the library world. For the record, I have been at my library 20 years. I entered the field by serendipity: I was fresh out of college, still didn't know what I wanted to do when I grew up, and needed a job. A comment from a Colorado academic library staffer sums up well how I feel: "I remember hearing something about librarians choose to be librarians, but library staff usually fall into the work." Well, I'm glad I fell in. **Q**

Thanks to Barbara O'Neill and Mark Cowan for assistance with this article and to all the paraprofessionals who took the time to respond to my survey.

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LSSRT — Wind On The Buffalo Grass?

by Donetta Sheffold
Oregon State University
and Deborah Cook
Southern Oregon State College

“A people without history, is like wind on the buffalo grass.” When I was in the sixth grade, I had a teacher who had that phrase written above the bulletin board. Certainly, I cannot remember who he was quoting, and at the time I thought it was the silliest quotation I had ever seen. Come to think of it, I do not even remember if I actually understood what a quote was back then.

As time has passed, the meaning of this quotation has become much clearer to me. We need to have a history, need to know what happened before or we cannot begin to improve upon the past, learn from it, and be assured of creating a better future. It is also clear to me from this quote that we need to create a record of our previous experiences, like bookmarks, or the people and events of the past will disappear without a trace, “like wind on the buffalo grass,” making it impossible for others to learn from our experiences. I certainly never thought of this concept in the sixth grade and little did I know that I would work in a library, at an institution of higher learning, where one of our major goals is assisting research and providing the tools for others to learn from access to those all important bookmarks.

Those of us involved in the OLA’s Library Support Staff Roundtable (LSSRT) have learned a great deal through our historic events and we would like to share those experiences with you.

LSSRT became an official roundtable in January 1992. The formation of this roundtable started after Donetta Sheffold attended the New Jersey Association of Library Assistants during the summer of 1991. This would not have been possible without the vision and support of Melvin R. George, library director of Oregon State University Libraries. As the seed grew into a vision of what might be possible in Oregon, so did the enthusiasm of others within the state. After preparing the petition, drafting bylaws and a presentation to the OLA Executive Board for their approval of the roundtable, LSSRT realized their first historical event — the formation of LSSRT as an official roundtable within OLA.

LSSRT’s first business meeting was held at the joint OLA/WLA conference in April 1992, just three months after becoming an official roundtable.

Approximately 50 individuals from Oregon and Washington attended the meeting. The Washington Association of Library Employees (WALE, Washington’s support staff organization) had already been solidly in place for a few years. WALE’s chair, Ruth Poynter, was the speaker at this first meeting. She spoke about the organization’s history and the conferences they were sponsoring. This first meeting also brought LSSRT its first elected chair, Donetta Sheffold, and the first vice-chair, chair-elect, Jey Wann. WALE and LSSRT sponsored a session at this joint conference entitled, *Creativity Within the System—A Roundtable Discussion for Support Staff*. At this session, attendees exchanged ideas on processes, systems, and policies to increase awareness of the various roles support staff hold in the library community.

Sheffold and Wann had a big job ahead in trying to build a membership base for LSSRT. They worked together to create a vision and goals for this new organization, along with a plan to establish a membership base and publicize LSSRT. One of the ways they decided to reach the potential membership was through traveling to libraries around the state speaking to support staff about their vision for LSSRT in developing a communication network among support staff in all libraries and informing them of LSSRT’s sponsorship of workshops, OLA pre-conferences and eventually an LSSRT annual conference. Both Sheffold and Wann worked together to design, produce, and distribute the first LSSRT membership directory. Advertisement and getting the word out was key, so great effort was made to ensure an article in each issue of *Oregon Library News* which was distributed each month.

To increase visibility and provide programs of interest to support staff, LSSRT sponsored its first pre-conference workshop entitled, *More Than the Sum of Its Parts, Building the Library Team*, at the OLA annual conference in Portland. In 1994, when Wann took the reins as chair and Donna Ainslie as vice-chair, LSSRT sponsored a second OLA pre-conference entitled, *Doing the Right Thing: Ethics and Libraries*. The event was well attended and well received. So began an annual tradition of LSSRT pre-conferences.

Also at the 1994 OLA Conference we experienced for the first time the award of a scholarship to a support staff member to attend the OLA annual conference by OLA’s Honors, Awards and Scholarship (HAS) Committee. The first support staff person to receive the HAS scholarship was Anna Beauchamp, interlibrary loan coordinator at Southern Oregon State College.

In September of 1994, Ainslie began her year as chair and Deborah Cook was elected vice-chair. Under their leadership planning for the first LSSRT

See LSSRT page 18

Student employees can be the most frustrating and rewarding employees to supervise in academic libraries. There is a wealth of information written about student employees, but nothing specific to the Portland metropolitan area. To gather information about student employment, a survey was sent that asked questions about use of student workers in libraries: Where and when do they work? Who supervises them? What type of training do the students receive? What wages and benefits are paid?

Student Employment in Portland Area Academic Libraries: A Preliminary Report

by Linda Johnson
Student Supervisor,
Oregon Health Sciences
University Libraries

This is a preliminary report of the findings. A more completed analysis will be available Summer 1997.

Surveys were sent to libraries in the Oregon State System of Higher Education, the Portland Area Library System, and other academic libraries in the Portland Metropolitan area. Of 26 surveys sent out 54 percent or 14 surveys were returned.

Of the responding schools 64 percent were public and 36 percent private. The majority of

the institutions offer general academic studies. Three community colleges, three medical schools, one research and one religious school answered the questionnaire. School enrollments range from 383 at Western States Chiropractic College to 30,000 enrolled at PCC.

The number of students employed varied from two at OGI to 75 at SOSC. The average total hours of student work per week reported by the survey is 363 hours. PCC, counting all three campus libraries, uses the most with about 2,200 hours and OGI uses the smallest amount at 22 hours per week. Individual students work between four and 40 hours per week, depending on which department of the library they are assigned. There appears to be no correlation between the number of regular staff and the number of student workers. The number of students working is based more on the size of the collection, the hours the library is open, and what kind of jobs the students are hired to perform.

Student workers are an integral part of the library. Without them the library could not offer the open hours and the accessibility of the collection to its clientele. "On one hand student workers in the 1990's do much more than keep our buildings open and our service desk staffed. They actually allow us to offer innovative reference, instruction and outreach services to previously unreachable (or at least difficult-to-reach) clientele." (Gregory, 1995)

Student workers also free up time for the regular staff to do the more detailed and intense work and policy making. Students are inexpensive to hire and there usually is a large pool from which to draw applicants. Most of the libraries surveyed only hire students from their own school. OHSU hires students from other schools because the medical, dental, and nursing students do not usually have time to work between classes and clinics.

Requirements for work as a student assistant in libraries range from a person who can work the hours needed, to detailed listings of knowledge and skills requested for specific jobs. Technical services, computer support, office help, and reference work all demand skilled and knowledgeable workers. Some of the skills requested are communication skills, computer knowledge, good language skills, detail orientation, accuracy, good customer relations, and flexibility.

Recruitment is often done by word of mouth. Students already working at the library tell their friends and classmates about the job openings at the library. Libraries also post position openings around campus, at the financial affairs office, at the student employment office, in student newspapers, and in the library. SOSC sends letters to incoming freshmen announcing job openings.

Work-study grants are one of the main reasons students are inexpensive to use. These grants pay 75 percent of the salaries. The library picks up the other 25 percent. There are some drawbacks attached to using work study students. The amount of the grant limits the number of hours and the length of employment for the students. Salaries are usually set by the financial department of the school. Employee turnover can be high with this pool of employees. Many schools using 50 percent or more work study students report the length of employment at one year or less for work study students. Non-work study students' average length of employment was mentioned at two to three years.

Student employees are considered temporary, short-time employees. Working in the library is not their main focus. Their focus is getting an education; this is one reason they can sometimes be difficult to work with. According to the survey, the incidence of "the flu" at midterm and finals time always goes up. Additionally, they are unavailable during school breaks. Work schedules cannot be written in concrete because they can change from day to day and week to week. The average number of hours worked in a week is 10. This can affect the training and retention of library policies because the students do not work long enough to make the work routine.

Student workers are supervised by a variety of library employees. Paraprofessional employees do 66 percent of the supervising, librarians 17 percent, managers 11 percent, students and others 1 percent.

LIBRARY DEPARTMENTS USING STUDENT EMPLOYEES

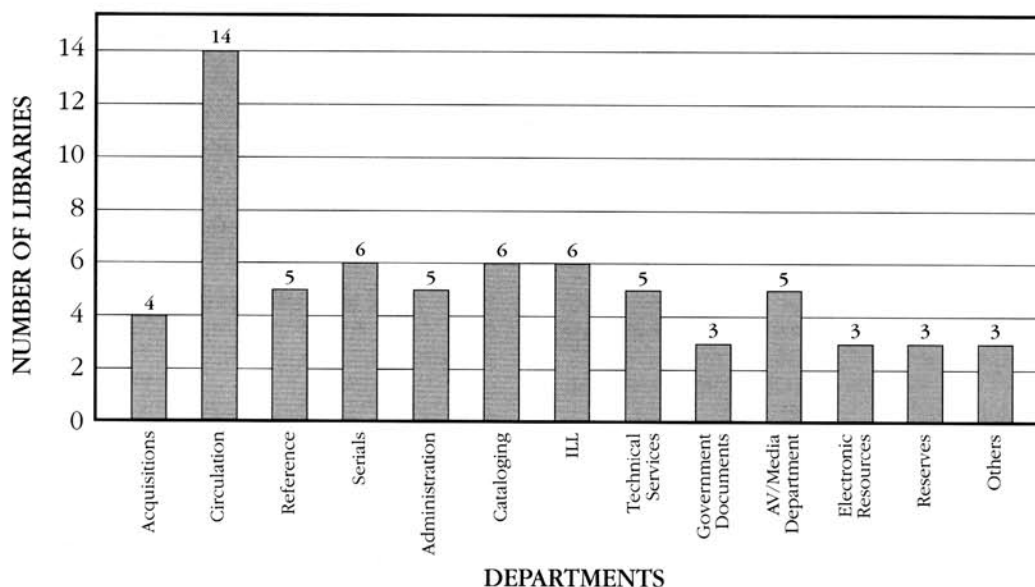


Figure 1

In the not-so-long-ago past the only jobs the students were assigned were shelving, shelf-reading, and staffing the circulation desk in the evenings and weekends. Today, because of budget cuts and the increase in computer technology, students are working in all departments of the library and doing all types of jobs. Besides the tasks already listed, some of the jobs students are doing are processing books, maintaining computers, supervising other students, assisting patrons with computer problems, answering reference questions, and processing document delivery requests and acquisition documents. This is not a complete list because students' job assignments change all the time.

Some libraries pay their students at the same salary range. Other libraries craft the compensation to correspond to skill levels and technical aspects of the job. For example, students working in computer labs are paid more than those shelving books. Salaries fluctuate from \$4.90 (Clark) to \$9.30 (WOSC). Raises are determined in several ways depending on the institution. Performance, longevity, skills and level of responsibility are the main reasons for increasing salaries. For some libraries the school administration or the government determine salary policies. Benefits are few. OIT student workers' fines are forgiven, pizza and treats are given every term at MHCC, and OHSU offers free bus passes. No library offers insurance or vacation benefits.

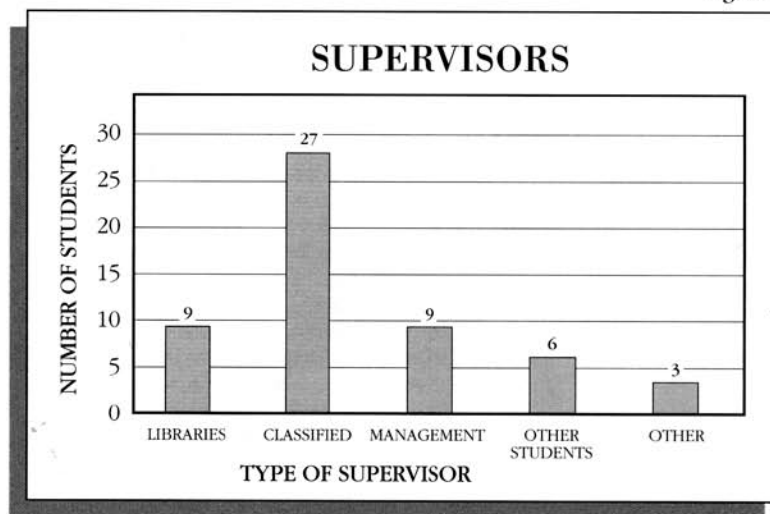
The training students receive depends on the department of the library for which they work. A lot of training is done on the job, under fire. This is partly because of the time element. There is no time to

train, everyone is too busy just trying to do his or her regular job. Another reason is because students are perceived to be short time employees, "low man on the totem pole" and not worth the effort of intense training. Sometimes training is delegated to staff members and other students who have not been instructed in training techniques or in communicating the goals of the library.

The result is a pool of employees who do not understand their role in the library and perceive their job

See Student Employment page 19

Figure 2



Since the 1960s, the Internet has evolved into the form we know today. First it was the domain of the university and the government. Now, it's everyone's tool—or toy. Those of us in libraries have been using the Internet for years in a number of different ways. We use it to search other libraries' online catalogs; we use it to communicate with our colleagues; we use it to schedule conference meetings and plan agendas; we use it to solicit information and opinions from our colleagues about our libraries' operations. This last use of the Internet is what I propose to examine.

LIBSUP-L:

More than Just Mail

by Mary T. Kalnin

University of Washington Libraries
Suzzallo Library

There exist on the Internet today many electronic mail discussion lists for libraries. AUTOCAT, Collib-I, IMUG-L, COOPCAT quickly come to mind. Each of these lists has a function and each provides a forum for discussion of library issues from a specific point of view. AUTOCAT is the forum for the cataloger—all questions

answered, sometimes within minutes; Collib-I is the forum for the general college library discussion—any and all questions and problems welcome; IMUG-L and MLA-L exist for the music catalogers among us; COOPCAT discusses the benefits and headaches of cooperative cataloging programs.

I propose to examine in depth another library-oriented discussion list: LIBSUP-L. LIBSUP-L is a discussion list aimed at but not limited to library paraprofessionals, also known as support staff. It runs at the University of Washington in Seattle and has more than 1950 subscribers worldwide. The list was founded in 1992 following a request in the journal *Library Mosaics* and is likely the first international electronic mail link for library paraprofessional staff. For this discussion, paraprofessional library staff members are those who work in positions that do not require the MLS or equivalent degree. I would like to examine three points about LIBSUP-L.

WHAT IS IT?

Besides the obvious answer, "an electronic mail discussion list," LIBSUP-L is a forum for discussion of library topics and work-related topics from the paraprofessional's point of view. As the role of library employees has changed from the 1970s, so have the needs of library staff members. This is particularly true of paraprofessionals, or support staff, who hold about 60 percent of the positions in today's libraries. In the past, these positions were usually typist and filer positions, circulation desk attendants, and pages. That is true today, but in many libraries, paraprofessionals also hold positions once reserved for holders of the MLS.

Paraprofessionals are original catalogers, section heads, division heads, liaisons, reference staff members, and occasionally library branch managers. This change came about gradually and almost by accident. It caused a need for communication among staff. This need was filled by COLT: the SSIRT of ALA; *Library Mosaics*; and other local, regional, and state organizations. LIBSUP-L was followed by ASSOCIATES, an electronic journal; LIBTEC, a discussion list in Australia; and NET-NEXUS, an Australian paraprofessional electronic journal for library technicians. There are other local, regional, and national electronic journals evolving constantly.

WHAT DOES LIBSUP-L DO?

Since 1992, LIBSUP-L has been a discussion forum for paraprofessionals. Within one day of its launch more than 100 staff had subscribed. By day two, another 100 or 200 had subscribed. At one time, there were more than 2,000 subscribers. The number has now become somewhat stable at 1,950, plus or minus. The list gains and loses members every day. Some of the first discussions were less discussion and more venting frustrations, but by the end of the first week, the discussions had moved toward finding solutions.

Many of the first discussions concerned working conditions. The library world was just beginning to see the rise of repetitive motion disorders; and ergonomics was a topic of some of the first discussions. As libraries were seeking solutions to these problems, LIBSUP-L provided a forum through which to share answers already found. The discussions also allowed those members who hadn't heard of carpal tunnel syndrome to locate information for use in their institutions. Ergonomics is still a discussion topic on the list because it is still of concern to newer members whose libraries are just beginning to automate and connect to the Internet. Other topics of discussion those first weeks and months were salaries, fringe benefits, cost of living, and other workplace concerns. They are still discussed today, although with less frequency.

As the list grew and changed, the discussion changed. Much of the discussion has been the result of subscribers asking for information:

"The members' library is moving from one online catalog system to another – what does anyone know about it?"

"Another member has been assigned to a committee to recommend purchase of a system – please write to let me know what your system is and what you think about it."

"I have a patron who wants a children's book but has only part of the title – can anyone identify it?"

See LIBSUP-L page 20

Intellectual Freedom on the Front Lines

by Maresa L. Kirk

Mark O. Hatfield Library,
Willamette University

Why on earth do you have that horrible display up?" For those of us on the front lines of library work, questions like these are all too familiar. Unfortunately, few of us are prepared to offer a response. With Oregon holding the honor of being the state with the largest number of challenges to materials, those of us on the front line need to prepare ourselves to answer questions such as this.

The Office for Intellectual Freedom, American Library Association (ALA) and Candy Morgan, ALA-IF Chair, offer the following bits of advice for dealing with patron concerns and challenges within your library.

- First and foremost, be prepared! Learn and understand U.S. and Oregon constitutional principles. Learn your library's policies and your responsibilities when faced with a challenge. Morgan suggests that you "seek out what is offensive to you and defend its place in the library." This is a great way to learn to defend challenged material.
- Maintain a clearly defined method for handling complaints. Create a policy that explains, step by step, what to do in the event of a challenge. Your policies should address all areas within your library, including library materials, computers, displays, bulletin boards and meeting areas. ALA suggests, "The complaint must be filed in writing and the complainant must be properly identified before action is taken." If your policy dictates that the patron fill out any paperwork, ensure that he or she receives a timely response.
- Maintain familiarity with intellectual freedom principles. Read and understand the ALA Code of Ethics and the ALA Library Bill of Rights. Read the *Intellectual Freedom Manual*.
- Maintain a materials selection policy and a collection development policy. Both should address all library mediums (including computer software and the internet) and be approved by the appropriate governing authority.
- Maintain inservice training of staff, administration, and boards. Make certain all levels of your staff, including students and volunteers, know the principles of intellectual freedom as well as the

process for dealing with challenges. If training is not offered by your library, seek out that training yourself. Find a current copy of ALA's *Intellectual Freedom Manual* and see what it has to say. Inside, you will find the ALA Code of Ethics, the ALA Library Bill of Rights and a plethora of information to help you deal with concerns and challenges. Attend classes and conferences on the subject. If none are available in your community, see if you can bring a speaker in or if you can create a staff training session yourself.

- Maintain lines of communication with community and institutional leaders, such as your board of trustees, college president, and civic leaders. Presentations by library staff or board members to these groups can be a wonderful opportunity to illustrate your library mission and selection process. The staff can also emphasize intellectual freedom principles and their importance to your library.
- Contact the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom and your state intellectual freedom committee or resource center to inform them of the complaint and to enlist their support. They may be able to offer some advice or refer you to local organizations that may assist you further.

Because of the new emphasis on internet resources in many libraries, the web has become another area of concern for library staffers on the front line. Two ideas for dealing with the web and potential concerns: Add privacy screens to your monitors and move terminals out of high traffic areas. (Although, some people believe that putting them in a high traffic area deters patrons from connecting to "graphic" sites).

Beyond the fundamental elements for dealing with a challenge is the ability to defuse the situation when the person is actually speaking to you face to face. How you behave when interacting with a patron may determine whether the situation escalates.

When a patron comes to you with a complaint, remain calm. Do not personalize the challenge, and keep your temper in check. Pay attention to your body language and facial expressions – try to remain neutral in appearance. Listen carefully to his or her concerns regarding the item and take them seriously, no matter how unusual or trivial they may seem to you.

It's important not to become drawn into a philosophical debate with the patron. It is unlikely that you would be able to change his or her opinion and it is not your place to try. Instead, stick with the basics of intellectual freedom and explain your library's policy, procedure and process for dealing with a challenge. Offer the patron your *Request for Reconsideration of Library Resources* form (or a similar form) and any accompanying literature you might have.

See *Freedom* page 19

The changes libraries face today are driven by a variety of factors that affect us deeply, even though most of them are external to the library itself. Foremost among these are the rapid infusion of information and communications technologies, the trend towards static or declining budgets, and the transformation that is occurring within higher education itself.

Universities are becoming increasingly distributed and less place-bound and their student bodies and faculties more diverse. We see a move away from the traditional talking-head teaching model towards a student-centered learning model.

Within our schools, this change drives—and in turn is driven by—the infusion of the new technologies and the networking possibilities that promise to enhance teaching, learning, and research. As the unit of the university responsible for providing the information upon which the success of our teaching and

scholarship rests, we in the library face unique challenges. Ralph A. Wolff, the executive director of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, summed it up this way:

“Events within and outside higher education are changing our fundamental conceptions of the library, as well as the very nature of the content and methodologies of learning sponsored by the institution. These changes could catapult the library into a central role within the teaching/learning enterprise if appropriate adaptations are made; if not, they could further remove the library from the institutional center.”

As a profession, we have accepted the need for change more or less gracefully, although we differ considerably on how rapid and how profound that change should be. Some of us have adopted an evolutionary approach that presumes the basic soundness of our current policies, practices, and structures. Others actively encourage a radical rethinking of our basic assumptions and processes, believing that if we are to remain serious players in an increasingly volatile education and information environment, we must create new services, new collections, new organizational structures, new information access tools, and new relationships with our campus allies and competitors alike.

Whether we like it or not, the change that is occurring within our libraries today is having a profound effect upon the deployment and use of all staff. The work of librarians, paraprofessionals, technical staff

members, and supporting personnel differs, in many cases significantly, from what it was even a few years ago. Our efforts to manage this change effectively are hampered by librarians' lack of clarity on how we ought to staff our libraries and on who ought to be doing what within them. More than a century after our professional associations were formed, adequate guidelines for staff deployment and use have yet to be formulated. To this day, we have not resolved these issues, and this lack of resolution compounds the staffing dilemmas we all face. As a consequence, we have not been able to demonstrate convincingly what it is that makes us a profession, this despite the fact that earlier generations spent decades constructing separate lists of tasks that were declared suitable for either librarians or clerks.

Because of our traditional inability to articulate clearly who we are, and what we ought to be doing, librarians have created considerable insensitivity, even indifference, to the status and working conditions of support staff. Here is an illustration of our historic insensitivity as a profession: For many years, liberal arts colleges routinely offered support positions to the spouses of new faculty members or administrators as a perquisite of the job. Regardless of the competencies of the individuals involved, non-competitive hiring practices trivialized the importance of these positions.

We have soul-searched a considerable amount about appropriate terminal degrees, our status and image, curricular emphases in graduate library school programs, and what to call ourselves now that the new information technologies have so profoundly changed our lives and our libraries. Unfortunately, we have resolved none of these issues, and this lack of resolution compounds the staffing dilemmas that have for too long characterized the library workplace. These problems of definition go a long way towards explaining why the expression “professional librarian” is still not perceived to be a redundancy and continues to appear in our literature.

Librarians also have a long history of hiring into support staff positions candidates with qualifications higher than our job advertisements require. We often employ individuals with graduate, or even terminal library school degrees, and we do not hesitate to assign these talented individuals tasks in accord with their educational level, whether or not these tasks appear in the position descriptions. As a result, support staff in many libraries are inadequately compensated for their contributions.

During the past 20 or more years, library staffing patterns have been further complicated by the need to adapt to new technologies. Faced with the prospect of extinction, most librarians have chosen to redefine their roles, their mission, and their profession. In so doing, they have all but given up performing the traditional process work of the library, work that characterized the role of librarians a generation ago.

Support Staff in a Transitional Age:

Implications for Continuing Education

by Larry R. Oberg
University Librarian
Willamette University

As librarians redefined themselves, they shifted their attention toward automating their libraries, creating new networked services, designing integrated information interfaces, and teaching students and faculty how to be wise consumers in an environment suddenly rich with information resources. These new roles require librarians to spend more time outside the library, working with faculty and researchers in schools, departments, and laboratories; teach more classes; integrate print and networked resources; and collaborate more closely with colleagues at other institutions on cooperative resource sharing projects.

As a result, many tasks once performed by librarians have migrated to support staff, a trend that is likely to continue. My own research demonstrates that in academic libraries across the country, support staff now administer major functional areas of our libraries, work increasingly at the reference desk, and catalog most of the books we add to our collections (Oberg et al, 1992).

The migration to support staff of tasks once performed more-or-less exclusively by librarians is only one of many profound changes that are now occurring. Library support staff are also assuming complex tasks and filling key positions newly created by automation and the consequent reconfiguration of library services. Today, support staff do far more than passively learn and apply new software programs. Rather, they are beginning to work side by side with librarians to rethink and reconfigure many of our basic systems and processes. Over a decade ago, Allen Veaner pointed out that the introduction of new technologies had upgraded the level of work we all perform and that many librarians have virtually ceased to be production workers ... When, we might ask ourselves, was the last time any of us filed into a card catalog, typed an order card, or checked out a book with a pencil?

In my own library, for example, the systems librarian position, traditionally devoted to PC support and the care and feeding of our Innovative Interfaces system, has migrated to a member of the support staff. The librarian who formerly held that position is now responsible for systems administration and spends much of his time designing and developing workstations, intuitive interfaces, Web homepages, and representing the library in campus-wide forums.

The assignment to support staff of tasks that were formerly performed by librarians and the creation of complex new positions invested with a high order of decision-making authority has resulted in considerable specialization. Support staff, especially the higher level paraprofessionals, are now authorized to perform tasks and make decisions that cannot be reviewed easily and may not be understood well by librarians.

Carla Stoffle believes that librarians must place a higher value on the contribution of support staff, examining their ideas and suggestions on an equal basis with those of librarians.

She feels that libraries should move away from the staffs that perform narrow tasks within the tightly defined job descriptions, toward staffs empowered to make decisions about the work they do and how they do it in a manner that in her words, results in delighted customers (Stoffle, 1996).

Today, librarians are more sanguine about the prospect of redefining themselves and their profession than they were five years ago. It is becoming clear that their libraries will remain key players in the environment of the twenty-first century. But, in order to guarantee this optimistic future, they must not fail to provide support staff with the training, compensation, and status needed to ensure that the library continues to play a central role within the teaching and learning enterprise. **Q**

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LSSRT

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conference was carried forward by a dedicated group of nine LSSRT members. The first annual LSSRT conference was held in July 1995 with a total attendance of 275. Since LSSRT's official membership base at that time was 65, we knew there was an untapped resource of library support staffers. The conference evaluations were glowing with comments ranging from, "I enjoyed this conference so much that I plan to join OLA. I now feel I have a part in the organization," to "It was great to meet so many people from the public and academic libraries and learn of their situations."


From this experience we learned that if you give people what they need, want, and can afford, they will attend. Even with holding registration fees down to \$40 we demonstrated we could create a cash reserve for future LSSRT conferences and activities.

Under Ainslie's tenure, LSSRT began the tradition of sponsoring *Soaring to Excellence* teleconferences at different sites around the state. LSSRT charged a small fee to those attending and thus placed a little more money into its account toward future continuing education opportunities for support staff.

Cook became LSSRT chair in 1995. In 1996, Katherine Stevens became chair of LSSRT, assisted by Maresa Kirk, chair-elect. They are working hard to prepare for the third annual LSSRT conference on July 18, 1997.


LSSRT has benefited from OLA's support and from the support of the library directors who have encouraged each of the LSSRT officers, both past and present. We would like to acknowledge these directors who assisted us with our vision: Melvin George (retired), OSU; Jim Schepcke, the State Library of Oregon; Carole Dickerson, Lake Oswego Public Library; Sue Burkholder, SOSC; Barbara Swanson, PCC; and Larry Oberg, Willamette University. There are a couple of other people we want to acknowledge: Maureen Sloan, OLA president in 1992, who gave guidance and assisted Sheffold through the establishment of LSSRT with the finer points of OLA and their requirements, and Deborah Jacobs, OLA president in 1993, who was extremely supportive of our cause from the beginning.

As for the future of LSSRT, we all have high hopes that we can build on the knowledge and expertise we have gained from not only knowing about our

LSSRT history but living it! If anyone is interested in not only sharing our history but helping shape it, please contact Katherine Stevens, Maresa Kirk, Deborah Cook, Donna Ainslie, Jey Wann, Donetta Sheffold, or any one of many other people involved in planning LSSRT's future. Instead of being swept back and forth as the buffalo grass, without a trace of change or progress being seen after it leaves—let's be like others before us who have let the winds of time teach them to become wiser and stronger as we create our future and our history! 

Crabs

(continued from page 3)

My favorite reference questions are those that involve identifying strange creatures that fishermen bring up in their nets. At these times, I am reminded of how strange and wonderful life is and of what a mysterious and beautiful world we live in. I have seen bizarre creatures from the ocean depths and stunning coral that wasn't supposed to live off the Oregon coast. And there are occasional benefits outside the library. I have stroked the back of an infant harbor porpoise separated from its mother shortly after birth, cast up on the beach, and brought to the center. As I touched him, he snorted and blew; I could feel the wildness of him, and I realized that it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, a great gift. It has all been a great gift. 

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Student Employment

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as busy work and unimportant. "An average student aide needs at least two months of work training before he/she starts performing quite efficiently." (Frank, 1984). Has the increase of computer technology in libraries since 1984 extended or shortened the learning curve for student workers? This is a question that could be investigated. Computers and videos could be used as training tools for students. They could be developed as tutorial programs that are always available for training and review.

Students receive training in public awareness, the libraries' call number systems, computer systems used by the library, other computer software, phone etiquette, reference and circulation duties, shelving, shelf reading and other task-appropriate instructions. The amount and variety of training depends on the library that employs the students. Only three libraries reported having student manuals available for training and communicating with the students. Another three libraries hold orientation sessions for new student employees that last from one to four hours.

Student workers are an important part of operating libraries. How we train, recruit, compensate, and allocate students is an essential part in improving the library's service to our clientele.

For more information about student employees in academic libraries, I suggest reading Susan Marks

and David Gregory's annotated bibliography "Student Employment in Academic Libraries: Recommended Readings and Resources," published in the *Journal of Library Administration*.

The surveys received have been very interesting and informative. If you would like to add your library to the research findings please contact me at OHSU library: (503) 494-3220 or johnsnli@ohsu.edu. ☐

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Freedom

(continued from page 15)

A friend and colleague, Katherine Stevens of Portland Community College, had an experience that led me to select the opening line of this article. In her library they had a display, sponsored by their campus gay and lesbian club, featuring materials available on gays and lesbians, such as literature, sociology and psychology texts. A couple approached Stevens and asked why this display was in the library.

Stevens listened carefully to their concerns and informed them of PCC library's selection and display policies. She offered them the library's suggestion form and referred them on to a reference librarian. Because Stevens recognized their right to have concerns and took the time to inform them of her

library's mission, which included protecting intellectual freedom, the situation was quickly defused. She was prepared, informed, and confident in her library's policies, mission, and philosophy. Because of this, the patrons took no further action.

This scenario is just one example that illustrates why it is important for your library to have policies in place that address intellectual freedom, as well as why you and your staff need to be well informed on the subject. If you do not know your library's policies and procedures, learn them. If they do not exist, start the wheels turning to get them established. It's a step that will make your work-life easier down the road, and ensure a better library for your patrons. ☐

LIBSUP-L

(continued from page 14)

Responses and answers flood the list within hours, and if enough subscribers are reading their mail, sometimes minutes. LIBSUP-L has also become a popular venue for surveys.

Several weeks ago, one fairly new subscriber asked for information concerning the use of PCs for cataloging instead of the terminals her institution used. It seems that her library was considering the change and asked her to gather information. Between the answers from LIBUP-S and another list, she was able to have the information within a day or two. It is common to read the results of surveys taken on the list or to hear from someone who asked for specific information and is pleased to report that the supervisor was impressed with the depth of knowledge "LIBSUPPERS" have. It is also common to see a request for someone from a specific library or area to respond to the member off list. That person usually needs specific information from only that library or area. One such request was to someone from either McGill or Laval Universities in Montreal, because the subscriber needed information on a specific bill submitted to the Quebec Legislature. Contact made and information received.

It would be foolish to claim that there are no problems with the list. It is unmoderated. There is, of

course, a filter that keeps most of the spam mail off the list, and particularly troublesome addresses can be ignored. However, should a member decide to use the list to chat, the posting will reach it and generate conversation, recrimination, and if it continues long enough, a message from the list owner about legitimate topics of discussion. Does this happen often? Not often, but once started it is self-generating. Unfortunately, we have had members resign because of it. Once, new subscribers hit a large chat session and were disgusted. Someone's supervisor picked a particular time to visit the list and hit that same chat problem. However, chat and its siblings are no worse on LIBSUP-L than on other lists to which the author belongs.

Is It Worth It?

Here I must plead some bias. I am the owner of the LIBSUP-L list and do believe that it is. That said, however, LIBSUP-L provides a service not only to paraprofessionals but to everyone in libraries. As the examples above show, the list provides information, a forum for discussion, and a mechanism for locating specific information. As long as it provided these services, attracts new members, fills a need for communication and organization among paraprofessionals, LIBSUP-L will be worth the financial resources, personnel and time it takes to run it. ☐

The MLS

(continued from page 5)

cheated. Work life can be truly miserable if you have to spend it with the wrong people.

I do view staff differently since getting the MLS, not because of the degree, but because of the lengths I went to in getting it. I expect staff members to want to take advantage of the training made available to improve themselves and improve their abilities to provide better services. And I expect them to set goals to expand services we don't provide at present. I want them to challenge me and to support me in promoting the concept of public library throughout the community. While it was a profitable experience, I know that I didn't learn enough at

graduate school to see me through the next decade—nothing on the Internet back then, or dealing with the homeless sleeping in the library, or emergency policies or ADA regulations.

THE MLS AND YOU!

If you are interested in earning an MLS, use your library reference skills to look into it. The ALA can provide a list of options. Their number is 1-800-545-2433. Whether you believe in the MLS or not, reality is that the career-track librarian must have it. "ALA-MLS required" is usually the cutoff in the job interview line. The MLS does have its place – right after your name. ☐



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