MINITEX

Reference NOTES

A Program of the Minnesota Higher Education Services Office (HESO) at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities

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Intellectual Freedom Today

By Beth Staats

On May 12, I attended *Intellectual Freedom in a Time of Fear*, featuring Emily Sheketoff, at the Southdale Hennepin-Area Library. Not sure what to expect, I found the day filled with passion, determination, and a true sense of a "library community." Emily Sheketoff is the Executive Director of the American Library Association's (ALA) Washington office. She was joined by panelists with various perspectives: Richard Fischer, Minnesota Council of Teachers of English; David Unowsky, owner of Ruminator Books; Marcia Wattson, Hennepin County Library and MLA Intellectual Freedom Chair; and Teresa Nelson, an attorney with the ACLU of Minnesota. It was great to see such a mixed group of people in the audience, which included library trustees, directors, media specialists, public, academic, and special librarians, as well as a few library school students.

Emily began the day with a passionate talk about what we, as librarians, need to do to work toward and ensure intellectual freedom. We need to grow library advocacy in the field and educate our patrons and communities about the issues facing libraries, namely censorship, filtering, and the USA Patriot Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act). We need to assume that legislators and the public are not familiar with these intellectual freedom issues and that they don't understand their impact. She urged us to make this library advocacy our second job by committing to spend the necessary time reaching out to library trustees, people in the community, and politicians and their staff.

Emily talked briefly about some of the current challenges in Washington. The biggest challenge facing libraries stems from anti-terrorism activity, specifically the U.S.A. Patriot Act. The FBI is allowed to spy in libraries and infringe on civil liberties. "The Patriot Act is inaptly named because it is patently un-American. Section 215 of the law allows federal authorities to force bookstores and libraries to turn over records of their customers' reading habits without judicial review. And it forbids librarians and book sellers from even telling patrons that the government might be monitoring them" (*Wausau Herald*, 5/20/2003). In general, the public is naïve about this so we need to let them know what the Patriot Act really means. It was said a few times throughout the day that the current state of intellectual freedom echoes the McCarthy era. During the current Bush administration, access to information has become more difficult because more and more information is becoming inaccessible.

The second half of the morning consisted of panel members discussing what aspects of intellectual freedom are most important to them. Richard Fischer said that currently in the schools there is a chilling effect on teachers because of the lack of academic freedom. There is a feeling that as teachers, they have to be muzzled in order to support the current government administration. Richard made four points relating to teachers' roles in their students' intellectual freedom:

- Give students a historical and cultural context for intellectual freedom.
- Ensure that students understand their intellectual freedoms and are able to think critically.
- Help students appreciate the freedoms that they have.
- Discover how to protect their intellectual freedoms and learn to be on guard to protect them.

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David Unowsky of Ruminator Books stated that intellectual freedom cuts across ideological and political lines. As a bookseller, the biggest issue facing him is control of the media by large corporations and multinationals and their sole financial interest. He feels that raising public awareness and supporting independent bookstores, publishers, and radio stations may be a way to fight back.

Teresa Nelson, staff council of the Minnesota ACLU, feels that the greatest threat right now to intellectual freedom is anti-terrorism government actions, including the Patriot Act. The Minnesota ACLU's mission is to protect the constitutional rights of all Minnesotans, challenging the climate of fear so citizens can be both safe and free. According to Teresa, the following needs to be done:

- We need to stop being afraid and exercise our right to free speech.
- We need to pass community resolutions.
- We need to speak to legislators and push them to be accountable.

Marcia Wattson, Hennepin County Library and MLA IFC chair, feels that filtering is currently the most important issue facing intellectual freedom, as well as the lack of people speaking out and taking a stand. She stressed that we need a fair and balanced approach to intellectual freedom in the library. Marsha sees the need to teach kids to think critically and to survive in what could be a dangerous environment.

The morning ended with passionate words by a librarian from Minneapolis Public Library. She looked at intellectual freedom from a wide angle and built on Marcia's comments about filtering in libraries. She stated that filtering in schools and libraries is a tiny fish when looking at the "big sea" of filtering and censorship that adults are currently dealing with. The media only gives us one perspective and, relating to what Richard had said, it is the corporate and government perspective. We, as adults, are experiencing so much censorship that we need to seek out alternative sources to be sure we are fully informed. It was refreshing to be in the company of so many librarians and library staff devoted to intellectual freedom issues. I left that day with a sense of hope for the freedom of information, a feeling I had lacked since October 21, 2001, when the USA Patriot Act was passed by Congress.

MEIR Task Force and ELM

MINITEX is pleased to announce the recommendations of the MINITEX Electronic Information Resources (MEIR) Task Force for the RFP on statewide licensing of electronic resources. In concert with University of Minnesota Purchasing, MINITEX will begin negotiating with (1) EBSCO Publishing for a suite of general and scholarly databases aimed primarily at academic, public, and government library users, (2) Gale Group for K-12 electronic resources, and (3) OCLC for WorldCat. At the conclusion of the negotiations, we will announce the names of the specific databases and electronic resources that will be licensed. (The databases/resources under consideration are those that were available at the RFP Trials website during February - March.) Access will begin July 1, 2004.

MINITEX has been in conversation with our North Dakota and South Dakota funding partners and the state libraries regarding the recommendations and associated costs. This week each partner will decide which of the recommendations it will choose to follow.

We understand the challenges many of you will face as we move forward with negotiations to license these recommended products. The MINITEX CPERS staff, Tim Peters and Karen Docherty, and the vendors' sales teams will work closely with you as you transition between vendor products. Similarly, the MINITEX Reference Services staff, Beth Staats and Heidi Armstrong Temple, and vendors' staff will work to provide training for you and your colleagues on the resources we license.

On behalf of MINITEX and the libraries and school media centers in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota, thank you to the MEIR Task Force members and their institutions for participating in the RFP process. Their dedication and commitment to the process and their expertise in writing and evaluating the RFP requirements were awesome!

Web Site Hit: Intellectual Freedom and ALA

To embark on a commitment of reaching out to legislators and people in your community, the ALA website (http://www.ala.org) is the place to begin. It offers lots of useful information for librarians, including sections on freedom of information and legislation.

ALA's "Issues & Advocacy" link separates issues into federal and state. Some current federal library-related issues listed are the U.S. Patriot Act, Civil Liberties, Intellectual Freedom, and Privacy, which include CIPA (The Children's Internet Protection Act) and COPPA (Children's Online Privacy Protection Act), Copyright and more. State issues listed include information that forty-one states have reported cuts in library funding. After selecting a state from the U.S. map, you get a summary of the funding cuts with the option to search for a specific library or library type. The following summary was retrieved when Minnesota was selected:

> "Reduction in library funding has resulted in cuts to operating budgets, limited hours, reduced materials budgets, hiring freezes or elimination of personnel, and reduced library programming. In Minneapolis, the library board adopted a 2004 budget, which included dramatic budget cuts and reduced library hours by 33 percent. The decrease in state funding has resulted in major cuts in the library system. The system will spend $18.3 million in 2004 compared to $22.9 million in 2003."

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The ALA site also helps you bone up on the fundamentals of Intellectual Freedom (http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/intellectual.htm; also available as link from "Issues and Advocacy" page). The Office of Intellectual Freedom (OIF) offers eleven sections covering many facets of IF, including the basics (fundamental principles of American and international libraries); ALA statements and policies (e.g., Library Bill of Rights, Code of Ethics, Free Access to Libraries for Minors); IF issues (e.g., censorship, privacy and confidentiality, copyright, Internet filters, USA Patriot Act); toolkits for different issues; and "Intellectual Freedom for Young People," with information and resources aimed at students.

The first step toward library advocacy is to look at the "legislative scorecard" available at the ALA site (click on "Take Action"). After entering your zip code, you can retrieve photos of and contact information for your elected officials. The site also gives information on whether a representative voted for or against particular legislation and his or her co-sponsorship status on ALA key legislation. From this site, you can contact the necessary people at their Minnesota and/or Washington D.C. offices (by clicking a link you can fax or email them directly from the ALA site). When contacting politicians or their staffers, you must be brief, appreciative, specific, informative, and courteous. Demand a commitment from the people who are important and then check on them, making them accountable for their actions or lack thereof.

"If you teach it, will they learn?"

This was the theme of the Fourth Reference Services Symposium on May 24, 2004, sponsored by MINITEX and the University of Minnesota Libraries. Although a definitive answer to that philosophical question may not have been reached, it was a productive day for those interested or involved in instructional activities in their libraries. Over 140 people registered for the event; the strongest attendance was from academic libraries in Minnesota, but there were people registered from several states, public libraries, government or special libraries, and school media centers.

Cerise Oberman of Plattsburgh State University of New York began the presentations with "Is there anything new in information literacy?" She reviewed the shift from "bibliographic instruction" to "information literacy" and cited some key developments along the path. Among the most influential are the ALA Presidential Committee on Information Literacy's final report in 1989 (linked from http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=infolitb) and ACRL's "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education" (http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracycompetency.htm). The ACRL standards have and are influencing the values and activities of other organizations involved with teaching and learning, not just the library profession. Information literacy has evolved to the point where it is no longer just a discreet goal that the library alone promotes, but it is integrated into the curriculum and pursued by both librarians and others involved in education.

Steve Hiller of the University of Washington shared the story of UW's library assessment program in "Learning from assessment: making our libraries better." He talked in general terms about assessment trends in higher education and in libraries as well as described the assessment methods used by the UW Libraries and how they have used the data gathered. Embarking on an assessment program involves some careful thought and planning about the what (measuring what is valued, not just valuing what can be measured), the why (so that the library can better serve its community), and the how (not just counting but understanding) of assessment. Steve mentioned the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) New Measures Initiative (http://www.arl.org/stats/newmeas/newmeas.html), which offers libraries practical methods for demonstrating outcomes/impacts and maximizing resources. Information on the UW Libraries assessment program – which employs user surveys, focus groups, observation, interviews, usability studies, and usage statistics — is available at http://www.lib.washington.edu/assessment/.

Symposium attendees had choices of numerous presentations and poster sessions during the day, which covered topics such as liaison programs, active teaching methods, learning assessment, effective discussions, presentation skills, and information literacy programs and tools in various institutions. We hope to feature some of these programs and tools in future issues of *Reference Notes.*

What is information literacy?

According to the ACRL standards, the basic definition of information literacy is "a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information." While college and university librarians have been the most involved in information literacy, the American Association of School Librarians has its own information literacy program with nine standards published in *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (see http://www.ala.org/aaslTemplate.cfm?Section=aaslinfolit for more information). Many states have adopted their own information literacy standards for students; the Minnesota Educational Media Organization (MEMO) is in the process of developing standards (http://www.memoweb.org/htmlfiles/links.html#literacy). While information literacy does not have the same organized focus in public libraries, many libraries are pursuing the same goals through programs and services that help their communities. For public librarians, the following report may be helpful: *A Library Advocate's Guide to Building Information Literate Communities*

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(http://www.ala.org/ala/advocacybucket/informationliteracy.pdf).

ACRL's five information literacy standards follow. These are just the framework of the standards document, however, as each standard has detailed performance indicators and outcomes. No matter the library type, the people served, or the questions posed, each of us can find ways to integrate the goal of increasing information literacy into our interactions with and services we provide to our patrons.

- The information literate student determines the nature and extent of the information needed.
- The information literate student accesses needed information effectively and efficiently.
- The information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system.
- The information literate student, individually or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.
- The information literate student understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally.

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The Institute of Museum and Library Services, a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership, and a lifetime of learning, and Library Development & Services, the Minnesota state library agency, supports MINITEX Reference Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA).

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