

Reference Librarian: Technologist or Scholar?  
Columbia University, March 12, 2004  
Session 2: Reference Librarian as Technologist

**Ann McCann Oakley**, Assistant Dean and Director of the Office of Computing & Instructional Technology at Columbia's School of Social Work

- In her talk, Ann described the successful collaboration between the School of Social Work, the information technology (IT) and academic computing groups at Columbia, and - very important - the Library.
- Ann set the stage by giving us an overview of the unique features of the School of Social Work community - the diversity of the student body, the extensive amount of time spent off-campus "in the field", the "case-based" format of the program, the lack of physical proximity of the School to the Library, the limited information resources access of alumni, etc.
- These potential hurdles to library service have been overcome largely due to the strong partnership between the School of Social Work and the Columbia Libraries.
- Ann talked about several ways that the librarians have responded to the School's distinct needs (eg. having office hours in the School of Social Work every week, creating electronic library reserves, working on online books projects, participating in an annual meeting with the School along with other IT and Academic Computing representatives, helping identify resources for teaching and research, providing training to faculty and students, etc.)
- Many examples of personalized library service were given, highlighting how - with the help of librarian specialists - the School had succeeded in putting together some wonderful projects/classes/assignment (one of which was even awarded a national award for innovation).
- Ann pointed out that surveys conducted of their faculty/students by consultants showed that having a physical library in their new building was very important to the School of Social Work's community.
- She concluded in saying how faculty should be encouraged to include librarians in research and development, to plan/attend meetings with librarians present, to write grants that include library projects, etc.

**Kate Wittenberg**, Director of the Electronic Publishing Initiative at Columbia (EPIC)

- Kate talked about library/press/university collaborations from the point of view of EPIC (<http://www.epic.columbia.edu/>), an organization that is trying to develop new models in the areas of electronic publishing.
- Several EPIC projects were described (CIAO, Earthscape, Gutenberg-e, etc.) and Kate touched on how some disciplines (such as the field of History) are being influenced by these new electronic publishing models.
- The question was asked: "Can digital environments replicate fieldwork experience that students may not be able to get otherwise?"
- Kate spoke about the diverse staff of EPIC (content editor, production coordinator, web developer, library advisors, marketing/customer service personnel, etc.)
- She stressed that there is still a need to partner with publishers (difficult to get out there and influence the world without them).
- Some challenges/opportunities that Kate listed were that: few university presses have librarians on board as advisors, new kinds of jobs need to be created, a production environment needs to co-exist with one that fosters innovation, support

from the university has to leveraged, and that a clear vision for the organization needs to be maintained despite the changing environment.

- She concluded with saying how the roles of everyone involved (authors, publishers, academic community, libraries) are changing, and that the university is still at the center of this collaboration (because that is where the faculty/context, support for the infrastructure, libraries, etc. are).

**Mike Winkler**, Web Manager, University of Pennsylvania's Van Pelt Library

- Mike opened his discussion by listing some "technologies to watch" that he considered to be "community" technologies not really "library" technologies. These included: desktops, browsers & portals; mobile computing; web servers; open sources software; and utility computing.
- Desktops, Browsers & Portals - Mike talked about XUL, a language that allows you to write applications inside the browser (in the future, he sees the browser as part of the OS). He mentioned the importance of personalization, for example *mylibrary*, *myuniversity*, *mylife*...
- Mobile Computing - Mike talked about wireless networks and hotspots where people can get connected (such as coffee shops). *WiFinder* (<http://www.wifinder.com/>), a website where you can find public access Wi-Fi hotspots around the world, was mentioned. Mike stressed how its users are a "community" and that the idea that they belong to something is important to them.
- Web Services - Machines can communicate irrespective of language and platform, etc. Mike proposed that in the future, things like federated searching (which do not work well now) would be run by web services (broadcast a need instead of going through the front door).
- Open Sources Software\_- Mike explained how open source generally means community based, and can be extended by the community itself. Usually open source software does one thing and does it well, and changes in a more directed way.
- Utility Computing - "On-demand" computing or "metered" computing will be more flexible and personalized. Mike mentioned that computers used to be about crunching numbers but now more and more they are about communication.
- Mike concluded his talk by offering his view of our technology tie-in. He said that technologies are changing with or without us, regardless of the goals of our institutions. He suggested we ask ourselves "are there opportunities or services that we can take advantage of?"; and that we should also guard against using technology for technology's sake.

Notes by Konstantina Matsoukas, Head of Reference, Health Sciences Library