



Chapter Council Presents Sharing Roundtables

MLA Annual Meeting
Phoenix AZ
Sunday, May 21, 2006

Tables 28: Virtual Library Services

Facilitator: Doris Wisher – Touro University, Nevada dwisher@touro.edu

Recorder: Mary Pranica – Pranica@uiuc.edu

Additional Participants:

Penny Coppennoll-Blach – University of California, San Diego

Fred Heidenreich – Arizona Health Sciences University

Marcy Lisiecki – Aurora Health Care

Steven MacCall – University of Alabama

Pat Pinkowski – Alzheimer's Association

Ada Seltzer – University of Mississippi Medical Center

Rita Sieracki – Medical College of Wisconsin

Topics discussed and ideas shared:

Facilitator Doris Wisher began by describing the recent launch of a virtual medical library at Touro University – Nevada. Approximately 98 percent of the library's offerings are electronic, and a wireless network encompasses the entire campus. Doris explained that rapid growth in the school's enrollment and degree offerings have shaped the start-up library's development and services.

Pat Pinkowski of the Alzheimer's Association's national office noted that demand for all-electronic services continues to grow within her organization, especially in light of the costs associated with housing the association's physical collection. Unfortunately, many valuable resources offered by the library (e.g., materials for caregivers) are not available electronically.

Pat asked if other participants had experience with AskAway, a 24/7 virtual reference service coordinated by library consortia in Wisconsin and Illinois (<http://www.askaway.info/>). Rita Sieracki of the Medical College of Wisconsin noted that medical libraries and other special libraries in her state have been approached to provide reference support for such initiatives. This led to a broader discussion regarding demand for virtual reference services among users of medical libraries. A virtual reference service offered by one of the academic medical libraries represented at the table

had received a tepid response from students, despite efforts to promote it throughout campus. Others at the table reported success with virtual reference, particularly email-based services. While the group was uncertain as to why virtual reference services succeeded in some institutions and not at others, it was suggested that libraries wishing to offer such services should promote them on every page of their Web site and conduct in-person campaigns to spread the word to departments throughout their institutions. Others at the table suggested that the time had come to embrace new technologies for virtual reference (beyond chat and email).

Marcy Lisiecki of Aurora Health Care raised the topic of cataloging electronic journals and books. She asked if other institutions created records for Web-based resources within their OPACS or maintained separate lists for such resources. While many participants noted that they maintained separate lists, it was mentioned that integration is possible (e.g., a federated search option on the Duke University Web site generates a results list that includes books, e-journals and Web sites). Steven MacCall of the University of Alabama described a recently published study that he conducted to determine the topical range of online medical books and ways in which health sciences libraries provide access to those books on their public Web sites. He found that the number of online medical books now available warrants collection-level consideration, but that few libraries have allocated resources to analyze these books at the chapter and section level in order to provide sufficient access points. The study can be found in the *Journal of the Medical Library Association*, 2006 January; 94(1): 75–80.

Finally, the group discussed the trend toward consolidation of space for physical collections and growing institutional pressure to make nearly everything available online. While some at the table expressed reservations about the pace at which such changes are taking place, others felt it represented an opportunity for health sciences librarians to take the lead in developing innovative services and new means of sharing information. Ada Seltzer of the University of Mississippi described a Transformation Planning process through which she and her staff are creating an eight- to ten-year strategic plan for the university's health sciences library. This plan will outline new, value-added services that the library intends to offer as well as costs associated with such services and a suggested implementation plan.