

Social Responsibilities Round Table

OF THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

N E W S L E T T E R

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from the srrt coordinator:

As I write this, Midwinter is less than two weeks away but by the time you read this, Midwinter will be history. I anticipate that the most pressing issue facing SRRT before Midwinter will still be a topic of serious discussion this spring. This issue, of course, is the attacks SRRT has faced over the last several months, first with a letter from ALA President Ann Symons and the Executive Board, accusing SRRT of speaking on behalf of the Association, and second, a proposed resolution from an ALA Councilor, demanding that SRRT rewrite its mission to prevent us from communicating our positions outside of ALA. These accusations are unwarranted and baseless, but alas, serious. We need every SRRT member to be involved in this effort to preserve SRRT's ability to speak and communicate its opinions. Please get involved: join the SRRT listserv for the latest info on this issue, read about it in the newsletters to come and on our web site, or get in touch with me directly.

You should receive this newsletter right before the deadline for ALA elections. If you haven't voted already, please vote! One of the ways we can preserve the future of SRRT is to elect progressive people to ALA Council. Several SRRTers ran for ALA Council successfully last year, and we need to build on this momentum to get SRRT members on Council. Although this issue is going to press before we know who will be running for Council, we will post the names of SRRT candidates on our web site and the listserv and you can read the candidates' descriptions in the ballot mailing to look for other progressive people. This is incredibly important, and it is well worth the time spent to vote. Please! And, don't forget to vote for SRRT Action Council members-at-large, and... drum roll... our first SRRT Councilor!

Last, but not least, I want to thank SRRT members and supporters, Action Council, and Task Force chairs for all the work you do to keep the round table involved with and committed to issues of social responsibilities and librarianship. I have been particularly impressed by the dedication you have shown over the last few difficult months, and I am look forward to continuing to work together to strengthen SRRT.

Wendy Thomas, SRRT Coordinator
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Corporate Publishers Charge More (Surprise!)

Library Journal's Academic Newswire reports that "A study of agricultural journals by Cornell University adds to the growing stockpile of evidence that price increases by commercial publishers are growing at a rate far higher than those by association and society publishers. According to the report disseminated by a faculty task force in consultation with Cornell's Mann Library, the prices of commercially-published agricultural journals increased 77.8 percent between 1988 and 1994 on a price-per-page basis, while journals published by associations and societies increased by 33.3 percent.

The task force report recommends that faculty groups be apprised of the situation, that they be made aware of the implications of publishing or editing high-priced journals, and that they reassess their relationships to their servicing libraries."

Gordon & Breach Sued (Surprise!)

Library Journal's Academic Newswire reports also reports that "Oral arguments were heard January 11 in the appeal of the August decision that found in favor of the American Institute of Physics (AIP) and the American Physical Society (APS) in a lawsuit filed by Gordon & Breach (G&B) in 1993. ALA, ARL, and SLA have filed an amicus brief in the appeal in support of AIP/APS who were originally sued by G&B for publishing a study by the late Henry Barschall, a physicist at the University of Wisconsin, comparing physics journals by price and value. G&B claimed that the study fell under the realm of commercial speech and that the results of the study—that journals published by AIP and APS were the most cost-effective and that those published by G&B were ranked low on cost-effectiveness—were a case of 'false advertisement.' Federal Judge Leonard Sand rejected G&B's claims in August, saying not only that Barschall's study was reliable, but also that academic journals are protected under the First Amendment no matter what the content."

Academic Journals are Too Expensive (Surprise!)

Library Journal's Academic Newswire, in consistent fashion, also reports that "The scholarly publish-

ing community, including librarians faculty, scholars, librarians and STM publishers alike, is watching Michael Rosenzweig very closely. The University of Arizona biologist has drawn the attention of academe due to his decision to leave the prominent scholarly journal he founded, *Evolutionary Ecology*, to start a lower-priced alternative. He made the move based on principle: He believes the journal's publishers have made the original too expensive for libraries and the scientific community to afford. According to Rosenzweig, *Evolutionary Ecology*, launched in 1987, has been averaging a 19 percent annual price increase. SPARC, the ARL initiative that aims to increase competition in scholarly publishing, will help create a marketplace for Rosenzweig's new journal, *Evolutionary Ecology Research (EER)*, by guaranteeing a subscription base of libraries for the new publication. EER is available now, with a free sample available on the Internet at <http://www.evolutionary-ecology.com>."

Public Domain? What Public Domain?

CARL S. KAPLAN in the October 30, 1998 New York Times reports that in February 1998, the editor of a Web site dedicated to republishing classic works of literature online will pull the plug on his operation. Eric Eldred's action is a protest against a law that adds 20 years to the existing copyright protection of books, films, songs and other intellectual property. That means, for example, that copyrights on old books that were scheduled to lapse next year, putting the works in the public domain, will now last until 2019. The law disturbs the loose-knit group of book lovers like Eldred who have been making classic texts available online since the days before the Web. They fear the law will have a devastating impact on their shared goal of creating a decentralized digital library of books in the public domain, available to students, scholars and fans around the world at no cost.

"If everything is private property forever, which is the way things are going, then there can't be a growing, global, free public library," NYT reports Eldred as saying. Michael S. Hart, director of Project Gutenberg, one of the largest online free book sites with about 1,700 public-domain texts posted by volunteers, figures that the new law will essentially prevent about one million books from entering the public domain over the next 20 years.

Gentle Reader:

You will note, perhaps, that throughout this issue of the SRRT Newsletter we have reprinted news items from several different online sources. We especially recommend these services:

Library Juice: <http://www.libr.org/Juice/>

The Scout Report: <http://scout.cs.wisc.edu/>

LJ Academic Newswire: <http://www.bookwire.com/ljdigital/>

-- Ken and Jessamyn, Newsletter Co-Editors

Get Outta The Library

CONSIDER THE ALTERNATIVES

Living Library is a 2 year project that aims at making the act of reading and writing an everyday activity for poor children and their teachers. This would mean fewer failures in elementary school and more children learning about their reality and how to change it. These libraries are being implanted in Community Centers in charge of children and adolescents living in the poor districts on the fringe of the big cities, where huge slums and acute social problems are concentrated. To achieve its objective the Project team provides personal development for the community teachers by preparing them to work with books and reading activities in the context of poverty and deprivation of their institutions. Each library is unique, taking into account the needs and the culture of the community where it is located.

MLSs Need Not Apply

The ALA Office for Accreditation has been informed by the University of California, Berkeley that it does NOT plan to seek ALA accreditation for its master's program in information science. It may reevaluate that decision in 5 years. The previous ALA accreditation of UC Berkeley ended in 1994.

Urban Library Journal - Call for Papers

Urban Library Journal, a refereed journal of research and discussion deliv

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“classic porn” novels like those of Henry Miller). Finally, panelists will share tips on developing selection criteria, finding reviews, and developing relationships with publishers.

TASK FORCE REPORTS

THE INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM BUFFET, our traditional summer “Gala event,” is also on tap for the conference. Don’t miss it!

Hunger, Homelessness and Poverty

Preliminary Announcement of Annual Pre-Conference: OLOS/SRRT Task Force on Service to Poor & Homeless People

REALITY CHECK FOR LIBRARIES: Making a Difference in Services to Poor and Homeless People

Friday, June 25, 1999 9:00AM to 5:00PM

An interactive session focusing on the implementation of the ALA Poor People’s Policy, emphasizing the incorporation of effective local library administrative policies and positive impact on library collections, programs and services. Take home valuable information about what works in local libraries and resources to support legislative and funding concerns. Hear firsthand from poor and homeless people and other experts on the topic.

ALA members: \$125
Nonmembers: \$160

ONLINE RESOURCES

Advocacy Groups Online

A web site with topical and alphabetic links to national advocacy groups (i.e. interest groups or lobbyists). Policy.com has something like this, but this site has more than just descriptions and links. Also includes contact information for each group (e-mail, phone, fax, address) as it is provided in the websites.

<http://www.creighton.edu/~kcfont/advocacy.html>

United Nations Human Rights Website — Treaty Bodies Database

<http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf>

This database was created “to meet the growing interest in the committees established to monitor the implementation of the principal international human rights treaties (also referred as ‘treaty monitoring bodies’ or ‘treaty bodies’)” such as the Human Rights

Committee, the Committee Against Torture, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Users may search the database by keyword and view results by relevance or date or browse by a variety of parameters, such as country, date, language, treaty, reporting status, or status of ratification. Documents may be in English, French, or Spanish.

From the Scout Report <http://scout.cs.wisc.edu/>

Human Rights Watch World Report 1999

<http://www.hrw.org/hrw/worldreport99/>

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has just released its ninth annual review of human rights around the world in advance of Human Rights Day, December 10, 1998, the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The report covers events and developments in 68 countries from December 1997 through early November 1998. The report is generally well-written, offering excellent overviews of the conditions of human rights on regional and selected national levels. Users in the US may be particularly interested in the detailed critique of American policies on human rights both internationally and within its own borders. The Report also provides information on selected campaigns and thematic concerns, such as arms, and the rights of women and children.

From the Scout Report <http://scout.cs.wisc.edu/>

A-INFOS News Service

“In the struggle for a free society, we distribute news and articles in several languages, covering a wide range of areas. These include workplace, environmental and anti-imperialist struggles as well as the fight against racism, sexism and homophobia.”

URL: <http://www.ainfos.ca/>

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

<http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/>

Located at Stanford University, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project is producing what will become the definitive collection of the great civil rights leader’s writings. These include a number of full-text primary documents (including the “I Have a Dream” speech and the “I’ve Been To The Mountaintop” sermon), a general biography, a chronology of King’s life, a recommended reading section, and scholarly articles produced by Project staff members (under construction). The Project plans to continually add new documents to the site as they are digitized.

From the Scout Report <http://scout.cs.wisc.edu/>

Morris, Anne and Hilary Dyer.
Human Aspects of Library Automation

2nd Ed. Gower: Brookfield, Vermont. 1998.
 (ISBN 0-566-07504-0)

From how and why people have difficulties with computers to the steps good managers take in acquiring a new computer system, Morris and Dyer provide a wide-ranging discussion of essentially all facets of human computer interface design. While they ground their book in a library setting, the issues they cover apply to all human computer interaction situations, not just library automation. They cite hundreds of technical sources but manage to bring this mass of current information on the subject together in an understandable way.

Most of the book deals with design issues—workstations, software, furniture, even jobs—and how to accommodate the most users in the best ways law and physical limitations allow. It ends with chapters on dealing with stress and training staff and the public to use new systems. Appendices follow detailing web sites (many in the U.S.) and addresses (mostly European) from which to find helpful products and detailed information on many of the book's topics.

The book frequently discusses what the law requires with respect to workplace design. Morris and Dyer, being British, discuss legal issues almost entirely from the perspective of British and European Community laws. This isn't necessarily a bad thing since those laws are typically more strict than comparable U.S. laws. Following their suggestions will allow a legal safety cushion while treating employees better than we here require.

This is a superb book, well written and appropriate for its audience. It should be on the desk of every library director and, especially those beginning to plan new or upgraded computer systems.

Jon McConnel
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Martin, Lowell A.
**Enrichment: A History of the Public Library
 in the United States in the Twentieth Century.**

Scarecrow Press: Lanham Maryland. 1998.

Upon picking up *Enrichment: A History of the Public Library in the United States in the Twentieth Century* and noting its slim 200 pages, a reader hopes that the author is a knowledgeable scholar and a skilled wordsmith who can quickly focus this broad topic and delve into solid details. Unfortunately, Lowell A. Martin has written a history of the Public Library that is unfocused, poorly edited, wordy without

being detailed, chronologically unsound, and lifeless. The book is so un-engaging and poorly organized that a lay reader will surely put it down and a librarian may well be insulted. In fact, *Enrichment's* only use may just be the chapter notes and bibliography: here one can browse the author's sources for a better treatment of a subject.

Martin takes on too much from the beginning. In the introduction, he promises to "describe the relationship between economic growth and the public library and the limitations on library response in times of recession and depression." He also aims to produce a social history that will "show the public library as a natural outgrowth of America in the making." Martin succeeds at doing neither of these. The main focus of the book, if it can be said to have one, is the public library's development and history of the often conflicting roles of informing, educating, and providing entertainment to its users. Even this thread gets lost in the loosely followed chronological arrangement.

Martin takes on the whole century by breaking it into seven chronological chunks to address the salient features of the library. Straightforward enough, yes? No. Each of these seven chapters starts with a dreadful, mainstream, often irrelevant historic "overview". Martin throws in president's names, major policy/economic trends, popular books and songs, jumps to an overview of the public library during this period, and never makes any coherent ties, observations or conclusions. Examples are vague, dates omitted, and thoughts jump ahead to the next decade. At times, this is not even a history. For example, In Chapter 5: *Recovery and Uncertainty, 1946-1959*, a six-page entry on *Building Collections* is just an introduction to general collection development issues, with no historical examples, dates, or conclusions.

The book contains a few coherent sentences, and sometimes even whole paragraphs of promise. In the chapter *The Innovative Years, 1918-1929*, the three-page section on *Children's Service* starts out with an upbeat assertion that *Children's services* are the backbone of the public library to this day, owing largely to their development by strong leaders in the 1920's. One crosses her fingers and hopes for a fleshed out tale of the development of children's services and colorful stories of the librarians who created these services. Unfortunately, the reader gets mired in badly constructed sentences that are mere irrelevant lists instead of true description. Details of the leaders in children's services are reduced to lackluster lines such as "Special credit goes to Augusta Baker of the New York Public Library for encouraging the development and promotion of storytelling."

Enrichment: A History of the Public Library in the United States in the Twentieth Century is a dreadful jumbled mess. Skip it.

Anne Gruel

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Views expressed in the newsletter are not necessarily those of ALA/SRRT. The editors reserve the right to edit submitted material as necessary or as whimsy strikes.

Next deadline 4/15/99

<http://www.jessamyn.com/srrt>

SRRTAC-L

The SRRT listserv SRRTAC-L is open to all SRRT members and is a low-traffic [less than five messages a day unless there's a hot topic brewing] way of keeping up with SRRT's issues and discussions in-between conferences. Help decide SRRT's future directions and join in some lively debates. If you would like to join the SRRT listserv, send the following message to listproc@ala.org

subscribe SRRTAC-L [your first name] [your last name]

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