Minutes of the Literatures in English Section, General Membership Meeting
Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL)

American Library Association (ALA) Midwinter Conference, Philadelphia, PA

Sunday, January 12, 2008, 1:30 - 3:30 pm, Marriott Philadelphia, Room 401-403

FINAL

Present: Sophie Lesinska, Michael Macan, Laura Fuderer, Frank Gravier, Shawn Martin, Tammy Voelker, Kathy Johnson, Candace Benefiel, Jen Stevens, Angela Courtney, Melissa Van Vuuren, Laura Taddeo, Cathy Eisenhower, Elizabeth Peterson, Linda Stein, Priscilla Finley, Stephanie Graves, Sara Seten Berghausen Kristina DeVoe, Amanda Watson, Jill Newby, Deborah Lilton, Helene Williams, Poliana Irizarry, Josh Petrusa, Tara Schmidt, Michaelyn Burnette, Aline Soules, Anne Fields, Christina Desai, Liorah Golomb, Kristine Anderson, Juliet Kerico.

Guest: Janice Simmons-Welburn

Introductions and discussion of meeting format - Sophie Lesinska, Chair LES. She provides a brief discussion of the mission of LES.

Reminders: Frank Gravier states the LES New Members Discussion Group will immediately follow this meeting. Sophie reminds us the all-committee meeting is Monday morning, and a good shopping opportunity for new members to get involved.

Introduction of Janice Simmons-Welburn
Ms. Wilburn introduces herself as one of the candidates running for ACRL's Vice-President/President-Elect. Describes her professional background and concerns for academic libraries, which include technical infrastructure, human resources (e.g., the graying of the profession), anticipation of users' needs, funding issues in higher education, student learning, advocacy, and scholarly communication. ("I'm passionate about those things that I'm dispassionate about.") Encourages members to vote, and to email her directly with questions about these issues. Christine asks Janice if her campaign has a theme, and how she feels about the ACRL President's Program meshing with LES's programs. Janice says there are issues she feels strongly about, but will look into that.

Other discussion includes the theme for the 2009 LES program (digitization, electronic publishing, and electronic dissertations); outreach to faculty and researchers in literary fields; conducting original research using the LES research competency guidelines; and the cost of attending programs. Sophie states that one of LES's objectives is to encourage presentations at local and regional literacy conferences. She mentions the South Central Society for Eighteenth Century Studies conference as an example, and reports that there is $1200 available for LES members who want to attend such conferences.

Committee reports
- Priscilla Finley, Chair of Membership Committee – provides a brief history of the mentoring program and its move to the Membership Committee. Given the reluctance of some members to identify themselves as mentors, the Membership committee decided at the 2007 Annual meeting to ask new members what this program could do for them (e.g., what kind of matchmaking or networking could be of use to new members that is currently not provided). Ensuing discussion includes current benefits of LES (newsletter publication opportunities, listserv exchanges, informal networking at happy hours), and suggestions for mentoring/networking, such as pairing new members with "seasoned" ones to provide

advice on publishing, pairing up members to politely hassle each other about publishing, members pairing up with each other to co-write articles (since "seasoned" librarians learn from new librarians, too), and using the LES membership directory to enhance networking/publishing opportunities (e.g., identifying one's research interests and one's willingness to work with others or be contacted).
Conclusions: Priscilla suggests that the New Members Discussion Group is a good forum for these ideas, and encourages experienced librarians to attend the group.

- Linda Stein, Chair of Publications Committee – Linda reports on the task force's progress this past fall with the wiki and blog and their respective purposes (getting new members to contribute information, getting ideas and comments from members). The LES Executive Committee approved both, so Linda hopes everyone will participate; directions on how to contribute to the wiki and blog are forthcoming. Linda distributes printouts from each. Reports on the LES bibliography, which Michaelyn Burnette and Aparna Zambare are currently updating.

General Membership Meeting - Priscilla Finley - 2:30
Subject Guides

Question: At academic libraries, one of the tools we have to convince users to tap into our resources includes subject guides. At each of your libraries, how have used your print or online guides (wikis, blogs, del.icio.us) to do this, and where have the subject guides led you?

Laura's library switched from individually created sites to database-driven websites (DDWs), but they're not flexible in terms of letting users customize descriptions. However, DDWs allow you to add free websites, print sources, etc. [Explanation of DDWs: data is drawn from a database as opposed to creating html pages "from scratch." The upside of DDWs is you can make changes once and the changes are updated in every location where you have that information; the downside is they're not (as) customizable as regular web pages because they're drawing only from the information you put in the database.]

Aline Soules mentions that subject guides at her institution are put in Blackboard and will be linked to the institution's upcoming Wordpress-powered site; her fear is that everything they're doing will be swept away. Although the headings for content will be dictated, the rest will be up to librarians.

Michael Macan uses Macromedia Contribute; content can be loaded on staff computers, permissions can be centrally controlled, and librarians log into the library's site to edit the pages they have permissions for. This option seems good for subject librarians with no experience in web design, since they don't have to worry about messing up the scheme of their website's template.

How do you customize subject guides and ensure they get to the students?
Sara Seten-Berghausen says they use Blackboard and focus their energy on individual courses, with an "Ask a Librarian" link to IM and other contact information. Librarians at Duke Univ. have course-builder status so they can put their contact information beneath the instructor's contact information. Aline asks how she deals with the flood of email; Sara replies that hasn't happened (yet). Amanda says her library's subject guides are built through a CMS, are easy to use, and luckily haven't yielded tons of email, either.

Kristina DeVoe says her library couldn't get faculty to add them, so librarians created library content packages, with a form that they can throw anything they want into it – chat widgets, reserves, links to Google Scholar, contact information, etc – so it's customizable and skirts the issue of getting added to Blackboard as a teaching assistant or instructor.

Cathy Eisenhower mentions that at George Washington Univ. the librarians got kicked off Blackboard because of privacy issues.

Liorah uses Google Analytics to track the number of visits to her guides, the length of time someone views them, and how users to get to them. Mentions that the wiki would be a good place to post links to subject guides. Sara reports that members have sent her links to their guides, so she'll make sure this is included in the LES directory soon.

Priscilla says UNLV Libraries use LibGuides, which is a content management system that allows librarians to upload content without having to go through the website folks (e.g., campus IT), while also giving them statistics (the time of day and year people use it), the ability to link to social networking sites, and widgets to put in Blackboard without having to be added to the course. Kristina uses LibGuides because she doesn't have to wait for the web team to upload content, and she can include RSS feeds for core journals and chat widgets, as well as track usage; "It's been a revelation for us."

Are there any subject guide minimalists? Or are longer subject guides better?

Elizabeth's institution underwent a crisis of faith and chose the minimalist route. Their guides have a maximum of five suggestions for getting started, with links to more extensive / course-related guides. All of the "getting started" links are above the fold; "We haven't assessed it but we feel a lot better." Aline: "We're great believers in the 'more' button. My problem with showing them one or two things is that students don't get past that."

Who are subject guides designed for? And how do you address multidisciplinary topics?

Laura's colleagues see them as designed for literary scholars, but the library's web team believes they're designed for first-year students.

Aline: another challenge is that students get in a writing class and are assigned a topic that has nothing to do with English.

Sara: it's the balance of meeting the lowest common denominator with addressing researchers' subject-specific questions. Their focus has been on tagging pages so that students have a better idea of where to go.

Aline's library did a usability study, asking users to draw their ideal website. "We got some really interesting things in focus groups with students and faculty, and never the twain shall meet…Students want to search, whereas faculty want [material] plunked on the page and don't care about new stuff."

How do you address the varying needs of different users? And has anyone assessed subject guide usage?

Stephanie: everyone has their own personal universe, their own page. Instead of providing static pages we provide information for students to take as they need it. [Her library is using del.icio.us.] She asks if a library site can be developed in such a way that users can mash up what they need. Josh says he encourages instructors to use wikis for library material.

Michael: but if you're leaving it up for students to decide, it's possible they won't add MLA if they're an English major, and it gets left off [the page they create]. Jen states that it may be better to start with a template and then push new material to users – to strike a balance between what students can change and what librarians provide.

Liorah mentions again her use of Google Analytics to track usage. Other librarians mention tracking usage, but in terms of assessment, nothing much more extensive that that seems to have been done (yet). Liorah's material is alphabetized, because subject categories are amorphous.

Michael's polling of faculty led to including ancient guides to literature, "so I feel like I have a major victory if I get a student to pick up a reference book."

Elizabeth states we're back to the philosophy that a student's need for information is driven more by course requirements rather than curiosity. Perhaps the purpose of a subject guide is to get them focused on their course. Priscilla closes nicely with the need for subject guide assessment, and thanks everyone for their participation.

Adjourned 3:25 pm.