REPORT OF THE LITA HEADS OF LIBRARY TECHNOLOGY (HOLT) INTEREST GROUP MEETING. AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION MIDWINTER CONFERENCE, PHILADELPHIA, JANUARY 2008

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There were four parts to the meeting. The first part was self-introduction by each of the attendees. The second part addressed HoLT business. The third part was the bulk of the meeting – HoLTalk. HoLTalk is an open discussion of compelling library technology issues. The final part of the meeting was wrap-up.

Michelle Robertson – Chair – called the meeting to order. We went around the room and introduced ourselves. We had representatives from the University of Pittsburgh Health Sciences Library System, Drexel University, Boise State University, the Smithsonian Institution Libraries, the University of Arkansas – Little Rock, the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, Brooklyn College, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Syracuse University, LexisNexis, the University of New Brunswick - Saint John, Temple University, Northwestern University, the University of Notre Dame, the University of Alberta, the Tri-Colleges (Bryn Mawr, Haverford, and Swarthmore), and Anne Arundel Community College.

After introductions, we moved into the business portion of the meeting. The purpose of HoLT [from the HoLT website] is as follows: "Established in 2001 and renewed in 2004. To provide a forum and support network for those individuals with administrative responsibility for computing and technology in a library setting. Programs and discussions will explore issues of planning and implementation, management and organization, support, technology leadership and other areas of interest to library technology managers and administration."

Michelle further explained that the interest group is a discussion forum. Many HoLT members are information technology people and may or may not have an MLS. HoLT has a web page under the LITA Interest Group section. We also have a listserv (information available at http://lists.ala.org/wws/info/lita-holt) that has relatively low traffic.

Richard Wayne – Vice-Chair - presented a summary of the program planned for ALA Annual in Anaheim, California. The topic is "Transformational Change: The Evolving Role of Library IT Departments." We have finalized three speakers who will represent different points of view on the topic. Robin Hastings is the

Information Technology Manager at Missouri River Regional Library. Carole Kiehl is the Associate University Librarian for Information Technology and Technical Services at the University of California at Irvine. Terry Nikkel is the Director, Information Services and Systems at the University of New Brunswick, Saint John.

The bulk of our meeting was HoLTalk - or technical discussion. The first HoLTalk topic was the issue of an 'Information Commons' or 'IC' and the various roles played by its support entities. Here is a sample of comments offered by HoLT meeting attendees:

We don't usually use the term IC. We try and use the term 'library' as much as possible. We are about to implement our 4th 'IC' that will be in front of the reference area. The four IC areas have 60, 120, 115, and 85 computers respectively. The one with 85 computers is 24 X 7.

I have been involved in two projects related to the concept of Information Common or Learning Commons. These concepts are not just a cluster of PC's on the main floor of the library. They are also the services that come with the computers. Some examples are reference services, technology services, and other services. Some of these other services might be writing assistance, homework help, tutors, statistical consulting, and research services. Furnishings are very important as well. Students like to work together. You need to create clusters for them. Buy chairs on casters that can be moved. You need to create a comfortable, inviting environment - not a quiet environment. Some places have emphasized the services instead of the technology. The unifying element is that information services are more easily accessible to the users. People can connect with librarians, IT people, and each other more easily. If you are building a new Information Commons, you can do it right from the start. The biggest trick to convert an existing area to an IC is usually acquiring the appropriate funds. In both of my experiences, the IC was a huge success. Students just get it. It works. It works at this time. The IC may evolve in a few years.

Our University learned from a neighboring University. Some of the IC is not technology driven. People want dining style booths.

At our institution, it has been part of the undergraduate library. Now it basically is the undergraduate library. We have incorporated a new classroom and re-modeled an old classroom. There is lots of 'loan-able' equipment available to students. Our IC has been very popular and very successful. The library is almost at 24 X 7. Another area - our scholarly commons area - will take over the traditional

reference area. It's not clearly defined at this time, but we would work with faculty and researchers. Part of this area is technology, part of it is reference. There are also subject specialists available.

We are using the similar concept of 'Research Commons.' We engaged in a master planning process to see how space could be re-designed. There were several phases to this. The first phase was the development of a café. It opens tomorrow. We tried to take the existing furniture and make areas more group-friendly. We ripped down the circulation and reference desks. We now have desks where trained library personnel can help users to find information and circulate materials and help out with technology too. It's a sort of one-stop shopping area. We ripped down our glass walls. The space is much more open now. We are collaborating with campus IT to put more computer labs in the library to get more use. IT staff will also be helping students in some cases.

There are many different models. Let me throw a few things out. At my last institution, Library IT had a presence. There was quite a bit of discussion about supporting personal devices. For example - getting a student's personal laptop to work with the campus wireless network. There were a number of group study rooms for four to ten students to work together. Some groups used computers, some did not. We provided multi-media capabilities and presentation rooms. A student that had a PowerPoint for a class could practice with the PowerPoint prior to his or her class. One of the most popular pieces of furniture was bean bag chairs. We purchased around 15 and they have been extremely popular.

We provide facilities for audio and video editing. It's all about providing centralized services many of which already exist in several places on campus.

Our DVD burner is very popular. We have Macs in rooms where you can close the door. The rooms can be loaned for several hours. We have Adobe suites on some of our computers. There is more specialized software too.

The discussion shifted at this point to how a library can maintain an Information Commons with limited staff? A key answer seemed to be to partner with the larger campus or organization's IT department. One attendee expressed that the IC is starting to break the camel's [library's] back with the resulting increase in support needs.

We then moved to a related topic – 'How do you find [to hire] good technology people?' One attendee expressed that recent applicants had been deplorable. They

didn't even have basic technical knowledge. His college is a member of a consortium and the salary offered was reasonable.

There were numerous suggestions to help the above attendee:

Perhaps you need to advertise differently.

At our institution, it took us quite a while, but we found some good people. We went through two or three hiring cycles to hire good people.

That was our experience as well. It takes some patience.

A lot depends on the job market at the time of advertising.

You might look also at how human resources categorizes a job posting. In some agencies, it is not clear what the posted job really is and what the person really does.

There are many potential listservs where you can post jobs for library technical positions.

As the HoLTalk portion of our meeting came to a close, Michelle asked what we might discuss during HoLTalk at ALA Annual. There was some interest to continue the Information Commons discussion. Perhaps we can survey members with a short survey prior to the next HoLTalk discussion to see where they stand with their Information Commons.

In addition to HoLTalk topics, we could evaluate topics for potential programs and publication at ALA Annual. Michelle read from a formal list of potential programs:
- Panel of new managers of systems departments – share experiences
- Managing IT staff and librarians
- Handbook for library IT managers / supervisors
- Systems departments' relationships / involvement with other Library IT projects
- Stakeholder's expectations
- Hiring, recruitment, and retention of IT staff
- Continuing education for IT staff and other library employees
- Keeping staff current with technologies
- Doing the most with the resources that you already have
- Cross-training, internships, volunteers
- External funding (grants, gifts, etc.)

- Purchasing versus leasing equipment
- Research & development role of systems departments
- Project management
- Centralized versus decentralized IT management
- Workflow issues
- Establishing collaborative relationships with others outside of the library
- Strategic planning
- Establishing priorities
- New and evolving role of library IT departments and personnel
- Developing potential IT personnel from current library staff
- How to get others to understand what Library IT does
- Image of the systems librarians to the rest of the library community
- Body of knowledge for best practices in systems
- International Computer Drivers License (basic IT literacy)

Attendees and potential future attendees were asked to think about these ideas for the next meeting. A new LITA committee (Assessment and Research) may also help provide topics for future HoLT discussions and programs.

Michelle began the wrap-up portion of our meeting. She explained that we will need to elect a Vice-Chair at the next meeting. One person expressed interest in that position. The meeting was formally adjourned.

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