For the last time, ALCTS-MRC held two meetings at ALA. Beginning with the Midwinter 2001 meeting in Washington, D.C., the committee will hold one meeting, scheduled for Sunday morning from 9:30-12:30.

The Sunday morning meeting centered on deciding whether or not to move forward with plans to co-sponsor a program session at the 2001 Annual Meeting. This program, tentatively titled “Digital audio/digital video -- is your library digital-ready?” proposes to deal with how libraries will deal with selection, acquisition, and delivery of these formats to their users. None of the members of the program committee felt able to chair the committee, but after some discussion Brian McCaffrey and Diane Boehr agreed to co-present the meeting proposal; the program committee will continue to assist in finding speakers and making other needed arrangements.

The Tuesday morning meeting opened with reports from liaisons, most of which report through other venues by which MLA members can learn of their sponsoring bodies’ doings. Several items in the Library of Congress report may be of interest to MLA members. One had to do with the Library’s preparations for inventory. David Reser clarified that this effort is dependent on funding, which thus far has not been forthcoming for actual physical inventories. The impending move of the Motion Picture, Broadcast and Recorded Sound Division to new quarters in Culpepper, Va., will probably generate some inventory-taking. The Culpepper move also accounts for a file of some 34,000 bibliographic records for sound recordings which OCLC created for LC to clean up some “odds and ends” in the MBRS collections. Finally, the LC report outlined a new procedure for ongoing cataloging of the Library’s CD acquisitions which involves batch searching in OCLC based on brief records created from the MUZE database; this is expected to produce ca. 16,000 new sound recording records each year. The ALCTS Standards Subcommittee continues to work on bibliographies of collection development resources for A/V materials, and is close to publishing them (probably on the Subcommittee Web site). In other business, the Committee heard that with changes in how ALA registration is handled, registration for the Committee-organized tours would probably not be handled by ALA without an increase in the cost of the tour or by ALCTS subsidy to pay the cost of processing registrations. In this light, coupled with the return to already-visited sites for the next two Annual Meetings (San Francisco in 2001, Atlanta in 2002), the Committee decided to not sponsor a tour until the Toronto meeting in 2003. The meeting concluded with some brainstorming on what long-range ideas the Committee should pursue. It was noted that a Media Resources Committee had almost magically surfaced within ACRL; initial attempts to establish contact and coordination seem not to have been well-received by that body, and this is a goal that could take some time. It was also noted that the ALCTS-MRC charge seems to not deal with analog A/V formats, an omission that is difficult to justify at this time.

Though not part of my official liaison activities, I attended the ACRL Media Resources Committee program session, “Byting into Video: DVD and Networked Delivery,” co-sponsored by the ALA Video Round Table. Two speakers addressed DVD (digital video discs) explicitly. Walt Crawford (RLG) provided basic information on the history and technical aspects of DVDs. He emphasized a number of points -- that DVD is a compromise standard that will not go away but also will not shut out VHS (the current videotape standard) in the short term, that “digital” does not always translate to “better,” and that archiving and networking problems remain to be solved. He noted the explosive growth in “market penetration” of the format since its emergence in 1996, a growth driven in part by “mass-market” pricing structures for first-run releases, in contrast to the “rental-price” structure widespread for VHS (initial releases are expensive, and prices go down later). DVDs have many advantages for libraries (durability, ability to focus on individual frames for long periods, added material often present), but have problems, too (labeling and security-system hassles). Judy Napier (Schaumburg (IL) Township District Library) asked the question, “Do DVDs belong in libraries?” Her answer was “yes,” due to the explosion in public acceptance and demand; but she also recognized challenges -- some studios’ and producers’ slow response to the format, the uncertainty about pricing that Walt Crawford identified, and the current lack of affordable recording/playback equipment. Napier discussed the information-gathering that led Schaumburg to begin acquisition of DVDs and stressed that at this time, titles were being bought in both DVD and VHS formats, though she looked forward to an end to that practice.
The other two speakers spoke to digital delivery of video material. Karen Lund of the Library of Congress reported on such efforts being carried out by the National Digital Library Program, which digitizes material from LC’s collections and makes them available through the American Memory Project. Over 700 films are online, including 10 Web presentations; so far, only silent films in the public domain have been mounted, principally reproduced from paper positive prints originally acquired as copyright deposits. Digitizing is done by a vendor from a Beta video copy, with files returned on CD-ROM in Mpeg and QuickTime formats. Part of the practical application of this effort, beyond the educational value it has already demonstrated, is that of preparing for the opening of the National Audiovisual Conservation Center in Culpepper, Va., scheduled for 2003. At that time, the video and sound collections of LC’s Motion Picture, Broadcast and Recorded Sound Division will be moved to that site; patrons in LC’s reading rooms will have fiber-optic access to the collections. The Division is considering the feasibility of establishing license sites at research institutions to allow use of copyrighted material. Finally, Claire Dougherty (Northwestern University) spoke on the history of delivering streaming media at Northwestern. The University’s efforts involve three partners -- the Academic Technologies/IT Division, the Mitchell Media Center of the University Libraries, and the College of Arts and Science’s Multimedia Learning Center. In addition, corporate sponsors (IBM, Cisco, Sony, AVID, Ameritech) have a part in research and development. Starting with the installation of a Real Audio server in 1996, service has branched out with the addition of an IBM Videocharger in 1998, and QuickTime streaming service in 1999. Several large projects have been carried out -- digitizing of the entire 83 hours of the Video Encyclopedia of the Twentieth Century, items in the Political Methodology series, Spanish and Italian soap operas for language classes, chemistry lab demonstrations, and a prototype of a digital video reserve. The upcoming challenge is to move beyond this “special projects” phase.

Submitted by Mark Scharff

Last updated August 18, 2000