Challenging ABC’s: Building Blocks of Intellectual Freedom

Workshop Follow-up

On March 13, about 22 librarians gathered at the Midwest City Library to learn about preparing for and dealing with challenges to library materials. “Challenge ABC’s: Building Blocks of Intellectual Freedom” was presented by five practicing librarians from around the state, and sponsored by the Intellectual Freedom Committee. The workshop was divided into three primary segments: Anticipating challenges with policy development and building stakeholder support, Being there with strategies for personal interaction and support, and Continuing service with techniques for retaining challengers as patrons and reviewing policy.

The first speaker of the day, Lynn McIntosh of the Chickasaw Regional Library System, spoke about laying the political groundwork and working with stakeholders. She emphasized the importance of doing this before a library receives a challenge. Typically we think of legislators as the political allies we need to have, but Lynn identified other groups we need to reach out to: our staff (training is very important); board members (constant need for education about libraries); Friends groups; city and county officials (attend the community functions they attend and greet them); and the media (take out small ads once in a while to encourage coverage).

Our second speaker, Caroline Dulworth of the Pioneer Library System, talked about collection development policies and challenged materials policies. She encouraged us to look at other libraries’ policies for ideas on what to include in ours, and directed us to the ALA Freedom to Read Statement and Library Bill of Rights, as well as the OLA Resolution in Support of Oklahoma Libraries. Caroline encouraged us to include in the policy a statement about customer input into collection development. She recommended that any library’s request for reconsideration form include lots of space for the patron to write, because often they just want to express their views. Caroline said the policies should be reviewed every three to four years, and updated as necessary.

Karen Bays, Branch Manager of the Edmond Public Library, then spoke about the value of scripting as a tool librarians can use when faced with a challenge. Karen informed us of the six A’s of responding to a customer complaint about library materials: Attitude check; Actively listen; Apologize; Affirm; Assure; and Assimilate. By using these six steps, librarians can help customers feel that their concerns have been heard and that their input into the collection is valued. Most importantly, the library will most likely retain that person as a customer. After lunch, we took turns role-playing irate customers and librarians facing them on the frontline. Many of the workshop participants commented on how useful it was to practice those skills.

Laurie Sundborg of Tulsa City-County Library spoke next about the process of reviewing material that has been formally challenged. She said it is important to let the customer know what the process is,
Oh what a wonder is this organization called Oklahoma Library Association! As I was reflecting on my year as president I realized I had many exciting experiences that I would never have had otherwise and that it has been fabulous. But, I realized that the thing that has been so truly outstanding about the year is being able to see the big picture of OLA. OLA is a whole lot of members working together to carry out what are often bold and audacious plans. It is a core of leaders who are so committed to seeing the organization grow and prosper that they willing give of themselves over and over again. It is members willing to give of themselves to see that the organization functions. It is absolutely amazing and I am grateful for having had the privilege to have a small part in it. I can not give you all the names or tell you all the things which have been done this year, but I would like to share of few examples of what I have experienced.

The first example is the work of the Program Chair for OLA. This year’s chair is Leslie Langley. Wow! what a job it is being program chair for an OLA Conference. Staying on top of all the programs and all the committee chairs to make sure all the information is provided, then organizing the conference program is a big job. Creating the program grid, trying to balance the offerings over the two days so that all of the children’s programs are not at the same time, or so that the programs PLD sponsors are spaced out so there are workers to cover them, etc. takes a master juggler. So what? you may ask. Well, keep in mind that Leslie is doing this while working in her two-person library. Her desk is the circulation counter. Her customers start arriving when they see her truck in the parking lot because they know Leslie will have the coffee pot on and be waiting to welcome them into Wister Public Library. On top of this she makes time for her family and life outside of the library and OLA. This is just a glimpse into the life of a Program Chair for OLA.

As an example of the work of a committee is the Local Arrangements Committee. This year’s co-chairs were Charles Brooks and Carla Aldrich. They and their sub-committee chairs take care of everything which pertains to the physical arrangements for the conference. Some examples of the work of this committee are the work of R.D. Bell and Anna Turner who worked with the hotel and several different libraries to provide all of the A.V. equipment for the conference. If the organization had to rent all of the equipment we use we could not have a conference! R.D. and Anna beg and borrow equipment then go and get it, set it up, and return it after conference. Tiffany Turner made all the arrangements for the books sold at the book store plus did the conference wiki. Lynn Wallace and Robin Leach took care of registration. They got the neck wallets donated, and then had them printed. They made all of the name badges and meal tickets then put them into the neck wallets. There
wished many others who worked hard on this committee. The committee gathered information and stuffed all of the packets each registrant receives. Carol Fox made arrangements with several vendors for financial support of the conference (She did much of her work from Dallas where she moved during the year.) Among the recruits for this committee are those who gathered door prizes for the membership meeting, people who made buttons, greeters who welcome conference attendees, people who take care of the flowers and on and on. There is not room to tell all the people and work of this committee. And it is just one of many committees. Then there are the divisions and roundtables. All of these OLA groups are like this; they are members working together to plan and produce the workshops, programs, and other events. All of their stories are phenomenal.

As a final glimpse into the wonder of OLA, I want to give a sampling of other work done by members that most of you never know. Again, this just a few of the many examples of the work of members. There is Marty Thompson who is on every committee. This puzzled me at first, but Kay said “Yes, he always signs up for every committee.” I now know why. He will do whatever needs doing for any committee whenever; wherever there is a need you can count on Marty. There is Bill Young. There is no way to tell you all that he does but just let me say he is always there when you need him, and his expertise in marketing and public relations is a mainstay of OLA. There is Buffy Edwards who many of you may not know but she is the person behind many of the Read Ya’ll posters. There are people like Linda Pye, Evlyn Schmidt, Larry Thorne, Tim Miller, Wynne Stowers, etc. who drive considerable distances to make it to committee meetings. There are the faithful workers who plan and produce the outstanding workshops and conference programs. There are members like Teresa Runnels who keeps up the Native American Issues list serve. There are members like Lynn McIntosh, Kathy Hale, and Marilyn Hinshaw, who send their entire staff to a workshop or conference. There are members who leverage their influence on behalf of OLA and the Endowment. There is Janet Croft who is the editor of this newsletter and has great patience and perseverance. There are members who go the extra mile, literally, to help another member in need as exhibited by Chris Sauro and Catherine Cook. They took another committee member home when she fell and broke her collar bone at a meeting. They then drove back to OKC picked up their cars and drove home. Finally, there are the members who go regularly to meetings; members who can’t go to meetings but who do work such as flyers or arrange for speakers from their home base; members who double up on work at their libraries so others can go or do (such as many of my staff); members who donate money or bring snacks to meetings or workshops; and many others who contribute in a multitude of ways to make the organization work.

Now when I think of OLA, I am reminded of the description of a management style I heard at Public Library Conference: the “joined hands” style of management. This is OLA. Hands joined all across the state from all kinds of libraries working together to create the wonder that is Oklahoma Library Association. If you have not experienced this wonder all you have to do is get involved. Then I promise you too will experience the wonder of OLA.

—Jan Bryant
This webpage review is an exception because we'll look at a federal website instead of a website created by Oklahomans. But this is such a useful source of Oklahoma information that it’s a good exception. The HotReports are a recent addition to the U.S. Census Bureau’s suite of online “Local Employment Dynamics” tools and are meant to provide civic and business leaders with recent data that they can use for economic development. We librarians can use it for retrieving profiles of our counties. It includes information about local economies (wages, top industries, and occupations), transportation, housing, schools, and more. The data comes from the Census Bureau and the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education.

After you click on the above link you will see a link titled “Community Economic Development (CED) HotReport” surrounded by explanatory text. Click the link to open the actual web page. You will then open the drilldown tools you’ll see and choose “Oklahoma,” and then choose a county in Oklahoma (you will also see another choice that lets you choose one of 39 geographies specified by the U.S. Department of Labor as “WIRED” regions; you will probably not find this option useful). Then click the “Go” button to get an “Overview” report about that county.

Across the top of the web page you will see tabs for these reports about each county: “Economics,” “Demographics,” “Housing,” “Transportation,” and “Community Assets.” Here is the some of the information included in these tabs—

- **Overview** – general statistics for the county.
- **Economics** – top industries for each county by number of employees; size of that county’s labor force by age; a drilldown tool for reports about the major industry sectors of that county (such as agriculture, mining, construction, retail trade).
- **Demographics** – the percentages of each race and Hispanic ethnicity for the county; income distribution by household; data on income; data on veterans.
- **Housing** – overview of housing for the county; housing values; housing vacancy, shortage, and surplus; average number of people per household.
  - Transportation – the percent of commuters by their time of travel to work; the percent of commuters by means of transportation (such as drove alone, carpooled, rode bicycle, walked).
  - Community Assets – types and numbers of schools in the county; number of students and teachers by level of school; colleges and universities in the county.
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Now that we have reviewed finding aids for government publications online, you may ask, “But what about paper publications, how do I find those if I’m not a depository?” The new Catalog of Government Publications (CGP) is your answer.

This database is only a bit over a year old, and currently you can now search for over a half million records from 1976 forward. (At present for older materials consult your depository library for the Monthly Catalog in paper). You can link directly to the CGP from the GPO Access homepage, www.gpoaccess.gov., or do a basic search the CGP directly from the GPO access homepage, from a search box in the center of the page. You can also link to the database directly at http://catalog.gpo.gov. This link takes you to Basic Search, where you can search for an author, title, keyword or subject in a single search box. You can do a combined Boolean search here also (e.g. environmental impact statement NOT draft). For those of you just looking for a publication on a certain topic, or for a particular title, the basic search is your easiest option. For the more intrepid searcher, the advanced search provides more expanded options. On this screen you can search by Series, by SuDoc (a government classification) number, by ISSN, or ISBN, by agency, by publisher, by OCLC number, or by date. Obviously many of these options are probably best suited for depository searching, but sometimes you only have a little bit of information to go on when a patron asks for a document. We have all been there for the patron who says “I know it’s in the USGS Bulletins but I don’t have a title, and the author might be … and it was published in 1988, maybe …” and so on. If you have just a bit of information you can fill in whatever you have and you just might come up with the document. Another interesting feature is the ability to search within a smaller set of documents, to narrow your field before you start. If you know your publication is a congressional document, for example, you can limit the search to Congressional Publications or to the Serial Set before you search. The records which come up for the documents are available in brief record form, expanded form, or MARC format. The record will include most important information which is usually included in an OCLC record, including SUDUCS number, series, LC subjects with links to do a subject search, and for the depository librarians, Government Printing Office item numbers and shipping list numbers.

Once you have pulled up this record, the CGP has two other features make this database a valuable resource for the non depository librarian. If the title you want is electronic, the database provides a link to the document online. Remember, since government information is free of copyright the database can link to all of their entries. In addition, if you want to borrow a paper or microform publication, there is a link from the record to a page where you can find out which depository near you has the document. You merely fill in your city, state or area code and you will get a list back of the depositories nearest you that have the document, along with contact information. What could be easier? Well, probably, if they could answer the patron who asks for the book by COLOR … but that’s another story.

—Barbara Miller
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The Oklahoma Panhandle, that "No Man’s Land" created by political forces and carved out of Texas, Kansas, and New Mexico once Oklahoma achieved statehood in 1907, is a veritable "American Outback" which is nonetheless rich in its various agricultural and geological resources as well as rich in its history. Richard Lowitt, a professor emeritus of history at the University of Oklahoma, has penned an excellent overview of the settlement and growth of the three counties in the Panhandle from the turn of the twentieth century to the beginning of the twenty-first. He traces the struggles of early settlers in the region through the Dust Bowl era of the early 1930s and on to the later rise of agriculture and livestock as well as the hog and petroleum industry that dominate its present-day economy. He also gives a fascinating account of the failed Optima Dam and Lake project and discusses the perennial difficulties posed by the arid climate of the region. Filled with archival photographs and details from primary sources he accessed at the University of Oklahoma Western History Center, the Oklahoma Department of Libraries, the Historical Society, and other repositories, this short but highly informative and entertaining historical chronicle is a must for any library's Oklahoma history collection.

—David D. Oberhelman, Oklahoma State University


This book mostly delivers on its stated purpose -- to provide basic information for librarians serving teens in the public library. The chapters on reference service, collection development, and reader’s advisory offer “best practice” guidelines for providing these services for any age group, with tips for the teen target audience. The chapters on teen programming and creating a teen space are more uniquely devoted to serving this group. It is apparent from her examples that the author is in touch with the attitudes and preferences of today’s teens. Miller tells us that: 1) Teens will not touch a book that is worn or has an unattractive cover (her point being that teen book collections must be well-maintained); 2) Teens will only participate in craft programs if the crafts are “cool” -- e.g., creating iPod holders or flash drive lanyards; and 3) The more computers you can put in your library’s teen space, the better. I especially liked the author’s emphasis on including teens in the entire process of planning programs, designing their space, and soliciting input into the teen collection. Although this book is a good starting point and guide, Miller points out the importance of listening to your community’s teens to learn how to best serve them.

—Christine Dettlaff, Redlands Community College


While this is an older title, it’s one that still deserves a wide audience. Crawford begins right at the heart of the problem: how do you say something fresh in a field that seems overrun with far too many dull and repetitive journals, filled with papers that “fairly shout ‘I wrote this for tenure’”? How can you find something that you want to write about, and that other people will want to read? How do you develop your own particular niche and style? Crawford provides excellent advice on such topics as matching your topic to a venue (covering new media as well as more traditional outlets), how peer review works, reviewing publishing contracts, working with editors, dealing with writer’s block, and other traps of the writing life. His analysis of the differences between library writing, mainstream writing, and non-library academic writing is useful and insightful. As both a writer and an editor, I find his advice sound and reasonable. For the established writer, this book is a reminder not to get stuck in a rut but to constantly seek new challenges, and it’s full of helpful material for any new writers you may be mentoring. The only thing I consider too dated to be useful is his advice on submitting paper copies to journals; I know of hardly any editor these days who does not prefer to work with electronic submissions from the start. To supplement this book, I’d also recommend *How To Write A Lot* by Paul J. Silvia, which deals more with the self-discipline and organization side of writing.

—Janet Brennan Croft, University of Oklahoma
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(continued from page 17) and to notify them that their request is being considered. Some of the factors in re-evaluating the book should be whether it is still relevant to the collection, whether it is placed at the appropriate age level, and whether there are other types of materials on the same subject in the collection. The review committee will need to be chosen, and not all committee members can or should be librarians. Community members and sometimes subject experts should be asked to sit on the committee.

While the committee is reading the book (or viewing or listening to other materials), Laurie researches the book to find out when it was acquired, how many circulations it has had, how it has been reviewed, and whether there have been any previous reconsiderations. After the committee has made its recommendations, she writes a letter to the customer, notifying them of the final decision. Laurie provided examples of letters written in response to challenges and pointed out that they often include actions taken as a result (adding materials in the patron’s area of interest) and suggestions that the patron work with library staff to find appropriate materials that they can enjoy.

Next, Donna Morris from the Metropolitan Library System spoke about what to do when it all goes public. She warned us that in dealing with the media, we must stay objective and have supporting facts. If there is advance notice, it’s good to develop key messages about controversial topics beforehand. She said she tries to keep her responses short and stick to the 5 W’s – who, what, where, when, and why. “Think before you respond,” Donna said, and “It’s better to say ‘I don’t know’ than to say something that may be inaccurate.” She told us to beware of the “creative editing” the media often do, and to never repeat a negative statement, answer leading questions, or give information they didn’t ask for.

Finally, Laurie Sundborg wrapped up the day with a reminder that libraries are protectors of freedom of access, and that their collections should represent a wide spectrum of ideas. On the other hand, libraries cannot exist without their customers, and it’s important to empathize with the customer and apologize that they had a bad experience. She recommended thanking the customer for taking an interest in the library and taking the time to express their opinion, and asking them for suggestions for other materials they would like to have added to the collection. She asserted that we should see a challenge as an opportunity to improve the collection and make it appeal to more members of the community it serves.

Not only did our speakers give us very useful, practical information, but the size of the group lent itself to great discussion and Q&A. In addition, the Intellectual Freedom Committee garnered some ideas for steps it can take to help support libraries in responding to challenges.

—Christine Dettlaff, Director
A.R. Harrison Learning Resources Center

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The Rural Library Project

is an important outreach program for Cowboy Poetry Week (http://www.cowboypoetry.com/week.htm), conducted as a part of the Center for Western and Cowboy Poetry’s mission to serve rural communities as it works to preserve and promote cowboy poetry and Western heritage.


To suggest a library for inclusion in the Rural Library Project, please go to http://www.cowboypoetry.com/week.htm#Library and email us the complete library address. We particularly like to add libraries that serve ranching communities.

—Karen Neurohr
The Oklahoma State University Library would like to introduce the newly established Oklahoma Oral History Research Program, part of the new interdisciplinary Center for Oklahoma Studies at Oklahoma State University. The Program will incorporate the Library’s existing oral history projects and will develop new projects exploring the lives and contributions of Oklahomans from all walks of life. Currently there are three main oral history projects underway. The O-STATE Stories project records interviews with alumni, administrators, faculty, staff and supporters connected to Oklahoma A&M College and Oklahoma State University as a means of preserving memories and campus history. The Women of the Oklahoma Legislature project chronicles the lives of women who have served or are currently serving in the Oklahoma Legislature. The Inductees of the Oklahoma Women’s Hall of Fame project preserves the voices of women who have been inducted into this prestigious state-wide group awarded by the Oklahoma Commission on the Status of Women. A past project of note is the Women in the Dust Bowl project. With the vast majority of Dust Bowl research focusing on the point of view of men, this oral history project profiles the plight of Oklahoma women from the Dust Bowl’s epicenter and their memories of this tumultuous time. Stay tuned as we begin to collect and share more “voices of Oklahoma.”

—Tanya Finchum, Associate Professor/Librarian, Oklahoma State University