

Book Reviews



The Economics of Information in the Networked Environment. Eds. Meredith A. Butler and Bruce R. Kingma. Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, 1996. 217p. \$40. alk. paper. ISBN 0-918006-29-5. LC 96-21222.

Is higher education pricing itself out of the marketplace? So warned the keynote speaker, Mario Morino, at the Economics of Information in the Networked Environment Conference held in Washington, D.C., in 1995. This is one of many difficult questions raised in this challenging set of papers.

These proceedings paint a troubled future for libraries and the associated scholarly publishing fields; we are caught in a downward, catch-22 economic cycle. As scholarly journals increase their prices, libraries with shrinking budgets are forced to cancel them. With a smaller audience, the publisher must then increase prices, forcing more library cancellations. This cycle has created 10 to 18 percent increases in journal prices for more than ten years.

To address this problem, a host of interesting pilot projects were presented. Richard Rockwell, from the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, spoke of a "blended support strategy" for finding diverse funding sources to keep his nonprofit service economically viable. In another pilot project, JSTOR is attempting to digitally archive the journal *Ecology* with plans to sell access to libraries. In this pay-as-you-go model, libraries no longer will have to store massive runs of journals.

Collaboration was offered as an alternative by several speakers. Methods for developing the ambitious National Digital Library were discussed by Hiram Davis. The Library of Congress is attempting to put five million digitized

pieces of Americana online by the year 2000. Burkart Holzner discussed the obstacles he encountered during efforts to rescue the beleaguered foreign acquisitions program at the University of Pittsburgh. The economics of e-journals were addressed by Lorrin Garson. Many scholarly societies are interested in pursuing this medium. However, as both Garson and Noll pointed out, 80 percent of the cost of producing a journal is incurred in developing the first copy. Only 20 percent of cost is associated with distribution, be it via print or online.

The ownership versus access debate was, once again, addressed at this conference. Bruce Kingma presented the results of a study that once again showed that access is cheaper than ownership, but he also found that cooperation has a price. Michael McPherson questioned the economics of a \$30 interlibrary loan (ILL) transaction when university presses have been forced to raise the price of their scholarly monographs as libraries cut purchases and use ILL to acquire titles. How does this make sense, he asks, when both libraries and university presses are owned by the same masters? In the end, ILL is at best a stopgap measure that will buy time but not resolve the underlying economic problems.

Many speakers addressed the "volunteerism" model currently in vogue on the Internet. Some speakers, such as Hal Varian, were relatively optimistic about voluntary efforts. James O'Donnell spoke about how he has successfully published the low-overhead e-journal *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, but he concludes by saying this model cannot be made universal. As Rockwell

asks, how long will host institutions be willing to pay the price for these voluntary efforts? Many speakers mentioned that for volunteerism to be successful, different models of rewarding and promoting scholars will have to become institutionally acceptable.

Quite a few papers offered overviews of how the economics of information work. Paul Evans Peters spoke about "the value chain" and changing the way scholarly information is handled. Varian presented the concept of "information objects." An *information object* is an encrypted copy of a journal that automatically sends e-cash to publishers when accessed. Other speakers raised concerns that the pay-as-you-go model could have negative effects on academic openness and information-sharing.

I wonder what the attitude of the attendees was after this conference. Readers of these papers are likely to come away discouraged. As Richard West said, our current model of providing access to scholarly information is not sustainable. The pilot projects discussed in these papers have limited expandability, the costs of collaboration and cooperation are all too clear, inter-library loan can only do so much, and volunteerism is currently not rewarded in academia.

There are no easy answers. We need to reinvent the scholarly communication process, including rules for faculty advancement, publisher/library relations, and the entire culture of the scholarly world. No small task.—*Valerie J. Horton, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces.*

Navigating among the Disciplines: The Library and Interdisciplinary Inquiry. Ed. Carole L. Palmer, *Library Trends* 42 (fall 1996): 129–366. Also available as an individual volume from the University of Illinois, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, 1996.

238p. \$18.50. ISSN 0024-2594. LC 54-62638.

Many crosscurrents complicate the work of a librarian seeking to provide accurate, timely, and comprehensive-for-the-purpose information on behalf of others, or for devising information systems that facilitate an information seeker's individual inquiry. This has ever been so, and the current environment of changing information technology has made it, in some ways, even more so.

When interdisciplinary inquiry is added to the mix, the complications increase. In keeping with *Library Trends'* long-established policy of exploring currently relevant themes in depth, Carole L. Palmer has brought together an impressive group of eleven scholars and practicing academic librarians to consider the nature of interdisciplinary scholarship and its impact on the daily work of people seeking to support the scholarly efforts of others. The essays reflect a variety of points of view and levels of analysis. Space limitations of this review do not permit a detailed examination of each of the essays, and to single out a few individuals' work would do a disservice to the other contributors' equally valuable presentations.

Although there is a good bit of overlap among the following categories, a rough classification can be made for the subject emphases of the book. The first five essays deal with the background and current context of the nature of inquiry in the overlapping subject areas between and among "classic" boundaries of disciplines; the dynamic interplay of integration and specialization; the "hybrid vigor" of investigations that cross over these boundaries; and the problems resulting from the more slowly changing classification systems, controlled vocabularies, and indexing approaches that have been devised to describe the "aboutness" of millions of "works."