

Sara Metz

# Disruption in the library

## ACRL in the 1980s

The 1980s brought significant technological change and upheaval to academic and research libraries. As computer technology skyrocketed in use and affordability, the rise in electronic resources would create new demands on collections and library staff, as the need for new skills changed the roles of librarians.<sup>1</sup>

Academic and research libraries embraced desktop computers, floppy disks, CD-ROMs, and online catalogs. Research institutions began to use the Internet and email.

As Susan Martin noted, “What we have automated has been changing the way our libraries work.”<sup>2</sup>

Systems that had previously been in the back rooms of the library were now present in public spaces, where students, faculty, and the public could access them. This meant that librarians were now responsible for training patrons in the use of online catalogs and CD-ROM databases. Not surprisingly, membership in the ACRL Bibliographic Instruction Section increased 45% from 2,269 to 4,128 as the section took a leadership role in developing standards

for the field, including the influential 1988 “Model Statement of Objectives for Academic Bibliographic Instruction.”

As technology use grew and libraries became increasingly reliant on computer systems, academic librarians continued to worry that computers would usurp their position in the information ecosystem. Li-

brarians, who had often been on the forefront of technology, were now dealing with users who had access to that same technology, and could sidestep the library in their hunt for information.<sup>3</sup>

Collection development also

faceted disruption as electronic resources and online services took an increasingly larger bite out of budgets. The inclusion of electronic and online resources in collections sparked discussions among academic and research librarians ranging from the percentage of collection budgets devoted to electronic and online purchases to the 1986 debate in *College & Research Libraries* over whether users



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of online searches and databases should be charged fees to offset costs.

Declining budgets for collections and the growth of scholarly publishing also forced librarians to reconsider their purchasing priorities, and numerous libraries moved from faculty controlled collection processes to a client-centered, library-controlled process to sustain their collections.<sup>4</sup> Librarians also used new approaches to evaluating their collections, and bibliometric studies proliferated as electronic circulation statistics were used to evaluate collection use.

The rise of technology generated new demands for professional development. The standard library education no longer met the needs of academic libraries, with technology competencies becoming a primary focus, as "responsibilities and the attendant knowledge required to perform effectively have increased in both new areas and depth of traditional ones."<sup>5</sup>

Academic libraries and librarians would now need to compete to retain their prominence in the information environment; to fall behind would be to lose even basic library services on campus to other businesses were willing to provide them.<sup>6</sup>

Barbara Moran urged librarians "to seize the initiative to take advantage of opportunities the new technologies are presenting them to make the restructured library a major force in the university's new information environment."<sup>7</sup>

ACRL sponsored four successful national conferences (1981, 1984, 1986, and 1989) to "provide a means for consolidating the opinions of academic librarians, for building a knowledge base for the field, and for informing those outside of the scope and status of the profession."<sup>8</sup> The 1989 ACRL National Conference held in Cincinnati featured papers on interface software for end-user searching, using microcomputers to analyze journal use data, preparation for automation, academic computing centers and libraries, and course-integrated bibliographic instruction using electronic innovations.

By the end of the decade, technology was fully integrated into academic libraries and as the 1990s began, librarians once again looked to redefine their roles, and the role of the library itself, in the new information environment.<sup>9</sup>

## Notes

1. L. Estabrook, "The growth of the profession," *College & Research Libraries* 50, no. 3 (1989): 287-96.

2. S. K. Martin, (1989, July). "Information technology and libraries: Toward the year 2000," *College & Research Libraries*, 50, no. 4 (1989): 397-405.

3. Ibid.

4. C. A. Gardner, "Book selection policies in the college library: A reappraisal," *College & Research Libraries* 46, no. 2 (1985) 140-46.

5. S. D. Creth, . Personnel issues for academic librarians: A review and perspectives for the future. *College & Research Libraries* 50, no. 2 (1989): 144-52.

6. Estabrook, "The growth of the profession."

7. B. B. Moran, "The unintended revolution in academic libraries: 1939 to 1989 and beyond," *College & Research Libraries* 50, no. 1 (1989): 25-41.

8. Estabrook, "The growth of the profession," 287-96.

9. Moran, "The unintended revolution in academic libraries: 1939 to 1989 and beyond," 25-41. *z*

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