

# Our Users Are Your Users — Blurring the Lines Between Academic and Public Libraries

by **Margaret Landesman** (Collection Development, Marriott Library, University of Utah, 295 So 1500 East, Salt Lake City, UT 84112; Phone: 801-355-4342) <Margaret.landesman@utah.edu>

Lines are blurring all over the place as so many parts of our lives and our libraries converge into what feels more and more to me like looking through a kaleidoscope. But there is a line that maybe hasn't blurred far enough or fast enough. That's the one between academic libraries and public libraries.

Academic and public libraries share core values and goals. We share users. We can get closest to filling our mission if we work at this together and if both sets of librarians work at telling both sets of users about both sets of libraries.

I wanted to gather some ideas about that. So I asked a lot of people what they thought and here are some of their responses — from public librarians, academic librarians, and consortia. A number are from libraries here in Salt Lake and others are from farther afield — including a report from a **University of Utah** librarian currently working in Ethiopia.

## Libraries — We Don't Just Buy Stuff Any More

Libraries were founded to allow people free access to information. The idea was that we bought stuff and then passed it around among our users, without charging them. The free part is core. The buying part isn't.

There is no inherent reason that libraries stock only or mostly purchased merchandise. That used to be pretty much what we did — but purchasing is no longer an adequate model for providing what users need. And it used to be that libraries had little say in how things come to be published — and that's not always so anymore either.

**John Ober** of the **California Digital Library** has written about why academic and public libraries need to jointly engage in the drive to create wider public access to publicly funded research results. Academic librarians have been heavily involved — but, for the most part, have failed to work with our public library colleagues, despite the fact that it is their users who currently have the most limited access to this literature. So why aren't we working more with public libraries? I don't know why.

There is no area where the need is greater than it is for medical and other health science literature. On my own campus, we train a wide variety of medical professionals and we hope many will go into the smaller towns of rural Utah to practice. We teach them "evidence-based medicine." Then, as with a

Physician Assistant we graduated some time ago who now practices in Green River, Utah — when they call and tell us how much they want to practice what we preached — we tell them they cannot have access to the literature they used while in school at the University. We're sorry. **Sally Patrick** has written about the **Eccles Health Sciences Library's "O" (Outreach) Team** — founded to reach consumers of health information through **Utahealthnet**.

Another way to offer more content is for libraries to engage in digitizing initiatives. Here again, academic libraries were initially most active. This is changing. Consortia often serve as matchmakers in helping these two groups get together. **Barbara Preece** has written about the **Boston Library Consortium** and its partnership with the **Open Content Alliance**. And **Sue Medina** about the ways in which Alabama has come together to provide access to the stuff Alabamians want — which is, not surprisingly, about Alabama. This group has also broken new ground in developing digital archiving techniques, developing a new application of **LOCKSS** as a local archiving solution for the consortium.

**Anne Carr-Wiggin** and **Louise Reimer** write about their hope that users of the **Edmonton Public Library** and the **University of Alberta Libraries** can "move seamlessly between our institutions throughout their lives" and what is being done to make that so. **Lisa German**, describing the planning of the **2007 Pennsylvania Library Association Annual Conference** by a group from the **Penn State University Libraries** and **Schlow Centre Region Library**, writes that she has "worked in two other states and has never seen any collaborative effort quite like this between the public and the university research library."

## We Need to Know More About the Other Libraries In Our Users' Lives

I live in a city with remarkable public libraries — the **Salt Lake Public Library** and its **Sweet Avenues Branch** are my home libraries and I love them best of all. But they're not all we have to offer — there's also the **Salt Lake County system**.

The first thing you notice about a **Salt Lake County Library** is how many cars are in the parking lot and how many people are in the

library. There are 18 libraries — I have been in most of them — and they're all like this, as far as I can see, almost all the time they are open. The users aren't concentrated at the computers — as they tend to be in my library. They are at the open "Hold" shelves which hold hundreds and hundreds of items, and they're clustered around the self check-out stand. They're going through racks of CDs and videos. There are even people reading the periodicals. And the newspapers (printed ones).

How do they get people to do this?

I asked about circulation stats. About a million, they said. That's kind of similar to ours, I thought. But it turns out they meant a million per month. Not annually. We have two pieces from librarians in this system — **Gretchen Freeman**, writing about what our higher ed students like about their public libraries, and **Samantha Larsen** making an analogy between public libraries and **Wal-Mart**.

The head of our Government Documents Division, **Kate Holvoet**, told me that **Salt Lake County** is her very favorite library. Why so, I asked? Because, she said, it allows for the satisfaction of asynchronous desire.

This was definitely a new concept for me. How do you translate that? Well, she said, it means that satisfaction is guaranteed — no visit, given her finely tuned system, lets you leave empty handed — and — she finds herself reading more widely and more different sorts of books than she believes she would in the print-only world. A pretty encouraging idea.

## And Finally, So as to Remind Us....

Finally, because she is in Ethiopia and telling me things I didn't know and feel I ought to know, I asked one of our most respected librarians, **Marie Paiva**, who is spending her sabbatical there (this is the third time she has gone to work in Ethiopian libraries) to describe for us what Ethiopian libraries are like. I thought this should put an end to any tendency to whine about our plight in either public or academic libraries here. And perhaps focus us on finding ways to help across the international boundaries — as we also think about how to do that at home. 🌱

