2011 ACRL Conference Report
Gregory Morrison
Wheaton College

The 2011 ACRL Conference was held in the expansive Philadelphia Convention Center (PCC) located in the heart of Philly. Those of us from Chicago, of course, were praying for a respite from the winter dreariness of Chicago, but it followed us out there. I actually purchased my hotel room through Priceline. $90 per night, but it put me about a mile from the Convention Center. I accepted the walk to and fro as good for getting a feel of the city, and my impression was largely positive. There was, however, the episode one day in a downtown Starbucks.  A woman sat at a table next to the cafe window. Her boyfriend was ordering their drinks. All of a sudden a man walked by the woman's table, snatched her purse, and raced out the nearest door, disappearing into a parking garage right next door. Only then did the manager reveal to the rest of us there that this happens occasionally, and to prepare accordingly.

Session Highlights:

The previous ACRL conference might have been justifiably labeled "LibGuides 2009." This year's program was dominated by the twim themes of faculty collaboration and librarians as educators ("instructional literacy").  There was so much about faculty collaboration in fact that a colleague from Calvin College warned, he'd rip off his clothes and run out screaming if he heard one more word about it.

*Keynote Speakers* - I took in two speakers, Tiffany Shlain and Raj Patel. Both were engaging speakers and their speeches interesting generally, but neither was very successful relating their respective topics to our professional lives, Patel in particular. Shlain contends that humans by nature "love to connect" and that's in part behind the flourishing of social networking and mobile devices. At the same time she recognizes that these very things can leave us disconnected to those actually physically around us. So she and her husband agreed to have a weekly sabbath from all technology. Patel documented the high price we pay for our brand of capitalism, the consumption it generates, the inequities and injustices it perpetuates, and its destructive impact on the natural environment.  Librarians along with everyone else should join in to help reform our systems and our lives.  He also expressed the great debt he owes to librarians who helped him in his scholarship and publishing...and his admiration for many of the same, who can also "drink him under the table."

*Char Booth* - Char was one of the highlights of the conference. Intelligent and humble. Always a winning combination. She struck a cord with a lot of people there when she spoke of the "crushing anxiety" she experienced while instructing students early on, and the realization that library schools currently offer little or nothing that prepares us to fulfill this role effectively. She encouraged those of us who do teach to become reflective learners (What just happened?) as one means toward becoming effective teachers. Her talk was essentially an introduction to educational theory and instruction design. I also appreciated how she depicted our role and work as librarians in terms of being the "anti-tunnelists," the "original systems theorists" and

those often in the best position to see the connections between things, our interdisciplinary (dis)position. Char went on to talk about the use of technology in instruction, and urged us to start the process by establishing specific outcomes for the instruction, by figuring out our audience so as to more effectively draw them in to receive what you're teaching.  And continually ask yourself what technology is helping you to do (or not). Technology in service of learning, and not the other way around. Finally, I found helpful her characterization of the kind of professional communities we should cultivate. "Communities of practice" she calls them, where colleagues share their expertise (mentoring),  and novices are drawn into the sphere of the trained and experienced ones. In her book *Reflective learning, effective teaching*, she describes an element of this practice as 'scaffolding,' which is "learning support in circumstances where knowledge is difficult to acquire independently....insight into the teaching practices of your colleagues [that] can catalyze shared initiatives, reduce duplication of effort, and build the collegiality necessary to maintain productive teaching and working relationships." (p. 28)

*Thursday paper related to faculty collaboration, and creating allies* - Librarians from one school described the relative success of a colloquium that brought librarians and classroom faculty together to evaluate (or 'deconstruct') current class assignments.  The faculty were paid a stipend. Over time these sessions became less structured and more interactive.  It's best to offer such a colloquium between semesters (e.g. May, August, or January). Start by courting the "easy departments," and be persistent.

*Friday morning paper session* - The first paper outlined the process of abandoning so-called "legacy services." Librarians are adept at adding new systems but often wait too long to retire old ones that can no longer justify their *raison d'etre*. The second paper drew lessons from the ancient library in Alexandria. The principle lesson: devote yourselves to continual environmental scanning in order to anticipate and exploit change. The Alexandria library staff failed at this apparently?  And the third paper in this session sought to give us tips for "moving on good ideas," and that it's important for organizations to reward that effort.  The speaker suggests that libraries have a place (e.g. online wiki) to put new ideas, and a schedule of reviewing them together.

*Friday afternoon paper session* - The first paper described some experiments at Grand Valley College that were conducted on the basis of selected library use statistics. In one case, they moved most of their reference collection to circulation and found them actually circulating whereas they were never consulted in the reference collection.  It was noted that more and more  library school grads exist their programs without every getting an an introduction to the standard print reference titles.  Highlights from the other two papers:  1) twitter and facebook as means to help students overcome their aversion to "expose their ignorance" and to get them to externalize their thought process. 2) another occasion to emphasis the importance of defining good learning outcomes and reflective learning as teachers: learning outcomes tuning pedagogy.

*Poster sessions highlights*:

- *Feeling like a third wheel?* Strengthen faculty-student-librarian relationships with tried and true methods of increasing mutual understanding, namely, focus groups, surveys, and informal conversations and formal interviews.
- *Subject guides: rethinking approaches.* Offered some good ideas to improve our research guides, e.g. consolidating our course and subject guides together in a single pop-down box, and listing the course guides (indented) under the appropriate subject/major