



Feature Story

OCLC Members Council encourages increased participation, cooperation at local and global levels

by Bob Murphy

During its May 18-20 meeting at OCLC headquarters in Dublin, Ohio, OCLC Members Council took steps to encourage broader participation in the worldwide library cooperative, discussed ways in which OCLC can help lead libraries through challenging economic times, and elected its leadership team for 2003-2004.

It was the last of three regularly scheduled meetings in the 2002-2003 term focusing on "Libraries, Their Present and Future Global Environments: National, Regional, Local."



Kristin Senecal passes the OCLC Members Council president's gavel to Bob Seal.

Council passed a resolution to extend its 2001 authorization of six transitional delegates from areas outside the United States to serve on OCLC Members Council to help broaden participation in governance of the global cooperative. Pending approval by the OCLC Board of Trustees, two delegates from OCLC Asia Pacific, OCLC PICA (Europe) and OCLC Latin America regions will serve three-year terms from October 2004 through June 2007.

Kristin Senecal, Assistant Director, Technical Services, Waidner-Spahr Library, Dickinson College, and 2002-2003 Members Council president, introduced the focus for discussion on "local" cooperation.

"Members Council is interested in the variety of types of cooperation happening on the local level, and how it might be changing," said Ms. Senecal. "The growth of electronic content makes cooperation on such tasks as cooperative collection development possible beyond the local level. After all, there is no need for geographic proximity when sharing an e-book."

Ms. Senecal noted that trust is key to successful cooperation, and lack of it may prevent librarians and other knowledge workers from realizing the full potential of electronic formats. "It takes a high degree of confidence in and knowledge of another institution and its staff to cede to it some portion of the collection development responsibilities from your institution," she said.



Jay Starratt, Dean of Library and Information Services and Associate Vice Chancellor for Information Technology, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, spoke about cooperation at the state and local levels in Illinois.

Mr. Starratt said local and state cooperative efforts are intermingled, and noted that cooperation in Illinois begins with the State Library. "In Illinois, cooperation is who we are," he said. "Cooperation comes about through hard work-it's not as much fun as it looks. We find ways to create new efficiencies and new services that we could not accomplish alone."

Mr. Starratt said access to electronic information in Illinois has become so common that students use these resources long before they reach college.

"ILCSO (Illinois Library Computer Systems Organization) has been funding databases that provide all libraries with access," he said. "People are coming to college who already have years of experience with WorldCat."

Mr. Starratt said focus, communication, leadership, dedication and trust are the keys to cooperative success in Illinois, particularly when libraries are facing difficult economic times.

Jay Jordan, OCLC president and CEO, spoke about OCLC's decision to hold prices at current levels through June 2004 in recognition of the current economic realities facing libraries.

"Since OCLC's founding in 1967, one of its chartered objectives has been to 'reduce the rate of rise of per-unit library costs,'" said Mr. Jordan. "Because we have operated in a business-like manner, we have the financial strength to keep our prices at current levels even as we continue to invest in new services and the new technological platform for the WorldCat database."

Mr. Jordan also provided an update on progress on OCLC's newest services, such as QuestionPoint, Digital and Preservation Resources, netLibrary and WebJunction.

William J. Crowe, chair, OCLC Board of Trustees, looked back on 10 years service in OCLC governance, first as a Members Council delegate,

then council president, board member and board chair. Dr. Crowe briefly described the unique talents and experience of each of the board's 15 members, and said he looked forward to the work ahead.

"I sense a revived commitment to the values that always have marked OCLC when it has been most successful as a cooperative: open communication based on mutual trust and respect, a strong commitment to a culture of collaboration and contribution, and an improved understanding of the challenges-and sometimes of the necessary tensions-that can be associated with OCLC's having to operate in a businesslike manner," said Dr. Crowe.

Also during the May meeting, Members Council:

- Passed a resolution encouraging OCLC to strengthen its library staff development efforts.
- Heard an update by program director, Marilyn Mason, on WebJunction, the new Web-based service developed by OCLC and partners from a Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation grant designed to help libraries share knowledge and experience.
- Heard an update and discussed the Library Access Program, designed to increase visibility of libraries on the World Wide Web by making library holdings available on search engines.
- Met in small Interest Group discussions focused on Cataloging and Metadata, Cooperative Reference, Digital Libraries and Research, Global Librarianship, Resource Sharing, and Preservation/Electronic Collections.
- Met in small discussion sections arranged by type of library, such as Large Research Libraries, Government and Special Libraries, State Academic Libraries, Public Libraries, and Private Academic Libraries.
- Discussed the issue of unauthorized use of OCLC records.

In reviewing her term as Members Council president, Ms. Senecal pointed to several accomplishments, including: reinvigorating the "library-type groups," and raising their visibility and importance; continuing to push council upstream in advising OCLC on strategic issues; opening further the lines of communication between the Board of Trustees and Members Council; and continuing to raise awareness of Members Council to the needs and concerns of OCLC members from outside the United States.

"I am grateful to all the people who have worked so hard this year to make Members Council more integral to the workings of OCLC," said Ms. Senecal.

Ms. Senecal passed the president's gavel to Bob Seal, University Librarian, Mary Couts Burnett Library, Texas Christian University, who will serve as 2003-2004 Members Council president. Delegates elected Charles E. Kratz, Dean of Libraries and Director of Information Resources Customer Service, Weinberg Memorial Library, University of Scranton, as vice president/president elect for 2003-2004. Elected as delegates-at-large to the Members Council Executive Committee: Dianne Leong Man, Deputy University Librarian, Wartenweiler Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa; Bruce Newell, Director, Montana Library Network; Emma Bradford Perry, Professor and Dean of Libraries, John B. Cade Library, Southern University.

"Innovation, Risk-Taking and New Models of Service: Library Survival in the 21st Century" is the theme for the 2003-2004 term.

"Recent changes in technology, networking, and the economy, along with increased patron expectations and sophistication require librarians to re-examine how we provide access, collections, services, and facilities," said Mr. Seal. "Survival in this environment requires innovative solutions, taking risks, and introducing sometimes radical-or, at least non-traditional-models of service.

"I would like Members Council to discuss these issues and look for ways for OCLC to partner with us to identify innovative, forward-looking solutions," said Mr. Seal.

Among the topics for next year's council are "Globalization of OCLC Members Council: The Next Steps" and "Communication for Success in the OCLC Collaborative." A new Committee on Communication for the Collaborative, chaired by Emma Perry, met May 19 to begin work.

The next OCLC Members Council meeting is scheduled for Oct. 26-28.

