

LIBRARY 21 COMMITTEE

MINUTES

9th Meeting

October 2, 1996

Senior Center, Central Square

The meeting was called to order by Co-Chair Nancy B. Woods at 6:42 P.M. in the Meeting Room of the Senior Center at Central Square.

Members in attendance:

Nancy B. Woods, Co-Chair
Richard Rossi, Co-Chair
William Barry
Ruth Butler
Karen Carmean
Ed DeAngelo
John Gintell
Andre Meyer
Karen Kosko
David Szlag
Emily West
Roger Boothe
Susan Flannery
Charles Sullivan

Co-Chair Woods welcomed the audience, committee members and guest speaker Ann Wolpert. She briefly reviewed the agenda for the evening and asked the members to introduce themselves for the benefit of the audience.

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:

Minutes procedure: Co-Chair Woods asked committee members in the future to let her have any changes to the minutes which she will relay to Don York as necessary.

Absences:

Co-Chair Woods asked the committee members to let her know in advance if they are unable to attend the scheduled meetings.

LIBRARY TOUR UP-DATE:

The Saturday, October 19th, tour preparations are complete. The bus has been arranged for. Reservation requests are coming in and any committee members wishing to take part who have not already reserved a seat, should let Emily West know by the end of tonight's meeting. The bus will depart from the Main Library for Everett at 10:00 AM and return to the Main Library at noon for a box lunch. Following lunch, the bus will depart for Waltham and Newton, returning to the Main Library no later than 5:00 PM.

SYMPOSIUM UP-DATE:

The symposium is set for the evening of Wednesday, October 23 and the various speakers confirmed. It is necessary that people RSVP if planning to attend as it is important to know the approximate numbers of attendees for whom to plan seating, refreshments, etc. Susan Flannery inquired as to the possibility of having a sign advertising the symposium erected on the City Hall lawn, but was told that this space is usually booked up well in advance. A sign in front of the main Library is probably possible. Co-Chair Rossi will look into advertising the event on the city's cable TV channel.

AREA IV FAIR:

Co-Chair Woods reported that she had been able to discuss the library with many people who visited the library table she staffed with Philecia Harris of the Valente Branch Library. Seventeen library cards were given out to non-users, but a surprisingly large number of people who stopped by were aware of and use the public libraries.

GUEST SPEAKER: Ann Wolpert, Director, M.I.T. Libraries.

Ms. Wolpert identified 4 kinds of libraries: public, school, private (corporate profit and non-profit) and academic, each kind being a quite separate sub-category with very different activities and usage. The academic libraries divide into two groupings, one consisting of the community college libraries and the liberal arts college libraries, the other being the academic research libraries such as those of Harvard and M.I.T. The latter have the mission of supporting the educational aims of the institution and also supporting high level research which is going on within the institution. She distributed a hand-out outlining the major points she would cover in defining the differences of the academic library from the public library, as well as what would be the latter part of her talk - the use of market research methods in public library planning.

Following her presentation on academic libraries she invited questions from the committee and audience before proceeding to the second topic. The many questions, which Ms. Wolpert answered carefully, included:

question: What services can the M.I.T. libraries provide to Cambridge citizens?

answer: There are neither the resources for nor a mission of providing public library style services to the M.I.T. community. For example, there are no children's services and no children's materials. There is no general reference collection similar to that of a public library, nor a similar style of reference service.

question: What about information technology and its effects?

answer: It is mostly supplemental to previous library roles, not a supplanter, just as TV didn't mean the end of radio. Nor has TV replaced print by any means as was once forecast. There are more books, more papers, more journals being published today than ever before.

question: What about CD Roms?

answer: While useful, they are not always reliable. They are dependant on and subject to hardware. The early ones are no longer useable as the hardware for which they were designed has been phased out. They are a very unstable asset long term. They require workstations, servers, climate control, and staff expertise. The useful life of a PC is three years and capital funding for replacement on an every three years basis is necessary.

question: What about interlibrary loans? Are they increasing? Is it due to costs?

answer: There is an increase, mostly driven by expanded awareness of what is available and where resulting from electronic indexes to holdings.

question: What about journals available in electronic format and those published only electronically?

answer: M.I.T. is not comfortable trusting publishers to keep such electronic files available long term. They may not be available for posterity. We need to look at the business and financial factors among others. Storage costs, needs, and conditions for the future are unknown. These electronic files will need to be refreshed and migrated to new platforms probably every five years. There are large ongoing costs if we are to keep being able to read and retrieve these as originally intended. The U.S. government has effectively lost the 1970 U.S. Census through a failure to refresh.

question: What is the number of internet terminals at M.I.T.?

answer: 425, but not all are in areas available to the public.

question: Does M.I.T. have a program equivalent to the Gutenberg Project at Cornell?

answer: There is some interest. The Aga Khan collection is being treated this way.

question: Are students continuing to use books for research or are they migrating to on-line sources?

answer: The younger ones prefer on-line. Freshmen are unused to using libraries. Students now have to be trained in what can be found electronically and what cannot. Paper costs for print-outs have a big implication.

question: Why invest in technology if it is so costly and short-lived?

answer: Don't, if its not really there or not really good. A lot of print has no electronic equivalent. Do, buy the "value added" - that which has good a good search engine. Depending on its nature, some information is better handled electronically versus print. Some electronic tools are excellent, but the cost is equivalent.

question: This issue has been raised in the past. Why not have Harvard and M.I.T. libraries open for the community to walk in and use.

answer: While there are cost implications as in the use of materials contracted for with publishers or licensed with a cost based on the size of the user body, the basic limitation of the academic libraries for use by the general public is the nature of what they can get at these libraries. Most of the material in these collections is way over the average head.

Because of time limitations, Ms. Wolpert summarized the market research portion of her talk to the basics of the distributed outline, addressing how to collect information from your library's constituency even if that constituency is not as restricted and well defined as that of the academic library. She particularly recommended an article from the Harvard Business Review of Jan./Feb. 1996, giving an overview of market research techniques.

Two more questions were asked:

question: What is the student - library space ratio at M.I.T. and how has it changed over the years?

answer: There has been no change as the student body has stayed roughly the same over the years, at about 10,000. The MIT community relies upon the public libraries of the area to meet its non-academic needs.

question: How will the Nintendo Generation use libraries?

answer: As you, as parents or as teachers, train them. Students don't have the knowledge base to decide - they need to be told. As to public library use, it has remained strong throughout all kinds of changes and has never been greater than today.

Co-Chair Woods thanked Ms. Wolpert and asked her if she would remain available as a resource to the Library 21 Committee.

OTHER LIBRARIES WORK GROUP: Bill Barry reported that the group had pin pointed local libraries for the group to visit, following which the bus tour for October 19th was set up to enable more people to view some of the best examples. For non-local libraries, harder to visit, the group has been developing a listing of those libraries/communities, comparable to the Cambridge situation, from which to seek information. They have a draft of easy to answer questions to be asked. A final, narrowed, list is now being determined.

FINAL REPORT: David Szlag distributed a draft of the final reporting document and lead the committee through the proposed process.

Co-Chair Rossi cautioned of the need for the committee to resist diversions from its mission and keep being disciplined if it is to bring its work back the central points of the process within the time frame.

NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY GROUPS: Fran Wirta reported that the Neighborhood meetings are proceeding and the group will be on target with the January schedule. The next two meetings are at the Collins Branch, October 17, 6-8 PM, and at the O'Neill Branch, October 22, 7-9 PM.

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