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Heard on the Net: Ain't Gonna Work on Charles'* Farm No More

Jill Emery, University of Texas Libraries (for now)

In June, I'll be joining a number of colleagues in making my departure from the academic research library landscape after ten years of service at both the University of Houston Libraries and The University of Texas Libraries. Starting 1 July 2011, my new job will be Collections Librarian at Portland State University. There are many personal decisions that went into making this move but there were also various professional considerations that played into this decision as well. First and foremost is the realization that serving as a mid-manager in an academic research library is not my strength due to the fact that I am not patient enough for this level of academic librarianship. Patience is not just a virtue for most academic research libraries; it is the virtue and after ten years, my patience has run out.

A recent one page article entitled: "The Weary Middle" by Ann Pace in *T+D Magazine* notes:

"Organizations tend to spend their money on executives and the first-level supervisory ranks, not growing their leaders in the middle. The recession has kept Baby Boomers in senior leader positions, but once they begin to retire during the next several years, organizations that have failed to invest sufficient resources into growing their middle leaders will feel the burn." (January 2011 p.22)

It is hard to find true investment in middle management by the association of research libraries. Their leadership fellows program is firmly aimed at and most often geared towards librarians who have already reached the senior administrative leadership ranks with titles like associate, director, assistant director; and are looking to be developed into directors and provosts. <http://www.arl.org/leadership/rllf/index.shtml>. Looking at the most recent class of 2011-2012, only four librarians chosen out of the twenty-five fellows truly come from middle-management positions which aren't even one-fifth of the attendees. Furthermore, from reviewing the past ten years of *Library Journal's* Movers and Shakers, less than one-fourth of these designees had come from academic research libraries when selected as a Mover and Shaker. What is more compelling is that of these designees less than half continued to work at academic research libraries three to five years after the designation had been given. It would make an interesting study to see if the American Library Association's emerging leader program suffers a similar fate with early-career librarians also pulling away from the academic research libraries over the next five years.

It appears that many academic research libraries are still relying on the 20th century construct that once hired and working for them there is little incentive to leave and by their very nature, they will retain the leadership needed for the future. I had lunch recently with one colleague and we were both marveling at the fact that both of our fathers had worked twenty years plus for the same companies. In my father's case, he had two long-term job commitments first serving a full military term in the armed services and then with a private company when he retired from service. This type of company commitment is definitely a hold-over of the 20th century job marketplace and certainly not an expectation in the 21st century where it is more likely that an employee goes through five to ten jobs over a career in any given field. Therefore, the belief of becoming a "company" man and/or "academic research librarian" is enough to retain staff can be seen as a false construct in this day and age.

Lastly, academic research libraries are still resting on their collections prominence and have yet to make the full shift to librarians as community developers. David Lankes recently gave a very timely and inspiring presentation at Special Libraries Association/Arabian Gulf Chapter in Muscat, Oman entitled: Awesome Librarians. This presentation is available via <http://player.vimeo.com/video/20528109>, <http://vimeo.com/rdlankes>, <http://vimeo.com> [This code supports iPad, iPhone, & Flash]

Among the points made, were that librarians need to work on building conversations & scholarship possibilities not collections. This may seem an odd message for a future collections librarian to hold but I'm completely on board with Lankes

that there are new methods and ways to development to gain the content and conversations of our libraries in the 21st century that exist outside of the standard constructs of collection building and development left-over from the 20th century. It is his belief; the community engagement by the Bibliotheca Alexandrina librarians was by and large what kept the library safe from being ransacked during the recent uprisings in Egypt. His presentation dovetails nicely into another presentation recently given. This one is entitled: Turning Collection Development Inside Out by Dorothea Salo as a VIMEO to the Ontario Library Association 2011 meeting.

<http://player.vimeo.com/video/20019850>, <http://vimeo.com/user6041864>, <http://vimeo.com>.

In this presentation, Salo advocates for librarians to build communities through developing relevant local collections through your institutional repository, developing a place where local digital culture can be captured like the Chicago Underground Library, and taking an active role in collecting campus scholarly output. While some academic research libraries are engaged in these types of activities, not all are and what is being done is occurring in a very piecemeal way even within any given academic research library. Oftentimes, these developments are only being implemented by a sub-set of the staff who has found the right way to advocate and/or get the experimentation space to develop their initiatives. In many cases, the pull to maintain process and procedures of standard collection development still over-rides the developments and initiatives to start new ways and methods of collection engagement. This is part of the reason why patron-driven acquisitions is such a buzz topic in the library marketplace these days. It is seen as extreme radicalism to turn over the selection to library patrons but in fact, this sort of change is just a baby step along the paths we need to be taking in libraries. There are so many other forms of community engagement that will result in collection management that can and should be occurring in libraries now.

In the end, I think the association of research libraries will get there as is outlined in their 2030 Scenario Set.

[<http://www.arl.org/rtl/index.shtml>]. However, it is going to take what philosopher Alain de Botton recently tweeted: "Work only starts when the fear of doing nothing finally exceeds the fear of doing something badly."

In the midst of this teapot tempest, I'm going to go and work in a library setting where change and growth are occurring and not just being strategically mapped out for future implementation. I see my choice in change of jobs at this point as engaging the 21st century now and trying my best to be just like I am.

*Charles=Charles Lowry, current executive director of the Association of Research Libraries