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AN INTERVIEW WITH PATRICIA SENN BREIVIK

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In February 2007, the editors of *Communications in Information Literacy* (CIL) interviewed Patricia Senn Breivik, author of *Higher Education in the Internet Age: Libraries Creating a Strategic Edge*. The interview was recorded and audio files (MP3 format) are available as supplements to this brief introduction.

Patricia Senn Breivik retired in June 2005 as Dean of the University Library, San Jose State University, where she had been instrumental in the merger with San Jose Public Library. Previously she has served as Library Dean at Wayne State University; Associate Vice President for Information Resources at the Towson State University Campus of the University of Maryland; and Director of the Library and professor, University of Colorado, Auraria. In 1998, Dr. Breivik founded and served as the first chair of the National Forum on Information Literacy. She holds an MLS from Pratt Institute and a DLS from Columbia University.

Recently, Dr. Breivik authored, with E. Gordon Gee, *Higher Education in the Internet Age: Libraries Creating a Strategic Edge*. This book closely and critically assesses the role of the

library in colleges and universities, strongly advocating for information literacy as part of the core educational mission for higher education. Dr. Breivik suggests that information literacy is a “learning issue,” not strictly a “library issue,” and that university administrators would do well to recognize the value librarians have as educational leaders. Breivik and Gee envision a core strategic role for libraries, one their book describes in considerable detail. The book is a valuable resource for any university librarian or administrator.

Our questions for Dr. Breivik, based largely on readings from the book, examine information literacy as a learning issue, the implications of an information-literate citizenry, resource-based learning, and methods for strengthening our libraries and their strategic positions within higher education. The CIL editors are very grateful for Dr. Breivik’s time and her insightful answers.

REFERENCE

Breivik, P. S., & Gee, E. G. (2006). *Higher education in the Internet age : libraries creating a strategic edge* (Fully updated and rev. ed.). Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers.

APPENDIX

The following questions were asked during the interview. Following each question is a synopsis of Dr. Breivik's response.

Audio files (MP3 format) are available for each question and answer given during the interview and may be downloaded from the CIL web site:

<http://www.comminfolit.org/>

Question One:

In your most recent book, *Higher Education in the Internet Age: Libraries Creating a Strategic Edge*, you make the point more than once that “information literacy is fundamentally a learning issue, not a library issue.” Could you please explain for our readers and listeners what you mean by this?

Dr. Breivik explains that historically librarians have been in the business of library instruction, of bibliographic instruction, but that we need to expand our role.

“I think we have to move beyond that *open head, pour in knowledge* image, to focus on student learning outcomes,” Breivik says. “We need to concentrate on preparing information skeptics, who can find the information they need when they need it, long after they have graduated.”

Dr. Breivik goes on to explain that information literacy plays a pivotal role in this information age. Dr. Breivik notes, “In work that the National Forum on Information Literacy has done with UNESCO, in fact ... stated as part of its proclamation that information literacy is a basic human right.”

Question Two:

Regarding the importance of lifelong learning, you write, “If they [students] finish their education thinking that they can find all the information they need through a fast Google search and that libraries are useful only for classroom assignments and recreational reading, they are not information literate.” This has broad implications in terms of active citizenship and democratic decision-making. Do you believe that this is a primary concern for educational administrators?

Dr. Breivik begins with an anecdote about an information literacy education session for a service learning class that had registered many people to vote but had not considered the need to educate people on finding information about candidates and issues.

“I am concerned,” Dr. Breivik says, “that students need to understand the importance of not only being responsible citizens, but as part of that to be sure of what they are speaking to, or what they are voting for.”

“As for educational administrators, I am concerned about those who try to sell relativism ... or who do not foster a kind of balanced dialogue on topics on campuses...” Dr. Breivik warns.

Question Three:

In the book, you discuss the need for faculty to move beyond the “reserves-lecture-textbook” approach to teaching, and to adopt “resource-based learning” instead. Could you please elaborate on this and indicate how libraries fit in the equation?

“We need to be carefully designing the learning experience to force students to go out and find the very information from which to do their learning, and it cannot just be online.”

Dr. Breivik adds, “The role for the librarians that I see in this is to be the support partner for the classroom faculty member.” She goes on to suggest specific activities ranging from current

awareness and research support to helping design learning activities, such as case studies, that would help students develop their information seeking abilities.

Question Four:

What you were saying about faculty was very interesting, that there tends to be this movement away from “sage on the stage,” reflective of a movement away from the role of expert to that of “the wisdom of crowds,” the approach used by Wikipedia and similar online sources. Are we seeing the “death” of expertise?

Dr. Breivik compares Wikipedia to the anecdotal small businessman who gets his information on how to run his business from a friend, instead of going to a more authoritative resource. She remarks, “It is going to be important that we don’t just move to promoting information literacy in schools and colleges and forget about the workforce.” She also quotes author and educator Harlan Cleveland on how information is a valuable commodity of which we want as little as possible.

Dr. Breivik goes on to comment on the general pressures faced by modern college students and how they often put forth the minimum effort necessary to complete any given assignment, and says that perhaps giving them additional time to complete their assignments could help alleviate this pressure.

Question Five:

Surely, all college and university administrators value their libraries. But, not all of them seem to have a vision for leveraging their libraries in terms of recruitment, retention, development, support, outreach, and so on. What must libraries do not only to gain the attention of their institutional administrators, but also to convince them of the pivotal role that libraries must play in today’s educational environment?

Dr. Breivik recently authored *Higher Education in the Internet Age: Libraries Creating a*

Strategic Edge with E. Gordon Gee for specifically this reason. She believes librarians need to be more aggressive in “stepping up to the table.” Library directors should routinely meet with deans to better understand their departmental needs, and provide them with summaries from the literature about what other schools are doing to meet those needs, to help influence the administration of the university. Dr. Breivik also recommends librarians have an active and participatory role in university governance.

Dr. Breivik also suggests the business sector as a natural partner for pursuing information literacy within the university. Businesses, she explains, recognize the value of strong information skills in the workplace and could be a valuable partner in influencing the development of information literacy programs in a university or college setting.