

ACRL Conference

Hilda Kriel

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Summary

Hilda reported on their experience of the ACRL conference which confirmed that the high tech / high touch scenario which guides our new strategic plan is in line with international thinking. The culture and assertiveness of American university librarianship was also very obvious and reason for reflection. She used the metaphor of a tree that is floating in the clouds and came to the conclusion that we should pay more attention to the trunk (mindset and identity) and to grounding the roots (theory and philosophy of librarianship). Our skills and technology applications should be based on these.

DISCUSSION

The discussion started with the question: “What should we do to get grounded again?”

Various issues were raised namely:

- For librarianship to be a profession, it needs to be grounded in theory. (The underlying knowledge and principles that makes librarianship a profession).
- There is name confusion on who we are and what we can do. Some librarians are called information specialists and others subject librarians. It was noted that we should stick to “librarian” and be proud of it.
- We are still fighting a stereotype of a woman who issue books, young people find it amazing when they get to know what we do. For example an audience member who is responsible for websites, ClickUP etc. told us how surprised students were to find out what she actually does.
- It is our responsibility to market our fascination with information and knowledge, and to do it with enthusiasm.
- The closing of the Library Science Departments at Universities and the complexities surrounding the lack of interest from prospective students were discussed. Suggestions from the audience include community engagement and marketing of the profession at school level.
- Due to the limited library science courses presented, a lot of the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in our profession are lost. The statement was

made that new comers to the information profession are not able to deliver the kind of services wanted and needed by our clientele.

- The discussion continued by what the curriculum for Library and Information Science should include. A specialised subject was suggested. This suggestion led to a further discussion on whether one should have subject knowledge or not. Both sides were argued with differences in opinion.
- On a more personal note it was suggested that we as librarians should own our profession and be assertive in what we can do, similar to the Americans. Then the discussion continued on how their education differ from ours in the sense that their librarians do have for example a law degree together with their library science degree and that they decide to study the latter at a later stage in their lives. It was also noted that the naming of the degrees differ. One of the audience members stated that she felt intimidated by someone who had a Master's degree but in actual fact they had the same degree named differently.
- The discussion continued by the question how should we market and encourage use of our services and products. One could have all the products but we do not have the time to get to know a product in-depth and that library users look to us for having the in depth knowledge of the products. We not only need to know how to search for information but how to find it.
- We should have a bird's eye view on our products and services. We should take our library users and what they want into consideration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It was a thought provoking session that started a discussion on librarianship that needed to be discontinued due to time constraints. The need for a continuation of the discussion was expressed.
2. We need to collaborate with all role players in the profession to work towards a better image of the "librarian".
3. We need to market our skills, accomplishments and competencies amongst our users.