Libraries Team Builds for the Future

How does the modern library remain relevant?

That annoying question is constantly rearing its head in libraries, and so it sometimes seems that ideas are acted on as fast and furiously as possible to see if something, anything will work. Granted the process of testing new schemes is more careful and considered, but with the constancy of new innovation and the ever-changing way the world deals with our primary commodity — information — the approach sometimes seems about as focused as buckshot.

One unit of the Libraries that has an enviable ratio of success in the arena of shifting paradigms is the fledgling (by library standards) Library Instruction Services (LIS) group — a team of young up-and-comers who have a recent education in the field and experience with all kinds of new media and technologies that are in vogue with a primary constituency: students between the ages of 18-24.

It’s the group’s familiarity with the new modes of information sharing that provides them a unique perspective on a growing problem in higher education. Students have become accustomed to relying on spurious resources as the foundation for their study, a habit that could have detrimental effects in a professional application. It was recognition of this growing concern that laid the foundation for evolving certain traditional library structures into something with an almost exclusively modern purpose: teaching students the difference between good and bad information in easily locatable sources.

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LIS emerged in 2002 to take the place of an earlier unit – the Digital Information Literacy Office or DILO – and expanded on its mission to integrate information literacy (how to find, evaluate and ethically use information) into the campus-wide curriculum for general education. The group worked with subject specialists on incorporating the same training into departmental curricula, as well as to direct training and support librarians in instruction.

The big breakthrough began in September 2004, when the Commission of 125 released a report to then University President Larry R. Faulkner with recommendations for the future of the University. One of those recommendations was to revamp the core undergraduate curriculum.

In September 2006, Dr. Paul Woodruff, Darrell K. Royal Professor in Ethics and American Society from the Department of Philosophy, was appointed as the first Dean of Undergraduate Studies to institute and oversee this core curriculum.

The new core curriculum that Woodruff developed included a requirement that every freshman take a Signature Course—interdisciplinary lectures with small discussion sections or 18-person seminars that are proposed and taught by UT faculty and designed to encourage the development of critical thinking skills.

Although the Libraries had been working with freshmen courses for years including the Freshmen Seminars program that was a precursor to the new Signature Courses, a primary impediment to success had been an inability to reach every student. The mission of LIS – to teach all freshmen baseline information literacy skills – had never been achievable because there were no courses common to every freshman. Woodruff understood this essential need and accepted a 2007 Libraries proposal to integrate information literacy into the signature courses by 2010.

So it was that the Libraries would finally be in a position to influence almost every student of the University – even those who might somehow never set foot in one of the branch libraries – and in a way and at a time that was relevant to the changing modes of research. The group developed a number of programmatic implementations that would hew to their mission. They began collaborating with faculty on assignment design. They initiated and began to teach course-integrated classes in hands-on classrooms where every student was situated in front of a laptop using a SMART board (interactive whiteboards). They created tutorials on subjects such as avoiding plagiarism for integration into course web sites and embedding in online courses. Through a combination of these methods, LIS now reaches almost 3,000 lower division undergraduates every year, and that number will only increase as the programs are more fully integrated into the Signature Courses and the program expands.

This year, the labor of love by the LIS group is finally starting to get some of the public recognition it deserves. The Library Instruction Roundtable – an arm of the Texas Library Association – recently awarded its Library Instruction Project of the Year honor to the LIS team for their Signature Course Information Literacy program. LIS is headed by librarian Michele Ostrow, and is composed of First-Year Experience Librarian Cindy Fisher, Information Literacy Librarian A.J. Johnson, Instruction & Outreach Librarian Meghan Sitar and Graduate Research Assistant Emily Wood. The most recent addition to the team is Library Assistant Jackie McCormick who handles the group’s web presence and design, and who is being eased into a teaching role. Rounding out the group is Library Assistant Dan Barrera, who keeps the day-to-day administrative affairs in order.

This tight-knit group has so effectively attacked their original mission that they’ve found room to experiment with concepts that not only brush hard against their goals, but expand on their role while supporting other needs of the Libraries. The group is in their second year of well-received undergraduate book discussions – faculty-led groups that take their turns at modern literature. And more recently, in partnership with other campus librarians, they’ve developed a pair of contests that generated some much-needed student input about perceptions of the Libraries; a Valentine’s Day promotion inquiring how students “loved” their libraries garnered over four hundred responses, and another survey asking students for their favorite study space had similar success. Both initiatives used an unobtrusive, almost conversational approach to gain valuable information that can be used in many strata of Libraries operations.
This spring the Libraries undertook a series of efforts to highlight Barbara Jordan’s life and career in advance of the University’s unveiling of a statue honoring the Texas politician.

The Libraries’ Barbara Jordan celebration – entitled “When Barbara Jordan Talked, We Listened,” from a quote by President Bill Clinton – began on March 27 with the opening of an exhibit of materials related to Jordan’s career co-hosted by the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History and featuring some of the Jordan resources from the Libraries collections. The small display of materials includes reproductions of Jordan campaign materials, photos, news articles and other ephemera. The Libraries has also provided a case of in-house resources, and has put a number of volumes on reserve for those who would like to study further about Jordan. The exhibition will be on display through June 1.

On Thursday April 16, 2009, the Libraries presented “When Barbara Jordan Talked, We Listened,” a panel discussion, produced by the Texas Politics Project in the College of Liberal Arts. The discussion moderated by TPP Director James Henson, featured Max Sherman, Former Dean of the LBJ School of Public Affairs, and Susan Rieff, Executive Director of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. The panel took place in the UFCU Student Learning Commons and was filmed and video of the event is available on the web.

The University of Texas at Austin Barbara Jordan Statue Project Committee composed of students, faculty, staff and alumni selected artist Bruce Wolfe of Piedmont, California, to create a commemorative outdoor bronze statue in honor of the late Barbara Jordan. Its unveiling on April 24 earned it the honor of being the first statue of a woman to be installed on The University of Texas at Austin campus. The statue site is located at 24th and Whitis Streets, just north of the Tower.

In 1972, Jordan became the first black woman from a southern state elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. She served in the House until 1979. After she retired from politics, Jordan taught courses on intergovernmental relations, political values and ethics at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the university. Jordan died in 1996.
Fourth Nilsson does “The Real Thing”

This year marked the fourth anniversary of the David O. Nilsson Lecture in Contemporary Drama, and much as last year, the format belied the title’s implication.

Three outstanding stage actors performed scenes from Tom Stoppard’s meta-drama “The Real Thing” and Director of Shakespeare at Winedale Dr. James Loehlin provided commentary, engaging the audience in what could have passed for a master class.

British actress Eunice Roberts hopped the pond to join her former colleague Matthew Radford – who’s been keeping sharp with Austin Shakespeare while working on a graduate degree in English at UT – and Austin Critics’ Circle darling David Stahl to treat the fifty-plus attendees to a unique evening of theatre.

The concept, as imagined by Loehlin and English faculty Dr. Kurt Heinzelman, was to present the crowd with the opening scenes from Stoppard’s mind-bender, then question their perceptions about the play and, by virtue of its structure, their own reality. The performance, played out to near perfection by the players, provided some lively back-and-forth between the audience, “director” Loehlin and the actors themselves.

After the first “act” of the night, Loehlin brought the players back to stage where they presented the scenes again, but this time in the style of direction as imagined by two of Stoppard’s contemporaries, one each from London and New York: Harold Pinter and Mike Nichols, respectively. The contrast between the actors’ interpretations of Nichols’ post-nuclear, plasticine Americans and Pinter’s loathing and loathsome Brits was unmistakable.

The David O. Nilsson Lecture was founded through the generosity of Dr. David O. Nilsson, a retired mathematics instructor at The University of Texas at Austin, independent scholar and Henrik Ibsen aficionado.

Past lectures have featured the Swedish novelist Lars Gustaffson (speaking on paradox in Ibsen’s “The Wild Duck”) and a panel of local playwrights including internationally renowned Kirk Lynn and Keene Prize winner George Brant (discussing the state and fate of theater).

Academy award winner visits the Benson

Jorge Drexler, well-known Uruguayan singer and composer, accompanied by UT Artes Américas director Joe Randel, took a break from SXSW activities to visit the Benson Latin American Collection on March 19.

Drexler won an Academy Award for his song, “Al otro lado del río,” from the 2004 film The Motorcycle Diaries, which featured Gael García Bernal as the young Che Guevara.

While browsing the Uruguayan literature section in the Benson stacks, Drexler was amazed to find many works by and about a little known but influential writer, Felisberto Hernández. “I just read one of his books, and look, you have them all and some I didn’t know had been translated [into English]!” A moment later, Drexler found a book penned by his aunt’s ex-husband and a few seconds after that, a book of poetry by young Uruguayans published in the 1970s. Opening the book at random, he found a poem by a good friend to which Drexler has written music.

Clearly overwhelmed, Drexler noted, “I had no idea the University of Texas had so much literature from my country.”
Garza brings out the crowds for ¡A Viva Voz!

Renowned Chicana artist Carmen Lomas Garza came to town as guest of honor for the Benson Latin American Collection’s 7th Annual ¡A Viva Voz! celebration, and her fans followed.

Garza – whose papers reside at the Benson – related to the crowd of over one hundred her formative years both as a girl growing up in the culturally-rich South Texas burg of Kingsville, and as an artist who found her calling early in life.

An exhibition of over twenty works by Garza will be on display at the Benson through August.

Guest curator Claudia Zapata – a graduate student at The University of Texas at Austin in Art & Art History – and Dr. Roberto Tejada, associate professor in Art & Art History, introduced the attendees to Garza and provided their insight into the artist’s work. Zapata is currently producing an online exhibit of the featured works that will be available later this year.

Drawing on her experiences in a close-knit Mexican-American community, Garza’s work focuses on memories of everyday life with her family and friends.

Heath Named Chair of North American Library Board

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University of Texas Libraries Director and Vice Provost Fred Heath has been elected Chair of the Board of Directors of the Center for Research Libraries (CRL), a consortium of North American university, college and independent research libraries.

Heath succeeds Yale University Librarian Alice Prochaska, and will serve along with representatives of such prominent universities as Emory, Michigan and Duke, among others. He will serve a one-year term, and is eligible for re-election.

CRL was formed in 1949 as the Midwest Inter-Library Center (MILC) in an effort to plan and build a central regional collection deposit library to house materials from thirteen Midwestern universities. The group eventually changed its name and broadened the scope of the project to include North American institutions in the late 1960s. By 1974, CRL represented 130 members.

Today, the CRL claims 250 participating institutions with a collection of approximately four million items. CRL acquires and preserves traditional and digital resources for research and teaching and makes them available to member institutions through interlibrary loan and electronic delivery.
Clint Chamberlain Recommends

**Clint Chamberlain is Coordinator for Electronic Resources at the University of Texas Libraries.**

An avid reader, Clint has taken some time to offer recommendations for your reading pleasure.

**Dog Years: A Memoir (2007)**
**By Mark Doty**

Although I am a devoted animal lover, I tend to shy away from most books about pets because they are too often full of mawkish sentimentality. Award-winning poet Mark Doty’s account of his life with two dogs, Arden and Beau, also shies away from cheap emotion in favor of another approach. Doty’s poetry is in large part elegiac; this memoir continues in that vein. Although we get plenty of vignettes that showcase each dog’s personality, from goofy, lovable Beau to the quietly regal Arden, what Doty is ultimately about here is the question of why and how we choose to love, when the object of our affection (dog, human, or otherwise) is, in the end, likely to be lost to us. As a result, the book ultimately becomes not so much about two particular dogs, or even about doggishness in general, but rather an exploration of the deeper mysteries of what it means to be human: love, attachment, death, grief, and happiness. In spite of this meditation on loss, though, Dog Years is not a dark book at all but rather is suffused with a kind of joy.

**By Jennifer 8. Lee**

In 2005, an unusually large number of ticket holders won the Powerball lottery. Upon further investigation, it was discovered that each of the winners had selected their winning numbers using those printed on the back of a slip of paper found in a fortune cookie. This discovery set Jennifer 8. Lee, a daughter of Chinese immigrants whose middle name “8” in fact connotes prosperity in Chinese, on a quest to uncover the history of the fortune cookie – a food that is perhaps the quintessence of Chinese take-out in America, yet mostly unheard of in China. Lee ends up embarking on a journey that criss-crosses the United States and eventually takes her to China. What she learns during her travels makes for an enlightening view of not only what most Americans think of as Chinese food (such as the fact that there was a real General Tso, but he had nothing to do with the chicken dish that bears his name), but also about American culture, immigration issues past and present, and our relationships with food and what those relationships signify to ourselves and to the world.

**Sin in the Second City: Madams, Ministers, Playboys and the Battle for America’s Soul (2007)**
**By Karen Abbott**

Set in Chicago in the early years of the 20th century, freelance journalist Abbott’s book is non-fiction that reads like a novel yet also like something ripped from today’s newspapers. Featuring crooked politicians, crusading reformers, lurid tales of white slavery, and a scandalous shooting of department store heir Marshall Field, Jr., the story focuses on sisters Ada and Minna Everleigh (names they assumed along with a storied past so convoluted that it’s a wonder even they could keep their own tales straight), owners of the world-famous Everleigh Club brothel that operated from 1900 to 1911 in Chicago’s rough-and-tumble Levee district. The excesses of the Everleigh Club and its neighbors would help bring about the Mann Act, meant to bring an end to human trafficking, while also providing the perfect conditions for the creation of what would eventually evolve into the F.B.I. Abbott’s book is thoroughly researched and well-written, such that the many characters spring to life, especially the roguish and conniving Everleigh sisters. One aspect I most appreciated was how even-handed Abbott is in her treatment of the various personages, no matter which end of the moral spectrum they fell upon. It would be easy to cast the Everleigh sisters, their competitors, and the Levee aldermen as villains, but the author merely presents the facts and allows the reader to make his or her own judgments. What saves this history from being merely a salacious tale is how Abbot is able to focus on larger issues, such as bias in media coverage and the fight for women’s suffrage and fair wages, all contained within a tale that gives the reader a real feel for the life of the demimonde in the Second City. Readers who enjoyed The Devil in the White City by Erik Larson will be equally enchanted by this book.

**By China Miéville**

These novels can be found shelved in the fantasy section at your local
bookstore, but don’t expect to find anything resembling Tolkien in their pages. Instead, they belong to a group of writings sometimes characterized as “New Weird.” Miéville and other authors of the “New Weird” are influenced by the pulp novels and “weird fiction” of the early 20th century and combine elements of fantasy, horror, and science fiction. Miéville’s works feature carefully crafted sentences and an obvious love of language, complex characters whose flaws are all too human – even when the characters themselves are anything but human – and substantial, weighty themes of social conflict, racism, and political strife. Perhaps most fascinating of all is the world in which these three novels are set. Prolifically imaginative, Miéville populates the world of Bas-Lag with cities such as the darkly Victorian New Crobuzon, which teems with races human and otherwise, arcane sciences, steam-powered technologies, and dark secrets. My brother characterized the first novel as being “weird for the sake of being weird,” but for those weary of the standard tropes of the fantasy genre, perhaps a little New Crobuzon-style weirdness is just what the witch doctor ordered.

Staff Highlighter - Paul Rascoe

Position:
Government Documents, Maps and Electronic Information Services Librarian
Age: 54

Years of Service:
30 years at UT. I started as an Office Assistant at the LBJ School of Public Affairs Library in August 1978. There are some gaps, I “retired” twice in the 1980s to travel around the World and to travel to Africa.

What you do at UT:
I am a subject specialist (I purchase books and databases, teach classes and help with research) in these areas: History, Maps, Geography and the Environment, African Studies, African American Studies, Asian American Studies, U.S. Government Documents, U.N. and International Documents, Texas Documents and Military Science. I also work some hours on our Information and Research Help Desk and supervise government documents and maps staff and the computer proctor staff in PCL. My most visible project is the PCL Map Collection, which has more than 20,000 maps online.

Something you didn’t expect:
I didn’t expect the extent to which information would be online. When I first started here, we had a computer terminal that was only searched by librarians, because the costs were so high that you needed to have trained staff to use it.

Favorite book(s):
I buy a lot of books, especially travel books. My favorite is “The Travels of the Abbe Carre in India and the Near East, 1672 to 1674”. He was a sort of spy for the French Government and had some most entertaining adventures. The book that people ask to see most frequently at my home is the Codex Seraphinianus. I have a special interest in historical reference books, many of which are now online.

Hobbies:
Travel. I have been to about 70 countries, and have also done research for a travel publication. When I was 20, I went overland to India and later got my first master’s degree in South Asian studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. So travel certainly led me into academia. I think that the most interesting countries I have been to are Afghanistan, Papua New Guinea and Madagascar.

What’s the future look like ten years on?
More books will go online because of the enormous cost savings. There will be more sharing of hard copy books in regional repositories. There will be fewer library staff. I think that printed books (and librarians) will continue to be valued by society for some time to come.

Gifts in Action

Unrestricted gifts provide the backbone of support for our Libraries’ collections. Here is a small sample of the books recently purchased by the Libraries, made possible in large part by individual donations. Thank you!

An apple a day: the myths, misconceptions, and truths about the foods we eat
Joe Schwarcz

All the world’s birds
New York : Rizzoli

Communicating mathematics in the digital era

Henry Austin: In Every Variety of Architectural Style
James O’Gorman

Arnold Daghani’s Memories of Mikhailowka: The Illustrated Diary of a Slave Labour Camp Survivor
Arnold Daghani

The Gardner Heist: The True Story of the World’s Largest Unsolved Art Theft
Ulrich Boser

Peter Gran

Latinos and the Nation’s Future
edited by Henry C. Cisneros
From the Vice Provost

As is richly evident from the content of this newsletter, it’s been an eventful semester at the Libraries.

Our Library Instruction Services unit has continued to build on its successes with Undergraduate Studies and has been duly honored by their peers. This small and dedicated staff has shown great imagination and incentive in opening the greater campus community to the broad range of resources and services at the Libraries. And by staying attuned to developments in web technology, the staff are helping our Libraries stay on top of the latest trends in user tools.

We’ve also actively engaged in a broader approach to public programs in an effort to expand the scope of the Libraries’ interaction with the general public. These early programs and collaborations are often experiments to see what new ideas will work. At other times, they are enhancements of annual or recurring programs that build on core followings.

With our Barbara Jordan program leading up to the unveiling of a great Texas stateswoman’s statue north of the Tower, we sought to test ideas about how public programming could benefit both the Libraries and the university. Happily, our initiative aligned with efforts of the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, and we were able to partner in commemorating Jordan’s legacy with a joint exhibit of material related to her life drawn from the collections of both institutions. And by virtue of that first collaboration, another opportunity presented itself when the Texas Politics Project worked with us to form and document a discussion of Jordan’s life with a panel of her colleagues.

We also saw an increased interest in annual programs at the Perry-Castañeda Library and the Benson Latin American Collection. We expanded our participation in “Texas’ Largest Open House,” Explore UT, with the inclusion of readings by several local Austin youth authors, a program that drew over 200 visitors to PCL on a dreary Saturday in March. And by working with artist Carmen Lomas Garza, including both a gallery talk and exhibit of her work, the Benson’s seventh annual ¡A Viva Voz! celebration attracted its largest crowd ever.

The value of creating a din about the Libraries should be self-evident. By inserting ourselves into the daily lives and behaviors of our university community, we constantly reinforce our own values and enhance our value to a very special audience.

Whether bringing branch libraries together to advance a common interest, or working toward the achievement of similar goals through collaborations with campus partners, we’ve begun the development of a vigorous public presence aimed at fortifying the Libraries’ significance to the University and beyond.