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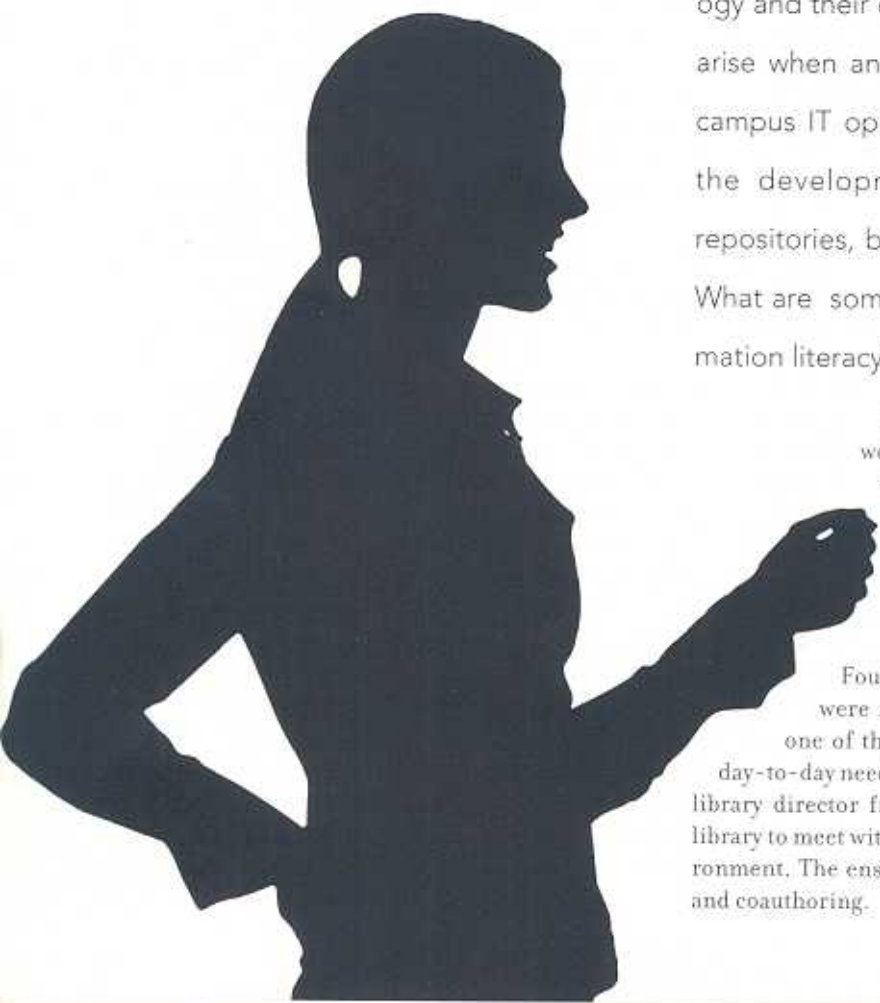
Historically black colleges and universities participate in staff exchanges

by John Burger and Lillian Lewis

What are some innovative ways to stretch dollars? How can libraries cope with never-ending changes in technology and their effects on service? What issues can arise when an academic library merges with the campus IT operation? How can librarians foster the development of a school's institutional repositories, both technologically and politically? What are some real-world best practices in information literacy?

These were the questions posed by librarians working at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) as they collaborated last summer with peers at the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL) to offer five two-week exchanges as part of a pilot staff exchange program.

With funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, associate-level HBCU librarians were matched with ASERL partners to focus on one of the leadership issues they derived from the day-to-day needs of the HBCU institutions. Meanwhile, the library director from the ASERL site traveled to an HBCU library to meet with colleagues and learn about the work environment. The ensuing collaborations resulted in coteaching and coauthoring.



teach one

Launched in 2003, the HBCU Library Alliance is an organization dedicated to supporting information professionals at historically black colleges and universities. With help from the Council on Libraries and Information Resources, the Southeastern Library Network, and the Mellon Foundation, the HBCU Library Alliance offers its constituents a broad range of activities that foster leadership within the HBCU library community.

The exchange program is one component of a leadership initiative the goals of which are: to further equip HBCU librarians to articulate and advance a vision for their library as a valued partner in teaching and learning; to manage change that will transform the library; to build partnerships with faculty and administrators and within the broader HBCU community; and to create a culture of leadership within the library staff.

The nation's largest regional consortium of research libraries, ASERL has long developed test-bed programs that have later been expanded or adapted for use by a wider array of libraries. For example, ASERL's efforts to harness its collective buying power in the mid-1990s led to some of the first group licensing of databases in the country, a practice commonplace in libraries today.

The initial five staff exchanges took place in June and July 2006. Evelyn Council, associate director for collection development at Fayetteville (N. C.) State University, worked with three representatives of the University of Tennessee at Knoxville: Barbara Dewey, dean of university libraries; Jill Keally, assistant dean; and Linda Phillips, head of collection development and management. Council wanted to learn about new advancements in open access scholarly publishing, as well as the development of institutional repositories. University of Tennessee librarians had actively participated in leadership roles in both issues for years, making the partnership a natural match.



"The exchange was just the first step in what I anticipate will be an ongoing collaboration between our two institutions, involving not only the librarians but also library staff, and even students," Keally noted.

The library at the University of the Virgin Islands recently merged with the campus information technology department. Sharlene Harris, manager of library and student technology services, visited the Earl Gregg Swem Library at the College of William and Mary in

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Williamsburg, Virginia, to identify ways that an academic library can successfully collaborate with IT to create new services and efficient partnerships for both teams. During her two weeks in Williamsburg, Harris established a robust working relationship with Dean of Libraries Connie Kearns McCarthy and Associate Dean Berna Heyman.

"Not only were we able to demonstrate the benefits of successful collaboration within our campus between the library and IT," commented McCarthy, "but Sharlene, Berna, and I expanded on aspects of the HBCU leadership program by investigating professional and career development issues, too."

Iyanna Sims, electronic resources librarian at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in Greensboro, spent two weeks at nearby Wake Forest University sharing experiences regarding the infusion of technology into the delivery of library services.

"I learned so much from this experience, from specific software skills to an overall philosophy about the appropriate uses for technology within an academic library," said Sims. She also felt that the potential for future collaboration between the two libraries was enormous. "After spending two weeks at Wake Forest, it's clear we have so much knowledge and experience we can share with each other."

"We learned as much from Iyanna as she learned from us," said Wake Forest Library Director Lynn Sutton. "We share the same intensity in meeting user needs. We are already implementing one of her ideas in our special collections department. Being separated by only 30 miles, we are planning for a reciprocal visit by two of our technology staff to North Carolina A&T so that we can

explore new levels of collaboration."

Carol Diedrichs and Janet Walsh, who worked closely together during Walsh's visit to the University of Kentucky in Lexington, had similar observations.

"I came to the William T. Young Library to improve how we deliver information literacy activities, and in the end we covered so many things that we're already implementing at home," commented Walsh, assistant librarian of access services at Fisk University in Nashville.

Diedrichs, dean of libraries at Kentucky, reciprocated. "Janet went away with many new ideas to pursue but we also learned a great deal from her as well," she said. "She helped us see some of our projects and programs with fresh eyes."

Brenda Wright, assistant director for collection development at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in Tallahassee, and Hannelore Rader, dean of libraries at the University of Louisville, in Kentucky, also participated in the program. The two forged a lasting bond.

"We focused on how our library uses our budget to gain the most visibility and value," said Rader. "We met with university administrators, partners within the local business community, and other library leaders in the area to gather new ideas and techniques. In the end we had great fun while gaining experience that benefited us both."

According to Wright, "The visit was a great affirmation that it is all about relationships, relationships, relationships. We must continue to establish and sustain relationships with anyone and everyone who can have a positive impact on issues in our libraries, including stakeholders, business partners, and other libraries."

The pilot HBCU-ASERL Librarian Exchange Program proved to be successful and popular with participants, and several recurring themes emerged during these initial exchanges. The collegial environment allowed teams to share social events and daily journals about their experiences.

In October 2006, HBCU librarians joined via conference call with their ASERL partners to discuss the outcomes from the exchanges. The same process was also used in December during the ASERL membership meeting. The Mellon Foundation has already approved funding for a summer 2008 exchange, and options for further program development may include scheduling visits during the academic year so visiting librarians can have more contact with faculty and students during their exchanges.

"It's clear that these exchanges will lead to new and exciting partnerships between HBCU and ASERL libraries," said Loretta Parham, director and CEO of the Robert W. Woodruff Library of the Atlanta University Center and board chair of the HBCU Library Alliance. "And most importantly, these exchanges will promote the values of diversity and collaboration at each of the institutions involved." ■