
'Cross Canada check-up': the SCONUL/CARL exchange of experience seminar

3 December 2007, British Library, Euston, London

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Having just spent half a day with members of CARL, the Canadian Association of Research Libraries, when they visited us at Warwick to see our Learning Grid, check out our (work-in-progress) library remodelling and discuss – all too briefly – some of the (common) concerns of librarians, I was really looking forward to catch up with colleagues to explore topics further. I was certainly not disappointed by this session hosted at the British Library.

After a casual lunch (filled with friendly faces from both sides of the Atlantic) **Anne Bell** (Chair of SCONUL) welcomed the 60 or so delegates. **Leslie Weir**, the CARL President, then took the floor and thanked her British colleagues for making this such a great visit and expressing a desire to develop further, long-term collaboration with SCONUL (a theme that was to come up several times during the afternoon).

The first hour of the session saw four 15 minute presentations on projects and areas of concern for our Canadian cousins. This was to be followed by 'speed dating' (not a concept I believe has appeared before in *SCONUL Focus!*) where groups of SCONUL delegates would be wooed by CARL colleagues. The first sessions proved so interesting, though, that we didn't manage many dates.

The first speaker up was **Janine Schmidt**, who delivered a very amusing talk called *Vive la difference: cultural perspectives on library management*.

Janine reviewed cultural differences, cultural similarities, issues for libraries, management solutions and what we can learn from each other. With perspectives from Canada, Australia and Britain she could see how we are culturally different, but also how we are (increasingly) similar. This similarity has been fuelled by the growth of the Internet and Multinational companies on one level and (closer to home) international students, student exchanges, university colonisation and librarian exchanges and visits. And of course, Google is doing what we should perhaps be doing: providing a global library.

So what were the key themes and findings of the CARL visit? Key themes were:

- different ways of responding to change;
- librarians are good at planning, poor at implementation;
- fading facilities (but also some glowing facilities);
- storage of little-used materials;
- digitization;
- information fluency (not literacy).

Janine ended with her own observations from the visit:

- 1 One size does not fit all
- 2 Steal ideas from others
...and my personal favourite:
- 3 Most of us were employed because we are different – and we should not lose sight of this!

The next speaker was **Marnie Swanson** who gave an overview of the AlouetteCanada Open Digitization Initiative to assist with the preservation of the Canadian national heritage. The project comprises of 28 institutional sponsors, with 42 volunteers in working groups and 400 contributors of metadata and content. So far 150,000 plus records (including images, sound files, oral histories, newspapers, books and other artefacts) have been added.

AlouetteCanada is currently looking for international collaborators. See www.alouettecanada.ca for more details.

Carolynne Presser followed with an overview of CRKN, the Canadian Research Knowledge Network. CRKN is a collaborative programme of the Canadian universities concerned with expanding equitable, cost-effective access to research materials. The reasons for this approach might sound a tad familiar to UK readers: a changing research

environment; decrease in Government support for universities; an increase in the output of scholarly information; increased costs of journals (double digit inflation); cancellation; and so on. Despite this rather grim picture CRKN has been successful in securing pan-Canadian licences for some packages, has helped increase understanding of the marketplace by interviewing and provided a more level playing field so the biggest and the smallest institution has the same access to information – which can only be to the benefit of the individual researcher. Again, for more details visit CRKN's Website, www.researchknowledge.ca.

The last spot of this part of the programme fell to **Madeline Lefebvre** who spoke about *Congenial space and the university library*. Madeline provided us with 'a very personal journey' on how she provided congenial solutions for St Mary's University and Ryerson University. Brutalist 1970's buildings were converted to friendly, wireless-enabled showcases which allowed food and drink and provided a far more relaxed atmosphere. But it is more than a coat of paint and few funky sofas that you need. Madeline stressed the need to listen to the students to find out what they really want. By giving them ownership you can also get them to own campaigns like her successful 'respect our space' programme, encouraging students to respect the library environment ...and each other (with special regard to rubbish, noise and mobile phones). But it is not just the customers we need to be concerned about. You also need congenial staff. And you are not going to get this if they don't feel at home in what is also *their* environment. So you need to involve them in planning their areas as well.

Congenial space, leads to congenial staff which leads to congenial users.

This was a lively talk and a fitting end to an excellent lecture session. This part over-ran but nobody seemed to mind. This did, though, mean the speed dating was cut down to two dates.

Date number one was **Michael Ridley**. Michael is the CIO and Chief Librarian at the University of Guelph. Appropriately, he spoke on the convergence of interest of CIOs (Chief Information Officers) and University Librarians. Convergence, as we in the UK know it, is not common in Canada so Michael really focused on approaches and perceptions rather than management structures. His main observations were:

- change can sometimes be more difficult for librarians because of the burdens of history;
- the JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee) has helped create the opportunities and environment for change: Canada lacks such an agency (a common feeling of the colleagues I spoke to);
- collaboration in Canada is often left to individuals: the two relevant organisations that facilitate this are CARL and CUCCIO (Canadian University Council of Chief Information Officers).

CARL is 40 years old, whereas CUCCIO is a mere infant at one year old. Still, CUCCIO has already embraced an ambitious programme for activities, including qualitative analysis of user satisfaction (TechQUAL+), consortial acquisition and licensing of software, an e-science infrastructure and the development of natural strategies for digital information. For more details on these projects go to www.cuccio-cdpiuc.ca.

My group's second date was with **Maggie Haines** who was quite successful in seducing us with ODESI, the Ontario Data Documentation, Extraction Service and Infrastructure. This is a Web-based portal providing a central store of statistical datasets that can be delivered to researchers and students across Ontario. After covering background developments and technical planning we were treated to a demonstration of this excellent tool. It is little wonder that (following a brief publicity campaign) major pollsters were offering the project polling data (for free!) and academics were quickly viewing this as a potential archive for their own statistical data. ODESI now want to extend collaborative links across the globe. Anyone interested in pursuing this (or just learning more) is directed to http://odesi.uoguelph.ca/wiki/index.php/Main_Page.

After tea – and more valuable networking – we were called back to the auditorium for a Wrap-up session with **Anne Bell**. For me, one of the main themes of the afternoon was collaboration, or, as one speaker put it, active engagement. So how can CARL and SCOUNL actively engage? Anne collected suggestions from the floor which included developing a scholars' portal, consortium work with the JISC, leadership training and succession planning, repositories and advocacy, digitisation projects and bringing together scattered resources from across the globe. Very quickly Anne had amassed quite a shopping list for the SCOUNL Executive Board to consider.

This was a thoroughly fun afternoon, with both interesting speakers and interesting delegates. It will hopefully mark the beginning of a beautiful relationship between SCONUL and CARL.