Welcome Back and Welcome to a Forward-Looking New Library Catalog

The library is the heart of the campus, so it’s big news when a new library system is installed. This fall, as faculty and students returned to campus, they were greeted by an integrated, automated system that reflects some of the latest technological refinements available on the market today.

What does this system offer users that the old one did not? “The biggest change,” observes Amherst College Librarian Jan Jourdain, “is that for the first time in twenty years, users can now search all four college collections and that of the University in a single command.” Jourdain, who served as project manager for the installation, added that it also provides many more options for searching by format—film and videos, DVDs, and archival materials. To illustrate, she mentions carrying out searches on music numbers: “Doing a search using the publishing number for a recording will be much easier now,” she points out, and “searching for a keyword in a DVD will yield a list of DVDs and where they are held.”

Jay Schafer, director of libraries for the UMass Amherst campus, agrees. Having “the union view,” Schafer thinks, “represents a big step forward. To see all the holdings at one time is something we have aspired to for a long time, but the technology was just not there. Now it is.” Among the advantages the new system offers, he says, is “greater sophistication for the user in handling foreign language searches, having the option of setting up personal accounts to receive notification about acquisitions in a particular subject area, and being able to save previous searches as a time-saving measure.”

From the viewpoint of library staff, Jourdain says, the new system makes data more “portable.” Because data can be stored in a more conventional way, she explains, “it is more accessible to a wide variety of tools, making it easier to connect with local systems like Datatel, Banner, and others.”

Partnership Active in Two Grants with Area Schools

The Five College Public School Partnership enters its 22nd year active on several curricular fronts in working with area schools and teachers. Earlier this summer it received word of two new grants that will support projects in which it will be a primary collaborator with area schools.

The Partnership will play a key role in a third award from the U.S. Department of Education (DOEd) to the Springfield Public Schools that will fund a multiyear series on Teaching American History (TAH). Each of the three awards has been for approximately $1 million.

Earlier this summer, the Partnership was awarded a grant of $88,412 from the Fullbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad Program that will fund a study tour to South Africa in the summer of 2007 for educators of the area.

The new DOEd grant builds on the work of the two previous grants for Teaching American History, whose goal is to better prepare teachers for dealing with the subject matter by exposing them to current scholarly sources. “To date, those grants have involved more than 80 teachers from Springfield,” states Rosemary Kalloch, director of social studies for the Springfield Public Schools, “have resulted in a widening circle of teachers who have become deeply engaged in the study of American history, who have remained with the program and are now taking on leadership roles by researching new curriculum modules and serving as mentors to their peers.”

New Grant Supports Course in Media Arabic

Five Colleges, Incorporated has received a grant of $600,000 from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to support a new language learning project to be undertaken by the Center for the Study of World Languages. The grant will be used by the center over the next four years to design upper-level offerings in Hindi, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), and the Arabic dialects for independent learners at the Five Colleges and beyond. It will also support the development of a course in media Arabic as well as online pedagogical resources to help native speakers who will be working with those learning one or more of those languages.

Commenting on the award, Lorna M. Peterson, executive director of Five Colleges, Incorporated, said, “The Center for the Study of World Languages, under the direction of Elizabeth Mazzacono, professor of Italian at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, has established itself as a vital curricular resource for the learning of languages that are not normally offered at the undergraduate level. The center’s work has enabled our schools to respond to student interest in these languages in a manner that is both pedagogically sound and cost-effective. It also serves to accommodate students who need the flexibility that this form of instruction offers. We are grateful once again to The Mellon Foundation for its continuing support of the center’s work.”

The center’s latest project, she noted, builds on the success of its Supervised Independent Language Program (SILP) and its mentored language model. During the past three years, with support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the CSWL has created and launched...
Course in Media Arabic—continued

A series of multimedia, Internet-delivered curricular guides for the study of elementary and intermediate levels of Arabic, Farsi, Hindi, Turkish, and Turkmen; developed a written component for less commonly taught languages through the introduction of a mentored language program for Arabic, Hindi, and Swahili; and introduced the use of Fulbright scholars to serve as native language mentors and instructors.

Originally, the center had envisioned the mentored language course sequence just for Arabic, Hindi, and Swahili, but the five cohorts of this project were unique in the field of MSA.

The choice of Ex Libris, a recognized worldwide developer and provider of applications for the world’s top libraries, was based in part on its flexibility, says Carpenter, and “it’s a standards-driven system, which uses Unicode to represent any number of international scripts and provides protocols for such languages as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean.”

It is currently in use among 70 of the leading universities worldwide and in 45 of the top-ranked universities in North America, including Harvard, Duke, MIT, the State University of New York (SUNY) system, the University of California at Santa Barbara, and the University of Maryland.

The real sophistication of the new system, however, lies at “the back end” of the operating system. According to Jourdain, that sophistication will do a lot to help library staff get their jobs done more efficiently: “Back-office operations are simplified considerably. It will help us do electronic transactions such as acquisitions in a more streamlined way,” she says.

The system debuted without a hitch on Monday, August 25, when Ex Libris was officially up and running. “A core group of dedicated people did a lot of work to make this happen,” says Jourdain.

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Partnership Grants—continued

As it has done in the two previous DOEd grants, the Partnership will once again have a leading role in this new three-year TAH project, entitled “Creating, Challenging, and Sustaining Democracy,” which will get under way in the summer of 2007. Other partners include a number of local museums such as Historic Deerfield, the Quadrangle Museums in Springfield, and the Wistariahurst Museum in Holyoke. The emphasis in recruiting teachers for this project, says Carpenter, will be new cohorts of historians and those who do not currently meet the NCLB guidelines for “highly qualified” in the district’s underperforming schools. Those who elect to take part will receive over 350 hours of professional development including a two-week summer institute at Smith College, featuring distinguished historians from the Five Colleges and from other colleges and universities in the region.

The focus of the first year’s study will be “creating the new democracy,” with lectures and discussions and readings on the Declaration of Independence, the Revolutionary War, ratification of the Constitution, and the early presidencies. “Challenges to democracy,” the theme of the second year, will cover the presidencies of Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln, the rise of the Abolitionist movement, and the Civil War and its aftermath. In year three, the teachers will examine the challenges of sustaining democracy through industrialization, immigration, urbanization, the Great Depression and the New Deal, and 20th-century movements and events that resulted in America at war.

The focus of the Fulbright-Hays award is “America in a Global Context.” As Partnership Coordinator Sue Thraisher observed, “This project responds to the needs of K–12 schools to develop curricula that will prepare students for citizenship in a global society.” To support the yearlong project, the Partnership, Thraisher says, has assembled a management team knowledgeable about South Africa and about curriculum development. Joyce Bowman, professor of history at UMass Amherst, will serve as project director and Beverly Bell, Five College Teacher Librarian Coordinator, who teaches in the department of psychology and education at Mount Holyoke, will head up planning for the study tour. The orientation and curriculum-building phases of the project, Thraisher says, will be supported by faculty members of the Five College African Studies Council and curriculum specialists in the education departments of Mount Holyoke, Smith, and Mount Holyoke College. The five college districts that helped to develop the proposal to Fulbright—Amherst, Greenfield, Northampton, South Hadley, and Springfield—will send teams of teachers on the study tour to South Africa.

“The choice of South Africa made sense on many levels,” Thraisher explains. “It is a democ- racy in progress, its people and culture have great appeal for Americans of all ages, and the place of Africa in a global society is obviously central. What’s more, Thraisher adds, “we are unusually fortunate in having in our midst one of the largest cohorts of scholars of Africa in the United States. It just makes great sense to draw on their expertise.”

The study tour, Thraisher says, which “constitutes the centerpiece of the project,” will send 14 educators to South Africa in the summer of 2007 with the expectation that they will return ready to apply their firsthand experience and knowledge to developing teaching materials. The group will include ten K–12 teachers and administrators (two from each district) and four faculty members and administrators from the Five Colleges. During five weeks, the group will travel to four major regions in South Africa, where they will visit K–12 schools as well as sites that illustrate colonial, postcolonial, apartheid-era, and post-apartheid influences on the development of South Africa as an emerging democracy. School visits, Thraisher points out, “will allow us to establish cross-cultural learning projects linking schools and classrooms there with ours.”