

November 2003

A PROFESSION THAT LOOKS LIKE AMERICA?

"The real heroes of the digital revolution in higher education are librarians; they are the people who have seen the farthest, done the most, accepted the hardest challenges, and demonstrated most clearly the benefits of digital information. In the process, they have turned their own field upside down and have revolutionized their own professional training. It is a testimony to their success that we take their achievement for granted." Edward L. Ayers and Charles M.

*Grisham. **Why IT has not paid off as we hoped (yet).** *Educause review.**

November/December 2003, p.43.

Professors Ayers and Grisham are quite correct about the achievements of academic (and other) librarians in dealing with the now ubiquitous computer. Their praise is quite justified, as is their unspoken rebuke to the rest of academia. It seems to me that they are quite wrong about the impact on library education. (Earlier in the article they speak with wonder about how no-one would have predicted the death of the card catalogue ten years ago—oh, really?—so they are benevolent toward, if not especially well-informed about, our profession.) Our “professional training” has not been revolutionized; it has just drifted further and further from the practice of librarianship in libraries. Students graduate from the successors to library schools without a basic

education in the core skills that define an effective librarian—reference work, cataloguing, library instruction, collection development, etc.—and without a grounding in the basic values of our profession—service, intellectual freedom, stewardship, literacy, etc. This is a crisis that is teetering on the edge of catastrophe and it comes at a particularly bad time. Demography is our enemy. Librarians with command of basic skills and imbued with our values and a social conscience are retiring in unprecedented numbers. Who is to replace them? How will those people be educated in our core skills and values when many successors to library schools are indifferent to, or even contemptuous of, those skills and values? Even more importantly, how can we recruit potential librarians who reflect the demographics of today's multicultural diverse America? I cannot pretend to have all the answers to these questions but they must be addressed and the structure of education for librarianship must be changed if our profession is to survive and thrive.

Michael Gorman

California State University, Fresno