



SYNAPSE

NEWSLETTER OF ALABAMA HEALTH LIBRARIES ASSOCIATION INC.

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Spring 2001

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Another successful annual meeting was concluded on Friday, March 16th at the Hilton in Columbus, Georgia. Many thanks to Marian Morris and Pat Higginbottom for all the time and hard work they put into the conference. The theme of the joint meeting with the Georgia Health Sciences Library Association was "Reaching Across Boundaries – Sharing Information and Ideas."

The reception Wednesday evening at the Springer Opera House gave registrants a chance to mingle and attend a performance of "The Phantom." The breakfast business meeting kicked off Thursday's full schedule of events. The keynote speaker and Miriam Libbey Lecturer, Jocelyn Rankin, Ph.D. the chief of the CDC Information Center presented interesting information on "Libraries Reaching Out – Lifeline to our States and the World." After lunch we stretched our muscles with Helen Reinking as she demonstrated Deskercise. Then a panel of members that work with outreach projects in Alabama and Georgia presented "Librarianship Outside the Box." Two ALHeLA members, Judy Burnham and Kay Hogan-Smith participated on the panel and provided us with some ideas to expand our services. The banquet that evening was held at the Columbus Convention and Trade Center, a renovated mill on the riverbank. After dinner entertainment was provided by a magician who taught us how to increase our budgets by turning \$10's to \$50's. Friday morning we headed to Columbus State University for our hands-on CE courses. I attended the class, SuperSearcher taught by Bryan Vogh and learned some tricks for finding those elusive Web sites. The other class, "Bringing Your Library's Resources to the Web" taught by Chandra Alston was brought back by popular demand.



Please fill out the ALHeLA survey. (Article on p. 2)

This year ALHeLA had two student scholarship winners, Susan Hessler and Sylvia McAphee. Both of them will graduate this year from the University of Alabama and we look forward to their continued involvement in the association.

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be June 22nd in Montgomery at APLS. We will have a full agenda so I hope all members will be able to attend.



Susan Williams, ALHeLA President 2001

2001 ALHeLA President, Susan Williams (right) with the GHSLA President

The essay of one of the two ALHeLA Student Scholarship Award winners is included in this issue. Look for the other essay in the next issue of Synapse.

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ALHeLA Survey 2001 is now Online

The ALHeLA Executive Committee is seeking your opinions on the timing of future annual meetings, suggestions for future CEs, and any other input that would be useful in planning the next meeting or CE offering.

Please go to <http://www.uab.edu/lister/alhela/alsurv.htm> and fill out the survey. The survey will be available until May 4th. If you do not have access to the Internet, contact Pat Higginbottom for a paper copy of the survey.

The Executive Committee will use your input to determine the ALHeLA calendar, including the timing of annual meetings, elections, and terms of office. (We will also use any information given in the GHSLA/ALHeLA Evaluations) Consult the next issue of *Synapse* for a summary of responses, as well as the decisions made in the June Executive Committee meeting.

We hope every ALHeLA member will take the time to fill out the survey so that everyone has a voice in these important decisions.



Submitted by Marian Morris

**ALHeLA
2001
Officers**

OCLC Workshops at University of South Alabama Biomedical Library

Charles M. Baugh Biomedical Library will host two all day SOLINET workshops in early June: *The Successful Searcher* on June 6th and *ILL for New & Selective Users* on June 7th.

The Successful Searcher will teach OCLC searchers how to minimize the number of searches while maximizing the results. Topics covered include keyword searching, derived and numeric search keys, navigating screen displays, searching hints and tricks, and more. Great for those with little OCLC search experience or those who need a refresher.

ILL for New & Selective Users will focus on OCLC's PRISM Interlibrary Loan Service. Previous attendance at *The Successful Searcher* is required. This workshop covers no searching. Aimed at those with limited OCLC PRISM experience, it covers topics like Passport software, searching the Name-Address Directory, and Union List subsystems among others.

Both workshops provide hands-on training and will be held in the College Of Medicine computer lab on the second floor of the library. For more information about the workshops, registration and pricing, visit SOLINET's web page at <http://www.solinet.net/cet/reginfo.htm> or call Ellen Sayed at (334)460-7850. Directions to CMB Biomedical Library, can be found at:

<http://southmed.usouthal.edu/library/directions.htm>.

Submitted by Ellen Sayed

Print Without Guilt:

The Digital Millennium Meets the Paperless Medical Library

Truly great salespeople sell dreams, not products, especially the ones who pitch computer technology. "Imagine," they croon, "imagine everything made available online at the touch of a finger, a nod of one's head, the sound of your voice. New, improved, easier to use than ever. Just imagine the efficiency, convenience, and cost savings of *a paperless medical library!*" Some of us find it difficult to visualize this happy idyll, because we've learned the hard way that things never quite work out

like that in the field. Instead, we see the ghost of DeForrest Kelley waving a chrome-plated salt shaker over some guy's body laid out on a piece of Formica[®] as the good doctor peers nearsightedly at a glowing monitor screen and then grimly turns to tell William Shatner, "He's dead, Jim."

Salespeople find it much easier to sell their dreams to upper management, who don't seem able to hear their own technicians muttering: "We'll never have paperless offices until we quit installing a printer with every new computer!" Fortunately, good reasons exist for hanging onto both digital resources and printers at this stage of technological development. Computers are wonderful devices which excel at quickly locating and retrieving desired information from oceans of data. However, certain problems begin to crop up almost immediately after they come bounding back with all those query results, and two of the most important ones strongly support the use of paper printouts. They're called visual ergonomics and media stability.

"Doctor, My Eyes!"

A paperless library scenario generally assumes that a computer will deliver information directly to a user, who will probably read those results right off the screen. Unfortunately, this kind of behavior can have painful consequences when continued for any length of time. Why? Well, the human eye focuses differently when looking at a printed piece of paper versus a glowing computer screen:

- When font characters appear on professionally printed paper, they contain smooth dense strokes with well-defined edges. The text is sharp, crisp, and easy to read.
- When font characters appear on a computer screen, they are brightest in the middle of each stroke and then fade out toward the edges. This phenomenon makes it hard to look directly at what's being displayed. Instead, the user's eyes usually end up focusing on a place called the resting point of accommodation (RPA), which means that their eye muscles must then flex constantly to keep everything into focus.

Visual discomfort is one of the most frequently cited complaints of computer users. What happens when a person spends hours in front of a computer screen, especially if they don't look away? Their eyes may begin to exhibit symptoms of repetitive strain injury (RSI), according to specialists associated with the Video Display Terminal (VDT) Eye Clinic run by the School of Optometry at the University of California-Berkeley. Chief causes include difficulties in eye alignment and the focusing mechanism, which can result in eyestrain, neck pain, and headaches, as well as double or blurred vision, burning and dry sensations, ocular fatigue, loss of focus, and other visual disturbances.

Ergonomic countermeasures include resting one's eyes for at least 20 seconds every 30 minutes and looking away from the computer screen whenever possible, especially by focusing on things closer or farther away than the distance between one's eyes and the screen. Although the discomfort associated with impaired computer vision is believed to be temporary, every user should be regularly checked out by an eye doctor familiar with such problems.

Going, Going ... Well, Dang, It's Gone ...

Meanwhile, it's all well and good to have a colorful screen bouncing up and down today, but can that information be accessed again tomorrow? Next week? Ten years from now? Some things are unknowable, such as whether a digital information services provider will still be in business by then or what will happen to one's continued information access if one's provider somehow manages to fry all the backup tapes. Instead, let's consider one simple question: How do life expectancies compare for traditional print versus electronic media?

Actually, history firmly supports the use of stone tablets and papyrus scrolls, which often endure for thousands of years, especially in a dry climate. High-quality paper is not in that league but, if properly cared for, may well last for over 500 years. Even cheap acid paper made from wood pulp can last over 200 years if it's treated, stabilized, and protected from humidity, heat, and light, as well as other sources of acid. But computer diskettes? Those little guys can become unusable in less -- sometimes a lot less -- than a year. Manufacturers claim that some types of electronic media might last as long as 200

years ... but we don't know for sure, since none of them have so far. What we do know is that most electronic media are based upon either magnetic or optical storage, both of which have significant limitations in terms of longevity:

- Magnetic storage contains read/write heads that translate data from binary code (0's and 1's) into electromagnetic pulses. These pulses are passed along to media which record the data as magnetic fields. Unfortunately, such fields can be corrupted by outside magnetic fields, including those associated with other magnetic media stored nearby. Some seem to just plain wear out over time. All are sensitive to dust, dirt, humidity, heat, light, and perhaps even electromagnetic solar storms. Magnetic media include computer diskettes (good for 1 year or less, especially when tightly packed against other diskettes), hard drives (3 to 5 years, often failing as their precision mechanisms wear out), and magnetic tapes (up to 30 years, but they're susceptible to chemical reactions that can make two layers of tape stick together, as well as overlapping magnetic fields that may bleed through from one layer to another).
- Optical storage lasts longer because it retains data in a physical state. Here, lasers record changes in reflected light as they move among pits and lands etched into the surfaces of Compact Disc-Read Only Memory (CD-ROM) media. Such depressions and ridges are simulated using dyes on Compact Disc-Recordable (CD-R) and Compact Disc Rewritable (CD-RW) media. Warpage, corrosion, or dye breakdown may eventually make it impossible for data to be read from any disc. All can be harmed by dust, dirt, heat, and sunlight. CD-R's and CD-RW's can also be damaged by solvents, as well as being labeled with some marking pens which contain chemicals that may break down dyes. Life expectancies have been estimated for CD-ROM's (200 years), CD-R's (200 years for gold-tinted phthalocyanine, 75 to 100 years for green-tinted cyanine, unrecorded shelf life of 5 to 10 years), and CD-RW's (30 years). Yet these numbers are unsubstantiated and misleading, because it's entirely possible that a perfectly preserved disc may become unreadable in perhaps 5 to 10 years, due to new innovations in computer operating systems, software, and hardware.

Conclusions

Computers are good at finding and retrieving information quickly, while printed paper is easy on the eyes and extremely stable. Therefore it makes sense for health services librarians to use different media for different purposes, based upon their inherent advantages:

- Frequently used and important standard reference works should be kept on the shelf in print, in order to reduce the need to make copies for reading purposes. Digital versions can be added to ensure prompt availability of revisions, as well as to support online search capabilities.
- High-quality digital resources should be used for a wide range of materials not consulted quite as intensively, but for which currency is important, especially the "grey literature" which documents the progress of current research. RSI can be reduced by teaching computer users to take frequent vision breaks, as well as by making several laser printers available, ensuring that they are kept in good repair, and keeping plenty of toner and paper on hand.
- Other printed materials may be retained until archived in the digital realm and then either removed to storage or weeded. However, deselection of irreplaceable materials -- especially of historical interest -- should always be undertaken with great care. Electronic information services do not always digitize or maintain everything that one might assume they would.
- Digital media is about find-it-fast access, especially for information that must be disseminated quickly across a wide geographical area. (Just hang onto those papyrus scrolls as a backup!) The paperless medical library is a noble dream, and new paradigms and technologies might even adequately support it some day. Until then, health services librarians will be best served by using today's resources in ways that minimize flaws while taking full advantage of their strengths.

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Susan Hessler
AHeLA Student Scholarship Essay

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Alabama Health Libraries Association Business Meeting Thursday, March 15, 2001

Present: Everly Brown, C.J. Bryant, Judy Burnham, Nancy Clemmons, Lynn Fortney, Kristina Hammack, Jay Harris, Susan Hessler, Pat Higginbottom, Kay Hogan-Smith, Carolyn Holmes, Jana Jasper, Yvonne Kozlowski, Sylvia McAphee, Marian Morris, Inga Moten, Diane Williams, Susan Williams.

1. Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 9:04 am by Susan Williams, President.
2. Approval of Minutes: The minutes from the January 19, 2001 meeting of the Executive Committee were approved as written.

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3. Treasurer's Report: The treasurer's report was presented by Susan Williams on behalf of Lisa Rains-Russell, Treasurer. The balance as of 3/12/01 was \$9778.63, and does not reflect expenses of the 2001 meeting.
 4. Committee Reports
 1. **Bylaws:** A question was raised in the 1/19/01 meeting regarding an alternative chair for the Nominating Committee in the event that the Past-President is unable to serve. Further investigation indicated that this provision will necessitate a change in the ALHeLA handbook but not in the bylaws.
 - b. **Continuing Education:** No report
 - c. **Directory:** No report
 4. **Membership:** Carolyn Holmes reported that the organization currently has 49 regular members and 1 student member. Of those members, 2 are new to the organization. Carolyn has a supply of the new membership brochures if anyone needs some. She was thanked for all of her efforts in redesigning the brochure.
 5. **Synapse:** Diane Williams reminded the members that the deadline for submissions is in 2 weeks.
 - f. **Union List Coordinators:** No report
 7. **Web Coordinator:** Pat Higginbottom has been working on the web site: the look has changed, she has added the Handbook and Synapse, and is updating information on the site. She would like to add past awards winners to the site. The site has received 802 hits since 9/12/00. Pat can host items for members on the web without linking them to the ALHeLA webpage, such as a VA survey recently conducted by Jan Burns. Please let Pat know if there are other things you'd like to see on the webpage.

5. Old Business

1. 2001 Annual Meeting with GHSLA: Marian Morris reported that no financial numbers are available yet. Of the 22 ALHeLA members registered for the meeting, 15 attended a CE class. Of the total 58 attendees at the meeting, 33 enrolled in CE. Marian will give a final report on the meeting at the June meeting of the Executive Committee.

Marian gave a special thanks to those sponsors and donors who helped make this meeting possible:

Meeting Sponsors: Anonymous, ISI, Matthews Medical & Scientific Books, Inc., Ovid Technologies, Inc.

Meeting Donors: Abbott Laboratories (Jay Young), ALHeLA, American Sports Medicine Institute, Birmingham Baptist Medical Centers, Health InfoNet of Jefferson County, MDConsult, Ovid Technologies, Inc., Rittenhouse Book Distributors, Inc., SOUTHmed Information Network

Susan Williams thanked Marian and Pat Higginbottom for all of their hard work in putting the joint meeting together.

2. **Student Scholarship Winners:** Susan Hessler and Sylvia McAphee were this year's winners of the ALHeLA student scholarship. Both are part-time MLS students at UA, and plan to graduate at the end of this year. Susan works at IIT in Huntsville as a technical editor, while Sylvia works at Lister Hill Library at UAB. The essays submitted as part of the scholarship application will be published in 2 successive issues of Synapse. Congratulations, Susan and Sylvia!
3. **Joint Meeting of SCMLA and ALHeLA, Final Report:** The joint meeting held in October 2000 in Mobile broke even, so ALHeLA realized no profit.

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4. Scholarship for Members with Limited Institutional Support: It has been suggested that ALHeLA provide funding for members to attend annual meetings. An application similar to that used by MLA could be used, to ask for input on how attendance at the meeting will benefit the applicant. The applications would be judged on merit. Additional suggestions included looking at SCMLA's Martha Watkins scholarship as a model; asking applicants to indicate their financial needs on the application, and indicating the items their institutions will and will not support; and asking the members-at-large to judge the applications.

It was pointed out that all registrations and CE fees for this meeting were subsidized \$25 for ALHeLA members by the organization, to keep the costs low.

This topic will be discussed further at future meetings.

e. Other

1. Archives: The ALHeLA archives were discussed at the 1/19/01 meeting of the Executive Committee. Nancy Clemmons and Lynn Fortney have a lot of material for the archives. Nancy will investigate setting the archives up at Lister Hill Library. It was suggested that Tim Pennycuff, UAB's University Archivist and LHL faculty member, be approached about managing the archives for ALHeLA. He could be given an honorary ALHeLA membership in appreciation. It was pointed out that we will need a policy governing archive issues, such as who can access them; the SCMLA archives policy can be used as a reference. This issue will be revisited at the June meeting of the Executive Committee.

6. New Business

1. MASA Manual: Judy Burnham gave a brief history of the MASA manual. The manual is currently published by the Alliance for Continuing Medical Education and is in its 3rd edition. Sales have been declining since the first year of publication, with 38 copies being sold last year. If we wish to continue with the manual, it needs to be updated. The process involves a lot of work, and Judy feels that the scope would have to be changed to increase sales. After discussion, it was decided to hold off on updating the manual and rethink it to see if we have any new ideas for it. We will tell the Alliance that we won't update the manual now, and will keep them informed.
2. Election of officers procedure: the ALHeLA handbook calls for the Past-President to chair the Nominations committee. Our immediate Past-President is unavailable for this duty. We need to develop a contingency in the Handbook to deal with instances in which the Past-President cannot serve.

One alternative was suggested for developing a slate of officers in the instance that the Past-President cannot chair the Nominating committee. The President would appoint a 3-person committee to develop a slate of candidates, and an election would be carried out through the mail or at a fall CE offering. In the current schedule, the new ALHeLA officers begin their terms in January after a fall election.

A formal recommendation will be made at the June meeting of the Executive Committee.

3. Other

1. Timing of the Annual Meeting: Susan Williams indicated that she would arrange a survey of the membership to determine the best time of year for the annual meeting. A change in the meeting time to spring would necessitate a change in the bylaws governing the terms for officers. This issue will be revisited at the June meeting of the Executive Committee.

7. Announcements

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1. C.J. Bryant announced the building of a new library at St. Vincent's Hospital in Birmingham. The new facility will include a climate-controlled area for archives, and should be ready towards the end of 2001.
 2. Pat Higginbottom thanked the Georgia Health Sciences Library Association for inviting us to join them in Columbus and for their hospitality during our stay.
 3. Marian Morris reminded everyone to turn in his or her meeting evaluation.

8. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:35 am.

*Respectfully Submitted,
Tracy E. Powell, Secretary*

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