Introduction: Current Trends in Academic Media Collections and Services

Ciara Healy

This issue of *Library Trends* was proposed as an update to the last media issue in 1985, on the presumption that much has changed with regard to academic media collections and services in the last twenty-five years. While it is certainly true that media collections, creation, access, and distribution in academic libraries has changed radically, it is interesting to note how much things have stayed the same. From the introduction to the first *Library Trends* media issue in 1967, C. Walter Stone, then director of libraries at the University of Pittsburgh, writes:

> The impression would be that librarianship has completely "missed the boat" in developing newer media services; that necessary professional recruitment and training, both pre-service and in-service, are almost totally lacking. . . . Aids for selection of newer media are reported as inadequate. It is stated that the processing (including cataloging) of new instructional materials lacks basic standardization. . . . Research in the field is limited. . . . And to cite one special national problem, existing copyright regulations and those recommended in new legislative proposals impose too many restrictions on use of new media for educational purposes and, in particular stand to block effective library applications of computer technology for information storage retrieval and transfer. (Stone, 1967, p.179)

Though Stone goes on to say that the authors contributing to that issue were in fact offering positive calls to action, the next *Library Trends* media issue, edited by Phillip Lewis and published only four years later, added to Stone's laundry list: "The big problem, however, is in defining what such a center really is, what it should encompass, and how it relates to other library functions" (Lewis, 1971, p. 399). From 1971 to 1985, when the next media issue was published, one hopes that media collections and services managed to establish themselves through the work of media, or at least media-minded librarians, including catalogers, who accessed thorough

research in the library literature, good finding aids, and an understanding of copyright. These librarians and their collections became stronger for having passed through an identity crisis.

Phyllis Geraldine Ahlsted and Paul Graham, coeditors of the 1985 media issue, offer little solace. Though it is clear that things have improved for media in libraries between 1971 and 1985, their introduction harkens back to Stone's idea that perhaps librarianship has missed the boat—again, but has at least managed to make it to the docks. By 1985 circumstances *had* improved for media collections, librarians, and media centers. Ahlsted and Graham begin their introduction with the claim that media collections enjoyed "theoretical acceptance of media's validity among most commentators" (Ahlsted & Graham, 1985, p. 3). What is lacking, according to the editors, is thoroughgoing implementation. So media centers, librarians, and collections had been acknowledged but were still fighting for legitimacy in libraries canted toward print materials. They state that "especially in the case of audiovisual materials and services, the academic library community has often exhibited ambivalence toward the inclusion of these materials into their world. It is impossible to attribute this dichotomy to a single cause" (p. 4).

Further, they suggest three fundamental factors that contributed to the dichotomy they describe and each of the three will be familiar to media librarians working today. The first regards budget, especially with regard to "ongoing materials and replacement costs. The widespread failure to recognize that technology requires regular rejuvenation threatens to leave many media centers antiquated" (p. 4). The second is the necessarily experimental nature of building a media collection and its attendant requirement to accept—and fund—risk taking, such as betting on a new format before the market has settled. The last fundamental factor they describe is a lingering suspicion library personnel have regarding nonprint materials. Though they note, fairly, that media personnel may contribute to this bias as much as librarians, they suggest that "perhaps this mutual misunderstanding between librarians and media specialists has at its core a real uncertainty over whether media is in fact an important aspect of the academic library" (p. 5).

Clearly, looking back over the last thirty-three years of *Library Trend*'s media issues, it is demonstrated that the more things change the more they stay the same. Several of the articles in this issue directly address one or more of the above concerns, indictments, or fears for media collections, librarians, and services in academic libraries. In proposing this issue, I intended to offer an update to the 1985 issue because I assumed the earlier issues would not pose relevant ideas from which we could benefit in 2010. Recall though, that Stone's introduction from the 1967 issue was the one to explicitly address the connection between copyright and computer technology. Lewis's 1971 introduction also includes mention of

one possible identity for an all-inclusive library media center that would provide, among other equipment and services, "local production facilities for the preparation of software in any format, modern self-study stations and electronic networks to service a building, a campus, a community or all of these" (p. 399). The 1985 issue had a broader perspective, a luxury afforded by the progress achieved by library media centers and media librarians since 1971. That issue grappled with the larger theoretical issues regarding the role of audiovisual media in academic library collections and administration as well as scholarship, pedagogy, and research. Yet it also offered practical advice for managing collections and perceptions.

While the above consideration of the three *Library Trends* media issues shows an arc of progress, it is also the case that many of the pieces in this issue deal directly with major topics from the 1967 and 1971 issues, especially copyright, rapid format change, access to media, and the role of media centers in academic libraries. Each one also contributes, in its own way, to the larger questions and conversations found in the 1985 issue regarding the status of nonprint media collections in academic libraries. To be more precise, this issue, then, is in fact an update of the earlier issues and a reconsideration of much that was contained in the 1985 issue.

Gary Handman publishes here his White Paper, entitled "A License to Look," first prepared for the 2008 National Media Market meeting that canvasses the existing options of digital streaming and pricing models and considers the relationship between streaming and media collection development. Barbara Bergman writes about media access trends, from closed stacks to Interlibrary Loan of media in her article "Making the Most of your Video Collection." Carrie Russell discusses some scenario-based, practical advice for librarians struggling with copyright in a variety of educational settings. In Lori Widsniski's article, "Step Away from the Machine," she gives us a look at academic media's technological past, beginning with lantern slides. John Vallier directly addresses the question posed by Lewis in 1971: What is the role of an academic multimedia center? His article offers examples of activities in current media centers, arguing that academic media centers are, in fact, the library's "killer app." Mary S. Laskowski presents data from research into the education of media librarians, based on surveys of working media librarians and an analysis of library school curricula. I close the issue with a chapter on incorporating a NetFlix subscription into an academic collection as a just-in-time model for media access.

References

Ahlsted, P. G., & Graham, P. (1985). Introduction. *Library Trends, 34*(1), 3–8.
Lewis, P. (1971). Introduction. *Library Trends, 19*(4), 399–400.
Stone, C. W. (1967). Introduction. *Library Trends, 16*(2), 179–180.