



**Art Libraries Society of North America, 34th Annual Conference
Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel, Banff, Alberta, Canada, May 5-9, 2006**

Session 6: Ask ARLIS: Building the ARLIS/NA Mentorship Program
Saturday, May 6, 1:30 PM-3:00 PM

- Tony White, Art & Architecture Librarian, Pratt Institute *Planning a year-long pilot mentoring program for ARLIS/NA*
- Margaret Law, Associate Director of Libraries, University of Alberta, *The Mentoring Relationship*
- Jennifer Parker, Art & Architecture Librarian, University of Colorado at Boulder, *Building and Fostering the Mentor / Mentee Relationship*

Moderator: V. Heidi Hass, Head of the Reference Collection, The Morgan Library & Museum

Recorder: Liz O'Keefe, The Morgan Library & Museum

Session notes: Heidi Hass introduced the speakers, gave a brief description of development of the mentoring program under the auspices of the Professional Development Committee, and described the previous day's workshop on mentoring, during which ten volunteer participants in the pilot one-year mentoring project received guidance on the mentor/mentee relationship.

Tony White gave a summary of the review of literature on mentoring conducted by Heidi and himself. Salient points included the general characteristics of the mentor/mentee relationship, the characteristics and responsibilities of both parties, and the pro's and con's of mentoring. He reviewed the results of the ARLIS/NA survey on mentoring, which are set out in detail in his Powerpoint presentation.

Margaret Law, who conducted the workshop on mentoring held on May 5, talked about formal mentoring programs. Formal mentoring programs exist to acquaint newcomers with the culture of an institution, as opposed to formal training programs, which inculcate skills. A formal mentoring program begins with a formal matching process, which is often initially conducted by the Human Resources Department, though the matches are subject to approval by staff assigned to participate in mentoring. Participants are given a formal statement of the goals of the relationship, and formal rules governing how the mentoring proceeds. Because mentoring is by definition a relationship between non-equals, it is particularly important to avoid sexual or romantic entanglements, since this may expose the institution to legal problems (in addition to the consequences for the persons involved). Informal mentoring relationships are much less structured, and more dependant on personal initiative; initiating one can be as simple as approaching a person and inviting him or her for a cup of coffee and a conversation. She noted that although long-distance mentoring relationships can work quite well, at least one face-to-face meeting is desirable; after that, subsequent encounters can occur by telephone and/or email. Mentoring can occur at any point during one's career: for

example, a seasoned librarian may benefit from mentoring if she is asked to assume new responsibilities or required to become more familiar with new technology, contemplating changing jobs, moving to a different area of the country, or planning for retirement. A younger person can play mentor to an older individual, as well as vice versa, and one can have multiple mentors or mentees simultaneously.

Jennifer Parker described her experiences as both a mentee and a mentor. Although she originally planned an academic career, the mentoring she received from librarians in the library where she did research as a graduate student in art history converted her to librarianship. Mentors at the University of Virginia's library encouraged her to attend library school, provided her with paid and unpaid work opportunities, and introduced her to ARLIS. Her experience illustrates the importance of recruiting for art librarianship at the pre-library school level: instead of targeting students already in library school, art librarians ought to reach out to the art history students using their libraries, who may be unaware of the rewards and challenges of a career in art librarianship. She also described a program at the University of Colorado at Boulder to encourage recruitment to academic librarianship. Initially, recruitment efforts were limited to outreach to students at the university and local library schools. Students were educated about careers in librarianship through posters, and presentations on librarianship at departmental career opportunities programs. This approach was supplemented by a Provost's Fellowship, which offers five \$2,500 fellowships to enable selected masters students to work with a library faculty mentor and to provide them with the opportunity to expand their understanding and appreciation of library faculty careers in postsecondary institutions. The response has been enthusiastic, both from volunteer mentors and from students seeking mentors. Mentees have learned more about career opportunities in librarianship and also begun getting some work experience; mentors have learned about their own profession from the mentees, who are generally more conversant with recent library literature, and who ask questions that force the mentors to think analytically about their jobs.

The formal presentations were followed by about half an hour of lively discussion. One attendee remarked that the mentor/mentee relationship was usually perceived as one between an older person who was well established in the profession and a novice; it was a novel idea to consider that a newcomer to the profession might serve as a mentor, because he or she had technical skills or some other area of competence to share. The issue of withdrawing gracefully from an unsatisfactory mentoring relationship was raised; Margaret Law recommended that the mentee tell the mentor that she was interested in guidance in a different area of librarianship, and ask for suggestions on who might be qualified to mentor in that area. Time commitments for mentoring vary, but it is possible to sustain a satisfactory relationship by scheduling an hour or so of phone conversation once a month. Another point made was that mentoring was an excellent way to network and to build up a stable of possible recruits (or possible employers); although it is not the same as a work situation, it reveals many of the personality traits, goals and values that are usually considered in hiring situations.