

## Introduction to Conference

James Neal

Good morning. My name is Jim Neal and I am currently Dean of University Libraries at Indiana University. I welcome you to IU, to our Indianapolis campus, and to this national conference on the future of area librarianship.

George Bernard Shaw was opening a new play in London and he decided to send a letter to Winston Churchill which said the following: "Dear Mr. Churchill, my new play is opening in London and I am enclosing two tickets to the opening night performance. One ticket is for you, and one ticket is for a friend, if you have one." Mr. Churchill quickly replied, "Dear Mr. Shaw, I am very pleased that you sent me the two tickets to the opening night performance of your new play in London, but unfortunately I have another commitment that night and I won't be able to be there, but I would be most pleased if you could send me two tickets to the second night's performance, if there is one."

Area librarianship in the future: Will there be one?

This conference has its origins at the spring 1993 meeting of the Title VI National Resource Center Directors in Washington, where the topic of the preparation, development, and future of area librarians was raised. In response to this challenge, the five centers at Indiana, the IU Libraries, and the School of Library and Information Science came together and proposed to the Department of Education a project to investigate and promote area librarianship as a career, as well as an essential component for the future health and viability of university research libraries in this country. Three years of funding have been awarded. During this first year we have focused on gathering data and on the development of this national conference. I would like to introduce to you the members of the planning committee. They are Denise Gardiner, who is Assistant Director of the Russian and East European Institute at Indiana; Mary Krutulius who is Assistant Dean of the School of Library and Information Science; Nancy Schmidt, who is African Studies Area Specialist in the University Libraries; and Hilary Jolly, who is Project Coordinator. She has done a remarkable and outstanding job in managing the several survey investigations and organizing this conference. Quite a feat. And we thank you Hilary.

Funding and our goal to maximize opportunity for discussion limited to 50 the number that could be invited to this conference. Many people wanted to be here. You are predominately area librarians, but you are also center directors, library school faculty, research library administrators, and representatives of organizations who are interested in the future of area librarianship. You may recall that Lady Astor, an American born person, was a member of the House of Commons in England. She and Winston Churchill did not get along. One day on the floor of Parliament, she screamed at him. She said, "Mr. Churchill, if I were your wife, I would put poison in your coffee." To which Mr. Churchill quickly replied, "Yes, Lady Astor, and if I were your husband, I would drink it." Yes, there are tensions in our universities among the various groups represented here at this conference, but we think that this conference can forge a partnership that would be important in guaranteeing the strength and future development of our collections and services through our area librarians. You represent different world areas; you represent different types of library science; you represent different parts of the country; and you

represent very different types of institutions. You are a diverse group, and diversity was one of our goals.

Before I introduce our first speaker, I would like to offer some introductory remarks. This is a conference on the future of area librarianship. It is a commitment, I believe, on the part of the research library community to take a fresh look at the future of our world area collections and services and the people who have over many, many decades been responsible for the success of the collections and services that we have assembled. We have several objectives at this conference. First of all, we want to stimulate a national discussion on the future of area librarians across the communities interested in international education and research. You reflect that diversity and you represent the national interest in this. We want to present to you and discuss with you the results of four surveys that we have conducted over the past six months on the status and future of area librarianship. More specifically, we want to identify priority professional preparation and development needs of area librarians. We also want to assess the impact of technology and library cooperation on the future of area librarianship. Ultimately what we want to do is to draft a national action plan that will strengthen and advance area librarianship. How will we do this? Well, at least over the next day and a half, we will be involved in a series of presentations and discussions. We will have a keynote presentation on the current and future trends in international education and research. We will present to you the results of our four national surveys, and this afternoon we will proceed into small group discussions on education and continuing development of area librarians and the issues involved in technology and cooperative activities. This evening at our dinner presentation the focus will be on library education and its role in the future of area librarianship. Tomorrow morning we will start off with a discussion of area librarianship from the librarians' perspective, and then we will move into a general open discussion based on our presentations and the small group process on an action agenda and next steps.

As many of you know, the Association of Research Libraries and the Association of American Universities, have been working hard over the last several years focusing on the acquisition and distribution of foreign language and area studies materials in our libraries. To quote from the work of that group: "the goal is to develop a network based and distributed program for the coordinated collection and development of foreign language materials among North American research libraries." As I said at the Title VI Center Directors meeting in Washington last fall, this is not going to be achievable if we do not have the individuals working in professional positions in our libraries with the language, subject, professional, and technical expertise to advance this objective. Jutta Reed-Scott, knowing about the preparations we were making for this conference, went through the various reports; I believe there were 15 reports that have been prepared in conjunction with the AAU study, and she found two of those 15 reports that focused specifically on the issues that we are going to be talking about here. First, the report from the Africa Task Force mentions the following: "Attention needs to be paid to long range efforts to recruit and train the next generation of Africana librarians, as well as to provide support to new librarians with an interest in Africana." And secondly, the Committee on South Asian Libraries said the following in their report: "We need to encourage students in library and information science and in South Asian studies to consider a career as an area studies librarian. We need to explore ways to establish internships at major collections without library education

programs and we need to encourage more library education programs to offer flexibility that such training requires." Now none of these groups was charged to look at this issue, but the fact that two of them raised it I think is significant.

I think one of the most difficult things that we faced as we launched this project and as we began to try to communicate with those that we were working with in the survey process was what we meant by area librarian. This is what we have come up with, a generic definition. We are not sure it works, but I hope over the course of the next day and a half, we will flush this out and come to some common understanding of what we are talking about. For us, as we have proceeded with this project, an area librarian is that individual who is employed in a professional position in academic and research libraries with responsibility for the development, organization and the servicing of collections and resources in a world area. Generic? Too broad? It is all encompassing and I think it gives us a sense of direction as we move forward with this process.

The other thing we are recognizing is trends in library education. We have noted and protested and wrung our hands over the national phenomena of the closing and reorientation of many of our library and information science programs. We knew that there was a general decline in the number of new library science graduates being produced, although in recent years that has been modestly reversed. We also knew from data that we saw from POLE, the Professional Organization of Library Educators, that less than 5% of individuals who were receiving their first professional degrees had either a baccalaureate or graduate level training in modern languages, international relations, comparative literature--those area studies fields that would lead a person potentially to participate in this type of professional career assignment.

We also knew that librarians who had area assignments were carrying out a variety of activities and responsibilities. We tend to focus on the selection and acquisitions piece, but as we talked with area librarians and gathered information, we recognized that these librarians were involved in all kinds of professional assignments in the library ranging through cataloging and preservation, reference and teaching, involvement in cooperative programs, very much focused on new networking and technology developments, and certainly committed to their own professional development and service and the active role that they have played in their professional associations as well as their scholarly associations.

We felt that what we were trying to achieve here today was to bridge the separation that has existed among area librarian groups and create sort of an umbrella discussion that looks at area librarianship across world areas and not just focuses on area librarianship in one world area. The Indiana University project had a goal which we presented to the Department of Education, and that was to expand the number of individuals with the appropriate subject, language, and professional preparation working in American research libraries in area specialist positions. We were fearful -- we did not have the data, but our hypothesis was that we were facing a future in which we were not going to have sufficient numbers of educated and well-prepared individuals to step into these roles. We believe that these roles were going to be essential to our collective health scholarship and teaching at our universities. Our project brought together in partnership the national resource centers, the University Libraries and the School of Library and Information Science--a real coalescing project. And we set out several strategies. We wanted to implement dual degree graduate programs between the library school and area studies at Indiana University. We have already moved on that and several are in place and more are in development. We

wanted to carry out a national study--a needs assessment, and we will present the results here. We wanted to organize summer seminars for area librarians. We do have funding that we have received through our Title VI centers for 1996 and 1997 to hold at Indiana University continuing conversations and development opportunities for area librarians and individuals interested in this as a career. We also wanted to provide library work experience during study so that we can provide a sort of pre-professional internship opportunity as well as post graduate internship opportunity. In our national study there were several things we were interested in. We wanted to know what the projections were in terms of demographic and turnover patterns, what was the subject and language preparation of individuals working in this field, what was the experience of libraries in terms of recruiting individuals into these types of assignments, what were the career patterns of area librarians, what were library schools doing in terms of curriculum, recruitment and placement, what are some of the alternatives that are being employed by libraries when they cannot budget or recruit effectively individuals with the area librarian responsibilities, and what types of library assignments are individuals in area assignments really taking on. We received enormous amounts of input, not only in terms of responding to the questions that we raised, but hundreds of comments that people added to the survey tools as they returned them to us. Many wrote letters.

In concluding my opening remarks, I'd like to read from one of those letters. This is an individual who is a director of one of the ARL libraries, also an individual who I believe is one of our most important thinkers nationally on collection development in research libraries. This is a quote from his letter-- "I believe that the golden age of area specialists was not in the 1960s or in the 1970s but has yet to come. The increasingly global interest combined with the expanding magnitude and ever more complex nature of our information universe will make the area librarian's job more evidently than ever before that of efficiently and effectively sifting through the information universe to tailor it to the individual's needs. Who other than the area librarian can do this? The thrust towards such specialization has declined in the US during the last fifteen years, because I can only surmise, academic research librarianship is plunging into a wrenching period of transition, surrounded by among other notions a profound questioning even of the role these libraries themselves will be expected to play in the future. I think some of this is being sorted out, and that the expectations will be as suggested above, and that we will need to ready ourselves as a profession to meet those expectations perhaps much sooner than we now anticipate."