Trivial Reference Books
A bagatelle from David Isaacson, Assistant Head of Central Reference

Most of the reference questions that university reference librarians receive are serious. Students, professors, and other patrons seldom take time to joke about their assignments or research. Nevertheless, on occasion we do get questions that remind me of the game of "Trivial Pursuit." Fortunately, there are a number of reference books that help to answer questions about trivia or questions that might strike some people as trivial in nature. This feuilleton shall call your attention to a few of the titles. These books were usually compiled with the general public as well as the reference librarian in mind. While they are organized, as good reference books should be, for the quick retrieval of information, these books also invite leisurely browsing.

Recently, I was able to answer a question that was clearly trivial. In fact, the questioner seemed to have two motives in asking the question. Although she was genuinely curious about the answer, she also thought she might stump me. The question: Why do telephone cords often have twists in them? Well, according to David Feldman's Why Do Dogs Have Wet Noses? and Other Imponderables of Everyday Life (Harper Perennial, 1990), this is because right-handed people typically transfer the phone to their left ear in order to free their right hand to do other things. When they put the phone back on the "hook," they have added a twist to the cord.

Probably the best known reference book devoted to trivia is the Guinness Book of World Records (Bantam Books, 1993), although it should be acknowledged that trivia is in the eye of the reader—some of the bets that this book has settled are anything but trivial.

Western Michigan University has the distinction of being cited in this book for the longest telephone call on record: 1,000 hours from March 12 to April 23, 1975. Students worked in shifts for 41 days, 12 hours, to raise funds for a medical center to treat burns. Guinness doesn't say who paid for the call!

Some reference books are predominantly serious with some trivial information mixed in. One reference war horse, Facts About the Presidents (6th ed., H.W. Wilson, 1993) compiled by the nonagenarian Joseph Nathan Kane, besides listing thousands of solemn facts, such as the birth places and ages at death of each president, also tells us that one of the favorite foods of our fattest President, Taft, was turtle soup.

No one's name is trivial to the person or to the parents that named him or her, but one of the oddest books in our reference collection is Sue Browder's The New Age Baby Name Book (Workman, 1978). There are a good many dictionaries devoted to tracing the origins of first and last names, but this is one of the very few that inform us that the Hawaiian name for a second-born child is Kekona—the entry does not note whether this is male, female, or gender-neutral.

In truth, I have never used Alberto Manguel's The Dictionary of Imaginary Places (Expanded ed., Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987) to answer an actual reference question, but this would be the definitive source to find detailed descriptions, often accompanied by maps, of made-up literary locales, such as the island of Houyhnhnms, inhabited mainly by horses, discovered by Lemuel Gulliver, and described in Jonathan Swift's famed Gulliver's Travels.

Dozens of reference books about the movies are eminently browsable and often amusing to read. One of my favorites is David Thomson's A Biographical Dictionary of Film (Knopf, 1994). This third edition is chock-full of Thomson's deliciously witty opinions. Here, for instance, is the first sentence in the entry for Sigourney Weaver: "Lofty, droll, ready for surprise, smart, attractive, and plainly desperate for comedy, Sigourney Weaver has a robust reasonableness worth bearing in mind when other actresses kill themselves, ascend the Olympus of vanity, or disgrace the human race" (p. 797).

Almost everyone knows about standard quotations books such as John Bartlett's Familiar Quotations (16th ed., Little, Brown, 1992), but few are familiar with highly specialized quotation books, such as Jonathon Green's The Cynic's Lexicon.

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David Isaacson
Information Literacy: On Our Way

Room 1070, the Instructional Services classroom in Waldo Library, is identified by a brass plate to the left of the door that announces, "This room was made possible through a generous gift from the Harold and Grace Upjohn Foundation." The donors would be pleased with the fruits of their donation since the room offers state-of-the-art equipment that is used to achieve a special goal: information literacy. Faculty librarians use this facility to provide instruction in how to make efficient use of the resources in the University Libraries. Their efforts are especially directed toward students, but as technology changes the ways in which we find information in libraries and other information resources, the process of retrieving that information or conducting research becomes more challenging and demanding to every patron.

No longer can library users walk into the library, simply consult a catalog, and believe that the result is acceptable. In order to be "information literate," they must be aware of the broad range of print and electronic resources and make informed choices about the best sources for their needs. Western Michigan University Libraries offer nearly 100 electronic databases, many with different search techniques plus hundreds of other print bibliographies. And this does not begin to describe the plethora of possibilities found once the Internet gate is opened. Researchers at all levels must master the techniques of using those varied computer systems if they are to locate that which they are seeking—or discover that it does not exist. To do these things well, to become "information literate," they need to be instructed in searching techniques, search strategy, and evaluation of sources—long before they apply or use the information that they have found.

These are the ambitious goals of the University Libraries' instruction program that, in turn, supports the University's mission "to help each student develop the ability to think critically and objectively, to locate and assess information ..." (Western Michigan University 1993-1995 Undergraduate Catalog, p. 8). The University Libraries has established a departmental liaison program that is designed to work with the general instructional program. The ultimate goal is to deliver, systematically, instruction to students on how to become information literate. Faculty requests for course-related library instruction are met by the team of librarians in subject areas that include freshman composition, history, women's studies, English, education, music, business, occupational therapy, the sciences, and other disciplines that cross the University's curricula. Instruction is available, at the present time, by faculty request, but efforts are focused on courses that provide a basic introduction to a significant number of students, such as English 105, or required courses in the major, such as History 190 or Women's Studies 200, which introduce students to print and electronic resources in their majors. There is also a plan to reach those classes that involve specific research projects at either the undergraduate or graduate level, but personnel and scheduling have become critical factors as the library liaison/faculty/classroom project develops.

Essential to the achievement of the goals is the equipment found in the class-room. A Macintosh with DOS compatibility dominates the teaching station. This "computer" enables use of software from both MAC and DOS platforms, as, for example, presentations that were developed with either version of PowerPoint. Through an LCD (liquid crystal display) panel and projection system, search techniques are performed on the computer and simultaneously projected on a screen to an audience of up to 50 individuals. This means that demonstrations of how to search WESTNET databases, including FINDER (the online catalog), KELLY (the catalog for local area libraries), LOOK-ITUP (the KVCC online catalog), and DATAQUEST-1 (a selection of four periodical indexes), as well as FirstSearch (more than 40 different databases), are possible. Further, the system can also be used to demonstrate the use of specialized, disciplinary databases that the library has acquired on CD-ROMs, as, for example, America, History and Life on Disc. Finally, an amazing spectrum of information can be navigated through access to Internet including Gopher and the World Wide Web.

The classroom is also designed to provide hands-on practice on the WESTNET system with small groups. Twelve stations are equipped with terminals and several offer printing capability. Students can practice the searching techniques demonstrated for them and immediately apply them to their individual research topics. This permits instructor intervention and assistance wherever necessary—by both faculty librarian and classroom instructor.

Many instructional efforts begin with course-related sessions in the Waldo classroom, but others are part of University-wide programs, or are offered at other service points in the libraries. A classroom next to the Education Library in Sangren Hall is often used for instructional sessions for education students. A tour of Waldo Library and a video that introduces the WESTNET system are part of the University's Freshmen Orientation Program. University 101, which reaches about 700 students each fall semester, includes a unit on the library that teaches students how to search for books and periodical articles on the computer. For two years, students enrolled in 101 have had the opportunity to use a hypermedia tutorial, which is mounted on four Macintosh computers in the Central Reference area on the first floor of Waldo Library; complete a quiz; and "graduate" with a certificate signifying their mastery of these basic library skills. Other opportunities for learning about the library are offered through individual assistance.

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From Karlsruhe to Kalamazoo, from a little German boy sent to a rural community for protection from allied bombs to professor of Foreign Languages and Literature at a midwestern university, from a high school exchange student to president-elect of the American Translation Association—all these are part of the chronicle of Peter Krawutschke.

Peter was born in 1939 into an artistic family in southwest Germany. Both his parents were graphic artists; his father, and later his brother Hans, were also architects. Given that moment in history, it was not surprising that Peter’s father was drafted by the German army—just a short time after Peter was born. Wilhelm Krawutschke was sent to Norway to build chalets for the occupying German soldiers who needed lodgings for their recreational leaves. While working there, he was captured by the British, then transferred to the Americans, and was eventually sent to France—as also to work on various buildings. After the war, in 1948, he was able to return to his family in Germany and see his son—now almost ten years old.

During the war years, the German government often sent the children away from heavily industrialized areas to rural villages where there was less risk of allied air raids. Hans, the older son, was drafted, but Peter and his mother Elisabeth were among those sent out of Karlsruhe. The precautions were not always successful since Peter has vivid memories of standing outside their home watching the sky flame red as bombers obliterated the city just beyond the hills. When the war ended in 1945, Peter and his mother returned to Karlsruhe which was, by then, a bombed-out ruin.

Peter has observed that there have been a number of people who have influenced his life and career and for whom he has great respect and affection. The first of these was Victor King, a young man from Berrien Springs, Michigan, who, as one of the first Fulbright Scholars in Europe, came to Karlsruhe to teach English after World War II. In response to the situation in Germany, King developed his own exchange program in which he arranged for one student each year to spend the school year in Berrien Springs. Peter was the third of these exchange students, first coming to Michigan in 1957. Financial assistance for his ship tickets was raised by the office of the Mayor of Karlsruhe and by a local newspaper, the BNN. While in Michigan, Peter lived with Mr. and Mrs. Wilbur Arnett (his second and third mentors), and graduated from Berrien Springs High School where he lettered in tennis.

After returning to Karlsruhe, Peter did two things which would change his future. He returned to the Goethe Gymnasium in Karlsruhe, and he completed the requirements for the abitur that students must pass to study at German universities. He then qualified for legal immigrant status which permitted him to return to the United States in 1960. Unfortunately, his skills were not highly in demand, and he found his first employment as a window washer at the Berrien Springs High School.

One of the ways that an enterprising young immigrant could gain U.S. citizenship at that time was to serve three years in the U.S. Army. Peter volunteered and was sent to Ft. Knox, Kentucky, for basic training, and on to Ft. Benjamin Harrison, Indianapolis, for training as a Personnel Administrative Specialist. The Army then shipped him back to Germany, but did not provide him with a security clearance since he was not yet a citizen. As a result, he could not work in personnel. Instead, he was assigned to an armored cavalry regiment as a medic. However, he did not serve much time as a medic; rather, he spent most of his service years translating among the several languages that he had absorbed from his education and travels. Peter notes, somewhat ironically, that, in so doing, he saw a great deal more classified material than he would ever have seen as a Personnel Administrative Specialist! When his three years were completed, he returned to southwest Michigan and received his U.S. citizenship.

In January of 1964, Peter began work on a B.A. in Secondary Education at Western Michigan University, which he completed in 1966. In the process, he encountered several new mentors who would help the educational traveler on his academic journey: Hermann Rothfuss in German, Frances E. Noble in French, and Edward Galligan in English—all esteemed professors at WMU. Noble holds a special place in his recollections; it was in her French Romanticism class that Peter met his wife Ellie.

Ellie and Peter have one daughter, Jennifer, who took a B.A. at Bryn Mawr in mathematics and physics followed by an M.S. in applied mathematics at WMU. In the fall of 1995, she will be in Japan as part of the JET program. Ellie earned an M.A. in medieval studies at Western, administered the WMU Foreign Studies office, and then changed careers and completed a J.D. at Toledo; she now has a private law practice in Kalamazoo. Prior to all of this, Peter completed an M.A. in German, in 1967, and began teaching full time at the University, first as an instructor, and by the mid-1980s, as a full professor with a distinguished scholarly record. During the early years of his teaching career, he commuted to Ann Arbor to work on a Doctor of Philosophy in German language and literature that was completed in 1976.

In 1983, Peter started the Western Translation Center, a program in which interns worked as translators for southwest Michigan firms who had global business interests. The program was an immediate success. In 1987, Dr. Krawutschke became chairperson of what was then called the Modern Languages Department. He reinstated the teaching of Russian, started the teaching of Japanese, and designed a master’s program in the Teaching of English as a Second Language.

When, in the early 1990s, several interested faculty and staff members met to organize a Friends group at Western Michigan University, Peter was one of the first to volunteer; he worked hard and constructively becoming the first president (1992-94) of the organization. His leadership was instrumental in determining the structure and role of the current Friends of the University Libraries. All of the foregoing leads to one conclusion: the chronicle of Peter Krawutschke’s travels, his odyssey from Karlsruhe to Kalamazoo, from student to professor, from mentee to mentor, has not ended. G.E.
Traffic Jam Ahead???
A commentary by Dean Lance Query

At the present time, there’s congestion on the on ramp of the information superhighway! Michigan users of the Internet have discovered that their previously easy access has become an increasingly complicated and frustrating encounter—especially if they are in certain geographical locations. The local dial-in lines, which appear to be free to users, actually have been provided via MichNet, a network developed by Merit Network, Inc. This access road has members or affiliates from organizations in education, research, industry, and government. Western Michigan University is such a member. When first established, the local dial-in lines were paid for by the member organizations who readily published their numbers. The result, as more and more people access the Internet, is a rapidly growing “pile up” of phone signals that are jamming the local lines. Thousands of users, many not affiliated with the owners of the lines, have taken advantage of the seemingly “free” service. The number of busy signals that now results when anyone dials the local number(s) has left everyone in a negative mood. One answer, more lines, is not a viable one for most organizations including Western Michigan University. The reason is simple: more lines would increase the cost, continue to motivate the non-affiliated users, and further exacerbate the dial-in congestion.

In response to this critical issue, Merit established a Dial-in Access Committee that, in December 1994, produced a new Dial-in Access Policy that would replace the ad hoc practices previously used. The new policy, approved by the Merit Board, attempts to strike a balance between providing reasonable assurance of access to those who help pay for MichNet’s dial-in services while still providing an equitable amount of public, shared access. The policy became fully operational on August 1, 1995. As of that date, all users must have an identifying Access ID in order to connect to network resources over the MichNet dial-in lines. Anyone who continues to use the general “anonymous@merit.edu” identifier will not be able to connect to the network.

Member organizations of the Network are able to provide public access through one of two ways: (1) by buying Access IDs from Merit for users and (2) by obtaining “simultaneous access tokens” (SATs) from Merit and then issuing Access IDs to users. Western Michigan University is using the second method. SATs are “software” units that keep count of active dial-in connections to each organization. Each SAT is “owned” by a member organization and permits that organization’s constituency to use MichNet shared dial-in modems anywhere in the State of Michigan. An organization can obtain or “earn” SATs by providing shared dial-in (i.e., modems) access to the network. The more modems provided by an organization, the more SATs are earned, with the result that more “access” is available.

An important advantage of the implementation of the new approach to public access to the information highway is that it offers a way to give priority to users. Members of the WMU community who dial in to a modem with Access IDs provided by the University get top priority not only “at home” in the Kalamazoo area, but from any location in the state where WMU has provided modems. If organizations choose not to purchase and place modems off-site, their users can still dial-in to listed modems. However, the user then becomes one of several “drivers” in the shared dial-in “on ramp” that would connect to the network. They may well find themselves “jammed” until their organization decides to “pay the toll,” purchase SATs, and assure full-speed ahead onto the highway. However, in order to make access possible, those organizations that are not official members of Merit may still purchase Access IDs and so can individuals. The anticipated result is significant reduction in dial-in congestion; in other words, no busy signals or traffic jams.

Having outlined a solution to a complex problem in today’s computerized world does not, however, eliminate at least one other key concern: Does the Dial-In Access Policy widen the gap between the information “haves” and the “have nots”? The answer to that question is, unfortunately, “yes and no!” All of us need to be reminded that the access to the superhighway was never “free” although it appeared to be to the average user. Moreover, many of the users already had to have made a considerable investment in personal computing equipment before attempting to connect to the network. The new policy is not penalizing those who have already shown that they can pay. Further, in responding to those who were always “haves,” but were not paying prior to this, it must be pointed out that if access is a busy signal, the user becomes a “have not” regardless of the system’s capabilities.

At the same time, the fact is that many institutions including libraries and schools, whose mission is to provide information access, will not be able to afford Merit’s dial-in access equipment and maintenance charges. Already, discussions are underway among members of the Lakeside Library Consortium regarding its future role as a broker for Merit’s services. The Library of Michigan, our state library, is also attempting to resolve the issue of funding for library access. Until such planning is completed, there remains the possibility that some individuals will not have access; “have nots” will continue to exist.

In addition, Merit has also been attempting to find resources and expand dial-in capabilities throughout Michigan. The K-12 Dial-In Expansion Program is an example of one project. Merit has dial-in service in 37 Michigan cities that provides the necessary modems to access the system at less expense. This means that dial-in access is only a local call for 70% of those who use these high-technology modems; it also means that 30% will not have access locally.

In sum, the information superhighway infrastructure continues to expand at an amazing speed producing a massive reservoir of resources for those who can access the system. As those users continue to grow in number as well as need, the highway has become crowded, congested, and traffic has come to a full stop. Past practices have had to be changed and costs have had to be paid. Many organizations or institutions have responded to the challenge and improved access for their clientele while reducing the possibility of delays or even non-access. As with many other aspects of our technologically-dominated environment, other problems remain to be solved. For more information on issues related to libraries, see MichNet News, vol. 3, no. 2 (Spring 1995) and Merit/MichNet Shared Dial-in (May 1995).
Multimedia Education: A Multisensory World

Everyone who casually browses the literature of almost any discipline is now finding that one word is appearing in many different contexts: the word is "multimedia." However, most of us do not know how to define that word and its implications for education except in the most elementary way. Let's begin, then, with a description of what happens when personal computers have the hardware and software that enables the user to access multimedia programs. At that point, the user is presented not only with written text and data, but also information that is enhanced with high resolution color images, stereo sound, animation, and full motion video segments—thus empowering the user to make use of selected senses beyond vision. Moreover, the latest applications employ "hypertext," this means that the written material is linked to the other sensory components. Assume for a moment that you are reading about whales. When you arrive at the passage which describes whale songs, you can, by clicking the mouse pointer on "songs," hear the whale songs through the computer's speakers—or, by clicking on size or description, see illustrations of the different species in comparative formats or swimming in their natural habitat. As a result, more than one sense is involved and thus, multimedia.

In order to take advantage of this technology, the computer itself must have specialized software and hardware including a powerful processor, a CD-ROM drive, a sound board, and a set of speakers. In addition, the faculty member must have skills in the areas of electronic presentation technology, multimedia authorship, and other computer-based tools. As a result, in early 1994, planning began on the establishment of a University Libraries unit, Information and Instructional Services, that was designed to assist faculty and students in these areas. The primary goal of ISS is to supply full production support to those faculty who lack the technical expertise to display their ideas in a multimedia format.

Information and Instructional Services, located in Sangren Hall, houses a staff of graphic-multimedia designers who can provide start-to-finish support on any instructional project. Faculty may seek advice and meet with design consultants when developing multimedia instructional materials, hypertext-based learning modules, slides, transparencies, electronic presentations, and other advanced instructional delivery tools. Each designer has experience with computerized graphic design and illustration, as well as animation and video production. The design team helps the instructor to explore options and determine how the goals will be attained. Options are invariably plentiful: in some cases a set of electronically produced slides will suffice; other projects require hundreds of hours to create modules which utilize animation, video clips, sound bites, and text. In addition to consulting, this unit will accept projects and, in cooperation with the faculty member, create complete multimedia products or other computer-generated teaching resources.

The Instructional Technology Laboratory, in 3302 Sangren (formerly the Media Lab) has also expanded its services to meet the needs of those who wish to use the new software and produce their own multimedia units. This facility now includes a small computer laboratory equipped with two IBM compatible Pentium computers and four Macintosh Power PCs to permit the use of the newest in multimedia authoring, illustration, and presentation software. Furthermore, computer scanners, digital cameras, and specialized audio- and video-capture hardware and software are available so that video clips, sounds bites, or photographs may be used to enhance multimedia projects or electronic presentations.

The Education Library now houses the WMU video tape/film collection, and is acquiring a new demonstration collection of multimedia resources. Finally, in order to implement the teaching mission of ISS more effectively, another area, 3307 Sangren, has been converted into a multi-purpose classroom. This room includes a small video tape studio, an area for large group film/video viewing, and the necessary equipment to allow real time demonstrations of WESTNET resources, multimedia titles, computer software, and Internet resources.

The University Libraries is excited about and proud of the capabilities offered and services provided by these new facilities. The director is Dennis Strasser, Associate Professor of Libraries. Professor Strasser urges that you call 387-5010 if you have questions, ideas, or wish to investigate the new teaching technologies that open up the classroom to the evolving universe of multimedia/multisensory instruction.

D.S.
(St. Martin's Press, 1984). Not every book of quotations would include such gems as this comment by George Lichtenberg, German physicist and writer: "He who is in love with himself has at least this advantage—he won't encounter many rivals" (p. 122).

Every library has numerous books devoted to explaining punctuation rules. Only Karen Elizabeth Gordon, however, in *The Well-Tempered Sentence: A Punctuation Handbook for the Innocent, the Eager, and the Doomed* (Ticknor & Fields, 1983) makes a game out of this chore. Here, for instance, is how she defines a common point: "A comma is used to set off conjunctive adverbs, such as however, moreover, etc., and transitional adverbs." She then illustrates, "We hate your ideas; however, we will give them proper consideration" (p. 53).

Thousands of specialized reference dictionaries exist, but one of my favorite genres is dictionaries of unusual words. For instance, George Stone Saussy III, in *The Logodaedalian's Dictionary of Interesting and Unusual Words* (University of South Carolina Press, 1989) may be one of the few authors who will assist the reader to discover that his or her vocabulary is incomplete without a word meaning the ability to coin new words, such as "logodaedalian."

Some quite non-trivial, and even solemnly serious reference books include entries that are unintentionally humorous. On a slow day at the reference desk, for instance, I hope I am forgiven for browsing the index to the U.S. Department of Labor's famous *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* (4th ed., 1991). Just a few of the actual names for legitimate jobs in this country included among many thousands in this work are: suction-dredge pipe-line placing supervisor, continuous pillow-case cutter, upset-welding-machine operator, and ticket-chopper assembler.

And so goes the search for the insignificant fact or figure. All of the books mentioned above can be found on the shelves of the central reference collection in Waldo Library. They exist for your edification—and also for your amusement. Browsers are just as welcome as users with long faces! D.I.