



Lance Query, Dean of University Libraries

Information Literacy and Hypermedia

by Lance Query

There was a time when students and even faculty would lament, "I just can't find any information on that subject." Such a statement is difficult to comprehend in the mid-1990s. Rather, those who have any concept of computer searching are more apt to say, "How do I limit my search? I'm overwhelmed by titles and options!" From a single "card catalog" and a few paper indexes, the University Libraries have evolved to an international catalog (WorldCat) with some 30 million entries and a series of online periodical data bases that, in Waldo alone, number over 65.

In the last issue of *Gatherings*, I advocated that we teach our students to be "information literate." However, teaching information literacy is an expensive and labor intensive enterprise. Skilled librarians and teachers are required who, themselves, know the breadth and depth of available sources as well as the different search strategies.

Unfortunately, all of the teachers and librarians who exist will not succeed in that effort if left solely to them—regardless of their dedication or their skills. What can make a difference is the technology that has helped to create the problem.

One application of technology that holds promise for instruction of all kinds is hypermedia. Rather than relying on print, hypermedia is a different way of organizing information in many media—text, pictures, video clips, and sound. The common thread of hypermedia is non-linearity, in effect, the lack of a common thread. Rather than lead a user through the information, hypermedia encourages and permits a user to cut his or her own

path. Each student of the system can then move as expeditiously or as cautiously as necessary to achieve individualized goals.

The University Libraries has been experimenting with mediated programs as a means of extending introductory library use instruction. A pilot project was implemented in the fall of 1993 to determine if a mediated self-instructional tutorial could effectively replace the traditional University 101 workbook assignments. University 101 is designed as an orientation "course" available to new students with the specific objective of easing "the transition from high school to college and to introduce students to the University's resources." Each section uses a standard notebook that includes a work/experiential assignment in the University Libraries—a straightforward, linear method facilitated by library faculty who work with the student classes when they visit Waldo Library.

The pilot program substitutes a computer monitored, individualized program that allows each student to learn the same information as do the combination workbook and class visit—without human intervention. The 15 minute interactive program is entitled "Welcome to the University Libraries" and is currently available on three terminals located in the reference area of Waldo Library. Each user is educated through a combination of graphics, sound, animation, and movie clips that provide information on how to use the online catalog (FINDER) and a general interest database (*Readers Guide Abstracts*) to find books and journal articles in the WMU libraries. Units on branch libraries on campus, their hours of operation, and basic library services are also included. The program was developed by the University Libraries in cooperation with University Computing Services, Instructional Computing, and Media Services.

This is, needless to say, only the first step in the production of a broadly based, widely accessible series of hypermedia tutorials that will offer ever more sophisticated non-linear programs that instruct users in the selection and use of various databases that are most appropriate to the users' information needs. That goal is a major challenge since an underlying assumption is that we can also develop a method that will teach users to learn the distinction between getting the "right" information as opposed to accepting "some" information from a complex and ever expanding information network. The challenge, however, must be met or future library users will be the "information illiterate" rather than the "information literate."

"The Opening of a Door..."

When Emily Dickinson penned the words above, she could not have anticipated that Western Michigan University would acquire over 2100 volumes of poetry written by American women from colonial times to the present. However, she also wrote of many things that she had never seen so that this special collection would truly not amaze her as it has amazed many of us who have been able to see and use one of the world's unique compilations of women's imagery, thoughts, aspirations, beliefs, and representations.

The collection, now named for Carol Ann Haenicke, a librarian at the Portage Public Library and wife of President Diether H. Haenicke, was dedicated on October 28, 1993 at a special ceremony held in the Rare Books Room of Waldo Library. There, placed carefully on the ornate shelves of the beautiful room, is a very special record of women's poetry that begins with a 1773 book of verse written by Phillis Wheatley, a slave, and spans centuries to famous contemporary women Sylvia Plath and May Sarton. The entire collection was purchased from Harrison Hayford, a professor of English at Northwestern University, who is known for his scholarly and authoritative writings on the works of Herman Melville.

The genesis of the move from a private collection to a special collection at Western Michigan University was started when Professor Thomas C. Bailey, Department of English, WMU, learned that Dr. Hayford was interested in selling his lifelong effort to collect the published poetry of American women. In turn, Chair Shirley Clay Scott, English; Dean Douglas P. Ferraro, Arts and Sciences; and President Haenicke were persuaded

Continued on page 5



Carol Ann Haenicke, sitting, with Douglas Ferraro, Dean, College of Arts and Science, and Shirley Scott, Chair, English Department.