Richmond Academic Library Consortium

RALC Retreat

Country Club of Petersburg

06/27/2012

In Attendance:

JSRCC Hong Wu
UPS Joe Coalter
JTCC Helen McKann
VSU Elsie Weatherington
UR Kevin Butterfield VCU
John Ulmschneider
UR Paul Porterfield
Library of Virginia Sandy Treadway
VUU Pam Foreman
Richard Bland Virginia Cherry
RMC Ginger Young
Richard Bland (future) Dan Ream

Brief history of RALC:

John noted that RALC has evolved considerably over time. The RALC web site contains a history and timeline of RALC from 1985 to 1992, created by John Trotti (former director of Union Presbyterian Seminary Library), and from 1992 to 2000, created by Paul Porterfield (University of Richmond, and long-time treasurer of RALC.) RALC was founded in 1972. The history of its work from 1972 to 1984, and from 2000 to the present, remains to be written.

Participants contributed their perspectives and memories of RALC.

• RALC looked at a union catalog for a long time; eventually, VCU created a union catalog service. The service was discontinued in October 2012. A new service through Worldcat will be constructed in early 2013.

• At one time, the courier service was shared among the different schools in RALC and wasn’t a contracted service. Different institutions would cover different areas at their own expense.

• RALC historically has focused on sharing film and media. The ILL component for these materials (and other materials) remains a core commitment of the cooperative.

• RALC has sustained invaluable professional relationships among the library directors in the Richmond region. RALC meetings are important forums for the directors, both for information exchange and also to share challenges and opportunities.

• RALC has engaged in a wide range of projects with member libraries. RALC paid for fax machines at one point. RALC provided film cleaning services through VCU. There are many other examples.
• The consortium has helped with inter-institutional involvement beyond the libraries. This is especially true in the way RALC has supported student use of the resources at RALC institutions.

• The RALC committees have proven valuable for staff. The collaboration of the RALC community beyond the directors and beyond the RALC services has engendered growth and interchange among staff.

The retreat participants agreed that the history of RALC shows real and sustained benefit for the libraries, faculty, and students at all the participating institutions. And, not to be overlooked, the consortium has saved institutions money over the long run through its sharing efforts. Overall, the participants felt good about the work of RALC.

**Mission Statement:**

John noted that the RALC mission statement hasn’t changed for some time. Perhaps a revision of the mission statement is needed.

What is the audience for the mission statement? Participants agreed that clearly, the audience is the external community: those who benefit from RALC and who support the institutions who participate in RALC. Sandy expressed an important bottom-line need for all the participating organizations: she noted that she should be able to tell the Secretary of Education why she’s paying dues for this organization by pointing to the web site and the mission statement there. So the mission statement is aimed at the end user, at our constituencies.

Participants made the following observations about the mission statement.

• The language feels dated, even though we’re doing most of the things expressed in the mission statement. Sandy: note that the specific things we do in RALC may not be there in the future; everything that RALC does is in the first sentence.

• Where should the RALC Mission Statement reside? Only on the web site? Right now, it’s part of the Bylaws, and appears on the web homepage.

• The first sentence of the current mission statement focuses on the institutions. The second sentence is about the services to users, the promotion of resource sharing in an efficient a way as possible. Participants agreed that developing our libraries and staff is a good thing but secondary to our core mission.

• Creating a consortium that is “resource rich and economically efficient” through cooperation is important: resource sharing is important. RALC should focus on expedited resource sharing.

• Hong: students and faculty benefit from access, but librarians also benefit from the community of RALC. RALC should not lose its role as a forum for exchanging ideas about best library practice. How are each of us meeting various challenges? How are we meeting the needs of students who are off-campus, web-enrolled students? Virginia: we have a staff exchange but it hasn’t been active.
• Participants agreed that we should use the retreat to help inform an effort to rewrite the current mission statement. There was agreement that the mission statement should drop the phrase “shared cooperative collection development”, which is a relic of efforts to build media collections cooperatively.

• Participants agreed that RALC should create a group to re-write the mission statement for RALC. The group might also consider creating a short, snappy vision statement.

The discussion about mission raised two issues about the current web site.

• Can we use the RALC site to generate RALC passes?

• It appears that committees haven’t put their minutes up on the web site since 2002 and 2004. Is this a larger communication problem? Should we develop a newsletter for RALC that makes them feel more connected? Or make sure we have an RSS feed for the minutes? Should we have a group look at communications within RALC, explore new ways to do this?

**Quantitative profile:**

Participants had a number of questions about what the RALC statistics actually mean and why RALC is even gathering certain numbers.

• One original purpose of the media statistics: to determine how much an institution should be investing in media in order to be a balanced participant in the cooperative. There was a time when the number of items an institution borrowed from RALC institutions went into a formula. That number of items multiplied by a factor gave the amount of money an institution should be spending on media the next year, so that the asset holdings of each institution didn’t get unbalanced and institutions didn’t rely entire on the cooperative for these purchases.

• The total number of volumes circulated among RALC institutions is less than 5,000 items. That is not a substantial number compared with the cost, and wouldn’t impress people. It costs us between $3 and $5 per item to ship them among one another, perhaps, but that’s only one way. Essentially, that’s what we’re paying to provide expedited delivery of these items among us. It raises the question: does the RALC expedited loan program deliver value, and can it be achieved by another existing expedited loan service?

• There was a question about what the number “RALC passes received” means. It means the number of people who actually came to your institution.

• We should find a way to consider the accumulation of resources in RALC as an asset for all of the participating institutions, and brag it up.

• It was decided to reshape the RALC statistics to reduce the data collected to only what we need. RALC can supplement the numbers with NCES data if necessary. It was decided to ask a couple of board members to look at what numbers should be collected, and what numbers we’re not collecting that we should collect.

The discussion on statistics led to a sidebar topic: cooperative media purchasing.
• There once was a state-wide consortium that purchased ¾ inch video tapes, and then duplicated those for institutions that couldn’t afford it. This was a deal with a company that permitted it because they were considered educational materials.

• Should RALC focus collection sharing on streaming video? There might be licensing challenges in this, because it moves away from ownership of an item. Can we do a consortium purchase of these kinds of things?

• Paul noted Swank Motion Pictures licensing for classroom access; these are mostly motion pictures. Paul volunteered to check into how we might jointly license Swank films for RALC; are they open to that?

**Committees and work groups:**

Participants reviewed committee activity and made the following points.

• Committees are created to carry out the mission of RALC, according to the bylaws. They have done memorable workshops and programs in the past, but not a whole lot of them. They should create policies, procedures, etc. in support of RALC, and also plan for professional development opportunities in support of RALC. Networking is also important to RALC.

• The membership lists for the committees is outdated. General assignment to the committees shows that not everything is done.

• Invitations to the committees for the Board meeting is important.

• Prior to the retreat, Virginia asked committee chairs for feedback and read the responses to the group. The consensus from the committees was that the committee structure is appropriate and shouldn’t be collapsed. The need to know what other committees are doing, perhaps through some kind of newsletter, is important. This harkens back to the communication issue discussed previously.

• The effectiveness of the committees depends on the chair a great deal.

• Should we roll the media co-op committee into the public services committee? It was decided to ask the opinion of the media co-op members merging the committee into the public services committee.

• What is the purpose of each of the current 4 committees — Public Services, Technical Services, Media Co-Op, and Nominating? Are they user groups instead of committees? Remember that RALC also has the Web User’s Group, which isn’t a formal committee.
  - Public Services: professional development. Always pairs a program with a meeting, not just a meeting by itself. Networking and sharing best practice.
  - Technical services:
  - Web User’s Group: share ideas and networking among one another; presentations at meetings.

• Some members noted that there are many other opportunities for professional development outside of the RALC committees, such as webinars and other programs from
VLA and the like. Should the RALC committees focus on raising awareness of these opportunities, rather than creating new local opportunities?

• One member asked if the committees are effective in taking on some of the work of the officers? If not, the cooperative should empower them further to take up more tasks.

**Dues structure and courier service:**

Paul noted that courier service started in 1997; before then, we delivered things ourselves as mentioned previously. He distributed a history of the dues, along with budget allocation for courier service and actual costs for the courier service, since 1997. Until 2001, there were varying dues, depending on institutional use of the media services. Each library had a separate membership fee, too. Dues have increased by $665 over that time, about 53% increase over the period. Courier costs have gone up $7,000/year over the period, about 56%.

• Paul underscored that over time, he saw that the trend is to pay more for the courier service. The fuel surcharge became more expensive. At this point, RALC dues essentially pay for the courier service: 90%-100% of the dues goes to the courier service. We're paying about $2 a book for delivery, to and from a library. (Note: this number is at odds with the number cited in the discussion about quantitative profile.)

• Question: is it worth paying the courier service for deliveries twice a week, 50 weeks a year? We are already committed to this level of service for the upcoming fiscal year (2012-13), and we need to give them notice if we want to make significant changes. Reducing the number of deliveries by half will not reduce costs by half, but by some lesser amount.

• RMC and UPS both underscored that the delivery through RALC is very valuable because of its quick turnaround. And, it's more predictable than ILL: the stuff will be delivered in 2 days, instead of the unpredictable delivery of ILL. Also, UR noted that the courier service has run very very well over the years.

• It may be that the courier service is of more value to the smaller institutions now than to the larger institutions. That may be fine and acceptable. And that might make it okay to handle the courier service as it is.

• The scholarship fund is off-budget: that is, RALC does not collect dues for this purpose or budget the expense each year. It has been working off a surplus in the RALC balances.

• RALC does an audit every three years.

• Paul noted that there should be negotiation regarding the costs with the courier service.

**Should we expand the definition of RALC (includes agenda item on the future of RALC):**

Participants speculated that eventually, the core service of RALC – delivery – may become less important with digitization. It raises the question: if the service declines, what is the value of RALC ultimately?
• Are there new ways to collaborate besides resource sharing?

• RALC has scarce resources to do anything else besides resource sharing. Any dues increases might be difficult. Still, RALC should define itself as more than just the courier service.

• RALC right now is completely focused on Richmond metro area. Is that how we should remain? Ginger noted VICULA; John noted MALiA and the CRC in Raleigh. However, after much discussion, the participants agreed that RALC should remain focused on the Richmond metro region.

• We could open up educational and professional enrichment programs to non-RALC folks, perhaps for a charge? The participants agreed to explore this in a future Board meeting.

**Next steps and action items in follow-up to the retreat:**

Review RALC dues. The Board should ask a group to assemble data on ILL traffic, RALC traffic, costs, and delivery times to support a review of RALC dues and services for the long term. However, the dues discussion for 2013-14 must be finished by January in order to comply with the bylaws schedule for dues. Key question for the 2013-14 dues: should RALC look at ways to reduce or otherwise adjust the delivery service to reduce costs? Is there a less expensive way to deliver materials among RALC institutions?

• Shared storage facility: this issue must be brought to the next Board meeting. RALC needs to decide on the possible scope of the project and whether to explore options in a serious way at this point.

• Scholarship program: there is a sense that it is good, but ultimately not sustainable. The Board should discuss the future of the scholarship program and whether ultimately it should continue.

• Create ways to increase and expand communication between the Board and the Committees.

• Initiate a discussion about whether and how to restructure the committees by bringing the topic to the Board and including committee chairs.

• Committees should foster a sustained focus on sharing best practice and developing communities of practice.

• Decide whether RALC should create a new WorldCat-based union catalog for RALC institutions, or just rely on a regular WorldCat search and use WorldCat’s default proximity lists.

• Create a group to re-write the RALC mission statement, guided by input and reflections from the retreat. This group should also consider modifying the membership language to include “non-profit” in the qualifications.

• Ask 2-3 Board members to review statistics and suggest ways to simplify them and rely more on the already-reported NCES statistics.
• The Board should review whether and how to open up RALC’s educational and professional development programs to others outside of RALC.