

# NYMA NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF AJL/NYMA VOL. 22, No. 2 / WINTER-SPRING 2011

## **“When Media Change, People Change” New Information Age @ Reference Workshop**

Today, when librarians have become “media specialists,” navigating the Web is not the only prerequisite to gathering knowledge. There is also understanding the social and intellectual design behind the latest search engines. Attendees of AJL-NYMA’s Reference Workshop, held Tues., Jan. 18<sup>th</sup>, at the New York Public Library, were privileged to hear two informative lectures on the mechanism and impact of our brave new digital world.

### **Room in Mind**

The program began with Dr. David Walczyk, Assistant Professor of Information and Library Science at the Pratt Institute, whose “Evaluating the Usability of Digital Information” was both timely and thought provoking. Both influenced and inspired by the late Marshall McLuhan, Dr. Walczyk challenged us to re-think about how people adapt to the new ways in which information is presented and then accessed. In short, he explained, “When media change, people change.”

Four main topics were addressed at length:

•The current situation. Historically, running a library has  
(Cont’d on pg. 4)

## Reflections . . . .

The media would have us believe that the economy is improving and that it is only a matter of time before the general population feels benefits and the job market picks up. I would like to believe that this is true and that those of us whose work hours have been reduced or whose positions have been eliminated completely will once again be back where we were.

Personally, I believe that we must all adjust to a new reality, one that has yet to be defined. The days of generous grants from the Avi Chai Foundation have ended and, while it would be nice, they are not likely to return any time soon. I hope that we will all be able to make the adjustment successfully.

With this in mind, I found NYMA’s annual Reference Workshop to be a total breath of fresh air with speakers who are looking to the future and making the most of available resources. I especially enjoyed the perspective of Dr. David Walczyk, who said, “Start with what you would like to do; then make the most of what you have with which to do it.” While we librarians have always felt that way, it was wonderful to hear it from another perspective and from someone younger than many of us.

Also inspiring was the talk by the second speaker Michelle Chesner, who is relatively new to our organization, about cutting-edge possibilities in a digital age and who has injected new life into Judaic Librarianship at Columbia University, giving hope for the rising generation and confirmation that our field will continue to grow. That, in combination with National AJL President Jim Rosenbloom’s discussion of future developments in AJL, remind me of why I am in this profession and of the regard in which I hold you all, my colleagues.

I hope that the future will grow brighter and that this will be my last downbeat message. I look forward to our Cataloging Workshop in February, which will give us another opportunity to exchange ideas and support.

**Roz Friedman**  
President, AJL-NYMA

*(Workshop, cont'd from p. 1)*

been a labor intensive operation, where trained librarians were needed to process, store, and retrieve information. Today, technology has simplified and/or eliminated much (approximately half) of the time-consuming work that had once been performed by library staff. Using a pie-chart graphic, Dr. Walczyk estimated that technology might eliminate only a quarter of the necessary work, leaving a question mark for the remaining quarter. What is the usability (value) of this remaining 25%? His answer: new services provided by librarians.

**\*Myths of information.** There are both old and new myths of information. The old contend that information is scarce, linear, analog, surface, closed, non-visual, and hierarchical. New myths claim that information is abundant, holistic (ubiquitous), non-linear, exploratory, symbolic, and networked. The internet thus collapses both space and time.

**\*Precepts (perceptions) of information.** People and ideas are now interconnected in a non-

linear fashion via computer. New media are both extensions (+) and amputations (-): consider that a stone tablet can last forever (a+), but is not portable (a-); whereas a note written on paper can be easily transported (+) but is easily destroyed or damaged. Learning by observation is the optimal method to discover how new media create new environments.

Historically, libraries were closed buildings; now glass and open space are used extensively in library design, to engender a certain "openness" and expanse of imagination. It is important, Dr. Walczyk explained, "to learn to not have a point of view. If you are looking for something, you will find it." Information has three types of value: use, exchange, and symbolic (affect) value.

**\*Methods (tools) of usability.** Do the math. Usability = effectiveness + efficiency + satisfaction. It is important to understand the different groups of people who use information and empathize with their needs. Insight and understanding trumps a point of view when considering usability.



**ON VIEW: Watching Dr. Walczyk's presentation of "personas and scenarios."**