

SUNYAUG, September 19th

On 19 September, the SUNY Aleph Users Group met for the first time at SUNY Upstate Medical Center. I attended these sessions:

Aleph Privileges: staff empowerment and database integrity, presented by Frank Mols, Assistant Director for Technical Services, Binghamton

Frank gave a detailed overview of the process of creating and managing Aleph user levels. The focus was on technical services, but his informative talk would be helpful for any unit that needs to make decisions about Aleph permissions.

Help! Presented by Natalie Sturr, Head Library Automation, Oswego

Natalie gave a wonderful presentation of how to find information about Aleph from ExLibris, OLIS, ITEC and your colleagues. Her handout is something I will be hanging onto and will be happy to share with anyone who is interested in learning more about Aleph. I could have listened to her talk all day. She has a website with lots of Aleph info. I will be tuning in for her hints and help.

Patch 5-6 No frames web OPAC, presented by T. Roberts, Binghamton. A preview of what the Aleph no frames web opac looks like. Some of the features we now have will no longer be necessary, like the back button, because the browser will be able to do that. T. Roberts discussed a few problems that came up, like faculty who used a version of Netscape that doesn't work really well with the no frames version. T. Roberts found ways for users to access Aleph with just about any browser. Something interesting that BNG has done is create a new book list, pulling information from the invoice data. BNG also has subject lists of ejournals, done with XML. They use Serials Solutions for managing their ejournals. The subject lists were created with XML, but I'm not sure exactly how. I have his email address in case Nathan or anyone else would like to ask him anything.

After lunch, we were treated to an excellent presentation on authorities, given by Sandy Card and Andy Perry, of Binghamton. Sandy is Head of Cataloging and Andy is Assistant Director of Libraries for Systems. After hearing this presentation, I understood how Aleph handles dynamic authority control and the problems that arise out of Aleph not reading all three digits of the marc tags for headings. Sandy demonstrated how BNG identified ambiguous headings both across and within authority families. She showed how if you have set all authority UPD fields to Y, you will have conflicting entries, such as haddock (the fish) mixed up with Haddock, a fictional character in a detective novel. Sandy described the frustration of spending a substantial amount of time with ExLibris, attempting to show them the need for Aleph to read all three digits of the marc tags for headings. She also talked about how to identify and fix the records with conflicting headings. This presentation really underscored the need for public services staff to understand what technical services is doing; we don't all have to master cataloging, but we need to be aware of the way the headings are constructed and alert for problem headings in our own catalog.

After the authorities presentation, Andrew White and Jeanne Galbraith gave presentations on using Citrix for Aleph staff client applications (Andrew) and Aleph staff training (Jeanne). I don't know enough about maintaining hardware and software to take a position on whether or not the Aleph client should be given to staff in the thin client environment. It's certainly easier to update all the staff workstations this way and it prevents any staff member from messing with the client and it's very easy to restore a workstation that has been blown away. Jeanne Galbraith presented a very workmanlike scenario for teaching staff about Aleph, complete with in-class exercises and homework assignments, which she corrected. There was just the slightest shade of welcome to training at Stalag Aleph about her talk. Maybe we were too informal with our own training, but I enjoyed the sessions I attended and I feel that our trainers did an excellent job. Like everything else, a lot depends on personalities and communication skills of the trainers and the motivation of the staff to explore new territory.

The last afternoon session was an open forum. Recently converted and about to convert sites had questions and those who had been converted earlier were able to answer most of them. It would have been great to have more people from all sites at this session. We were given an evaluation questionnaire and asked to make suggestions for future meetings. I suggested that there be two meetings a year and that we should consider having breakout sessions to address specific concerns. One thing that I didn't think to suggest, but can email to SUNYAUG is that we could consider having Placeware sessions to include more people and save money on travel (especially rental cars). It wouldn't be as dynamic as having the live presentations with Powerpoint, but it would be another way to share information.

There was one session I would have liked to go to, but it was at the same time as Natalie's Help presentation. It was a presentation on using SQL to pull custom reports from either the test or production database. Phil attended this session and gave me the handout. It's something that can be done in ILLiad too, but that's something for me to work on in the future. There are a lot more things I would like to do. I'm making steady progress, but it's hard to make extra time for special projects. I don't want to compromise my primary responsibilities, so I must balance the ongoing workload with the extras. Those extra things do a lot more than make me feel that I am accomplishing something. I would not be as effective in my primary responsibilities if I just sat in the ILL office and processed requests. It's really important to understand how the whole library works and who to call upon to learn what I need and who to refer users to. If I don't know about the databases, I can't fix citations; if I don't know about the ejournals, I would order lots of things that we already have; if I didn't understand the path books take from acquisitions to stacks, I would be borrowing books that are sitting on trucks in processing; if I didn't know about serial practice, I would not be able to tell users how serials work in our kind of library; if I didn't talk to people in other parts of the library or make an effort to understand policies and practices in other units, I would not be able to give users the same level of service. There's so much to keep up with that no one person can keep on top of everything, so I am constantly communicating with other units of the library. Sure, I could do less, but I really don't want to. I love ILL; I always have, but I also love reference work and I am intrigued by cataloging. When I am in my office in ILL, I am an ILL machine; I am focused on the tasks I do, but if all I did was process ILL requests, I would not grow as much as I do when I participate in additional activities, like Ask a Librarian email and the reference desk. I often explain the ejournals and the remote access to users and I also explain a lot of aspects of Aleph and Circulation policies in response to questions that come in. It's a privilege to work with Godlind on Ask a Librarian.

I am very glad I am our library's delegate to SUNYAUG. I love to travel (except on the Cross Bronx) to meetings and I love to meet new contacts with whom to network.