



Feature

A Day in a Life at the OLIS

(a fictional Monday in October 1999)

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Cover Story

[SUNY Prepares for ALEPH](#)

Features

[Strategic Automation Consultation](#)

[SUNYConnect Means Databases](#)

In Her Own Words

Mary Alice Lynch, Executive Director, Nylink

[A Day in a Life at the OLIS](#)

[How to Contact Us](#)

[Linkable Links](#)

[Erratum](#)

[Link to the OLIS Committees List](#)

I, Laura K. Murray, have no typical days at the OLIS. With three of us in the Albany office (and two in remote locales) assisting 64 libraries with some of their library automation needs, I can never hope to have a typical day. The day described here is a fictionalized composite designed to provide an insider's view of what goes on in the Office of Library and Information Services. Names were not changed because who needs protecting?

Morning

Senior Staff Assistant, John Schumacher, is the the first one in to our office. 324 Broadway is a death-defying walk across Broadway from the System Administration "castle." John checks voice mail and our online help desk software, Target, to see if our production servers are indeed up and running. Good (caffeine addicted) person that he is, John then makes a pot of coffee for himself and Carey Hatch, Assistant Provost for Library Services. The coffee pot sits next to our broken electric typewriter and the In-boxes for our two project managers - Maureen Zajkowski in Binghamton and Larry Randall at Purchase. Just what does John check? I'll tell you:

- Two NT Servers for DRA Web2, one located in the old Federal building in Albany, and one at Buffalo State College
- 5 DEC Alpha servers for Multilis
- Z39.50 programs at Albany, Buffalo, Farmingdale, Plattsburgh and Syracuse

Just what is John looking for? Well, there are at least four different reasons why we would be having a problem on any given day:

- 1) The Web2 application on an NT server stalls (we don't know why - cyber narcolepsy perhaps? microsloth?)
- 2) The Z39.50 server located on the Alphas has stopped (this is happening much less frequently as a result of work done by Rolande St-Gelais, other DRA staffers, and members of the SUNY community)
- 3) The Multilis LMS isn't running (can you say "bad tape drive"?)
- 4) SUNYNet (or is it Bell Atlantic? or Applied Theory? or...)

is broken somewhere.

We troubleshoot Web2 through PC AnyWhere remote access software. PC AnyWhere allows us to operate our NT servers located two blocks away in Albany, and across the state in Buffalo. Our Alpha servers are accessible via Telnet and DECNet. SUNYNet is monitored through a snazzy web-based software that provides us with a colorful graphical rendering of SUNYNet routers and the data flow between them (green...Good!, red...Bad!).

John is in the midst of some troubleshooting when I arrive. I do not partake of the coffee because I have already swilled my cup at home to ensure an accident free commute from uptown to downtown Albany. John and I divide monitoring of our Target help desk software and answering phone calls. Wednesday afternoon through Friday afternoon is my turn. Because this fictional day is a Monday, I skip "Target" and go straight to my e-mail. I first scan subject lines for problem reports that were sent to me instead of Target. Next I look for e-mail messages sent through the feedback form on our web site. These are usually interesting. Today's feedback is from a graduate student in California who wants to locate a doctoral thesis written by a graduate of the University at Albany. Before responding to him, I link to UAlbany's web catalog and search for the thesis title - it is there. I then send the student a reply, directing him to the UAlbany library web site, and verifying that I did see the title in their collection, and giving him some tips on how to proceed with an ILL request.

E-mail takes me to 10am. Carey Hatch pokes his head in my office and asks if we can gather at the conference table for our sort-of-weekly staff meeting. For about an hour we discuss:

- bugs in the new version of Web2 and whether or not we really should implement it
- Y2K readiness and who will be available on January 1st in case the worst happens
- Staffing for the implementation of the new LMS (what if the System Administration hiring freeze is not lifted?)

After the meeting I turn to my "To Do" list. The first item to tackle is a web-based survey. Larry Randall, our *SUNYConnect* Project Coordinator, asked me to create the survey so that he, and SLiCat (SUNY Library Contracts Advisory Team) can better determine what resources to purchase with OLIS funds. Such database selections are geared towards benefiting all SUNY libraries. Larry coordinates many aspects of *SUNYConnect*, including information literacy offerings, database licensing, budgets, and advocacy. The survey data must go into a Microsoft Access database to streamline the process of data entry. Each page of the survey is its own Javascript program and I use a software called Drumbeat to generate the code. The huge challenge of building these Active Server Pages is that, just like any

program, they can have bugs, and they can break and crash. The result is great, getting there is tough.

I just finished creating a survey download page for APPE (Academic Planning, Policy, and Evaluation; formerly SUNY Institutional Research). Among other things, APPE collects statistics from SUNY libraries to meet state and federal reporting requirements and assist SUNY libraries in their various reporting and budget activities. In the past, these surveys were distributed on floppy disks and paper. This year, the OLIS is helping APPE out by hosting the survey's Lotus files on our administrative web site. The survey contact person needs only to go to the designated URL, click on their survey instrument's filename and save it to a local disk for editing in Lotus or Excel. The completed survey is returned to the APPE survey contact as an e-mail attachment. I am hoping that no one will miss those floppies.

Oh, just got a call from a SUNY library. All of their URLs (Uniform Resource Locators) have been changed with no notice. OK, I have to update four web pages on our NT server in Albany, four on the Buffalo server, and our campus database on our administrative web site. Anywhere else? I'll have to think about that.

Afternoon

Pounding on the SLiCAT survey has left me ravenous for lunch by noon. I run down to the microwave oven located in the Nylink (formerly SUNY/OCLC) office suite, zap a frozen vegetarian entree, and eat at my desk. The hasty lunch gives me some time to take a walk by the Hudson River. I admire the murals being painted on the I-787 underpass as I walk towards the Erastus Corning Preserve. A replica of the historic ship, Half Moon, is docked close by and I stop briefly to admire its red dragons and shining woodwork.



Enough fresh air and river views, back to work.

No chance to settle back in where I left off - John transfers a phone call to me. It is a systems librarian at the South Central Regional Library Council. They want to search our Z39.50 server on our Syracuse cluster's Alpha. After a discussion of firewalls and other concerns, I email her our Syracuse server definitions and Z39.50 attributes. Then I receive a problem report via personal email, rather than via Target. One of our campuses reports that Web2 is down on the Buffalo NT server. I fire up PC Anywhere to take control of the server across the state, then stop and start the Web2 application. I run a test

search, then send the "all OK" message back to the campus, reminding the sender to direct problem reports to the [Target email address](#), rather than mine.

Maureen Zajkowski, our SLAM (SUNY Library Automation Migration) Project Coordinator, gives me a call from her office in Binghamton. (We plan to nominate Maureen for sainthood sometime after the new LMS vendor is announced.) She has some new documents to go on our web site and we discuss when they need to be posted. She will send the files to me in MS Word format, attached to an email message. I will then convert them to HTML and format them into our web site template.

Finally, I get back to the SLiCat survey for a few hours. John and Carey provide welcome interruptions to consult on troubleshooting, interpret communications from DRA (our Multilis vendor), vent the occasional frustration, and share a joke or two.

It is 5pm. The coffee pot is long empty, but Carey and John are still diligently working away. I have to get home to grab a bite to eat before teaching a night class at the [UAlbany School of Information Science and Policy](#) (aka "the Library School"). One last check of my email and voice mail, I shut down my PC, and bid good night to my two compatriots.

Tomorrow, we do it all again, varying our routine as problems and projects ebb and flow: the OLIS rolls on.



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