

Library Connect Podcast: Carol Tenopir Interview

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MR. DAVIESS MENEFEE: Hello. This is Daviess Menefee, Elsevier's Global Library Relations Director, and I'm pleased today to bring you this Library Connect podcast. I'm speaking with Dr. Carol Tenopir at the Special Libraries Association meeting in Seattle, Washington.

Carol, as most of know, is Professor at the School of Information Sciences at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, as well as the Director of Research for the College of Communication and Information, and also, Director of the Center for Information and Communication Studies.

Today, we're talking about a return on investment pilot study that was done with the University of Illinois, Urbana, Champaign. This particular project looked at the institution's return on investments and scholarly resources. I'd like to ask Carol, first of all, what was your role in the first phase of this pilot project?

DR. CAROL TENOPIR: Well, my role in the first phase was somewhat limited. I served as a consultant. I helped select the organization that did the study with the University of Illinois. It was done by Judy Luther of Informed Strategies. And then, I consulted throughout the study, looking at the questions that they were going to be asking, looking at the cost benefit model, and the return on investment model, and helping edit and look through the final report.

MR. MENEFEE: Interesting. I understand now that the study is going to go forward and move into phase two. Maybe you could describe for us a little bit about what phase two is going to be, and what your role will be in that particular phase two.

DR. TENOPIR: I'm going to have a much larger role in phase two. I'm going to be coordinating a team of researchers, headquartered at my Center for Information Communication Studies, including myself and some graduate students, as well as including Bruce Kingma, who's at Syracuse University School of Information, he's an economist, and also, Donald W. King at University of North Carolina, who's a statistician.

And the team working with Elsevier is going to be actually expanding the pilot study that was done at the University of Illinois, to look at return on investment of the grant functions at universities across the world, so we'll have universities in North America, but also, in Asia and Europe, and we'll be looking at the whole function of grant proposal writing, and grants, and what return on investment to the university is of the library collection and the grant funding.

MR. MENEFEE: That sounds very interesting, going global with this particular project. What do you view as the overall importance of this return on investment study? How do you see it relating to the academic community, and also, for libraries in the future?

DR. TENOPIR: Well, I think everybody in the university just knows, intuitively, how important libraries are to scholarship and to the academy, but libraries are coming under increasing pressure to be able to quantifiably demonstrate their return on investment. Library collections and library services are something that cost a lot, and libraries want to be able to demonstrate that they return a lot to the university.

MR. MENEFEE: So where do you see a practical application for this study for librarians? They're always looking at wanting to implement information in their own universe, and try to find practical applications for it.

DR. TENOPIR: Universities can use the results of the studies of the other universities around the world. We will be able to provide a report that will show the findings, and so, they can just use that to share that with their funders, and with their university administration. But what also will be provided is the model and the instructions for how to collect this kind of information at their own university, so they can use that to go forward and to collect data, as well.

What this particular project is looking at just a very narrow slice of the investment and return on investment to the university. It's looking at just the grant funding operations and the money that comes back from grants. We're looking very deep at that, but it is just a very small part of the value of the university library. So what we're hoping to do is, in a phase three, is to look broader, that is, to

look at all of the functions of the university library, and look at the return to the academy of all of those functions.

MR. MENEFE: It sounds like a very interesting project, and I wish you much success and luck with it. Again, thank you very much, Carol, for speaking with me today. This is Daviess Menefee signing off on this Library Connect podcast.