

## U. S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science

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### INTRODUCTION

The law that created U. S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (Public Law 91-345 (20 U.S.C. 1501 *et seq.*, signed July 20, 1970) states that “library and information services adequate to meet the needs of the people of the United States are essential to achieve national goals.” It is the responsibility the U. S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) to develop and recommend plans that enable adequate library and information services.

In meeting this responsibility the Commission seeks to identify the needs of the American people for library and information services and to translate those needs into recommendations for national policy. The Commission is expected to advise the President, the Congress, state and local governments and others with its recommendations. To arrive at its recommendations, the Commission has undertaken many important initiatives during its 37 years, thus meeting its statutory mandate.

The Commission also plays a role in studying and publishing statistics relating to library and information services delivery. In this work, the Commission has partnered for 23 years with the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) to develop and implement the Library Statistics Program (LSP), serving as liaison to the library community, organizing meetings and training workshops, supporting in-state training and technical assistance, monitoring trends, and advising NCES on policy matters. As a result, the Library Statistics Program has led the development of standards for library statistics, as well as the accurate and timely collection of relevant statistics to assist in policy development and implementation at the Federal, state, and local levels.

The Commission is established as a permanent, independent agency of the United States government. Its members include the Librarian of Congress, the Director of the Institute of Library and Museum Services (IMLS), and fourteen Commissioners appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate for terms not to exceed five years (although the law was later amended to require appointees to continue in service until a replacement Commissioner has been appointed). The establishing legislation for the Commission requires that five of the appointees be librarians or information specialists, and at least one Commissioner must be “knowledgeable with respect to the technological aspects of library and information services and sciences.” Another Commissioner must be

“knowledgeable with respect to the library and information service and science needs of the elderly.”

The members of the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) are: Chairman Beth Fitzsimmons, Ph.D.; Vice-Chairman Bridget L. Lamont; José A. Aponte; Sandra F. Ashworth; Edward L. Bertorelli; James H. Billington, Ph.D., The Librarian of Congress (ex-officio); Jan Cellucci; Carol L. Diehl; Allison Druin, Ph.D.; Colleen E. Huebner, Ph.D., MPH; Stephen M. Kennedy; Mary H. Perdue; Anne-Imelda Radice, Ph.D., Director, U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services (ex-officio); S. Diane Rivers, Ph.D.; Herman L. Totten, Ph.D. At the call of the Chairman, the Commission had one meeting during 2007, on June 4-5 in Washington, DC.

### **THE COMMISSION AS A FEDERAL AGENCY**

As an independent agency of the Executive branch of the Federal government, the Commission presents its budget request to the President, who through the Office of Management and Budget then sends to Congress an appropriations funding request to support the Commission’s work for the coming fiscal year. Since 2001, the Commission’s annual appropriation has been \$1,000,000.

In addition to the Commissioners, who for employment purposes are considered special government employees (SGEs), Commission staff is made up of the executive director, the director of operations, the director of statistics and surveys, a management analyst (operations), and a special assistant for technology. Consultants and temporary support staff are engaged for providing additional specialized services. The position of executive director has been vacant since June, 2006, with Commission Chair Fitzsimmons assuming many of those responsibilities as the Commission’s future status was determined.

That status has been unstable since February, 2006 when the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) proposed the consolidation of the Commission into IMLS, with the consolidation to be completed by FY 2008 (that is, by October 1, 2007). The Administration also proposed the merger of the current National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) programs for public and state library surveys into IMLS, using the rationale that merging the survey programs into IMLS will consolidate grant making (the primary function of IMLS) with data collection.

The proposed consolidation was described in an implementation plan put forward by IMLS ([http://www.imls.gov/pdf/ConsolidationPlan\\_draft.pdf](http://www.imls.gov/pdf/ConsolidationPlan_draft.pdf)). In August, 2006 the Commissioners agreed to oppose the plan and determined to work with legislative leaders and the library and information science profession to seek to continue its authorization as an independent advisory agency. These activities were not successful. In 2007, as the Commission sought appropriations to continue the Commission’s work, it was made clear that the agency’s minimal annual funding—which had remained static since 2001—had only been intended to be used to keep the agency doors open. Without being aware that there had been considerable interest in closing down the agency since that time, the

Commissioners had come to the Commission expecting to implement its statutory mandate.

With the election of November, 2006, the proposed consolidation seemed less urgent. Unaware that they had been appointed to close the agency, the Commissioners continued to engage in initiatives in support of their legislated and statutory mandate, as described below. However, as the end of FY2007 approached, the Commissioners became aware that the work of the Commission as a Federal agency is no longer required. The Commissioners and staff then focused their efforts on closing the agency. Funding has been provided for the closure, and the Commission expects to vacate its offices by March 31, 2008.

## **POLICY**

In light of the Commission's closure, the Commissioners made a decision during 2007 to authorize a study to identify a future research agenda for the Commission or, if required, for its successor organization, and particularly for significant issues that need to be addressed in the near term, in the next 12 to 18 months. Information was sought from opinion leaders in the library and information science community; leaders in information policy and publishing; academics; school, State, and public librarians; librarians in the national libraries and other government experts in areas of information; faculty in graduate schools of library and information science; employees in trade and professional associations; foundations; experts in intellectual property; and experts in digital libraries.

The goal of the study was to produce a mosaic-like document demonstrating the interests and information needs of the American people, building on the fundamental statement of why the Commission was created originally, and, through that, approaching a national information agenda for the American people and for those who deliver services to different segments of the American people.

## **INITIATIVES**

In organizing and implementing its activities during 2007, the Commission has been guided by its strategic plan of April, 2004. In the plan, the Commission established three goals for its work:

- To appraise library and information services provided for the American people
- To strengthen the relevance of libraries and information science in the lives of the American people
- To promote research and development for extending and improving library and information services for the American people

To achieve these goals, the Commission identified the following strategic initiatives for its work, and each initiative resulted in specific policy advice or comment delivered to the President and to Congress as required by law:

- ***Health communication and the role of libraries in distributing consumer health information and in promoting healthy lifestyles for all Americans.***  
<http://www.nclis.gov/activities/librariesandhealth.html>
- ***Digitized information and the role of libraries in the development and implementation of large-scale digitization programs.***  
<http://www.nclis.gov/digitization/digitization.html> In 2007, the Commission continued to study the subject, and at its June, 2007 meeting the Commission was addressed by Dr. Paul Courant, university librarian and dean of university libraries at the University of Michigan. A specialist in the study of the economics of universities, the economics of libraries and archives, and the changes in the system of scholarly communication that derive from new information technologies, Dr. Courant has written that ideas must be made public to qualify as ideas, just as art must take physical form in order to qualify as art. Noting that “literally and metaphorically, universities are built around their libraries,” Dr. Courant told the Commissioners that libraries “hold, catalog, and curate expensive material that not everyone can afford to have, and they make it available to everyone.” He declared that “This fundamental requirement of an effective infrastructure for scholarship is that it puts ideas into the library, and lets others get them out again, reliably, the same ones every time.” In his presentation, Dr. Courant linked his remarks about scholarly resources and their connection with the University of Michigan's master digitization project, framing his presentation around the structure of the symposium on large-scale digitization held in Ann Arbor in March, 2006 (jointly sponsored by the University of Michigan and the Commission).
- ***Adequacies and deficiencies of current library and information resources and services.*** <http://www.nclis.gov/survey.htm> Members of the Commission continued their discussions about the desirability of a assessment tool for the Nation’s libraries. Unfortunately, work was limited as reductions were required in the Commission’s Statistics and Surveys program.
- ***The relationship between school libraries and educational achievement.***  
<http://www.nclis.gov/info/schoollibraryactivities.html>. The Commission continued its efforts in this matter and in July, 2007 distributed a press release about the subject. “From our perspective,” Chairman Fitzsimmons said in the press release, “a critical part of the comprehensives and renewed strategy to ensure that students learn to read and are effective users of information and ideas is the requirement that every school have a school library and that school libraries be staffed by highly qualified, state-certified school library media specialists.”
- ***Adult and family literacy.*** In 2007, Commissioners Totten and Druin reviewed the literacy work being done at the Illinois State Library. They noted the exemplary commitment of the library and its partnering abilities, with program funding not only from the State of Illinois, but through collaborative and partnering arrangements with almost every organization in America focusing on literacy. They recommended that identifying funding agencies for conducting further targeted research in this subject is a major concern.

In a related matter, the Commission in 2007 served a second time as co-sponsor for the Chicago Public Schools Battle of the Books Program (the only large urban program sponsoring a Battle of the Books activity). At the Commission's June, 2007 meeting, Carol Josefowicz, who has been actively involved in the program, spoke to the Commission and related the work to the Commission's interest in linking school libraries and educational achievement. Josefowicz described the details of the program and the role of volunteers and encouraged further work in this area.

- ***Library and information services for the aging.*** <http://www.nclis.gov/info/nationalinfo.html#Elderly> The Commission continued its discussions about this important subject, monitoring situations in which libraries are able to provide needed services for the Nation's senior citizens.
- ***Emergency preparedness and the role of libraries as community distribution centers for emergency preparedness and disaster response information.*** During 2007, the Commission continued its dialogue with state officials in New Hampshire, with the goal of establishing a pilot program for emergency response in disaster conditions and utilizing the library network to help inform the public

Additionally, in keeping with the Commission's charge as described in the enabling legislation, other subjects related to policy development with respect to libraries and information science require attention and on-going review by the Commission. Among these, the following were given consideration in 2007:

- ***Internet neutrality.*** NCLIS continued its work related to Internet neutrality, and in October, 2007 the Commission distributed a press release (<http://www.nclis.gov/news/pressrelease/pr2007/NCLISNewsRelease-Internettaxban2007-04.pdf>) urging Congress to make permanent a moratorium on Internet access taxes. In the press release, Chairman Fitzsimmons noted the unfairness of taxing citizens for Internet access in order to fill out tax forms and Medicare forms required by the government. "If the government is increasingly requiring citizens to use the Internet, then Federal, state, or local taxes on its use should be prohibited," she said.
- ***Access to Information in Federal Libraries.*** In February, 2007 the Commission published a statement recognizing its earlier study with respect to this issue (*A Comprehensive Assessment of Public Information Dissemination*, 2001). The Commission distributed a press release (<http://www.nclis.gov/news/pressrelease/pr2007/NCLISNewsRelease-LibraryClose2007-02.pdf>) describing a presentation of Vice-Chairman Bridget Lamont to the Commission in which she acknowledged the debt of the library and information science community and the general public to the earlier Commission study. The Commission then restated its earlier position on the matter and recommended to the President and Congress that the study be revisited. In the original study, the Commission took a very strong position on the role of the Federal government in assuring access to Federal government information.

In other work in this area, the Commission continued to study the concept of open access and the relationship between open access and public access policies. As the call for public access seems to be an issue growing in scope and intensity, not only in the United States but in a global context as well, the Commissioners met with Heather Joseph, Executive Director of the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC), Eric Slater, Manager of the Copyright Office at the American Chemical Society, Obligations Division, and Glenn Ruskin, Director of Office of Legislative Affairs for the American Chemical Society to discuss this issue.

## **STATISTICS AND SURVEYS**

In March, 2007 the position of Director, Statistics and Surveys became vacant, impacting the agency's ability to fulfill its commitment to the NCLIS/NCES interagency agreement. As a result, the agreement was renegotiated to reflect task areas NCLIS would no longer be capable of performing, with an NCES/NCLIS memorandum of understanding signed by both parties in April. However, under terms of the new NCES/NCLIS interagency agreement, the agency has been able to support the State Library Programs Survey in the Federal-State Cooperative System (FSCS) meetings.

Additionally, in 2007 the Commission continued to manage two related studies which were completed at the end of the fiscal year:

- “The Search for Cause-and-Effect Relationships Between Student Achievement and Factors Relating to the Libraries for which the Students Have Access” (Kathleen Kennedy), to investigate possible cause-and-effect relationships between student achievement and factors related to the schools and the libraries to which the students have access.
- “Library Service Area Demographic and Statistical Display System” (Christine Koontz), to define and design an interactive information dashboard that provides administrators of public libraries with the library's current demographic data from the U.S. Census projected on maps with overlays of that library's statistical data and current FSC data. The project focuses on defining the data elements that are most needed by the users, administrators, and public libraries, and the functions desired and required by those users.

## **CONCLUSION**

A review of the Commission's service to the American people makes it clear that NCLIS has played a significant role in addressing the library and information science needs of the Nation's citizens. By its second year of operation the Commission had put forward a draft of a new national program of library and information services, culminating in the 1975 publication of *Toward a National Program for Library and Information Services: Goals for Action*. A second major publication, following soon after, was *Library and Information Service Needs of the Nation*, a seminal document in the development of this critical societal element.

Other highlights of the Commission's work have been:

- Influencing authorization legislation for a White House Conference on Library and Information Services
- Studying the role of Library of Congress in the national network
- Surveying the impact of federal funding programs on public libraries
- Compiling an inventory of national library needs
- Examining the volume and characteristics of library photocopying
- Surveying the role of school libraries in a national network
- Examining continuing library and information science education
- Sponsoring research in the coordination of bibliographic control
- Organizing the first White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services, resulting in the development of task forces to examine such issues as
  - community information and referral services
  - library and information services for cultural minorities
  - the role of the special library in nationwide networks and cooperative programs
- Studying the adequacy of library and information services to the Native American population
- Reacting to the Office of Technology Assessment's report, *Informing the Nation: Federal Information Dissemination in an Electronic Age*
- Establishing recognition awards, honoring initiatives taken by individuals (not librarians) and organizations (not library-related) to promote and improve library and information services
- Organizing a second White House Conference, with the three conference themes of library and information services for literacy, democracy, and productivity.
- Developing and adopting the Principles of Public Information
- Organizing and collecting the first public library data from all states, based on standard data elements and definitions
- Investigating public libraries and the Internet, resulting in the publication of *Internet Costs and Cost Models for Public Libraries* and *The 1996 National Survey of Public Libraries and the Internet*
- Publishing *The NCLIS Assessment of Standards for the Creation, Dissemination, and Permanent Accessibility of Electronic Government Information Products*
- Advising the IMLS director on policies and financial assistance for library services
- Providing information related to a variety of proposals for federally mandated use of filtering software for schools and libraries
- Organizing discussions with stakeholders about the Department of Commerce's intention to close the National Technical Information Service (NTIS) and the future of NTIS
- Continuing participation (since 1985) with the Department of State to coordinate the library and information aspect of the International Contributions for Scientific, Educational and Cultural Activities (ICSECA) program
- Partnering with the National Center for Educational Statistics (since 1987) in implementing a formal collaborative activity for library statistics
- Responding to an invitation from the Congress to refute an OMB proposal to eliminate the Commission

- Organizing and developing the research studies that culminated in the publication of *A Comprehensive Assessment of Public Information Dissemination*
- Organizing the Sister Libraries program—White House Millennium Project—created to provide a framework for the international sharing of mutual interests between libraries
- Sponsoring the production of *Trust and Terror*, an audio-visual briefing on the role libraries can take to provide needed information to the citizenry in the immediate aftermath of a man-made or natural disaster
- With UNESCO and the National Forum on Information Literacy, organizing and conducting the Information Literacy Meeting of Experts in Prague, the Czech Republic, in September 2003, resulting in the publication of *The Prague Declaration: Towards an Information Literate Society*
- Providing a delegation to the 2003 World Summit on the Information Society in November 2003 in Geneva, Switzerland
- In 2005 and 2006, identifying and recognizing libraries that excel in meeting the consumer health information needs of American citizens and publishing *Libraries and Health Communication: Model Programs in Health Information Provided by Libraries Throughout the Nation*
- In collaboration with UNESCO and the U.S. Department of State, commissioning the study of information dissemination in Sub-Saharan Africa with respect to HIV/AIDS and publishing in September, 2005 *The Role of Libraries in HIV/AIDS Information Dissemination in Sub-Saharan Africa*
- Studying the library needs of the elderly and publishing *Recommendations to the ALA RUSA/RSS Library Service to an Aging Population Committee—NCLIS Position Paper for the White House Conference on Aging, December, 2005*
- Co-hosting (with the University of Michigan) “Scholarship and Libraries in Transition: A Dialogue about the Impacts of Mass Digitization Projects,” a symposium held in March, 2006 in Ann Arbor, MI and publishing *Mass Digitization: Implications for Information Policy*

This was work on a grand scale, and no other government agency, professional association, trade association, research and development organization, academic institution, or philanthropic organization was given the statutory responsibility that was given to the Commission in July, 1970. To provide policy advice to the President and the Congress with respect to libraries and information science was a great responsibility, and for nearly four decades the Commission has embraced this responsibility with much enthusiasm and prodigious effort. Other organizations and individuals did, of course, become involved in these matters, for the Commissioners had made it clear from the beginning that such partnerships and collaborations were required if the Commission was to succeed in its mission. Over time, these organizations thoughtfully and sincerely informed the Commission’s work, and for this support, enthusiasm, and cooperation the Commissioners are grateful.