

**Messages from MARS, the Newsletter of the RUSA Machine Assisted Reference Services Section**, Hui Hua Chua, Editor

February 2006

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**From the Chair**

I hope all of you have started the new year with lots of new ideas and plenty of energy. The MARS meetings in San Antonio had both of those. I encourage you to take a few minutes to read the reports below to find out more about the discussions and plans being made for programs and publications.

The New Orleans conference is shaping up as a “must-attend” activity. The programs planned by MARS units promise to be interesting and to provide you with useful information you can take home. We are excited to be hosting in the Sunday morning Chair’s Program both John Horrigan, from the Pew Internet & American Life Project and Roy Tennant of the California Digital Library. They will provide insight into the thinking and behavior of independent users as these users search for facts and information. Are you thinking about your library’s web site as an extension of your library itself? Check out the program being planned by the Education, Training and Support Committee. The User Access to Services Committee will co-sponsor with the RSS Catalog Use Committee a fascinating program about emerging library catalogs and decisions other libraries are making. Check out the program about problem virtual reference patrons sponsored by the MARS/RSS Virtual Reference Committee.

Be sure to sign up for the encore presentation with new interactive exercises of the Preconference on Reinvented Reference: The Integration of Digital and Traditional Reference Services on June 23.

MARS has been asked by the RUSA Executive Committee to set up a blog for all RUSA members. The blog is being created by the Local Systems and Services Committee. It will debut later this spring before the Annual Conference. Watch MARS-L and RUSA-L for more details!

A brief summary of Executive Committee actions from the Midwinter conference appears below, but I wanted to be sure to talk about the plans for the MARS Web site. The MARS Website Task Force presented its final report, including a new design for MARS web pages and guidelines for maintaining those pages in the future. Shannon Jones, our webmaster, and the Publications Committee are hard at work making those plans a reality. MARS committees are reviewing the information on their sites and creating new pages. Stay tuned!

Kathleen Kern will chair MARS next year. She is looking for volunteers for committees. Whether you are a new member or an experienced Martian, please take time to sign up to share your expertise!

MARS and other ALA elections are just around the corner! Be sure to vote. We have a wonderful group of people ready to serve you.

I am always glad to hear your ideas for MARS. Please write and share what YOU think. I look forward to hearing from you.

Mary Pagliero Popp  
[popp@indiana.edu](mailto:popp@indiana.edu)  
MARS Chair

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## Midwinter Executive Committee Summary

The MARS Executive Committee was busy at the conference. Here are some of the issues discussed, decisions made and plans approved:

- The Executive Committee approved a new design for the MARS web site to be implemented this spring.
- MARS will celebrate its 30<sup>th</sup> birthday in New Orleans!
- The Management of Electronic Reference Services Committee proposed a new name for themselves—Management of Electronic Resources and Services. They plan a virtual poster session on evaluation of virtual reference services.
- The MARS Best Free Websites committee will develop a subject index.
- The Outreach committee will take on responsibility for creating a discussion group flyer at every conference.
- The Planning Committee has sent an issue for inclusion on the ballot this spring, adding a secretary position to each discussion group to help with program planning.
- The Planning Committee will investigate the possibility of establishing an All-Committee meeting for MARS.
- The Publications Committee and the 2006 and 2007 Program Committees will investigate posting streaming audio for the programs.
- The Publications Committee will do a membership blitz to encourage more members to subscribe to MARS-L.
- The User Access to Services Committee will create a survey about interaction between Heads of Reference and Heads of Information Technology.
- MARS will conduct a Section review in 2007-08.

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## General MARS News

### MARS Needs You!

The committees in MARS have wonderful things in the works - take a look at the committee reports from Midwinter. You can be involved with these activities and bring your own ideas and enthusiasm to the section by volunteering to be on a committee or discussion group.

The volunteer form is at  
<http://www.ala.org/ala/rusa/rusaourassoc/rusavolunteers/marsonlinecommittee.htm>  
(There is a link to Volunteer from the RUSA website.)

There are one-year intern positions and virtual positions available, as well as committee member and chair appointments. If you have an interest in one of the MARS representative roles, please make a note of that as well.

I will make appointments before the end of April, but will start the process in a couple of weeks.

I look forward to making appointments and working with you all in MARS!

Kathleen Kern  
[katkern@uiuc.edu](mailto:katkern@uiuc.edu)  
MARS Vice-Chair

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## **ALA Midwinter 2006 MARS Discussion Forum Reports**

### **Hot Topics in Electronic Reference Discussion Group**

The RUSA MARS Hot Topics in Electronic Reference Discussion Group led by Chair, Matt Bejune, Digital Reference Services Coordinator at Purdue University and Co-Chair, Mark Dehmlow, Electronic Services Librarian at the University of Notre Dame, sponsored a lively discussion titled "Integrating Electronic Reference Resources into the Library". The session was held 10:30 am - 12 pm on Saturday January 21st as part of the ALA Midwinter conference in San Antonio. Featured speakers were Alecia McManus, Head of the Science Library at Binghamton University, Eric Calaluca, President and CEO of Paratext, and Rosanne M. Cordell, Head of Reference Services, and Feng Shan, Database Coordinator, both from Indiana University at South Bend. One hundred and ten people attended the session and took part in the thirty minutes of discussion that followed the presentations. A review of the session was featured on page 3 of Sunday's Cognotes <http://www.ala.org/ala/eventsandconferencesb/midwinter/2006/MW06-Sunday.pdf>.

The Hot Topics discussion group is actively soliciting input from past session attendees for potential topics for the next discussion group to be held at ALA Annual in New Orleans. What specific subjects related to electronic reference are you interested in hearing about? What do you think is a particularly hot topic that has not been addressed or has not received adequate coverage thus far?

The group is also accepting nominations for the next Co-Chair as Matt Bejune leaves the group and Mark Dehmlow becomes the next Chair. The position would be a two year commitment, with the first year as Co-Chair and second as Chair, starting after the ALA Annual conference. If you have a suggestion for future hot topics ideas or are interested in being the next Co-Chair, contact either Matt Bejune ([mbejune@purdue.edu](mailto:mbejune@purdue.edu)) or Mark Dehmlow ([mdehmlow@nd.edu](mailto:mdehmlow@nd.edu)).

Matt Bejune  
[mbejune@purdue.edu](mailto:mbejune@purdue.edu)  
Chair, Hot Topics in Electronic Reference Discussion Group

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### **Local Systems and Services Committee**

The MARS Local Systems and Services Committee hosted a discussion forum on Federated Searching in the Age of Google Scholar on Sunday afternoon. Over 80 participants shared their thoughts on the use of these systems in their libraries. The use of federated search tools was widespread among the attendees' institutions, but a number of users expressed frustration with configuration and uneven search results.

Interesting comments included the use of XML rather than Z39.50 as a standard for searching, and use of federated search systems by remote library users. Many smaller libraries expressed frustration with Google Scholar because of their lack of access to full-text resources represented there.

At our meeting on Saturday morning, the committee discussed our new charge to set up a RUSA blog. We decided we needed more information from RUSA on their goals for the blog, but we will move ahead quickly and try to get something in place by the Annual Conference in New Orleans.

Scott Garton  
[s-garton@northwestern.edu](mailto:s-garton@northwestern.edu)  
Chair, MARS Local Systems and Services Committee

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## Products and Services Committee

The Products and Services Committee held a discussion forum at ALA Midwinter in San Antonio on the reference applications of RSS technology, originally called Rich Site Summary or Really Simple Syndication feeds. Three speakers were invited to begin the discussion forum. Chad Fennel, University of Minnesota Libraries, provided an overview of RSS technology. Antonio Barrera, Web Development Manager at Princeton University Library shared an in-house application to generate lists of recently cataloged materials. Steven Bell, the Director of Paul J. Gutman Library shared his innovations in using RSS to push content from a blog to courseware management software at Philadelphia University.

After hearing the speakers, the 35 participants broke into small groups at tables to discuss their impressions or applications of RSS. The following points emerged from the breakout sessions:

- RSS brings content from many places to one place – it is a powerful tool for communication and is good for time-sensitive information.
- Librarians can take a lead in creating Web sites that explain RSS to their user communities and direct them to important links. Opportunities exist for library staff to educate their community users about using RSS with content providers that distribute text, sound, or digital visual files.
- Staff do not need to be programmers to utilize this technology. There is a large development community that creates free tools.
- RSS are XML scripts that are easily integrated with blogs, such as internal ones alerting library staff about course assignments, new resources, upcoming library events, technical service issues (such as access problems) and circulation issues.
- A major RSS application among libraries is new acquisition lists i.e. new books and other new items in the catalog. RSS is currently used for library news and events and alerts regarding resources, web sites, or networked licensed resources.
- RSS is an opportunity to collaborate with faculty utilizing courseware or course web sites to inform your campus community about library news, events, and resources. Incorporating RSS feeds into courseware software like Blackboard and WebCT requires buy-in from faculty.
- RSS feeds might get used with federated search results, but limits set by licensed subscriptions are currently an obstacle that is not yet resolved.
- Bring the information to the users where they are. Don't expect them to come to your Web site and sign up for a feed about library news.
- Database vendors are starting to build RSS feeds into their products. Users are already calling the library about access to full-text content from commercial publishers who distribute partial content via RSS (for example Wall Street Journal). How do we get library subscription content to work with feeds from publisher web sites?

Van Houlson  
[houl001@umn.edu](mailto:houl001@umn.edu)  
Co-Chair, MARS Products and Services Committee

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### **Public Libraries Committee**

The Public Libraries Committee hosted a discussion on “Encouraging Database Usage among Reference Staff” - Are there incentives or tips that you can offer those who plan and manage their library’s electronic resources? Are reference librarians fully trained to use library databases? If not, what can we do about it?

Attendance was small but varied and included public librarians, a librarian from the Library of Congress, an academic librarian and a librarian from a state-wide network (INCOLSA).

The following examples were given of types of training available at the libraries represented:

- In-service days for staff training.
- Database tips and guidelines posted on the library’s Intranet for staff to access.
- Formal staff training schedule – new databases and refresher training every three years.
- Monthly database questions sent to all staff via email to informally test staff database knowledge and searching skills.
- State agencies offer training – trainers will travel.
- Bookmarks and pathfinders for staff and public use.
- Publisher/Vendor training – in person, Webinars, and online tutorials.

Through our discussion it became evident that few libraries have a formal training program. However, managers, realizing the need for a well-trained staff, implemented a variety of tools to train and encourage database usage at their institutions.

The committee is considering a future program titled “Electronic Resources – Training That Works”. Input on this topic is welcome and can be sent to the committee for consideration at the Annual meeting in New Orleans.

Carolyn Strickland  
[cstrickl@lakeco.lib.in.us](mailto:cstrickl@lakeco.lib.in.us)  
MARS Public Libraries Committee Chair

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### **Virtual Reference Discussion Group**

The RUSA MARS Virtual Reference Discussion Group (VRDG) conducted a session incorporating table discussions at ALA Midwinter 2006, San Antonio (Saturday, January 21, 4-6 p.m. Convention Center, Room 001). The event was co-sponsored by the RUSA RSS/MARS Virtual Reference Committee. The topic was “It’s All Just Reference: Virtual Reference (VR) is here to stay....”

Approximately 120 people, seated at 13 round tables, attended the event. There were 12 table facilitators and 1 self-facilitating table. Jana Ronan provided an introduction and Anne C. Moore (Chair) explained the process and moderated the session. Tables spent 30 minutes discussing general questions on integrating reference services. They then spent 15 minutes discussing one or more subtopics: instant messaging, staffing, quality control, or training and development. Note-takers recorded the table discussions. The room reassembled and a spokesperson from each table reported on three salient, memorable points from their discussion. A discussion within the whole group followed. This centered on the most popular topic: instant messaging.

Evaluations were overwhelmingly positive about the format and the quality of the table conversations. Note-taker sheets from the tables and reported points will be compiled and posted to the VRDG Web site. An email with a link to the notes will go to attendees.

Table Facilitators:

Ronald Burdick  
Kathe Conley  
Stephen Cramer  
Buff Hirko  
Alex Hodges  
Laura Kotz  
Deidre McDonald  
Meg Meiman  
Mary Mintz  
Barbara Petersohn  
Jana Ronan  
Joe Thompson

The theme for the VRDG session for the ALA Annual meeting in 2006 will be quality control. Subtopics for the Annual 2006 session include: instant messaging, blogs, learning styles and communication, and transcript analysis (for quality control, peer review, training, and performance appraisal). The RSS/MARS Virtual Reference Committee will assist with planning for the 2006 session in New Orleans.

The Vice Chair/Chair Elect is Sheryl Katzin.

Anne C. Moore  
[annem@library.umass.edu](mailto:annem@library.umass.edu)  
Chair, Virtual Reference Discussion Group

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## **ALA Midwinter 2006 MARS Committee and Task Force Reports**

### **MARS and RSS Joint 2007 Pre-conference Committee**

Committee members met at ALA to discuss focus, topics and speakers. The working title of the pre-conference is "Reinventing Reference: Emerging Technologies for Reference Service." The pre-conference will take place on Friday, June 22, 2007 in Washington DC. Technologies presented will likely include blogging, rss, wikis, podcasting and others that can extend and enhance reference services. Pragmatic uses of these technologies will be highlighted.

The committee will continue planning via e-mail and conference calls throughout the spring, since committee members have only recently been appointed. Committee members are Joe Thompson, Anne Moore, Garrett Montanez, Mark Dehmlow. Co-Chairs are Nancy Huling and Carole Pilkinton.

Speaker and program suggestions are welcome.

Carole Pilkinton  
[pilkinton.10@nd.edu](mailto:pilkinton.10@nd.edu)  
Co-Chair, 2007 MARS/RSS Pre-Conference Planning Committee

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## **Management of Electronic Reference Services Committee**

MERS spent time at the conference finishing an old project and planning a new one. We worked with the Planning Committee to propose changing our name to the MARS Electronic Resources and Services Committee and our charge to clarify our role and purpose within MARS.

We are working on a revision of the Guidelines for the Introduction of Electronic Information Resources to Users. The committee completed an initial revision at ALA Annual 2005. We presented that revision to the RUSA Standards & Guidelines Committee and sent it out for comment to RUSA-L, MARS-L and the chair of MARS. At this meeting we incorporated suggested additions and changes, and completed another, hopefully final, draft.

We are planning a "virtual poster session" on the topic of evaluation of virtual reference services. We drafted specific language describing the proposal to present to the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee has approved the proposal and we will move forward this spring to identify libraries to participate and to take first steps toward its implementation.

Anne Houston

[annehouston2@hotmail.com](mailto:annehouston2@hotmail.com)

Chair, MARS Management of Electronic Reference Services Committee

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## **Nominating Committee**

We're happy to post an outstanding slate of candidates for the three open positions on MARS Executive Committee. In alphabetical order, the candidates are:

### ***Vice Chair/Chair Elect (2006-2009):***

Linda S. Keiter

Associate Librarian, University of Utah Marriott Library

Mary M. Mintz

Senior Ref Librarian, American University Library

### ***Secretary (2006-2008):***

Laura Probst

Head of Public Services, Penn State University

Carolyn A. Strickland

Head of Reference, Lake County (Indiana) Public Library

### ***Member-At-Large (2006-2009):***

Deborah K. Bezanson

Coordinator, Electronic Reference, George Washington University Gelman Library-Periodicals Unit

Scott W. Garton

Reference Librarian, Northwestern University Library

We want to thank all these great candidates for being willing to support MARS.

Linda Friend

[lx5@psulias.psu.edu](mailto:lx5@psulias.psu.edu)

Marcella Stark  
[mstark@mail.smu.edu](mailto:mstark@mail.smu.edu)

Co-Chairs, MARS Nominating Committee

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### **Publications Committee**

At its Midwinter meeting, members of the Publications Committee volunteered to serve as liaisons with other MARS units to provide them with the latest information about deadlines for updates and suggestions for changes and additions to their unit's Web pages. Liaisons will also encourage reports and other publication products documenting the extensive research and collaborative work of MARS committees and discussion groups.

The committee discussed ways to publicize MARS activities on the web site and voted to recommend that MARS investigate streaming or podcasting the 2007 Chair's Program. If possible, a low-budget podcast of the 2006 Chair's Program might be produced as a pilot project. In order to increase subscribers to MARS-L, the committee proposes that all new MARS members receive an e-mail inviting them to join the MARS-L discussion group and including an easy link for completing their subscription.

The committee discussed the format for an HTML version of the Handbook on the MARS Web site and proposed that Handbook pages not be duplicated throughout the MARS Web site. Shannon Jones is investigating a navigation scheme which will allow linking to individual pages and forms within the Handbook.

After discussing ways to increase contacts with other MARS units to promote the development of print and electronic publications, the committee voted to propose that MARS adopt an all-committee meeting format for future meetings.

Ann Viles  
[vilesea@appstate.edu](mailto:vilesea@appstate.edu)  
Chair, MARS Publications Committee

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### **Task Force on Continuing Education and Publications**

The MARS Task Force on Continuing Education and Publications met for the first time on January 22 during ALA Midwinter 2006. All task force members were in attendance; guests included Mary Popp, MARS Chair and Kathleen Kern, MARS Vice-Chair.

Task Force members: Leilani Freund, Marcella Stark, Lisa Horowitz, Becki Whitaker, Natalie McDonough, Ann Viles, Pat Riesenman, Consultant, and Linda Keiter, Chair.

The charge to the Task Force is to: identify ways that MARS members and prospective members would like to learn; consult with RUSA and ALA staff about planned technologies for delivering training and continuing education; consult with the MARS Web Site Task Force and the MARS Publications Committee to learn about ways learning can be incorporated into a new design for the MARS Web site; recommend a philosophy of continuing education for MARS in creating programs and publications over the next 3-5 years; solicit input from MARS committees about planned projects that would fit the learning needs of members; work with MARS committee chairs to develop a pilot project for both a continuing education program and a publication that translates discussion sessions or programs from Annual or Midwinter in 2004-2005; create guidelines to

assist MARS officers and chairs in translating a program to a post-conference presentation/publication; recommend Action Plan to MARS Executive Committee for next steps.

Mary Popp reviewed the task force charge. We brain-stormed ways of gathering information about what sorts of continuing education and publications would be most helpful to MARS members and discussed innovative ways of presenting continuing education and publications. Task Force members accepted assignments to investigate specific groups or issues raised in the meeting. Mary Popp will ask Donovan to create a listserv for the task force. We will continue our work virtually and meet again in New Orleans at ALA Annual.

Linda Keiter  
[linda.keiter@library.utah.edu](mailto:linda.keiter@library.utah.edu)  
Chair, MARS Task Force on Continuing Education and Publications

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## **Preliminary ALA Annual Conference Plans**

### **MARS Pre-Conference**

Reinvented Reference: The Integration of Digital and Traditional Reference Services  
Friday, June 23, 2006, 8:30am-4:30pm; location to be announced

In most libraries the reference environment has changed. Whether libraries are just beginning to offer digital reference services or whether they have established services, the issues of sustainability, integration, and evaluation are on the minds of most librarians. Through a combination of expert presentations and small group exercises, attendees will explore how these issues relate to their local environments.

The pre-conference focuses on tools and outcomes of practical interest to libraries facing these challenges. Speakers for the pre-conference include Buff Hirko, Joe Janes, Marie Radford, and Jerilyn Veldof.

Laura K. Probst  
[lkp5@psu.edu](mailto:lkp5@psu.edu)  
Chair, MARS 2006 Pre-Conference Planning Committee

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### **MARS Program**

Who's Out There and What Are They Doing? Supporting the Independent User  
Sunday, June 25, 2006 10:30am -12:00 noon; location to be announced

Roy Tennant, User Services Architect at the California Digital Library and an always thought-provoking speaker, will be joined by John Horrigan, Associate Director for Research at the Pew Internet & American Life Project, for a very exciting program in New Orleans.

Tennant and Horrigan will explore some of the ways libraries and librarians, especially reference librarians, can become more knowledgeable about and better prepared to serve users who operate in a digital environment without seeking assistance from librarians. As more people rely on universal search services such as Google or on commercial portals or (we hope) on remotely accessible electronic resources offered by libraries, they increasingly conduct research without direct guidance from librarians. Yet librarians need to know as much as possible about these autonomous or independent users, such as:

- Who they are
- What their characteristics are
- Whether today's school children will become tomorrow's users of academic/public libraries
- What their assumptions and information-seeking habits are
- How they view libraries

Plan now to attend this interesting program and e-mail MARS 2006 Program Chair, Mary Mintz, ([mmintz@american.edu](mailto:mmintz@american.edu)) if you have comments about the speakers or questions you would like them to address.

Mary Mintz  
[mmintz@american.edu](mailto:mmintz@american.edu)  
Chair, MARS 2006 Program Chair

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To subscribe to MARS-L, send the following to [listproc@ala.org](mailto:listproc@ala.org):

subscribe MARS-L Firstname Lastname

Mars, Mars Incorporated. \* \* \* MARS (Servicio de Referencia Asistido por Ordenador). = MARS (Machine Assisted Reference Service). Ex: Her ALA activity includes having been Editor of Message from MARS, the occasional newsletter of the new RASD discussion group MARS, which stands for Machine Assisted Reference Service. Spanish-English dictionary. 3 Servicio de Referencia Asistido por Ordenador (MARS). = MARS (Machine Assisted Reference Service). Ex. Her ALA activity includes having been Editor of Message from MARS, the occasional newsletter of the new RASD discussion group MARS, which stands for MARS, Machine-Assisted Reference Section, Reference & User Services Association (RUSA), a division of the American Library Association. Their Web page includes links to RUSA Machine-Assisted Reference Section (MARS) 2002 Annual ALA Conference programs on portals which include: "Cool Web Tool: Many Databases, One Interface" by Jennifer Lucas, Jed Moffitt and Meg Rheingold. "Enhancing Resource Discovery and Access: MetaLib & SFX at the Boston College Libraries" by Bob Gerrity and Theresa Lyman. "The Search for the Holy Grail: Why One-Stop Searching is Both Essent Search Machine Assisted Reference Services on Amazon. Search Machine Assisted Reference Services on Google. The Web's Largest Resource for. Acronyms & Abbreviations. A Member Of The STANDS4 Network. Free, no signup required: Add to Chrome. Get instant explanation for any acronym or abbreviation that hits you anywhere on the web! Two clicks install Â». Free, no signup required: Add to Firefox. Get instant explanation for any acronym or abbreviation that hits you anywhere on the web! Two clicks install Â». Â—Close.