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## Anne Clyde, IASL Webmaster: A Day in Her Life

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I don't do mornings. This means that it is some time after 10:00 a.m. when I arrive in my office at the University of Iceland, having fortified myself with a cappuccino at one of the many downtown coffee shops along the way. If it is winter, then it will still be dark: Reykjavik has around three hours of daylight in December. If it is summer, then we will have had daylight from around 3:30 a.m., although the temperature will still be cool. If, as now (September 1999), it is close to the equinox, then it will be daylight, but cold. There may be snow on the ground (as there was early this morning), but if there is, in September it will be a light covering, and in any case, my walk to the University is mostly on heated footpaths, so that the snow will not be a problem at any time of the year. This is very different from the environment in which I grew up: a small town on the western plains of New South Wales, Australia, where snow was unknown and our lives centered around keeping cool in the summer rather than keeping warm in the winter!

The first thing I do when I get to my office is read my e-mail. I manage five listservs (Internet discussion groups) and belong to six others; this means that I have to deal with 130 to 150 e-mail messages each day. The listservs that I manage (all of them on the University of Iceland system) are IASL-LINK (for members of IASL), IASL-BOARD (for communication among Board members of the Association), KATALOGOS-L (the listserv of the faculty and students of the Department of Library and Information Science of the University of Iceland), SPORA (for doctoral students in library

and information science in the Nordic countries), and SUNDAY (for foreigners in Iceland). All of these listservs are very different from each other, and each presents its own set of challenges. The two with the most traffic (the largest numbers of messages) are KATALOGOS-L and IASL-LINK.

IASL-LINK, unlike my other listservs, has a changing membership, many of whom are unfamiliar with basic listserv functions. All members of the Association are eligible for membership of IASL-LINK—as long as they have an e-mail address. People subscribe and unsubscribe throughout the year. There are (as of September 1999) subscribers in 46 countries. IASL-LINK is often the first listserv that an IASL member joins. This means that there are always new members who are in the process of learning about the workings of a listserv and the procedures that should be used. Consequently, each day there are e-mail messages related to IASL-LINK that need action. These messages could be, for instance, from a new IASL member who wants to be added to IASL-LINK; a member who wants to unsubscribe temporarily from the listserv; a member whose e-mail address has changed; or someone who has had a message “bounced” by the listserv computer. In addition, there are always a number of system messages (messages generated by the computer on which the listserv is operating) about messages that have been posted to the listserv incorrectly, or e-mail addresses that are not working. To solve some of these problems, I communicate by e-mail with Millie Watson in the IASL office in Vancouver, Canada, or with the University of Iceland Computing Services Division. I now have form e-mail messages (an online version of form letters) to deal with the most common problems.

In addition to this, there are usually at least one or two e-mail messages related to the IASL Web site, “School Libraries Online.” As the Association’s Webmaster, I established this Web site in 1995. When it began, there were 12 pages of information on the site; now it is a major international “portal” site for teacher librarians, with more than 300 pages of information and more than 2,000 links to other sources of information on the Internet. It is the largest Web site on the University of Iceland system apart from the University’s own administrative site and the site maintained by University Computing Services. However, acting as the IASL Webmaster is my spare-time contribution to the Association, not my real job. Consequently, I flag any messages related to “School Libraries Online” for attention later, when the real work is done.

As a professor at the University of Iceland, I am required to teach, to do research, and to play a part in Faculty and University administration. In addition, each year I teach part of a course (on electronic information sources in business) at the Cooperative University College of Bifröst in the west of Iceland, and undertake consultancies. Life is busy. This semester (September to December) at the University of Iceland, I am teaching two courses related to the Internet, plus a reading course; in the spring (January to May), I teach courses related to online searching and the applications of computers in libraries and information agencies. All of my courses are taught in the after-

noons and/or evenings; some classes finish as late as 10:00 p.m. Even when student assistants supervise some of the computer lab sessions, I still need to be available in case of problems. I try to have at least one day each week (even if it is a weekend day) when I can devote up to 10 hours to a research or writing project. This month, the time is being spent on a research project that is investigating the Web sites created by school libraries; the ultimate aim of this project is the development of quality indicators for school library Web sites, although this is a long way off. A report will be presented at the IASL conference in Birmingham, Alabama, in November, so there is a clear deadline for the work. However, the results to date are interesting, and this alone is incentive to continue. Because it is early in the new academic year, perhaps 40 to 60 minutes of each day will be taken up with basic course administration, including creating e-mail lists for each class (for the distribution of course materials), work on course Web pages, organizing a guest speaker, and working with our office staff to solve scheduling problems.

I spend, on average, around seven to eight hours each week on the IASL Web site (yes, I have calculated this!). Most of these hours are in the late evenings (until well after midnight) and at the weekends. I have no formal schedule for this: I do things when they need to be done and when they can be fitted around other work. The exceptions are when major system problems arise and University Computing Services need action "right now." I work best at night, and I like doing important tasks when other potential users of our mainframe computer system are either in bed (Sunday to Thursday nights) or out clubbing (Friday and Saturday nights). In addition, it is easier to concentrate when other people in our building have gone home! For the Webmaster of an international Web site, there are other advantages to this upside-down schedule: I am often at my desk in the middle of the night (Reykjavik time) when people in Australia and Asia are just coming to the end of their working day and people in North America are just starting work.

When people think of a Webmaster's job, they usually think in terms of writing HTML code and solving technical problems. In reality, the job consists of much more, and my days (or nights) reflect this. The work of a Webmaster comprises, among other things, planning future developments, ongoing page and site design work, evaluation and selection of new content and services for addition to the Web site, the addition of new pages and links, "housekeeping" (checking current pages and links and making any necessary changes), ongoing evaluation of the site itself and the extent to which it is meeting user needs, and publicity and promotion for the Web site. A Webmaster has to be a manager who designs information systems, evaluates and organizes information, and presents it in a way that serves the needs of users. She or he has to keep up to date with the subject matter of the Web site—in my case, this means belonging to listservs related to school librarianship, reading books and journals, attending conferences, and keeping in touch with the people who are leaders in this field (it helps that most of these also relate to my teaching and research). In addition, a Webmaster has to

keep up to date with current Internet developments and with new Internet software, and both my teaching (two Internet courses each year) and my research (which this semester includes two international projects based on the Internet) help with this too. I enjoy some aspects of the role of a Webmaster more than others, but all are necessary!

Some of the fun of being IASL Webmaster comes from online interaction with IASL office-bearers and members in different places. People who play a part in the development and maintenance of "School Libraries Online" include Peter Genco in Erie, Pennsylvania, USA (IASL Vice-President for Association Operations and Reviews Coordinator), Dianne Oberg in Edmonton, Canada (Editor of the IASL journal *School Libraries Worldwide*), Ken Haycock (Executive Director of IASL), Lynne Lighthall (Associate Executive Director for Conferences), and Millie Watson (the IASL office manager), all in Vancouver, Canada.

My morning e-mail might include a message from Peter Genco, who coordinates reviews for the Web site and the printed *IASL Newsletter*. "School Libraries Online" has a substantial section of reviews of professional materials (books, computer software, CD-ROMs); reviews usually appear on the Web site before they appear in the print newsletter, and there are many more reviews on the Web site than in the newsletter. Peter receives new professional materials from publishers; assigns the materials to reviewers; collects and edits the reviews; and then sends them to me by e-mail for inclusion in the reviews section of "School Libraries Online." He also provides notes about any links that should be made (for instance, to the Web site of the publisher). It takes me about 20 minutes to add each new review to the Web site, and I have a checklist that I follow (each major section of "School Libraries Online" has its own checklist). I use a template to create a Web page for a new review. I copy the text of the review from Peter's e-mail message to the template, and add all the necessary HTML code. I then create links to the new review from the index of current reviews on the Web site, from the site map, and from the "New on School Libraries Online" page. I move the oldest review on the index of current reviews to the searchable review archive on the Web site (any review usually stays on the current-reviews list for about four to six months), so that there are only around 10 to 15 reviews in the current list at any one time. Then I do a search of the online bookstore Amazon.Com to see if they have the new item listed, and if they do, I create a link from the review to the listing on Amazon.Com. "School Libraries Online" is a registered associate of Amazon.Com, which pays the Association a fee when anyone buys a book or other item as a result of clicking through from the link in a review on "School Libraries Online." The Association will use this money to support a member in a developing country, something that I think is particularly important in terms of the Association's goal to promote the development of school library services throughout the world.

In my Internet courses at the University of Iceland and at the Cooperative University College of Bifröst, I teach two different Web page development packages: Netscape Composer and HomeSite. To keep in practice, I use both packages, along with FrontPage, when working on "School Libraries Online." Right now, I am teaching myself to use Dreamweaver, because it seems to offer more than the other packages that I work with, and I might spend an hour or so of my week testing out the features of this software by using it to work on one of the "School Libraries Online" pages. I might also spend a few minutes on the telephone, chatting to one of the technicians in University Computing Services who has used Dreamweaver to develop a wonderful personal Web site. However, I began to create Web pages before Web page development tools were available, and I still do most of the work on the "School Libraries Online" by writing HTML code directly into a text editor on the UNIX-based mainframe computer at the University of Iceland. I like the challenges of this way of working; I also like the precise level of control that it gives me over the Web pages. Some of the features on the site were created as demonstrations for my students ("On the IASL home page, you will see that I have used the Excite search engine, at a remote location, to develop a current news service for school librarians ..."); others were experiments with JavaScript or other techniques. In other words, "School Libraries Online" is closely related to my teaching, as a source of examples, and as a "sandpit" in which I can experiment—as well as being a contribution to the Association's programs and good fun.

Despite the *Day in the Life* title on this article, in fact this Webmaster has no typical day. Even during the University semester, when I am in Iceland, each day of the week is different, depending on teaching commitments, research and writing deadlines, meetings schedules, and other activities that form part of my real job. However, this calendar year (1999), I have spent only a little more than five months in Iceland, because I was on research leave in the first half of the year. In any case, I spend only nine months or so of any year (sometimes less) in Iceland, depending on conferences, research, and other commitments. No matter where in the world I happen to be, I can manage the IASL listservs and work on the IASL Web site, as well as maintain contact and exchange files with colleagues in Australia with whom I do research, keep in touch with students, and maintain the listserv and Web site of the Department of Library and Information Science at the University of Iceland. The Internet has made all this possible. Just as the Internet has changed my life, so it is also changing the nature and practices of our profession of school librarianship. "School Libraries Online" is a manifestation of this. I find it exciting to be involved in school librarianship at a time when so much is going on and so many changes are taking place. I like the idea that our profession is "a work in progress": although it may sometimes be difficult to keep up with current developments, the opportunities are endless.