Where Next?

I n choosing a title for this volume, the editors borrowed the expression "process of discovery" from Charles Henry's introduction because it evokes the principal concerns of CLIR's postdoctoral fellowship, while at the same time communicating the unresolved nature of those concerns. The term works equally well describing CLIR's experience administering the program. Deadlines and decisions fill the program team's busy calendar, with each succeeding year introducing new opportunities to learn. After 12 years, the program is not as experimental as it was in its early days, but each year new host partners, new funders, and new fellows bring with them a richer appreciation of the complex environments that today's researchers navigate and the equally complex responsibilities that today's academic and cultural heritage institutions assume in support of their research. The program is very much a "process" of continual, often surprising, "discovery," requiring substantial commitment, yet never failing to yield rewards many times greater than the organization's investment.

The development of this publication has mirrored CLIR's overall experience with the program in several ways. What was at first a vague notion has through patient nurturing and the warm enthusiasm and generosity of colleagues become something much bigger and richer than anyone at CLIR would have dared to dream at the outset. Those named on these pages as contributors to and supporters of the publication—as well as the many unnamed individuals who reviewed and offered suggestions for improvement—deserve all the credit for the merits of this project. It has been CLIR's privilege to convene this talented group and watch them as they work; we hope that there will be many more such opportunities in the future.

As Lauren Coats and Elliott Shore describe in their contribution to this volume, it is the energy and expertise of individual fellows that drive and continually refresh the ongoing conversation about the future of libraries, cultural heritage institutions, and higher education. In program seminars and meetings, allowing this conversation to grow and develop organically requires Coats and Shore to do far more listening and responding than "instructing." This approach calls for considerable wisdom and even a healthy dose of humility. In administering the postdoctoral fellowships, CLIR staff are most successful when following this example. Not one of the achievements connected with this program would have been possible without the continued engagement and leadership of all host partners, funders, and, of course, fellows.

When CLIR launched the Postdoctoral Fellowship in Scholarly Information Resources in 2004, it was impossible to imagine that within a dozen years

the program would mature into one of the organization's flagship initiatives with widespread benefits that speak to the heart of CLIR's mission. Over the fellowship's history, the recipients have made substantial contributions to CLIR's publications and most of the organization's other programs, including Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives, the Mellon Fellowships for Dissertation Research in Original Sources, the Digital Library Federation (DLF) program, and the DLF E-Research Network. Fellows have offered their perspectives in strategic meetings, designed and executed important assessment projects, and represented CLIR at numerous professional and scholarly conferences. Some have continued their leadership training with CLIR and EDUCAUSE within the Leading Change Institute. In recent years, some have even supervised new CLIR postdoctoral fellows.

So where next? Now that CLIR's community of "new kinds of scholarly information professionals" is no longer all that "new," now that the "digital" in "digital scholarship" is more or less understood, and now that "alt-ac" no longer seems especially "alt," what should be CLIR's priorities for the postdoctoral fellowship? Academic libraries, and the academy, will continue to evolve in tandem with rapidly changing research, teaching, and collecting methods, and many academic and professional networks are working to support these transformations. CLIR will seek more opportunities to engage its network of fellows in these national and international conversations. Some meaningful engagement has happened organically—recent fellows' contributions to the Research Data Alliance make up one example—but CLIR can do more as an organization to support the continued professional growth of current and former fellows by helping them find and pursue opportunities offered by other organizations. As part of a strategy for engaging former fellows in ongoing work of national significance, CLIR has discussed building from the fellows' ranks a formal network of expertise that could be made available to academic and cultural institutions seeking short-term professional help with expanding collections, systems, and services.

The program's recent emphasis on research data curation, made possible with funding from the Alfred P. Sloan and Andrew W. Mellon foundations, has brought to the surface the possibility of engaging multiple fellows to work at multiple locations on issues that transcend institutional boundaries. In 2015, CLIR is welcoming the fourth set of Fellows in Data Curation for the Sciences and Social Sciences and a third set of data curators in the humanities. By cultivating meaningful, mutually supportive relationships among these fellows, CLIR aspires to cultivate stronger ties and a beneficial interdependence among host institutions that has the potential to last well beyond a fellowship term. It is still too early to judge whether these efforts have been successful, but given the urgent financial problems now facing institutions of higher education, the model of the fellowship may be one low-risk, moderate-cost strategy that could help.

Finally, CLIR might offer advice to other organizations seeking to establish similar kinds of professional transition programs that could enrich the talent pool available to educational and cultural institutions. CLIR's focus on bringing recent PhDs to libraries has been an important part of the success of its fellowships, but post-master's programs, postdoctoral programs targeting a broader range of post-PhD careers—as Meridith Beck Sayre, Marta Brunner, Brian Croxall, and Emily McGinn suggest at the conclusion of their essay

in this volume—or networking programs designed for young professionals on fixed-term appointments in the educational, cultural, or nonprofit sectors might have similar value for establishing new professional roles quickly while meeting institutions' urgent, short-term needs. If today's young scholars and professionals are indeed facing a "trackless" future, they will need to develop strong professional "orienteering" skills as they chart their own courses through their professional lives.

Whatever may come, what the postdoctoral fellowship teaches us is this: The Romantic myth of the lone "creator-genius" (see the essay by Rose-Steel, Kouper, Parrott, and Rawson in this volume) and our naïveté as we bathe in oceans of digital information in hopes of "Eureka!" moments have done us no favors. These fallacies obscure the toil, dedication, and creativity of information professionals; scholars and educators ignore these efforts at their peril. When given the opportunity to contemplate the broader landscape in which they have been trained, however, researchers can make both tremendous progress in their own intellectual development and valuable contributions to the development of others. Understanding the motives, methods, and obstacles to human inquiry is vital to all scholarly and information professionals, in whatever context they work. In other words, behind every "discovery" is a "process."

—Christa Williford