Menucha Conference Center, nestled in the woods near the Columbia River Gorge, feels like a real retreat from the workaday world. The views from the grounds are stunning, showing wide vistas of hills, trees and the gorge. Attendees of the 2006 ACRL Washington & Oregon Joint Fall Conference were especially lucky to be treated to sunny skies instead of the forecasted rain. It was a beautiful setting for diving into the nitty gritty of Library and Librarianship 2.0.

Janeane Rockwell-Kincanon (Western Oregon University), ACRL-OR chair, welcomed us to Menucha and to the conference, and then introduced the first keynote speaker. Dr. Bernier (San Jose State University) presented “The Emerging Youth Literacy Landscape of Joy,” telling us about “new youth literacies” and the role of young people in the information future. He pointed out several gaps in current scholarship which lead to deficiencies in teaching information literacy to young people, such as seeing young people as one-dimensional “students” and as information consumers, not producers. Most importantly, he mentioned that we cannot assume that information seeking behavior is individuated for young people; it’s more likely to be collaborative. Finally, he mentioned some research possibilities for the future, posing the question, “why are youth successful in certain literacy behaviors but not others?”

The second keynote speaker was Jessamyn West (Librarian.net), who gave a very enjoyable presentation entitled “A sensible approach to new technologies in libraries: How do you work Library 2.0 into your 1.5 library with your 1.23 staff and your .98 patrons?” She began by discussing the diversity of tools available for the read/write web, including email, instant messaging, blogs, wikis, rss, social networking (yes, my pe have accounts on Catster and Dogsster), and beyond, to the potentials of open source software, such as mash-ups. The bottom line is that there are tons of tools out there, so it’s important to go wherever the eyeballs are. It’s not necessary to know everything about how to use these tools up front – knowing how to read the manual and the help files is more important. Jessamyn also noted the digital divide between people who have access to broadband and those who are still using dial-up. Most of the interaction on the read/write web is happening with those who have the faster broadband connections, leaving the dial-up folks behind as the web evolves. You can see Jessamyn’s slides at http://www.librarian.net/talks/acrl-or/

Rachel Bridgewater, (WSU-Vancouver) presented "Web 2.0 Is the Web" or "We're All Millenials Now," weaving together the keynote presentations. I was particularly intrigued by her point that using the metaphor of “pages” to shape our understanding of the Web limited the ways in which the early Web developed. Now the younger folks, who can understand the Web without metaphor, are helping take the Web in new, un-page-like directions. We need to “learn from students about the future of the information landscape as our metaphors lose their utility.”

The Washington State Chapter Meeting was short and sweet, and afterwards it was time to cut loose at the Conference Party. It was a lot of fun, with some people playing games,
some people carving pumpkins, and a lot of people mingling. The highlight was the “steal this book” game, although we were all much too polite about stealing. I’m going to be way more cutthroat next time!

Friday came awfully early, but fortunately we were greeted with another delicious meal before diving into the day. The day included a panel and then a discussion on “Using New Technologies for Teaching.” Dr. Shaun Huston (Western Oregon University) told us how he uses TypePad and LiveJournal instead of paper journals to encourage his students to get more writing practice, get experience using technologies, and to engage with other students. The assignments are structured so that the students are logging in and participating regularly, to maximize their opportunity to interact and learn from each other.

Anne-Marie Dietering (Oregon State University) talked about productive ways students can use Wikipedia. Disadvantages aside, it has some advantages over traditional encyclopedias – even those that are online. She suggests to students that they use Wikipedia as a place to start exploring a topic before choosing a thesis statement, since it is easy to go from broad to specific, and to link to related topics. She recommends using Wikipedia’s history and discussion pages to teach students about the nature of the scholarly conversation. Students need to understand the rhetoric of using sources – why to use them, not just how.

Elizabeth Breakstone (University of Oregon) presented on using IM for reference. Instant Messenger clients are easier to use and more familiar to students than the expensive 24/7 products many libraries use. Although there are some features that IM cannot reproduce, IM can be set up to save transcripts of sessions and even to forward instant messages to email when you are not logged in to IM. It can also be used to improve communication between library departments, as well as helping to provide information services to areas of the library that are without service desks. Elizabeth explained that it’s possible for a single reference librarian to handle in-person, phone and Instant Messenger questions, since, although we may feel pressure to answer questions immediately, the culture of IM is accepting of delays, as students generally multitask while using IM.

Elizabeth also presented for her colleague, Annie Zedina-Kapinski, on ways the University of Oregon is using podcasts and wikis. An oral history project on the Willamette was presented as a series of podcasts, a much cheaper alternative than the original idea of using university voicemail boxes. They have found wikis to be helpful because they can be used on different platforms and posting updates is easy, not requiring a tech person as intermediary. One recommendation was to create a wiki for the reference desk to keep track of resources for class projects. The bottom line, though, is that any technological solution requires peer buy-in; if you create a wiki and no one else uses or edits it, it isn’t fulfilling its function.

The discussion which followed ranged far and wide. Some websites that were mentioned that I particularly enjoyed visiting included Wikipedia in Simple English...
If Amazon Looked Like Our OPAC, Evergreen, Georgia’s statewide OPAC, and Pew Internet reports, which Jessamyn described as “crack for librarians.”

Of course, the best part of the conference was being thrown together with a relatively small number of colleagues from the region. The intimacy of this setting makes it a great starting place for first-time conference goers and I’m very grateful that I received the first-time attendee scholarship so that I was able to attend. I’m definitely looking forward to next year’s conference at Pack Forest!