

Leadership beyond the library: Accrediting teams

By William N. Nelson

How librarians can become effective members of these teams

Membership on a regional or specialized accrediting team provides the academic librarian a unique opportunity for leadership among peers outside librarianship. Service on an accreditation team presents the rare chance both to ensure the effective operation of an institution's library services and to share with teaching faculty and administrators a mission crucial to higher education. The opportunity and responsibility of reviewing the overall effectiveness and viability of an academic institution and of recommending required actions to the accrediting agency is indeed an awesome responsibility and a valuable learning experience. Proper preparation can make librarians more effective in this leadership endeavor.

Summary

For effective membership on an accrediting team, a librarian should:

- have experience as a librarian (preferably varied),
- have (as nearly as possible) the same academic background as other team members,
- know the criteria (standards),
- attend training sessions,
- have experience with accreditation,
- use training materials, and
- read regional accrediting agency publication(s).

Preparation

The librarian who aspires to become a member of a regional or specialized accrediting team should have the following background, experience, and training to be effective. Obviously,

the prospective team member should have experience as a librarian. Preferably this background should be varied and include service in at least one position that provides a broad understanding of the total operation of the library and of its relationship to the parent institution. Most often this would mean some service in a policy-making role such as library director, associate director, or perhaps as a department head in a medium to large library.

A prospective team member should have, as nearly as possible, the same academic background as other members. The majority of team members are teaching faculty or top administrators who have earned the doctorate. Frequently, however, several members have a terminal degree other than the doctorate. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) regional accrediting agency teams include a business manager who typically has a master's as terminal degree; frequently fine arts faculty members (especially music and art) have not earned the doctorate in their field. Sometimes computer services and student affairs professionals with other terminal degrees are also members of a team. Thus, although the MLS is sufficient for consideration, a doctorate or second master's degree could increase the probability of a librarian being selected.

All team members are expected to understand the criteria or standards for the regional accrediting agency or specialized association. Advance review and study can provide this knowledge, as well as experience with accreditors and with the institutional self-study process. Materials are generally available to assist in learning the standards and in preparing for an accreditation visit or for membership on a visiting team. For example, SACS has published the following handbooks for its members: *Criteria for Accreditation* and *The Handbook for Peer Evaluators*.

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It is advisable to attend training sessions to prepare for membership on an accreditation team. Some sessions are offered by the regional agencies, frequently in conjunction with an annual institutional membership meeting. At the December 1995 meeting, SACS offered a number of general sessions and one specifically about libraries, "Libraries: New Realities, New Opportunities." Prospective team members, including librarians, can gain valuable information and insight through attendance at some of these sessions. Other training sessions are sometimes offered at library conferences or as free-standing workshops. Most of these latter sessions, however, seem to be geared more for preparing to receive an accreditation visit; even these could be of substantial value to prospective evaluators.

Experience with accreditors is probably one of the better ways to prepare to become an effective member of an accrediting team. This service can take several forms, including: membership on a campus committee, membership on a campus steering committee, and membership on a self-study committee. Sometimes library directors are asked to chair the institutional self-study committee. This could be because librarians have skills of organization and evaluation, are user-oriented, and have editorial abilities. Often librarians are also viewed as a neutral party to help mediate competing demands of the varied disciplines represented at the institution. Additional opportunities for pertinent accreditation experience are given by Bangert and Gratch in their article, "Accreditation: Opportunities for Library Leadership."¹

Tapes, books, and other training materials are a good source of information for visiting team preparation. SACS, for example, makes available audiotapes of many sessions offered at the annual institutional membership meeting. Tapes can be ordered for 20 presentations at the 1995 meeting including the library session already mentioned, and for programs on international education, indicators of excellence, distance learning, outsourcing, and "Using the Self-Study Process to Effect Change." Monographs such as Edward Garten's *The Challenge and Practice of Academic Accreditation: A Sourcebook for Library Administrators*² and ALA's *Preparing for Accreditation: A Handbook for Academic Librarians* by Sacks and Whildin,³ are available to assist in this preparation. Helpful and informative articles are often found in journals such as *College and Research Librar-*

ies, College and Research Libraries News, and the Journal of Academic Librarianship.

Regional accrediting agency publications offer important information regarding accreditation, including future conferences and training programs. SACS publishes bimonthly *Proceedings*. The second issue (March/April) includes a complete report of sessions and decisions of the preceding annual institutional membership meeting. The other issues are much smaller, but contain valuable information such as the schedule of the next annual meeting and order forms for audiotapes.

Team member appointments

For SACS, visiting accreditation team members are currently appointed based on a completed application form, including an endorsement or recommendation by the president of the institution. Approved applicants are then entered into a registry of individuals eligible for appointment to a visiting committee. In the past, experience and an institutional endorsement were sufficient to receive an offer to serve. Now it is important to receive some specialized training; indeed such training may now be a prerequisite for committee service.

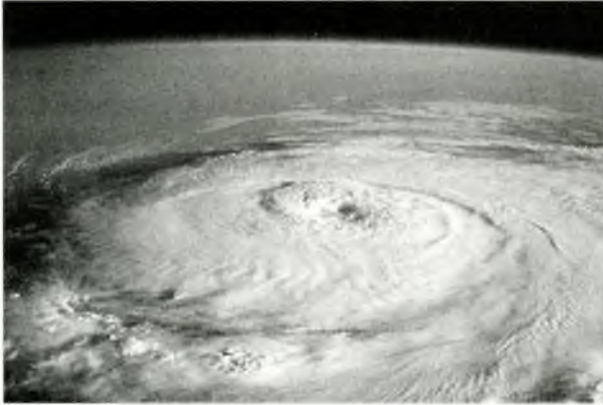
The assigned SACS staff member and the visiting committee chair select the team members for a committee. Every member, including the chair, is evaluated on every visit. These evaluations apparently play a key role in subsequent invitations to serve. Sometimes an individual is repeatedly asked to go on visits with the same chair or staff member. Apparently there has been a recent conscious effort to increase the pool of librarians in the registry. A librarian is included on every SACS team, which evidently is not the case for most other regional accrediting agencies.

Observations

For the team member, an accreditation visit is intense, structured, and pressured. One must be organized and extremely flexible. Best results are usually obtained when the member drafts preliminary findings, based on the self-study document and other institutional materials. From this base, the member sets out to confirm, modify, and amplify the assigned portion of the report. All parts of the final report are a team effort and must be unanimously approved by the team members. Librarians on a SACS team, in addition to examining library
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The Exclusion of Black Soldiers from the Medal of Honor in World War II, by Elliott V. Converse III, et al. (200 pages, May 1997), investigates the reasons why no African American soldiers were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor in World War II. The authors show in this report, commissioned by the U.S. Army, that segregation, exclusion from combat, and racism were indeed the causes for inequity in awarding the medal. Based on this study, the Army forwarded in May 1996 the names of seven African Americans to Congress and the White House as potential recipients. In January 1997, President Clinton presented the medal to First Lieutenant Vernon J. Baker for valor beyond the call of duty in the Italian cam-

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services, frequently are also assigned media services and computer resources. A team member works very hard but learns a great deal about a specific library operation and gains an understanding of the many facets of an educational institution. Also, there is frequently an opportunity to share ideas and "best practices."

This is a valuable leadership opportunity for an academic librarian to be included as a peer with other academic specialists in specific and detailed deliberations on the effective operation of an academic institution. Should you have the opportunity to serve as a member of a regional or specialized accrediting team, I recommend that you accept. It is a challenging but very rewarding leadership experience.

Notes

1. Stephanie Bangert and Bonnie Gratch, "Accreditation: Opportunities for Library Leadership," *C&RL News* 56 (November 1993): 697-99.

2. Edward Garten, *The Challenge and Practice of Academic Accreditation: Sourcebook for Library Administrators* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1994).

3. Patricia Ann Sacks and Sara Lou Whildin, *Preparing for Accreditation: A Handbook for Academic Libraries* (Chicago: ALA, 1993). ■

paign, and to the relatives of the other six, all now deceased. \$23.50. McFarland & Co., Box 611, Jefferson, NC 18640. ISBN 0-7864-0277-6.

Eyewitness to History, edited by Brian M. Fagan (493 pages, February 1997), brings together 55 first-hand accounts of archeological discoveries that recreate the excitement and mystery of uncovering bones, buildings, and artifacts that have lain buried for centuries. Included here are: Donald Johanson's discovery of Lucy (*Australopithecus afarensis*) in Ethiopia in 1974; Champollion's recounting of how he first deciphered Egyptian hieroglyphs; Leonard Woolley's reconstruction of a royal funeral at Ur; David Soren's description of finding an early Christian community in Cyprus buried by an earthquake in 365 A.D.; Konrad Spindler's account of the 1991 discovery in the Alps of Otzi the 5,000-year-old man preserved in a glacier; and Ivor Hume's excavation of the colonial settlement at Martin's Hundred, Virginia, that was destroyed by Indian attack in 1622. These fascinating stories will undoubtedly inspire future generations of archeologists. \$39.95. Oxford Univ. Press, 198 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016. ISBN 0-19-508141-2.

Slee's Health Care Terms, by Vergil N. Slee, Debora A. Slee, and H. Joachim Schmidt (655 pages, 3rd ed., January 1997), pulls together all the relevant terminology from earlier editions and defines many new words and phrases that came into common usage during the health care reform movement of the 1990s. Medical, legal, and policy terms are included. Have this one on hand next time you attempt to read an HMO prospectus. \$49.95. Tringa Press, P.O. Box 8181, St. Paul, MN 55108. ISBN 0-9615255-8-4.

We Were Next to Nothing, by Carl S. Nordin (257 pages, April 1997), is a first-hand account of an American POW's experience in prison camps in the Philippines and Japan during World War II. Throughout his 27 months in captivity, Nordin detailed his thoughts on the camps in a secret diary that became the basis of this work. Memoirs like this are invaluable records of the horror and costs of war. \$28.95. McFarland & Co., Box 611, Jefferson, NC 18640. ISBN 0-7864-0274-1. An interesting comparison can be made with Bernard T. Fitzpatrick's *The Hike into the Sun* (McFarland, 1993), a record of the Bataan Death March and similar Japanese internment camps. ■