

brary was difficult for the students due to our crowded conditions. Setbacks normal for any students, such as a particular volume not being on the shelf or having to select a new topic due to an absence of references, were particularly formidable for these students. We were torn between the advisability of "cooking" the assignment to ensure that everything would run smoothly or leaving things "natural" to give a realistic idea of library research process.

Conclusion

At some point, what the library staff can and cannot do for print-handicapped students should be spelled out. Extra help may involve fetching, photocopying, telephoning, but must never involve usurping the student's right to an education. The research decisions—which information to select or use—should be left to the student. Helpers should not pre-select or decide.

If the effort to instruct the print-handicapped in library techniques seems formidable, we can assure you that it is worth it. To see our print-handicapped students now in their second or third

year, using the library confidently on a regular basis, knowing that you have been a part of the process that has made it possible, is truly gratifying. No instruction librarian could ask for anything more satisfying and, at the same time, of more service to "equality of opportunity" for all students.

Recommended reading

Clarke, Alice S., and Kay F. Jones, eds. *Teaching Librarians to Teach: On the Job Training for Bibliographic Instruction Librarians*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1986.

Dowding, Martin. "Service for the Disabled an Accessible Idea." *Quill and Quire*, October 1987, pp. 19-20.

Fox, Peter. *Reader Instruction Methods in Academic Librarians*. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

Kirkendall, Carolyn, ed. *Improving Library Instruction: How to Teach and How to Evaluate*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Pieran Press, 1979.

Velleman, Ruth A. *Serving Physically Disabled People*. New York: R.R. Bowker, 1979. ■■



INNOVATIONS

Humor and creativity: Holidays

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The response to my article on "Humor and Creativity" in the March 1988 *C&RL News* has been most encouraging. The material I have received to date, largely in the form of copies of academic library newsletters, shows, as I suspected, that library humor is indeed alive and well out in the field. The light-hearted look that academic librarians are able to take at their own operations is a good sign. The results have been so encouraging that I am able, as promised, to provide *C&RL*

News with an analysis and excerpts of the best of academic library humor from time to time.

Holidays are a time for celebration and fun. There is substantial evidence that holidays are celebrated in both the usual and some unusual ways in academic libraries. Such celebrations serve to enhance staff morale by binding the staff together as a "family." These celebrations also serve to demonstrate that even staid academic librarians can have fun and prove that they are, after all, human.

The primary holiday for fun is, naturally, April Fool's Day. It is widely celebrated in academic libraries either through the issuance of special editions of the staff newsletter or substantial segments of the regular staff newsletter. Imaginative titles (e.g., *Update* becomes *Downdate*) and parodies of real life are the heart of these efforts with the organization itself being the obvious and favorite target. The "Staff Newsletter" of the Texas Medical Library Center for April 1988, for example, contains a delightful fictional set of minutes for a laid-back meeting of the Library Council where, among other things, it was proposed to keep the library open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, to "solve the dangerous problem of searching the stacks and washrooms late at night for possible marauders in hiding." These special newsletters are issued in such abundance that I will devote a special April Fool's column just to them.

Other holidays are also observed in fascinating ways in some academic libraries. Valentine's Day may bring with it a touch of the romantic or, more often, through the exchange of humorous cards and gifts by secret Valentines, the school child's playful affection. Constance Fairchild, one of the perpetrators, reports that in 1976 the Catalog Department at the University of Illinois at Urbana even offered the first, and last, public performance of the Salvation Army Band when, after one rehearsal, nine members of the department paraded through the library performing several Christmas carols to wake the users from their holiday slumbers. As noted in the official typed program, the instruments included a tambourine and a brass drum and the performers a flamingo guitarist ("who turns pink when performing on one foot in her front yard").

Next to April Fool's Day the holiday that offers the most scope for our imagination is Halloween, especially given the recent national revival of interest in this occasion. I can report at first hand that for the past several years, for example, the staff at the Homer Babbidge Library at the University of Connecticut has taken to wearing costumes not just for the usual out-of-sight afternoon party in the staff lounge but openly at work and even to meetings. A pink mother pig, complete with rubber nipples, at the exit control point caused faculty and students some consternation one year. The pirate with her live parrot may have brought the subsequent official written edict from the University's Assistant Vice President for Labor Relations reminding all staff that pets were *not* to be brought to work. At the end of the afternoon party the costumed staff parade silently throughout the public areas of the library in a demonstration of their humanity.

The most famous library Halloween activity has taken place at the Northwestern University Library since 1972. That is the renowned pumpkin carving contest sponsored by the Northwestern University Libraries Staff Association (NULSA),

which provides a limited number of free pumpkins and gives out awards at its party. The nature of the awards has varied over the years but seems of late to have settled down into three categories: most original; best crafted; and most humorous. Rolf Erickson, the current editor of the NULSA newsletter, *The Lantern's Core* (which can always be counted on for entertainment) has provided an extensive historical record of that event. In 1974 the Catalog Department produced an Automated Marc Pumpkin that lit up and whirred when plugged in, while the Order Department managed to find a Pumpkin Who Called in Sick. In 1978 the Interlibrary Loan Department came up with the mixed media winner with its entry, *We Are Not a Loan*. In 1979 there were a total of fourteen entries including the Serials Department's *The Cereals Quarterly*. In the most appropriate category might be noted the Africana Department's 1983 entry of *Last Coach to Timbuktu* and NOTIS' 1986 entry of *Max Headroom*. In a 1983 note the idea of staff voting for winners was rejected in favor of continuing to have qualified judges because of "departmental loyalties and unbalanced departmental populations." The pumpkins are displayed for staff and users alike to admire, thus bringing life to the library.

These and similar holiday celebrations are an important aspect of library humor. They provide, in a natural setting, the opportunity for academic library staff to poke fun in a truly creative way at the library bureaucracy, to build morale, to relieve stress, and—above all—simply to have a good time.



Coming soon

The response to the note, "Feeling Funny?" in the March 1988 *C&RL News* has produced a wealth of amusing items that have entertained me and enhanced my collection of academic library humor. My thanks to all who have contributed. Please keep those business cards and newsletters coming. Forthcoming columns will deal with humor in the Music Library—even though that seems to consist largely of bad puns—and preservation which in humor, as in real life, is receiving increased attention of late. More samples of humorous material in those two categories would be most appreciated. Please send material (remember to sign and date your business card on the verso) to Norman D. Stevens, 143 Hanks Hill Road, Storrs, CT 06268.