

Letters

COLLEGE & RESEARCH LIBRARIES

Search and Screen Committees

To the Editor:

The artiness of the science of management was never more clearly demonstrated than in the article on "University Library Search and Screen Committees" in the July 1976 issue. In paragraph 12 (p.353) under "Strengths" the authors state, "No objective evidence was located concerning the superiority of the judgments made or the candidates appointed through search and screen committee use. . . . Nevertheless, most respondents *felt* such committee methods to be more successful than traditional administrative methods." [Italic mine]

My own experience with campus search and screen committees, which ranges from the search for a college president, vice president, and a school dean, as well as being rejected by a couple of search and screen committees for library directorships, leads me to the conclusion that the weaknesses far outweigh the strengths. I say this as one who long advocated such committees and still uses a highly participative procedure for recruiting staff members.

The typical search and screen committee begins by setting criteria, often with the advice of the faculty. Such criteria are so lofty in experience, education, publications, and other professional activities that few librarians below retirement age could possibly meet them. Then they advertise the position using those superperson qualifications which scare away all applicants who have a decent and desirable amount of modesty. So they receive applications mostly from those who have grand notions of their own importance or are desperate enough to apply for anything.

When the committee realizes that the criteria are too high, it is too late and too embarrassing to advertise the position again so the committee makes do with the pompous and the desperate. If by good fortune

some genuinely promising but modest candidates have applied (due to someone's urging) the committee either weeds them out because they do not meet the criteria or, if they should advance to the interview stage, one member of the committee is not absolutely convinced of the applicant's perfection beyond a shadow of doubt in the interview. It takes only one member of the committee to ding a future Keyes Metcalf! So the committee becomes desperate itself and selects a sweet talker who displeases no one.

If authors Harvey and Parr want to get some objective evidence on the best method of appointment of university librarians, I suggest that they study the methods that were used to select the university library directors who have been and are now successful. But objective evidence, or the truth itself, is of little value unless it is used. Participatory management must become more than a euphemism for shifting responsibility to the members of a committee, or the science of management will not even be an art.—R. Dean Galloway, *Library Director, California State College, Stanislaus.*

Response

To the Editor:

We appreciate Mr. Galloway's comments on the article. His negative opinion of search and screen committees is shared by many; however, he, as well as others, continues to use them as a management technique.

While some committees carry on their work as Galloway suggests, many other patterns exist around the country. No comprehensive survey data exist which show all of the patterns or all of the policies being followed. Certainly, the "sweet talker who displeases no one," to use Galloway's phrase, often seems to be the candidate selected for the position.

Galloway's suggestion for collecting objective evidence on the best method of selecting university librarians does not seem feasible to us because defining "successful" librarians is almost impossible, and we suspect that the method by which they or any other group were initially selected would present considerable variety.—*John F. Harvey and Mary Parr.*

The Independent Research Library

To the Editor:

As the founder of the Women's History Research Center, a former independent research library, and an associate of the Newberry Library, I welcomed your article by William Budington in the July 1976 issue. It gives a history, a perspective to, and an understanding of our work and struggles to survive that was most refreshing and even comforting.

The funding and IRS classification problems are what "sank" us, to use his word, but not necessarily "quietly!" We have dispersed our collections and published the major ones: Women & Health/Mental Health, Women & Law, and Women's Serials on microfilm, with grants (both private and governmental). The original collections are now housed at Northwestern University's Special Collections Library (Women's Serials) and the Archive of Contemporary History at the University of Wyoming (Subject Files). Also, our collection of women's movement pamphlets is now at Princeton University.

The Women's History Research Center did maintain the library of record for the current international women's movement, as well as material on women in general, anytime/anywhere. For several years we were open to the public, especially by mail, and published many books (bibliographies/directories) on women and film and art, for instance, which are still in print.

We certainly did seek "to enlarge the sphere of human knowledge," and "supplementing academic libraries" was a virtual emergency. But our users taught us that there is no subject less narrow than women, who have affected and been affected by every issue and event. They further shaped our collections by donating their sources and completed research as well as time and money.

In turn, we believe, our very existence shaped collections elsewhere because of the demand people put on their libraries for resources about women. (Parts of our microfilm collections, for instance, are available in 200 libraries in seven countries due more to the interest of their patrons than to our work, as our grants only covered production and ended two years ago.)

To paraphrase the American Council of Learned Societies' definition of research libraries, we were once facilitating effective action on the frontier of a novel . . . field of knowledge. But soon I hope such a field will be viewed as traditional.—*Laura X, Founder, Women's History Library, and President, Women's History Research Center Foundation.*

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