

Continuing Education: Attitudes and Experiences of the Academic Librarian

Continuing education opportunities for librarians must respond to a broad range of requirements, abilities, and expectations. Knowledge about continuing education attitudes and experiences can facilitate the planning of effective programs. This study investigates the attitudes and experiences of librarians at the City University of New York and the variables age, sex, years since completion of library degree, job security, type of college library, career goals, and additional academic degrees. Also covered are: areas viewed as most crucial for update and improvement, encouraging and discouraging factors, modes of education, and continuing education in librarianship versus a subject specialization.

CHANGE PERSISTS as one of the major concerns and motivators to professional development in librarianship. With the increasing variety of formats in which information is available, the expanding dependence on automated systems, the shifting nature of library clientele, and the demand for library managers with the skills to cope with the growing size and complexities of libraries and library networks, the profession has begun to assume a greater responsibility for the provision of adequate programs of continuing education for its members.

The combination of these developmental in librarianship and the pressure for specialization has had a profound impact upon the professional growth of academic librarians. College and university libraries in particular are significantly influenced by the rapid transformations and unprecedented innovations. This has taken place at the same time that many academic librarians have tried to cope with the pressures and responsibilities of recently secured faculty

status. The continuing education needs of librarians vary markedly, and the task of planning courses, programs, and other opportunities that respond to individual requirements and abilities is clearly complex.

THE PRESENT STUDY

This study was designed to investigate:

1. The attitudes of academic librarians toward continuing education in both librarianship and a subject specialization.
2. The continuing education activities of academic librarians.
3. The relationship between attitudes toward continuing education and continuing education activities experience.
4. The impact age, sex, years since completion of library degree, job security, type of college library, career goals, and additional academic degrees have upon these attitudes and experiences.
5. The areas in which academic librarians feel the need to update knowledge and/or improve skills.
6. The factors academic librarians view as encouraging and discouraging their participation in continuing education activities.
7. The modes of continuing education academic librarians view as being best

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suited to their needs, objectives, and capabilities.

One of the prime national needs identified in the final report of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science was continuing education for librarians.¹ Borko, in his *Targets for Research in Library Education*, through the use of the Delphi technique, views research on "improving and updating the skills of professional librarians" as a project "of very great importance."²

It is important to determine the attitudes, experiences, and perceived needs and problems specific to library types, systems, and functions so that programs can be organized and applied more effectively.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

There have been a number of important studies of questions relating to continuing education for librarians, but three projects in particular significantly influenced the planning of the present investigation: Elizabeth Stone's *Factors Related to the Professional Development of Librarians*, Allie Beth Martin and Maryann Dugan's *Continuing Education for Library Staffs in the Southwest (CELS)*, and the report to NCLIS entitled *Continuing Library and Information Science Education*.³⁻⁵

Special note was also made of specialized studies of special, school, state, and medical library staffs.⁶⁻⁹ The works of Virgo, Conroy, and Redfield were important in the analysis of the survey results.¹⁰⁻¹² Many of the issues and problems identified in these works are examined in this study as they apply to academic librarianship.

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this study, the excellent definitions provided in the Stone and NCLIS projects were used. Stone views continuing education as "all activities and efforts by librarians to upgrade their knowledge, abilities, competencies, and understanding in their field of work or specializations so that they can become more effective professionals and be able to handle responsibilities of greater scope and accountability."¹³ The NCLIS definition of continuing education emphasizes the following points:

1. The notion of lifelong learning as a means of keeping an individual up to date with new knowledge and preventing obsolescence.
2. The updating of a person's education.
3. The allowance for diversification to a new area within a field.
4. The assumption that the individual carries the basic responsibility for his or her own development.
5. Educational activities that are beyond those considered necessary for entrance into the field.¹⁴

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Once the purpose and scope of the investigation were determined, the methods and procedures to be used to obtain the necessary data were developed. These included: identification of the sample and the nature of the survey sample design, selection of the variables to be measured by a questionnaire, development of the questionnaire format and technique of presentation, the organization and administration of the questionnaire, and the analysis of the data.

It was decided to use the librarians of the City University of New York as the group to be surveyed. The latest available *LACUNY Directory* listed the names of 360 professional librarians working at twenty individual units of the university (not including part-time or adjunct librarians or library directors). A sample of ninety individuals, or 25 percent, was selected. A stratified random sampling allowed for distribution proportionally to two- and four-year college librarians, male and female, and the various academic ranks.

The literature on the construction of questionnaires was reviewed as the basis for developing the questionnaire used in the study. The questionnaire was designed to effect the purposes of the study and to measure the variables being analyzed, with the provision for statistical manipulation of the results.

The questionnaire was pretested by eight representative academic librarians, and, as a result, several revisions were made before the final questionnaire was sent out in April 1976. A cover letter identified the investigator, gave the purpose of the study, defined the subject matter, assured the

anonymity of the replies, and suggested that the questionnaire be returned by a specific date. A postpaid, preaddressed return envelope was included, and no provision was made for a follow-up request for nonreturns.

Of the ninety questionnaires sent to CUNY librarians, two were returned as undeliverable, and seventy-three completed questionnaires were received, for a return rate of 83 percent. Chi-square tests were used at 0.05 level of significance as the statistical test of significance for all data in this study.

RESULTS

Attitudes toward Continuing Education

Respondents were asked, in a series of five questions, to list how high a priority they assigned to continuing education in librarianship; interacting with other librarians at conferences and association activities; undertaking formal course work in librarianship; carrying out self-study programs; and continuing education in a subject specialization. Values of 0 to 3 (corresponding to no, low, medium, and high priority) were given as responses to each question. The total value of these five answers for each respondent will be referred to as the attitude index, ranging in value from 0 to 15, where 0 represents no priority, 5 low priority, 10 medium priority, and 15 high priority.

This index was designed as a frame of reference for comparing attitudes toward continuing education in librarianship and a subject specialization, identifying the most favored modes of continuing education, and measuring attitudes against a series of variables. The value of the attitude index could range from 0 (no priority) to 15 (high priority). The mean value of the attitude index for the entire sample was 9.6, or just below medium priority.

The study clearly demonstrates that CUNY librarians favor the interaction (meeting with other librarians at conferences and association activities) and self-study modes over formal course work. This supports a similar conclusion reached in the NCLIS and Stone projects.^{15,16} Continuing education in librarianship and a subject specialization were both assigned the same level of priority.

The variables sex, job security, type of

college, and additional degrees had no significant relationship to the attitude toward continuing education. Noteworthy was the progressive increase in the attitude index moving toward the middle-age librarian (40-49 age group) and the mid-career librarian (11-20 years since library degree).

There was a significantly higher value assigned by younger librarians (under 30 age group) and the recent library school graduate (under 5 years) to continuing education activities in a subject specialization. The unwritten requirement that CUNY librarians have a second subject master's degree should be kept in mind throughout this analysis.

Those librarians who indicated plans to move into more administratively responsible positions (22 percent of the sample) had a markedly higher attitude index than those who indicated they wanted to remain in their present positions. This supports Stone's observation that librarians with higher career aspirations are more likely to support and take advantage of continuing education opportunities.¹⁷

Continuing Education Experience

On the basis of responses to a series of questions about recent activities in both librarianship and a subject specialization, a value was assigned to each respondent that will be referred to as the experience index. These questions covered books and journals read, research and publication, membership and participation in professional associations, additional course work beyond the library degree, and attendance at workshops, conferences, and seminars. The experience index was designed as a frame of reference for comparing continuing education activities in both librarianship and a subject specialization and for relating experience to the attitude index and the other variables.

The results demonstrate that CUNY librarians devoted equal energies to continuing education activities in librarianship and in a subject area. A breakdown of the various elements producing the experience index shows that in terms of books read and formal course work a subject area was turned to, while in terms of association membership and conference/workshop participation librarianship moves to the fore.

Similar to the results obtained with the attitude index, there was a significantly higher experience index value for the middle-age and the mid-career librarian. Furthermore, the younger librarian and the recent graduate were more involved with subject area activities, while the older and more experienced librarians were more active in the library field.

The experience index value for librarians planning to move into more administratively responsible positions was significantly higher than that registered by the rest of the sample in both library and subject area activities. Those librarians with additional academic degrees beyond the library master's degree had a higher experience index, particularly in subject area activities.

Noteworthy is the positive relationship between the experience and attitude indexes: the more affirmative a librarian's attitude toward continuing education, the more extensive his or her continuing education experience. The reverse relationship was also valid. Stone had noted a "significant disparity between what the librarians were doing and what they thought they should be doing for maximum professional development."¹⁸ The results of this CUNY study demonstrate a closer relationship between experience and attitude.

Encouraging and Discouraging Factors

A list of factors that could be viewed as encouraging or discouraging participation in continuing education activities was included in the questionnaire. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they felt each represented a significant, a minor, or no factor in terms of their personal situations.

CUNY librarians ranked exposure to new ideas, the opportunity to update skills and knowledge, and assistance in providing better service as the top three factors motivating participation in continuing education activities.

It is noteworthy that promotion and tenure and encouragement from colleagues and supervisors were factors ranked significantly lower. These results support Stone's conclusion that librarians are motivated most by activities that provide "a feeling of growth in job competence."¹⁹ Virgo's study similarly demonstrated the importance of con-

tinuing education opportunities that provide information about new approaches and innovative services.²⁰

Lack of time was indicated as the prime deterrent, followed by prohibitive costs. These concerns are part of the long-standing demand of CUNY librarians for more released time and increased financial support for participation in such activities. Stone concluded that the major deterrents were those factors "associated with extrinsic conditions," while Martin found that insufficient time and money were the major frustrations.^{21,22}

Subject Areas

The questionnaire included a list of areas in which academic librarians might feel the need to update knowledge and/or improve skills. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they felt significant, some, or no need for additional training or information in each area. Values of 2, 1, and 0 were respectively assigned to each response.

The areas included: library automation, library administration, non-book and audiovisual materials, interlibrary cooperation and networking, collection development and evaluation, systems design and analysis, research methodology, non-library science subject specialization, educational theory and methods, reference services, data base operations, problems and developments in higher education, personnel administration, cataloging and classification, human relations, remedial instruction, current issues in librarianship, and bibliographic instruction.

Library automation, data base operations, non-book materials, and systems design and analysis were the four areas CUNY librarians viewed as demanding their greatest attention in library continuing education. The NCLIS and Virgo studies also identified these areas as important to librarians, but with much greater emphasis on management and human relations skills.^{23,24}

In the CUNY study, librarians seeking to advance administratively indicated a higher level of need to update knowledge and/or improve skills than the total sample in all but one area, bibliographic instruction, with very significant differences in library administration, human relations, personnel administration, and systems design and analy-

sis—all directly related to their career goals.

The senior and community college rankings provided some interesting responses, with two-year college librarians placing greater emphasis than their four-year colleagues on two areas in which the latter are far more heavily involved in practical work experience, namely, library automation and data base operation. Perhaps anticipation provides greater motivation than daily involvement, which is in fact a form of education itself. The media emphasis in the community college evoked a higher response for non-book and audiovisual materials, and the heavy concentration of open-admission students in the community colleges explains the higher ranking for remedial instruction.

CONCLUSIONS

Librarians at the City University of New York maintained a largely equivocal attitude toward continuing education at the time of the survey, responses ranging from low to high priority ratings and an overall index value just below medium priority. The favoring of continuing education activities in a subject area on an equal basis with activities in librarianship to a great extent reflects the subject organization of academic libraries, the pressure for additional academic degrees beyond the master's in library science, particularly in the CUNY system, and the subject expertise that is increasingly essential for the effective operation of the academic library.

These attitudes are reflected in the experiences of CUNY librarians in continuing education activities. All the librarians surveyed were involved in both formal and informal activities, with books read and course work in a subject area and association membership and conference participation in librarianship clearly favored.

This demonstrates the impact of demands for tangible evidence, in the form of course credits, of advancement beyond the library master's. However, CUNY librarians still clearly viewed interaction with other librarians in conference and association activities as more productive and warranting their membership and attendance.

This study shows the positive relationship between continuing education activities and

experiences. It is not clear whether affirmation breeds involvement, or vice versa. Nevertheless, those CUNY librarians who recognized the need for such participation and viewed it positively also tended to be more actively involved.

The middle-age and mid-career librarian maintained a more positive attitude toward continuing education activities and was more extensively involved than other groups. Clearly, years of experience and time since completion of library degree are important factors in producing recognition of the need to update knowledge and improve skills. Ambitious career goals also produced a significantly more positive attitude, which was manifested in greater participation.

Automation, non-book materials, systems design and analysis, and data base operations were the areas identified most frequently and forcefully as requiring greatest attention in continuing education. Faced with new trends, technologies, and patron expectations that are unfamiliar and for which many have had neither training nor work experience, the academic librarian feels the need to seek out opportunities for update and instruction.

The librarians at CUNY viewed continuing education as a source of more effective job performance, challenge, creativity, and satisfaction. However, practical concerns, particularly the inability to budget sufficient funds and time, frequently made involvement difficult.

CUNY librarians viewed the interaction and self-study modes as being best suited to their needs, objectives, and job demands. Time and cost restrictions influenced this response. Nevertheless, continuing education opportunities must be broad, with freedom of choice and individualized programs ensured.

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