

Letters

Indexes as Memory Assists

To the Editor:

Elaine C. Clever's article "Using Indexes As 'Memory Assists'" (*C&RL*, Sept. 1979) contains at least two major substantive errors.

First, on page 448 Clever attempts to compare the cost of searching *Social Sciences Citation Index*, *Social Sciences Index*, and *Humanities Index*. She states, "Assuming a rate of \$9/hour, the cost of searching SSCI was 20.5 cents per minute for list I and almost 44 cents per minute for list II." Unfortunately, Clever confuses cost per minute with cost per *hit* (that is, the number of citations located). Cost per minute *cannot* vary unless the cost per hour varies. That is, assuming a set rate per hour (for example, Clever's \$9/hour or 15 cents per minute), a seventy-five-minute search must cost the same *per minute* as a fifteen-minute search; only the total or end costs differ. While space precludes a complete analysis of Clever's error, it is clear that she has confused cost per minute with cost per hit.

Second, Clever utilizes a research design that biases the results. Clever insists on judging the utility of the *Social Sciences Index* and *Humanities Index* on the basis of criteria the two indexes were never designed or intended to fulfill. The two indexes were doomed to fail, as Clever's evaluation was based on functions which neither the publisher nor most subscribers expect the indexes to satisfy.

Finally, Clever cites a catalog use study by Lipetz and Stangl (*Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science* 5:137-39) as evidence that faculty and graduate students use periodical indexes as "memory assists." However, Lipetz and Stangl discuss use patterns of card catalogs only; no mention is made of indexes, abstracts, or other reference tools. One simply cannot assume, *a priori*, that use pat-

terns of periodical indexes and abstracts parallel use patterns of card catalogs.

Evaluation research should focus on the function for which a product is designed. Evaluation of subject/author indexes on the basis of key word title criteria is both unnecessary and unacceptable.—David R. McDonald, *Systems Librarian, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, California.*

Response

To the Editor:

Mr. McDonald is right. It is cost per hit, which is what I had in the original manuscript, but I failed to catch the change in a subsequent revision.

More important, I regret that I did not elaborate on the relationship between the Lipetz and Stangl use study of the university catalog and research that shows that not only the catalog but other materials in the library are used extensively this way. It's implied, but not stated, that if a person comes into the library looking for something already known to exist and if that item is current, he or she will use indexes for the search. It may be obvious to the reference librarian that the search does not have a high likelihood of success, but it is interesting, I believe, to learn just how unlikely it is.—Elaine C. Clever.

ISBD: Aid or Barrier?

To the Editor:

Researchers often fail to extract all of the important information immanent in their data. In contrast, Gorman and Hotsinpiller (*C&RL*, Nov. 1979) have contrived to extract from their data more information than is actually contained in it. From being unable to reject their hypothesis that "there is no significant difference in understanding as between ISBD and non-ISBD (catalog) descriptions," Gorman and Hotsinpiller make an illogical leap. They conclude that their

study "proves that the ISBD aids, rather than halts, the understanding and speed of use of descriptive data." Astounding! The results merely suggest that ISBD descriptions are neither easier nor harder to understand than non-ISBD descriptions. One should perhaps more readily conclude that ISBD has provided a standard where none was needed.

The emphasis given to the speed of the use of ISBD descriptions is as unwarranted as the claim that they aid understanding. Given the timing methodology adopted, the observed average difference of only one second between ISBD and non-ISBD descriptions could be ascribed to experimental error. Speed is a virtue only if the responses are correct. Although the ISBD descriptions resulted in "15 quicker responses" (p.526), it is apparent that in four of these cases (questions 2, 4a, 7, and 15) the non-ISBD descriptions elicited more correct answers.

This study is flawed by at least seven serious reporting errors. Mostly these errors take the form of discrepancies between the text and the data; the data (appendixes 3 and 4) are assumed to be substantially correct. But appendix 3 contains two egregious summation errors: the total number of "correct" responses for non-ISBD descriptions should be 60, for a proportion of 65.2%; the number of "partially correct" responses for these descriptions should be 16, for a proportion of 17.4%.

Perhaps the most disquieting aspect of this work by Gorman and Hotsinpiller is their use of a catch-all rating category, Partially Correct, in which responses which "gave too much information (including the correct answer)" were given equal weight with responses which gave only "half of the answer." One is left to wonder how these quite different kinds of responses were distributed between ISBD and non-ISBD descriptions.

Taken together, the foregoing criticisms bring into question the reliability if not the validity of Gorman and Hotsinpiller's work. There is no compelling reason to suppose that the laxity which permeates their reporting did not extend also to the conduct of their enquiry.—*Joseph M. A. Cavanagh, Library Systems Planner, Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore, Maryland.*

Response

To the Editor:

Joseph Cavanagh's letter about "ISBD: Aid or Barrier to Understanding" (*C&RL*, Nov. 1979) contains a number of assertions and implications upon which I would like to comment.

First, the "leap" from the hypothesis that ISBD and non-ISBD are equal in promoting understanding to the conclusion that ISBD aids, rather than halts, that understanding is not "illogical." The study suggests that ISBD entries may be marginally easier to understand than non-ISBD entries.

Second, Cavanagh relates speed and accuracy. The study did not. Cavanagh is free to interpret the data any way he chooses. We simply reported on the speed of response. I agree that the difference is certainly insignificant. In fact, after consulting with Charles Davis (dean of Illinois's library school) and other research-oriented colleagues at the University of Illinois, I can state that there is no statistically significant difference between ISBD and non-ISBD entries for any of the comparisons. This can be seen by inspection in most of the cases, but where it is not obvious, chi square and *t* test analyses do show that the observed differences could have occurred by chance. This suggests to me that users would be better served, or at least just as well served, by entries conforming to ISBD.

Third, of "seven serious reporting errors" Cavanagh quotes two. Both concern totals which are wrong by one (due to error in the translation from manuscript to typescript to print, not error in "summation"). Cavanagh describes these errors as "egregious"; I would suggest that he try to acquire a greater sensitivity to the English language or a greater sense of proportion. The other five (presumably less egregious) "errors" are not described. If they exist, one can assume that they have a similarly minor effect on the results of the study.

Fourth, in the real world "partially correct" is a large category of response. The study did not choose to analyze it further. I can see no benefit to be gained by doing so.

Fifth, Cavanagh's letter (and, in particular, its last sentence) should win some award for its snide sub-academic tone. Cavanagh is presumably trying to imply that

the whole study was rigged but has not the courage to say so.—*Michael Gorman*.

To the Editor:

Despite the elaborate "method," the nicely reproduced card examples, and the impressive statistical tables, Michael Gorman and Jami Hotsinpillar's "study" (*C&RL*, Nov. 1979) does *not* prove that "ISBD aids, rather than halts, the understanding and speed of use of descriptive data as compared with pre-ISBD descriptions." Why? Not because of too small a sample nor the exclusive testing of undergraduates, but rather because the *questions* employed—e.g., "Is this book illustrated?" or "What is the subtitle?"—inevitably prejudice the results. That is, the questions themselves tend to induce "correct" answers. For instance, it's a very different matter to ask an "ordinary user" what "ill." means (in context) than to ask "Is this book illustrated?" The former question genuinely tests understanding and recognition, while the latter "gives away" the answer, merely testing (if anything) the respondent's ability to apply *external* cues, to guess rightly with the benefit of Very Heavy Hints.

For examples of truly objective research into ordinary users' understanding of standard bibliographic elements, particularly abbreviations, see Larry Legus' "Sure, They Save Space, But Who Knows What They Mean?" *HCL Cataloging Bulletin*, no. 40 (May–June 1979), p. 24–29, and "The Mystery of Ips and Mono; or, Do Students Understand AV Card Catalog Terms?" by Jane Schlueter and Robert D. Little, in Deirdre Boyle's *Expanding Media* (Phoenix: Oryx Pr., 1977). These studies, incidentally, demonstrated a significant non-recognition or non-understanding of such taken-for-granted cataloging conventions as "c" (copyright), "d" (died), "v" (volume), "1" (leaves), and "n.d." (no date).

No, the "long-drawn-out 'controversy' over the ISBD" is hardly ended by Gorman and Hotsinpillar's transparently flawed "research."—*Sanford Berman, Head Cataloger, Hennepin County Library, Edina, Minnesota*.

To the Editor:

As a librarian who has been concerned with the fear public library users seem to

have for our catalogs, I welcome Gorman and Hotsinpillar's interest (*C&RL*, Nov. 1979). It appears, however, that wrong questions were asked about wrong books to (admittedly) wrong people.

Questions: Out-of-school public library users rarely seek information from the catalog about publisher, place of publication, or subtitle. Of the questions asked, only those relating to the author or title of the book might be asked with some frequency. There is a slight possibility that questions about illustrations might be asked.

Books: American public libraries deal overwhelmingly with English-language books. Why ask questions about books in foreign languages?

People: College students are a vastly different population from general public library users.

If catalog intelligibility is really our goal, why don't we have our computers spell out what the ISBD symbols stand for? Our slogan might be: "ISBD for machines, English for people." And less is more; we should simplify and suppress information that is not sought by the overwhelming majority of public library readers (e.g., place of publication, ISBN).

For an example of a reader-oriented format, see my "Scilken's Supercard" (*The Unabashed Librarian*, no. 12, 1974).

Why use arcane symbols when real English is available to us? If we make finding aids easier to use, perhaps more people will use our catalogs—and our libraries.—*Marvin H. Scilken, Director, Orange Public Library, Orange, New Jersey*.

Academic Libraries and Undergraduate Education

To the Editor:

In the article "Academic Libraries and Undergraduate Education" (*C&RL*, Jan. 1980) it is stated that the CLR-supported college library programs were "based on concepts generated by Patricia Knapp's Monteith College library experiment." Patricia Knapp was one of the founders of the library-college movement and remained a key spokesperson for its precepts. We spent much of one day discussing library-college not long before her death on her last visit to Washington, D.C.

While it is encouraging to observe the studies made in bibliographic instruction practice in the 1970s, it is appropriate in this context, I believe, to acknowledge its antecedents in library-college theory and practice.

Promulgated by the writings and practice of Louis Shores and B. Lamar Johnson in the 1930s and revitalized by Louis Shores, Patricia Knapp, and others in the 1960s, the concepts of library-college are virtually identical with those expressed in the Gwinn article: "the closer integration of academic libraries with undergraduate education," "an academic library . . . as an active, committed partner in . . . education," and "to provide to the academic library world examples of things that could be done to integrate the library more fully into campus life."

The majority of the librarians mentioned in this article and its bibliography of CLR-supported college library programs were participants in one or more of the many library-college workshops held yearly or more often since 1965.

Long articles on library-college can be found in the *Encyclopedia of Education* and the *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science*.—Robert T. Jordan, Professor, Department of Media, Information and Learning Systems, University of the District of Columbia, Washington, D.C.

Research and Publication Requirements

To the Editor:

The elaborate research design of Rayman and Goudy in their article "Research and Publication Requirements in University Libraries" (*C&RL*, Jan. 1980) is wasted on a set of incomplete returns. The authors sent questionnaires to all ninety-four ARL libraries but received only sixty-eight responses. A 72 percent return on some questionnaires is considered a success, but in this case the institution that does not respond either has something to hide or cares too little about the subject to bother responding. In either case we need to know which libraries responded.

Can we assume that the sixty-eight librar-

ies that responded to the questionnaire represent a true cross section of the ARL libraries or not? Our researchers tell us nothing about those who responded or those who did not respond. Though they express their hope that this study will provide a benchmark for future investigations, without the knowledge of which libraries (or even which types of libraries) responded we cannot know whether the next study on this subject will deal with the same set of libraries. The results may not be comparable.

Why couldn't the names of these institutions be published? The authors are not dealing with secret information; rather it is policy information that presumably could be obtained from published personnel documents or from any librarian on each campus. It is time we started gathering complete data and naming names in the same way that AAUP gathers salary data. Then we can have a data base on which to do some research.—R. Dean Galloway, Library Director, California State College, Stanislaus.

Response

We would like to thank R. Dean Galloway for his letter. We reluctantly reply since we mutually feel that the "letter-to-the-editor" format, with which Galloway is so well versed, is an inadequate forum in which to analyze or criticize research effectively in our field. Statements of opinion, no matter how well intentioned they may be, are absolutely no substitute for actual research.

We carefully delineated the limitations inherent in our research and dealt with those effectively. And, because of the sensitive nature of our ground-breaking study, we assured potential respondents of complete confidentiality. We were rewarded with a very acceptable return rate, as well as a number of revealing comments that helped in the writing of our article. We feel confident that the results of our research are valid and valuable and will provide a basis for continued research on this increasingly important topic.—Ronald Rayman and Frank Wm. Goudy.

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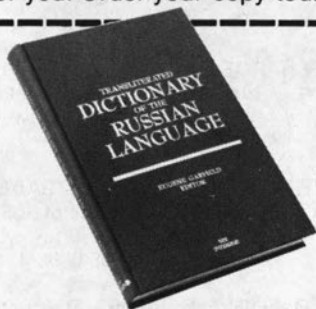
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