

Letters

To the Editor:

"Inventory Costs: A Case Study," by Clifford H. Haka and Nancy Ursery (March 1985), begs the essential questions: why should an inventory be performed, and if performed, how complete should it be? The authors' *A Guidebook for Shelf Inventory Procedures in Academic Libraries* (Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, 1985), unpublished at the time of this letter, may help to answer these questions. A short explanation in the article, however, would have helped to place the purpose of this case study in perspective.

The purpose of the inventory should be to locate materials that library users are likely to seek out, not to find materials for which no one was looking. Before conducting an inventory, a pilot project should determine the loss rate based upon a random sample of the general collection. Recognizing that some of the lost items will not be sought, the gross loss rate should be reduced by a factor to yield a probable net "effective" loss rate.

Prior to the pilot, criteria should establish what will constitute an acceptable loss rate; if the losses are at that level or lower, then the cost/benefits of a complete collection inventory would not be indicated. Establishing an acceptable loss rate *before* evaluating the pilot data will ensure that a complete inventory will not be conducted simply because *any* loss will be unacceptable.

In the case study in the article, a complete inventory was performed on an old Dewey collection to which little had been added in fifteen years, and from which a decreasing amount doubtless had circulated. The loss rate was only 3.29%. Performing a complete inventory of the Library of Congress collection, with a loss rate of 0.8%, seems even more dubious. If there were good reasons to conduct either of these complete inventories, they cannot be evinced from the article.

The authors conclude that "If a sample inventory at a library is confusing and expensive (slow), it probably indicates that a complete inventory is badly needed." The converse could lead to the conclusion that the author's simple and fast inventory must *not* have been necessary. A slow and cumbersome inventory indicates poor planning or poor supervision. The need for an inventory should be indicated by a pilot study, not by a now-it's-too-late statement that "This inventory was confusing and slow, so it must really have been needed!"

ARNOLD HIRSHON

Associate Director for Technical Services and Automation,
Virginia Commonwealth University Library

To the Editor:

In Paula Watson's *C&RL* (July 1985) article, "Production of Scholarly Articles by Academic Librarians and Library School Faculty," the calculation of "per capita productivity" in table 2 does not provide information on two aspects of the data collected that bear on "productivity": (1) the number of individual librarians responsible for the publications at each institution and (2) the range of the number of publications among those individuals.

These data would be most useful to help assess the relative productivity of librarians, *as a faculty group*, at each of the institutions cited.

WILLIAM J. CROWE, Assistant Director for Technical Services,
Ohio State University

To the Editor:

Joseph Dagnese, Director of Libraries at Purdue, has brought to my attention that there is an error in table 2 of my article "Production of Scholarly Articles by Academic Librarians and Library School Faculty" published in the July 1985 issue of *C&RL*. In column 2, the per capita productivity of librarians at Purdue should be .24 and not .13. This raises Purdue to the third rank in per capita productivity.

PAULA D. WATSON, Assistant Director of General Services,
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

To the Editor:

I read your editorial in the July 1985 *C&RL* with interest, and am moved, in spite of the reputation enjoyed by writers of letters to the editor, to send you my comments.

Much of what you say is talked about in similar ways by many other librarians, I believe. Perhaps on this basis my remarks may have some general applicability. While I wholeheartedly agree that academic librarians—all librarians—must raise new questions and challenge old assumptions, they must do it in ways that do not introduce further unexamined assumptions and ideas, as I am afraid your comments tended to. Let me take your four final points (p. 294) one by one.

1. Books, records, films, videodisks, even computer memories, are not "containers," and words, ideas, information, and knowledge are not "contents." The members of the second group are inseparably linked with those of the first which happen to convey them. Did you ever spill the "contents" of a book? Do you throw away a film after viewing it because it is "empty"? This metaphor is false and misleading, and ought to be disposed of forthwith.

2. Apropos of number 1 above, librarians cannot help but be in, to use your metaphor, the container and contents business simultaneously. The characteristics of the medium affect the message it conveys, sometimes in subtle, and sometimes in obvious ways. To be effective, a librarian must understand both to the best of his or her ability. There is no dichotomy.

3. What are "static" and "dynamic" here, except terms that convey an attitude about the thing labeled. In our culture "static" seems to be bad, and "dynamic" good, but beyond that they tell us little. Indeed, one could argue that all information and knowledge are static, and that it is really the reader, the user, the thinker who manipulates them who is dynamic. But they are merely neutral terms, and not praise or blame.

4. Sure, why not. But this is another false dichotomy. The one does not exclude the other, and both, as well as other techniques, may be applied to the particular needs of particular knowledge seekers. The current Librarian of Congress, Daniel Boorstin, has amply demonstrated in his books that the trend of modern technology is towards a plurality of solutions. The new does not replace, but rather supplements and extends the old. We should expect this in libraries, too.

Librarianship needs a vigorous debate on its purposes and techniques. But, as I suggested before, it is important to examine new questions as vigorously as old answers.

PHILIP A. METZGER, Special Collections Librarian, School of Medicine,
Southern Illinois University

To the Editor:

I was surprised and delighted, when going through my mail after returning home from my tenth year as a volunteer leader at the Creative Problem Solving Institute, to read your editorial in July *College & Research Libraries*. I was especially pleased to see you cite Min Basadur's study as a reference. Min was one of my first teachers at Creative Problem Solving Institute. His interest in training for creativity has extended from his position at that time in Proctor & Gamble to his present empirical research. I couldn't agree more that we need increased emphasis on creative behavior in our libraries and in our professional organizations. With the legitimate need for "structure" and order in libraries it is especially

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important that we retain our flexibility and openness of perspective. This, of course, is especially important in the 80's, with the rafter-rattling changes that technology presents.

Thanks so much for bringing this need to the attention of the library world and through the respected editorial page of your journal.

SUSAN P. BESEMER, Associate Director of Library Services,
State University College at Buffalo

To the Editor:

Re: the editorial "Collection Development: The JANUS image" (March, 1985), p. 109-110.

Albeit one of the greatest skills of the ancient Romans was the adaptation of the best of other cultures and especially the Greeks', they did manage to have a few inventions and customs which were completely their own. The god Janus had no Greek counterpart and was an old Italian deity. While it is fitting that the committee on collection development at California State University at Sacramento be called JANUS, let us give proper credit to the Romans.

Janus was one of the more important of the Roman deities, in prayer and sacrifice, his name was invoked first, the first month of our year is named for him, and the doors to the temple of Janus in the Roman forum were closed when Rome was at peace but open during a time of war. Given the warlike nature of the Romans, only three times were the doors ever closed—in the time of Numa, after the First Punic War, and after the battle of Actium.

It is only fitting that I now invoke your peace and close the doors on this subject.

NANCY BIRK, Associate Curator Special Collections,
Kent State University

To the Editor:

For some time I have been wondering what criteria you are using in selecting books for your "Other Publications" section. At first I assumed that this compilation was intended as a kind of addendum to the book review section: i.e., titles of professional interest that were not being reviewed. It is true that books of this sort are included, but I am somewhat puzzled by the seemingly random inclusion of miscellaneous books on scholarly topics (e.g., *Thailand: A Short History*, Yale Univ. Pr., 1984). And I am completely mystified at seeing titles such as *Photographing Your Baby*, *The Art of Buffet Entertaining*, and *Boating Cost Guide*. My current theory is that you are simply listing any books anyone happens to send you. Please enlighten me if I am wrong.

JACK RAY, Assistant Director, Loyola/Notre Dame Library,
Baltimore, Maryland

Editor's Note: You are right. All books received but not reviewed are listed in "Other Publications."

To the Editor:

I have enjoyed reading *College & Research Libraries*. As its editor you are to be commended. I too work in the area of publications and am pleased to hear from people who get something special from reading an article I have worked on.

Recently I felt something beyond the ordinary when I saw Carlton Rochell's "The Knowledge Business" in the January *C&RL*. It was a sense of déjà vu, because I edited the same article in *Bibliographic Services and User Needs*, the report of a conference sponsored by the Council on Library Resources. The conference, where Dean Rochell presented the paper, took place in December 1983; the proceedings were published in March 1984.

I remember the paper well because it had been spit out by a word processor that did not distinguish between upper and lower case, used four periods at random between words, and was paged incorrectly. It's hard to forget a wild child you have tamed, but I did not expect this child to show up again with new clothes.

I see a few revisions in wording, but the paper is virtually the same as the one given in 1983.

For bibliographical accuracy's sake, I was taught, a paper or article previously published or presented should be cited as such. In other words, there should have been a note indicating that this was not the first time this paper had been published. Don't you agree?

PAUL PETERSON, Reference & Special Projects Librarian,
Linda Hall Library

Editor's Note: I certainly agree. I was unaware that Carlton Rochell's article appeared in the March 1984 proceedings. Nonetheless it should have been cited as a paper presented at the December 1983 conference sponsored by the Council on Library Resources.

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