

Letters

To the Editor:

Vikki Ford's excellent article "PR: The State of Public Relations in Academic Libraries" (Sept. 1985 C&RL) will surely stimulate administrators to allocate more funds for this neglected area. Ms. Ford's well designed survey, which is the basis for the article, supplies us both with facts about academic library public relations and also with attitudes toward this function.

My congratulations to Ms. Ford for her splendid work, however, carry a note of regret at the information in your author's note. This reveals that while doing the research for the article Ms. Ford was the public relations officer at the University of Nevada Library but she is now the account executive for a Reno public relations firm. We need her and many more like her on the staff of our academic libraries.

ALICE NORTON

Alice Norton Public Relations, Ridgefield, Conn.

To the Editor:

In response to Arnold Hirshon's letter (C&RL September 1985) concerning "Inventory Costs: A Case Study," the following comments seem in order. First, the basic intent of the article, which should be clear from the title, is to provide managers with some idea of the cost/benefit ratio for an inventory and not to tell people "what led to this decision at our library." The comprehensive inventory undertaken at University of Kansas was prompted by a rather unique set of circumstances including a total renovation program that necessitated shifting most of the main collection of approximately 1,000,000 volumes two and sometimes three times in an extremely rushed manner due to the construction timetable. In short, the stacks ended up a jumbled mess that at least required a massive shelving program. Instead of just doing that we opted for a complete inventory, the main benefit of which was discovering thousands of mishelved materials. That may or may not have been the right decision, but that is completely irrelevant to the article, which made no attempt to describe the situation or process leading up to that decision.

What the article did provide was an estimate of what it costs to discover catalog and/or shelf errors that would prohibit a user from a successful retrieval. This cost is much more relevant than the percentage loss rate that Hirshon mentions. For example, suppose one collection has a loss rate of 25 percent, but it costs \$100 to discover each missing item, while another collection has a loss rate of 2 percent, but it only costs \$1 to discover each missing item. Where would an inventory make the most cost/benefit sense? Hirshon's analysis would indicate the former.

Hirshon goes on to contend that "a slow and cumbersome inventory indicates poor planning or poor supervision." Not every process in the world can be accomplished expediently, regardless of how well planned and supervised. Taking this out of the world of libraries it is clear that reputable accounting firms certainly know how to plan and supervise an audit. Yet some audits takes months to complete because the company's records are a mess. The records of some libraries are a mess as well and to make a blanket contention that an expedient procedure can always be carried out is simply naive. Any inventory of a high-circulation, high-loss area will always be a "slow and cumbersome" process.

Finally, we are admonished that inventories "should be to locate materials that library

users are likely to seek out, not to find materials for which no one was looking." One can only conclude from this that some libraries have large identifiable sections of their collections that no one ever uses. We are pleased that we do not work in such institutions.

NANCY STEVENS Texas Education Agency

CLIFFORD H. HAKA Michigan State University

Editor's Note: Reference 10 in "PR: The State of Public Relations" by Vikki Ford (**C&RL** Sept. 1985, p.401) should be corrected to read as follows:

Virginia Van Wynen Baeckler, *PR for Pennies: Low-Cost Library Public Relations* (Hopewell, N.J.: Sources, 1978), p.7.

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