

versity of Michigan cataloging staff in the editing of the resultant RLIN records. Marko concludes her piece with an outline of the "issues that are applicable to the bibliographic description of all computer files," followed by a short paragraph on the project's benefits for the University of Michigan library.

Katherine Chiang's "Computer Files in Libraries: Training Issues" is an inventory of the skills and expertise required to incorporate electronically stored information into the library. Like the Marko piece, it is rather brief, but substantive even so. Chiang focuses on the unique knowledge demanded for the tasks of selecting, acquiring, cataloging, and servicing machine-readable files. She then addresses central issues related to the training of library staff to meet the demands of managing computer files, stressing level of service, structure of service, service novelty and its relation to existing staff competencies, and staff learning styles as key points for special attention.

The inclusion in this volume of discussion summaries from the RLG workshop is particularly welcome because these are at least somewhat visionary in articulating the formidable array of tasks facing the broader research library community as it begins to integrate computer data files into its collections. In fact, the most telling aspect of the discussions is that they are far less tentative than the four articles in setting an agenda for making computer data files a central resource in the research library of the near future. The result of these efforts is a more than adequate primer for librarians just beginning to think about computer file management and access.

But collective thought about "the big picture" may be what most of us need quite urgently at this moment. There is, in fact, something frightening about the pace with which the national information infrastructure is evolving. Two recent examples make this clear: the anarchic expansion of information resources on the Internet and the proliferation over the past half-year of government information distributed on CD-ROM. Each of these developments has serious implications for

any discussion of computer data file management and access in the research library context, but neither is mentioned anywhere in this volume. Still, I learned much by reading this RLG publication, although I am concerned that the information it provides may be of only limited value, given the velocity of change in the current electronic information environment.—Joseph Lucia, *Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.*

Van House, Nancy, and others. *Measuring Academic Library Performance: A Practical Approach.* Chicago: American Library Assn., 1990. 182p. (ISBN 0-838905-293). LC 89-77253.

When drafting this review, I was prompted by some misguided stylistic conceit to seek the grabbing quote. The beautiful phrase "shut up in measureless content" in *Macbeth* provides a backdrop for my ambivalence toward the work under review.

Some eight years ago, I gave a workshop on the bibliographer's craft—including collection evaluation—to collection development librarians at a large upper-midwestern research library. I recall two pieces of advice I gave to that workshop group. First: "beware the fetish of mensuration"; that is, for a significant part of selectors' work, empirical measurement and quantification are of use only in the largest sense. Second: regard measurement, quantitative norms or standards, algorithms, and partial or full-blown models of collection development as heuristic exercises rather than empirical tools for decision making; that is, one should assess and, if necessary and relevant, perform such measurements as exercises in informed persuasiveness and the art of the exposition and interpretation of the mostly undemonstrable. On the one hand, measurement and measures have their greatest social utility as a form of argumentation that complements subjective judgment and experience. On the other hand, they are least useful when reified and put forth as objective determinants of human action or policy or when regarded as an intrinsic part of something called "the science of

management"—whether of libraries, physical facilities, or McDonalds.

How, then, should one approach the manual under review? Perhaps the basic attitude should be that struck in the work's preface: "What difference will it make for us to have this information?" My ambivalence toward the work under review derives from the value that I, as a student and teacher of politics, place on the empirical and positivistic side. And as a social sciences curator and "house" survey researcher, I find descriptive statistics useful in explicating and informing the library policy-planning process. However, it is necessary in all truly "applied" work to be extremely cautious about making claims regarding conclusiveness, generalizability, and replicability and not to dress up that work in scientific or Taylorist garb.

The authors recognize that "measurement is not an end in itself." They also acknowledge that "good measures are valid, reliable, practical, and useful." Any measure, supported by data that are not only unreliable but—even worse—that do not, in fact, measure, for example, the in-library use of materials or reference satisfaction, must be invalid and can hardly be useful in a sane or minimally moral universe. But while the authors are at some pain to insert disclaimers with regard to comparability—the third elementary benchmark of measurement beyond reliability and validity—both the foreword of the ACRL Ad Hoc Committee on Performance Measures and the authors' preface specifically refer to the goal of replicability from one institution to another.

While we are not exactly talking about cold fusion here, to speak of being able to replicate these measures at an infinite number of local units without being able

to interpret them comparatively "across libraries, or even across units within the same library or library system" suggests questions about utility, whether practical or theoretical. This difficulty becomes especially acute when we are told that "management needs objective, standardized data on which to base decisions [and] on the extensiveness and effectiveness of library services" for the purposes of "accountability" and to "quantify services." While the authors believe that "little is known about the factors that affect output measures results," they also believe these measures can be used to "monitor performance [and] help libraries to allocate resources and plan operations and services." Help!

In spite of my philosophical and methodological reservations, there is, in fact, much good in the manual for line professionals, unit heads, middle managers, and directors of college libraries, especially if one can get by or ignore the "M.B.O." talk and get at that which is practical. There is much of use here for those who have never run a survey or, if they have, are unsure about what they found out. The measures are well presented and unburdened by the heavy hand of technical language; indeed, one wonders whether the novice would even be able to carry out data analysis, not to mention interpretation.

Librarianship and libraries are neither full of "measureless content" nor full of that which is measurable. In choosing, employing, and interpreting measures, one should surely follow the authors' own dictum that "interpreting and using output measures . . . requires a full understanding of the data's meaning and limitations."—*Tony Angilletta, Stanford University, Stanford, California.*