

ive Survey. A Neal-Schuman Professional Book. Phoenix, Ariz.: Oryx Press, 1977. 154p. \$11.95. LC 77-8514. ISBN 0-912700-05-X.

Approval Plans and Academic Libraries: An Interpretive Survey provides a much-needed source for the practitioner. The primary purpose of the study is the determination of the state of the art among academic libraries. These findings are then compared to the approval plan experience at Purdue University.

The authors represent a rather unique team of two librarians and a businessman, each recognized and respected for long-term contributions to the profession.

The book describes the results of the survey that was mailed to 144 academic libraries (101 responding) and analyzes the material in both detailed and summarized formats in seven sections. The interpretation of these results offers probably the most valuable and intriguing part of the book. The design of the research methodology and information gathering questionnaire and the independent evaluation and interpretation of the findings are both significant achievements.

McCullough points to the fact that the survey was not concerned with acquisitions routines but focused instead on the function of approval plans in collection development. She says that an approval plan is ultimately a collection development tool and only incidentally an acquisitions device. She discusses the various difficulties brought out by the survey respondents and contrasts procedures and problems encountered by libraries, whether having centralized or decentralized collections. Her sharp observations and analytical solutions should be of great interest to the reader.

Posey writes from the subject-specialist viewpoint. He looks on approval plans as a great asset to collection development programs and as an attractive labor saving tool. He is amused by the critics of approval plans who claim that such an approach to collection development is inferior. Posey defends approval plans, point by point, and justifies his reasons with convincing arguments. He states that the engineering library at Purdue purchases books for two reasons: (1) to support teaching and research and (2) to build an archival col-

lection for the use of retrospective researchers. These reasons are well met by the approval plan at that institution.

The suppliers' view is presented by Pickett's *Response*. Pickett underscores the fact that the approval plan concept has long suffered from a basic misunderstanding of its intent, unrealistic expectations of its strengths, and little attention to any limitations. He emphasizes the importance of profile design. Without a good profile and knowledge of its application, the best plan is certain to encounter difficulties. His comments and perceptions may be most helpful in creating a better understanding and stronger relationship between libraries and vendors.

The publication is largely a presentation of library practices in matters of approval plans. The information it contains should prove helpful to individual institutions seeking to establish comparative guidelines of common procedures. Approval plans are, however, unique institutional experiences from which helpful interpretations and generalized conclusions can be drawn, but cautiously applied.

The book principally addresses approval plans as a collections-development device and a vendor service, which fact makes this work valuable and attractive to a wide range of readership. It is well written, carefully organized, and has a rather complete bibliography on the topic. For these reasons, *Approval Plans* should be considered a significant and major contribution to the field.—Peter Spyers-Duran, Director of the University Library, California State University, Long Beach.

International PRECIS Workshop, University of Maryland, 1976. **The PRECIS Index System: Principles, Applications, and Prospects.** Proceedings of the International PRECIS Workshop, Sponsored by the College of Library and Information Services of the University of Maryland, October 15-17, 1976. Edited by Hans H. Wellisch. New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1977. 211p. \$12.50 U.S. and Canada; \$15.00 other countries. LC 77-1932. ISBN 0-8242-0611-8.

Unlike many proceedings volumes, this one was well worth publishing. The work reported is both new and significant, the

papers are readable, and the price is not exorbitant in today's terms. PRECIS (Preserved Context Indexing System), developed by Derek Austin and his associates at the British National Bibliography, is probably the most important innovation in indexing since coordinate indexing was developed by Taube in the 1950s.

The workshop combined descriptions of PRECIS and its use at the British Library with papers on research and applications elsewhere. Austin's three papers on development of the system, its syntax and semantics, and management aspects go into more useful detail than the several articles that have appeared. Jutta Sørensen's paper on multilingual aspects presents us with tantalizing glimpses of the possibilities of automatic translation of PRECIS strings so that indexing done in one language can serve several others. Intellectually, such transformations appear to be possible; it is too early to judge yet whether they would be operationally practicable.

The section on research projects contains three comparisons of PRECIS with subject headings and title words, by Phyllis A. Richmond, Valentina de Bruin, and Ann H. Schabas. De Bruin's report will be of special interest to academic librarians because the eventual goal of her work is to apply PRECIS in the library of the University of Toronto. She devised comparative PRECIS, subject headings, and keyword indexes for books in special subjects for departmental librarians to use. Richmond compared PRECIS (from BNB), LC subject headings (from OCLC and NUC), and a KWIC index; while Schabas offered an SDI (Selective Dissemination of Information) service from UK MARC tapes, comparing retrieval on titles, PRECIS subject headings, and combinations of these. The first two found that PRECIS provided more access points and more precise indications of the subject matter of the work than did subject headings. Titles performed as poorly as would be expected. Schabas' study was still in progress, but the results appear to be similar.

In the section on practical applications there are reports of manual PRECIS application in a Canadian high school library, of audiovisual indexing at the College Bibliocentre in Ontario, and of film indexing

at the National Film Board of Canada. The authors are all enthusiastic over the quality of access available with PRECIS.

C. Donald Cook provides a thoughtful discussion of the future of practical application of PRECIS in North America in the context of subject heading dominance via Library of Congress and National Library of Canada practice.

The reviewer is left with some questions that are not criticisms either of this book or of the PRECIS system, but rather of the nature of "where should we go from here?"

How costly is PRECIS to apply compared with current systems? A study¹ has been performed that should answer this question, but the results have not been disseminated in the United States.

Since many of the horrid examples given in comparisons with subject headings are simply bad cataloging and not inherent in the system, how would PRECIS fare if its authority files contained as many millions of records as LC's subject heading files?

If LC and North American libraries finally face the logical consequences of the knowledge that the present subject heading system is breaking down and decide to adopt a new system, should PRECIS be adopted or should we go back to square one and try to determine what kind of system would best meet our needs?—*Jessica L. Harris, Associate Professor, St. John's University, Jamaica, New York.*

REFERENCE

1. British Library. Working Party on Classification and Indexing, *Final Report* (R&D Report No. 5233; London: British Library, 1975).

Simpson, Antony E. *Guide to Library Research in Public Administration*. With a Preface by Marc Holzer. New York: Center for Productive Public Management, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 1976. 210p. \$5.95.

Simpson has provided a well-written, comprehensive guide to library research that should serve as a model for guides in other social science disciplines. While designed specifically for researchers and students in public administration, this volume encompasses material of use to all fields of the social sciences and, therefore, supplements guides such as *The Student Sociol-*