

Guest Editorial

Library Managers: Off the Bench and onto the Court

In recent years, increasing attention has been directed to the issue of advancing the library's role in the academic community. During his Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) presidency, William Moffett focused on the role and standing of the academic library on campus. ACRL's Professional Association Liaison Committee continues to advance this discussion, and ACRL members and staff continue to link up with higher education associations to strengthen the role of librarians on campus. Two articles in this issue of *College & Research Libraries* continue this dialogue.

Both the Larry Hardesty article and the Marcia J. Myers and Paula T. Kaufman article confront us with perceptions of librarianship that should give pause for thought about the library's role in the academic community. These articles remind us to look not only at formal links with our higher education colleagues, but also at the perception of academic library directors within their own institutions and whether that perception advances the library's standing.

In these times of extreme challenge for higher education, when resources are in short supply, the perceptions of academic administrators who are the key to library resource decisions take on a heightened level of importance. Thus, it is troubling to note that Hardesty's subjects (college deans) "did not consider the administrative skills of library directors directly applicable to larger college concerns" and that Myers and Kaufman found that "librarians are often perceived by universities to be inappropriate or unqualified for general administrative positions."

Unfortunately, the skills related to library management are not seen as transfer-

able to the management of the larger academic enterprise. If one considers the size and scope of the academic library in comparison to other campus units, it would seem apparent that the library operation is as complex as that of these other units. In fact, running a library is every bit as demanding as the management of other campus operations, requiring essentially similar managerial skills and expertise to deal with resources, facilities, and personnel (although the applications may be different). In the words of one university chancellor, the library director's role is perhaps the most complex and all-encompassing of any on campus except the chancellor's itself!

While administrators may respect the professional and administrative skills of their library directors, their inability to see these individuals as generalist managers surely must hamper the opportunities for the library director to be a more central figure in the academic decision-making structure. While it is flattering to be respected as a competent professional with a specialized role, it is nevertheless also important to be considered an integral part of the management team.

The fiscal crises of the past six months and the enormous challenges of changing demographics have already demonstrated all too clearly that critical resource decisions will be required in many of our academic institutions in the next decade. It is absolutely necessary that academic library officers be players on the management team that makes fiscal and other strategic decisions. Also, the academic enterprise is a complex environment where a variety of talents are needed to move the higher education agenda forward. A narrow view of library directors' managerial expertise

denies institutions a valuable resource, particularly where information-related issues are at stake. Parenthetically, this view also hampers those directors who may wish to develop broader career aspirations in higher education administration.

In order to be a part of this management team (or, as Hardesty calls it, the "inner administrative circle"), library administrative officers need to enhance their roles as generalist managers. Management team members must not only bring their professional, disciplinary, and operational expertise to the table; they also must be knowledgeable about larger issues that confront the higher education community and about how those issues affect their particular institution.

How can the library director's role be enhanced? First, library administrative officers must take the initiative in educating other campus administrators about library issues. For professionals who are close to these issues, the challenge of presenting them in nontechnical, concise, and direct ways is great, but it is a challenge that must be met.

Second, library managers must take another initiative to learn more about higher education issues, both national and local, and about particular concerns that confront their fellow administrators. This learning process will enhance informed choices that library officers will need to make as part of the management team. Moreover, because decision making is at least in part a political process, library officers must be willing to learn about, understand, and support nonlibrary issues in

order to gain similar support for the library from other team members. If library managers can develop a broader view of the academic enterprise and can better understand the concerns of the individuals who manage it, they can also create better and more relevant arguments for library resources and better ways to integrate the library into larger campus concerns.

Third, library directors and other senior officers must search for ways to make informed contributions on nonlibrary issues, particularly where information access and resource management skills could enhance the strategic decisions of the management team.

Fourth, individuals from the academic library management community must increase their participation and visibility in local, regional, and national higher education arenas. Increased participation will not only help them to be better informed about higher education issues, but will also enhance the visibility of library issues at the same time.

Becoming a true member of the management team is absolutely critical in the next decade as the higher education agenda is reshaped to address twenty-first-century needs and challenges. The bad news is that this participation requires time-consuming effort. The good news, however, is that this enhancement of perception and participation by library administrative officers should allow the library a greater role in resource allocation for the future.

**RUTH J. PERSON, ACE FELLOW,
ARIZONA BOARD OF REGENTS**

CORRECTIONS

In the January 1991 *College & Research Libraries*, the column headings in table 2, p. 10, should have read "1967-77," "1977-87," and "1967-87." This correction restores the author's version.

In the book reviews, the last two sentences of the first paragraph on page 98 should have read "Veener's focus is the *process* of administering, without much attention to the particulars of the environment that is being administered. It is a focus that is popular these days within academic librarianship."