

Letters

To the Editor:

I am writing to express our dismay at the publication of an essay as methodologically flawed as the Calhoun and Bracken article, "An Index of Publisher Quality for the Academic Library," which appeared in the May, 1983 issue of *College and Research Libraries*. This "study" does a great disservice to publishers and librarians alike. In particular, it comes to an unfair and inaccurate conclusion concerning Greenwood Press' publications.

The major premise of the article is that one can construct a "ratio" to determine "publisher quality" by comparing a publisher's output, as cited in *Literary Market Place*, to the number of "Outstanding Academic Book" citations the publisher receives. Herein lies a major methodological error.

The output figures which appear in *Literary Market Place* are a publisher's total (my emphasis), not its scholarly, output. Thus, for example, Doubleday's total output is heavily weighted toward fiction and children's literature, while McGraw-Hill's is weighted toward elementary as well as advanced textbooks. Are fiction, children's literature, or most textbooks candidates for *Choice* reviews or Outstanding Academic Book recognition?—Of course not. In the case of Greenwood, the total output cited in *Literary Market Place* consists of reprints as well as original titles. Are reprints candidates for review? Again, no! Had our original scholarly titles been published under another imprint (as Macmillan does with its Free Press imprint, for example), allowing us to report those titles separately, the authors' conclusions would have been entirely different. Thus, the use of total output figures, as reported in *Literary Market Place*, distorts an assessment of a publisher's scholarly list and invalidates Calhoun and Bracken's major premise.

How serious is the distortion? Using Greenwood as the example, if reprints are removed from total output, one arrives at 113 average original publications during the five year period under review (565 total output minus 452 reprints). During the period used in the article, original books represented *only* 20% of the Press' total output! Following the logic of Calhoun and Bracken's essay, then, Greenwood's "ratio," a "measure of publisher quality (at least seen by this one review source)," can be compiled (1:18.33). This results in an "indexing value" of 1.25, a considerable difference from the .24 initially arrived at due to the distortion. This would also completely alter the authors' premise concerning their library's purchases of Greenwood's publications. Assuming their purchases included reprints and new books in the same relationship as the Press' output, the correct "index value" would have dictated greater purchases, not less.

Obviously, a better approach would have been to survey all reviews in *Choice* during the last five years and then construct a percentage of Outstanding Academic Books based on all reviews. However, even this approach would not indicate "quality" as Outstanding Academic Books are selected not only with quality in mind, but appropriateness as well for undergraduate libraries. Therefore, publishers that issue upper level and specialized reference materials, even quality materials, would be adversely affected.

To come to the conclusions reached by the authors on such flawed methodology does a serious injustice to trade and textbook houses and, perhaps, irreparable damage to a schol-

arly publisher such as Greenwood Press. We appreciate being given this opportunity to point out these facts to the readers of *College and Research Libraries*.

DR. JAMES T. SABIN

Vice President, Editorial

Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut

To the Editor:

I am writing to express my concern about the article by Calhoun and Bracken on publisher quality (*CRL*, v. 44 (May 1983), p. 257-59).

Among the many methodological flaws embodied in the article, perhaps the most fundamental is the failure of the authors to realize that the universe of titles reviewed by *Choice* does not accurately reflect the universe of publishing appropriate to an academic library.

In the first place, *Choice* has a pronounced bias toward the traditional scholarly monograph published by a university press. Other types of books essential to an academic library which are published by a commercial or small press are much less likely to be reviewed. As a consequence, any index based exclusively on *Choice* is automatically misleading if used to assess the major publishers of academic titles. Even if a major commercial publisher, such as Harper & Row or Academic Press, produced the highest quality scholarly monographs, it would still end up with a low quality score because so many titles represent trade or textbook publications.

In addition, *Choice* carries a disproportionate number of reviews in the humanities and the more humanistic social sciences. As a result, the index constructed by Calhoun and Bracken is hopelessly biased toward publishers that emphasize the traditional liberal arts fields. (Within this context the relatively low rating of even such respected university presses as Oxford and Cambridge is explained by the high proportion of titles in science and medicine that they produce rather than any qualitative deficiencies in the books themselves.)

Publishing quality is an important criterion in a selection decision. Unfortunately, any academic library that bases its acquisition decisions on this index will do a disservice to the mass of its users. Moreover, since I seriously doubt that an unbiased quality index for all publishing appropriate to an academic library can be created, the selector is best advised to read reviews and talk with faculty in order to determine which publishers are the best for a specific subject field or a specific kind of book. This information can then prove useful as a guide to the early selection of titles.

Finally, I would like to point out that while quality is important, it is secondary to need, especially in the case of a library with limited funds for book purchases. As a result, even if a valid quality index had been constructed, I strongly disagree with Calhoun and Bracken that this constitutes "convincing evidence" that a library ipso facto should be buying more from the high scorers.

LUKE SWINDLER

Social Sciences Bibliographer

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library

To the Editor:

I read with interest the article by John Calhoun and James K. Bracken in the May, 1983 issue of *College and Research Libraries* and would like to point out a flaw in their survey. By using the *Literary Market Place's* numbers on publishers' output they are skewing the report in favor of academic houses. The commercial publishers' statistics include certain categories of titles that would never be purchased by a library such as theirs—juveniles, cookbooks, textbooks, etc. Our colleagues at Random House, for example, whom they excoriate in their commentary, is the largest children's book publisher in America (over 150 titles a year), and its 500-odd average also includes Vintage paperbacks, a category their survey doubtless ignores. (The trade division of Random House, in fact, published approximately 86 adult hardcover titles in 1981.) The same is certainly true of Harper & Row, McGraw-

Hill, and Doubleday. Incidentally, Knopf's average annual number of adult general titles in 1977-81 was 110.

Frankly, I think the authors should have stuck to the raw numbers from the OAB, although I understand how this can favor the larger publishers. But I believe it would be fairer than their ratio method, and I hope there is some way that the readers of *College and Research Libraries* can be informed as to how their survey went astray, particularly since they are recommending that academic libraries buy fewer titles from Random House and other commercial firms. It all underlines the perils of using another organization's statistics without realizing how they are compiled.

ASHBEL GREEN

Vice President, Senior Editor

Alfred A. Knopf Incorporated, New York, New York

To the Editor:

Thank you for inviting us to respond to the letters you received from Mr. Swindler and Dr. Sabin in response to our article "An Index of Publisher Quality for the Academic Library" which appeared in *C&RL*, May 1983.

First, with regard to the claim of Mr. Swindler's letter that *Choice* showed "a pronounced bias" toward the traditional scholarly monograph published by a university press, we refer to Beth Macleod's "Library Journal and *Choice*: A Review of Reviews," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 7, no. 1 (Mar. 1981): 23-28, which found "Predictably, *Choice*'s selections were somewhat more scholarly, although the differences in broad categories were modest. Thus, 32 percent of *Choice*'s books came from university presses, compared to only 18 percent of *Library Journal*'s books. But a majority of the books reviewed by both journals were published by commercial presses—65 percent of those in *Choice* and 81 percent of those in *Library Journal*." Books essential to an academic library published by a commercial press are "much less likely" to be reviewed? Quite the contrary: *Choice* reviewed commercial press books *twice* as often as university press books.

Also, when Swindler alleges that *Choice* carried "a disproportionate number" of reviews in the humanities and more humanistic social sciences, Ms. Macleod reported "The broad differences between the two journals with regard to the subjects of books reviewed was modest and attributable in part to *Library Journal*'s more extensive reviewing of fiction." She also observed "A higher proportion of *Choice* books was in science (18 percent compared to 10 percent in *Library Journal*)." If Swindler's notion that "the relatively low rating" of such respected presses as Oxford and Cambridge could be explained by the high proportion of titles in science and medicine that they produce (we fail to see how our assigning an indexing value of 1.0 to the 1:22.7 figure enjoyed by both could result in "a relatively low rating"), then an academic library which based its acquisitions decisions on this particular index would not be doing "the mass of its users" a disservice at all—far from it. *Choice* reviewed almost *twice* as many science titles as the other major reviewing source.

Finally, concerning Swindler's point that "while quality is important, it is secondary to need," we trust that the 14,000 undergraduates, many of whom will feel that they "need" to make A's on their term papers and exams, will be satisfied with all the less than outstanding academic books on the shelves of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library.

Second, to follow the reasoning of Dr. Sabin's letter, we should construct a ratio, not of OAB titles to total titles, but of OAB titles to scholarly titles. Thus the ratios for Greenwood Press in columns 1 and 2 should be 6:113 and 1:18.83, and (discounting the good doctor's arithmetic difficulties) the "correct" indexing value for Greenwood Press in column 3 should be 1.21.

Then Sabin assumes we should purchase new books and reprints "in the same relationship as the Press' output" (the argument based on "need" in its most elemental form: we "need" to purchase a lot of books because they publish a lot of books; we are not sure we see the connection here). Thus because we were willing to buy 24% of what Oxford and Cam-

bridge published, we should be willing to buy 30% of Greenwood Press's 113 original titles; and then, because those 113 were only 20% of what they published, we should also be willing to buy 30% of Greenwood Press's 452 reprints—for a grand total of 170 titles.

Wait a minute! Doesn't this sound like V. K. Ratliff's story about Pat Stamper's horse? We were already buying *more* titles from Greenwood Press than from Harvard University Press (which reprints the Loeb Classical Library); now we are supposed to *double* this number? We think not. A record company that produced a hundred new albums, half a dozen of which were hits, on Monday, and then produced a hundred golden oldie albums on Tuesday, another hundred golden oldie albums on Wednesday, another hundred on Thursday, and another hundred on Friday could, on the same basis, claim to rival Motown Records. But golden oldies do not jump onto albums all by themselves. Someone (the sound engineer, let us say), who could have been spending Tuesday through Friday recording potential hits, had to spend time mixing golden oldies. So, we believe, is the situation at Greenwood Press: four out of five days in their production week (by their own account) the editorial staff does something besides edit original scholarly titles. This is what distinguishes their situation from Free Press's and Macmillan's. That they do not have a chance to boogie most of the week is no fault of ours. Our treatment of Greenwood Press was reasonable and fair: they received exactly the same consideration we gave the other fifty-nine publishers in the study (some of whom also issue reprints). Any of the other fifty-nine could try to improve his lot by not counting certain titles. (Any of the sixty could also try to improve his lot by publishing more outstanding titles, but so far only Temple University Press has called to say this is their intention.) We believe our methodology, of discovering what proportion of a publisher's total output is composed of outstanding academic books, is sound, and we will continue to use and recommend it.

JOHN C. CALHOUN, Technical Services Librarian

JAMES K. BRACKEN, Reader Services Librarian

Seymour Library, Knox College, Galesburg, Illinois

To the Editor:

In what I considered an otherwise interesting issue of *C&RL* (July 1983, Vol. 44, No. 4), I was distressed to see the gratuitous appendix on elementary algebraic principles that appeared on page 234.

No self-respecting professional librarian or information specialist should need this kind of rudimentary instruction in mathematics. It is not only gratuitous, it is insulting and embarrassing. Since I cannot imagine that the author wanted such an appendix herself, I must assume that it was published on the advice of the editorial staff or the reviewers. In any case, it has no place in one of our major professional journals.

CHARLES H. DAVIS

Dean, Graduate School of Library and Information Science
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

To the Editor:

In response to Charles H. Davis's letter of August 10, 1983, wherein he comments on Appendix A, p. 234, *C&RL*, Vol. 44:4 (July, 1983):

In doing research for my article, I found that many professionals do not know elementary algebra. Hence, I included the Appendix for their benefit.

But, whatever the merits of the Appendix, I would rather Mr. Davis appraise the content of the article itself.

DONNA LEE KURKUL

William Allan Neilson Library

Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts

To the Editor:

I have received Donna Lee Kurkul's letter of August 23, and wish to reaffirm my earlier

position that Appendix A of her paper in *College & Research Libraries* should have been omitted. The inclusion of this Appendix is, in my opinion, the most remarkable thing about the article, and I feel so strongly about the issue that I intend to write an editorial in *Library and Information Science Research* for which I serve as Associate Editor. While I don't doubt Ms. Kurkul's assertion that she found "that many professionals do not know elementary algebra," I don't know how representative her sample might be, and I find it distressing that professional librarians might be wandering around with such poor preparation. Individuals who do not possess this basic knowledge have not received a good education in the liberal arts and sciences, and they should not be admitted to our schools, let alone graduated from them.

CHARLES H. DAVIS

Dean, Graduate School of Library and Information Science
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

To the Editor:

In Johanna Ross' research note entitled *Observations of Browsing Behavior in the Academic Library* (v. 44, #4; July, 1983), she describes a research technique used to record patron's browsing that she calls "unobtrusive technique," but I call spying or peeping. I wonder who gave Ms. Ross permission to have her associates spy on the patrons?

If I am ever confronted with someone using an "unobtrusive technique" on me, whether for research or any other reason, they had better be ready to defend themselves with their "clipboard with data forms attached."

LESLIE R. MORRIS

Director of the Library, Xavier University, New Orleans, Louisiana

To the Editor:

In reply to the letter regarding my article, I wish to reply:

The *Code of Federal Regulations*, 45CFR 46.101 (b) (4), specifically states that research involving the observation (including observation by participants) of public behavior is exempt from review. The one possible criteria, the linking of data and subjects, that might have made the data subject to review, was not present in this case.

No attempt was (or could) be made to connect a particular area of the subject classification being browsed to *any* individual. The focus was on the general subject area of the classification(s) being browsed.

The terms "spying" and "peeping" seem rather strong words to use to describe the recording of the number of books a science patron scans in the course of making a book selection. Even should it be possible to identify the exact title of the book removed from the shelf and replaced, one could hardly identify the section or page. Furthermore, should this have been capable of being accomplished, there is nothing titillating about science literature.

I believe this will adequately reply to his critique.

JOHANNA ROSS

Librarian, University of California, Davis

To the Editor:

We appreciated the thoughtful and favorable review of our recent publication, *Online Search Strategies*, in the July 1983 issue of *College & Research Libraries*.

However, I would like to correct the puzzling reference to the book as "the first in a Professional Librarians series." The Knowledge Industry Publications Professional Librarian series has been in existence for many years. It now has some 25 books in print. Quite a few have been reviewed in *College & Research Libraries*.

Your readers might also like to know that *Online Search Strategies* is available in a hard-cover edition, as well as the paper edition specified in the bibliographic note. The hard-cover version is \$37.50; ISBN 0-86729-005-6.

Book reviews in *College & Research Libraries* are consistently informative and well-written. We are gratified by your attention to our publications.

ADRIENNE HICKEY

Asst. Vice President & Senior Editor

Knowledge Industry Publications, Inc., White Plains, New York

To the Editor:

Our librarian emeritus, Paul Bixler, has asked if we know of a library with an interest in collecting materials about book publishing and distribution in developing countries. Mr. Bixler has turned over to us some mimeographed materials on this subject, in most cases prepared in the early 1960s under contract for the U.S. Agency for International Development. Please write to me if you would like to have these materials.

RUTH BENT

Librarian for Public Service

Olive Kettering Library, Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio

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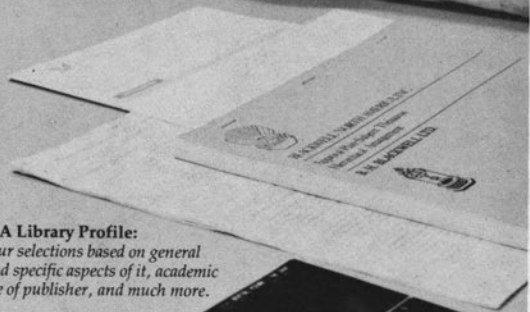
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