



Editorial

Why Do Research?

In the middle of my career as a librarian, I taught English in three different colleges. Over coffee with colleagues, I argued that research and publication made for improved teaching. That relationship is well established. Teacher/researchers believe that the research activity provides vital data and essential inspiration. These qualities enliven, sharpen, and enrich instruction. At the same time, the intellectual stimulation of the classroom helps the researcher to question basic premises and to maintain an inquiring attitude.

When I returned to librarianship, I found an even more crucial relationship between practice and research. Librarianship requires the same kind of intellectual cross-pollination that fires good teaching. An uninterrupted regimen of practice may lead to unimaginative and mediocre service. Research into activities being performed invigorates; new techniques may be explored and new viewpoints developed.

Libraries have changed significantly in the last twenty years and may change even more radically in the next decades. Research identifies and develops successful responses to the challenges of the future. Librarians can best prepare themselves to meet change by engaging in a continuing intellectual dialogue on the nature of the profession and its practice.

Even though *College & Research Libraries* and other journals have been publishing articles for over half a century, many areas of librarianship have received only cursory study. These unexplored or under-explored areas constitute knowledge voids, which need to be filled with published research. While the practitioner's perception may be that library literature covers all topics regularly and even perhaps repeatedly, the researcher seeking information about a specific topic may find the shelves fairly bare. *Libraries for the Year 2000: Research Perspectives*, a forthcoming monograph from ACRL's Publications in Librarianship series, surveys the existing literature and provides lists of areas needing further investigation.

C&RL has been a premier publisher of research involving statistical data. The journal will continue to publish the best articles written using that methodology. Mail surveys and questionnaires produce interesting and valid studies of library problems, but many other methods of data collection make significant contributions to improving practice. For instance, a great deal of fascinating data has been gathered about reference and document delivery service through unobtrusive testing. And, the automated systems that now pervade libraries often provide mountains of raw material about technical services functions, circulation, and online catalog use. For the most part, these data supply the answers to the questions on the annual ACRL survey and then languish in a filing cabinet. The data themselves are only raw material. They cannot guide improved decision making in librarianship without incisive interpretation. Librarians who care about improving service need to study the data, find the relevant patterns, and offer wise interpretations.

Some librarians associate the word "research" solely with the gathering of concrete data that may be analyzed using statistical methods. But other approaches make significant contributions to the profession. Case studies have a mixed reputation; many regard these "how we done it good" pieces as a lower form of scholarship. Yet, when a local institution

embarks on a new project, the experiences of others become extraordinarily valuable. People are, of course, much more likely to publish the results of a successful local experiment than of an unsuccessful one. However, reports on failed attempts would doubtless save many others.

Thought pieces are a valuable but scarce commodity in library literature. George Bernard Shaw once said "I have made a reputation of thinking two or three times a week because others only think once or twice a year." Both library professors and practitioners can observe the fortes and foibles of the profession, consider reasonable alternatives, and offer worthwhile advice on solutions. Provocative thought pieces encourage a higher level of intellectual activity in all professional endeavors.

Every librarian has a responsibility for contributing to research on librarianship. On the one hand, library school faculty take a leadership role in exploring basic research issues. Their studies provide a groundwork of knowledge about the nature of the library universe. A program of grants from the Council on Library Resources has allowed practitioners to work with library school faculty in tackling problems. On the other hand, practitioners tend to concentrate on issues that directly improve service in local libraries and, by extension, in the wider profession. Among practitioners, colleges and community college librarians have been underrepresented in the published literature. Perhaps, partnerships between college practitioners and those in research libraries could cause more college librarians to participate in research in librarianship. Studies comparing two or more libraries have a greater potential for applicability than studies conducted in a single location.

College & Research Libraries exists to publish research by and about college and research libraries and librarians. Together with other ACRL publications—*C&RL News*, *Choice*, *Publications in Librarianship*, *Rare Books & Manuscript Librarianships*, and section newsletters, and other non-serial publications—*C&RL* attempts to meet your professional information needs. When you finish your research and compose your article, the Editorial Board and I invite you to submit it to *College & Research Libraries* or other members of the ACRL publishing family.

GLORIANA ST. CLAIR

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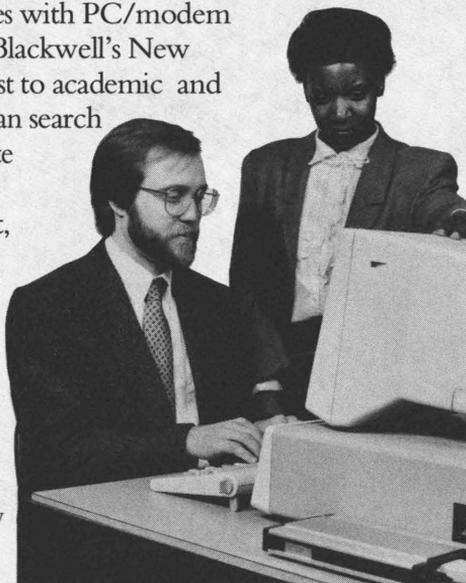
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