



Guest Editorial

Life in the Minor Leagues; or, Crash Davis Finds Happiness

Preparing this editorial, I reread William A. Moffett's address to the ACRL Third National Conference in 1984.¹ Although I had heard it then, I had forgotten just how effectively he made the case for college librarianship. Many of the ideas I had been considering Moffett had more eloquently communicated six years ago. Yet, these ideas deserve repeating from a slightly different perspective.

In his address, Moffett lamented the status of college librarianship. He found library literature dominated by editors and writers associated with the concerns of larger institutions. Both private and public funding agencies almost invariably favored very large institutions. Even within ALA and ACRL he found a decline in the status of the college library. Moffett concluded, "Being small in American academia means having to endure the nagging sense of being in the minors." To many, college librarianship is not the big leagues.

Following this analogy, I have perceived an assumption among some librarians from larger institutions that college librarians would love to move up to the major leagues (or the "Big Show" as the character Crash Davis called it in the quintessential baseball movie, *Bull Durham*), if only they could. There is an expectation that the appropriate career path for professional fulfillment is to bigger libraries.

Some college librarians share this expectation. Most, however, find the challenges within the college library quite satisfying. I am concerned that too many library school graduates do not understand the rewards of college librarianship and succumb to the temptation to follow only the university model.

In recent years college librarians have been strongly encouraged to publish more. Certainly increased publication has its desirable aspects. When, however, publication in the professional literature becomes a self-serving career advancement step made at the expense of more important accomplishments, then publication is not such a good idea.

Ironically, librarians frequently bemoan the growth in the number of journals and their increased costs in other disciplines, but we need to examine our own periodicals. By one count, fifteen library and information science periodicals have started just within the past two years. Do we really benefit from all these journals, or do they exist mainly to provide places in which librarians can publish to get tenure and to move up the career ladder?

Perhaps college librarians are less represented in the professional literature not because they lack the talent, but because they have less pressure to publish to validate what they do. Publication is only one of many ways college librarians can contribute to the profession and to their institutions. Seldom is it the most important.

College librarians need not look elsewhere for a model. In fact, college librarianship might serve as a model for other elements of academic librarianship. Recently, thanks to a

grant from the Council on Library Resources, I had the opportunity to visit more than forty liberal arts colleges. (Yes, the Council on Library Resources does fund research projects submitted by college librarians—albeit jointly with library school faculty members. I still have hopes that some day the Council will support management internships for college librarians but that is the subject of another editorial.) From interviews with chief academic officers and discussions with library directors, I came away very impressed by the role and status many college librarians have at their institutions.

The confidence most chief academic officers at these institutions have in their library directors and the role that many college library directors play should be the envy of librarians at every size and type of academic institution. Many college library directors spoke highly of daily contacts with undergraduates, classroom faculty, and administrators. They communicated respect for their colleagues both within and outside the library. In turn, I gained a sense that this respect was mutual. These library directors frequently expressed strong loyalty to their institution.

Interestingly, many of these college library directors are neither well represented in professional publications nor at national meetings. This is certainly not because they have little to offer in these areas. They can gain their satisfaction from quietly and effectively practicing their profession within a smaller arena.

Talking with these librarians reminded me of Robert Bolt's *A Man For All Seasons*, which I first saw some twenty years ago while an impressionable undergraduate preparing to be a high school teacher. In the opening scene, Sir Thomas More asks ambitious young Richard Rich, "Why not be a teacher? You'd be a fine teacher. Perhaps even a great one." To this, Rich, seeking a more lucrative and visible position, replies, "And if I was, who would know it?" More answers, "You, your pupils, your friends, God. Not a bad public, that . . ."

Writing articles and serving on committees can certainly advance one's standing in the profession and can be personally very satisfying. Nevertheless, a sense of purpose can be easily lost. In the so-called minor leagues our public is more readily identifiable. College librarians meet almost daily with students, classroom faculty, administrators, and staff, who constantly remind us of their library needs. In the minor leagues, as Crash Davis observed, there is a chance to play every day.

Obviously I can overstate the idyllic nature of colleges and the analogy to baseball. Picturesque ivy-covered halls of serene little colleges and the purity and joys of minor league baseball are more the fictions of movies than the facts of reality. Nevertheless, there can be immense gratification in working in the college atmosphere. The skills needed, challenges faced, and goals sought in the academic library minor leagues are not inferior to those of the big leagues—just somewhat different. Therefore, I echo More's question, "Why not be a college librarian?"

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REFERENCE

1. William A. Moffett, "Reflections of a College Librarian: Looking for Life and Redemption This Side of ARL," *College & Research Libraries* 45:338-49 (Sept. 1984).



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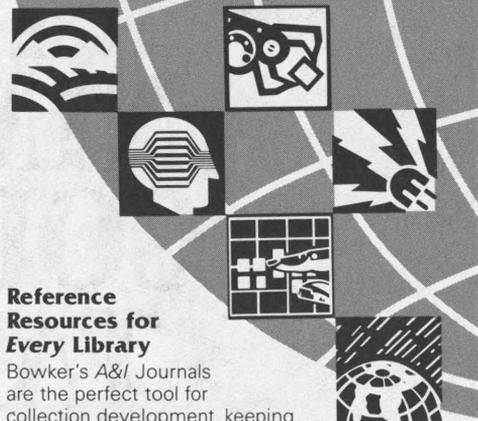
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