

Continuing Education—XV

As a librarian who believes that "continuing education" presently circumscribes so wide a variety of educational functions as to make generalization about its totality hazardous, I wish to examine only one portion of the subject that I hope is still comprehended by the term *continuing education*. I want to focus upon the formal academic course, in all its manifestations and local variations, from quarter, semester, trimester, mini-term, half-course, or by whatever name formal academic instruction involving from fifteen to thirty contact hours with an instructor is presently identified in academic institutions. I believe that this form of continuing education is, or ought to be, the *summum bonum* of continuing education—the ideal—and that we as a profession ought to foster it in any way, and through whatever mechanisms, that we can. In making this assertion I do not deprecate the encouraging efforts of the planners of conferences, pre-conferences, workshops, seminars, or institutes whose tireless energy on our behalf has reaped substantial benefits for the profession. I merely wish to assert my conviction that, for substantially increasing one's professional skills, it is difficult to find a better substitute than a formal academic course from a qualified instructor.

Having stated my prime assumption about continuing education, I am prepared to retreat somewhat and admit, along with my critics, that this form of continuing education—the formal academic course of instruction—is fraught with many organizational problems when one considers the diversity of the profession, the differing levels of awareness, and the varying needs of both individuals and libraries. This argument notwithstanding, I believe that the conditions for librarians to obtain additional skills through formal academic instruction will be quite favorable over the next decade and that we ought to be poised to take advantage of the situation.

I say this for several reasons. As the well-known and long-forecast demographic shifts become a reality over the next decade and the eighteen- to twenty-four-year-old student population does experience the anticipated decline of 15 percent to 20 percent, campus planners will have to accelerate their programs that are already in place to serve the over-twenty-four adult population, who will become a prime group to retard the expected enrollment decline. Given this developing external situation, the already well-supported, the geographically far-flung, continuing education establishment on college campuses is likely to prosper even more in the decade ahead. Continuing education divisions will be more receptive than ever before to the needs of any group who, like librarians, face a continuous

need to upgrade skills, to borrow freely from advances in fields outside their own, and to keep abreast of their own fast-breaking professions. These continuing education divisions—especially those in state universities with formula-driven budgets—will be more willing than ever before to export their faculties to locations that formerly had fewer offerings, more willing to subsidize travel costs to import qualified instructors in subject areas where the local pool of talent is lean, more willing to publicize course offerings and special programs, and more willing to work with groups whose special needs require modification of traditional procedures and policies.

What I am suggesting, in short, is that we ally with these continuing education units on our local campuses and nearby campuses that are likely to receive priority support over the next decade. We should watch these units with great care, see how they become organized to meet the new external conditions, observe the services that they offer, and suggest services that will be appropriate for library continuing education needs. I think that the conditions are favorable for the alliance to be mutually beneficial to both groups and a productive union is likely to occur from our efforts. Incidentally, I might say in conclusion, such an alliance might very well support Gretchen Redfield's earlier suggestion in this column of stressing a decentralized approach to continuing education.—*Eduard M. Walters*.

Editor's Note: Mr. Walters is director of libraries, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City. ■■

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