

*The Way  
I See It*

## Librarianship and certification

By Susan K. Martin

---

*We may need a process to keep us up-to-date with changes*

---

**C**ertification, licensing, and similar mechanisms often bring shudders to librarians and thoughts of bureaucracy without benefit; many people immediately ignore these processes as being irrelevant to our profession. After all, we have a terminal master's degree; does that not suffice?

The MLS may indeed be a sufficient qualification 1) to convey to library users what skills and competencies they should expect from librarians when they use a library, and 2) to communicate to current and prospective librarians what criteria are appropriate for this profession. However, the mere possession of a degree or certificate does not, in itself, communicate these important values in most other professions; why do we assume that librarianship is different, and that we can do with a single degree what other professions must strive for with a formal program of certification and continuing education?

To answer this question, earlier this year the ACRL Board of Directors voted to establish a Task Force on Certification for Library and Information Professionals. Chaired by Deborah Leather (director, Towson State University Library), this task force is being enhanced with liaisons from each ALA division interested in striving to come to grips with this issue. The task force has been asked to come to the Board with a preliminary report in mid-1995, and a final recommendation in mid-1996.

Most professions do have some sort of certification, licensure, or other process to ensure that their members are kept up-to-date and qualified to practice in the field. Nursing, ac-

counting, law, education, psychology—these are only a few of the very many professions requiring continuing learning and/or professional intellectual contribution on the part of their members.

Our colleagues in England and Australia have implemented voluntary systems of "chartering," similar to certification. Librarians are not required to become chartered librarians, but the experience indicates that employers are tending to look with more favor at librarians who are chartered. Like the education profession in the U.S., this is an internal professional attempt to set standards and communicate those standards to the public. These systems are not linked to the government, whether federal or state, but rather are closely tied to the profession and its educational structure.

Some ask why a certification process is necessary or appropriate, especially when librarians' salaries are so low. I suggest that, just as in nursing, there is the possibility for a vicious circle to be broken, by the professionals taking the lead, making an effort, and proving to their hiring organizations that they're worth more than the entry-level salaries we currently see.

In some universities, salaries for supervisory support staff approach those of entry-level librarians, even for younger and more junior support staff. Faculty and students are confused about who is the librarian and who is the library assistant. The general public claims to respect librarians, but closes libraries and library schools readily.

I won't suggest that a certification structure would be a panacea for the ills that affect the profession. I do think, however, that we need to take a serious look at the way we become librarians, our attitude toward the profession, and the means we use for keeping up-to-date in a world that is changing very rapidly. ■

---

*Susan K. Martin is university librarian at Georgetown University and current president of ACRL; e-mail: skmartin@guvax.georgetown.edu*