

Letters

Cost-Benefit Analysis

To the Editor:

The article by Bommer and Ford (*C&RL*, July 1974) on a cost-benefit analysis for determining the value of an electronic security system, contains the statement: "Of the 55 documents not accounted for in December 1971, 7 have been accounted for after an exhaustive one-year search. It is doubtful that more of these documents will be accounted for in the future. Thus we estimate that approximately 7/55 or 13 percent of the documents estimated to be lost will be accounted for in the future" (p. 273).

Thus the assumption is made that 87 percent of the documents found missing will not be returned. If this assumption is not true, then the basis of the cost-benefit analysis models which are suggested are likely to be unsound.

The policy at the University of Bradford is to carry out a 10 percent stock check every year. In order to establish how long it is necessary to continue searching for missing material before it is safe to amend the catalog, an annual recheck has been carried out each year at the University's Social Sciences and Management Centre Libraries. The figures are given in the table below for three and two years respectively:

	<i>Soc. Sci. Lib'y</i>	<i>Man. Cent. Lib'y</i>
Total missing	251	312
% still missing after 1 year	71.3	76.9
% still missing after 2 years	59.8	66.3
% still missing after 3 years	55.4	

It can be seen that books continue to be returned in significant numbers two and three years after they are first reported missing.

It would appear, therefore, that it would

be dangerous to use the cost-benefit analysis model suggested by Bommer and Ford until more exhaustive tests have been carried out to establish the proportion of documents which are lost forever, as opposed to those which are returned to the library after periods of up to three years and even longer.

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Response

The authors of this article recognize nothing sacrosanct about the figure 87 percent as an estimate of the number of documents which will never be accounted for of those judged to be lost. Obviously different libraries employing different search methodologies will need to develop procedures particular to their own situation for estimating this figure.

It is our belief that some missing documents at the University of Pennsylvania are recovered, not so much as a result of being returned by "borrowers," but rather as a result of being found within the library. In addition, we are convinced that the search procedures employed in this study were so thorough (not merely a stock check) both in the initial search to verify the lost condition of the initial group of 55 documents and in the subsequent year-long search which recovered 7 of these documents, that it would be most unlikely that additional documents of this group would be recovered in the future.

However, the major point to be made in reply to Mr. Ayres' comment is that questioning the accuracy of a particular data input for a model does not discredit the validity or usefulness of the entire cost-benefit analysis model. Although a different estimating procedure might be needed to ob-

tain various data inputs for different libraries, the credibility of the basic model has not been affected.

Michael Bommer
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 and
Bernard Ford
University of Pennsylvania
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Library Decision Making

To the Editor:

Jeffrey Raffel's article in the November issue of *C&RL*, "From Economic to Political Analysis of Library Decision Making," contained many interesting concepts, but I strongly object to his statement on page 417 that "... a high-level [MIT], library acquisitions department staff member had not only made no effort to buy books from the Harvard Coop but also had never even been to this store. . . ." I cannot imagine how Mr. Raffel obtained this startling bit of misinformation, but to set the record straight, the "Coop" is, and has been for a number of years, our fifth largest vendor. For years it has been our practice to make daily shopping trips to the Tech Coop (the MIT branch of the Harvard Coop) to fill orders by picking books off the shelves. Furthermore, since 1966 an average of 2,000 books have been purchased from the Coop each year for the MIT Student Center Library alone.

In 1968 three different experiments were undertaken by the MIT Libraries acquisitions department in an effort to determine the best way to utilize the resources of the Harvard and Tech Coops to fill our daily orders for current American publications. One experiment, for example, of personal shopping tours to the Harvard branch of the Harvard Coop was abandoned as too expensive when it was determined that it took an average of three hours daily for one clerk to fill only 12.4 percent of the orders.

Robert L. Hadlock
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Response

The "startling bit of misinformation" which has upset Mr. Robert L. Hadlock, head, Acquisitions Department, M.I.T. Libraries, grew out of an interview I had with an Acquisitions Department staff member in the summer of 1967. The subject was the Harvard Coop, not the Tech Coop branch, which had a far more complete inventory in the nonphysical science areas. Thus the Acquisition Department's use of the Tech Coop, as described in detail by Mr. Hadlock, is irrelevant to the statement quoted in my paper.

I am glad that three experiments took place in 1968 to investigate the "best way to utilize the Harvard and Tech Coops. . . ." I would like to think that my original conversation or research encouraged this inquiry.

I am afraid, however, that Mr. Hadlock's letter misses the key point of my article. His letter leaves unstated the value choices associated with the conclusion that "personal shopping tours to the Harvard branch . . . [were] . . . too expensive." If it costs \$35 per book purchase at the Harvard Coop, including personnel time, to get a book to serve as required reading for an undergraduate seminar, is it too expensive a method? What if the book is for a senior faculty member's research project? Who decides which means are too expensive? These are the kinds of questions which I think should be addressed.

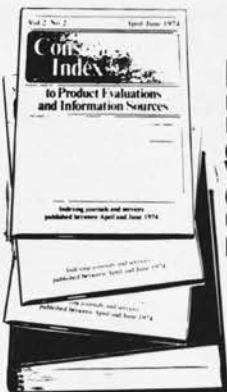
I should take care not to miss Mr. Hadlock's major concern. My article was not intended to criticize any individual or department associated with any library. My research was undertaken almost a decade ago and times, libraries, and people have changed. In the context of the article I reported an interview I had had years ago to illustrate a series of more general points which are as appropriate now as they were in 1967.

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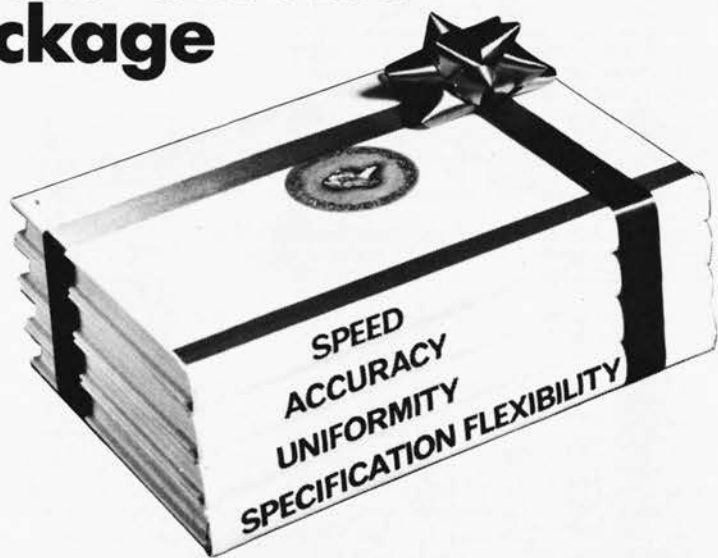
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