

## Editorial

# Academic Library Leadership and the “Life of the Mind”



After reading the excellent study by Peter Herson, Ronald R. Powell, and Arthur P. Young of the attributes of present and future directors of libraries holding membership in ARL, I began thinking about the lack of contribution to the research/professional literature by ARL university library directors and directors of other academic libraries.<sup>1</sup> The bottom line is that the contribution to the research/professional literature by the leaders of North American academic libraries is relatively insignificant. A quick perusal of the articles in *College & Research Libraries* and the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* during the past ten years revealed that only a handful had been authored by ARL university library directors. While serving nearly eighteen years as dean of libraries at two ARL libraries (Arizona State University and the University of Michigan), I discussed their work habits and scholarly activities (or the lack thereof) with several academic library directors, and I continue to observe the scholarly aspect of their work.

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### Justifiable Reasons and Excuses

Lack of time is the most common reason given by academic library directors for not writing scholarly pieces. One director is noted for saying that because of extraordinary demands on his time, he could not find time to write the library's annual report. Does this sound like making time to do something one wants to do, or does it sound like finding an ex-

cuse for not doing it? Regardless, the lack of time issue is real among academic library directors, who today spend an unprecedented amount of time on business-type issues that library directors formerly did not have to perform (e.g., fund-raising). Several of these directors work sixty hours or more per week.

### Unlike Deans of Colleges and Schools

Library directors normally progress upward through the administrative ranks to become director. They are judged on their administrative ability, whereas persons aspiring to become deans of colleges and schools must prove themselves via research and publications. To become dean of a college/school at a major university, one normally has to establish oneself as an author/scholar in a particular discipline. Deans must build an extensive bibliography of their scholarly endeavors, and must be tenured and hold the rank of full professor. Possession of an earned doctorate is a given. The scholarly credentials of a library director, however, normally pale quickly when compared to those of a dean of a college or school. In defense of library directors, before becoming director, they were not afforded the luxury of sufficient time to write and publish as the teaching faculty were. Most academic library directors do not have the earned doctorate and have not had to jump the rigorous “high hurdles” of gaining respect as a scholar via scholarly publications. If one were to look closely at the cumulative research and publication records of library directors holding the rank of full professor at some of our most prestigious universities, one would dis-

cover that their credentials do not measure up to the research/publishing records of full professors/deans of the colleges and schools. Indeed, it is not uncommon to find many librarians in a given academic library with a better scholarly record than that of the director. Unlike the deans of colleges and schools, the academic library director does not lead by example when it comes to scholarly activities. The lack of the doctorate and of a respectable scholarly record creates a situation where the teaching faculty, deans, provosts/vice presidents for academic affairs, and presidents do not perceive the library

director as a fellow academician. This is especially true in institutions where library directors/deans are supposedly on par with the academic deans.

**Conclusion**

Will directors continue to contribute little to library/information science literature? Probably. Their time constraints will likely increase, not lessen. Intellectually, the profession will suffer from the absence of the directors' insights, reflections, and assessments. Only time will tell what impact this absence will have on the role of the library in the academy.

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**Note**

1. Peter Herson, Ronald R. Powell, and Arthur Young, "University Library Directors in the Association of Research Libraries: The Next Generation, Part One," *College & Research Libraries* 62 (Mar. 2001): 116-45.