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# The education of academic librarians: How many degrees are enough?

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## *Credentialing—a call for action.*

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**I**n the July/August 1991 *C&RL News* Jeanne-Pierre V. M. Herubel again raises the question of what kind of training (and credentialing) is required for academic librarians.

Herubel addresses the issue from the standpoint of academic credibility, opining that without advanced training in a subject discipline librarians cannot gain respect from teaching and research faculties. Additional subject training "sensitizes the academic librarian to the fields of research and the sociology of knowledge within that discipline." Even though librarians will continue to be "different," they must undergo this "rite of passage," this period of "guided intellectual effort," to achieve equality with their faculty counterparts. Herubel's is not a new argument, and just a year ago Deanna Marcum, dean of the School of Library and Information Science at Catholic University, made the point somewhat differently in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 1, 1990. Marcum developed her argument from the supposition advanced by Francis Miksa that a fundamental shift has occurred in contemporary information-seeking behaviors, behaviors that are sharply different from the information-gathering methods practiced in the 19th century. In order for library school students to be effective in this new environment, Marcum maintains that students must now "learn how to make the transition from the current focus on the resources of a single institution to the more cooperative, interdependent setting of the future." To make this transition and to become "real partners" in the "research process," another

advanced degree in a subject specialty will be required.

Whatever the merit of Herubel's opinions about credibility and Marcum's predictions about the cooperative and interdependent information environment of the future, few will question that access to scholarly information has been broadened, even "democratized," to a degree that would have been

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undreamt of even a decade ago. Now the materials of scholarship are brought with sometimes astonishing celerity into the hands of scholars, often at sites far removed from the great archival collections where these materials are housed and to which, in other times, travel would have been obligatory. The relative ease and moderate cost of obtaining search materials in microformat, the development of high-quality reprography (including availability of hand-held machines at low cost), and the publication of

textual sources like the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* in CD-ROM format is revolutionizing the ways that scholars conduct research. Institutional subsidization of the sharing of library resources, sometimes with tax dollars, has also enhanced scholars' access to research materials.

What has not changed in the environment of academic information-seeking (and Herubel and Marcum acknowledge this implicitly if not explicitly) because it may never have been there to be changed, is the degree of involvement of librarians with scholars in the research process. While librarians may be credited with creating an array of resources that enables scholars to locate materials in libraries, there is little evidence that librarians, well-trained or poorly trained, have ever been much a part of the "scholarly research process" or that scholars have relied on them for more than the most basic assistance in the conduct of their inquiries. For librarians who staff reference or information service departments in academic libraries, the pos-

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session of advanced degrees in the humanities and social sciences (or even the sciences) will not help them achieve the equality desired by Herubel or to play the significant role in the research process that Marcum believes possible and perhaps necessary.

Librarians in academic communities can and do aid scholars, but studies of information-seeking behavior among humanists, conducted by Jones and Wiberley at the University of Illinois at Chicago, reveal that librarians are not the first people to whom scholars turn in their "information-seeking" among humanists. Scholars find librarians helpful, for example, at those times when they begin to extend their investigations into areas where they are no longer unquestionably expert. Archivists and librarians in special collections are consulted because they are knowledgeable about collections for which mechanisms of access are often poorly developed. Generalist librarians who have broad knowledge of collections and bibliographic sources can often locate materials for scholars that provide the framework within which a particular line of inquiry can be extended. They can also help with unscrambling garbled and incomplete citations. But reference librarians are usually among that last resources to whom scholars turn.

As in any personal relationship, scholars' contacts with librarians are aided by quality of response, knowledgeable, and reliability. However, scholars are usually able to locate materials in general library collections without the detailed knowledge of library systems that librarians advocate. Scholars also are capable of identifying these materials in other institutions when electronic and paper catalogs are available. We might well reflect on how the tremendous growth in interinstitutional loan of library materials has come about, and whether it is attributable in any part to the reliance of scholars upon librarians, or whether it has occurred because scholars have had direct access to OCLC-like systems and have learned how to use them.

More needs to be known about information-seeking behaviors of scholars before anyone can argue with confidence that there has been a significant shift in those behaviors. Present reconstructions of information-seeking among humanists are inadequate in explaining how imagination, intuition, and apparent luck contribute to the creation of scholarly works. There is evidence, however, that information-seeking is continuing in much the way it has for some time, with scholars investing their greatest effort in tracing citations found in books and journals, scanning professional association publications, and referring to sources suggested by colleagues. The inclination of some scholars to defer using libraries until after they have learned about publications of potential use from collegial or non-library sources was succinctly outlined by Yale sociologist Charles Perrow in a recent paper called "On Not Using Libraries," one of a number of papers read at a 1988 conference—"Humanists at Work"—held at the University of Illinois at Chicago that provide insights into the ways that scholars carry out their research.

Indeed librarians must still understand how scholars do research, how their inquiries relate to the printed record of our culture, where that record is maintained, and, most importantly, when and how scholars are most apt to draw on the specialized skills of the librarian. We fail to teach these aspects of scholarly inquiry in library schools today because our knowledge of them is still slight and, for whatever reason, the profession has ignored its own literature. Intelligence, discrimination, perseverance, and knowledge of bibliography and the bibliographic principles on which libraries are organized appear to be characteristics possessed by successful academic librarians. But there is no evidence that another advanced degree in a subject specialty would help library school students acquire these characteristics. Another advanced degree would, however, assure that librarians who provide services to scholars understand the intellectual norms of disciplines recognized within the scholarly community and the importance of primary and second-


ary sources in them. The greater significance of another advanced degree is that it would strengthen the credibility of the librarian within the scholarly community and lead to adjunct and joint appointments in teaching departments, routine memberships on dissertation committees, participation in departmental research seminars, and to the teaching of courses on bibliography in these departments.

The sad history of recent and continuing closings of library schools informs us that not only have librarians failed to become a part of the scholarly process, they have become marginal in the eyes of campus administrations as well. More training through acquisition of advanced degrees will not by itself save librarians or library schools from the endangerment of the species or give them the credibility that they may deserve. The situation is graver and the problem deeper than that.

Where are we then to look for leadership, and why have our leaders failed to respond? Deans of library schools (when they are not struggling with provosts intent on closing their doors) have until recently had considerable success in placing their graduates, and the training of academic librarians is only a small component of their programs. In short, academic librarians have not appeared to require assistance from them. The directors of large research libraries might have helped direct attention to the marginality of librarians in their campus

communities, but directors are increasingly limited to short terms of service, and are more disposed to ally themselves to campus administrations than with campus research faculties. In any case, few have close ties to their teaching faculties and the forming of alliances with campus deans, whether they be in the library school or a discipline, must not rank very high among the many pressing issues that they confront daily. The agendas of the library associations, although influenced by academic librarians, have of late shown little concern with issues of professional credentialing.

The fact is that changes in both training of librarians and in the organization of services to scholars are in order, and it is still not too late for library schools, associations, and directors to begin reviewing curriculum requirements for students who choose careers in academic libraries, to investigate models that will promote library/faculty interaction, and to set a research agenda that will advance our understanding of scholarly information-seeking. In the meantime, academic librarians need to obtain as much formal training as possible, to acquire second master's and Ph.D.s and to begin to find ways of putting that training to work in the institutions in which they are employed. The marginalization of librarians will not be reduced at once, but it will be reduced over time. That reduction will derive not from the holding of the advanced degree, but from performing solidly with it. ■■

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