

## **What if we viewed library instruction like driver ed?**

By George W. Bain

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*Students should demonstrate competency in library use to graduate*

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**H**ow many of you under 60 years old were required to take driver training for driver education before you were allowed to drive an automobile? I would wager that the percentage is high, above 80 percent. But how many of you were required to demonstrate your competency with library materials before you obtained a baccalaureate degree? I would hesitate guessing how low this figure might be.

To the extent that we can draw an analogy between these two, is it worth our while to do this? I believe it is. Certainly, as a colleague points out, demonstrating our competency in operating an automobile is more of a life-and-death matter for ourselves and fellow motorists than is true with showing our command of the *Social Science Index*. A larger percentage of our population drives than attends college, and insurance companies are for good reason insistent. Yet learning how to find pertinent information in books and articles and then to make an effective, persuasive case statement is an essential matter for the educated person. To me, the difference is not in kind but in degree. So let us make our case—and do it forcefully!

Learning to drive a car effectively requires strategy and practice. This, however, is not unlike other things we learn. Certainly we who can walk learned to do so over time, and then mastered new tricks when we learned to run. We learned to speak first in words and then in sentences. We received a great deal of instruction in our school years in how to read and write, all intended to help us be better readers

and writers as we matured. We generally learn to do other things such as biking and swimming more beneficially with instruction. I dare say this is also true with football and volleyball, or with cooking and carpentry, if we have learned these. I dare wager some among us would not have first sat behind the wheel without the support of a driving instructor.

But what about the library? Does this not also require instruction for effective performance? Certainly there is informal training in how to use libraries even in grade school. My children initially mastered the basics of the catalog card in the third grade. Yet my library instruction colleagues insist that many a first-year college student needs to be taught this.

How many do we miss even at this point? My experience from conducting tours at my university is that approximately 25 percent of first-year students have yet to use the *Readers' Guide*. So it is better to forget tallying the number we miss and demand instead demonstrated levels of competency from first-year students, upper-class students, and even graduate students.

Approximately two decades ago, before the flowering of bibliographic instruction, I obtained a doctorate in American history from a Big Ten institution without learning how to use federal government documents. But why is it that a beginning graduate student whom I encountered this past fall, with a political science major from another Big Ten institution, had never heard of *PAIS*? Given the prevailing reality, I suspect this must be regarded as excusable. But I still find it deplorable.

The library, like the automobile, has evolved dramatically over this century. No doubt many of your classroom faculty could wax eloquently about the changes from Henry Ford's Model T to the swept-wing fins of mid-century on to the

sleek cars with cruise control of today, and how highways have changed from rutted mud roads to the wonder of the interstate system. But can they also describe the changes in the library from the old card catalog and bound newspaper volumes (then newspapers on microfilm), to the impressive online catalog and slick CD-ROM full-text newspapers?

With change so much a fact of life in our society, let us convert our academic deans to require that those who matriculate from college show they know current tools and basic strategies before they depart. "Driving" a CD-ROM station requires reading the "owner's manual," very much like driving an auto for

the first time or driving a new auto off the lot.

Information literacy, as we know, has to become seen as a skill needed over a whole lifetime. Over 30 years ago I found driver training to be valuable. I hope library instruction is as commonplace for undergraduates by the time my youngest child graduates a decade hence. Metaphors, the anthropologist Brenda E. F. Beck writes, are like bridges. "They are also mental detours," she adds, "that sometimes help one to sneak around obstacles." If the analogy I have developed is useful for sneaking around the formidable obstacles we face, then let us master the opportunity this detour presents now. Drive on! ■

## Ten things you can do to help in the scholarly communication crisis

The North Carolina State University (NCSU) Libraries' staff frequently receives inquiries from faculty as to what they can do to help in the scholarly communication crisis. Some suggestions are:

**1. Reduce the volume but not the quality** of published research by publishing research results in one paper, rather than fragmenting them for publication in more narrowly focused journals.

**2. Urge your institution to re-examine current** promotion and tenure policies, with the goal of emphasizing quality of research in a few key articles over quantity of published research (the Harvard Medical School and Stanford are among the institutions that have already instituted changes in this direction).

**3. Send a signal to publishers by protesting** current pricing practices.

**4. Resign from the editorial boards of journals** published by companies that practice exorbitant pricing, or encourage colleagues on those boards to resign.

**5. Educate colleagues in professional societies** about the hidden danger in contracting

with commercial publishers to publish society journals, which often results in higher subscription prices for libraries.

**6. Encourage your professional associations** and societies to resist the temptation to raise prices based on the models of commercial publishers.

**7. Encourage university presses to undertake** the publication of scholarly, refereed journals.

**8. Insist that privatization of federal government** information be tempered with equitable access through the depository library network (the NCSU Libraries is a member) and that prices are not driven by the market alone.

**9. Encourage abstracting and indexing companies** to incorporate the contents of electronic journals in their products.

**10. When submitting an article to a journal,** consider the journal's pricing policies and select the one with the fairest policies.—*Jinnie Y. Davis, assistant director for planning & research, North Carolina State University Libraries (Bitnet: jinnie\_davis@library.lib.ncsu.edu.)* ■