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COLLEGE & RESEARCH LIBRARIES

news

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Report on the Conference on Writing and Publishing for Librarians

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The Conference on Writing and Publishing for Librarians held Friday, April 4, 1975, on the campus of Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, was sponsored by the New England Chapter of ACRL. In spite of a spring snowstorm, over 300 conference participants came from the six New England states, New York, Michigan, and Illinois. The conference was inspired by the May 24, 1974, Seminar on Writing and Publishing for Librarians developed for Harvard University librarians. Thomas H. Cahalan, founder of the ACRL New England Chapter and assistant librarian for acquisitions, Northeastern University Libraries, headed the committee which planned a well-run conference. The program covered the writing, editing, publication, and use of library literature, with a focus on the significance and purpose of journal articles and library news for college and research libraries.

The conference was introduced by its chairperson, Patrick J. Wreath, head of acquisitions, Boston College Libraries, who said the purpose of the conference was to offer something concrete and something more conceptual. Wreath said the variety of library literature, despite its proliferation and other problems, serves both intellectual and utilitarian purposes and helps to define the state of the art.

The two speakers of the morning general session approached the literature of librarianship from the standpoints of its authors and its users. Robert D. Stueart, dean, School of Library Science, Simmons College, spoke on "Writing the Journal Article." He mentioned that he intended his remarks for the novice. Stueart made the point that only a few library articles have had an influence outside the field. He questioned whether academic librarians' salaries, status, and promotions are dependent on publishing or whether other criteria exist to create the climate to publish, such as (1) the desire to publish, (2) the appearance of the idea in the literature before, (3) the need to publish in order to advance professionally, (4) the wish to relate results of research, (5) the desire to share a speech with a wider audience, (6) a real commitment to writing, and (7) a distinction between scholarly and "how-to-do-it" articles. Stueart pointed out that studies have shown that release time is not necessarily an inhibiting factor in the decision to write and publish. Therefore, it may well be that those who do not write possibly do not know how or have no interest. The common incentive for librarians to write is to advance in rank, tenure, and pay. Stueart reminded us that journal articles are a primary source of continuing education for librarians. Finally, he mentioned several points on the technical aspects of writing.

In his lively remarks on "Using the Literature of Librarianship," Samuel Goldstein, ed-

itor of *CALL*, defended library literature against five typically negative clichés: (1) he questioned whether there were really too many library periodicals when few librarians regularly read as many as ten; (2) the visible impact of the information explosion has been a “dud” for the working librarian; (3) when they claim that “library literature stinks,” too frequently librarians expect to be entertained instead of informed; (4) librarians claiming that “library literature is not relevant to my needs” demonstrate a low level of intellectual curiosity when, in fact, they could find relevance in the journals of distant regions or states; and (5) as for the charge that too much “rehashing” occurs in library literature, other literature refers to the practice as “variations on a theme.” Goldstein submitted that negative remarks result from people not having a personal commitment and that in library schools literature should be a “core subject, not a sore subject.” Chairperson Wreath offered the comment that there is a dearth of good writing which is stimulating, informative, and insightful.

In the next part of the program, librarians had an opportunity to participate actively at one of the four special sessions.

1. “Staff Newsletters”—Mary J. Cronin, administrative assistant and editor of *Focus*, Boston Public Library, and Elizabeth P. Mitchell, editorial librarian, Harvard University, led a session covering the purpose, content, and audience of staff newsletters. Discussion ranged from planning to production and emphasized the thinking and writing that go into newsletters. Session leaders pointed out that each library situation is very different, so the purpose and content of individual newsletters will vary widely.

2. “State and Regional Journals and Newsletters”—Adelaide C. Gardner, editor, New England Library Association *Newsletter*, introduced this two-part session. First, three editors discussed the objectives and policies, priorities and deadlines, and relevance of their respective publications. Susan Rabinowitz, member, research staff, *Proceedings in Print*, edits the Special Libraries Association Boston Chapter *News Bulletin*. Jane M. Lopes, librarian, Boston City Hospital School of Nursing Library, edits the *Bay State Librarian*, official journal of the Massachusetts Library Association. Mary C. Spillane, editorial assistant, Massachusetts Library Extension Bureau, edits that bureau’s *Newsletter*. In the second part of the session, Joseph G. Sakey, director, Cambridge Public Libraries and president, New England Library Association, proposed that at least three regional organizations might combine their costs and efforts into one *Regional Library Newsletter for New England*. Anne Conway, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, led a

panel/audience discussion of Sakey’s proposal.

3. “Library Publications for Your Community”—This session on the need for communication with faculty and students, the use of newsletters to the faculty, acquisitions lists, library guides and handbooks, and other publications, was led by Miranda J. Beaven, principal reference librarian, Yale University Library, and Sherrie S. Bergman, college librarian, Wheaton College, and coordinator, ALA/SRRT Clearinghouse. The purpose of such publications is to establish good relations with faculty and students and to alert them to what the library has to offer. It is important to keep the content simple because too much information will “turn off” or confuse potential readers.

4. “Research and Scholarly Publishing by Librarians”—Timothy W. Sineath, assistant professor, School of Library Science, Simmons College, and Kenneth E. Carpenter, Kress Library of Business and Economics, Harvard University, conducted this popular session on research and publishing by librarians for the academic community. Sineath discussed factors contributing negatively and positively to scholarly research of this type. Carpenter addressed himself to sources of topics in general and why librarians are best able to produce scholarly bibliographies. He also brought up the issue of staff development and hoped the increasing needs of making collections accessible would stimulate a greater emphasis on staff development of this nature.

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Throughout the conference, librarians had opportunities to visit the exhibit of library publications compiled by Marilyn Grant, assistant science librarian, Boston College Science Library. Many examples of writing and publishing by librarians, including national publications, the alternative press, and all of the types covered by the special sessions, were available for browsing.

The afternoon session presented editors of three major, national publications of importance to academic librarians. This afforded a special opportunity for those present to gain an insight into the realm of library editing and publishing.

From his experiences as associate editor of *Library Journal*, Karl Nyren spoke on the "General Library Periodical." He said the editor of a national journal must publish articles ranging from those purely factual to those expressing strong opinions. It is the responsibility of the editor to try for an appealing mix of all articles. Editors of national journals are also aware of various pressures from advertisers or parent associations. Nyren related three qualities he thought good periodicals should possess: (1) readability—a good format has the means to invite the reader and hold his or her attention; (2) comprehensiveness—he would like to see an annual accountability of how well general periodicals do their job of bringing librarians all the information they require; (3) significance—editors must keep a continuous stream of information flowing which will be of interest to a wide range of librarians.

Richard D. Johnson, editor, *College & Research Libraries*, opened his remarks on "Academic Library Articles" with the history of *College & Research Libraries*. Scholarly essays are now preferred, but the value of practical articles continues to be recognized. Johnson then described the process he and his editorial board undergo to select the thirty-six to forty articles that appear annually from 150 or so manuscripts received. With few exceptions, manuscripts are unsolicited, and each is seriously considered. In an acceptable manuscript, the editor looks for the following: (1) a length of 2,000 to 5,000 words; (2) two typed, double-spaced copies following the University of Chicago *A Manual of Style* with references on separate sheets at the end; (3) headings in the article supplied by the author; (4) tables, ready for the camera, on separate sheets; (5) no pictures; (6) subject content—if the subject is more appropriate for another journal, it will be sent there; overworked subjects are governance of libraries and academic status; (7) type—surveys should avoid sloppy questionnaires; library school term papers must be revised and submitted as formal manuscripts; master's theses and dissertations can be developed into

acceptable articles; and (8) an author must avoid treating his subject as if it existed in a vacuum.

Mary Frances Collins, editor of *College & Research Libraries News*, spoke to the audience on "Academic Library News." She emphasized the sources of news about academic libraries such as the ACRL executive secretary's office, the public relations offices of larger academic institutions, and hopefully, information from ACRL chapters across the country. Collins plans for the *College & Research Libraries News* to become a forum for academic librarians on issues like faculty status and collective bargaining. Also, monthly columns by professionals should provoke exchanges of news and opinions. She welcomes newsworthy items from libraries and local ACRL chapters.

The conference was concluded by a lively panel discussion period which unified the day's proceedings. Panelists Wolfgang M. Freitag, head librarian, Fine Arts Library, Harvard University, and Patricia G. Schuman, editor, Library/Education Book Program, R. R. Bowker Co., directed questions of the audience and of their own to the speakers of the general sessions. This period of the conference produced comment and sparked debate on a number of issues including: the place and significance of alternative library publications, the censorship by library administrations of unfavorable articles, and an atmosphere in which librarians are encouraged to write and publish. Further discussion touched upon the rights of authors who publish in journals, the lack of investigative follow-up of library news, and the emphasis of a technical literature to the exclusion of theoretical or humanistic inquiry. The questions raised during the final session of the conference demonstrated the continuing interest in the many aspects of writing and publishing. It is clear that these issues should receive further public discussion. Those who had been hesitant to publish were greatly encouraged by the conference, and all who attended came away with new insights about the relevance of library literature to their individual jobs and to their profession. The Goldfarb Library of Brandeis University hosted a social hour at the conclusion of the conference. ■■

ACRL Membership

April 30, 1975	8,543
April 30, 1974	12,015
April 30, 1973	11,404
