

LETTERS

The editors have received the following letter commenting on the ACRL policy statement on the M.L.S. degree. The editors welcome such comments from the membership on policy statements. We recognize not only our responsibility to report the news of ACRL to its membership but also the importance and value of reporting the membership's comments and reactions to ACRL. In this regard we offer the pages of the News as a forum for the exchange of ideas and opinions on matters of concern to the membership, within of course, the usual constraints of space available.

Dear Editor:

I think that the ACRL Board of Directors made a mistake when its members approved the policy statement at their Midwinter meeting in January of this year (*C&RL News*, March 1975, p.69) to the effect that the master's degree in library science is the appropriate terminal degree for academic librarians.

The M.L.S. degree is not enough for academic librarians now, and certainly the requirements of the future are going to be much greater. (See, E. J. Josey, *New Directions for Academic Library Service*, Scarecrow Press, 1975, p.322.) The "generalist" librarian is already an anachronism in the university and research library and is going to become ever more so with the unrelenting trend toward specialization. The M.L.S. may well have been an appropriate terminal degree a few decades ago, when most librarians spent the greater part of the day doing routine acquisitions work and routine cataloging, the larger part of which is now done by paraprofessionals, a new class of specialists, and by clerical assistants. In many libraries, including our own, directional questions, as well as routine and superficial reference questions, are now handled by nonprofessionals. Assuming that the answers are to be fully competent or better, the remaining inquiries do in fact require subject specialties on the part of the reference faculty, evidenced in part by the attainment of advanced degrees in relevant subjects.

Undergraduate students with strong subject interests, graduate students doing advanced research, and faculty scholars must have the knowledge that the full implications of the questions put to the reference librarian are understood. They need also to have full confidence that they will be answered competently by subject specialists.

The drive of librarians for full faculty status, including titles and benefits, as well as the ever-

increasing pressure being exerted by faculty and university administrators toward excellence, indicate clearly to me that academic librarians must present standard academic credentials: besides the M.L.S., a relevant subject master's degree and probably the doctorate eventually.

The handwriting is on the wall. If librarians fail to meet the challenge, there are others on the campus ready to provide a higher level of academic support services, relying more heavily on nonprint media. Librarians will be left behind through their own inability or unwillingness to accept a challenge. The M.L.S. is not adequate for the university library today, and it will be less so very soon.

Sincerely,
Louis A. Kenney
Director of Library Services
San Diego State University

Correction

In the May issue of *C&RL News*, page 142, the Folger Library was mistakenly identified as being at the University of California, Berkeley. The Folger Library in Washington, D.C., was the acquiring institution.

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