Letters

Editor's Note: *The response to the March issue editorial, "Can Academic Libraries Afford* CRL," *was resounding. Seventy-seven letters have already been received at the editorial offices. All support the continuation of* CRL *and over 95 percent, the continuation of* CRL News. *Fifteen letters were selected by the leadership of ACRL to illustrate the issues which concerned those who responded. These letters have been distributed to academic librarians serving on the ALA Council. The letters will appear in the September issue of* CRL.

To the Editor:

Bob Carmack and Trudi Loeber of the University of Nebraska Library wondered if the findings of their study on the reserve system are unique, or if they are true generally for all colleges and universities ("The Library Reserve System—Another Look," *CRL* 32:105–09 (March 1971). It is my observation that the results of their study are not unique.

For the past ten years the librarians at Stanislaus State College have attempted to keep the reserve system simple and the RBR collection as small as possible. Reserve book cards which show the amount of use are sent to faculty members at the end of each quarter. This has helped to keep the RBR collection under control. Nevertheless, a few faculty members continue to place on reserve materials that are never used.

A survey at the end of the Winter Quarter 1970 revealed that 37 percent of the RBR collection had not been used. We reported the results of this survey to the faculty, requesting their cooperation in not placing on reserve books that may have little or no use, pointing out that it would have been better to leave those unused titles in the general collection for possible use by browsers and to save the efforts of both the faculty and library staff. This report may have contributed to a decrease in unused RBR materials as found in the results of another survey just completed. Reserve materials that did not circulate during the Winter Quarter 1971 were only 16 percent, compared to 37 percent in 1970. Regardless of this improvement we believe that there is still need for vigilance and for continuous reporting of unused materials to the faculty concerned.

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To the Editor:

The letter by J. McRee Elrod in *CRL*, March 1971, p.145, about the University of British Columbia's computerized circulation system, illustrates perfectly my contention in the May issue that the computer is a brain-devouring God. Elrod, as those who know his work can testify, is one of the fine minds in technical processes, one who questions every aspect of everything. Yet before the computer, he questions nothing about anything; he flops down on his knees before the Golden Calf and out fly his brains.

Viz., it obviously is not the computerized system that saves the borrower from filling out charge slips, but the borrower's card typed for each book in the collection before the system was put into operation. This new big deal goes back to the beginning of the century, and is used in elementary school libraries with charging machines, all of which clear the borrower faster than the computer charger.

Although it is an article of faith at UBC (a remarkably fine library, by the way, despite these reservations) there is absolutely no evidence at all that the computerized circulation system "has encouraged greater use of the library and its resources." Dur-

ing the five-year period that indeed saw a spectacular increase in circulation, other radical changes occurred at UBC, which, among other things, broke loose a number of finely conceived subject branch libraries from a totally forbidding central library to locations dead central to the disciplines served. Hofstra can match UBC's circulation rise, with a manual system that is not working to our satisfaction.

There is no evidence that "loan information is recorded more accurately." Like most computerizers, UBC lacks a basis for comparison since it did not analyze the manual system that preceded the computer. Nor have they analyzed the accuracy of the present system, although this takes only a checking of the print-out against the stacks. Everyone just assumes that a computerized system has to be more accurate. But for half a year I listened to computerators complain about how much garbage had piled up in their data files, with no one eager to empty it out. In addition to human errors, this machine keeps getting out of order in minor ways.

The 1,300-page print-out of three months' circulation is very useful, although we can seriously question some of the factors in the data assembled. The obviously significant factor, the number of holds on a book out in circulation, has been used for duplicate purchasing in small libraries from time immemorial. But the assumption here is that only the computer can provide the total analysis of three months' circulation. This can be done by hand at a fraction of the cost of the computer system. If such data are to be analyzed only once a year, the cost of the system is clearly not justified.

So how far is Mac ahead of the little library I once saw where the librarian charged out books by hand on brown paper squares torn from kraft bags? And what does it cost him? Or shouldn't we question?

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To the Editor:

Certainly there is truth in Mr. Mason's cutesy diatribe-harangue against THE COMPUTER (*CRL* 32:183–96, May 1971), but apparently he fails to comprehend that when he damns that maligned machine, he damns man himself. The computer, or any other machine or device, is an extension of man and is merely performing as it was designed and programmed. Any muddle, mess, or mischief caused by the machine is a reflection and magnification of the man controlling it.

When one learns (from an article in another library journal) that Mason based his revelations on a two-months' study of the literature and a tour of only ten large research libraries, one knows immediately that his sweeping generalizations and conclusions are based on limited knowledge and information. One also has a feeling that he approached his topic with a closed mind.

Now that he is absolutely positive that there is no future for the computer in the library (just as it was certain earlier that there would be no place for the typewriter in the library), perhaps he can retire to his obviously perfect library and let some of us get on with the job of *at least trying* to force the library to cope with some of the technological problems facing it.

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