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Quest for Expertise:
A Librarian's Responsibility

A distinguished anthropologist, Ashley Montagu, once wrote, "The deepest personal defeat suffered by human beings consists of the difference between what one was capable of becoming and what one has, in fact, become."[1] The purpose of this article is to focus attention squarely on ourselves as librarians to see what gaps exist between perceived importance and actual involvement in the area of the academic librarian's professional development and to develop action planning on the basis of the data.

M UCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN concerning the need for the continuing professional growth of college and university librarians, but the ideas expressed have generally been the feelings and suppositions of library administrators, library school professors, or library association leaders. The author knows of no study concerned directly with the perceptions of practicing academic librarians toward their own responsibility for professional growth and their own practices concerning these activities. This essay presents part of the findings from a study which presented an opportunity for a stratified random sample of sixty-eight college and university librarians (twenty-one graduates of the MLS class of 1956 and forty-one MLS graduates of the class of 1961) to express their views concerning their responsibility in this area of growth and to reveal their practices in order to determine gaps be-

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tween what they think they should be doing and what they actually are doing for professional growth.[2]

The college and university library participants placed greatest importance on (1) reading professional literature in library science; (2) reading in their subject specialty; (3) attending library conventions or meetings; (4) recruiting for their profession; and (5) visiting other libraries. They placed least importance on (1) participation in in-service training activities inside the library (Rank 37); (2) formal course work to meet certification requirements (Rank 36); (3) formal course work at the post-MLS level in library science leading to a sixth-year credential (Rank 35); (4) service in political clubs (Rank 34); and (5) participation in honor societies or fraternities (Rank 33).

The findings revealed that the college and university librarian participants were chiefly involved (spending time and energy) in reading professional literature in library science (Rank 1); reading in their subject specialty (Rank 3); visiting other libraries (Rank 3); attendance at library conventions or meet-

ings (Rank 4); and recruitment for the profession (Rank 5)—exactly the same activities which they considered to be the most important for professional growth. The college and university librarians further indicated that they were minimally involved in formal course work to meet certification requirements (Rank 36.5); formal course work at the post-MLS level in library science leading to a sixth-year credential (Rank 36.5); participation in employee unions (Rank 35); service in political clubs (Rank 34); and formal course work to qualify for salary increments (Rank 33).

Thus, based only on comparison of overall rankings, the chief differences between activities considered *important* for professional growth of the college and university librarians and activities in which they were actually *involved* were at the lower end of the continuum. They rated activities related to employee unions, in which they were minimally involved, twelfth in importance out of the thirty-seven items listed and, rather surprisingly, they ranked in-service training activities least important but ranked it tenth out of the thirty-seven items on which they were spending time and energy (which would seem to have a message to give regarding the quality of the in-service programs in which they were participating).

On the basis of the evidence presented, it might seem at first glance that college and university librarians could sit back and be well pleased with their efforts in the area of continuing education and professional growth. Were they not busily involved (except in two instances) in the very things they rated most important for professional growth, and least involved in those activities they deemed least important? Further analysis showed, however, that on an item-by-item basis, the librarians were spending far less energy and effort on the majority of the activities listed than

they considered necessary for maximum professional development.[3] The activities that showed the largest gaps between importance and involvement were legislative promotion of financial support of libraries; legal support of intellectual freedom; and support for librarians' tenure, retirement, and other benefits.

From the data, some aspects of the present character of librarianship become apparent. Evidently the librarians seemed to regard as more important those activities that are somewhat informal in nature and which provide social contacts with others in the profession. The librarians were much less concerned with activities which called for independent action, such as research, writing, formal course work, and study in small independent groups.

These observations are reinforced by findings in other sections of the study which show that 87 percent of the college and university library participants had not published any books in library science or in any subject specialty; 81 percent had edited no library journals; 79 percent belonged to no individual study group; 74 percent had not engaged in any research since their MLS, nor did they belong to any learned societies; 68 percent had not formulated any self-learning career agenda for themselves; 58.8 percent were not reading regularly any other professional journals (outside librarianship) at the time of the survey; and 58 percent had had no articles published during the last five years.

IMPLICATIONS

These findings suggest three problems. (1) The library school has not given sufficient attention to presenting its students with a clear and precise model of what one should be able to do to qualify as a professional. If the library school does not instill this concept, it is

difficult for the librarian to develop his own after leaving the university. (2) Library administrators have not succeeded in "producing conditions where people and ideas and resources can be seeded, cultivated, and integrated to optimum effectiveness and growth."[4] (3) The librarians themselves have not fully realized that an essential element in professional behavior is clientele service based on expertise and on the willingness to do all that is involved in order to assume the role of expert. In this article, attention is focused on this third area.

This study did not attempt to state what the ideal character of librarianship should be. But the data collected did suggest some objective norms by which an individual librarian could compare his position within the profession with other librarians. As part of the overall study, a Professional Index Score was derived which reflected twelve commonly held professional criteria. Based on the answers from the total number of respondents, scores were dichotomized into a "high" and "low" category.[5] Of the academic librarians, 74 percent fell into the "low" category. Similarly, a level of aspiration score was derived (made up of certain professional and personal goals within the profession of librarianship); 72 percent of the college and university librarians were in the "low" category when these scores were dichotomized.

Writing to educators, Don Davies forcefully points out that a profession

. . . will be irrevocably shaped by that for which its members hunger most. If we hunger for the self-respect that comes with self-discipline and the courageous exercise of personal and professional autonomy, and if we hunger for expertness in all that we do as professionals, we shall be proud of our calling and our commitment to it, and we shall build a profession that will be able to provide the high-quality . . . service which the times demand.[6]

Are the things that the librarians hun-ger for most—professional reading, attending meetings, recruiting, and visiting other libraries—the activities that would most effectively upgrade the profession? What the librarian considers most important for his professional growth is one of the tangibles which will determine in what manner the profession is upgraded.

In essence, there would seem to be two basic problems facing the profession relative to the data presented. First, how to upgrade the level of what librarians consider most important for their own professional development. Second, how to bridge the gap between what the librarians are actually doing for their professional development and what they think they should be doing in those areas.

The means that the librarians are using to achieve professional growth are the old familiar ways that many other professions have tried. But, as Houle pointed out, in profession after profession, these overworked standbys are being examined in a new light. The universal conclusion is that some form of strong correction is needed.[7] These altered means are based on the premise that every profession must be concerned with the education which occurs throughout the lifespan of its individual members and on the premise that one of the most creative and effective solutions to many complex problems is the development of programs that anticipate the stresses of rapid and radical change. John Lorenz has sensed the urgency of this need.

The development of strong programs for the coming decades demands from professional associations, library schools, and librarians a commitment to the ideas of self-renewal and excellence in professional education, and to willingness to adapt to change, to utilize the knowledge of other disciplines in designing new libraries and new services to meet new needs.[8]

Lorenz calls attention to one of the

Rank According to Involvement (Range 1–37)	Rank According to Importance (Range 1–37)	Type of Formal Course Work
36.5	36	For post-MLS sixth-year credential in library science
36.5	32	For certification purposes
33	32	For qualification for salary increment
28	21	For master's in subject specialty
25	24	For Ph.D. degree
14	13	For general enrichment

greatest needs—for professionals to take the commitment to continuing education seriously.

If librarians are going to be victorious in their fight against obsolescence, it would seem that one area of primary focus would be formal study in a university setting following the MLS degree and experience in the field. In a recent article, Bennis emphasizes that attitudes toward continuing education are changing. "The idea that education has a terminal point . . . is old-fashioned. A 'drop-out' should be redefined to mean anyone who hasn't returned to school."[9] One of the most revealing and alarming findings in the data collected was the attitude of academic librarians toward formal course work. In general, these librarians were neither hungering for nor did they attach much importance to formal course work, nor were they involved in it to any great extent. Of all the activity items listed, formal course work received some of the lowest ratings both in importance and involvement. For example, out of the thirty-seven items listed, various kinds of formal course work received the ratings given above by college and university librarians.

This attitude toward formal course work is also noted elsewhere in the study by the fact that 93 percent of the college and university library respondents had not received a further advanced degree since receiving their MLS degree, and 62 percent had taken no formal study of any kind for credit following the receipt of their MLS degrees. But will the library schools be able to draw the busy professional away from his work to learn that which is new and difficult in order to keep abreast of constant changes in a turbulent and uncertain environment?

This presents a problem in motivation. But the librarians themselves gave some valuable clues to solving the problem. They stated forcefully that they were interested in taking only courses that were based on their actual job needs and those that were interdisciplinary in their approach and instructors who were more concerned about content presented than in fitting a student into a formal degree program. This general feeling was also reinforced by the statistics presented here which show that the one type of formal course work rated in the median ranking for importance and involvement was the formal course for enrichment purposes. The respondents also suggested that the content of courses might be packaged by the library schools and, making full use of the new media and technology now available, be made available to them wherever they might be located geographically.

BATTLEGROUND FOR ACHIEVING EXPERTISE:
THE MIND OF THE PRACTITIONER

College and university librarians are not actively pursuing obsolescence, but there are indications that some are passively permitting it to overtake them. To obtain the expertise demanded by today's faculty, students, and community, it is necessary to work individually to narrow the gap between what we are doing and what we are capable of doing professionally. We must become aware of our own needs for learning and realize that continuing education is not something done to someone, but rather something the individual must constantly do for himself.

Examples of the realization of this concept are found in the spontaneous responses of the participants in the survey.

> Continuing education is basically an individual responsibility for which one has to plan.

> If students graduate from an MLS program with the attitude that graduate school is a life-time guarantee of professional competence, their minds may never be able to master the vastness of today's challenges and problems. They will not be as literate as the people they serve.

> No matter what opportunities are made available by societies or government, they are useless without individual initiative.

> The primary responsibility for the individual's continuing growth rests with the individual.

Two signs of a professional are the individual's continually seeking opportunities for development and further learning, and his realization that the main instrument or "tool" for him as a professional is himself and how creatively he can use his talents and train-

ing. The respondents in the study indicated that a new kind of self-discipline and initiative are required. They suggested some important strategies for learning and pointed out areas in need of attention.

> How you grow depends upon you alone, but any growth should be based upon a considered view that the growth enable you to serve your clientele (not yourself) better.

This calls for reassessment of our attitude toward professional development. We must come to the full realization that one has entered a client-oriented profession which makes lifelong learning mandatory if one is to serve his clients with expertise. Further, it is a necessity if the librarian is to be looked upon as a professional by those he serves. A strongly stated presentation of the importance of client orientation is found in the recent article by Bundy and Wasserman, "Professionalism Reconsidered."[10]

> Classify impediments and favorable conditions . . . seek avenues of growth . . . plot a course of action and stick to it.
> . . . decide on goals.

The suggestion here is that the librarian should carefully analyze his own needs and work out a plan for long-term professional growth to combat personal obsolescence. A definite learning agenda is called for. Specifically, this would mean the formal writing of a statement of aims, definition of the areas for study, searching, reflecting and testing, and preparation of a list of priorities. Such a systematic approach to the matter of self-learning insures that time invested will be used efficiently and that efforts will be concentrated where most needed. An excellent checklist to guide the individual in the preparation of such agenda is the statement by Dill on "Strategies for Self Education."[11]

The problem in this area is, according

to Knowles, "that education is not yet perceived as a lifelong process, so that we are still taught in our youth what we ought to know rather than how to keep finding out. One mission of the adult educator, then, can be stated positively as helping individuals to develop the attitude that learning *is* a lifelong process and to acquire the skills of self-directed learning.[12] He goes on to point out that, in a sense, the criteria of success of a human relations workshop, a staff meeting, or any given course is the extent to which the participants leave the experience with heightened curiosity and the increased ability to carry on their own learning.

Read! Widely! Outside library professional literature.

Formal instruction in government, economics, information retrieval, education, public administration, sociology, all would be helpful.

The librarian must recognize that he needs to study the basic disciplines which support librarianship—and they are growing in number every year—so that he will be able to judge the applicability of their findings to his own work. The librarian cannot, of course, become a "professional" in all relevant disciplines, but he must be sophisticated enough to make competent use of the scientific knowledge that is available. The time has come when every competent librarian, as every other professional practitioner, finds it necessary to be sufficiently well versed in all the disciplines relating to his work to be able to read the literature and judge the adequacy of his findings and claims for himself. That is to say, the position of the librarian in relation to the social and behavioral sciences should be no different from that of the engineer in relation to physics or the doctor in relation to biology and chemistry.

Don't be afraid of innovation and change. We see fear everywhere that the non-book material is going to gain supremacy. Fear is nurtured by ignorance. Go to every course and workshop you can.

The view expressed by this respondent reflects the contention made by Bundy and Wasserman that "Innovation remains on trial when it should be encouraged. The field stands conservative and deeply rooted in the past at a time when such a stance exposes it to danger."[13] One way to welcome innovation rather than flee from it in fear is to participate periodically in formal academic programs—whether of a course, institute, or workshop framework—in a university setting. At a university it is acceptable to be critical of the status quo, to experiment with new concepts and innovative ideas. Such return trips to the university will broaden the librarian's understanding of his job and challenge him to replace old truths with new truths which he can later incorporate into his job. By such procedures he can prevent change from outdating his competence.

The respondent suggested attendance at workshops, but it was found that during the last five years, 0.3 days per year was the median time spent in attendance at workshops or short courses by the academic library participants in the study. Further, 38 percent of the college and university librarians reported that they had attended no workshops or seminars at all during the last five years.

What we need most after we have been out in the profession is training in human relations, personnel guidance and supervision.

This statement points up the need of the individual librarian for sensitivity to human values as well as the necessity of stimulating the development of each individual in his library. As the librarian moves from echelon to echelon, he needs help in directing effectively the work of other professional workers and

colleagues. Skill in work direction involves, over and above all other elements, understanding of human motivation and human relations—how to develop the full potential of each individual. These skills can be improved through classroom experience and problem-solving situations; they can be improved through reading. Such study can give an understanding of theory which is basic for every manager as he directs others, because every decision he makes and every action he takes rests on the management theory which he holds and believes in.[14] But skill in social interaction does not come solely from lectures, discussion of the principles of supervision, or reading. Research has shown that effectiveness in applying skills and practices in the area of human relations is also related to the impact of our behavior on others. One recent method for developing skill in social interaction uses variant forms of sensitivity training developed by a group of social scientists affiliated with the National Training Laboratory for Group Development.[15] The purpose of the T-group (training group or sensitivity group) is to help individuals increase their understanding of the impact of their behavior on others, of their own reactions to the behavior they exhibit. That its consequences are of genuine significance is evidenced by the growing demand in many professions for opportunities to participate in this form of education.

Bennis sums up the need in this area: "In addition to substantive competence and comprehensions of both social and technical systems, the new leader will have to possess interpersonal skills, not the least of which is the ability to defer his own immediate desires and gratifications in order to cultivate the talents of others."[16]

I'll suggest individual discussion groups to my colleagues.

In making this statement, the respondent was referring to the value of the small voluntary study groups which, in recent years, have become an important extension of the principle of self-instruction. The American Psychological Association has viewed them as loosely knit groups of people who meet together, correspond with one another, read papers to each other, circulate reprints, and generally stimulate one another through mixed collaboration and competition. In the literature they have been termed "invisible colleges."[17]

It has been found that these groups have extraordinary importance, not only for their own participants, but also for other alert people who aspire to membership. In the present study, 22.4 percent of the respondents indicated that they were participating in such groups. The suggestion here is that such groups are an excellent method for the professional to use in constantly expanding his knowledge, and are a means of reinforcing and strengthening existing professional associations.

Engage in research and growth will follow automatically.

Although many leaders in the profession have emphasized the need for librarians to engage in research, it has generally been characteristic of the profession to invite specialists from other fields to study the nature and needs of librarianship. These specialists from other disciplines do research, state their views and conclusions, and depart. Rarely does sustained research ensue on the part of the librarians themselves. In fact, this has been one of the characteristic differences between librarianship and other professions. In librarianship, leadership typically comes from the ranks of those holding office in professional associations, while in scholarly disciplines, it comes from the production of research resulting in thoughtful publications.

The importance of publishing the ideas and findings of research in a scientific manner, of making those materials visible to as wide a reading audience as possible, is also important. It was Dr. Abraham Flexner's contention in 1915, and it stands as true today as the day he spoke his view to social workers, that "the evolution toward professional status can be measured by the quality of publication set forth."[18] He went on to observe that this was not the sole responsibility of publishers, but the joint responsibility of all members of the profession to provide a record that was scientific rather than merely journalistic in its character.

Admittedly, it is difficult to get the results of research published, but even without publication, the rewards of research are great to the individual, as the participant in this study indicated, and certainly all such research serves the ultimate objective of giving more expert service to the clientele.

Admittedly too, not everyone is inclined to do research himself, but just as important to the profession's overall research effort is a scholarly concern which will cause the individual to interpret and apply the research of others. There is no value to research which in the end is not applied and tested. There are countless opportunities for the practicing librarian to research further within the profession by experimenting with research findings not only in library science but also in the behavioral sciences. Gomersall and Myers recently published a helpful article delineating ways and means of testing research findings in an organization setting.[19]

Individual growth will follow just as surely from the application and testing of research findings of others as from solving problems through the basic research activity itself.

Librarians should get involved in non-library activities in the community . . . be active and alive, the rest of us are being judged by you.

Some of the best minds in America are telling us that our nation today faces the most severe domestic crises we have confronted since the Civil War. In our cities we are faced with deep-seated problems which can be arrested and cured only by daring, imaginative, and *cooperative* action. There is no single group which can cure the situation. It is a job for everyone—a job in which librarians should be playing a major part as professionals in society. If we are to stand with other professions we must involve ourselves in community action as a means of serving our widest clientele—the public at large.[20] In short, to stand with other professionals in our society, the librarian must accept his share of responsibility for the environment in which he operates; he must bring to these community needs the full weight of his professional expertise.

In order to bring expertise to the situation, the individual librarian needs to see fully how the forming of objectives of library service should be related to major problems in society. He needs to "catch up" and to supplement prejudices and beliefs with knowledge based on current sociological findings. Reading is helpful, but as most people grow older, they find it increasingly difficult to adapt to new ways. They are less eager to experiment with the development of new procedures. To make their reasoning processes more flexible and to acquaint them with possible approaches to increasing the effectiveness of library service to the community, they need detachment from the day-to-day routine of the library and the stimulus of new faces and new concepts. Here again the university is an environment which can satisfy such a need—*if* it recognizes the individual's special needs and provides individualized opportunity to seek the

concepts and knowledge that are essential in formulating ways and means of cooperating with other agencies in the community.

CONCLUSION

Margaret Mead stated one of the most vivid truths of our new age: "No one will live all his life in the world into which he was born, and no one will die in the world in which he worked in his maturity."[21] Facts and conditions change. We must keep up with the facts and the conditions. Keeping up with the facts and conditions changes them. It is a fallacy to think we can solve the problem of obsolescence in any final sense. The belief that we can is a hindrance to our thinking. What we need is some systematic process for confronting new facts and concepts continually. When we think we have slipped behind and we must run to achieve expertise, we are often discouraged. Why? Rather than be discouraged, it should be our strength and our hope, for we do not want any life pattern that holds us enmeshed and keeps us from becoming that of which we are fully capable of being.

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   The questionnaire used in this section of the study was made up of thirty-seven items relating to the activities of librarians which may or may not be important for professional growth. Each participant was asked to indicate the relative importance of each activity as to whether he felt it was of "major importance," "fairly important," or of "little importance." At the same time, the librarian indicated in a second column whether his present involvement (in terms of time and energy expended) was "very much," "somewhat," or "little."
   Weighted ratings were then converted into weighted scores for interpretative and statistical treatment and for comparison. Activities were ranked by "degree of *involvement*" according to magnitude of weighted scores thus derived. Responses relative to "degree of *importance*" of activities were accorded the same treatment.
   Rank order correlation coefficients were then computed to show relationships between each category of librarians and their rankings for involvement and importance. In addition to this vertical comparison of the data, column by column, the responses were compared horizontally, item by item. In order to make a comparison between the perceptions regarding involvement and importance for each of the thirty-seven items, correlation coefficients were computed to show the relationships.
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