

Letter

To the editor:

I read with great interest Ann Beaubien's guest editorial "Image Counts" in the latest issue of *College & Research Libraries*. Many of us can only agree with her regarding the misunderstanding of our profession as well as the erroneous perception that the public has of any library employee, and her suggestions are well taken. However, I believe that in the case of academic libraries, another audience needs to be targeted very strongly: accreditation teams.

These teams should include at least one librarian (although two or three would obviously carry more weight), so that a thorough evaluation of library holdings and services can be done. From my personal observation, accreditation teams, which are composed of faculty members in one specific area, too often base their judgment on a cursory look at title counts (at our university, faculty members select books and journals). Just because a library has a number of journals in nursing, for example, does not necessarily imply that it is sufficiently equipped for research, including basic research, for a nursing program, as some teams tend to believe. This attitude reinforces the inherent dichotomy that exists between the faculty's knowledge of their respective field and the librarians' methods of teaching research. As teaching faculty members have already acquired an acceptable depth of knowledge (although they seem to have forgotten how), they rely on a few specialized journals to keep abreast of new developments in their fields. If they conduct research, they can use the various automated indexes offered to them or can ask the services of a librarian for convenience sake. However, students are taught a more systematic approach of using specialized indexes to gain access to a wide array of articles published in specialized or more esoteric journals. Hence, librarians on an accreditation team can be more attuned to gaps within their area of expertise. Likewise, they will be more likely to evaluate the quality of services by asking probing questions regarding the hours of services, the staffing of the library, adequate reference assistance including evenings and weekends (mainly when courses are offered at those times), bibliographic instruction programs, volume of interlibrary loan, etc. Not only are many libraries regularly understaffed, but in times of economic recessions, administrators will often begin by targeting the library budget, thus cutting the acquisition of materials as well as the recruiting of adequate staff. ALA and ACRL for academic libraries need to promote minimum standards of service more aggressively than has been done in recent years. Administrators are not always willing to listen to requests from within, but they will bow to the recommendations of accreditation teams, mainly if the accreditation of their programs depends on them. For that reason, our organization needs to lobby for the automatic inclusion of librarians on accreditation teams. Then may we harvest the recognition we are long overdue.

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