

Editorial

The Intellectual Side of Academic Librarianship



"The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function."—F. Scott Fitzgerald¹

Before getting into the essence of my first C&RL editorial, I want to commend Gloriana St. Clair, the immediate past-editor of C&RL, for her fine work during the past six years. It will be my intent to build on Gloriana's work toward improving the journal.

In casual conversations, C&RL has been described as the world's leading research journal in academic librarianship. Regardless of the validity of this description, C&RL is charged with carrying the best articles on research findings and qualitative analyses and syntheses. One of the many strengths of the journal is that it carries articles on nearly every aspect of academic librarianship; the articles range from community colleges to research universities. C&RL must continue its responsibility for including articles of relevance, maintaining a balance in types of articles accepted, and promoting a better understanding of the scholarly communication process.

Academic librarianship is undergoing a metamorphosis. For the next several years, we will be working with three types of libraries: (1) the library of the past (one that depends on the paper collections), (2) the library of the present (one that is best described as a "hybrid," depending on both paper collections and electronic resources), and (3) the library of the future (one that will depend more and more on electronic resources). While

the mission of the academic library will not change much, the strategies used in achieving the mission will certainly be different. Advancing technology will eventually enable us to participate in a "global library." International networks are already in place between and among some continents. Re-inventing the delivery of academic library services will bring forth many sociological issues and challenges. Economic factors are driving new funding models for academic libraries.

Doing More with Less

The transformation of academic libraries is occurring faster now than at any other time in the history of higher education. Technology is enabling libraries to add unprecedented value to access, collections, and services. However, the added-value components are causing increased user expectations. The more we give users, the more they want. While the expectations expand, the library staff remains the same in size or is being reduced. Thus, the staff is doing more with fewer resources. Downsizing—the need to be more productive with fewer staff—is part of today's economic reality. However, the focus should be on rightsizing in order to realize the greatest return on the library's best investment (i.e., its staff).

What impact is "doing more with less" having on the intellectual life of the library staff? Obviously, the staff has less time to devote to critical thinking, analyzing, and synthesizing. The expanded demands coupled with no additional staff have created an environment in which librarians have less time for research and

intellectual activity. They do not have time to reflect on why they are doing what they are doing and how they can do it better. They are being pulled into noncerebral work; it is becoming harder to distinguish between the work of librarians and the work of support staff. To many librarians, doing more with less suggests only the latest incarnation of traditional worker exploitation. Is the new technology marginalizing the work of librarians? Is the work of librarians becoming less intellectual? Such questions deserve thoughtful answers.

From a Profession to a Trade?

With greater attention on doing the daily work while having less time to think, are we witnessing the first evidence of academic librarianship migrating from being a profession to being more like a trade? Let's trust that this will not be the end result. Indicators of how librarians are struggling with the use of their time include the proliferation of "how to do" publications. Publishers are finding a good market for monographs and articles on "how we did it well in our library." Fewer research-oriented papers are being presented at the ACRL national conferences. Are we losing the theoretical base of our profession? Does academic librarianship require a philosophical foundation? Is technology leveling the playing field between the library's support staff and its professional staff? Will the mechanized nature of technology make academic librarianship more pedestrian, more trade-like? Will the movement toward a performance-centered enterprise reduce the intellectual activities of librarians?

What Can and Should Be Done?

First, we have to get out of the passivity syndrome! Creative ways must be explored, tested, and implemented to save the foundation and theoretical base of academic librarianship. Priorities and

values should be revisited. Technology offers the capacity to improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of library work. The information technology that forms the infrastructure of the modern library must support the work we are doing now and in the future; it must also help us learn and grow and change in line with user demands. Undoubtedly, there will be profound cultural and moral issues in question as a library restructures itself by involving technology to increase efficiency and effectiveness. We should work smarter and stop doing things that are no longer as important as they were a decade ago. For some inexplicable reasons, learning to stop doing things that have always been done is difficult for librarians. Library management should give the staff the flexibility to perform one's job more effectively; for example, self-managed teams should be encouraged. Furthermore, libraries should embrace more calculated risks.

Academic librarians must be supported in research-oriented endeavors. Released time, funds to pursue research projects, appropriate workstation/software capacity, recognition for innovation, and more efficient organizational constructs for decision-making are a few examples of ways to encourage and foster research and discovery. Creative leadership translates concerns into reconstruction of this important area. A compelling commitment to intellectual aspects will be the key element in determining the future direction of this worthy profession. The right vision for academic librarianship transcends the status quo and it bridges the present with the future.

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Notes

1. F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Crack-up," in *American Literary Masters*, vol. 2, Charles R. Anderson, ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 1007.