

Reactions to "Defining the Academic Librarian"

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REACTION FROM IRENE B. HOADLEY

There are many specific points on which I could agree or disagree as far as Dean Holley's comments are concerned. However, there are many pitfalls to that avenue. Rather than get into a "my opinion" or "your opinion" situation, a somewhat different tact seems in order. Therefore what I want to do is

1. Counter Dean Holley's basic assumption;

2. Present my concept of what an academic librarian is (primarily in terms of a large university situation).

Dean Holley's basic assumption is that a general background is utmost in the needs of an academic librarian. He states that it is important "to know the social, economic, and political context in which the library operates" and I agree that knowledge of these contexts does make a more effective librarian. But this knowledge is not as high a priority as knowledge of one's discipline. These contexts are not as important as leadership in being effective. And in my opinion, there is no way they can be a significant part of a one-year curriculum.

Let me, then, suggest what academic li-

brarians should be—not necessarily what they are. My definition will be in terms of the aggregate, not in specifics.

My definition begins with the environment in which the library exists. It is characterized by three factors:

- change
- technology
- tradition

1. *Change*. In my career, change has come almost full circle. It has moved from fully independent to somewhat centralized and now back toward independent. I feel I will be around long enough to see us go back to centralized. This might be termed the "Ring around the rosy" concept of library organization.

There has also been change in terms of new services—i.e., bibliographic instruction. And there are new roles for the library. In some instances libraries are information creators and not just information keepers. The security of a stabilized environment has disappeared as libraries are caught up in making things happen rather than letting them happen.

2. *Technology*. All librarians are aware of what technology has done to libraries. Machines are almost as much a part of li-

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barians as are books. Technology issues such as

- access versus ownership
- database searching
- online catalogs
- OCLC/RLIN debate
- laser disks

are a part of our everyday lives.

These are all an integral part of library operations today. Heaven forbid that someone would take away our automated circulation systems or word processors. It would be like removing the books from the shelves.

3. *Tradition.* On the other side, tradition is as prevalent as is technology and innovation. Libraries continue to provide all of the time honored services (even if some are provided in distinctly different ways). These include

- reference service
- reserve operations
- acquisitions
- cataloging

Academic libraries are also part of one of the most conservative institutions around—higher education. This is where what Dean Holley says is accurate, but not in the degree he claims. If you cannot manage change and technology, and if you do not know libraries, knowing the environment will not be enough to carry the day.

There is one more piece of background that is needed before defining the academic librarian, and that is a definition of the academic library. My definition is fairly specific. It is defined as having the following characteristics:

- availability of traditional library functions centered around print materials;
- provision of most functions in an automated format with both local and national online access to data;
- the assumption of an information transfer role within the university;
- an emphasis of information service and aggressive outreach functions;
- networks and cooperative arrangements serving as backup support; and
- completion of retrospective conversion and closing of the card catalog.

Basically, the library maintains traditional service but in an highly automated environment.

This is what the library should be today.

Knowing the environment and what the library is like, it is now time to define what it is that the academic librarian does. But since this is readily apparent to everyone, the type of person who is needed to fulfill a role in the library that has been described will be provided instead. That person is one who

- can think and reason;
- has the ability to communicate—both in writing and orally;
- has good interpersonal skills;
- has the ability to function in an automated environment;
- has research capabilities;
- has basic knowledge of library operations and principles.

And what is it this person is doing? This person is

- dealing with automated systems;
- involved in information planning and management;
- utilizing database systems;
- dealing in organizational change;
- involved in human resource planning, recruitment, training, and development;
- involved in legal relationships and issues;
- managing library resources;
- doing research;
- organizing collections;
- using reference sources.

This is basically what an academic librarian is. It is someone (on many different levels) who molds and manages organizations or parts of organizations to respond to the gradual obsolescence of existing technologies.

What has been said is not really in conflict with Dean Holley's basic assumptions, but it goes beyond it. It is a matter of priorities and perspectives. His perspectives might be likened to the person who still only listens to the "oldies but goodies" and who has failed to realize that "rock" in all its variations is here to stay.

His definition of the academic librarian is a limited one. It is relevant but not significant. His definition ignores the fact that academic librarians are basically managers

- of people

- of materials
- of facilities
- of users

And to a lesser degree that they are

- politicians
- lawyers
- arbitrators
- financiers
- counselors

and much more

And where does this leave us? It leaves us where librarians have always been—in a quandary. Librarians have spent considerable time over the years trying to determine who we are and what we are. Why else would the four of us be addressing this topic today and why would all of you be listening to what we have to say? Issues such as the composition of the library school curriculum continue to be debated because it has to do with who we are. It is difficult to educate people for a profession which is still in search of itself.

Dean Holley concludes by saying

- that a M.L.S. makes a librarian;
- that additional education beyond the M.L.S. is critical;
- that librarians must make contributions to learning and scholarship.

If three of three are required, I have personally failed as a professional. I have met the first two criteria, but I do not feel I have made a contribution to learning and scholarship and probably never will although I have made other types of contributions. On the other hand, I imagine many have not met those three criteria, nor do many people in any discipline.

Since an ending should not be negative, my suggestion to all of us is to forget about the definition and to go forward with what we are doing. Then Dean Holley, when he writes the definitive history of librarianship, can, with the help of hindsight and our record of accomplishments, tell us what we are. In the meantime we will continue to do what has to be done to provide the information needs of our clientele.

REACTION FROM SHEILA CRETH

I would like to take an approach that complements what Ed Holley has already touched on and also raises some additional issues. In identifying the character-

istics or requirements for defining the academic librarian—for today and the future—I think there are three components that need to be considered: knowledge, skill and ability. Let me define these terms before going any further. *Knowledge* refers to the information that academic librarians should possess, such as knowledge of reference tools, cataloging practices, collection development policies and issues, the publishing industry, management concepts, a subject field, and many, many more topics. *Skill* represents the techniques, the approaches, and the style for translating knowledge into action or practice. For instance, this might be the skill to conduct a reference interview, to interpret cataloging rules in relation to the intellectual content of the material, to evaluate staff performance. *Ability* represents the intangible qualities or characteristics that we bring to the profession; qualities affected by our motivation, integrity, and attitudes. Abilities that academic librarians should possess include flexibility, decisiveness, cooperation, and leadership. In defining the academic librarian, we should assess the requirements and strengths in all three areas in order to determine what is needed to set the pace, provide direction, and mold the future for ourselves and the academic library.

Librarians must be able to establish and maintain a proactive rather than a reactive position within our library organizations and within the academic community. Pressures are building on campuses, particularly on the university campus with which I am most familiar, thereby requiring librarians to redefine the role that they should play in order to best serve the information needs of students and faculty. Specifically, librarians face competition with computing facilities not only for dollars but for a central role in shaping the way research and instruction will be served by computers as they become primary links in providing access to information. Questions we might ask when assessing the strengths of academic librarians in relation to these new needs might include

- Will librarians be sufficiently knowledgeable about automation to contribute not only to library planning but also

to campuswide planning?

- Will they be skilled in communicating the needs of the library and the central role it should play to the academic community?
- Will they have the ability to operate in the political environment, cultivating relationships, avoiding land mines, and developing strategies for garnering support among campus groups for library programs and goals?

Few would deny that the role of librarians and libraries in delivering information services is changing and will continue to do so over the next few decades. Knowledge, skill, and ability traditionally associated with academic librarians will not cease to be important but these areas will need to be redefined, refined, and supplemented if we are to maintain our vitality.

I would like to turn to some specific attributes that currently are needed by academic librarians and will continue to be important in the future. Patricia Battin identified four qualifications as critical for research librarians:¹

1. A first-rate mind with problem solving abilities.
2. A solid undergraduate education (the rigor of the undergraduate education and training is critical, not the subject matter.)
3. Concrete evidence of managerial abilities (even the beginning librarian will have to supervise.)
4. An intellectual commitment to research librarianship.

In a recent article, Allen Veaner, referring to these qualifications, said "No academic librarian anywhere can afford to lack these requirements."²

I recently conducted a research study (to appear in a forthcoming issue of *C&RL*) with Ronald Powell, University of Michigan School of Library Science, in which we sought to identify knowledge needed and possessed by university librarians during the first ten years of their careers. Three hundred and fifty librarians from twenty libraries (randomly selected from members of the Association of Research Libraries) participated in the study. Results of this study indicated that management knowledge needed—specifically

planning, personnel, and training—ranked very high in importance among the 350 respondents, but these areas were ranked very low as knowledge possessed. The same results occurred for automation—high in importance but low in knowledge possessed. In addition, the results indicated that certain knowledge was perceived by these university librarians to be relevant only when associated with certain positions. These knowledge areas included writing skills, systems analysis, program evaluation techniques, and inferential statistics. This result is particularly troubling, because how can any librarian be effective without the ability to think analytically or to write well? How can professionals be effective if they are unable to evaluate services and activities using program evaluation techniques, or to conduct operational studies using statistics? This is a brief summary of the study that we undertook, but it suggests that deficiencies may exist among academic librarians in aspects of knowledge that are important for effective performance and professional leadership.

How do we move forward, remove barriers, and prepare ourselves to create a future that will be dynamic in meeting the needs of the academic community and that will be challenging to us as professionals? I suggest that changes are needed in three areas: library education, library organization, and individual librarians. I would like to discuss briefly each of these areas.

Graduate library schools must be rigorous in selecting students for their programs and they must be rigorous in the content of the program and demands placed on the students. The curriculum should reflect—indeed anticipate—changes in the profession to provide the knowledge, skill and ability required within the library and information profession. Relationships between library school faculty and library organizations should be strengthened so that the faculty can maintain currency in their specializations and practitioners can be more aware of library education. Many librarians who work in institutions that have graduate library school programs are frequently in-

vited to contribute to particular courses through team teaching or by making presentations. It is equally important for the library school faculty to return to libraries to work on projects or activities as a way to strengthen their knowledge of academic libraries.

It is not accurate to place the responsibility for the perceived ills and inadequacies of the profession on the shoulders of the library schools. Library organizations also have a responsibility to contribute to the preparation and development of academic librarians. Library administrators and managers should periodically review how professionals are used in the library—their assignments, roles, and responsibilities. We should ask if we provide opportunities for beginning librarians to use the education that they have received. Do we encourage them to express ideas, to question, to make mistakes? Or do we smother them in bureaucracy and insist on molding them to the traditions with which we are comfortable? Do those of us who are not managers welcome assertive beginning librarians to our departments? Are we open to the ideas and opinions that beginning librarians express? Or do we believe in a "rite of passage" for the new librarian—that the beginning librarians should be seen and not heard?

We must also reexamine the organizational structure within our academic libraries in order to assess communication patterns, access to information, participation in decision making, and the attitudes and behaviors that are encouraged and rewarded. As individuals and collectively, we should welcome new ideas, encourage disagreement over issues, and learn to trust and respect one another. Equally important is our commitment to the continued learning and development of library professionals. The M.L.S. degree cannot be expected to offer all of the knowledge, skill, and ability that academic librarians will need as they begin their careers, much less over a career that may span twenty, thirty, or forty years. This places a considerable responsibility on library administrators and managers to move beyond "lip service" to staff development and put resources into organized programs that sup-

port the growth of the academic librarian. Ignoring this responsibility is a luxury that can no longer be afforded. If we want the academic library to be a resilient and central player in the future of the campus community, we must consider these issues within the the library organization.

Finally, I would like to focus on what I think librarians as individuals should address. We tend to focus on what we think library educators should do for us and what we think administrators or the organization should do for us. But we must take responsibility for our own future. We need to throw off the mantle of passivity wherever it exists. We need to cease seeing ourselves as victims, victims of the public's ignorance; victims of stereotypes. Instead we need to develop a strong professional identity in which we take pride. At an ACRL New England Chapter conference in 1976, Eric Moon outlined what he thought were issues that academic librarians should address over the 1980s—a decade that is quickly coming to a close. One issue that I remember clearly is the need for us to establish our own professional identity and to stop "hooking ourselves to the coattails of faculty." I am not sure that we have achieved an identity with which we are comfortable and proud, in which we do not have to apologize or compare ourselves with another group to achieve recognition. In an article entitled "Why People Really Hate Library Schools," Samuel Rothstein presented the results of research on how librarians feel about themselves, their self-perceptions.³ According to Rothstein, there seems to be little doubt that librarians are strongly affected by the image that they have of themselves or think non-librarians have of them. He goes on to say that our views are mixed. We like libraries, but we have serious doubts about librarianship and librarians. Indeed, we have serious doubts about ourselves, and therefore, about library educators, our institutions and our colleagues. He suggests that our very first lesson in management should be self-management and he exhorts us to give up being so critical of our fellow librarians and of ourselves. He suggests that librarians cultivate a sense of

pride and confidence in themselves and their profession.

Clearly, librarians need to develop new areas of knowledge and skill and enhance those they already possess. We need to achieve a pride and confidence in our profession and ourselves. We need to acquire new abilities and we need to relinquish some old outlooks, attitudes, and behaviors. Without this personal change, organizational change will be severely hampered.

I have tried to present in rather broad brushstrokes a definition of the academic librarian. It may be dangerous to articulate a specific definition for the academic librarian in this rapidly changing profession; it could become a straitjacket for the future. I believe that the best definition of an academic librarian is the individual who meets the needs of today while actively planning for and shaping the future.

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REACTION FROM HERBERT S. WHITE

I find little with which to disagree in the comments by Dean Holley or the two other respondents. Both Irene Hoadley and Sheila Creth stressed that one important quality of academic library administrators was leadership, and I cannot disagree with that. However, I would add another critical requirement; that of courage. Given the blurred and undefined responsibilities that not only exist in academia, but on which the process thrives, a willingness to stake out an area of expertise and then be willing to fight for that area is essential for academic library administrators who seek to avoid benign indifference for themselves and for the library as an organization. That, of course,

is the staking and defending of "turf," and I will have more to say about this later. I would also seek to add one factor to those described by Ed Holley as important to academic faculty in determining the quality of the institution. I would add to his list of critical issues that of adequate parking, and librarians are fortunate in not having to deal with that difficult and perhaps insoluble problem. My comment is, of course, facetious, but the implication is serious. Many of the concerns that surround the negotiation between librarians and their faculty colleagues have nothing to do with academic quality or research issues. They are disguised with these labels, but largely they center on the egos of a group of desperately insecure people who see slights and enemies everywhere.

I am the only one of the three panelists who does not come out of academic library administration, and I therefore assume I carry some responsibility to react to Ed Holley's thoughtful and sobering comments from outside the academic library establishment. It is a responsibility I accept gladly, because many of you already know that my reactions tend to come from somewhere beyond left field in any case. However, I nevertheless have a very close relationship to academic librarianship beyond the educational preparation that our school provides. I sit in the middle of an academic library, and I use academic libraries largely with the same unreasonable preconceptions and biases of my other academician colleagues. However, I can also see some of the problems because I am a librarian. What makes it worse for me, is that I am also a victim by extension of some of the problems that academic librarians face. In their simplistic ignorance about the nuances of libraries and librarianship, my faculty colleagues also dismiss any distinction between library administration and library education, if indeed they accept any need for graduate library education at all.

In any case, your problems become very much my problems on the academic campus when the peer evaluation system, which governs academia, minimizes our research problems and denigrates our discipline, or when our doctoral students are

asked by fellow doctoral students what there could possibly be in this field to warrant a master's degree, let alone a doctorate.

I think it is something of a mistake for us to try so hard to look like people we are not. I have no particular quarrel with the need for a second master's degree or a Ph.D if we decide this is what we need for the tasks to be performed, but not because we think it might impress somebody. It won't in any case. I see some evidence of this attempt in the stockpiling of over-qualified individuals, a concern in academia in general, and in the practice of some major academic libraries with professional staffs of sixty or more of hiring only individuals with experience, and then even bragging about this monstrous misuse of people and resources. Larger libraries in particular have mundane little professional jobs; if anyone can argue for the need for prior experience for all professionals, it is perhaps the small college library and not the major research library.

It is difficult to establish our own area of expertise in a community of snobs who are at the same time desperately insecure snobs, but the computer and systems people have succeeded in doing it. More importantly, we are also captives of a value system which operates increasingly on the basis of self-validation, and without much relevance. The Ladd and Lipset studies have told us that the image of serious academic research to find facts is largely a mirage even in major institutions, and the search for large bodies of information is confined to a very small part of the faculty. The others are looking for proofs for decisions already reached, and most definitely not for information that contradicts their conclusions. There appears to be an inconsistency in our belief that faculty care deeply about students learning how to use libraries, when at least a good many of them still send them in after assignments for which they have made no prior arrangements. Finally, the development of computer-based information access and document delivery systems not only broadens our ability to obtain both bibliographic and document delivery but also decentralizes this process. As I am sure

you already know, faculty don't have to wait for us to finish cataloging a book to learn it exists.

All of these issues cause a number of problems for you, and therefore also for me.

1. We and the faculty still look at an emphasis on the size of collection as the value of the library. I know that the ranking formula now encompasses other factors such as size of staff, but it still doesn't include fill rates and response times, and certainly not anticipation of need. The emphasis on collection becomes, as I need not tell you, an overriding priority which tends to destroy all other priorities in its path. Robert Munn described the perception of the academic library materials budget as a bottomless pit,¹ and I have not thought of a better term. As Allen Veaner noted in the May 1985 *College & Research Libraries*, we haven't done very well in improving the speed of interlibrary loan, but we have done well in convincing our users that they ought to wait patiently.² This doesn't help.

2. The use of the library carries with it a considerable amount of accountability for students but virtually none for faculty. For a fair number, the perception is that of a free bookstore to help offset the rotten salaries. One of the valid criticisms (there were many emotional and invalid ones) of the materials utilization studies carried out by Kent at the University of Pittsburgh was that some of the most significant material in the "library collection" (at least in the library catalog) never make it to the shelves at all, and therefore their use can't be measured.³ A book is ordered at the request of a specific faculty member, it goes to the office of the faculty member immediately after cataloging, and there it remains. Yes, it has to be renewed annually, but that is more of a nuisance than a control. Like all other faculty members, I have such books in my office, and you aren't going to get them back. I have even adopted the standard excuse: "Nobody else could possibly be interested in these." All of this may be relatively harmless if the state legislature can afford it, but it doesn't do anything for our image. Bookstore clerks, or even bookstore man-

agers, are not considered fellow academicians.

3. University administrators have been allowed to abrogate almost entirely their own responsibility for the governance of the library. I once posed this question to a group of theological seminary presidents in a workshop on the role of the academic library: "If the library director is somehow able to stay within budget and to keep the faculty from complaining to you, will you settle for that, or do you have other expectations?" Theologians are perhaps more honest people who hope to get to heaven, and they agreed they would gladly settle for this, although they also agreed, a little more reluctantly, that this also constituted a total abdication of their own role and responsibility as chief executive officers of their institutions.

It should seem clear that academic libraries and library schools share a very battered and leaky boat. We share a professional identity, we share a building, and many faculty can't tell us apart. At Indiana we are a large library school, but a tiny part of the university. My concern is visibility. Your institution is certainly visible, your concern is professional relevance—not for the library, but for the librarians. We fight for our unique identity on the campus and for our unique expertise as you must fight for yours. Ours is a professional degree program—like the schools of business, public administration, and music. Nobody really understands what these programs do, but they accept that. They must also understand and accept their own ignorance of what we are and do and not be allowed to operate on the basis of their preconceptions, particularly since many of these are inaccurate.

Some of this requires a greater involvement in the collegium of the university, and I know that Ed Holley has been active and visible on his campus. I was a little amused at one section of our recent Committee on Accreditation site visit team report that stated that university administrators saw me taking an active role in university-wide issues. That roughly translates to mean that I stick my nose into everybody else's business—in part be-

cause that is my nature, in part because it is my business to help decide university priorities, and in part because library education needs academic campus visibility. So do libraries, and it disturbs me when I find that librarians with faculty status have no opinions to express except on issues which affect the library. Why not also on student health fees, or concerns about misuse of the pass-fail system, or the relationship between academics and athletics? Your opinions on these issues are as important and certainly as informed.

Virtually everything I now deal with in my classroom work, in my continuing education seminars, in my writing, and in my talks, concerns assertiveness training. It is fairly clear to me that the issue of professional respect must begin with self-respect. I see a huge problem with that issue—and in part it is something that Ed Holley has already alluded to.

I mean no disrespect to my academic colleagues. After all, I am a professor just like them. However, I understand something about their strengths and weaknesses. My two next-door neighbors, on a cul-de-sac that is populated entirely with Indiana University academicians, are one professor of Ethno-musicography and one of Uralic and Altaic Studies. Both are world renowned experts in their own discipline, about which they know a great deal. They know very little about other disciplines, because the rigor and specialization of academic preparation demands such narrowness. I am happy to grant that I know nothing about their fields, and indeed they would not take kindly to my claiming such a knowledge. At the same time, I also have an area of expertise, and they know as little about my area as I know about theirs. I have managed to make that point successfully to my neighbors, but our campus and your campus still teem with academicians who erroneously believe they know something about our profession, and who sit on library committees that think they are managerial instead of advisory. Until we correct that impression, until we establish our expertise and our turf as successfully as computer professionals have most recently done (they give the faculty the option of

either trusting them or studying under them), we will earn little respect. Our research proposals will continue to be regarded as insignificant by individuals who don't understand and don't know that they don't understand. Our doctoral students will still be embarrassed by other doctoral students, who don't comprehend what they could possibly be studying. It is difficult to understand how faculty balance their insistence that librarians hold a doctorate with the lack of appreciation of the substance of our doctorate. That is, of course, illogical and inconsistent, and you have to tell them that. I can't visit every campus.

It is not an easy battle, but is an absolutely essential one. Perhaps it can't be won at all, and there will in any case be casualties, as there are in any war. And yet, just occasionally, there are victories. Gail Peck, one of our own Indiana SLIS doctoral students, was this year's top winner of the campuswide Jonathan Edwards competition, the most prestigious doctoral student award. To put it most simply, she is the top doctoral student at Indiana University and in the field of library science. That takes a while to sink in. But that is how we must start, and you can be sure I mention that honor every chance I get. Perhaps my colleagues still don't understand or call it an aberration, but they remember. I don't really disagree with any of Ed Holley's injunctions, but I would suggest that the primary responsibility for academic library administrators is the proper administration of academic libraries, because faculty certainly don't have that capability. The environment for libraries is changing, as the environment for research is changing. Academicians will occasionally admit that in conferences, but they will resist the specific

changes they admit in principle are necessary, and they will most specifically resist them with regard to academic libraries if that impacts what they find comfortable.

I know I angered some of my colleagues who were kind enough to invite me to participate in an Association of Research Libraries meeting discussion, but as I looked at academic libraries and compared them with the special libraries I know well and the public libraries I know far less well, I concluded that in academic libraries there have been technological changes, but virtually no philosophical ones. We now use technology to do what we used to do manually, and that is an improvement. However, we haven't examined any of the premises of the information gathering, analysis, and dissemination process. Until that happens, the changes continue to be cosmetic. Irene Hoadley and I may differ in our assessment not of what needs to happen, but of how much of it has happened and is happening. I am not content at the rate of change, but patience has never been my long suit. Impatience is not generally considered a virtue, but perhaps in this instance our profession may be a little too virtuous. I think it is high time we dragged our academic faculty colleagues into what for some libraries are the 1970s. After a while, we might even dare to introduce them to the 1980s.

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