
Letters

Eastern exposure

To the editor:

I read with great interest the article about visiting libraries in Eastern Europe (*C&RL News*, July/August 1990, pp. 616–20), since my own travel plans included an August visit to Prague. I wrote to both the State Library of Czechoslovakia and to the Strahov Monastery Library.

When my companions and I arrived at the Klementinum, we found that my letter had been received and we were offered a tour of the Jesuit College Library by Miroslav Stoje and Viera Suchankova. Dr. Stoje is the head of the foreign studies department of the library and Dr. Suchankova had spent two years in the United States at the Embassy in Washington. Both spoke excellent English.

We entered through a huge bronze door to find a beautiful example of a Baroque library that includes an impressive collection of antique clocks. This library has no electrical power or heat. When I asked Dr. Stoje about preservation efforts for the collection, he told me that the library administration had been advised that for the time being it should continue to keep the library closed. He gave each of us a booklet containing examples of illustrations from illuminated books that are in the collection. We felt very fortunate for the opportunity to enter this wonderful library.

At the Strahov Monastery Library we were greeted by Vladimir Zavodsky, who gave us the unique opportunity to look at a volume by Copernicus. We also signed the library's guest book and received gifts of a facsimile book describing the discovery of America by Amerigo Vespucci, the first Czech book to mention the New World.

I agree with your statement that only a year ago, it would have been unlikely that western librarians would have been admitted to these libraries. I also think that in the near future so many western librarians will want to visit these libraries, that the special and gracious tours that were given to us will not be available.—*Susan Anderson, Director of Libraries, St. Petersburg Junior College, St. Petersburg, Florida.*

First impressions

To the editor:

The article by Goldberg and Womack, "Academic Applicants: Make a Good First Impression" (*C&RL News*, September 1990, pp. 701–705), opens up the issue of the purpose and use of references in the personnel selection process. Human resources and legal literature has focused

on this topic, much of it exploring the dangers involved in providing a negative or prejudicial reference. Discrimination in hiring as a result of these references has served as the basis for legal action against the institution or individual responding to the reference request. On the other hand, references that do not disclose a potentially damaging character flaw in the individual (incident of theft, physical assault) have been used in wrongful hiring cases against the respondent. As a consequence, most individuals and agencies are reluctant to provide anything other than a bland letter of reference.

Another issue that was overlooked in the article is that of the applicant's right to privacy. The authors indicate that the search process is long and may involve many reductions in the applicant pool. Do the authors really believe that applicants for a professional position want their current employers to know about their job search? And, since these employers best know the candidates' skills, what effect would the *exclusion* of these supervisors from the list of references have on the perception of the screening committee?

While it is true that the majority of personnel advertisements in *C&RL News* require references (only 11 of 80 did not), only eight asked for letters of reference at the beginning of the process. Perhaps ACRL can sponsor more programs or discussion of the hiring process to ensure a system of fairness, equity, and responsiveness to the needs of employees and employers alike.—*Arthur L. Friedman, Chair of the Library, Nassau Community College, Garden City, New York.*

Spurious precision

To the editor:

In the April 1990 issue, p. 301, a correspondent took issue with the widespread practice of carrying out a "calculation to a greater number of decimal points than is justified by the experimental accuracy." He might have added that in the social sciences—or at least in soft paradigm studies—the corollary is the calculation and publication of numbers to more places than is justified by the research design or by the data on which the calculations are based. Indeed, some astonishingly messy data can be touched with the healing hand of numericity. In either case the intended result is apparently to cast the rosy glow of science over the work; thus, surplus decimal places are often labeled "spurious precision." While spuriously precise decimalization can dazzle the unaware, its presence in papers tends to diminish authorial credibility with informed readers.—*Henry Grunder, Williamsburg, Virginia.* ■ ■