

# COLLEGE & RESEARCH LIBRARIES NEWS

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## Faculty Participation in Library Automation Planning

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In early 1981, the University of Cincinnati libraries began a planning study of options to current manual record systems, specifically the card catalogs and acquisition, circulation, and binding files. The planning study had two equally important foci: a Final Report and the process for preparing it. These foci recognized the fact that the five library jurisdictions potentially serve all 50,000 university members. Any major changes contemplated by the libraries are of greatest interest and concern to that community.

The Final Report would make recommendations to top university administrators about steps to take in the 1980s to automate library record systems. The process was to provide maximum practicable participation by the libraries' constituencies—faculty, students, library staff, university staff, and non-campus users—in discussions and decision-making prior to issuing the Final Report. Achieving both goals, it was felt, would mean submittal of recommendations that reflected consensus between constituents and library automation planners about the future of library record systems. In an era of divisive influences on campus, such as budget cuts and shrinking mobility, it was important that planning for library automation be visible, widespread, and participatory.

By March, administrative groundwork had been completed with issuance of an Overview paper, disseminated among administrators, faculty, and library staff, concerning the study's goals, assumptions, timetable, methodology, and deliverable products. It was time to turn to a full-fledged inquiry into our constituents' opinions about 1) the degree to which the record systems met instructional and research needs; and 2) ranking future improvements to those systems. The user opinion survey

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was selected as a brief, convenient device that could be designed and distributed to faculty and students before the end of the school year in early June.

The survey was viewed as a method for obtaining necessary administrative information, not as a research project. Following a brief literature search that revealed no exact models, we turned to a library staff member who was also pursuing a doctoral program in statistics for sample methodology; simultaneously, an ad hoc library committee worked with the automation team to design a survey instrument. Over 4,500 surveys were sent out and nearly 1,300 returned. This article focuses on the findings from the academic faculty.

One hundred per cent of the full-time faculty and fifty per cent (134) of the guest lecturers of the Evening College received surveys. Of 1,109 surveys sent, 436 or 39.3% were returned. The statistical computer package SPSS was used to analyze returns, noting especially collegial differences from the entire faculty. Since some colleges and divisions had low return rates, their differences from the overall faculty group were considered less representative than those from colleges and divisions with high return rates, defined as greater than 33%. Those "high return rate" colleges and divisions were: Arts and Sciences (A&S) 57%, College Conservatory of Music (CCM) 37%, Education 52%, Engineering 58%, and Business Administration 43%.

Highlights show:

- The most frequent use of UC libraries by faculty is for their own research (66%), followed by classroom-related research (31%).
- Periodical record systems were rated unexpectedly high by faculty, as determined by answers to four questions. Overall, about three-fourths always or often find what they need to know. About 10% checked "never" or "sometimes"; however, Education felt less successful with 30% and 54% checking those lower-rated categories on two questions. Similarly, 51% of Business Administration respondents checked those categories on one question.
- Card catalog use was generally rated easy or effective by two-thirds or more. Three questions addressed this issue. While 27% found the card catalog very easy to use, 46% of A&S selected that category, thus pulling up the group average due to its high proportion (45%) of the entire group.
- The most frequently chosen way to use the card catalog is by author (62%), with subject used nearly half as much. However, 60% of Business Administration and 24% of A&S selected subject as a first choice: the converse is that 74% of A&S selected author first, as did 72% of CCM. Series access was in last place for everyone at about 5%.
- Circulation came in for better marks than librarians expected, as measured by three ques-

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tions. Only one-fourth of the 436 faculty rated the process of filling out cards to borrow materials as poor or nearly poor. However, 40% of Business Administration selected those categories, as did 37% of Design, Architecture and Art (DAA).

- If UC automates library record systems, the first-ranked choices were card catalog (43%), followed by circulation (37%) and periodicals (27%).

- Decentralized access to a common computer database was considered very valuable by one-third of the faculty respondents; 4% considered it of no value. However, 55% of DAA rated it very valuable—that college is remotely located on the main UC campus.

- One-third of the faculty have had experience with computer systems in libraries. That per cent is doubled for Business Administration.

- Open-ended Question 17 produced nearly 250 suggestions from 163 persons:

- Increase collections (63 comments);

- College and departmental libraries (e.g., need better facilities; locations; security; general satisfaction with) (26 comments);

- Processing materials (acquisitions, cataloging, binding, how to speed up the process) (26);

- Circulation (e.g., improve efficiency; policies regarding journal circulation; loan periods; staff) (20);

- Staff (complimentary, 9; some suggestions, 7) (16);

- Automation (e.g., favorable; have more commercial databases; have printouts of text) (12);

- Physical environment (e.g., buzzing lights) (10);

- Periodicals (better access needed) (8);

- Keeping stacks in order (6);

- Reserve room operations (e.g., want more convenient way to place items on reserve) (6);

- Library hours (5);

- Faculty studies (e.g., need more; air conditioning poor) (5); and

- Patron education (5).

In summary, the faculty opinions clearly surprised librarians who had expected much worse marks for the set of files that comprise periodical control, for the process of filling out lengthy data when charging out materials, and for the card catalog.

What did it all mean?

1. UC has breathing room to carefully acquire an integrated set of systems that will ultimately be a full, online union catalog for all materials, all media. We compared the faculty's preferred sequence of automating the catalog, circulation, and periodical systems with the state-of-the-art and concluded that a circulation-plus-partial-search system (i.e., search by author, title, subject heading, and call number) was the first step that should be taken toward that full, online catalog.

2. Faculty do want to be able to query a UC-wide catalog from terminals scattered around campus, saving time.

3. Faculty are not "anti-automation." From 436

returns, only four comments were made that were critical of automating library record systems.

Findings and conclusions from the user opinion survey were instrumental in deriving the Final Report's recommendations to 1) provide better services more economically through the adoption of automated library record systems and 2) employ scarce resources more effectively through use of management information provided by those systems starting with acquisition of a circulation-plus-partial-search system.

With the user survey's findings in hand, library management confidently made recommendations to top university administrators based, among other things, on opinions from a significant portion of the faculty about the future of library record systems. The survey provided invaluable information for library administrators and for the planning study team because it suggested the community environment in which the acquisition and operation of library systems will take place. Participation in planning library automation is valued by library managers, automation planners, and faculty—the user opinion survey is one tool for securing that participation. ■■

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