

Recruiting the best and the brightest

By Anne K. Beaubien

We must act now to ensure the strength of our profession

Imagine the qualifications of the ideal "information czar" on every campus in the year 2001: someone whose credentials combine liberal arts, computer science, and information studies. Where are we going to find one such person, let alone several thousand, if we do not make a conscious and consistent effort to recruit today?

And the problem is not limited to the future; it is with us now. Ask any academic library personnel officer about the available pool of candidates with (a) science or social science degrees, (b) both spoken and written fluency in any foreign language, or (c) first-hand knowledge of the struggles and aspirations of minorities in our culture.

We must address these shortages without delay. I have chosen recruitment to the profession as my presidential theme as a way of increasing the variety of talents and backgrounds of those entering the field of library and information science. ACRL has initiated a number of activities in this area. Be sure to attend the ACRL President's Program in San Francisco to hear about the positive effect we've had on the profile of librarians in career guidance materials. Details about these activities and about our efforts in minority recruitment will be covered in ACRL's annual report.



Anne Beaubien

Three forces are battering our field right now, forces which will only become harsher in the future. These forces are not new—funding, technology, and access—but if we keep them firmly in mind, we will be better able to spot people with the strength and ingenuity to turn troubles into opportunities. Those are precisely the individuals we should urge to enter the profession.

Funding

As government appropriations falter, tuition dollars decrease, research grants shrink, and investment income declines, colleges and universities of all sizes have difficulty maintaining even their most basic assets. Intensifying these strains for academic libraries are the falling exchange rate, madly increasing serials prices, and the wide range of physical formats to be acquired. Even in relatively flush periods, budget officers are more likely to allocate money for plant expansion and renovation than for less visible, yet equally urgent, projects like collection conservation and development.

Decisions in this environment are never easy and often amount to a tough choice between people (staff) and things (books) with service caught in the middle. Resource sharing must go far beyond interlibrary loan to become an acquisitions principle. Collection managers can no longer determine what to buy based on the institution's mission, but must justify what not to buy based on cooperative arrangements with other institutions. Now that printed indexes are searchable in electronic form and whole documents can be retrieved from full-text databases, we must think again about ownership, delivery, access, and perhaps the most touchy issue of all, fees.

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Freedom of information is never free information. The first phrase is a philosophical position, the second is an economic reality. Arguments against charging fees are many but they all end in a debate about who should subsidize the cost of making information available and whether subsidies should be borne directly by users or indirectly by the library, parent institution, or government. Issues complicating the debate include the definition of primary clientele, the distinctions between basic and special services, and determining the cost-per-use of resources, especially when staff intervention is necessary.

Technology

Microchips are to the late 20th century what movable type was to the late 15th: the means of disseminating knowledge and ideas quickly to a large audience. Five hundred years ago people only needed to be literate and able to afford printed books to benefit from Gutenberg's breakthrough. In addition to those criteria, today's consumers must understand how to operate all sorts of machines that process or communicate information, from telephones and photocopiers to calculators and computers.

The same "gadgets" that make information easier and faster to identify, obtain, reconfigure, and share also require an immense investment in both capital and highly educated labor. Furthermore, conditions are never stable. No sooner do educators, business leaders, and governments adopt one innovation—overnight mail delivery, for instance—than another technology such as facsimile transmission comes along to compete with or supplant it.

Information providers, especially in the public sector, are always caught—not between a rock and a hard place, since nothing remains stationary for long—but between an ever-higher tide of information and a flash flood of demand. The technology we use to control the former and satisfy the latter is often obsolete before we master it.

Even more trying than the need for continual equipment upgrades and staff retraining are the increasing, and increasingly opposed, expectations of library users. Some want us to teach them everything so they can be self-sufficient, while others insist we instantly provide complete documents to their desks. The possible, however costly, becomes the required. Because technology speeds information flow, people assume time is saved when in fact more

and more of it is spent on planning, implementation, and explanation.

Access

The last member of the triumvirate of concerns on my mind is access to recorded information. Funding and technology obviously influence access, but so do old-fashioned factors like professionalism, marketing, and commitment to excellent service.

I often hear that our role is changing, that librarians are no longer getters, markers, and keepers of information. Instead we are supposed to be "information specialists," trained to discover and produce information on demand and often to help evaluate and manipulate it as well. I think both these images are wrong. Our role has not changed, our tasks and methods have. Civilization will always need the expertise we bring to the capture, organization, and retrieval of knowledge, whether the means we use is a cardfile or an online database.

The real challenge of access is to appropriately market our collections and services to our current and potential clientele. In higher education "appropriately" implies a constant effort to support teaching, learning, and investigation. We must market our talents as library instructors, research consultants, and all-purpose problem solvers whether our work is selection, acquisitions, cataloging, circulation, reference, preservation, or any other specialty, not the least of which is administration.

Good access is not automatic in libraries. It is based on a desire to serve those who inquire. No policy can produce this desire, although policies can destroy it. Each encounter we have with users is unique, taking the person and the need as a unit. We must respond to this uniqueness as we assist the individual, without either patronizing or preaching. Finding answers and matching users with sources is a fine but ultimately frustrating occupation. Our real goal as academic professionals should be to stimulate thought and further inquiry, which in turn leads to more conversations about access.

So when I think about recruiting, I think about the colleagues I want to work with in the future on these critical issues of funding, technology, and access. I want to be confident that the best people—people with the background, character, education, and experience

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four different ways publishers are dealing with electronic storage and use of journal articles. For a number of years science publishers have been distributing full text without graphics electronically through STN. Because of the loss of important graphics, however, users see such access as a surrogate, not a substitute for the complete article.

Another method of distribution has involved CD-ROM collections of bit-mapped articles from selected journals, an approach employed by UMI. *Adonis* is a document delivery service sold on subscription, employing a similar approach. It is a CD-ROM collection of articles from 360 biomedical journals from 30 different publishers, and the subscription price is about ten percent of the list price of the paper copy of the journals plus a charge for each copy made.

Publishers may also grant permission to other organizations that request electronic access to provide document delivery. Although not many large publishers have yet agreed to provide that access, Elsevier's Hunter thinks that will change. She cited *Uncover 2* as one successful collaboration. Publishers are also usually willing to permit corporate use of the electronic information because they are unlikely to extend access beyond the company to competitors. Some universities, such as Cornell and Carnegie-Mellon, have also succeeded in making experimental arrangements with publishers.

Elsevier is considering another approach. Its *Tulip* (The University Licensing Program) proposal would load the page images of 42 journals in material science onto an Internet server for network distribution to a dozen participating universities. The universities would then be licensed to redistribute the articles throughout their campuses using whatever local system and procedures seemed appropriate to their users. From the publishers' point of view the major issues are not technical, but legal and economic. Such an unbundling of services involves significant risk. A decision is expected later this year.

EBSCO's perspective

Rounding out the program, EBSCO vice-president Tim Collins provided the perspective of a publisher and subscription agent. EBSCO produces *Academic Abstracts*, providing abstracts for 10,000 general reference magazines, as well as serving as a subscription agent for libraries.

Collins thinks the biggest change in the industry has been the phenomenal growth in in-

formation with its implications for publishers, libraries, and researchers. Libraries are looking for ways to control the rising cost of acquiring the incredible surge in published information. Increasingly they are relying on electronically produced abstracts from which patrons select those articles they wish to examine. Those articles are then purchased through a document delivery system, obviating the need to buy, catalog, bind, and shelve paper copies of entire journals.

As more institutions choose to cancel subscriptions and substitute document delivery, publishers are considering how to price their products and services. Their approach, according to Collins, has been more intuitive than scientific. If the publisher of information in electronic form believes that information will be infrequently consulted, he will probably charge a high initial purchase price in order to recover costs. If, however, he believes his product will be consulted very often, he will probably be inclined to provide the product as inexpensively as possible, relying on per-use charges to recover his investment. After setting charges based on intuition, publishers then measure the effect of that pricing policy and revise it as experience dictates. EBSCO has used this approach in marketing hundreds of its CD products.

EBSCO's seminar, attended by approximately 60 librarians, concluded with a brief question and answer period. ■

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to understand these immensely difficult forces—are ready at all levels of our profession to make wise decisions based on fact rather than illusion. I want to confer with people who will see all sides of any problem, who have the creativity and energy to think new thoughts, who can motivate those around them, yet who will accept real constraints and be willing to change their opinions when necessary. Those are my personal reasons for advocating recruitment. I hope you will share them.

This has been an immensely exciting year for me, one I will never forget. As it winds down, I want to thank Althea Jenkins, Cathleen Bourdon, Mary Ellen Davis, Sheila Delacroix, and Margaret Myers and all their very capable staff for unfailing support. The association is in excellent hands, and I am honored to have worked with its staff and with so many members to accomplish our common goals. ■