

Letters

Library Research

To the Editor:

I was happy to see the coverage given to problems in library research in the May, 1980 C&RL. However, several points were not made which should be aired:

1) The assumption that most librarians need to be taught basic research skills is misleading. Many librarians, especially academic librarians, are well-educated and hold several degrees; many of these degrees were awarded after considerable research skills had to be demonstrated. Basing research primarily on previous research may work well for true beginners, as any reference librarian knows, but it is hardly worthwhile advice for the sophisticated researcher. Moreover, this type of research often tends to strengthen, rather than examine, old assumptions, data, priorities and approaches to problems. After decades of being over educated for our positions, librarians ache for an opportunity to prove it, not simply the skill to publish articles worthy of "faculty status."

2) If a librarian is not a member of a university faculty, obviously there's little opportunity, encouragement or reward for doing research. Of all "professionals," surely we work the longest hours, day for day, and suffer the greatest indignity from supervision, accountability, status and intellectual security. We don't get overtime or release time, don't teach 12-16 hours a week, aren't expected to work at home, don't have summers off; in fact, rarely are we expected to read the professional journals, or discuss current professional issues at regular in-house forums. Paid conferences and continuing education are also painfully limited. This sad state of affairs can be directly laid at the feet of library leaders and administrators, who are after all responsible for best using and developing their staff, and for setting standards of professionalism.

3) A minor point: Dr. Magrill, among many others, continues to promote the assumption that library research must concern itself with "information." This approach greatly limits the concept of librarianship, of research priorities, and is attractive mainly because "information" is more quantifiable than, say, education, cultural enlightenment, socialization, change, all of which libraries traffic in. As long as research in libraries concentrates on information processing, our skills, roles and self-images will move closer and closer to those of businessmen, engineers and scientists. And since we are none of those, we will lose touch with our true clientele, with our capabilities (and their limitations), and with the traditions of our greatly misunderstood profession.—Paul B. Wiener, *Special Services Librarian, State University of New York at Stony Brook.*

To the Editor:

That a logical, well-written article such as Mr. Shill's "Open Stacks and Library Performance" (May 1980) should fall short of proving its basic hypotheses, is a telling indicator of the lingering general lack of research capability in the discipline of library science.

A good grasp of the problem and sufficient data were not enough to stimulate any substantive research beyond the level of descriptive statistics, thereby resigning all hypotheses cast to remain as nothing more than untested assumptions. What is Mr. Shill's level of confidence? Which tests for significance did Mr. Shill perform to prove statistically that his columns of figures were or were not related significantly in some way?

The dismissal of increased enrollment as a possibly intervening variable is highly suspect. Indeed, too many likely factors, which could have been correlated with those variables identified for description, were either

mentioned only in passing or summarily ignored.

In conclusion, Mr. Shill's lucid and serious presentation did not complete the task of analyzing the variables associated with closed and open library stacks. Scientific research demands rigorous quantitative testing of all data on which hypotheses are based. Library science is certainly no exception.—*P. Robert Paustian, Collections Librarian, University of Missouri at Kansas City.*

To the Editor:

Sound methodological criticism is essential if library science is to establish itself as a scientific discipline. Unfortunately, Mr. Paustian has misunderstood the statistical basis of "Open Stacks and Library Performance," applied inappropriate criteria for evaluating my research, and arrived at incorrect conclusions as a result.

The crucial flaw in Mr. Paustian's critique is the apparent assumption that my data was drawn from a sample of some larger popula-

tion. If this were the case, significance tests would, of course, be necessary to confirm that the statistical distributions in my tables could not have occurred by chance. However, the data used in this statistical case study are population parameters, not sample statistics. Parameters are fixed values corresponding to the actual characteristics of a population. Significance tests and confidence levels are used to determine whether inferences about population characteristics can legitimately be made from sample statistics. Since no sample has been used and no effort has been made to generalize these findings to a larger population, his objections are irrelevant and invalid.

The type of criticism offered by Mr. Paustian is essential for the development of rigorous research standards in library science. Though his objections must be dismissed in this case, I hope he will continue to offer such criticism. Our research will be better for it in the long run.—*Harold B. Shill, Head Librarian, West Virginia University, Morgantown.*

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