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## BOOK REVIEWS

Conant, Ralph W. *The Conant Report: A Study of the Education of Librarians*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1980. 210p. \$17.50. LC 79-2867. ISBN 0-262-03072-1.

"At last!" This will undoubtedly be the first reaction of many readers to Ralph Conant's long-awaited study of American library education. Planned since 1968, "in process" since 1972, circulated in draft form since 1977, the *Conant Report* must be judged not just on its own merits but also in the light of the hopes and fears and controversies that have been building up about it for more than a decade.

The *Report* had its genesis in the desire of the Advisory Committee of the ALA's Office for Library Education to obtain a "good solid, constructively critical examination of library education [which] . . . might do for library education in the 1980s what the Williamson report had done in the 1920s" (p.vii). For this task the committee wanted a nonlibrarian, who would be "not influenced by the desire to . . . make library education look good" (p.vii) and who would be a qualified researcher. Dr. Conant, an urbanologist who had had considerable involvement with public libraries, was the committee's unanimous choice.

Assisted by a research team and an ALA advisory committee, Conant launched the study in 1972. His group examined fourteen accredited graduate library schools, one nonaccredited graduate school, and one undergraduate program. At each institution, Conant's team conducted "in-depth, open-ended" interviews with all full-time faculty members, the administrative officers, twelve to fifteen students, and two or three recent alumni. Interviews also were conducted with fifteen libraries (representing the "employers of librarians") and with "a selection of leaders in the library profession" (p.6-7). Some additional information was obtained from class visits and tours of the facilities and from the documentation gathered by the Committee on Accreditation.

Since Conant's investigation relied so heavily on interviews, the *Report* reflects

this emphasis. In the very brief first chapter (7½ pages), Conant indicates the "functions and responsibilities of professional education and of library education" and identifies the "issues" that served as focus for the interviews. The next four chapters, which make up three-quarters of the book, give a detailed recounting, with rather little analysis or commentary by Conant, of the views elicited from the four groups interviewed. In chapter 6 ("Reforms"), Conant presents his overall findings and recommendations for change, including a model curriculum. Last, there is a section called "Conclusions and Recommendations," which largely recapitulates chapter 6, and a bibliography and an index.

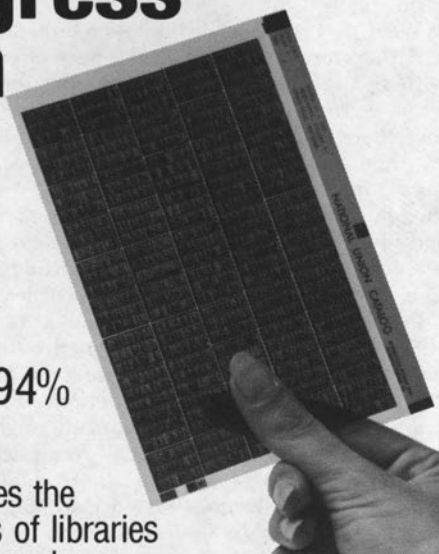
Just what did Conant find out and what does he advocate? Though he has no direct praise for the library schools, his criticisms are not all that severe. Still, they are certainly numerous enough and include the following: failing to separate "professional from subprofessional training"; giving inadequate place to "practical instruction"; insufficient specialization; weakness in research; dull teaching; underdeveloped programs of continuing education; allowing a "damaging gap" (p.195) to exist between the library educators and the working profession; an unchallenging and insufficiently comprehensive curriculum.

By way of remedy for all these deficiencies, Conant relies mainly on an extension of the library school program to encompass about five semesters. "Foundation courses" would be taken in an undergraduate semester; then would follow four semesters of graduate study, the last two of which would give two-fifths time for an internship. He would have a number of schools closed down or converted to "paraprofessional" programs, so "the total number of graduates . . . each year approximates the number of professional positions available" (p.195, Conant's italics). To achieve all this, he would have established a "permanent national forum for library education" that would develop a "national plan." Under this national plan, there would be "a common educational format (curriculum)" for the schools (p.193), an allocation of specializations among them (p.194), and a much more powerful accreditation system (staffed by

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"professional evaluators") that would serve as an "instrument of reform" (p.174-77).

What do I make of all this? As a Canadian and therefore not so likely to be charged with the "self-interest bias" that the foreword warns against (p.viii), I can permit myself some candor. To put matters bluntly, then, I think that the *Conant Report* says some things that are sensible and thought-provoking, too much that is naive and illogical, and is generally so deficient in its research procedure and actual writing as to invoke little confidence in its conclusions.

Conant's criticisms of American library education are actually the easiest part of the *Report* to accept, if only because they are long since familiar to any experienced library educator. Mind you, Conant might well have been more critical about the *validity* of the charges leveled by students, alumni, and employers. But no matter: the body of testimony he has collected on these matters is certainly large enough and consistent enough to make any conscientious library educator give serious consideration to the weaknesses that the testimony points up.

Conant's recommendations—his "reforms"—are much more suspect. Though I agree with him about the advisability of extending the length of the MLS program (after all, the Canadian schools have been on a two-year program since the early 1970s), I find most of his other recommendations quite unrealistic or even ill informed. Given the autonomy of American universities, it does not make much sense to me to even consider imposing a common curriculum on

library schools, or allocating specializations among them, or regulating enrollment in strict accordance with employment opportunities. Similarly, Conant seems to misconstrue the nature and purposes of the accreditation process; he ignores the cost factor in continuing education programs; he forgets that universities are reluctant about accepting advice from "the field." Need I say more?

Admittedly, however, all of the above points are debatable and therefore have some warrant. What is clearly not acceptable, it seems to me, is the poor quality of Conant's research and presentation. To begin with, he never addresses the crucial question of how reliable and representative his data are. For example, are we simply to assume, as Conant appears to do, that his fourteen accredited library schools fairly typify the whole group or that interviews with fifteen employers and thirty-six alumni adequately represent the opinions of employers and alumni generally? Second, Conant's data, which were mostly gathered from 1973 to 1975, obviously are of very doubtful accuracy in portraying the present-day situation, but Conant never deals with this major consideration. Indeed he muddles matters by occasionally fetching in some references to developments in 1979; the reader is thus never sure whether a given description is intended to represent the situation as of 1973-75 or of the present.

Worse still, there are whole areas, very much germane to his enquiry, that Conant did not tackle at all. For example, he is much concerned with paraprofessional train-

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ing but he never examined the library technician training programs, which exist for just that purpose. Conant advocates a two-year program but ignored the experience of the Canadian library schools (accredited by the COA), which have been giving a two-year MLS program for about a decade now. Library schools are professional schools, but Conant never investigated the degree to which the criticisms he heard made of library schools paralleled or differed from those leveled at other professional schools.

Last, I complain strongly about the ineptness or carelessness of the presentation itself. The book is badly misproportioned, with the key first chapter being far too brief to make its point and the interview reports given three times the space they warrant. There are no bibliographical citations whatsoever. The bibliography is so lamentably incomplete (e.g., it does not include Danton's major study on sixth-year programs) as to suggest that Conant was not well informed about previous studies on his subject. The index is simply laughable; for example, there are entries under "graduate library schools" and "gatekeepers of the profession" but none under "library schools" or "librarianship." There are typos aplenty and some outright unintelligibilities. Why, for example, would Conant's model curriculum include—as required courses, no less—such topics as "serial files maintenance" and "reproduction" (p.179)? Even the printer has nodded over this book—there are at least seven instances of text being badly misaligned on the page!

I spoke at the outset of the hopes and fears that attended the publication of the *Conant Report*. My judgment is that neither emotion is warranted by this disappointing study. The Williamson report for the 1980s remains to be written.—*Samuel Rothstein, The University of British Columbia, Vancouver.*

Slater, Margaret. *Career Patterns and the Occupational Image: A Study of the Library/Information Field*. Occasional Publication no.23. London: Aslib, 1979. 334p. UK £18 (£15 Aslib members); overseas £22.50 (£18.75 Aslib members). ISBN 0-85142-122-9.

Margaret Slater has gathered a

tremendous amount of statistical data for this study of the library/information profession in Great Britain. Her goal was to describe career patterns set in the context of the professional image as perceived by employer, librarian, and the general public. To do this she analyzed 307 organization charts and surveyed 1,770 unit heads and 303 members of the profession as well as 100 members of the general public. A less formal evaluation of the public image was gleaned from the media as mirrored in books, films, advertising, and pornography.

A profile of the librarian/information officer in Great Britain emerges from this study. Women predominate in the profession (63 percent were women). The average age was 37.6 and the average length of time in their current job was 5.5 years. Job satisfaction was surprisingly low. Asked if they would choose the same career if they were given a hypothetical second chance, only 47 percent said yes.

The patterns of mobility delineated in the study were representative of the year 1977. Slater found that mobility in the profession was sluggish, with only a 16 percent turnover rate. Curiously, only 45 percent of the libraries surveyed had any turnover at all. Unit heads, asked to conjecture about the reasons for staff departures, identified domestic commitments, the desire for better jobs, and return to school as the primary factors.

Although the image of librarians is a recurring topic for research, Slater fails to compare her findings with many earlier studies on the subject. However stale the topic, her approach is novel and the study reveals some interesting facts. She asked members of the library profession and the general public to place about twenty occupations in rank order from the most important to the least important. Librarians were ranked similarly by the profession and the general public, about twelfth out of the twenty.

Despite this apparent agreement, Slater concludes from her survey and her impressionistic appraisal of the image of librarians in the media that there is a divergence between the profession's self-image and the public's perception of librarians. Librarians view themselves as a people-directed com-