

## Letters

To the Editor:

John Olsgaard's article, "Characteristics of 'Success' among Academic Librarians," [C&RL January 1984] addresses an important question: "what makes the successful librarian different from the unsuccessful librarian?" I read it with interest, hoping for information on the qualities which result in success in our profession; perhaps such traits as organizational ability; an interest in many aspects of the profession besides one's immediate job; a high level of energy; the ability to express oneself well and convince people; the ability to formulate precisely the information needs of others, even though expressed vaguely; high ambition; technical competence for the job; and also more practical matters such as having the time to invest in one's career outside of regular working hours. Which of the above are relevant to what aspect of the profession, and what other qualities are relevant to success?—I hoped to learn. Olsgaard, however, finds that success is composed of very different characteristics, namely:

- preferably being male
- being in one's forties
- living in the North-East or West
- having an MLS, preferably from a highly ranked school (how can one get a professional job without one, let alone be successful in it?)
- having a bachelor's degree (how can one get an MLS without one?)—preferably in the Humanities (what does "preferably" mean here?)
- having published (but only one or two articles).

I have no quarrel with Olsgaard's study; but I hope this is not the way the profession wants to consider success. The above profile may well be true, as far as it goes, but how useful is it? It hardly seems to further us in our search for "measurable standards of success that would guide performance evaluation committees and library school educators," to use Olsgaard's words—or job application evaluation committees, which could also do with some guidelines. If I am evaluating a woman librarian from the Mid-west aged 35, of how much use to me is it to know that the average successful librarian is probably male, ten years older and lives elsewhere?

I am also not very happy with Olsgaard's sampling framework: the list of successful librarians in *Who's Who in Library and Information Services*. I find *Who's Who's* criteria disquieting: they beg the question of what "successful" means. Evidence of active participation in professional organizations; activity in support of libraries and information services; contributions to the literature (per se no indication of an evaluation of their quality)—all these imply successful ≈ visible. What they mainly require is *willingness* and *time*, more than ability. Since a male librarian is a lot more likely than a female to have spare after-work hours (assuming they both have families), then if these are three of the five criteria of success, it follows logically that men have "a greater chance of being successful" than women. Yet we haven't begun to evaluate how good our "successful" librarian is at his or her job.

I would have hoped that past success is judged on solid evidence of ability on the job, *plus contribution* to the profession in general; the guidelines as quoted consider only *participation*. Of course there are many people whose contributions and/or success meet any criteria we may manage to devise. But it is much harder to establish criteria that will distinguish between the successful, the moderately successful, and the marginally successful—which

is often our task in performance evaluation. We have to ask ourselves what we are trying to do, and why. Measure past success, or predict it in the future? Well, perhaps both. But our main reason for analyzing the already successful is surely to aid us in predicting the same potential condition in others. So what we would really like are criteria for future success, for distinguishing the likely-to-be-successful from the less-likely. Which glow-worm will become a star is a problem not addressed by criteria that define success in terms of the number of committees sat on or papers published. It would be potentially more useful to know the type of personality, or personal qualities, that result in a librarian's being successful; I suspect success is the result of traits of character, innate ability at something, and a few wise career choices. The latter are crucial: a successful administrator is not necessarily a successful reference librarian. But then I am judging success as competence on the job, not visibility.

I repeat: I am not disputing Olsgaard's findings, I am arguing against the danger of our accepting that the line of enquiry they represent is really relevant. It seems to me that a more fruitful line of attack is that of Denis and Mackesy in their article "Personality and Professionalism," (*Argus*, 11:63-74, May-Aug. 1982). I agree that this sort of thing is more difficult to do (and a quick review of the literature reveals that librarians don't seem to have been doing very much of it). Meanwhile we need to do some thinking about how we define "success" and why we want to know about it.

JUDITH G. KOREN

Head of Technical Services

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To the Editor:

In reply to Charles McClure's criticism [*C&RL* September 1984] of our research project ["Tenured Librarians in Large University Libraries," *C&RL* March 1984] we wish to reassure readers of this journal that the survey, while by no means perfect, was carried out with thought and care.

When a librarian comes up for tenure at SUNY Buffalo the primary question in the mind of the president is, "Would this librarian receive tenure at comparable institutions?" Thus it was important for us to find out about the subgroup of academic librarians who had already received tenure at large university libraries. As should be clear from the title of the article, we never claimed that the results would be generalizable for all academic librarians.

Every member of the population had an equal opportunity to respond. We encouraged response by assuring anonymity, including stamped preaddressed return envelopes, and making the questionnaire easy to fill out. By assuring anonymity we made it impossible to follow up on non-response, so we ended up with a 52 percent accidental sample of 530 individuals from a total population of 1,026. In simple random sampling, 530 cases is sufficient for a tolerated error rate of 5 percent at a confidence level of 95 percent or a tolerated error of 6 percent at a confidence level of 99 percent. Even though, strictly speaking, we did not have a random sample we felt we were within the bounds of reasonable precision.

We found no reason during the analysis of the data to believe that the half of the population which responded was different in any significant way from the half which did not respond. A cynic might assume that people who had not published would be less likely to respond, however there were only two questions about publishing out of 35. We were willing to have the questionnaire published. Copies are available from the authors.

We did not find any longitudinal data covering individual productivity in the literature. We had an immediate need which we fulfilled by asking the individuals themselves and we felt a responsibility to those individuals to publish our findings. We thought it would be of interest to the profession, for instance, that more people have published articles than have presented papers. In a university setting where professors are evaluated on their ability to get grants, it may be helpful to be able to show that it is very unusual for a librarian to get a grant.

We hope someone else will do a more sophisticated study to update and improve our information about the professional productivity of academic librarians. We learned a great

deal the hard way in carrying out this survey and welcome constructive criticism and instruction for improving our future research efforts.

KAREN F. SMITH

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(for TAMARA U. FROST, AMY LYONS, MARY REICHEL)

To the Editor:

I am not one to carry on a lengthy correspondence through letters to the editor; however, the views of Robert E. Skinner [C&RL May 1984, p.227] represent a serious distortion of my original position, and I feel that I must set the record straight.

At no point did I suggest that "a strong knowledge of algebra" should be required of librarians. On the contrary, I argued that an elementary knowledge of algebra should be expected of all liberally educated people, and elementary algebra was all that was contained in the appendix to Donna Lee Kurkul's article.

I am well aware that students' abilities in mathematics, science, and even reading and comprehension have decreased in recent years. However, the Sputnik issue is a red herring. No one is suggesting that graduate librarians should have backgrounds in trigonometry, calculus, differential equations, and so forth. These are the things that are needed in the space race; however, without rudimentary algebra, librarians cannot even do straightforward studies of the kind Ms. Kurkul was reporting, let alone take advantage of contemporary technology. If librarians, particularly academic librarians, do not have such fundamental knowledge, they invite the contempt of the people whom they serve, particularly those in an academic environment.

Perhaps it was enough in Mr. Skinner's day to equate the liberal arts with the humanities, but today that won't wash. Much to their credit, our students seem to know that, and I have yet to find one who cannot understand the meaning of an expression like "Let  $X = 10$ ."

CHARLES H. DAVIS

Dean, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

To the Editor:

I am more annoyed than offended by Frank Immler's notice of *Special Collections* in Beverly Lynch's review column of "Selected Journals . . ." [C&RL March 1984, p.119-20], which—speaking of delays—arrived the second week in June.

My annoyance stems from Mr. Immler's indifferent and offhanded treatment of the contents of the publication, the expertise of the guest editors, and the authority of every one of the librarians and others who have worked so hard to make their contributions. All of our contributors (except guest editors) are unreimbursed for hours of their time which they have volunteered in order to share their knowledge and collections. It does seem to me that the excellence of reviews in the subject journals of the fields we have covered—Theatre, Biochemistry, Geriatrics & Gerontology, Science/Fiction, Banking & Finance—represents more responsible, considerate, professionally critical and qualitative evaluations of substantive use.

Mr. Immler's sorry cry about schedules indicates that he has certainly not considered the difficulties of trying to manage a publication schedule with over a dozen untrained writers—all of them with prime responsibilities to their jobs. And I am shocked to think that there can be professional librarians who measure costs in relative terms of dollars per page against the substantive content of any worthy publication.

It is not my place to explain nor defend the publisher's policies of issuance nor of pricing. I am not privy to the finances of our publisher. I do know that profits are hardly excessive though, and overhead is managed carefully. There is an acceptable way of looking at publishers critically (it is called "objectively") and when the library press has one who honestly cares about the library profession, we had best start off with some display of appreciation.

LEE ASH

General Editor, *Special Collections*

To the Editor:

Reviewing a serial, even one only four issues old, inevitably leads to generalizations: one looks at organization, purpose, themes, recurring features, whatever patterns a prospective reader or purchaser can expect. One such pattern is production history. That of *Special Collections* struck me as severely damaging to an enterprise which in other ways seemed reasonably attractive, so damaging that I chose to detail this matter rather than to annotate yet another abridged table of contents and contributors list. In doing so, I did not intend to castigate Mr. Ash, though I am of course aware that the staffs of many professional journals suffer the conditions he describes in his letter and still maintain a good production record.

Production problems at *Special Collections* seem larger than simply not making deadlines. Mr. Ash disclaims responsibility for some of the problems mentioned in my review, [C&RL March 1984] and perhaps rightly so. I can only assume, then, that the problems lie with the publisher, Haworth Press. At any rate, the problems remain, and they are serious, in that they undermine the publisher-subscriber relationship.

Here is my view of that relationship from the point of view of "I," a subscriber addressing "you," a publisher. If I subscribe to a quarterly, I expect you to publish it four times a year. If you decide to publish a double issue, I expect it to be roughly the equivalent of two single issues. If you decide to publish three issues of roughly the same size and content (as is the case with *Special Collections*), I expect you either a) to call your journal a tri-something-or-other, or b) to refund a quarter of the subscription price I paid you. If you do not meet my expectations, then I may feel that you have violated the agreement that exists between a subscriber and a publisher that accepts his/her money. Whatever your intentions may have been with your journal, it should not surprise you that, upon surveying the results and feeling exploited, I think it important to communicate my misgivings to my friends and colleagues.

FRANK IMMLER

Principal Bibliographer, University of Illinois at Chicago

IN FORTHCOMING ISSUES OF  
COLLEGE & RESEARCH LIBRARIES

*The Knowledge Business: Economic Issues of Access to Bibliographic Information*  
by Carlton Rochell

*A Proposed Method for Reducing Periodical Subscription Lists*  
by Robert N. Broadus

*Journal Subscription Acquisitions: The View from the Library*  
by Stephen J. Bensman

*Ratings of Journals by ARL Library Directors and Deans of Library and Information Science Schools*  
by David F. Kohl and Charles H. Davis

*Selected Reference Books of 1983-84*  
by Eugene P. Sheehy

*Selecting Rare Books for Physical Conservation: A Model for Decision Making*  
by Lisa B. Williams

*Using a Microfiche Holdings List to Access and Retrieve Periodicals and Serials: A Study of Student Success*  
by Paul T. Adalian Jr., Ilene F. Rockman, and Ernie Rodie