

Letters

To the Editor:

On reading your editorial on library superstars (July 1988) my first thought was: what a pain in the butt a lot of them must be to work with. I wonder how many superstars are compensating with supererogation because certain qualities are lacking or are seriously flawed in their personality—such as an ability to get along with their staff. I wonder if you took a survey of their co-workers—both peers and supervisees—what would be the *candid*, the honest response?

In my own limited observation I've noticed that people who excel in their work from the perspective of their patron or supervisor may do so at the expense of social and other skills. I suggest somebody often pays for the superstar performance and I suggest it may be (among others) the supervisees.

Superstars do not operate in a vacuum. Without the rest of the library staff their efforts are of minor consequence. Yet I think that they gain some of their "superstardom" by driving—not necessarily pleasantly—those around them. The star gets the glory and the crew gets the shaft (something of a paraphrase from the movie *Patton*).

Finally, some focus ought to be put upon those librarians who deal humanely and decently with their staff—superstars in human relationships who otherwise may be average librarians. Don't they belong on your list?

Of course, I'm not suggesting any of the "superstars" that you mention fit into the negative characterizing I've outlined above.

What price excellence?

STEPHEN WALKER
Warrensburg, Missouri

To the Editor:

The November 1987, issue of *College & Research Libraries* included an article titled "Librarians and Faculty Members: Coping with Pressures to Publish." The premise of the article is that both librarians and faculty members have time to write and publish if they manage to find one-half hour per day for this purpose. I was alarmed by the premise for two reasons. First, adding a writing requirement to present librarian assignments could cause library service to deteriorate, both because less time would be available for usual duties and because the added pressure to fulfill this requirement might impel many librarians to move to other libraries or to other professions where the pay is higher and the stress is less. Second, if librarians are forced to write articles without adequate time for research and reflection, the quality of library literature will deteriorate.

The authors' research raised several questions in my mind which were not answered in the article. First, on what basis did they select the sample of librarians? All but one of the librarians in the sample worked in public services, all had tenure, and none had heavy supervisory responsibilities. What percentage of academic librarians meets these criteria? Perhaps this library is unusual, but, of nineteen librarians here, none matches the sample studied in the article. Did the authors intend to imply that only librarians who met these criteria would be likely to find currently uncommitted time during working hours? Or should readers assume that the authors' conclusion that librarians have adequate time to write applies to all librarians, including those in technical services, those with supervisory

responsibilities, and junior librarians who are already finding it difficult to fulfill the requirements for tenure?

The authors' conclusions were based on self-report sheets by the sample of librarians and faculty members on the activities of their positions, the length of their work weeks, and the intensity and enjoyment of their work. These were supplemented by weekly visits of 10-20 minutes each by one of the authors.

The study was conducted during an academic year. Presumably it did not take into account the four-month break during the summer which most faculty members get every year and which is not available to librarians in most institutions. Faculty members at this university have a total of twenty-one weeks of leave plus four scattered paid holidays every year compared to the librarians' four or five weeks of annual leave (depending on the length of service) plus ten scattered holidays. Faculty members could, if they wished, take the same amount of vacation time as librarians and be left with fifteen or more weeks for research and writing without having to do any of it during the academic year. This is almost as much time every year as a librarian has available every six years if a sabbatical leave is granted.

According to the text of the article, the faculty sample reported an overall mean of 23.5 hours on campus to which must be added the work done at home. The authors conclude, after analyzing the desk duties and other fixed assignments of the reference librarians, that "the resultant patterns of at least 25- to 28-hour workweeks for these librarians resemble the on-campus workweeks of traditional faculty depicted in figure 1." Figure 1 appears just above this statement and shows the librarians' on-campus work week ranging from 17 to 42 hours but seeming to average above 35 hours per week. The faculty range is from 15 to 20 hours and appears to average about 18. In an article which tries to prove that one-half hour per day, or 2½ hours per week, is ample time for writing and publication, even if the text and figure 1 agreed, the two patterns cannot be said to resemble each other.

Are the faculty and librarian fixed work weeks similar? Our reference librarians are

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
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scheduled to be on the desk 18–20 hours per week. Most of the time this is a very stressful activity. If, on occasion, there is a five-minute break, they probably need it just to let the adrenaline level subside. As the article reports, reference librarians also spend several hours per week in teaching activities and they design and conduct online searches. All of these services are at the convenience of the users, not the librarians; in other words, most of the work-week schedule is out of the librarians' control and any lull in these activities cannot be foreseen.

In contrast, although most faculty members undoubtedly work a full work week, their fixed schedule is limited to 9 hours in class and 6 hours of office time. Some of the six hours in the office could be used for research and writing if there are no scheduled appointments. Many faculty members also serve on university committees with scheduled meeting times, although few committees meet every week.

Our faculty manual states that faculty members are expected to be on campus four, not five, days per week. If faculty members can arrange to work at home at least one day per week, they save the approximately two hours normally spent in getting ready for and commuting to and from work. This is almost as much time each week as a librarian would gain if it is indeed possible to generate a 30-minute block of time each day. (The authors did not explicitly state that they found a single 30-minute block of uncommitted time during the librarians' work days, but this is implied since 30 minutes broken into several short segments would be difficult to use productively.)

The authors asked the sample groups to analyze their intensity and enjoyment and compared it with an observer's analysis. On what basis did the observer determine that a librarian who rated his or her intensity as a 10 only merited a 3 or that another librarian who rated his or her enjoyment as a 3 deserved a rating of 7? The only clue in the article is that some librarians overrate their intensity and those who are burned out rank themselves low in enjoyment. Isn't the intensity level a measure of the stress one is conscious of rather than of the activity level observed by someone else? Is someone who is burned out likely to enjoy his or her work?

Were the same librarians observed by the same person each week or were the assignments rotated among the three authors? (Rotation would help to explain the discrepancies from one week to another.) Was either of the librarian authors the supervisor of some of the librarians in the sample? Was the sample group aware that the authors wanted to prove that writing time was available during the work week? Was the level of activity preceding the observation factored in? Was the intensity level compared with the analysis of the library department head who observes the librarians regularly? Were the fluctuations and discrepancies as great for faculty members as for librarians? (The chart represented only librarians' ratings.)

Finally, the authors conclude not only that librarians could find half an hour per day to write, but that this would be more productive than longer time spans. Leaving aside the fact that setting up one's notes, logging on to the word processor, reviewing where one is from the day before, and trying to work in the middle of a busy office may mean that the half hour passes without anything at all getting written, what does one write about if there is no scheduled time for research?

Literature searches are time-consuming. A researcher must identify promising materials, locate them, read them and take useful notes. Even if librarians are conscientious about keeping up with current literature in the field, their reading is unfocused and it is probably not adequate background for the articles they may wish to write.

Many academic librarians do not have the advantage of working in an institution with a library school and may not even have access to a library school collection in their community. If they must borrow materials on inter-library loan, many of the items they borrow may be irrelevant. Faculty members can schedule visits within the work week to other libraries or research institutions if on-campus materials are inadequate. Librarians do not have the same opportunity.

Finally, one half-hour per day does not allow sufficient time for the proofing, checking,



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and rewriting which is essential if articles are expected to be accurate and clear.

The implication of the November article is that librarians should publish even if they have nothing to say. This is a pernicious view for three reasons:

- It furthers the image of librarianship as an unresearchable, unscholarly, and untheoretical discipline.
- It would swamp the library literature with articles which are not worth reading.
- It makes it less likely that librarians will pursue badly needed research and writing on broad philosophical and policy questions.

SALLY JO REYNOLDS

Head of Cataloging
American University

To the Editor:

Most of the criticisms that Sally Jo Reynolds levels at our article, "Librarians and Faculty Members: Coping With Pressures to Publish," have their basis in an *a priori* rejection of the comparisons we make between librarians and faculty and the strategies we have suggested for helping librarians engage in writing. Reynolds arbitrarily asserts scholarly writing would come at the expense of service (teaching) despite lack of evidence in the literature of librarianship to support her view. Moreover, she ignores the works we have cited which suggest no deleterious effects on teaching when one engages in such writing (apparently seeing these as having no relevance to librarians). Reynolds dismisses any similarity between librarians and faculty members in this area, falling back on the age-old lament that faculty members have more time for research than do librarians. In some settings that may indeed be true; in the one reported on we found that overall work weeks were not unlike and that demands placed upon both groups resemble each other. While we make no claim that the situation in our study is identical to those of every institution where librarians have faculty status, we suspect that it is not as atypical as suggested by Reynolds. We reported the findings of an investigation based upon careful analysis of the activities of librarians. We invite others—Reynolds included—to conduct similar examinations of their libraries and to share the results with the profession.

The basic questions we pose are the same we asked at the beginning of our study: How can librarians who are expected to publish (and at the particular university studied, they are expected to publish) be assisted in doing so? And, can less traditional approaches to scholarship bring about broader participation in the process of producing "accurate and clear" manuscripts on "broad philosophical and policy questions?" We cite evidence that the use of brief writing sessions can be effective, and hold that activities such as setting up, searching the literature, gathering materials and proofing, checking and rewriting also can be managed during the interstices of busy days. We deny any implication in our article that librarians should write merely for writing sake and reject the old saw of too many librarians cluttering up the literature with articles "not worth reading." We do claim, however, that scholarly writing can be a strengthening and creative element in our work with students and faculty. Reynolds is concerned that the image of librarianship not be one of "an unresearchable, unscholarly, and untheoretical discipline." We agree and submit that practitioners have an obligation to contribute to the scholarly development of the field. Such development, however, will derive not from the rejection out-of-hand of new ideas, but rather from a willingness to conduct empirical tests of what we do and how we do it.

To respond to some of Reynolds questions and comments that may be of general interest to the journal's readers:

- the sample of librarians was chosen by the library director to be representative of all librarians on the staff; virtually all of the library's professionals work in public service, are tenured, and have non-managerial positions
- all the librarians are eligible for academic year appointments, with summers off (and, as indicated in the article, at the same salary levels of the faculty); therefore, approximately the same number of days for writing are available to each group

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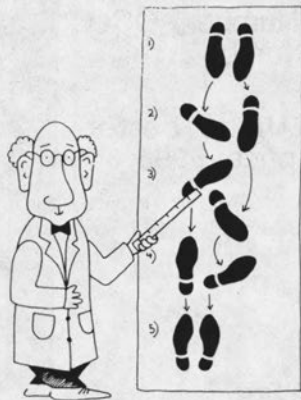
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- the single observer remained the same throughout the study, tracking each librarian each week
- one of the authors has overall accountability for the performance of the librarians in the sample; in keeping with a faculty model, however, the term "supervisor" is not a term normally used in describing this relationship
- there was no preconceived notion of results; we began by not knowing what we would find and were prepared to report whatever results were discovered including data that indicated librarians did not have adequate time for writing; the *intent* of the study was *not* "to prove that writing time was available during the work week" and therefore the sample group was not told this was so
- the study continued for a full year, beyond the data reported, with similar results.

In choosing to ignore evidence (e.g., R. Boice, *College Composition and Communications*, 1985, p. 472-80) showing that brief, daily writing sessions produce better, more creative material for publication, Reynolds may reject such an approach as workable for librarians. It has been shown, however, that where academicians have practiced this regimen they have incorporated scholarly writing into busy schedules without decreasing quality of service, increased writing output when compared with previous practice, realized greater satisfaction and confidence in their work, and published more successfully.

ROBERT BOICE, JORDAN M. SCEPANSKI, and WAYNE WILSON



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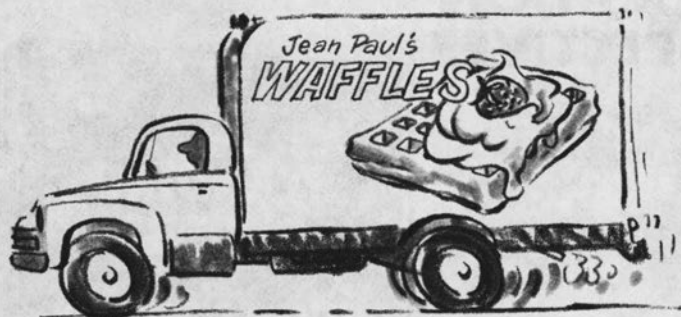
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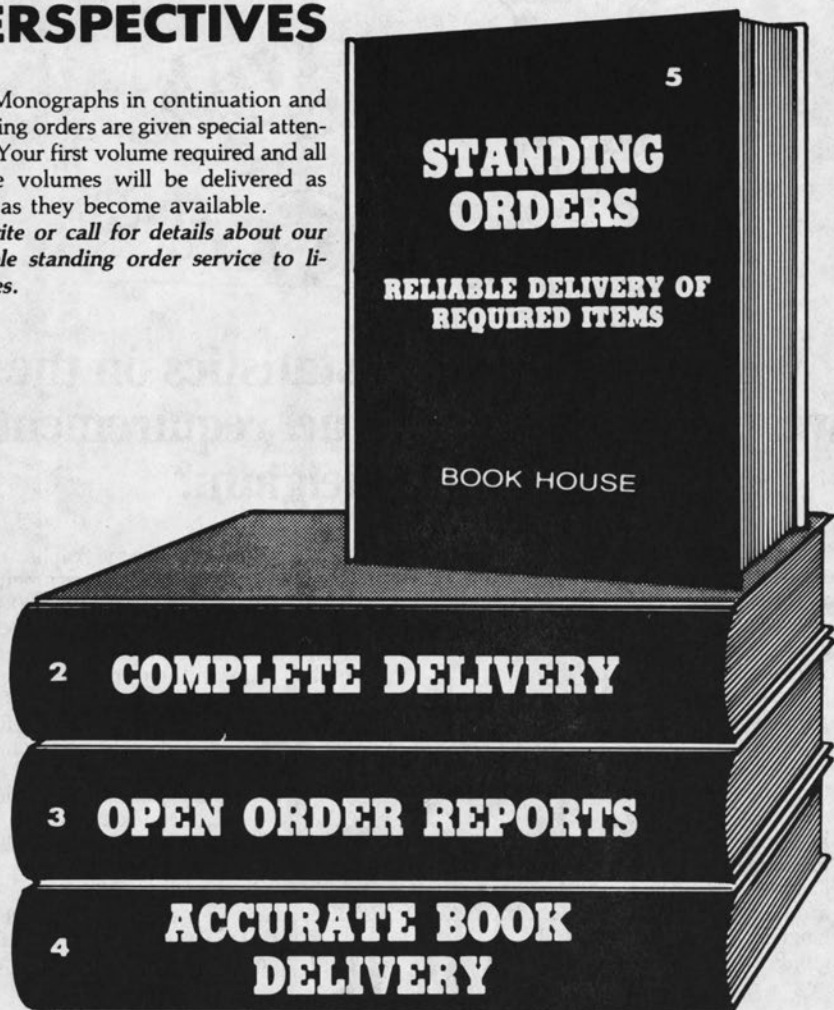
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