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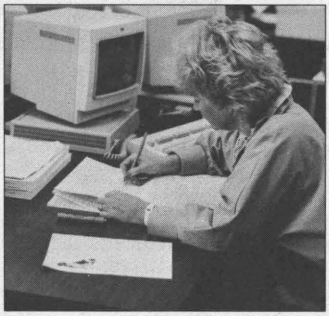

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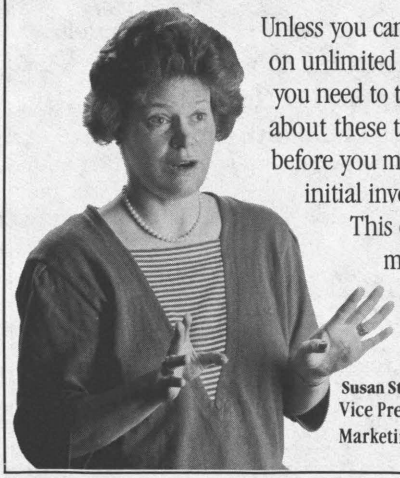

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Letters

To the Editor:

It is time for the research community to establish a university-based electronic publishing network. Such an arrangement would facilitate and speed access to research publications, bringing order to the now informal and inexorably growing online publication process taking place through the Internet. Scholars do not read journals, they read articles. The paper journal has been a logical and practical medium for delivering articles to scholars. Online electronic publication should be superior in meeting scholarly needs. A university-based publishing network would extend to other interested research audiences the communications now taking place within scholarly disciplines.

The electronic publishing network would link scholars and researchers to refereed papers stored in computer facilities on participating campuses. The papers might be prepared and reviewed entirely online as described by Rogers and Hurt in their Guest Editorial "How Scholarly Communication Should Work in the 21st Century," *C&RL*, January 1990. In addition, papers published in hard copy or electronically by commercial and not-for-profit publishers would be entered into the network and stored online.

Governance of the network would rest with the participating universities in the way that university presses are managed. However, each campus publishing node should be loosely related to publishing nodes on other campuses through an administrative structure somewhat resembling television broadcasting network affiliations. This would strengthen the electronic publishing network financially and administratively to better support operations, negotiations with other publishers, and marketing. The result would be a network of autonomous units publishing original papers and independently or jointly contracting for commercial and not-for-profit publications. Several networks of such autonomous units might be formed if there were administrative or financial reasons for doing so, in much the way that there are several broadcasting networks.

As economics and use patterns dictate, a campus publishing node might store publications that are also held by a publishing node at another campus. This might reduce telecommunications costs for distant users, or relieve the traffic and system load in heavily used disciplines. Also, similar editorial interests might reside in publishing nodes on different campuses. That is, there might be editors and their respective editorial boards in the same disciplines in different nodes. This would retain in the electronic publishing network the diversity of control and perspective evident in traditional journal publishing.

Further, according to the economics and use patterns, some campus network nodes might exist only to distribute publications from their computer facilities by making the publications accessible online. These nodes would resemble traditional libraries by serving as repositories of publications created and issued elsewhere. These distributing nodes would not offer editorial software for creating and reviewing papers. They would replicate the holdings of publishing nodes by downloading publications created elsewhere, and making them available to researchers. Hence, it can be seen that although publishing nodes are "libraries" because their holdings are accessible, there would be nodes in the network that would adhere more closely to the conventional role of the library.

By negotiated contractual payments to commercial and not-for-profit publishers for their contributions to the network or by royalty payments to publishers and authors, those providing publications to the network would be compensated. The Copyright Clearinghouse

might play a role in these transactions, but new agencies might emerge analogous to ASCAP and BMI in the music industry.

Index access to the network would be provided by the network itself, but also by other electronic literature indexes. Pointers might lead to several publishing or distributing nodes according to where and in how many places a publication is stored.

Revenue opportunities to support the network might be available through payments for each publication selected by users for reading, downloading or printing. Institutions will need to decide whether to pass charges along to users or whether to absorb charges in the way that library costs are now absorbed by institutional budgets. Further revenue might come from advertising included with items selected for use. Policies with regard to advertising must be carefully developed and applied with discretion.

The era of the electronic journal has arrived. To be sure, there is still a great deal of research, development, engineering, and institutional and managerial planning to be done before a model such as the one I have described might be realized. However, universities and other research organizations have the choice of controlling electronic publishing, to their economic and intellectual advantage, or surrendering the initiative, and the future of scholarly communications, to others.

JEROME YAVARKOVSKY
Director, New York State Library

To the Editor:

I note that the reigning powers of academic librarydom are sufficiently enthralled with the Rogers/Hurt vision of the future as expressed last fall in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* to have reprinted it in the January 1990 *C&RL* as the Guest Editorial. This is reasonable enough, given that so much of what passes for research in the intensely self-referential (reverential) world of library science has within it an implicit yearning for just such system of universal neatness and efficiency. However, I would have preferred that *C&RL* balance this paean to the power of centralized technology with the letters of doubt and opposition that it inspired. Perhaps it would have been too much to expect that handful of letters published on November 15 by *CHE* to appear with the Rogers/Hurt piece, and perhaps you'd prefer to generate a new set of responses (library science also has a strong tradition of reinventing the wheel), but just in case, you certainly have permission to reprint my letter—and I strongly suspect the other writers (not a Luddite in the bunch, by the way) would say the same.

JOHN SWAN
Head Librarian, Bennington College, Vermont

To the Editor:

Fremont Rider's *The Scholar and the Future of the Research Library* is not "a book published in 1940," as Susan Awe reports, nor *just* a book, as she implies. Instead, Ms. Awe has confused Rider's 1944 book with his 1940 article on the same subject and has shown no awareness of the significance of either. Her review of *Research Library Trends, 1951–1980 and Beyond: An Update of Purdue's "Past and Likely Future of 58 Research Libraries"* (*C&RL*, Nov. 1989) also misstates the title of the (nine) Purdue reports, somehow overlooking that title's presence in the subtitle of the volume she reviews—and overlooking as well the complete listing of the nine that comprises appendix A, p.131–32.

She questions the usefulness of the study findings, saying that "even 1986 statistics[1] are of limited use in 1989" because "current [trends] are changing more quickly than ever before due to automation, proliferation of information, funding or the lack of it, and so on."[2] This myth of modern metamorphic discontinuity is contradicted by the evidence, particularly by the 35 year record of spending and collection growth that . . . *Trends* . . .provides and that Ms. Awe mysteriously misses (see e.g., table 5 and figures 1–5).

Ms. Awe wishes that . . . *Trends* . . . had an index and she tells us that the "correlational analyses . . . are difficult to locate and understand." In fact, *results* of those analyses

are in a conventional triangular matrix on p.108, exactly where the List of Tables (p.vi) reports them to be. She had more trouble finding evidence of the average trend for the crucial "volumes added" statistic, except for the summary that's included in the Abstract. For the record, these data are in the "VA" column of table 5; they are displayed in figure 2; they are discussed on p.111 and 114–16; similar but differently defined versions of VA's trend are included in tables 6–12; and they comprise the entire contents of figures 7, 12, 15, 18, 21, 24, and 27, which are appropriately titled and listed on p.vii–viii.

WARREN F. SEIBERT
Department of Health & Human Services, Bethesda, Maryland

References and Notes

1. The report is based on annual statistics from 1951 through 1985, *not* through 1986 (see p.23).
2. Untroubled by a need for consistency, Ms. Awe elsewhere states that "library statistics are *always* useful for forecasting trends and planning future needs . . ." [emphasis added].

To the Editor:

In her July 1989 article ("The Effectiveness of an Information Desk Staffed by Graduate Students and NonProfessionals"), Beth S. Woodard suggests that ACRL or RASD establish a discussion group on the topic. RASD has a number of units that consider just such topics as this, and they would be very interested in hearing from her:

Management of Reference Committee
Performance Standards for Reference/Information Librarians discussion group
Reference Services in Large Research Libraries discussion group
Reference Services in Medium-sized Research Libraries discussion group

I would encourage her to contact the chairs through RASD/ALA, 50 E. Huron St. Chicago, IL 60611.

In addition, ACRL members may be interested in knowing that RASD is reviewing its structure and responsibilities. As the chair of RASD's Ad Hoc Committee to Restructure the Division, I invite ACRL members and *College & Research Libraries* readers to participate in this process by suggesting new ways in which RASD can work alongside ACRL in support of academic libraries and librarians. Please contact me at the following address or through the ALA/RASD office.

REBECCA WATSON-BOONE
2101 Marigold #8, Pocatello, Idaho 83201

To the Editor:

As advocates for the effective use of nonprofessional staff at reference desks, we were disturbed by the practices described in "An Evaluation of Reference Desk Service" by John O. Christensen et al. (*College & Research Libraries*, July 1989, p.468–83).

As the authors note, the literature indicates that nonprofessionals and students are being used to answer many types of questions asked at the reference desk. It is critical, however, that the levels of questions asked at the desk be identified and defined so that basic-level questions, such as directional and known-item questions, are the only ones handled directly by support staff. In-depth reference and search strategy questions should then be referred directly to a librarian. However, in "Appendix A: Representative Selection of the Questions Used for Unobtrusive Testing," only a few of the questions listed are appropriate for nonprofessionals to answer. Most of the questions, in particular the "Escalator Questions," are beyond the scope of what nonprofessionals should be expected to handle in terms of training and subject expertise and should be referred to a librarian.

The lack of a referral relationship is our second concern. The authors describe a case in which "over half the student reference assistants commented on the lack of subject specialist availability when they needed to make referrals." The rationale for using two levels of staffing is to provide better service by siphoning off the more difficult questions to the librarians who should be immediately available to assist the patron. Referral should be a

required step in the process when a question does not fall into one of the categories in which the nonprofessional has been trained. In the situation described in the article, however, this process wasn't followed. Rather, it appears that the goal was to remove the librarians from the reference desk altogether so that they could spend more time on collection development and faculty contact.

A third critical element is training. The authors describe an evaluation of the effectiveness of training provided for nonprofessionals, but do not provide a description of the training program. The article implies, however, that training consisted primarily of "show-and-tell" between student and librarian. While this may be an effective means of supplementing a training program or addressing an individual trainee's need, it is a scattershot effort that does not provide a consistent, planned approach which places the information being provided into the context of service goals.

Any program of using nonprofessionals at reference desks should have as its foundation the intent of improving reference service. Nonprofessionals can be trained to answer the more routine questions, freeing the librarian to spend more time with patrons who need in-depth assistance. We found this goal lacking in the program described. Overall, we are puzzled about the motivation behind the writing of this article: Was it to describe a program that didn't work as a lesson to library management?

MARTIN P. COURTOIS and LORI A. GOETSCH
Michigan State University Libraries, East Lansing

To the Editor:

The July 1989 issue of *College & Research Libraries* included two articles which dealt either largely or partly with the role of support staff and reference desk service. The articles were "The Effectiveness of an Information Desk Staffed by Graduate Students and Non-Professionals" by Beth S. Woodward and "An Evaluation of Reference Desk Service" by John O. Christensen, et al.

In both of the articles of *College & Research Libraries* there has been a tone or implication that "non-professionals" or "para-professionals" are the problem. The role of support staff in an academic library is a very complicated issue. I think it is simplistic and insulting to label the support staff (which incidently is the term they prefer to be known by) as the problem.

In the interest of fairness and in the hope of stimulating an intelligent and lively debate, I urge you as editor to seek a manuscript written by a library support staff worker at an academic library. I think you would find the views of academy library support staff very interesting, intelligent and provocative. I suggest contacting the support staff interest group of the Academic Library Association of Ohio or a similar association to help you solicit a manuscript.

DENISE GREEN
Coordinator of Reference, Ohio Wesleyan, Delaware, Ohio

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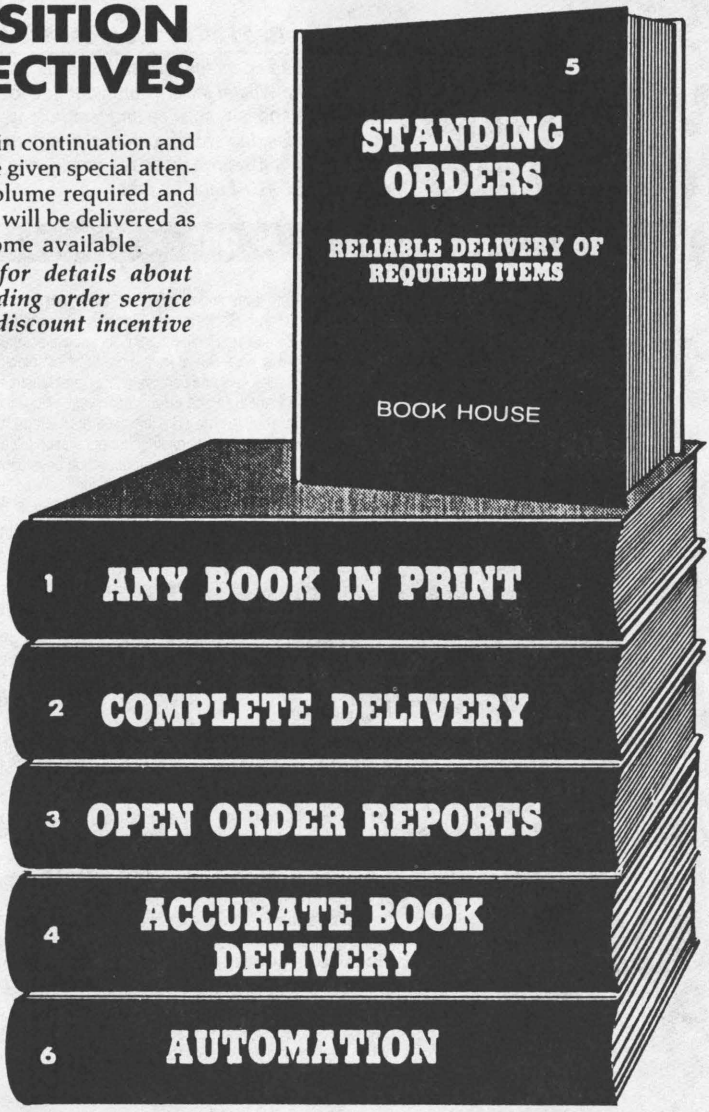

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