# Book Reviews

**Quaratiello, Arlene Rodda.** *The College Student's Research Companion.* New York, London: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 1997. 151p. $35 (ISBN 1-55570-275-9). LC 97-18811.

**Woodward, Jeannette A.** *Writing Research Papers: Investigating Resources in Cyberspace.* Lincolnwood, Ill.: National Textbook Co., 1997. 272p. $16.95 (ISBN 0-8442-5929-2). LC 96-43725.

If 99 percent of the people on your campus—students, faculty, young, and old alike—walk into your library or sit down at their computer and appear to employ as their chief research strategy a prayer to get lucky, we librarians are not, at least in principle, to blame. We have tried from the beginning to persuade our users that a small investment in learning research techniques and resources pays handsome dividends in time saved, hassle avoided, quality of work completed, and confidence gained. Indeed, long before the current vogue for so-called lifelong, active, or independent learning—and inscribed on the founding tablets of librarianship carried down the mountain in 1876—instruction in the use of libraries and their collections has been a cornerstone of our professional existence.

But 120 years later, we are still shaking our heads in disbelief at what "they" do not know or will not learn. Librarians in all sorts of libraries have volleyed and thundered right, left, and center; and have published, persuaded, assisted, cajoled, held hands, guided, walked the extra mile, stalked the teachable moment, and tried every strategy known to humankind—and still "they" walk in the door with their fingers crossed and that stiffness, or slackness, of bearing that connotes resistance and fear of the unknown. You know the stories well, the stories librarians love to tell around the campfire or in the convention hall about how few attend to the lessons we have tried over decades of good intentions to teach, the stories that 120 years of catalogs, reference desk hours, manuals, pathfinders, maps, point-of-use documentation, search engines, interfaces, help screens, tutorials, charts, signs, Web pages, slides and videotapes, clinics, courses, workbooks, e-mail consulting services, one-class-stands, and fully integrated course-related instruction—not to mention the library–college and undergraduate library movements, the 1960s wave of library instruction, and all the good and tireless offices of BIS, LIRT, and LOEX—have done little to change substantively or reduce numerically.

Yet, even though our successes have been local and limited, and even though any given librarian may do more to confuse than enlighten any given researcher, the publication record of librarianship is encouraging to all who have the interests of their users, especially students, at heart. Many such manuals as those under review exist (a bibliography from LOEX listing a few dozen from the past twenty years), occupying a place in a universe of several overlapping literatures: locally produced guides and bibliographies; textbooks of reference service; guides to, and bibliographies of, reference works; the literatures of library instruction and information-seeking behavior; works on pedagogy, educational psychology, and human development; field-specific how-to's for advanced students; and handbooks of writing, study skills, and editing.

The introduction of electronic information technologies has effected changes in these literatures, creating new content and prompting reconsideration of how teaching and learning, researching, read-

ing, and writing happen in an environment increasingly dominated by networked computing. Such changes render antediluvian, for example, Jean Key Gates's discussion of card catalogs in the 1994 edition of her *Guide to the Use of Libraries and Information Sources* and make Thomas Mann's pre–World Wide Web *Guide to Library Research Methods* (1987) look dated.

For all these changes, however, a consistent repertory of goals, concerns, and strategies still informs these several literatures. Thus, although Quaratiello's (Emerson College Library) and Woodward's (Wayne State University Libraries) books are creatures of the New Electronic Era, both are replete with the advice that has characterized research methods instruction all along. Both reproduce, *mutatis mutandis*, the traditions established by that literature in offering chapters on selecting and planning a research project, searching catalogs, understanding classification schemes, finding materials in the stacks, consulting reference works, using the periodical literature and its indexes, and evaluating and documenting the sources revealed. Both employ a conversational tone, retain the familiar emphasis on reference publications, and consistently urge their readers to consult a librarian. Granting that any given librarian might teach research methods with different emphases, both writers are eminently readable and offer sound cautionary and hortatory advice.

Woodward covers the territory at greater length and is more expansive than Quaratiello on process, relating throughout the procedural aspects of research and writing to the computer. Unlike Quaratiello, Woodward devotes 40 percent of her book to note taking, writing, revision, and editing; she also includes advice on buying and learning to use a computer and on selecting software and related equipment. Because she treats the role of personal, "expert" sources in research, she helpfully offers a topically arranged directory of national organizations to which students might apply for information. If only because her publishers afford her more pages, Woodward is more nuanced in her treatment of the vagaries of working with machines and libraries. She talks more about how projects develop organically and about differences among scholarship, research, and term paper writing in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. She also lists questions students should ask themselves at various stages.

Woodward's attempts to reach her audience occasionally involve her in facile distinctions, for example, as she differentiates between objective and subjective papers, advises on how to judge the credibility of sources, or discusses how a popular culture topic can be appropriate to college-level work. In the same way, Quaratiello's less successful moments occur when she distinguishes popular from scholarly journals and primary from secondary works, holds up the *Readers' Guide* as the model for all other indexes, and describes the Internet as the "icing on the cake" of research projects (when for some it will be the cake itself and for others it will not come close to being icing). Furthermore, she glides too easily over the difficulties students have in categorizing information, generalizing from one moment of the process to others and formulating questions that can translate into research strategies.

In reading these books, well done though they are, one is haunted by the old saw about horses and water. Although most students want to get their work done, it comes at them so fast that investing any time in any activity that does not directly produce words they can hand in is more than they have patience for; and although most faculty would rather grade good work, few of them design assignments or hold their students accountable for that work in ways that

encourage systematic development of library skills. Thus, very few of our users stop to consider the lessons these books, and the related paraphernalia of research instruction, offer. Moreover, because of the sheer volume and variety of what libraries contain, their idiosyncrasies, and the frequency with which students take on new courses and professors, it seems to many that whatever they learn about research does not help much next time. For these reasons, libraries, and by extension library research, remain as chaotic to the average student or professor as we librarians give the Internet credit for being.

The question of what the Internet might mean methodologically and substantively for the ways that students and faculty conduct their work raises a final point of comparison between the two books, for, similar though they are, their authors frame the role of information technologies differently. Quaratiello appeals to the timeless verities of research, urging students to keep in mind that no matter what the format or medium of access, research has not changed all that much in the Internet Age because it is still "content content content" that counts. Without slighting the work networked computers can do, she takes a number of opportunities to warn readers against basing their work on whatever comes out of the computer most conveniently. In contrast, Woodward emphasizes how the computer "completely revolutionizes the way one sets about a research project." Although recommending print sources and exhorting students to be critical of all they find, Woodward peppers her work with observations on how the processes of research and writing are reshaped by the capabilities of the computer and networked information.

As the Genie of the Network seems so effortlessly and plentifully to serve up whatever "they" want, these two perspectives remind us of the challenges ahead for the library instruction community.

First, the electronic dispersion of collections requires us to think of new ways to organize access, offer advice, and intervene in student work, ways that the print world may not have afforded, yet ways that must contest the perception that the Net is self-teaching and library research a glorified fishing expedition. Second, because the medium is the message and we can expect students to rely increasingly on what they can bring to and print from a networked computer, bridging the gaps between sources that are networked and those that are on shelves becomes a major undertaking as the latter are buried not only by catalogs and classification schemes, which few nonlibrarians could ever negotiate well, but also by the avalanche of the Net. Thus, though the world of research materials may change and the attentions of our users may be, as ever, otherwise engaged, Quaratiello and Woodward remind us that the tradition of research instruction is a continuing project.—*Robert Kieft, Haverford College, Haverford, Pennsylvania.*

**Shumar, Wesley.** *College for Sale: A Critique of the Commodification of Higher Education.* London and Washington, D.C.: Falmer Pr. (Knowledge, Identity & Social Life Series, no. 6), 1997. 208p. alk. paper, $64.95 (ISBN 0-7507-04101); paper, $24.95 (ISBN 0-7507-0411-X). LC 97-154053.

This book is an ethnography written by a cultural anthropologist who conducted fieldwork at Temple University, where he was a graduate student until 1991. Shumar is concerned with the impact of the commodification process on higher education and how this is reshaping the work force of educators and the "production of knowledge." He argues that "commodification of culture is part of the global explosion of transnational corporations and their power to define . . . all aspects of social life, in instrumental economic terms." Education, especially since World War II, is increasingly evaluated,