Recent Publications

BOOK REVIEWS

Centralized Book Processing: A Feasibility Study Based on Colorado Academic Libraries. By Lawrence E. Leonard; Joan M. Maier; and Richard M. Dougherty. Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1969. 401p.

This report summarizes a fourteen-month study of nine Colorado academic libraries. Focused on technical service functions, the study examined existing patterns of operation for times and costs by using traditional industrial engineering techniques. A proposed Book Processing Center was then analyzed, with unit processing costs calculated for the center using minimum processing times obtained from the academic libraries. The Book Processing Center study was supported by mathematical simulation of proposed operations. A variety of processing operations was fed into a computer, and the result is a generalized model that could be used by other libraries.

Methodology used involved time observations, diaries of work performed, and samples for processing time lags and duplication of titles. Some of the findings are most interesting and should be mentioned in summary. The study on time lag for processing showed a mean of 189 days for the period from "order requested" to "book cataloged," with a range of 123 to 374 days within eight libraries. This is an average of a six-month delay. Thus, a faculty member who comes on campus June 15 has no assurance that books required for teaching on September 15 will be available. In fact, it appears that there is only a 50 percent chance his books will be cataloged and on the shelf by December 15—just in time for Christmas vacation. Colorado libraries of the study are probably not atypical in this respect, and quantitative substantiation of this report should highlight why there is an increased interest in blanket order plans and machine-assisted cataloging.

The per volume cost of processing ranged from $2.76 to $7.71, with an average cost of $4.50. The disparities in this range are considerable, but factors of staffing patterns, efficiencies, and types of materials handled are significant. The average cost per volume for the processing center was computed to be $3.10, with the greatest difference from the academic libraries occurring in the category of labor costs. These figures are only general guides since most of the costs would be sustained by the member libraries, yet increased discounts due to volume purchasing were considered as an additional savings factor.

This factor of duplication of titles was given much attention; the mathematical model testing this aspect showed a potential saving in ordering multiple copies. The cost of processing one volume per title is $2.96, whereas the cost of processing six volumes per title is $2.33. Coordinated ordering is shown to be an advantage, but this objective of an academic book processing center may be one of the most difficult to achieve.

These summary figures are interesting, but of greater significance is the methodology used in their derivation; the methodology should mark this as a landmark study for subsequent investigations. It would seem that, with this and the earlier studies cited in the literature, a handbook of standard times and study methods for library technical processing functions could be compiled. Studies might be expected to modify and cause adjustment of the standards, but at least the method of conducting such a study would not have to be re-established *ab ovo*, and a foundation for comparison would then exist in one work. With the Colorado study perhaps the point has been reached at which such a synthesis is now feasible, for this research

contains statistically accurate formulas by which the results of time or diary observations can be tested.

Inclusion in the report of the formulas used by the researchers is good, although it is likely that librarians using this book as a manual will have to seek the assistance of a statistician in application and interpretation of symbols. Specialists are available, however, and one should not feel reluctant to request help; the point is that librarians should do more of this kind of analytical inspection of their routines.

A condition not explored in the study, perhaps because it is too subjective, is the impact that specialization of activity might have in a centralized processing center. The study points out how individual speciality improves production—would not group speciality have an efficiency factor? A separate processing center, established according to the concepts of industrial engineering as used in the study itself, should be more effective than a regular technical service department operating as one function of a library. The concentration and specialization of such a center based, perhaps, on assembly line techniques, should—in theory—develop an unknown factor of greater efficiency. Elimination of such negative factors as catalog maintenance, interruptions by faculty seeking information and/or books, the coming and going of student assistants, all should strengthen the "speciality of function" concept and increase production.

In addition to the main findings of this study, several valuable tangential inquiries are also explored: the blanket order plan, the user attitude survey, and the problem caused by delayed receipt of LC copy.

The "Library User Attitude Survey" seemed alien in this report. The survey was undertaken to determine the impact of various services proposed as part of a potential bibliographic network. The results were of interest and probably of great value to the participating libraries, but reporting on faculty attitudes toward existing library resources and services, on "insight as to the level of faculty awareness of library services" (p. 211) might have been better had it appeared separately. The results showed how little faculty members know about existing services, but were rather vague concerning suggestions as to new services conceived as part of the proposed bibliographic network. This particular section was weakly tied to the theme of centralized book processing.

Research conducted on the blanket order plan in this report indicates that a reduction in processing time of up to 20 percent can be anticipated by the proper use of an approval program. An incisive comment from the study deserves emphasis:

> In spite of all national efforts to accelerate the flow of cataloging copy to research libraries, copy is still available for only about one-half of the titles at the time they arrive. This type of delay has already reduced the effectiveness of the approval plans now in operation. It must be recognized that until the Library of Congress is able to shorten the lag time, the processing of a substantial number of books will be delayed. [p. 129]

During the late 1960s the library profession has been saturated with optimistic information about the rapid dissemination of cataloging data. The fact remains, however, that traditional cataloging must be done before entry onto tape is possible. The translation from the regular to the tape format adds another step to traditional cataloging, even though it becomes a mechanical process. Patterns of funding the Library of Congress by the federal government have not been outstanding, and MARC would appear to have been grossly oversold to the profession. Any responsible speculation upon the usefulness of the MARC tapes in a centralized processing center can only lead to pessimistic conclusions at this time.

It is always a temptation to fault the Scarecrow Press for its typographical errors and its lack of esthetically pleasing page design, but, nonetheless, they remain one of the few publishers to make such a work as this available to the profession. The tabular displays in this book are inexcusably awkward; column headings are not uniform, and the figures—perhaps the most important content of a work of this kind—are extremely difficult to use.

Beyond this, however, the chief importance of the book is its timeliness. As library networks evolve beyond theory, the coordination of purchasing and processing may be one of the last tasks undertaken, but when it is tackled, the Colorado study will be invaluable in planning such operation. It is a welcome relief to have a research report appear while the findings are still useful.—*Donald Hendricks, Sam Houston State University.*

Scientific and Technical Communication: A Pressing National Problem and Recommendations for Its Solution. National Academy of Sciences-National Academy of Engineering. Washington, 1969. 322p.

The SATCOM report, as this work has now become known, is basically the report of a committee made up of representatives from both the government and private enterprise. Its charter was to examine the communication problems of both areas, in broad perspective, paying special attention to information activities, policies, relationships, etc., of private groups and organizations, and their interaction with federal agencies. Further, it was to make recommendations based on the present status and future needs of an effective national and international information system. The result acquits itself quite well.

Using the charter as a base, the report is divided into several parts: recommendations, state-of-the-art background, and the extension or explanation of the recommendations. Placing the recommendations in the beginning is very effective. The only weakness in format is the lack of an index.

The recommendations are presented in groups: those dealing with planning and coordination (establishment of a joint committee, leadership at the national level, shared responsibility, copyright legislation, standards); those concerning services for the user; those on classical services (abstracting, indexing, meetings); those on personal information communication; and finally, those involving research and experiments. In content the recommendations do not propose anything radically new. They are relatively broad and as a result lack force. For the first time, however, they do take into serious consideration both governmental and private information activities and strive for closer coordination and in some cases integration. Unlike some of its predecessors, this report also provides detail for each recommendation, resulting in cohesiveness.

The greatest contributions of the report are the state-of-the-art background chapters: "primary communications, the basic access services, consolidation and reprocessing, and new technologies and their impact." These chapters are well-written, imaginative compilations of both the major concepts and the literature. They are well documented and the selection appears to be excellent.

The report stresses the role of the professional societies, services to special user groups, coordination efforts in both government and private areas, and the participation of the whole community. The recommendations are well stated and firmly based, and the reader can see from whence they came through the documentation. The international scene is included, but the orientation is definitely national. There is a certain weakness in the lack of recommendations for implementation. They do recommend a Joint Commission on Scientific and Technical Communication, but this appears more advisory than implementative. Anyone working in the information communication field will find something of interest in this report.—*Ann F. Painter, Indiana University.*

De wetenschappelijke bibliotheken in Nederland; programma voor een beleid op lange termijn. Netherlands. Rijkscommissie van advies inzake het bibliotheekwezen. 's-Gravenhage, Staatsuitgeverij, 1969. 72p. $1.25.

The important activities of the National Advisory Committee for Libraries in the Netherlands have now resulted in the publication of a long-term plan for coordination and development of academic and research libraries in that country.

In an attractively produced publication, the committee reports in detail on some major issues facing academic libraries: problems of information retrieval and bibliographic access, collection development,