Letters

To the Editor:

I would like to suggest some additional details for three of the points in David Crawford's "Meeting Scholarly Information Needs in an Automated Environment: A Humanist's Perspective" (*College & Research Libraries*, November, 1986).

Crawford said humanists need an umbrella organization (p.572), but we do have one in the Association for Computers and the Humanities. There is also HumaNet, an international online computer network for scholars working in any area of the humanities, headquartered at North Carolina State University.

The author also suggests a national database of databases distributed through *RLIN* (p.572). Why not be more concrete and recommend amplification of the Rutgers Inventory of Machine-Readable Texts in the Humanities to include all humanities databases, or explore the possibility of Martha Williams' developing a subset of her collection of database descriptions, also amplified?

The call for critical evaluation of discipline-oriented bibliographic databases (p.573) is well taken. But it is not clear in the article that the author is aware that these databases are almost exclusively merely the online version of *printed* bibliographies, which are also rarely reviewed in the scholarly journals of the disciplines. The lack of review of databases is a combination of the scholars' or scholarly journals' traditional neglect of critical evaluation of bibliographies and the added obstacle of an electronic medium new to scholars.

I found Crawford's presentation cogent and personally very interesting. I especially appreciated the discussion of the examples of databases in music. There still seems to be, however, evidence that even forward-looking humanists, who both use computers and are concerned that scholars know how to take advantage of new technology, are not always aware of the existing electronic channels for scholarly communication.

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To the Editor:

Despite the familiar scholarly trappings (charts, tables, "chi-square tests," etc.) that decorate Sajjad ur Rehman's "Management Reviewing Literature" in your September 1987 issue of *College & Research Libraries,* the fact remains that this article is riddled with distortions, misleading data, and simple errors of fact. As a book review editor at one of the journals Rehman "analyzed," I feel obligated to call these matters to your attention.

Let's begin with the errors of fact. In the elaborate table devoted to "Reviewers and Their Affiliations in the Core Reviewing Media," it is stated that one hundred percent of the thirty-two management reviews found in *Booklist* are unsigned. This statement is flatly untrue. Since June 15, 1980, the initials of all reviewers, both staff and free-lance, have appeared following their reviews. Full names of staff members are listed in the masthead, and free-lancers are identified at the beginning of the nonfiction and fiction departments. It seems a shame that all those fancy computations Mr. Rehman performed to compare signed and unsigned reviews with descriptive-analytical content are totally invalid. Even

the chi-square test can't make up for erroneous data.

The question of descriptive versus analytical reviews is also extremely misleading as Rehman defines it. Obviously in a review of around 150 words, there will be more space devoted to description than to analysis. *Booklist* reviews routinely contain qualitative evaluation of the book under consideration; it is hardly worthwhile, however, to analyze something one hasn't adequately described. Hence, in a brief review, it is inevitable that there will be more words of a descriptive nature than of an analytical one. To dismiss our reviews as "descriptive," therefore, is to ignore that they do have a point of view, however succinctly stated. In the terms of Rehman's study, *descriptive* can be defined as short and *analytical* as long—hardly an enlightening revelation.

Perhaps the most irritating part of Rehman's article is the section devoted to "lag time." Leaving for the moment the question of whether Rehman's figures are accurate, it should be pointed out that he has chosen to analyze reviews published in 1981. Book review media, like most things in life outside of academia, do change over six years. Any conclusions about timeliness of review journals in 1981 are almost certainly worthless to anyone using these journals in 1987. Perhaps some enterprising scholar should undertake a study of "Time Lag in Scholarly Articles Purporting to Analyze Time Lag in Review Journals."

Rehman's statement that the average *Booklist* review of a management title appears 4.3 months *after* the book's publication is absurd judged against any current issue of the magazine and highly suspicious even in 1981. (It is impossible to check Rehman's figures since he never identifies the specific reviews on which his study is based.) Perusal of any recent issue of *Booklist*, however, will reveal that approximately seventy-five percent of all adult books reviewed appear in the magazine *during* or *before* the book's month of publication. The fact that we have had great success in improving the timeliness of *Booklist* reviews is completely negated by articles such as yours based on data that is woefully out of date.

> BILL OTT
> Editor, Books for Adults
> *Booklist*

To the Editor:

As a retired librarian, I read with appreciation the informative opinions of Cheryl Price on what a librarian expects from administrators and the different and interesting perspective of Deborah Fink (*College & Research Libraries*, September, 1987).

Although the clear statements made in both articles are addressed to issues of obvious importance, there seems to be much ado about librarians. In neither article could I observe as a first concern the primacy of the library itself or its stated priority in a discussion of policy. It may be argued, of course, that what is good for librarians is good for the library.

Perhaps it is the projection of a discredited "image" to think of an academic library as "an object"—to take Spinoza out of context—"which creates an irresistible love which cannot be lost, or taken away, or impaired" (*Ethics*).

Brian Alley in his reasonable and realistic administrator's response mentions librarians' performance and responsibility, desiderata which might otherwise seem to have been diminished in the shuffle.

In connection with the content and composition of these excellent articles, I shall continue reading Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, trusting that all those who work in and for a library are important people: intelligent, dedicated, unselfish, cooperative, thoughtful, and not what in a departed time was designated as *vox et praetera nihil*.

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