Letter to the Editor

I'd like to comment on Scott Walter's review of my book *Streamlining Library Services.* I concur with the reviewer's comments regarding the importance of qualitative techniques in assessing the effectiveness of libraries. Based on my experiences, however, libraries that seek to assess their contributions should also employ analytical tools help build their cases to officials. We are not talking about an either/or situation, but one that is complementary. Let me explain.

In his review Walters cites a project at the University of Rochester Library designed to learn more about how undergraduate students actually gather information and write papers. The project's investigators employed a variety of qualitative methodologies to collect information about their students. Walters noted that the project as reported by Foster and Gibbons illustrates "…how qualitative approaches to inquiry, equal in rigor to the quantitative approaches favored by earlier generations…can guide library approaches to assessment and accountability." While the Rochester project is an assessment study in the sense that it "assesses" how students actually use libraries and information, the project wasn't designed to document for campus officials how the library contributes to the undergraduate educational experience of students. Hopefully the campus administration has been willing to give the library kudos for making efforts to become more student focused. It is also possible that the data gathered in this project can be used to develop metrics that will reveal how the library is contributing to students' experience.

What concerned me as I read Walters's review was that some readers might reach the conclusion that the tools, techniques, and strategies presented in *Streamlining Library Services* are intended to be assessment tools. That is not the case. The book's objective is to provide techniques and tools that can be used to analyze key library activities to ensure that resources such as staff time and dollar resources are used effectively. For example, a library decides to emphasize its document delivery and ILL services because it believes that enhanced access to publications will improve the quality of student term papers. To validate this conviction the library subsequently conducts a series of interviews with student users in order to assess the service. This I would term assessment project. Where the tools and techniques presented in *Streamlining Library Services* can contribute is in analyzing the effectiveness of the procedures that undergird the document delivery/ILL service. If the procedures can be streamlined and made more efficient, the library and the campus will get a "bigger bang for their buck" because productivity is increased and/or dollars are saved. In this scenario qualitative and quantitative techniques are complementary.

I confess that this is only a minor quibble, but it worries me that when Walters refers to the "tools of scientific management," he seems to be discounting them because their origins reach back to the era of Scientific Management. While such techniques, such as time study, and tools, such as the flow process chart, and the Gantt chart were indeed developed by practitioners many years ago, versions of these and other tools are actively used by all types of organizations today.

It seems to me in this period of budget stringency when assessment and accountability have become so important; I hope that LIS programs will find some place in their curricula to introduce students to both qualitative and quantitative assessment techniques and techniques that analyze efficiency and productivity.

Richard M. Dougherty
Professor Emeritus
School of Information
University of Michigan