

Gone and Mostly Forgotten

A Slice of Academic Librarianship's Professional Past

Librarians of a certain era may remember *Library Issues*. From 1980 through 2016, Mountainside Publishing published five or six issues per year on the prevailing academic library issues of the day. What made this publication unique is that it was not written for an audience of academic librarians. Rather, *Library Issues* was intentionally designed for the needs of academic administrators who needed a quick introduction to and insight into any library matter. The intended reader was likely the provost or president, depending to whom the library dean or director reported. *Library Issues* served as the library dean or director's go-to publication to make the case for additional resources. No doubt there were issues that went right to stacks or waste bin. Library leaders sometimes have their reasons for choosing to make sure the academic leadership is better off being kept in the dark on a particular issue. Though less intentionally intended for the academic library practitioner, the issues served as timely primers on a host of topics for the library audience.

Origin of *Library Issues*

Library Issues was the brainchild of Richard Dougherty.¹ Dougherty led an illustrious career in academic librarianship that included dean positions at the University of Michigan and University of California Berkeley. He was a professor at the University of Michigan School of Information and served as the interim dean at one point. He's a former president of the American Library Association and was instrumental in starting the Association of College and Research Libraries conferences. He was the first recipient of the Hugh Atkinson award² for risk-taking and leadership in 1988. He received the Joseph Lippincott award³ for lifetime service to ALA in 1997 and was named ACRL's Academic and Research Librarian of the Year in 1983. He was the editor of *College & Research Libraries* and later helped found another journal you may have heard of—*The Journal of Academic Librarianship*. With a record like that, creating and publishing *Library Issues* for its entire run may seem like an afterthought. But of all these accomplishments, *Library Issues* has an enduring impact for academic librarianship.

So why is *College & Research Library News* devoting space to a publication that ceased in 2016? I would posit that knowing what's happened in the past can be as crucial as knowing what's happening right now. Why? One critical reason is to be well informed to make good decisions. Knowing academic librarianship's past can assist our understanding of contemporary issues—knowing how we got here, what we thought about key issues, and where we got it wrong. It recently came to my attention that nearly every issue of *Library Issues* is now

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digitized and accessible in HathiTrust.⁴ Today's students of librarianship, aspiring to careers in academic libraries, could learn more about academic librarianship from this collection than most textbooks. The first sentence of the first issue may sound familiar to us all, no matter when we came to this profession:

Academic libraries are in trouble and too many academic administrators are unaware of the severity of the situation.

Warnings of impending doom in college and university libraries is a familiar refrain in our profession, but a publication that referred to itself as “Briefings for Academic Officers” needed to focus on the most challenging and controversial issues that would get a provost or president to pay attention, ask questions, and take a personal interest. Mundane, day-to-day fodder was of no interest to the *Library Issues* editors—and that's what makes it so relevant to our professional history as a collection of our greatest challenges between 1980 and 2016.

Publishing Process

Here's how *Library Issues* worked. The editorial board, usually five or six academic librarians plus Richard and Ann Dougherty (who personally edited the issues), served as the editorial board and decided what were the hottest, most challenging, or controversial issues of the time. The editors would typically meet at the ALA Midwinter Meeting for an hours-long roundtable discussion of those issues. That conversation resulted in a tentative schedule of the next year of issues, decided on by consensus. Then each editor agreed to author an individual issue, occasionally with a co-author or identifying a special guest to take on that issue. Early issues feature two or three brief reports, but in later years each issue focused on just a single topic. Writing an issue required authors to adopt a different mindset. Instead of writing for their fellow librarians, they needed to adopt language, examples, and a practical urgency that would grab the attention of academic administrators in a way they could grasp the issues. Any hint of librarian jargon or scholarly tones would result in a stern rebuke from the managing editor. Rather than offer a list of the notable librarians over the years who served on the editorial board and wrote the issues, names now mostly forgotten, suffice to say it was a veritable who's who of academic librarianship, more than a few who are now in ACRL's Hall of Fame.⁵

Into the Archives

While there's much to learn from 36 years of a publication devoted to the practice of academic librarianship, one way to better understand what *Library Issues* meant to the profession is to delve into the archives. Examining issues across the decades provides insight into how academic librarianship evolved over time. While it continuously stayed true to its core mission to inform academic administrators about the issues of the day, *Library Issues* evolved as well. For example, the July 1982 issue offered a collection of editors covering several topics, one of which focused on the theft of special collection materials.⁶ It was a rarely discussed topic then. This issue no doubt contributed to the introduction of far more stringent access policies and security systems in academic library rare book rooms.

What *Library Issues* did effectively over the years for both academic librarians and academic administrators was to frame library literature research studies in practical terms for

interpretation and action. Consider the July 1994 issue's coverage of the convergence of the academic library and campus computing under one division, often led by a high-ranking information technology administrator.⁷ There was much debate in the profession about the effectiveness of such mergers and the potential impact on library staff, students, and faculty. Prior to the publication of this issue, there were several influential studies of these mergers in the academic library research literature. Presented in the form of a case study from a single institution where the two units were merged, it condensed multiple research articles into a format optimized for busy administrators needing to grasp the essence of the issue.

A random walk-through *Library Issues* brings attention to the degree to which academic librarians have worked with a never-ending succession of new technologies. From the early days of national bibliographic utilities to the dawn of the World Wide Web to the spread of social media, one or more issues per year spoke to the growing interdependence between academic libraries and technology. These issues sought to make academic administrators aware of this connection and the growing need for institutional support that would allow academic librarians to acquire and apply new technologies for learning and research support. One such issue appeared in November 2005 and offered an analysis of what it referred to as the “cornucopia of library technology.”⁸ Those reading it now will likely find the mentioned “hot” technologies mildly amusing. Some of the technologies are still significant to library operations while others have faded into the technology dustbin, but the emphasis was always on helping library deans and directors, as well as those to whom they reported, to better understand how these technologies fit into academic library services in support of students and faculty.

In its fourth decade *Library Issues* continued to reflect the depth and breadth of challenges confronting academic librarians, but it veered into those campus issues related to open access, the emerging textbook crisis, library as academic partner, big data, print versus digital collections, and other areas where the library was well suited to provide a leadership role.⁹

Unfortunately, HathiTrust currently offers no way to subject search specific issues among the archival content it holds. The current workaround is to use a database such as ProQuest's *Library and Information Science Abstracts* to search for indexed *Library Issues* content. With the exact volume and issue numbers, the original issues can then be easily located in HathiTrust.

Changing Times

Library Issues had its flaws. Community college librarians claimed it failed to reflect their challenges. Too few issues did. Efforts to add racial diversity in the later years were made, but ultimately the editors failed to add a colleague of color to the editorial board. As no-table library publications established policies for openness, as a small, for-profit publication operating on thin margins, the best it could do was to offer limited free access to the latest issue. What caused the demise of *Library Issues*? At times, the editors struck out and completely missed a topic of importance that should have been an issue. It certainly wasn't the cost. It was always affordably priced. Over time the number of paying subscribers declined, likely owing to the publication's print-only format when readers increasingly demanded an electronic version they could easily share with staff and academic administrators.

As the median age of the editorial board increased, there was a recognition that a new

generation of academic library leaders has less interest in an occasional print newsletter that competed ineffectively against blogs and other social media outlets. Quite possibly, it diminished in relevance as social media became the communication outlet of choice for many newer-to-the-profession academic librarians. Over time, academic library deans and directors found other ways, preferring electronic communication, to share the issues of the day with their provosts.

No doubt all those factors contributed in some way to the end of *Library Issues*. Though it fades from the memory of academic librarians who once subscribed and is virtually unknown to those now entering the profession, it is perhaps best remembered as a slice of our profession's past, a reflection of the challenges and change over its nearly four-decade run. Now it serves as a chronicle of how far academic librarianship has advanced, reflecting our many waves of human and technological transformations. Aspiring academic librarians and those new to the profession may find it a worthwhile investment of their time to browse through the HathiTrust collection of issues to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the evolution of academic librarianship.

Is there a place in academic librarianship now for a *Library Issues*-type publication? There does seem to be a gap in our academic library literature that misses out on the exploration of the issues of day from the perspective of what non-library academic administrators would want or need to know about contemporary challenges of library operations. For example, who is currently writing about the challenges of integrating artificial intelligence into library operations in a way that would speak to presidents, provosts, and deans to gain their support for new technology development? I see a need for a space where academic librarians write and reflect on change within higher education more broadly and how we adapt to it, again focusing on an audience made up of non-library administrators. Doing so would provide these administrators with insight and awareness into the critical functions academic librarians provide to their institutions. This profession cannot afford a complacency that leads more academic administrators to conclude that their librarians are “a luxury that we can't afford.”¹⁰

Yes, at one time there was a serious discussion on the future of microforms in an emerging digital library environment, as odd and perhaps irrelevant as that may seem today.¹¹ That said, your academic library is still likely in possession of microform cards and reels, along with the necessary reading equipment. It is often the case where we are required to have one foot in the past as we navigate our way through contemporary challenges. *Library Issues* may be long gone, but fortunately it remains forever preserved in HathiTrust for consumption by future generations of academic librarians who believe that learning from the past will help them to succeed in the future. ❧

Notes

1. “Richard M. Dougherty,” Wikipedia, accessed December 16, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_M._Dougherty.

2. “Hugh C. Atkinson Memorial Award,” American Library Association, accessed December 16, 2024, <https://www.ala.org/awards/professional-recognition/hugh-c-atkinson-memorial-award> and <https://www.ala.org/acrl/awards/achievementawards/atkinsonmemorial>.

3. “Joseph W. Lippincott Award,” American Library Association, accessed December 16, 2024, <https://www.ala.org/awards/professional-recognition/joseph-w-lippincott-award-0>.

4. “Library Issues: Briefings for Academic Officers,” HathiTrust Catalog Record, accessed December 17, 2024, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000068470>.
5. Michael J. Krasulski and Steven J. Bell, “ACRL’s Hall of Fame: An Analysis of Academic/ Research Librarian of the Year Award,” *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 10, No. 3 (2010): 283–308, <https://scholarshare.temple.edu/bitstream/handle/20.500.12613/129/Bell-JournalArticle-2010-07.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.
6. Richard M. Dougherty, “Profiteers Among the Stacks,” *Library Issues* 2, no. 6 (1982), accessed December 17, 2024, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015092928244&view=1up&seq=1>.
7. Kevin Brook Long and Beth J. Shapiro, “On Paths That Have Converged: Libraries and Computer Centers,” *Library Issues* 14, no. 6 (1994), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015092927154&view=1up&seq=1>.
8. Steven Bell, “Cornucopia of Technology: What to Choose and Use,” *Library Issues* 26, no. 2 (2005), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015092926776&view=1up&seq=1>.
9. See the following issues: “Open Access and the Future of Scholarship” (32, no. 5, May 2012), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015092926529&view=1up&seq=1>; “Textbook Turmoil: The Library’s Role in the Textbook Revolution” (31, no. 1, September 2010), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015092926628&view=1up&seq=1>; “Capacity Building: Academic Libraries as Campus Partners” (34, no. 6, July 2010), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015092926396&view=1up&seq=1>; “Big Data or Big Brother: Data, Ethics and Academic Libraries” (35, no. 4, March 2015), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015092926354&view=1up&seq=1>; “Can Academic Libraries Get Rid of Their Books” (36, no. 3, January 2016), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015092926305&view=1up&seq=1>.
10. Adrienne Lu, “A Luxury That We Can’t Afford: Why One University Axed Its Entire Library Faculty,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 10, 2024, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/a-luxury-that-we-cant-afford>.
11. Norman D. Stevens, “Microforms: The Quiet Revolution,” *Library Issues* 5, no. 3 (1985), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015092928160&view=1up&seq=1&size=125>.