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Editorial: Future Research and ACRL's Redefining Scholarship Project

by Gloriana St. Clair

In June, a member of the Carnegie Mellon bagpipe band piped the North American Serials Interest Group to the opening of its 14th national conference. Program organizers had drafted Rush Miller, University of Pittsburgh's Library Director, and me for a program about the Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) redefining scholarship initiatives. Privately, Miller had challenged me to demonstrate how articles in the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* (JAL) fit into that construct. Based on the resulting program, this editorial demonstrates the value of the redefining scholarship work and suggests initiatives for further research in each of the four categories, with some additional comments on new developments. My thesis is that research in librarianship fits well into a system that can be applied to all disciplines. Doing research, talking about it on campus, and publishing it in refereed journals does increase campus respect both for the field of librarianship and for individual librarians.

VALUE OF ACRL'S REDEFINING SCHOLARSHIP PROJECT

In 1997, Ernest Boyer elaborated the work of Eugene Rice in a book entitled *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorate*, which received positive attention throughout academia.¹ Syracuse University Center for Instructional Development received funding from the Lilly Endowment to have this work studied and adopted by a variety of disciplines. Bede Mitchell sought support for librarianship and formed an ACRL Committee, consisting of Bede Mitchell, Rush Miller, Gloriana St. Clair, Larry Oberg, Carol Parks, Brian Kelley, and Althea Jenkins, to establish appropriate guidelines for ACRL. The results were published in *College & Research Libraries News* in 1997. Without Mitchell's leadership, this work would not have been accomplished.

The Rice/Boyer work defines scholarship in four categories:

inquiry, integration, teaching, and application. Each of these will be defined briefly below. The point of the work was that all discipline scholarship seems to fall into one of these categories. The body of JAL literature for 1998 divided itself neatly into them as follows: 12 articles fell into inquiry, seven into integration, and four each into teaching and application. Librarians often criticize the quality of their overall scholarly output. Although there is room for improvement, the scholarly productivity of librarians is like that of other disciplines. Nine years of intimate relations with librarian research have convinced me that librarian work compares well with that in other disciplines, especially if the issue of the master's in library science as a terminal degree is considered. Good library research is respectable across the whole campus.

FURTHER RESEARCH IN INQUIRY, INTEGRATION, TEACHING, AND APPLICATION

Inquiry

The inquiry category involves research on the organization of information, user information needs, library contribution to learning, preservation and access, navigating cyberspace, and related topics. The 12 JAL articles used a variety of research approaches: surveys; focus groups; studies of datasets; and humanities techniques, such as studies of texts. A primary challenge to the researcher is excellence of design in the study itself. Both novice and practiced researchers should have research techniques checked by experts in the field. Two sources of such expertise are readily available to all: The Library Research Round Table (LRRT) has a continuing commitment to support quality in research design. Mary Jo Lynch, the American Library Association (ALA) program officer for LRRT, can arrange for such assistance. In my new role as the vice-chair, chair-elect of LRRT, I can also locate experts to review designs. In addition, most campuses either provide a statistics help desk service or have a more informal arrangement for accomplishing that end.

More and more students want all their information to be

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in electronic form. Even the most basic research has not been done to understand what the effects of this transformation in libraries will be. Articles are desperately needed on:

- Effects of Web and digital information on learning;
- Strategies for long-term maintenance of digital files; and
- Solving the problem of the catalog versus the database versus the digital full-text resource.

These are all issues of keen interest to administrators and faculty in college and universities everywhere. Well-designed articles on these subjects will find easy acceptance in highly ranked journals and will also receive positive notice on the campus.

Integration

This category includes applying learning theory to instruction, employing communications theory for reference, adapting administrative and management techniques to library services, and other applications. Theory and practice from one discipline is applied to solve the problems of another discipline. *JAL* authors applied knowledge from education, finance, management, and fundraising to problems in librarianship to create first class articles.

Librarianship is changing rapidly, and seeing the parallels with other disciplines will help to understand the nature of change and how to harness it to the goals and missions of libraries. At Carnegie Mellon, librarians are working with computer scientists to address a number of issues around the digital future, such as automated reference assistance for students using the library remotely and the creation of multimedia electronic journals. The National Science Foundation (NSF) recently funded a meeting of the Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) state librarians to explore possibilities for a million volumes digital library. Further research is needed in these areas:

- The economics, technologies, user reactions, social ramifications, and sustainability of a large digital library;
- Applications from artificial intelligence to reference service;
- Transforming discipline discourse through electronic journals; and
- Changing workforce requirements in libraries.

Working one-on-one with a faculty member in another discipline enhances the librarian's understanding of that field and allows that faculty member to observe library areas of expertise and personal skills. Over the years, many fine articles have been created through such collaborations.

Teaching

In this category, research on developing, testing, and improving pedagogical techniques to meet the library's role in teaching people to be independent scholars produces a large number of articles. Once called "Bibliographic Instruction," this category produced so much work that, during my 1990-1996 *College & Research Libraries (C&RL)* editorship, the referees often ranked articles as being technically excellent but not of interest for *C&RL* because too much had been published on the topic already. "How I did bibliographic instruction well" was a genre as overpopulated as the once

prolific discussions of the ins and outs of faculty status for librarians. Nevertheless, many new dimensions of this important librarian responsibility exist for the digital library, such as:

- Effectiveness of online tutorials;
- Best practices in Web page design; and
- Student learning styles related to a variety of techniques.

Some good work is being published in this area now, but more is needed. The teaching category overlaps somewhat with the integration category in that the work of other disciplines, such as psychology, education, and computer science, often contribute to it.

Application

Application is the home of the ubiquitous and often maligned genre of librarianship articles known as "How I did it well." Here research revolves around applying the results of the first three categories to the practice of librarianship as a service enterprise. *JAL* only published four articles from this category in 1998. The hallmark of good articles in this genre is that they focus on the general applicability of the work they are proud of. Instead of dwelling on the local success, better articles talk about the general problems of all libraries and how a local solution could be applied to other college and university libraries.

Although some editors have damned this genre as a whole, I have always thought that the best pieces here were of tremendous value to the practitioner community. Much more valuable work could be created in these areas:

- Best practices for benchmarking in production areas, such as shelving and interlibrary loan;
- Initiatives that did not go well; and
- How everyone could do it as well as I did.

No one has ever submitted an article to me at *C&RL* or *JAL* about a project that failed. Although issues of personal pride and institutional image make that understandable, much energy could be saved nationally by warning each other of seemingly promising, but practically unworkable, ideas. One interesting aspect of the ongoing uproar over National Institute of Health's proposed creation of an E-biomed database of articles on biomedical research is that failed work could be recorded there. Floyd E. Bloom comments that their field also suffers from a tradition of not publishing information on drugs or treatments that have no effect.² Perhaps librarians could create a modest Web registry of great ideas that did not work out. For instance, the NSF meeting, mentioned above, may realize only a fraction of its potential because of severe political opposition by EPSCoR scientists.

Another great development in the applications field is the recent establishment of the Blackwell Excellence in Academic Libraries Award Program. Larry Hardesty, a dedicated referee for *JAL*, had the vision and energy to create these awards. The program will recognize an excellent community college, college, and university library annually. Instead of focusing on the old input measures, the selection committee will use the philosophy of the new draft "Standards for College Libraries" (www.ala.org/acrl/outcome.html). This philosophy, which values outputs and outcomes, applies equal

to community college and university libraries. Librarians whose institutions win this award are strongly encouraged to write articles about their techniques for creatively meeting the needs of their academic communities.

CONCLUSIONS

Although being a librarian has always been an exciting career choice, never have we been changing so quickly and having so much potential to bring digital information resources to students in such convenient and easy-to-use formats. Transformation requires research so that the choices made can be informed, economical, and effective. The Rice/Boyer scholarship categories of inquiry, integration, teaching, and application offer a construct for shaping research

into the categories used by the rest of academia. Doing such research and talking about it on campus connects librarians with teaching faculty and administrators in a positive way that improves the discipline and increases respect for librarianship, libraries, and librarians.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Ernest L. Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorate* (Princeton, NJ: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1997).
2. Vincent Kiernan, "The Editor of *Science* Voices Doubts on Proposed Archive of Biomedical Research," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (July 9, 1999). Available: <http://chronicle.com/free/99/07/99070901t.htm>.