

Fall 2004

## The Southeastern Librarian v. 52, no. 3 (Fall 2004) Complete Issue

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seln>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

(2004) "The Southeastern Librarian v. 52, no. 3 (Fall 2004) Complete Issue," *The Southeastern Librarian*: Vol. 52 : Iss. 3 , Article 1.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seln/vol52/iss3/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Southeastern Librarian by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu).

# **The Southeastern Librarian**

## **Volume 52, No. 3 Fall, 2004**

### **Up Front**

President's Column . . . . .	2
From the Editor . . . . .	3

### **Articles**

Ethical Decision-making in Library Administration Stephen R. Shorb . . . . .	4
SACS Standards 2004: A Compliance Strategy for Academic Libraries William N. Nelson. . . . .	10
The Realities of Relevance: A Survey of Librarians' Use of Library and Information Science Research Christine Brown and Brett Spencer. . . . .	19
Libraries and Donors: Maintaining the Status Quo Steven Cox. . . . .	34
The Relationship of Undergraduate Students' Self-assessment of Library Skills to Their Opinion of Library Instruction: A Self-reporting Survey Christopher A. Freeman . . . . .	42

### **Regular Features**

Guidelines for Submission and Author Instructions . . . . .	50
Editorial Staff & State Representatives . . . . .	51

**Cover:** Downtown skyline of Charlotte, North Carolina. Charlotte is host city for the 2004 biennial conference of the Southeastern Library Association, held in conjunction with the special centennial conference of the North Carolina Library Association; November, 9-13, 2004.

---

*The Southeastern Librarian* (ISSN 0038-3686) is the official quarterly of the Southeastern Library Association, Inc. A subscription to the journal is included with the membership fee. The subscription rate is \$35.00, which includes institutional membership. Please send notice of change of address to: Robert E. Fox, Jr., SELA Administrative Services, P.O. Box 950; Rex, Georgia, 30273 Ph: 770-961-3520. Fax: 770-961-3712; or email: [bobfox@mail.clayton.edu](mailto:bobfox@mail.clayton.edu). Send editorial comments and/or submissions to: Frank R. Allen, editor; University of Central Florida Library, P.O. Box 162666, Orlando, FL 32816-2666. Email: [fallen@mail.ucf.edu](mailto:fallen@mail.ucf.edu); phone (407) 823-2564; or fax (407) 823-2529. Membership and general information about the Southeastern Library Association may be found at <http://sela.lib.ucf.edu/>.

## President's Column

In most of my columns, I have tried to encourage participation in SELA and its conferences. Because hurricane season coincides with this issue, I decided to take a different approach. My question for each of you is: How prepared are you and your library to deal with a disaster whether it is from a hurricane, a tornado, a flood, a fire, or some other unexpected event? A number of libraries and librarians in the southeast have faced one of more of these disastrous events in recent years and many more of us may.

I strongly encouraged you to find out what kind of procedures your library has in place. Procedures may be as simple as designating areas to which customers and employees will be directed in case of a tornado or as complicated as detailed lists of who will do what in case of specific events that threaten collections. The good news is that you don't have to start from scratch. There are wonderful resources available where you can find procedures already created for a library similar to yours. A great deal of information about disaster preparedness is available on ALA's web page at <http://www.ala.org/ala/alalibrary/libraryfactsheet/alalibraryfactsheet10.htm>. It is an annotated disaster recovery bibliography that includes numerous links to helpful web sites.

One of those links is to our own Southeastern Library Network (SOLINET) Preservation Services at [http://www.solinet.net/preservation/preservation\\_home.cfm](http://www.solinet.net/preservation/preservation_home.cfm). This site offers not only helpful information resources but also information about training opportunities. For example, it was through this site that my own library at Georgia Southern University found a template for a disaster preparedness plan developed at a New York university that proved invaluable in developing our own disaster preparedness plan. We had an emergency plan in place, but the template quickly showed us how much more planning we needed to truly address disaster preparedness. Our planning was further enhanced when we had the opportunity to host the SOLINET day and a half hands-on disaster recovery workshop in June 2004. I cannot recommend that workshop too highly. Our emergency plan had been in place for more than ten years, and we had drafted a disaster preparedness plan with help and advice from SOLINET preservation personnel. However, the workshop put those efforts in a whole new light. The first day was devoted to training. At the end of that day, volunteers went to a mock library setting and hosed down all types of library materials that we had been collecting for the workshop. They include all types of books, film strips, photo negatives, computer discs, and paper records. The second day we were divided into teams and each team was assigned a specific area on which to practice the recovery training provided the previous day. The response to the workshop was positive at the time, and as hurricanes and tornados have torn through Georgia, Florida and other states I have heard several employees mention how glad they are that we have had disaster preparedness training.

If your library has not created disaster preparedness plans and emergency procedures, I strongly urge you to consider doing so before you are faced with a serious threat to your collections whether from a leaky sprinkler system or major storm damage. We have some real treasures within southeastern libraries, and it would be a terrible shame for them to be lost forever because we did not have procedures in place to salvage them if disaster strikes.

- Ann Hamilton

## From the Editor

Several articles in this issue have loosely correlating threads. Stephen Shorb shows us a model for ethical decision-making in libraries based upon S. R. Ranganathan's "Five Laws of Library Science". The five laws are elegant, powerful and refreshingly simple, particularly when applied in the practical manner Mr. Shorb employs. More study could be conducted on these five laws and the extent to which they can contribute to a theoretical foundation for librarianship. Christine Brown and Brett Spencer report on results from a survey which asked Alabama librarians to assess the relevancy of library and information science research studies to actual library practice. Their findings suggest that librarians view much of LIS research as not particularly relevant. In the editor's opinion this is somewhat disheartening but also not surprising. Mr. Shorb's paper is perhaps just such an example of successfully coupling library theory with library practice. In another article, Bill Nelson carefully lays out the new SACS accreditation guidelines. While certainly more pragmatic in nature than the five laws, accreditation plays a critically important role in upholding professional standards of librarianship.

Steven Cox offers some advice on the art of accepting gifts and donations on the library's terms, while keeping all parties happy. As Mr. Cox relates, some gifts, while well intended, simply do not further the library's mission and may in fact fail a cost-benefit test. Does accepting a marginal gift in order to appease a prominent donor compromise the library's ability to provide core services? Maybe one can look at the Five Laws here as well.

Christopher Freeman uses survey data to look for correlations between users' self-perception of their own information literacy skills and their opinion of the importance of library instruction. Mr. Freeman sees a slightly negative correlation based upon visual analysis of the data, though he points out that the sample size is too small for the findings to be statistically valid. I.E. Users with a high self-assessment of their library skills tend to value library instruction lower than users with a low self-assessment. The problem with this is that many users have an over-inflated opinion of their information literacy skills.

We commend all of these authors for their scholarship and thoughtful contributions.

#

As I close out my term as editor of *The Southeastern Librarian*, I would like to again thank Ann Hamilton and Barry Baker, current and past-presidents respectively of SELA, for their wonderful support and guidance these past four years. I would also like to thank Raynette Kibbee, SELA Webmaster, for her eager assistance in editing and mounting issues on the SELA web site. Thanks goes to Phyllis Ruscella and Catherine Lee, SELn editorial board members for their guidance with a number of decisions made early on and throughout, regarding emphasis for the journal. Another word of thanks goes to the team of SELA manuscript reviewers, who diligently worked their way through article submissions. For the record, the acceptance rate for the journal during this editor's term was 65%. Lastly, thanks to the SELA state representatives and the general membership for your news submissions, suggestions, interest and support. It has been a pleasure serving as your editor for the past four years.

- Frank R. Allen

## Ethical Decision-Making in Library Administration

Stephen R. Shorb

Stephen R. Shorb is Associate Director, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida. He can be reached at [shorbs@ufl.edu](mailto:shorbs@ufl.edu).

---

### Introduction

Libraries, like many public sector service organizations, are under increasing pressure to do more with less. Pressure to make the best use of limited resources and provide an ever-expanding range of services requires a careful consideration of priorities. Establishing priorities often requires difficult decisions – decisions that can challenge long held beliefs and practices. In order to maintain the public trust and the profession's own self-esteem, library administrators need to find ways to form and evaluate decisions that can be justified. When difficult choices must be made, how do administrators know their choices are the right ones?

A growing body of literature in the study of public relations is concerned with the ethical dimensions of public service (Cooper 1994). Ethics, as the explicit philosophical reflection on morality, offers a standard by which to measure decisions. Public administrators are increasingly using ethical analysis to confirm that their decisions match the moral framework of their constituencies, and use ethical terms both to define issues and to direct their actions towards workable solutions. These explorations may lead to a useful model for ethical decision-making in libraries.

The first section of this paper develops a simple model for ethical decision-making. A useful model serves two main purposes. First, it easily explains the relationship between the various components of ethical decision-making by creating a chain between the most basic underlying values, the intervening ethical processes, and the actions that finally result. Thus, decisions can be more easily explained and justified. Second, use of the model may also assist in the actual implementation of the decision. A step-by-step progression through the model has the additional benefit of modeling the developmental stages found in models for the ethical maturation of individuals. By considering

the ethical dimensions in a structured, incremental way, individuals (and groups) at all levels of ethical development can be identified and brought into the process. Each decision process is “built from the ground up” and the resulting decisions will have cognitive consonance and a certain inherent momentum that can help convert the decision into action. The second section of the paper discusses the advantages of a decision-making model over a code of ethics and then uses the model to address actual problems in library administration.

### A Simple Model for Ethical Decision-Making

The study of ethics begins with the conception, both as individuals and as a society, of what is moral. Morality may be defined as “the first-order beliefs and practices about good and evil by means of which we guide our behavior” (Hinman 2003). Thus, the most basic consideration of ethics contains the germ of a model for decision-making. Behaviors, including decisions and their implementation, are guided by moral beliefs and moral actions. Moral beliefs form the pre-existing, internal, mental framework from which moral practices are derived. Moral practices represent the external manifestation and consequences of those beliefs. The definition of morality, then, contains two essential properties of an effective model – direction (from internal to external) and motion (from belief to action).

The model can be made more useful by defining additional stages on the path from belief to practice (see Figure 1). Moral beliefs are composed of a constellation of values, defined as inherently desirable qualities. Values represent what people believe to be good and worthy of pursuit in their personal and professional lives. Values are often viewed as the ideals, customs, and institutions that arouse an emotional response in a given society or individual. They represent society's fundamental moral beliefs, subdivided into discrete concepts.

Moral beliefs also include principles, the basic laws and axioms that describe values and provide a guiding sense of the requirements and obligations of right conduct. As such, principles begin the process of turning concept into action.

They are a “mental shorthand” for relating values to practical decisions. Principles are characterized by short, simple phrases that incorporate a value (or set of values) with an explicit, or strongly implied, prescription for action. Principles can range from “Thou shalt not kill” in the religious realm to “A stitch in time saves nine” from the realm of practical experience. Both convey the underlying values along with directions for converting them into action.

Moral practices include decisions and the actions taken as a result of those decisions. The decision process requires applying appropriate principles to a given situation in such a way that appropriate actions are suggested. This process is often subdivided into problem definition, generation of alternatives, projection of consequences, and systematic acceptance or rejection of alternatives based on possible outcomes (Cooper 1998, 18). However, the critical element of decision-making is finding effective routes of transmission for the underlying values that will shape the decision. Constant reference to principles, even competing principles, will aid this process. Finally, action is necessary to complete the ethical process. Having the “strength of one’s convictions” is meaningless in the absence of timely and effective action based on principle.

Action almost always requires the assistance of others. To best assure cooperation, others must share – or at least comprehend – the ethical underpinnings of a decision and request for action. Importantly, the level of moral development (on any given issue) of others cannot usually be known with any degree of certainty. Thus, the decision process must begin at the lowest possible level and use the inherent direction and action of the model to “sweep up” and carry along participants in the decision who begin at all levels of moral development. If the model of ethical progression can clearly show the connection between each “rung of the ladder,” it may be possible to lead others “upwards” so that they share the connection to values and the validity of the process. Perhaps the classic example of this effect is from the New Testament. In the Sermon on the Mount, those from the lowest levels of spiritual development (“Blessed are the poor in spirit”) to the highest (“Blessed are the peace-makers”) are swept upward toward acceptance of the Christian ethic.

Figure 1 also shows Aiken’s (1962, 68) four levels of ethical development, and the way in which they mirror the progression of the decision-making model. Values are often so deeply embedded that they can only be understood at a visceral and emotive level that Aiken terms the “expressive.” The translation of values into communicable ideas is assisted by principles – Aiken’s level of moral rules. Deeper reflection and the essence of ethical argument occur at the level of ethical analysis. Finally, the level of post-ethical consideration encompasses the actions, consequences, and moral refinement that result from the resolution of the ethical process.

Effective use of this decision-making model involves a conscious progression from values to principles to decisions to actions. It requires constant referencing between intended action and the supporting principles. Finally, in order to assist the process of leadership, there must be an open communication of the progression from the basic level of expressive understanding to the higher levels of ethical consideration.

### **Ethical Decision Models Versus Codes of Ethics**

Professions, and librarianship is no exception, form codes of ethics with the intention of promulgating the ethical principles that guide their work. The American Library Association Code of Ethics (2004) is one example of such an effort. The code attempts to provide “principles...expressed in broad statements to guide ethical decision making.” However, using the logic developed in the first section of this paper, the information offered in the ALA code is, in fact, a mixture of values (both general and specific to the profession), principles, and practical direction. These are combined with vague exhortations to “quality” and “service” that offer very little guidance for decision-making on ethical grounds.

The ALA Code of Ethics shares a trait common to other such codes in that it focuses on the ethics required under special circumstances – points of ethical crisis – while minimizing the ethics required for successful day-to-day administration. This is not to say that special ethical situations are not important. The most prominent principle in the code, “resist all efforts to censor library resources,” is sometimes a needed shield from intense pressure exerted by

special interest groups. However, when taken out of the crisis context, the principle tends to lose meaning. If censorship is the intentional exclusion of material from the library collection, then the librarian must practice censorship on a daily basis. Since limited resources demand selectivity, materials are excluded routinely. This exclusion must be based on some principle that is less known, or less obviously stated, than the injunction against censorship found in the code.

A deeper look at values and how they are organized into moral rules, or principles, is needed to complement the code of ethics and adapt it to the decision-making required for ongoing operation of a library.

### **Applying a Decision-Making Model in Libraries, Using Existing Ethical Principles**

Any study of the history of library administration will soon uncover the contributions of S. R. Ranganathan. Trained as a mathematician, Ranganathan was possessed of a keen analytical mind and a strong sense of the values underlying modern librarianship. He used a disciplined approach to understanding human endeavors in combination with powerful observation of practical experiences to form his five laws of library science (Ranganathan 1931). These laws possess the essential traits of principles as defined in the model discussed above. They are succinct basic axioms that consolidate a set of values, and express them in a way that both clarifies the values and points the way to their implementation. These laws are:

- 1. Books are for use**
- 2. Every reader his/her book**
- 3. Every book its reader**
- 4. Save the time of the reader**
- 5. The library is a growing organism**

At this point, it is necessary to introduce some standard disclaimers. Even though he wrote more than seventy years ago, Ranganathan was not limiting his laws to books. In his work, he clearly explains that this is shorthand for all library materials and services. Consequently, by reader he means any user of any form of library material. The concepts of the five laws can be taken to apply equally to books and readers, videos and viewers, and computers and researchers.

Ranganathan's work is far from forgotten, as evidenced by recent articles building on his five

laws (Gorman 1998) and applying them to specific types of libraries (Yucht 2001). However, the power of his basic formulation has tended to remain in the forefront while the careful work of relating the underlying values to these principles has been neglected. A careful reading of his book shows how values can be translated into moral actions and how the principles of the five laws can form an important element of an ethical decision-making process. For each of the five laws, a brief example will demonstrate the clarity and momentum that can be achieved by clearly enunciated principles, and the efficacy of a simple decision-making model.

**Example One.** Computers are provided for library patrons to use. It is often convenient for them to download information onto a diskette or CD, but use of those drives opens the possibility for introduction of computer viruses and subsequent downtime. The IT department recommends disabling the diskette drives to avoid this problem.

#### **Application of Law 1: Books are for Use.**

This law reflects the basic premise that libraries acquire materials for the express purpose of making the contents (information, knowledge, inspiration, entertainment) easily available and easily transmissible. The simple clause "for use" must then include a huge diversity of factors, including the organization of materials, open access, hours of operation, qualifications of staff, etc.

The underlying values of the first law are many. They include a belief in the free transmission of ideas, the right of the individual to education, and equality of access to the common birthright of human knowledge. The principle "books are for use" gathers these concepts into a form that can be easily weighed against a specific situation. If books are for use, then all forms of information are for use and all forms of information technology are for use. It would not make sense to "disable" the index of a book, or chain it to a bench as in Medieval times, to limit its accessibility. The first law links the value of free transmission of ideas to the question of unfettered computer access and points the way toward an ethical decision based on that value. Action taken will reflect the paramount morality of usefulness and include actions to guarantee that the computers will continue to be available for optimal use. The drives should remain

activated, complemented with anti-virus software, an educational campaign about viruses, or other options to reduce the risk of equipment failure.

#

**Example Two.** The university is increasing its focus on distance learning. Although excellent instruction and access to electronic resources will be available to all registered students, some library materials can be accessed only in their physical form at the main library. Some of these items are too scarce to send copies by mail, so distance learners will be unable to have the same opportunity to access these items.

**Application of Law 2: Every Reader His/Her Book.** This law has several main components, all enunciating the theme that each person in a community should be served by the library designed for that community. First, the library is for the “real world” user, not for the librarian or for some idealized version of what the user should be. Librarians must select items beyond their own interests to reflect the needs of the community. Second, the concept of “every reader” must be very inclusive. Library users of all groups in the community should have access to meet their needs. Accommodation for handicapped individuals, literacy programs for those unable to read, training for inexperienced users, and research to find the best materials for advanced scholars are all elements of this law.

The values informing the second law include those of equality, open access to knowledge, universal education and literacy, professional detachment, and intellectual neutrality. In this case, decisions must be made based on the underlying values of equality and access. Distance learners pay the same tuition and deserve the best possible facsimile of the on-campus experience that can be provided. Action on this decision will reflect the principle of the second law by finding ways to make materials more widely available. The scarce material should be digitized, with the necessary work required for copyright clearance and technical issues dealt with as appropriate.

#

**Example Three.** A section of the library has a large number of items with multiple copies. The items are rarely used and occupy considerable

space. However, they do contribute to the total number of volumes in the collection – a measure of quality and prestige in academic circles. It is also difficult to tell whether scholars might find some renewed interest in a seemingly obsolete topic.

**Application of Law 3: Every Book Its Reader.**

This law points out that books not read, and equipment not used, can only interfere with the other laws and run counter to several core values of libraries. Each item should be selected, maintained, and continuously evaluated on the basis of its potential contribution to the needs of a specific user. Items not used should be promoted and advertised to appropriate audiences so that the potential usefulness can be achieved or they should be discarded to make way for other items with greater potential.

The values collected in the third law include economy, responsible use of public resources, and the duty to communicate about available resources. To assure “every book its reader,” the book must be appropriate for the intended audience and the reader must be informed, or easily led to the item through good methods of organizing the collection. The third law links the value of economy to the decision to keep or discard items. Action taken will weigh actual use, potential use, and the “opportunity cost” of inaction. The redundant multiple copies should be removed to make way for more useful items. The withdrawal could be complemented with an effort to donate the extra copies to another library.

#

**Example Four.** The library web site is being redesigned. It is found that a large percentage of users follow several links to arrive at the online book catalog, and then key in a simple keyword search to locate a needed item. The web committee is divided. Some think they should move a simple search window to the top page. Others feel this will cause users to take the “easy way out” and fail to see ways to conduct more sophisticated searches that could be found on a web page with more detailed information about the online catalog.

**Application of Law 4: Save the Time of the Reader.** This law helps bring the required degree of specificity to broad calls for “quality”



and “excellence of service.” Library policies should be designed to benefit the user – not merely make administration more convenient for the library staff. The essentials of any bureaucracy required to accomplish library functions should be continuously examined for opportunities to streamline. The important work of the first three laws can best take place in an environment arranged for ease of use.

The fourth law touches on some very deep values not ordinarily associated with library administration. In simple axiomatic form, it envelops the ideas that life is precious and that our time – limited as it is – is a commodity to be valued. The purpose of life (which may be partly expressed in the values of the first three laws – knowledge, understanding, exploration, enlightenment) must be accomplished in the time allotted. Therefore, the web committee must weigh convenience against depth of knowledge without knowing if the depth is desired. A top level search should be allowed, moderated by training and other “pointers” that will assure access to more detailed searches for those who need them.

#

**Example Five.** There is tremendous value in maintaining long runs of scientific journals. Each issue of a journal brings development of previous ideas and suggestions for further research. Each issue also brings an increase in the total amount of space needed to store this information. Many key journals now make their entire historical runs available on electronic databases. Some suggest that the printed copies can be safely discarded, relying on the electronic services. Others insist that the library has always kept paper copies, and that electronic services are commercial businesses or grant-funded initiatives that could disappear without warning.

**Application of Law 5: The Library is a Growing Organism.** The fifth law draws a powerful analogy between the world of knowledge and its biological host – the human being. The essence of life is growth and change. Technology, individuals, communities, and societies are all subject to growth. Some growth results in a larger physical presence, and other growth results in a change of character. Librarians must remember that information

resources will grow and develop and must be dutiful in their planning for that inevitability.

The values underlying this law include a belief in progress and the acceptance that change is to be welcomed as a form of growth. These values also include the importance of planning for the future (even though we can’t know exactly what it will bring) and the duty for responsible stewardship of human knowledge. As Ranganathan (1931, 112) himself puts it, “a growing organism takes in new matter, casts off old matter, changes in size and takes new shapes and forms.” The fifth law would aid greatly the decision to discard redundant printed sources in favor of electronic forms. A growing organism does not always experience less exposure to hazard. A larger electronic library may be more vulnerable to business failure, yet less vulnerable to fire or other physical threats. Finally, it must be considered that an organism unable to shed waste would eventually collapse under its own weight. The avoidance of that fate is one that can be planned for and realized.

#

### Assessment and Conclusion

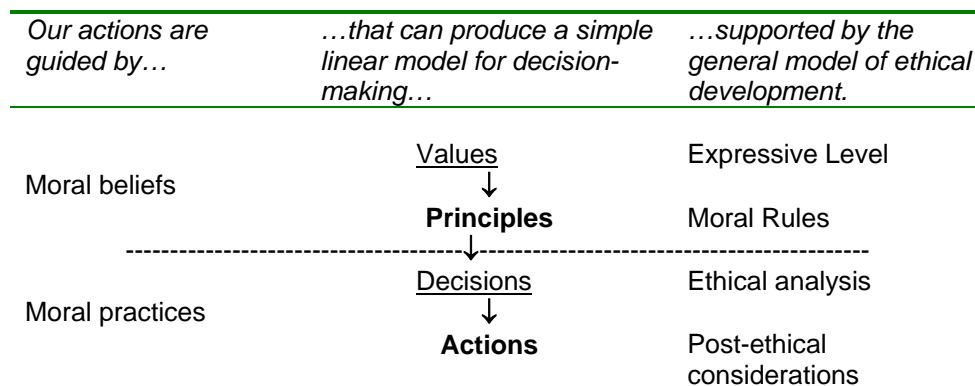
The preceding “trial run” of the simple ethical decision model shows that the consideration of commonplace library issues can be enriched by examining the path from values to principles to decisions and actions. As the examples indicate, the approach is essentially deontological, in that values influence dutiful actions on the part of the library administrator. The model could be improved by introducing more elements of the teleological approach to moral thinking, which would further consider the end effects of decision making in libraries. An increased emphasis on the “science” in library science should include the qualitative factors that the extended field of moral philosophy can offer. Each example could also be further explored to see how the model might facilitate group consensus on the issues. To be most useful, the model would combine the preceding justifications for action with the potential to serve as a way to organize different viewpoints and direct them towards a concordant result.

Library administrators will soon face the greatest challenges ever in the short history of modern librarianship. Rapidly advancing technology and changing user expectations will combine to assure that the status quo cannot be

maintained. The process of setting priorities and making appropriate decisions will be discomfoting to many. The increasing pressure to justify results and demonstrate value will

require a return to the core values of the field. Opportunities for true leadership through ethical decision-making will result for those who can successfully link values to actions.

**Figure 1. A simple model for ethical decision-making.**



### References

Aiken, Henry D. 1962. *Reason and Conduct*. New York: Knopf.

American Library Association. 2004. "Code of Ethics of the American Library Association." <http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/codeofethics/codeethics.htm> (accessed April 19, 2004).

Cooper, Terry L., ed. 1994. *Handbook of Administrative Ethics*. New York: Marcel Dekker.

Cooper, Terry L. 1998. *The Responsible Administrator: An Approach to Ethics for the Administrative Role*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Ranganathan, S. R. 1931. *The Five Laws of Library Science*. Madras, India: The Madras Library Association.

Gorman, Michael. 1998. "The Five Laws of Library Science: Then and Now." *School Library Journal*. 44:7 (July):20-24.

Hinman, Lawrence, M. 2003. *Ethics Updates: Glossary*, s.v. "Morality." <http://ethics.acusd.edu/glossary.html> (accessed April 20, 2004).

Yucht, Alice H. 2001. "Guiding Principles." *Teacher Librarian*. 28:5 (June):38-40.

# SACS Standards 2004: A Compliance Strategy for Academic Libraries

William N. Nelson

William N. "Bill" Nelson is Library Director at Augusta State University, Augusta, GA. He can be reached at [wnelson@aug.edu](mailto:wnelson@aug.edu).

---

## Introduction

In January 2004, the *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*<sup>1</sup> promulgated by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges (SACS-COC), replaced the *Criteria for Accreditation* in effect since 1986. These SACS-COC standards apply to universities, colleges, and community colleges whether they are public or private, non-profit or proprietary institutions. The *Criteria* included 480 "must" statements for compliance, 22 of them relating directly to libraries. *Principles of Accreditation* is much less prescriptive in stating institutional and library requirements, using such subjective terminology as, "appropriate resources," "appropriate facilities and services," "adequate library resources," "sufficient collections and resources," "sufficient number of qualified staff—with appropriate education or experience," and "adequate physical facilities." Along with the new standards came new challenges and opportunities for Southeastern colleges and universities, and their libraries.

This article first provides an introduction to and summary of *Principles of Accreditation* accompanied by a detailed list of provisions specifically applicable to libraries in higher education. The provisions and importance of *Standards for College Libraries*, approved by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) in 2000, are summarized and examples

---

1. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges. 2003. *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*. Decatur, Georgia: Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The current version of the document is available as a pdf file at: <http://www.sacscoc.org/principles.asp> [last accessed 9-23-2004]

of implementation are identified. In a 2003 revision, minimal changes were made to these ACRL standards, which received final approval as the *ACRL Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* in June 2004. These standards now supercede the three ACRL type-of-library standards produced separately for universities, colleges, and community and junior colleges. All institutions accredited by a regional accreditation agency or professional groups that expect outcomes assessment will gain valuable information and suggestions by reviewing these ACRL standards.

Since the new SACS-COC *Principles of Accreditation* is much less prescriptive than the superceded one, it is difficult for librarians to determine an appropriate compliance strategy. Use of the newest ACRL standards for the assessment of an academic library provides the comprehensive library evaluation required to demonstrate compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*.

## Principles of Accreditation

Following is a summary of the major provisions of the new SACS-COC standards. *Principles of Accreditation* requires that an institution have a purpose, as well as sufficient resources, programs, and services to accomplish its purpose on a continuing basis. The institution also must maintain "clearly specified educational objectives" that are consistent with its mission and appropriate to the degrees offered. Additionally, the institution must be successful in achieving its stated objectives.

Asserting that accreditation is both a process and a product, *Principles of Accreditation* envisions the process as involving:

- (1) assessment of the institution's effectiveness in fulfilling its mission;
- (2) compliance with accreditation requirements; and
- (3) continuing efforts to enhance the quality of student learning, programs, and services.

As a product, accreditation is a public statement assuring an institution's capacity to provide effective programs and services; it is also an affirmation of an institution's commitment to SACS principles.

SACS accreditation requires integrity and a commitment to “quality enhancement.” For quality enhancement SACS-COC “expects institutions to dedicate themselves to enhancing the quality of their programs and services within the context of their missions, resources, and capabilities and creating an environment in which teaching, research, and learning occurs.” The concept presumes that “each member institution is engaged in an ongoing program of improvement and can demonstrate how well it fulfills its stated mission.” Additionally, “an institution is expected to document quality and effectiveness in all its major aspects.”

Initial and continued SACS accreditation involves: (1) the collective analysis and judgment of the institution’s internal constituencies; (2) informed review by external peers; and (3) a decision by the elected representatives of the COC. The COC evaluates an institution based on compliance with: (1) the Principles of Accreditation (also called Key Principles), (2) the Core Requirements, (3) the Comprehensive Standards, and (4) Title IV requirements (for those receiving federal funds).

Without compliance with the Core Requirements, an institution cannot gain or maintain SACS-COC accreditation. The Comprehensive Standards represent the norms or commonly accepted standards of good practice that are required of institutions and establish a necessary level of expected accomplishment in three areas: (1) institutional mission, governance, effectiveness; (2) programs; and (3) resources.

The SACS peer review process consists of internal and external components. The internal review requires:

- (1) An expanded institutional profile (two annually),
- (2) Compliance certification representing the institution’s internal analysis of its compliance with each Core Requirement and Comprehensive Standard, and
- (3) A focused and succinct Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) addressing institutional improvement.

The External Review involves off- and on-site reviews. For the off-site portion a small team (usually including a librarian) meets at an off-site location, reviews documentation provided by the

institution, and determines the institution’s compliance with standards. For the on-site review a team of peers (which may include a librarian) conducts a focused on-site review to:

- (1) verify the institution’s statements of compliance,
- (2) evaluate actions proposed regarding the institutions statements of non-compliance,
- (3) evaluate acceptability of the QEP,
- (4) provide consultation on the issues addressed in the QEP, and
- (5) prepare a written report.

### **Key Elements for Libraries**

A careful review of *Principles of Accreditation* identified the following seventeen specific elements of the standards that are directly applicable to libraries in higher education. They are listed according to the section of standards where they appear.

#### Application of the Requirements

“The requirements [of the *Principles of Accreditation*] apply to all institutional programs and services, wherever located or however delivered.” (p. 7)

#### Core Requirements

“The institution has a clearly defined and published mission statement specific to the institution and appropriate to an institution of higher education, addressing teaching and learning and, where applicable, research and public service.” **Core Requirement 2.4** (p. 15)

“The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation that incorporate a systematic review of programs and services that (a) results in continuing improvement and (b) demonstrates that the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.” **Core Requirement 2.5** (p. 15)

“The institution, through ownership or formal arrangements or agreements, provides and supports student and faculty access and user privileges to adequate library collections as well as to other learning/information resources consistent with the degrees offered. These collections and resources are sufficient to support all its educational, research, and public service programs.” **Core Requirement 2.9** (p. 17)

#### Governance and Administration

“The institution has qualified administrative officers with experience, competence, and capacity to lead the institution.” **Comprehensive Standard 3.2.8** (p. 21)

“The institution defines and publishes policies regarding appointment and employment of faculty and staff.” **Comprehensive Standard 3.2.9** (p. 22)

“The institution evaluates the effectiveness of its administrators, including the chief executive officer, on a periodic basis.” **Comprehensive Standard 3.2.10** (p. 22)

#### Institutional Effectiveness

“The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs and its administrative and educational support services; assesses whether it achieves these outcomes; and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results.” **Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1** (p. 22)

#### Educational Programs

“The institution provides appropriate academic support services.” **Comprehensive Standard 3.4.9** (p. 23)

“The institution’s use of technology enhances student learning, is appropriate for meeting the objectives of its programs, and ensures that students have access to and training in the use of technology.” **Comprehensive Standard 3.4.14** (p. 24)

“The institution ensures that its graduate instruction and resources foster independent learning enabling the graduate to contribute to a profession or field of study.” **Comprehensive Standard 3.6.2** (p. 24)

#### Faculty

“The institution regularly evaluates the effectiveness of each faculty member in accord with published criteria, regardless of contractual or tenured status.” **Comprehensive Standard 3.7.2** (p. 26)

“The institution provides evidence of ongoing professional development of faculty as teachers, scholars, and practitioners.” **Comprehensive Standard 3.7.3** (p. 26)

#### Library and Other Learning Resources

“The institution provides facilities, services, and learning/information resources that are appropriate to support its teaching, research, and service mission.” **Comprehensive Standard 3.8.1** (p. 26)

“The institution ensures that users have access

to regular and timely instruction in the use of the library and other learning/information resources.” **Comprehensive Standard 3.8.2** (p. 26)

“The institution provides a sufficient number of qualified staff—with appropriate education or experiences both in library and/or other learning/information resources—to accomplish the mission of the institution.” **Comprehensive Standard 3.8.3** (p. 26)

#### Financial and Physical Resources

“The institution operates and maintains physical facilities, both on and off campus, that are adequate to serve the needs of the institution’s educational programs, support services, and mission-related activities.” **Comprehensive Standard 3.10.7** (p. 27)

#### **ACRL Standards for College Libraries (2000 Edition)<sup>2</sup>**

The Association of College and Research Libraries, a division of the American Library Association, promulgates professional standards for academic libraries. Since 1959 several editions of type-of-library standards have been approved for university libraries, college libraries, and community and junior college libraries. The 2000 edition of the *Standards for College Libraries* was notable as the first set of ACRL standards to incorporate outcomes assessment.

With the 2000 edition of the *Standards for College Libraries*, ACRL departed from the trend of establishing prescriptive standards. Some standards about quality and quantity were retained from the earlier edition, but the main emphasis of the most recent college standards was to assist libraries in establishing individual goals within the context of their own institutional goals. The *Standards* included basic statistical “inputs” used for traditional aspects of assessment, as well as outcomes assessment, and provided methods to analyze library outcomes and operations. Additionally, questions were included to provide guidance for the provision of library services.

---

2. Association of College and Research Libraries. 2000. *Standards for College Libraries*, The Final Version, approved January 2000. *College & Research Libraries News* 61 (3) (March): 175-182.

That edition of the standards addressed twelve different aspects of academic libraries: planning, assessment, outcomes assessment, services, instruction, resources, access, staff, facilities, communication and cooperation, administration, and budget. Even though these standards were developed for college libraries, they were relevant to all academic libraries. Foremost, these standards incorporated outcomes assessment as defined by the ACRL Task Force Report on Academic Library Outcomes Assessment.<sup>3</sup>

ACRL *Standards for College Libraries* introduced and described the use of suggested points of comparison and the use of outcomes measures. It provided qualitative measures to assess user satisfaction, and service quality. That set of standards also provided quantitative measures (inputs and outputs) for internal trend analysis and comparison with peers.

Fernekes and Nelson examined the application of the 2000 edition to academic libraries. They concluded that academic libraries, both college and university, have found the *Standards for College Libraries* to be practical for the following reasons:

- (1) They meet the expectations by accrediting associations that require outcomes assessment.
- (2) They are applicable to any size library, and are the basis for a single standard for all academic libraries.
- (3) They have been successfully applied by academic libraries.
- (4) They provide a nationally approved professional standard for comprehensive assessment of academic libraries.<sup>4</sup>

---

3. Association of College and Research Libraries. 1998. Task Force on Academic Library Outcomes Assessment Report. Chicago: American Library Association (June 27, 1998). Available at: <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlpubs/whitepapers/taskforceacademic.htm> [last accessed 9-23-2004]

4. Fernekes, Robert W. and William N. Nelson. 2002. How Practical are the ACRL "Standards for College Libraries"?: Applying Standards in the Academic Library. *College & Research Libraries News* 63 (10) (November): 711-713.

A number of academic libraries have successfully applied the standards, and several have made all or part of their assessment publicly available on the web.<sup>5</sup> To provide further guidance for the practical application of the *Standards*, ACRL published a workbook keyed to the 2000 edition.<sup>6</sup>

### **ACRL Standards for Libraries in Higher Education<sup>7</sup>**

Since the ACRL Board of Directors mandated in 1998 that all new and revised standards incorporate outcomes assessment, the 2000 edition of the *Standards for College Libraries* served as a model for applying outcomes assessment in other type-of-library standards.

---

5. Amherst College [November 2002] <http://www.amherst.edu/library/assessment/facilities/> [last accessed 7-26-2004]

Butler University Libraries [May 2002]. The "Accreditation Self-Study" report was posted on the web, but recently removed by institutional policy because of the age the document. An electronic copy can be obtained by contacting Lewis Miller, Dean of Libraries, at [lmiller@butler.edu](mailto:lmiller@butler.edu)

Governors State [January 2000]. [http://www.govst.edu/gsu\\_library/t\\_gsu\\_library.asp?id=1201](http://www.govst.edu/gsu_library/t_gsu_library.asp?id=1201) [last accessed 9-23-2004] – pdf file available here. <http://webserve.govst.edu/library/assess.htm> [last accessed 9-23-2004] - The original html file is still available here.

University of Wisconsin–Parkside <http://www.uwp.edu/departments/library/services/selfstudy.htm> [last accessed 9-23-2004]

6. Nelson, William N. and Robert W. Fernekes. 2002. *Standards and Assessment for Academic Libraries: A Workbook*. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries.

7. Association of College and Research Libraries. 2003. Standards for Libraries in Higher Education: A Draft. *College & Research Libraries News* 64 (5) (May): 329-336. The final version (approved June 29, 2004) is not yet in print, but is available at: <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/standardslibraries.htm> [last accessed 9-23-2004]

In 2002, the ACRL Board appointed a College and Research Libraries Standards Task Force with representatives from each of the three type-of-library sections (ULS, CLS, and CJCLS; representing the university, college, and community and junior college libraries sections) to work together on a common set of standards for academic libraries. The task force developed a document, *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education*, which closely follows the *Standards for College Libraries*. The Task Force held open hearings and solicited comments on the draft document, which received final approval by ACRL in June 2004 and superceded the separate standards for universities, colleges, and two-year institutions.

The *Standards for College Libraries*, 2000 edition was the basis for the *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education*, which has the same format as the earlier document, with minimal changes to the text. The primary new elements are: (1) replacement of the word “college” with “institution” throughout the document, and (2) substitution of the word “higher education” for “college” in the title. This latter terminology is used because some technical institutes are not considered “academic” but are included in the broader term, “higher education.”

### Common Elements: ACRL & SACS-COC Standards

The United States is divided into six regions, each of which has an association responsible for accreditation of higher education institutions. All six of the regional accrediting associations have rewritten their standards in the last several years. These regional standards typically have very vague requirements that relate to libraries and learning resources. This trend is more pronounced in the revised standards. As an example, all the revised standards have eliminated a separate standard for libraries and learning resources and have included them within the other sections. One of the most important changes in the standards has been the new emphasis on student learning outcomes, placing more emphasis on what students learn and less on how they learn it.

Nelson and Fernekes reviewed the regional association standards, including the SACS-COC *Principles of Accreditation* for provisions affecting academic libraries, and categorized

them by the twelve sections of the 2000 edition of the *Standards for College Libraries*: planning, assessment, outcomes assessment, services, instruction, resources, access, staff, facilities, communication and cooperation, and administration. That analysis was published in the ACRL workbook on standards and assessment in academic libraries. The analysis showed that the 2004 SACS *Principles of Accreditation* had corresponding elements in eleven of the twelve sections of the ACRL standards.<sup>8</sup> The chart has been revised for the *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* and to incorporate changes in the numbering system of the *Principles of Accreditation*. The new chart is included below.

### A Compliance Strategy

Any evidence of compliance with SACS-COC standards should be: (1) relevant to the *Principles of Accreditation*, (2) current, (3) representative or typical, (4) integrated and coherent (relating to fact), (5) useful, (6) verifiable and authoritative, and (7) quantifiable and quantitative.<sup>9</sup> The non-prescriptive nature of the SACS standards presents a challenge to those attempting to document compliance. At the same time this affords the academic library an opportunity for a comprehensive evaluation of the library that will generate useful and authoritative data for use in regional and specialized accreditation reports.

A recommended compliance strategy is to use a nationally-approved, comprehensive standard for a thorough review of the academic library. The ACRL *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* (as was its predecessor, the 2000 edition of *Standards for College Libraries*) is an ideal standard to use. This set of standards can be used as the basis to draw conclusions regarding the adequacy, sufficiency, and appropriateness of library collections, services and facilities. Once the *Standards* have been applied, the conclusions are supported by the

---

8. Nelson and Fernekes. *Standards Workbook*, 142-143.

9. Russell, Ralph. 2003. Presentation, “Assessing Library/Learning Resources Using the New Standards.” Georgia Library Association-Council of Media Organizations Conference. Jekyll Island, Georgia: October 23, 2003.

data generated by the assessment. With the thorough review, bolstered by data that support the conclusions, the SACS peer reviewers must agree with the conclusions or demonstrate some error or flaw in the process. The use of the ACRL standards seems to be an ideal strategy, as SACS-COC has already approved a set of "guidelines" which may be used in assessment of the faculty section of the *Principles*.

Outcomes assessment is now almost universally required by regional accrediting associations and specialized accrediting bodies. By using this comprehensive, national academic library standard, libraries have the opportunity to review all aspects of the academic library, not just those specifically mentioned in the SACS *Principles*. Use of the *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* can provide the library evaluation required by all of the groups that accredit a particular institution. The conclusion and supporting data from application of the *Standards* can then be reformatted as necessary to meet the particular reporting requirements, allowing the library to conduct its own coherent and ongoing evaluation plan, then reporting the data as needed to meet accreditation requirements.

Use of these *Standards* also facilitates the comparison of data among peers because all peers using the standards would be collecting the same data. Furthermore, once one library in a group of peers aggregates and analyzes the data, it is available for all other members of the peer group. The onerous task of collecting and aggregating the data can be shared among institutions. For example, in a group of five peers, a given library could accomplish the comprehensive collection of data once every five years, or each library could collect only a fifth of the total each year.

SACS and the other accrediting associations generally take the position that they will not accept any standards, other than their own, in making a determination about the accreditation of an institution. However, it is reported that ACRL standards have been informally used to supplement those of the regional associations in the evaluation of academic libraries.<sup>10</sup> Some

---

10. Coleman, Paul and Ada D. Jarred. 1994. Regional Association Criteria and the "Standards for College Libraries": The Informal

have asserted that the ACRL standards can have an impact on the library more significant than accreditation itself.<sup>11</sup>

The best strategy for library compliance with the new SACS-COC standards is to design and implement an assessment plan based on the *ACRL Standards for Libraries in Higher Education*, then present the conclusions and supporting data in a format compatible with institutional and SACS requirements. To assist in such an effort, the attached chart provides cross references between the SACS-COC Principles of Accreditation and the twelve sections of the *ACRL Standards for Libraries in Higher Education*.<sup>12</sup>

---

Role of Quantitative Input Measures for Libraries in Accreditation. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 20 (3) (November): 273-284.

11. Williams, Delmus E. and Phyllis O'Connor. 1994. Academic Libraries and the Literature of Accreditation. In *The Challenge and Practice of Academic Accreditation: A Sourcebook for Library Administrators*, ed. Edward Garten, 243-249. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

12. This chart was compiled by Nelson and Fernekes. It is a revision of a chart originally published in Nelson and Fernekes, *Standards Workbook*, 142-143.



**Cross Reference Chart**  
**SACS Accreditation Standards: Provisions Affecting Academic Libraries**  
**(July 2004)**

<p><b>ACRL, <i>Standards for Libraries in Higher Education</i></b> (June 2004)</p>	<p><b>Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges, <i>Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement</i></b> (January 2004 edition)</p>
<p><b>Planning</b></p>	<p>“The institution has a clearly defined and published mission statement specific to the institution and appropriate to an institution of higher education, addressing teaching and learning and, where applicable, research and public service.” Core Requirement 2.4</p> <p>“The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan and demonstrates the plan is part of an ongoing planning and evaluation process.” Core Requirement 2.12</p>
<p><b>Assessment</b></p>	<p>“The institution regularly evaluates the effectiveness of each faculty member in accord with published criteria, regardless of contractual or tenured status.” Comprehensive Standard 3.7.2</p> <p>“The institution demonstrates that each educational program for which academic credit is awarded (a) is approved by the faculty and the administration, and (b) establishes and evaluates program and learning objectives.” Comprehensive Standard 3.4.1</p>
<p><b>Outcomes Assessment</b></p>	<p>“The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that incorporate a systematic review of programs and services that (a) results in continuing improvement and (b) demonstrates that the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.” Core Requirement 2.5</p> <p>“The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs and its administrative and educational support services; assesses whether it achieves these outcomes; and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results.” Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1</p>
<p><b>Services</b></p>	<p>“The institution provides facilities, services, and learning/information resources that are appropriate to support its teaching, research, and service mission.” Comprehensive Standard 3.8.1</p> <p>“The institution provides student support programs, services, and activities consistent with its mission that promote student learning and enhance the development of its students.” Core Requirement 2.10.</p> <p>“The institution provides appropriate academic support services.” Comprehensive Standard 3.4.9</p> <p>“The requirements [of the <i>Principles of Accreditation</i>] apply to all institutional programs and services, wherever located or however delivered. (from the section on “Application of the Standards”)</p>

<p><b>ACRL, <i>Standards for Libraries in Higher Education</i></b> (June 2004)</p>	<p><b>Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges, <i>Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement</i></b> (January 2004 edition)</p>
<p><b>Instruction</b></p>	<p>“The institution ensures that users have access to regular and timely instruction in the use of the library and other learning/information resources.” Comprehensive Standard 3.8.2</p> <p>“The institution’s use of technology enhances student learning, is appropriate for meeting the objectives of its programs, and ensures that students have access to training in the use of technology.” Comprehensive Standard 3.4.14</p>
<p><b>Resources</b></p>	<p>“The institution provides facilities, services, and learning/information resources that are appropriate to support its teaching, research, and service mission.” Comprehensive Standard 3.8.1.</p> <p>“The institution, through ownership or formal arrangements or agreements, provides and supports student and faculty access and user privileges to adequate library collections as well as to other learning/information resources consistent with the degrees offered. These collections and resources are sufficient to support all its educational, research, and public service programs.” Core Requirement 2.9</p> <p>“The institution ensures that its graduate instruction and resources foster independent learning, enabling the graduate to contribute to a profession or field of study.” Comprehensive Standard 3.6.2</p>
<p><b>Access</b></p>	<p>“The institution, through ownership or formal arrangements or agreements, provides and supports student and faculty access and user privileges to adequate library collections as well as to other learning/information resources consistent with the degrees offered. These collections and resources are sufficient to support all its educational, research, and public service programs.” Core Requirement 2.9</p>
<p><b>Staff</b></p>	<p>“The institution provides a sufficient number of qualified staff--with appropriate education or experiences both in library and/or other learning/information resources--to accomplish the mission of the institution.” Comprehensive Standard 3.8.3</p> <p>“The institution has qualified administrative and academic officers with the experience, competence, and capacity to lead the institution.” Comprehensive Standard 3.2.8</p> <p>“The institution defines and publishes policies regarding appointment and employment of faculty and staff.” Comprehensive Standards 3.2.9</p> <p>“The institution evaluates the effectiveness of its administrators, including the chief executive officer, on a periodic basis.” Comprehensive Standard 3.2.10</p> <p>“The institution employs competent faculty members qualified to accomplish the mission and goals of the institution.” Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1</p> <p>“The institution provides evidence of ongoing professional development of faculty as teachers, scholars, and practitioners.” Comprehensive Standard 3.7.3</p>

<p><b>ACRL, <i>Standards for Libraries in Higher Education</i></b> (June 2004)</p>	<p><b>Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges, <i>Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement</i></b> (January 2004 edition)</p>
<p><b>Facilities</b></p>	<p>“The institution provides facilities, services, and learning/information resources that are appropriate to support its teaching, research, and service mission.” Comprehensive Standard 3.8.1</p> <p>“The institution operates and maintains physical facilities, both on and off campus, that are adequate to serve the needs of the institution’s educational programs, support services, and mission-related activities.” Comprehensive Standard 3.10.7</p> <p>“The institution has a sound financial base and demonstrated financial stability, and adequate physical resources to support the mission of the institution and the scope of its programs and services.” Core Requirement 2.11</p>
<p><b>Communication &amp; Cooperation</b></p>	<p>“The institution has a clear and comprehensive mission statement that guides it; is approved by the governing board; is periodically reviewed by the board; and is communicated to the institution’s constituencies.” Comprehensive Standard 3.1.1</p>
<p><b>Administration</b></p>	<p>“The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs and its administrative and educational support services; assesses whether it achieves these outcomes; and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results.” Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1</p>
<p><b>Budget</b></p>	<p>“The institution has a sound financial base and demonstrated financial stability, and adequate physical resources to support the mission of the institution and the scope of its programs and services.” Core Requirement 2.11</p>

## The Realities of Relevance: A Survey of Librarians' Use of Library and Information Science Research

Christine Brown and Brett Spencer

Dr. Christine Brown is Circulation Supervisor, Rutherford Library, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta. She can be reached at [cdbrown3@telus.net](mailto:cdbrown3@telus.net). Brett Spencer is Reference Librarian/Instructional Coordinator, Gorgas Library Information Services, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa AL. He can be reached at [dbspence@bama.ua.edu](mailto:dbspence@bama.ua.edu).

---

### Introduction

This article grew out of the authors' desire to explore the widely held notion that librarians disregard LIS research because they consider it irrelevant. For example, in the early stages of this project one colleague commented that librarianship "is all practice" and that LIS research has had no effect upon his own work. Editors of many LIS journals also question whether research exerts influence on practice. Peter Hernon and Candy Schwartz, editors of *Library and Information Science Research*, lament that "research has not penetrated the soul" of the library profession,<sup>1</sup> and William Katz, former editor of *Research Quarterly*, notes that many authors have failed to show the implications of their research for practice.<sup>2</sup> A survey of LIS scholars revealed that many researchers themselves doubt whether their findings affect practice.<sup>3</sup> While many authors within the profession have thus agreed upon the existence of a research-practice gap in librarianship, they differ in regards to the gap's causes. Some authors blame researchers; some blame practitioners; and some attribute the breakdown to deficiencies in LIS education or dissemination channels. This article examines the research-practice gap by discussing the results of a recent survey that measured the use of LIS research among Alabama's academic reference librarians.

Scholars have called attention to the anemic nature of LIS research utilization ever since librarians' first attempts to organize themselves into a profession. For instance, William J. Goode of Columbia University highlighted the problem in his treatise "The Librarian: From Occupation to Profession?" at the Twenty-Sixth Annual Graduate School Conference in 1961. Goode explained that certain fields, such as medicine, had evolved into distinct professions while others, such as hair styling, had remained occupational in nature. He pointed out that professional status brought with it several benefits: autonomy, associations, higher salaries, greater respect, and university departments. These benefits arose from a body of relevant "abstract knowledge" that guided the profession's practitioners in carrying out their tasks:

The knowledge [of a profession] must first of all be organized in abstract principles, and cannot exist in mere details however vast in quantity. These principles must be applicable to concrete problems.<sup>4</sup>

In Goode's opinion librarianship had failed to achieve professional status (and missed out on many of the accompanying benefits) because it had not created relevant principles. Librarians had no theories that could guide them in solving the fundamental problem of finding and organizing information:

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Hernon and Cindy Schwartz, "Editorial: Can Research be Assimilated into the Soul of Library and Information Science?," *Library and Information Science Research* 17 (Spring 1995): 102.

<sup>2</sup> William Katz, "The Influence of Theory and Research in the Practice of Reference Services," *The Reference Librarian* 18 (1987): 1-5.

<sup>3</sup> Charles R. McClure and Ann P. Bishop, "The Status of Research in Library and Information Science: Guarded Optimism," *College & Research Libraries* 50, no. 2 (1989): pp. 127-143; Thomas James Waldhart, Editorial, *Library Research* 2 (1980): 105-106.

<sup>4</sup> William J. Goode, "The Librarian: From Occupation to Profession," *Library Quarterly* 31 (1961): 308.

The central gap is of course the failure to develop a general body of scientific knowledge bearing precisely on this problem, in the way that the medical profession with its auxiliary scientific fields has developed an immense body of knowledge with which to cure human diseases...most day-to-day professional work utilizes rather concrete, rule-of thumb, local regulations and rules, and a major cataloging system. The problems of selection and organization are dealt with on a highly empiricist basis, concretely, with little reference to general scientific principles.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, Goode thought that most librarians went about their work without consulting LIS research because so little useful research existed. Doctors had capitalized on research findings to improve treatments for their patients, but librarians, for whatever reason, did not harness research results in a similar manner. If one can appreciate the significance of research to the medical profession, it becomes clear why past scholars called attention to the inadequacy of research use in LIS. The continued progress of a field depends upon its ability to make the most of its research findings.

In the twenty-first century, the profession invests heavily in producing research, but the low level of research use persists. At LIS departments all over the country faculty pour considerable time and energy into research projects. Currently, dozens of journals and ALA committees strive to foster research and publication. Many colleges and universities also put pressure on librarians to conduct research in order to fulfill tenure requirements. Workshops on how to jump-start publication projects, such as "Is Publishing Your Passion? Take Small Steps First" at the 2003 ALA conference, have become common.<sup>6</sup> The Southeastern Library Association lists research as one of the group's major purposes in its Constitution.<sup>7</sup> Yet, a perception still lingers that the profession fails to make use of its research. As one writer puts it, "the actual value of research to librarianship remains an unanswered question in various quarters of the field--even though generous lip service to research is widely expressed."<sup>8</sup> To examine this irony, the authors of the present study feel that it is important to take a closer look at research utilization.

In addition, the research-practice question seems especially significant when considering the challenges facing the profession. Internet search engines, virtual reference programs, electronic databases, and e-journals offer many new ways to expand services for patrons, but librarians need guidance from research to take full advantage of these technologies. More than ever before, twenty-first century librarians must have research that can help them assess programs, forge new services, inform decisions, and prevent them from having to "reinvent the wheel." After realizing the significance of the research-practice connection, the authors of the present study decided to shed more light on this issue through a survey of practitioners.

## Literature Review

Writers have taken various approaches to the research-practice gap, but only a few have conducted surveys of librarians' attitudes and habits. Some authors approach the research-practice gap through content analysis of library journals. Derr (1983) believes that LIS research lacks relevance because it fails to develop "applied theory" that "focuses on the design of procedures for the effective performance of professional tasks."<sup>9</sup> Katz (1987), who has edited several of the field's textbooks and journals, notes that

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 312-313.

<sup>6</sup> Carol Shepstone, "Is Publishing Your Passion? Take Small Steps First," *ALA Cognotes*, June 2003 Conference Issue, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Southeastern Library Association, "Constitution of the Southeastern Library Association," Article II, accessed on December 2, 2003 at <http://sela.lib.ucf.edu/Handbook/constit.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Charles H. Busha, ed., *A Library Science Research Reader and Bibliographic Guide* (Littleton, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, 1981), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Derr, "The Integration of Theory and Practice in Professional Programs," *Journal of Education for Librarianship* 23, no. 3 (1983): 193.

many authors view their work as “totally divorced from the experience of and education of the average reference/information librarian.”<sup>10</sup> In a similar vein, Floyd and Phillips (1997) survey the authors and editors of twenty-two library journals and conclude that LIS research often fails to provide relevant advice for librarians.<sup>11</sup> Studies like these reveal the limitations of the research literature but do not actually assess practitioners' use of this literature.

In another approach, many authors have addressed the research-practice gap by exposing problems in the curriculum and goals of LIS education. One study revealed that twenty out of fifty-two LIS programs lacked a course in research methodology.<sup>12</sup> Thus, many librarians may not utilize research because their schools do not teach them how to interpret it. Morehead (1973) contends that the traditional lecture method inevitably leads to a research-practice disjunction because lectures fail to show students how to implement research findings. Therefore, he calls upon library schools to offer seminar and laboratory courses that give students more opportunities to apply theories in a real-life setting.<sup>13</sup> In a slightly different vein, O'Connor and Mulvaney (1996) argue that the campaign by LIS faculty to achieve the status of “information scientists” has led to a schism between researchers and librarians. LIS professors give too much attention to carrying out theoretical research instead of training future practitioners.<sup>14</sup>

Other authors assert that LIS research is relevant and chide complacent librarians for failing to apply research findings. Anderson (1985) believes that many practitioners reject research because they think in terms of a dichotomy of “theory vs. practice.” In challenging this notion, he points out that practice cannot exist without theory anymore than “bodily processes” can exist without “mental processes.”<sup>15</sup> He does admit, however, that sometimes theorists work on irrelevant topics. Intner (1990) claims that practitioners' belief in the uniqueness of their own libraries and adherence to tradition—not an absence of useful research—has prevented the successful application of research.<sup>16</sup> Anderson and Intner thus rebuff a perception of research among practitioners although they do not document that perception.

On the other hand, Crowley (1999) claims that LIS faculty produce research with unclear implications because they leave librarians out of the research process. Practitioners possess “tacit knowledge” (undocumented or private wisdom) that a LIS researcher can capture through techniques like analysis of practitioner accounts and interviews. Drawing on librarians' “how I did it good” experiences can help researchers create more relevant theories.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Katz, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Barbara L. Floyd and John C. Phillips, “A Question of Quality: How Authors Perceive Library Literature,” *College & Research Libraries* 58, no. 1 (1997): 81-93.

<sup>12</sup> Soyeon Park, “Research Methods as Core Competency,” *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 44, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 17.

<sup>13</sup> Joe Morehead, “The Theory Practice Problem and Library-Centered Library Education,” *Journal of Education for Librarianship* 14, no. 2 (Fall 1973): 119-128.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel O'Connor and J. Phillip Mulvaney, “LIS Faculty Research and Expectations of the Academic Culture versus the Needs of the Practitioner,” *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 37, no. 4 (1996): 306-316.

<sup>15</sup> A. J. Anderson, “They Never Taught Me How to Do This in Library School: Some Reflections on the Theory/Practice Nexus,” *Journal of Library Administration* 6, no. 2 (1985): 3.

<sup>16</sup> Shelia Intner, “Theory and Practice or Theory versus Practice: Fundamental Issues and Questions,” in *Library Education and Leadership* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1990), 154-155.

<sup>17</sup> Bill Crowley, “Building Useful Theory: Tacit Knowledge, Practitioner Reports, and the Culture of LIS Inquiry,” *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 40, no. 4 (1999): 282-295.

Another approach, the survey method, provides an empirical perspective on the research-practice gap. In one of the first such surveys, Lynam, Slater, and Walker (1982) queried 1950 British academic, public, government, and corporate library workers selected from the membership rolls of the Association for Information Management, Institute for Information Science, and Library Association. The authors hoped to determine the attitudes of practitioners about research and what channels (journals, conferences, research reports) disseminated research effectively. They discovered that 44% of their respondents had a moderate interest in LIS research. Many respondents, however, noted that the irrelevancy of some research prevented them from taking a greater interest. Respondents listed journals as the most frequently consulted source for relevant research, and three out of four participants regularly used informal means like personal contacts to learn about research. Only a quarter of respondents had conducted research themselves.<sup>18</sup>

Ali (1985) followed the lead of Lynam, Slater, and Walker by surveying chief librarians at major libraries in the United Kingdom and United States. He affirmed their finding that journals serve as the most heavily used medium for learning about research.<sup>19</sup> In a 1986 survey of fifty Illinois practitioners, Ali reported that 88% of respondents perceived research articles as relevant to their practice; however, only 42% viewed secondary sources like *Library Literature* as definitely helpful in locating research findings. Ninety percent of respondents had attended conferences in the past year and reported that these events served as sources of relevant information (as well as catalysts for reading the professional literature).<sup>20</sup>

In a more recent study, Powell, Baker, and Mika (2002) conducted a survey that asked 615 American practitioners about their involvement in LIS research. They concluded that the "results of the study are mixed regarding the extent to which LIS practitioners read, conduct, and apply research." For example, nearly 90% of the 615 respondents said they read at least one research journal on a regular basis, but a much smaller number reported that they ever applied findings from the research literature.<sup>21</sup> Writers must conduct more such empirical studies so that they can clarify librarians' use of research and determine if new technologies have improved the dissemination process.

## Methodology

The present authors seek to describe the use of LIS research by Alabama's academic reference librarians through a survey based on the earlier one by Lynam, Slater, and Walker (1982). The Alabama questionnaire also includes new questions that take into account the rise of electronic dissemination. The authors chose to concentrate on reference librarianship, a subfield that has experienced a great degree of change in the last decade. For the purpose of the study, *research* consists of the findings, ideas, and theories that arise from the formal and intensive study of a phenomenon. Researchers disseminate their findings, ideas, and theories through various channels: journals, associations, listservs, and personal contacts. *Use* means the extent to which practitioners' consult dissemination channels and their perception of the value of research.

The authors created an online questionnaire that automatically compiled the responses into an SPSS database. Library science students working as reference assistants pre-tested the online survey, and the authors revised the survey based on the students' feedback. Library home pages and the *American*

---

<sup>18</sup> Peter Lynam, Margaret Slater, and Rennie Walker, *Research and the Practitioner: Dissemination of Research Results within the Library-Information Profession* (London: Aslib, 1982): 1-12.

<sup>19</sup> S. Nazim Ali, "Library Science Research: Some Results of its Dissemination and Utilization," *Libri* 35, no. 2 (1985): 151.

<sup>20</sup> S. Nazim Ali, "Attitudes and Preferences of Library Practitioners in Illinois to Channels for Dissemination of Research Results," *College & Research Libraries* 47, no. 2 (1986): 169-170.

<sup>21</sup> Ronald R. Powell, Lynda M. Baker, and Joseph J. Mika, "Library and Information Science Practitioners and Research," *Library and Information Science Research* 24 (2002): 71.

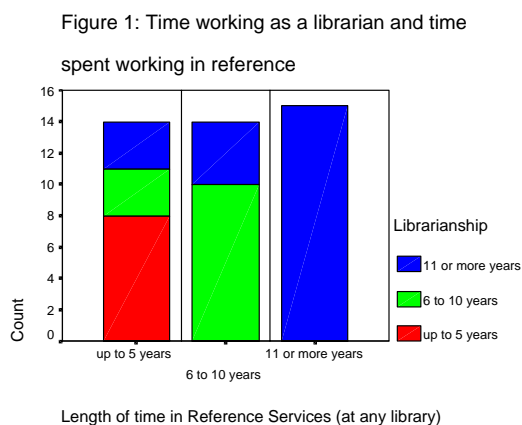
*Library Directory* furnished the names and email addresses of 115 librarians and full-time reference staff working at four-year colleges or universities in Alabama. The authors emailed the survey's link to all of the potential participants twice in December, 2002.

A total of forty-three responses yielded a response rate of 37.39%. While the investigators hoped for a higher percentage, the number of responses approximated those of past surveys on the same topic. For example, Lynam, Slater, and Walker (1982) had a response rate of 44%, and Powell, Baker, and Mika (2002) had a response rate of 42.6%. Like the studies of earlier authors, the present article offers a significant insight into the research-practice gap by presenting a detailed picture of one group of librarians' use of LIS research. Generalization to the greater population of American practitioners is limited; however, the responses highlighted issues that can guide future studies.

## Results

### Demographics of Respondents

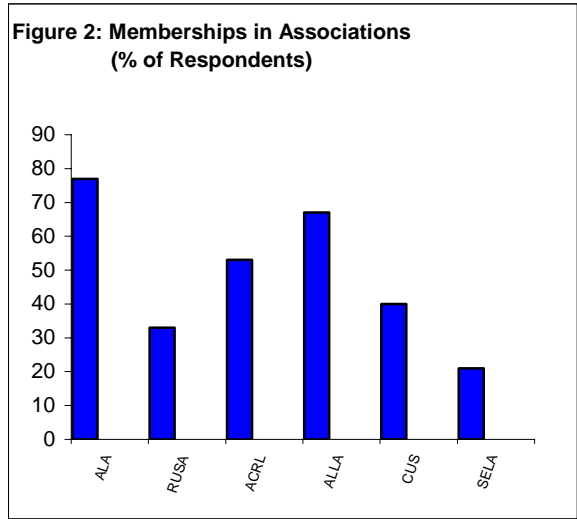
Most of the forty-three respondents have had substantial experience as professional librarians. Although classified staff also received copies of the survey, nearly all of the respondents (98%) indicated that they hold an MLIS degree. In addition, 42% hold an additional subject master's degree in either the humanities or social sciences, and a small number (20%) hold advanced degrees in science. Only two respondents said they have Ph.D. degrees (one in history and another in comparative literature). Figure 1 shows that two-thirds of the respondents have worked in the field as a reference librarian for six or more years.



### Channels for Hearing about Research

**Membership & Participation in LIS Associations & Conferences:** Several questions sought to gauge librarians' participation in associations since these groups serve as conduits for new research. Eighty-eight percent of the reference librarians hold memberships in either a state or national library association. On average, respondents have memberships in at least three organizations. This activity ranges from one respondent who holds memberships in seven associations to five respondents who hold no memberships. The American Library Association (ALA) and the Alabama Library Association (ALLA) have the highest level of membership among respondents (Figure 2).





In terms of ALA participation, a third of the respondents involve themselves in the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA), the ALA division dedicated to the work of reference librarians. Slightly more (40%) have a membership in the College, University and Special (CUS) Libraries Association of the Alabama Library Association. Several librarians take part in the Southeastern Library Association (SELA). The range of other associations mentioned by librarians included: Reforma, Georgia Library Association, Organization of American Historians, International Association of School Librarianship, Special Libraries Association, Art Libraries Society of North America, Black Caucus of ALA, Library Instruction Round Table, Music Library Association, International Association of Music Libraries, American Society for Engineering Education, and the Alabama Historical Association.

Participating in a committee in a LIS association helps librarians stay abreast of new developments in the field. Accordingly, twenty-three respondents currently serve as a committee member. The majority of them participate in committees in the Alabama Library Association and the American Library Association (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Association Activities**

<b>Committee/Round Table on which Librarian Serves</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>
Alabama Library Association College, University and Special Libraries Roundtable, College, University, and Special Libraries Research, Education, Public Relations, Round Table on Reference & Adult Services, Bibliography, Institutional Round Table, Government Documents Round Table	22
American Library Association Library Research Round Table, Intellectual Freedom Round Table, Business Reference and Services Section, Machine-Assisted Reference Section, Association for Library Collections & Technical Services, Library Instruction Round Table, Reference & User Services Association	12
Alabama Public Library Service Alabama Virtual Library	2
Reforma (National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking) Information Technology Committee	1

Network of Alabama Academic Libraries Continuing Education Committee	1
Southeastern Library Association Intellectual Freedom Committee	1
Association of Research Libraries Educational Behavioral Science Section	1

Most of these librarians serve on an average of two committees with some serving on as many as five committees. Two librarians said that they participate in so many groups that they could not list them all. Fifteen librarians said they previously served with a similar arrangement of committees.

Conferences offer one of the main avenues for practicing librarians to learn about the discoveries of others. While formal programs supply a great deal of information, many librarians also gain helpful ideas from informal networking outside of official activities. Nearly 90% have attended at least one conference in the last year. Over half of the respondents (56.1%) have attended two to three conferences in the last year (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Conference Attendance of Academic Reference Librarians in Alabama**

Number of Conferences	Last Year (% of Respondents)	Last Two Years (% of Respondents)
None	14.6	4.9
One	19.5	17.1
Two	26.8	17.1
Three	29.3	14.6
Four	4.9	9.8
Five or More	4.9	31.7
Can't Remember	0	4.9
Total	100	100

Several factors shape librarians' decisions to attend conferences: subject matter, possibility of hearing interesting new ideas, opportunity to stay up-to-date with the latest developments, contact with other professionals, and guidance on work problems (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Factors Influencing Conference Attendance**

Factor	Important (%)	A consideration (%)	Not Important (%)	Not Applicable (%)
Subject matter of the event	90.0	7.5	2.5	0
Possibility of hearing interesting ideas	90.0	5.0	5.0	0
Keep up-to-date with latest developments	72.5	22.5	5.0	0
Possibility of practical guidance at work	67.5	22.5	7.5	2.5
Contact with other members of the profession	60.0	32.5	5.0	2.5
Meeting job requirements	33.3	28.2	25.6	12.8
Meeting tenure requirements	28.2	25.6	30.8	15.4
A speaker's reputation for provoking thought	27.5	60.0	10.0	2.5
Temporary break from work place routine	12.8	48.7	33.3	0

The speaker's reputation for provoking thought or getting a break from work only provided "a consideration" in the decision to attend. In fact, a third of the respondents feel that participating in a

conference is not a break from work. To the surprise of the investigators, tenure requirements provide only a slight incentive for librarians to attend. For the two respondents who had not gone to a conference in the last two years, one said that none of the factors applied while the other said that a limited travel fund prevented them from attending.

**Information Seeking & Reading Habits:** Indexes, abstracting services, and databases serve as essential resources for reference staff to use in the identification of relevant articles and books. Most respondents have access to *Library Literature* despite the limited number of LIS programs in Alabama, and 86.8% of respondents utilize this database (see Table 4).

**Table 4: Indexing and Abstracting Services used by Alabama Academic Reference Librarians**

Service	Use (%)	Don't Use (%)	No Access (%)
Academic Search Elite	91.7	8.3	0
Expanded Academic ASAP	91.4	8.6	0
ERIC	88.9	11.1	0
Library Literature	86.8	7.9	5.3
Library and Info Science Abs	42.4	24.2	33.3
Other Index	16.3	0	0

Respondents use general databases such as *Academic Search Elite* about as much as they tap *Library Literature*. The high use of general databases may result from their inclusion in the *Alabama Virtual Library*, a free service to all libraries in the state. General databases also offer the convenience of full-text articles, an especially helpful feature for staff at libraries with small professional collections. Although lacking the breadth of LIS-specific indexes, these general resources apparently provide other advantages that attract these practitioners. However, most of the LIS articles in these databases reflect a professional rather than a research approach. Many of the other indexes listed by respondents cover literature outside of LIS: *Business Source Premier*, *Professional Development Collection*, *Dow Jones Interactive*, *ABI/Inform*, *Emerald Databases*, *Proquest*, *Newspaper Source*, *CQ Researcher*, and the *Humanities Index*.

Table 5 presents the level of exposure to common print journals in reference librarianship.

**Table 5: Librarians Journal Reading**

Journal	Every Issue (%)	Sometimes (%)	Never (%)
Library Journal	32.5	52.5	15.0
American Libraries	67.6	21.6	10.8
Reference & User Services Quarterly	43.2	37.8	18.9
College & Research Libraries	48.6	40.5	10.8
College & Research Libraries News	48.6	31.4	20.0
Journal of Academic Librarianship	17.1	54.3	28.6
Information Today	6.7	33.3	60.0
Library Quarterly	0.0	27.6	72.4
Library & Information Science Research	5.9	23.5	70.6
Journal of the American Society for Information Science & Technology	3.3	23.3	73.3

The majority of respondents read either every issue or some issues of most professional journals listed in the survey with the exception of *Information Today*. The heavy exposure to professional journals, combined with the high use of general indexes and databases, suggests that these librarians have ample opportunities to learn about research reported in the professional literature. However, the librarians read very few articles from research journals such as *Library Quarterly*, *Library and Information Science Research*, and the *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology (JASIST)*.

Respondents peruse general journals like *American Libraries* and *Library Journal* as much or more than journals like *College and Research Libraries* that focus on academic libraries. The fact that almost 80% of respondents reported membership in ALA may explain why so many read *American Libraries* (since this magazine comes with membership). One might have expected *Journal of Academic Librarianship* to score higher since *Magazines for Libraries*, a selection tool for libraries, describes it as basic to LIS collections. Interestingly, reference librarians seldom read technology journals like *JASIST* and *Information Today* despite the attention given to new technologies in libraries. Even from a professional perspective, it is puzzling that so few read *Information Today* since this magazine focuses on meeting the technology needs of information professionals.

In addition to the materials listed in the survey, thirteen of the respondents listed other journals or newsletters that they consult regularly. Two respondents mentioned *Research Strategies* and *Computers in Libraries*. Other journals listed by individual respondents included *Alabama Librarian*, *EBSS Newsletter*, *Library Trends*, *Library Hotline*, *Journal of Youth Services*, *Unabashed Librarian*, *World Literature Today*, *School Library Journal*, *Fontes Artis Musicae*, *Notes*, *Technical Services Quarterly*, and *The Southeastern Librarian*.

In addition to querying librarians about the journals they read, the survey asked respondents about specific types of articles in these journals. Most respondents indicated at least some interest in all of the choices except news about personalities (see Table 6).

**Table 6: Journal Content Interests**

Content Type	Very Interested (%)	Interested (%)	Little or No Interest (%)
Developing trends in library/information work	28 (65.1)	13 (30.2)	2 (4.7)
Discussion of ideas	24 (58.5)	14 (34.1)	3 (7.3)
Problems faced by librarians/information units	20 (46.5)	20 (46.5)	3 (7.0)
Information on availability of new services	19 (46.3)	17 (41.5)	5 (12.2)
How other libraries/information units are run	18 (43.9)	19 (46.3)	4 (9.8)
Research experience	15 (17.5)	20 (46.5)	4 (10.3)
Information about forthcoming events	7 (17.5)	25 (62.5)	8 (20.0)
News about personalities	1 (2.5)	15 (37.5)	24 (60.0)

Note: Figures do not include missing responses.

Respondents had the highest level of interest in developing trends in library-information work. Four respondents expressed interest in book or media reviews. Their interest in this material helps explain the popularity of *Library Journal* since this journal offers a large number of reviews.

All of the respondents either subscribe to or read electronic discussion groups. In total, they belong to seventy different groups, and on average they subscribe to 4.4 groups. Some only subscribe to one group, but one librarian reported belonging to seventeen. The most mentioned group is the Network of Alabama Academic Libraries Listserv (NAAL-L) followed by Alabama Virtual Library List, Alabama Library Association Listserv (ALLA-L), GovDoc-L, Digital Reference Listserv, and LIBREF-L. Although respondents thus read many general reference-oriented listservs, they also subscribe to various specialized listservs that relate to their respective work tasks.

While all the respondents collect information from listservs, only ten stated that they regularly read web sources such as *Scout Report* and *Search Engine Watch*. It is hard to believe that so few of these librarians scan web sites. Perhaps the tediousness of having to recall this behavior deterred others from answering this question. Future authors should ask respondents to copy their bookmarks or send a link to their homepage, thus providing a more accurate picture of this information behavior.

**Research Projects in Reference Services:** Participation in research projects offers another obvious channel for learning about research. Such activity may also reveal the value that respondents place on research and sensitize them to research by others on the same topic. Although thirteen (31.7%) respondents have carried out a research project in reference services, only nine (20.5%) have published any of these projects. Five (11.36%) have presented their projects at national conferences while six (13.63%) have presented projects at local conferences. About half of respondents (51.2%) have published non-research articles, and more respondents have composed non-research articles than research articles.

One might have expected that a larger number of academic librarians would have carried out research projects since many of them face tenure requirements. Limited time may explain the low number of research endeavors. In addition, many Alabama librarians can meet tenure requirements by publishing non-research articles or performing committee work for associations. Furthermore, although nearly all reference librarians carry out projects like assessment surveys or administrative reports for their libraries, they may not view these undertakings as research even though these projects incorporate some steps of the research process.

**Informal Channels for Finding out about Research:** When asked about their use of informal contacts for finding out about research, practitioners overwhelmingly revealed that they hear about new ideas through colleagues rather than acquaintances or researchers (see Table 7).

**Table 7: Sources for Informal Information about Research**

Channels/Source	Only Colleagues (%)	Colleagues & Others (%)	Only Acquaintances (%)
Email** (n= 32)	17 (53.1)	13 (40.6)	1 (3.1)
Telephone (n=20)	12 (60.0)	6 (30.0)	2 (10.0)
Face-to-face (n=28)	20 (71.4)	8 (28.6)	0
Obtain copies of articles* (n =26)	11 (42.3)	11 (42.3)	0
* 4 (15.4%) respondents said they obtain copies of articles from researchers.			
** 1 respondent said they obtained research information via email with researchers			

The reliance on colleagues came as no surprise to the investigators since colleagues offer the most accessible informal source. In asking how the respondents communicate with colleagues, more respondents said they use oral channels like face-to-face conversations than written channels like email.

**Comparing the Channels:** When asked to rank their preference of formal and informal channels for finding out about new research, respondents indicated that they most preferred to hear about research through conferences, journal articles, and personal contacts. As summarized in Tables 8 and 9, respondents preferred conferences the most, but they ranked journal articles as the most important format to them.

**Table 8: Formats Used for Obtaining New Ideas/Research**

Format	% of Respondents
Conferences	79.1
Personal contacts	74.4
Journal articles	74.4

Electronic discussion groups	55.8
Staff meetings	46.5
Indexing/abstracting services	34.9
Newsletters	34.9
Reports/theses	7.0
No preference	2.3

**Table 9: Formats Ranked as Most Important**

Format	% of Respondents Ranking #1
Journal articles	29.4
Personal contacts	20.0
Seminars/workshops/courses	18.8
Electronic discussion groups	12.9
Indexing/abstracting Services	10.6
Staff meetings	4.7
News Letters	3.5

The librarians also valued personal contacts almost as much as these other formats. Although preferred by 55.8% and considered significant by 12.9%, electronic discussion groups have not overtaken more traditional channels in importance.

The responses to indexes, newsletters, and staff meetings seem ambiguous. Over a third of respondents said they prefer indexes or newsletters, but they also gave these formats low rankings in importance. In regards to staff meetings, 46.5% of respondents prefer this avenue, but only 4.7% listed it as an important format. The librarians viewed reports and theses as the least preferred and least important channel.

**Table 10: Level of Interest in Research about Reference Services**

Level of Interest	Frequency and (%)	Cumulative Percent
Very Interested	21 (48.8%)	48.8
Fairly Interested	10 (23.3%)	72.1
Moderately Interested	9 (20.9%)	93.0
Of Little Interest	2 (4.7%)	97.7
Not Interested	1 (2.3%)	100.0
Total	43	

### Perceptions of LIS Research

**Interest in Research:** As noted earlier, *use* consists of the extent to which practitioners consult dissemination channels as well as their perceptions of LIS research. In turning to perceptions, the librarians affirmed that they have an interest in research in reference services (Table 10). Thirty-one described themselves as very interested or fairly interested (72.1%). The survey also included a separate question that asked respondents whether they viewed LIS research as relevant or not. A large majority (75.7%) described LIS research as relevant although only twenty-three specified why they felt this way. Table 11 lists the factors that affected why these respondents perceived LIS research as relevant, sometimes relevant, or irrelevant.

**Table 11: Explanations of Why Research is Relevant (or Irrelevant) to Practitioners:**

**Why it is Irrelevant:**

Topic Not Relevant

- “Yes, sometimes...I especially like the articles about library instruction and ways I could improve and measure instruction. Sometimes, the articles are too related to administration, and that is not my area or my interest.”
- “There should be a not always choice. Some of the research I read is applicable to my current needs, but a lot is not. Some of the research is focused on very narrow highly-technical subjects that would not seem to help me as a reference librarian.”

Material Not Interesting

- “Mostly people writing to meet T&P requirements. Most is BORING!”

Authorship

- “Much of what is written seems to come from people who are not actively involved in serving the public as reference librarians. Or have very limited experience in the day to day challenges and activities of the busy reference department.”

Lack of Practicality

- “They are not always practical”
- “I wish I could check both. Many times, I’m left with “So what?” as my response. I suppose I want research to produce usable practical results.”
- “All reported research is neither relevant nor worth plowing through.”

Too Focused on Fads

- “I think LIS is as insecure as education. Both areas jump neck deep into a fad and in the process ignore all data that does not support “the” fad. Librarians and researchers in the area of LIS are rarely independent thinkers.”

**Why it is Only Sometimes Relevant:**

Lack of Practicality

- “Some of it is relevant. Sometimes you have to work to make the connection to the “real world” or practice, but I believe that it is important that we try to do so.”
- “They generally do not show me how.”
- “Yes, it is relevant, but not necessarily applicable to my library. I am more interested in the old fashioned “how we do it good” type article than the hard core research requiring some sophisticated analysis.”
- “This is a loaded question. I don’t read it if it isn’t relevant.”
- “I am more interested in practitioner articles.”
- “I choose what I want to read so I read only those items that are of any interest to me.”

**Why it is Relevant:**

Practicality

- “Generally the article sparks ideas.”
- “Most of the research that I read is based on searches for specific topics, so the readings that I do are focused and relevant to my needs.”
- “Much of it has practical application to be useful to my working life.”
- “I’ve picked up practical tips from these sources I’ve read and gotten some ideas on how to do things better”.
- “Seems relevant to my work.”

Part of Job

- “It is a big part of my work.”

- “As electronic resource coordinator, research regarding usage, usability, etc. is very important.”

**Keeping up With Changes in Other Libraries**

- “Most sources seem to be in tune with “changes” in the profession.”
- “Because it is good to see the views of other librarians and how other libraries do similar things.”
- “In this area of constant change, there’s no way I’ll ever feel as if I know it all.”
- “I like to know what work is being done in other libraries—one never knows when the opportunity to implement new and improved services will knock.”

Most of the responses center around practicality: respondents who perceived LIS research as relevant usually did so because the findings have clear implications for practice and the research helps them do their job. Others considered LIS research as relevant when it keeps them informed about changes and trends in other libraries. In contrast, one respondent denounced LIS literature as irrelevant for the same reason—it focuses too much on “fads.”

**Future Areas for Research:** The largest number of recommendations for future research dealt with electronic resources or services (20.58% of responses to this question; see Table 12).

**Table 12: Areas for Future Research in Reference**

Subject	Respondents (%)
Libraries’ Electronic Resources and Services	7 (20.6)
Quality of Reference Service	4 (11.7)
Library Instruction for Users or Staff	3 (8.6)
Subject-Specialized Reference	3 (8.6)
User Studies	2 (5.9)
Faculty Collaboration	2 (5.9)
Internet	2 (5.9)
Other topics	7 (20.6)
Apathy or no desire for more research in a particular area	4 (11.7)

The debut of web technologies has sparked a demand for more research in this area. Two responses reflected a special interest in the effects of the free Internet on libraries. In this vein, one respondent asked for more research on “how to keep the reference desk and in-person reference services relevant in an age when patrons keep deserting us for the dubious convenience of the Internet.” This emphatic call for more research on the Internet and technology topics seems ironic since few respondents read technology journals.

Four librarians expressed a desire for more research on the quality of reference services. One respondent stressed that research should focus on frequently-asked reference questions and “why these questions are consistently hard to answer, so that resources could be created to help the problem.” Two librarians asked for more research on subject-specialized reference. Four respondents expressed either apathy or no desire for more research. “I have trouble keeping up with professional reading as it is,” lamented one librarian! Ten respondents provided no answer to this question.

**Interest in Obtaining LIS PhD**

When asked if they would consider undertaking doctoral studies in library and information science, 39.5% of respondents said “no,” 14% said “yes,” and 46.5% said “maybe.” Unfortunately, this survey did not include an opportunity for respondents to justify their response. Future studies should seek to determine what would change a respondent's answer from “maybe” to “yes.”

**Discussion**

Overall, the responses from the Alabama reference librarians suggest that practitioners *do not use* a substantial amount of LIS research. It is true that most respondents stated that they have an interest in



hearing about LIS research when it addresses practical matters. They also read journal articles on a regular basis and frequently attend conferences to hear about new developments (not just because tenure requirements compel them to go). The high use of journal articles and conference attendance in the current study corresponds to the results of earlier surveys by Lynam, Slater and Walker (1982) as well as Ali (1985). The library profession can view these findings in a positive light since articles and conferences serve as conduits for research findings. However, the scant attention given to research journals, high use of general indexes with few research articles, low level of involvement in research projects, and sparse contact with researchers reveals a disconnect between research and practice.

The results of the Alabama study show that the respondents read mainly professional, magazines, not research journals. Most respondents peruse magazines such as *Library Journal* and *American Libraries* and a few peer-reviewed journals that specialize in reference services in academic libraries. However, respondents read few journals with research-driven content (e.g., *Library Quarterly*, *Library & Information Science Research*). This finding suggests that a great deal of published research never reaches the practitioner. If relevant research exists in a journal such as *Research Quarterly*, librarians probably have no awareness of its existence.

The survey revealed a particular problem in disseminating research about technology. When describing the kinds of research they would like to see completed, several respondents called for more research on information technology. While plenty of research focuses on this issue, few respondents read technology publications such as *JASIST*, a research journal, or even *Information Today*, a professional magazine.

In addition to leaving most research journals off their reading list, the respondents engage in fewer research projects than one might expect. The librarians also indicated that they have little contact with researchers (Table 7). When confronted with a new project in their work, librarians typically consult colleagues for advice rather than researchers. In summation, although many respondents expressed some interest in LIS research, their habits reveal a need to take steps to increase research use.

### Suggestions

Although the forty-three respondents to the survey cannot represent American librarians in general, the survey's results do offer a few preliminary suggestions for improving research utilization. One possible way of facilitating the flow of research to practice might lie in including more LIS research articles in general, full-text databases since many librarians have access to these resources through virtual libraries. In addition, adjusting the tenure requirements of LIS faculty so that they could publish articles in professional magazines would allow researchers to communicate their findings more widely. Disseminating abstracts of research articles through professional listservs might also prove effective.

In addition to broadcasting more research through practitioner-preferred channels, other ways of strengthening the research-practice nexus can take place through SLIS graduate programs. The results reveal some willingness on the part of Alabama reference librarians to learn more about research. When asked if they would consider undertaking doctoral studies, 14% said "yes" and 46.5% said "maybe." Recruitment efforts on the part of LIS researchers and educators could help to bring more practitioners into programs. Practitioners would learn more about research; researchers would learn more about the challenges faced by current practitioners. Perhaps more programs of part-time study or distance education would benefit both parties.

LIS schools should also explore new ways of introducing students to research and provide more opportunities for mentoring of students. Inconsistencies in the teaching of research courses may contribute to the clouded perception of research among librarians. As noted earlier, a survey of fifty-two LIS programs found that less than half required a research methods course.<sup>1</sup> One author has warned the profession about this deficiency: "until a majority of the field's practitioners can understand and apply the research results of others, the profession is not likely to realize much benefit from its research efforts."<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Park, 17.

<sup>23</sup>Ronald R. Powell, *Basic Research Methods for Librarians* (Greenwich, CT: Ablex, 1997), 7.

More library school must therefore require research methodology courses or master's projects. Fortunately, recent activities and discussions surrounding research in the LIS curriculum may help.<sup>3</sup> More LIS schools should also encourage one-on-one experiences between LIS faculty and students so that they can forge a rapport that will last after graduation. This rapport would enable faculty to alert former students to current research.

However, as Table 11 suggests, creating more relevant research offers the most likely way of improving research use. Researchers and practitioners can both help create useful research by acknowledging each other's strengths and joining forces. On one hand, researchers should seek out collaboration with librarians so that research will focus on relevant topics and build upon the knowledge of practitioners. On the other hand, practitioners should strive to collaborate with researchers who have the social science expertise necessary to analyze data and publish research findings. Reference librarians conducting an evaluation of an instruction session, gathering statistics for an administrator, or performing some other "borderline-research" project should remember that this work has the potential to evolve into a publication when assisted by researchers. Only 20.5% of the Alabama survey's respondents have ever published research projects, but perhaps this figure would increase if more respondents had assistance from LIS researchers. Through cooperation, researchers and practitioners could create practice-focused research that would improve the overall relevancy of LIS literature and thereby boost its consumption by librarians.

While these suggestions may offer some help in bridging the research-practice gap, further study is required to fully understand the issue and guide the profession's attempts to find solutions. Some future topics might include: recruitment to doctoral programs, the value of tacit knowledge for reference librarians, the use of the "grapevine" for sharing research, the influence of LIS research on reference policy handbooks, and the effectiveness of LIS dissemination compared to dissemination in related fields. Authors must continue addressing this problem because librarians, like practitioners in medicine or other fields, need research that nourishes professional service. Considering the advent of new and often untested technologies in contemporary reference, the need for useful research is greater than ever before. In the recent statement "Dissemination of Research in LIS," the ALA Committee of Statistics and Research stressed the importance of research and proposed fostering more research use through awards, bibliographies, and conference programs. This call to action provides a start in strengthening the role of the research process in the LIS field.<sup>4</sup> However, for these kinds of efforts to succeed, researchers and librarians must build a mutually beneficial partnership. The profession will have a brighter future if the two groups can connect with each other, make sense of their common information needs, and move the field forward together.

---

<sup>24</sup>Peter Hernon and Carolyn Schwartz, "Regaining 'The Foundation of Understanding': The Role of LIS Education," *Library and Information Science Research* 17 (1995): 1-3; Barbara Moran, "Practitioners vs. LIS educators: Time to Reconnect," *Library Journal* 126, no. 18 (2001): 52-55. In addition to these articles, it is revealing to note that the topic of the 2003 Association for Information Science Educators Conference was "Declaration of Interdependence: Connecting Researchers and Practitioners."

<sup>25</sup>Committee on Research and Statistics, American Library Association, "Dissemination of Research in LIS: a Statement by the American Library Association Committee on Research and Statistics," (June 2001): [http://www.ala.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Our\\_Association/Offices/Research\\_and\\_Statistics/Committee\\_on\\_Research\\_and\\_Statistics/Dissemination\\_of\\_Research\\_in\\_LIS/Dissemination\\_of\\_Research\\_in\\_LIS.htm](http://www.ala.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Our_Association/Offices/Research_and_Statistics/Committee_on_Research_and_Statistics/Dissemination_of_Research_in_LIS/Dissemination_of_Research_in_LIS.htm).

## Libraries and Donors: Maintaining the Status Quo

Steven Cox

Steven Cox is Special Collections Librarian, Lupton Library, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. He can be reached at [steven-cox@utc.edu](mailto:steven-cox@utc.edu). Mr. Cox would like to thank Tyson Land for his editorial assistance with this article.

---

### Introduction

Many librarians who manage special collections are grateful for the donations of items or collections that fall within their mission and collection scope. In turn, most donors find satisfaction in knowing that their gifts are housed in repositories, where they will be preserved and maintained by qualified staff and available to patrons for future years. Oftentimes donors, after receiving formal acknowledgement and sincere thanks for their donations, disappear back into the public landscape, perhaps glad to have found a new home for all those books or items. Their donations are unconditional—no strings attached and no demands for special recognition. The feeling that they have donated their items to worthy institutions is enough to please them.

In most cases, our ensuing relationships with donors are valuable and enjoyable. People and families occasionally give to libraries books, artwork, and monetary gifts and endowments. Their thoughtfulness and generosity often knows no bounds.

In rare circumstances, however, we find ourselves dealing with donors who present challenges. To the point that the librarians begin to regret having accepted their contributions, some donors follow their gifts with hints or demands that their contributions be given a large amount of attention. What drives donors to act in such a manner? What can be done about it? Can librarians do anything to prevent such behavior?

### Review of the Literature

Much has been written in the professional journals concerning gifts and donations to libraries. Many of these articles reflect on accepting gifts and donor relations. There is a shortage of articles, however, about refusing donations and dealing with donors who have overly high expectations of something in return

for their generosity. Paul L. Little and Sharon A. Saulmon write that donations to libraries should be classified as gifts. Libraries, they add, should address and identify the areas of need; and criteria should be set to determine which donations are kept. This criteria includes aspects such as whether the donation meets community needs; the donor remains financially involved in future expansions of the donation; the library retains control over the size and content of a collection; how the collection will be housed; and that there are no donor-imposed constraints.<sup>1</sup>

Ed Buis writes that gifts are never truly free. They cost the library time and money to process and may create problems later. Policies concerning gifts may save a librarian time in making decisions if the policies contain statements regarding the library's needs, acceptance of gifts without restrictions, and gifts other than library materials.<sup>2</sup> As Jennifer Paustenbaugh points out, special collections play an important role in shaping identities of libraries through exclusive and unique collections and materials. She adds that special collections librarians must lay the framework by developing a history of providing excellent care of their collections and professional stewardship to its donors. After all, donors may well make further donations and gifts in the future. Paustenbaugh also states that donors often have a greater emotional attachment to a donation of objects or their creations than they would to a monetary donation. Even though they might have made gifts of money in the past they would probably "require and deserve explicit communication about the proposed care of the material and what they may expect in terms of stewardship reports."<sup>3</sup> Veneese Nelson writes that if handled properly, gifts can be a cost-effective means of acquiring useful material. Nelson adds that a library needs a gift

---

<sup>1</sup> Paul L. Little and Sharon Saulmon, "Gifts, Donations and Special Collections," *Public Libraries* 26 (spring 1987): 8-10.

<sup>2</sup> Ed Buis, "Killing Us With Kindness," *Collection Building* 11, no. 2 (1991): 10-12.

<sup>3</sup> Jennifer Paustenbaugh, "Fundraising For Special Collections," *The Bottom Line* 15, no. 4 (2002): 186-89.

policy, a gift procedure and a gift form. Disposing of unwanted gifts can be done by exchanges, donations, selling or discarding.<sup>4</sup>

Janice Norris points out the value of gifts and donations, stating that they can be important parts of collection development in that they can replace or add rare or out-of-print items.<sup>5</sup> Benita Strnad writes in her article that many donations are not suitable for a particular library, and that many donors only want to be rid of the books or items. She emphasizes the importance of collection development policies to help explain the type of items the library collects.<sup>6</sup>

Major donors are significant to institutions, Andrea Lapsley writes, because their gifts are often large enough to make a difference. Identifying major donors and the amount to ask for, she adds, is not often easy. The important keys are to identify, cultivate and solicit major individual prospects. Formulating plans for cultivating donors and soliciting are the first steps. Inviting the potential donor to consider a donation or gift should follow.<sup>7</sup>

If a gift is to be accepted, Peggy Johnson points out that many institutions have statements that cover relations with donors but few have policies addressing the selection of gift materials. Since all possible criteria may carry accompanying caveats, flexibility is a necessity and considerations should include the appropriateness of the gift, costs associated, and any restrictions that accompany the gift.<sup>8</sup> Mary Bostic writes that there are several ways to effectively handle gifts. The suitability of each

gift should be judged by the same standards applied to regular library items.<sup>9</sup>

Nicholas Basbanes writes that libraries, in order to acquire valuable collections, will often acquiesce to the whims of the donor. He adds that this situation could pose a problem, but not an insurmountable one. Their whims may be as simple as keeping the collection together as a unit. Or they could be slightly more demanding by asking, for instance, to keep collections sealed for a certain amount of time or to keep fresh flowers in front of the donor's portrait. Basbanes also writes that one of the major issues facing special collections librarians is the relationship of their libraries with private collectors, especially those who have amassed major holdings on particular subjects. These collections existed originally to satisfy the passions of their creators, as well as a way to achieve a sense of immortality.<sup>10</sup>

Declining gifts is not always easy, writes Kathleen Huston in an article about refusing gifts. But, she adds, there are valid reasons to do so. She includes the following in her list of reasons: Staff time and effort exceeds the gift's value; the gift meets neither selection criteria nor community needs; there are strings attached; the collection is too old and in poor condition; and the political or public relations price is too high. A librarian must be polite and direct but give the would-be donor the opportunity to save face. Invoking existing policies and donor forms may help.<sup>11</sup> Donald L. Dewitt, in another article dealing with refusing unsolicited gift collections, states that an offered gift or donation represents the donor's concept of the mission of the institution to which the donor makes the offer. Accepting the gift serves to reinforce the donor's self-identity and concepts. Refusing the gift rejects the donor's judgment as well as his gift.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Veneese C. Nelson, "Buried Alive In Gifts," *Library Journal* 113, no. 7 (1988): 54-6.

<sup>5</sup> Janice G. Norris, "A Subject-Oriented Approach to Gifts Management and Donor Relations," *Collection Management* 27, no. 1 (2002): 41-57.

<sup>6</sup> Benita Strnad, "How to Look a Gift Horse in the Mouth, or How to Tell People You Can't Use Their Old Junk in Your Library," *Collection Building* 14, no. 2 (1995): 29-31.

<sup>7</sup> Andrea R. Lapsley, "Major Donors, Major Gifts," *The Bottom Line* 9, no. 2 (1996): 40-3.

<sup>8</sup> Peggy Johnson, "When to Look a Gift Horse in the Mouth," *Technicalities* 13, no. 6 (1993): 10-13.

---

<sup>9</sup> Mary J. Bostic, "Gifts to Libraries: Coping Effectively," *Collection Management* 14, nos. 3-4 (1991): 175-84.

<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Basbanes, "Collectors and Libraries: Some Studies of Symbiosis," *Rare Books and Manuscripts Librarianship* 8, no. 1 (1993): 37-48.

<sup>11</sup> Kathleen Raab Huston, "How to Look a Gift Horse in the Mouth: Saying No to Donors," *The Bottom Line* 3, no. 1 (1989): 174-7.

<sup>12</sup> Donald Dewitt, "Unsolicited Marginal Gift Collections: Saying No or Coping with the Unwanted," *Library Acquisitions* 12, nos. 3-4 (1988): 357-62.

Little has been written concerning the reluctance, remorse and grief some donors experience in parting with their collections or items. Lucy Caswell explores this issue and writes that donors, much like people who experience the stages of grief, suffer levels of anger, bargaining and depression. Owners, she writes, have a significant attachment to the item or collection in that they have “put time, intellectual effort, and money into building their collection.”<sup>13</sup>

### Gift Proposals

In addition to spending large amounts of time processing collections and managing their department, librarians occasionally work with potential donors. The contributor may initiate contact by means of a letter, a personal visit, or a phone call. The would-be donor describes what he or she has to donate, and the librarian must decide whether to pass, to find out more about the item or collection, or to accept it. A historian’s donation of his personal research library could add an important collection to a library. A collection on a theme of interest, either locally or more widespread, can bring some recognition and prestige to a library, as Paustenbaugh notes, especially in an age where libraries are becoming more technology-oriented.<sup>14</sup> The individual who makes the decision on accepting or refusing donations and gifts would do well not to accept a contribution on the spot, but to personally view the offered material first and to obtain information about the donor.

Perhaps the donor is a prominent citizen. Maybe the donor is a citizen who wants to donate a collection of Benjamin Franklin’s letters, or hundreds of seventeenth-century rare books, or even a lifelong collection of oddly shaped gourds.

Certainly, a large collection of valuable books or historical documents would get one’s attention. But the librarian may wish to consider several aspects of the potential contribution. Are there donor-imposed conditions? If the donation is a collection of books, are they mostly duplicates of

titles already extant in the collection? If so, might they be used to replace deteriorating copies? Does the donor want his donation to have a room of its own? Perhaps you accept the gourd collection, because it’s easier just to say yes, only to find it numbers in the thousands and will completely take up already dwindling storage space.

There are no clear-cut solutions to these situations. Every step must be handled carefully and with plenty of thought and consideration. The potential for a public relations imbroglio is too great to take such considerations lightly.

### Accepting Gifts

Many repositories have collections that do not fit into their acquisition policy or their mission. The reason for this discrepancy varies. The collection or an item may have accompanied a major cash donation. Perhaps a collection was accepted by someone else of authority and then subsequently handed over to the department with specific orders on how to handle it. Or, a previous librarian or administrator accepted it years earlier, feeling it was just easier to accept it rather than to decline it. Whatever the reason, the repository acquired the collection and, perhaps, is forced to permanently display it, or to give it a disproportionate amount of space and publicity. These policy incongruities present problems, both in the space taken up by the collection and the amount of time staff spends contending with the issue.

In some cases one might consider which is the worst scenario— refusing a gift and possibly offending the donor (with possible repercussions), or ending up with an inappropriate collection that serves no purpose other than to absorb much needed space. In the event a library ends up with a collection of marginal worth and interest, the decision must be made on what to do with it. Is it expected to be on permanent display? Will it take an inordinate amount of space? Will its donor insist that it be given priority treatment and display preferences over the other collections? Will there be costs for processing and maintaining the collection?

It is very likely that most donors do not consider the cost of processing and preserving the items or collections that they offer for repositories. Huston writes that the cost of processing should not be more than the value of the collection.

---

<sup>13</sup> Lucy Shelton Caswell, “Grief and Collection Development,” *Library Acquisitions* 11, no. 3 (1987): 195-9.

<sup>14</sup> Paustenbaugh

Once donors have been informed and educated about this requirement they could very well see the need for additional cash gifts or endowments to accompany their offerings.

### The Psychology of Giving

Gift giving is usually well rooted in sincerity. Givers wish to bestow something of value and to feel that these gifts are useful and appreciated. There are various reasons people give gifts to libraries.

Individuals, as they grow older, become more aware of their mortality. With pride and satisfaction elderly people consider their possessions and work.<sup>15</sup> As they reflect over their lives, the desire to leave a legacy becomes stronger. Their goal might be to ensure that their passions, possessions, or creations do not die with them but live in perpetuity, representing their life and work. Dispossessing their belongings could also be precipitated by an event such as the serious illness or death of a loved one. The donors themselves may face moving into a long-term care facility for the elderly. It could be that they are experiencing trying times and are forced into a decision to give away special possessions. They have invested time, money and intellectual effort into their collection and evidently feel that it is valuable, beautiful, and symbolic of their accomplishments. As Caswell stated, in parting with these possessions they often feel a sense of grief.<sup>16</sup>

### Addressing Potential Problems

An ounce of prevention is worth a ton of cure; and in the case of donor problems, this maxim certainly rings true. Whether donations are solicited or unsolicited, there are certain aspects many librarians and archivists should address before accepting them:

- Does the donation fit in with the collection scope and acquisition policy?
- Will you be able to receive the complete collection, or are other parts of it being deposited elsewhere?
- Will you have the right to decide how and where the collection will be housed?

- Are there any restrictions, conditions or restraints the donor imposes upon the donation, and are they practical?

Acquisition policies (see appendix 1) may help prevent the problem of unwanted items and collections. A good acquisition policy should address the collection scope of the repository, and what can and will be done with donations. The policy should have a statement describing materials the library collects, with emphasized subjects and priorities. The policy should stipulate that the legal title to a donation passes to the library at the time of transfer of the items and that the repository, at that juncture, is free to maintain—or dispose of—the collection as it sees fit.<sup>17</sup>

If donors are setting unreasonable conditions, invoking an acquisition policy might be a reasonable way to deflect the donor's conditions or even the gifts. It will also let donors know what they can expect if and when their donations are accepted. This policy should have some flexibility, however, in the event someone shows up with items too significant to pass up. For this reason, policies should be re-evaluated periodically.

Some items in a donation may not be needed and their removal from the collection should be covered in an acquisition policy. For instance, a large donation of random books probably will contain some unusable titles. There are also bound to be duplicates of books already in the circulating collection— perfect candidates for the next *Friends of the Library* book sale.

A deed of gift, or a gift agreement (see appendix 2), which spells out all conditions, restrictions, and expectations, can be one of the best tools for both parties of the exchange in the event that a misunderstanding arises. Both the donor and the accepting representative of the repository receiving the gift should sign this document. However, sometimes it is not enough in this situation to invoke a deed of gift if disagreements persist afterwards. You might just have to resort to good public relations, perhaps offering a compromise.

---

<sup>15</sup> Linda L. Price, Eric J. Arnould, and Carolyn Folkman Curasi, "Older Consumer's Disposition of Special Possessions," *Journal of Consumer Research* 27, no. 2 (2000): 179-201.

<sup>16</sup> Caswell

---

<sup>17</sup> Peggy Johnson, "Grace Under Pressure: Relations with Library Donors," *Technicalities* 13, no. 8 (1993): 5-9.

One of the best tools that you can use is an effective, sincere, diplomatic way to say “no” (and the earlier the better!). As Raab writes, “Saying no takes more preparation, more diplomacy and more professional finesse than saying yes.” As much difficulty as some people have in saying it, the ability to say “no” may very well prevent a future nuisance.

In extreme situations a repository might find it has no other recourse than to return a gift. This case is not without precedence. In 1989, the University of Utah returned \$15 million in stocks after the donor insisted that they name the medical center after him. UCLA, in 1998, returned a \$1 million grant after it was discovered that an overseas program that was started with the grant had restrictions that the school deemed unacceptable. Yale University, in 1995, even returned a \$20 million gift after the donor insisted that he be allowed to approve the faculty appointments for the department his gift would have created.<sup>18</sup>

After a donation is accepted, thorough and complete documentation is essential for the acquisition process and will help if problems arise in later years, as stated in the article by Little and Saulmon.<sup>19</sup> It is frustrating, when searching for documentation on the acquisition of a collection, to find there is none. Lack of documentation, deeds of gifts, or other important acquisition documents cultivates a breeding environment for problems.

### Public Relations

Good public relations and communication skills are essential when dealing with donors. Any time potential donors propose gifts, perhaps we should consider the possibility that they expect something in return. Will the relationships deteriorate when they come in a year later and fail to see their donations prominently displayed, or perhaps on the library sale table? Perhaps by asking donors why they wish to donate their items or collections to the library you will discover the truth about their intentions or desires.

Many donors come to us altruistically, and we don't want to offend them by turning down their offers and gifts. Remember, they are *giving* us something. It is hard to say “no” and, as Donald L. Dewitt states, “The fear of offending a donor is supported by the equally powerful one of being considered unknowledgeable, of passing up truly great collections that will go, because of ignorance, to a rival institution that takes everything without question.”<sup>20</sup> The staff person doing the negotiating or accepting should be able to express a need for the item or collection, to show some knowledge of the subject and material, and to explain how it will be used.

There should be a specific person in the library or repository who ultimately decides to accept or to decline donations and gifts. Reserving the right to refuse is essential so that donations do not come in “through the back door” or by someone else's approval. If a donation is declined this person should say something positive, as Huston suggests, such as expressing admiration for the motives the donor undoubtedly had in making the offer, or for the quality of the items.<sup>21</sup> Making suggestions as to institutions better suited for their donations may help soften refusals, but the suggestions must be informed and sincere, not just a measure to get rid of the donors.

In the consideration and acceptance of a collection of corporate, personal, or family papers it is important to examine, judge, sort and pack the materials yourself. This measure of care could prevent problems such as the loss of the original order, the disposal of important documents, or getting unusable items or duplicate material as part of the deal. You should keep in mind that after a donor dies his or her family might claim or attempt to gain ownership of the collection or items. Does the person offering an item or collection actually own, or have the authority or approval to donate, the material he or she is offering? A statement of ownership should be stated in the deed of gift. Is the item or collection valuable, and could it contain something that could be considered a family heirloom? Will the family of the donor make demands that burden the library staff?

---

<sup>18</sup> Nicholas Basbane, *Patience and Fortitude: A Roving Chronicle of Book People, Book Places and Book Culture*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 328-30.

<sup>19</sup> Paul L. Little and Sharon Saulmon, “Gifts, Donations and Special Collections.”

---

<sup>20</sup> Donald Dewitt, “Unsolicited Marginal Gift Collections.”

<sup>21</sup> Kathleen Raab Huston, “How to Look a Gift Horse in the Mouth.”

Publicizing gifts should be done on a gift-by-gift basis, and with the knowledge and cooperation of the donors. Reiterating such acknowledgements should also be done through official letters of acknowledgement and appreciation. Any agreement concerning naming opportunities should be restated in the letter. Keeping the channels open can be beneficial since, once a donor has given a gift, he or she could very well continue with additional donations.

Our job as librarians, archivists, and curators is an important one and a role many people do not fully understand nor appreciate. A donor's hidden agenda or best intention may start us on a road we do not wish to travel, and we must be cautious where we step. Nevertheless, many of our repositories are full of priceless items from generous donors. They function as a result of the good graces of local philanthropists. Without such generosity our collections would not be as bountiful as they are.



## Appendix 1: Acquisition Policy for Lupton Library Special Collections

### Mission

The mission for the Special Collections and University Archives in Lupton Library is to collect, preserve and conserve important historical items such as books, records and documents, personal papers and manuscript collections, historical documents, non-print items such as video and audio tapes, and art works that relate to and/or document the history of the University, the city of Chattanooga, the state of Tennessee, the South and the United States. These items of continuing value will be arranged and prepared by the Special Collections staff for reference and/or academic and scholarly research by persons having occasion to refer to them.

### Acquisitions Overview

The primary method of acquiring items and collections will be through donations. The purchase of items is rarely done but may be considered on an individual basis as items and funds become available. It is the duty and responsibility of the Special Collections librarian and the dean of the library to seek out, consider and accept items for inclusion into the Special Collections. Items falling into the scope of the areas listed in the mission will be given serious consideration, and items outside the scope will be considered on an individual basis, with such considerations as to its relevance to the University's curriculum, any conditions or stipulations imposed by the donor, its overall condition and preservation needs, its effect on the entire department, and whether it would be better suited at another location. In negotiating for and accepting any donations, the Special Collections cannot make any appraisals nor arrange for any appraisals of the items. Acceptance of a gift at an appraised value does not necessarily constitute endorsement of said valuation.

### Acquisitions Concerns and Donation Refusals

Certain concerns may make the acquiring of some items or collections problematic. These concerns may include:

- Donations which present a financial drain due to conservation or preservation needs
- Items which the special collections staff is unable or unqualified to maintain and store
- Items and collections which may require a large amount of space for storage
- Items or collections in formats which might require constant updating, reproducing, and/or duplicating
- Donations which come with particular conditions, stipulations or legal encumbrances which might make their access and use too restrictive or impractical, or which may cause an over-emphasis to that particular collection
- Duplications of items already held in the Special Collections

Items and collections that are loaned to us must have a clear date and time to which they are returned to lender or become the property of the special collections. Items of ephemeral or temporary interest will be considered on the basis of their long-term relevance to the Special Collections and immediate or long-term need by the University. Items of which we already hold copies will be considered on an individual basis as to the need for extra copies.

All items donated to or purchased by the Special Collections become the property of the University and/or state of Tennessee and will be administered according to the professional judgment of the special collection librarian and Dean of Lupton Library. Records and items determined to no longer have any value or which have deteriorated beyond practical use may be de-accessioned.

## Appendix 2: Deed of Gift for Lupton Library, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

### Name and Address of Donor:

### Description of the Gift:

The donor gives to the T. Cartter and Margaret Rawlings Lupton Library of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga the items described above and agrees that the Library will hereafter have unrestricted rights of ownership of the items. The donor recognizes that the location, retention, cataloging, and preservation of materials or other considerations relating to their use or disposition are at the discretion of the library in accordance with institutional policy.

Donor acknowledges that to the best of his/her knowledge s/he has ownership of the items indicated, and has the legal right to authorize this transaction.

### Terms and Conditions, if any:

### Copyright Interests:

\_\_\_ I represent and warrant that I control the copyright in some or all of the donated materials.

Please indicate what portions of copyright you control and the nature (sole/joint owners, heirs, literary executors, trustees, etc.):

\_\_\_ I do not control copyright in any of the donated materials.

\_\_\_ To the best of my knowledge, copyright is controlled by:

Name:

Address:

Phone Number:

Other Contact Information:

---

Copyright Conveyance: If you wish to transfer, convey and assign to the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga any copyright which you control in the above-named materials, subject to the limitations, if any, stated below, please initial here: \_\_\_\_\_

Limitations, if any:

---

\_\_\_\_\_  
Donor's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Authorized UTC Library Representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

---

# The Relationship of Undergraduate Students' Self-assessment of Library Skills to Their Opinion of Library Instruction: A Self-reporting Survey

Christopher A. Freeman

Christopher A. Freeman is Head of Circulation and Interlibrary Loan Services, Lane Library, Armstrong Atlantic State University, Savannah, Georgia. He can be reached at [freemach@mail.armstrong.edu](mailto:freemach@mail.armstrong.edu).

---

## Abstract

College students, in general, are known to be lacking in their ability to effectively make use of academic library resources, yet in many previous studies these same students have estimated their library-use skills at inflated levels. Neither do college students in general often willingly take advantage of library instruction opportunities. A self-reporting survey was administered to forty first-year college students in order to investigate whether students' tendency to over-estimate library use skills has an effect on student opinion about library instruction in general. Results from the survey not only indicate that such a relationship may exist, but also strongly support earlier findings that students rate their library use skills highly.

## Introduction

Academic librarians often observe that university undergraduates have a difficult time using the resources available at the library to find the information they need for classroom assignments (Lombardo and Miree 2003, Maughan 2001, Quarton 2003, Rehman and Mohammad 2001). Yet students display a reluctance to enroll in library workshops designed to improve students' understanding of effective library use. Furthermore, college students as a group show a marked tendency to over-evaluate their own set of library skills (Geffert and Christiansen 1998, Maughan 2001, Ren 2000). This pattern of behavior raises the question of whether a relationship exists between a student's perception of his or her ability to use library resources and a belief about the basic value of library instruction.

## Problem

The study reported here was designed to investigate the relationship between college undergraduates' self-assessment of library skills and their opinion of library instruction. An

examination of this relationship will contribute to an understanding of how college students view their ability to use library resources within the wider context of their educational development at the university level. This knowledge will also provide insight into the motivations behind students' choices about actively pursuing self-improvement in this area. Furthermore, the results of this study deepen our understanding of the factors affecting students' willingness to take advantage of library instruction opportunities.

Understanding the factors related to why students choose to neglect improvement of their library skills is important since we already know that many students lack what most librarians consider an adequate level of development in this area (Lombardo and Miree 2003, Maughan 2001, Quarton 2003, Rehman and Mohammad 2001). The results of the current study would have practical relevance as well. This information could facilitate the creation of library instruction courses that are more attractive to college students. By considering students' perceptions and opinions about library instruction when working on course design, it is likely that performance in these classes would be generally positive.

At the onset of this investigation, it was expected that those students who have assessed their own library skills favorably would also have a negative opinion about the value of library instruction. This belief was based on the assumption that students who believe they already have a firm grasp on the use of library resources are less likely to see a need for further assistance. Since a significant body of literature exists demonstrating that library instruction is effective in improving students' understanding of how better to make use of library resources it would be valuable to better understand the nature of this relationship (Franklin and Toifel 1994, Leverence 1997, Lombardo and Miree 2003).

Additionally, it is known that a majority of undergraduate students need refinement of their library skills (Maughan 2001, Quarton 2003, Rehman and Mohammad 2001, Seamans 2002)

and that it is unlikely these same students will seek out formalized library instruction (D'Esposito and Gardner 1999). It stands to reason that if students are unwittingly exaggerating their own ability to effectively make use of library resources, many do not even know that they should be asking for help.

### Literature Review

To date, little has been written addressing the effect of students' perceptions of library-use ability on their perceptions about the value of library instruction. However, results from studies in related areas have provided some information of use to the current study.

Geffert and Christensen (1998) conducted a study among college freshmen at St. Olaf College in Minnesota meant to correlate student attitudes about many aspects of academic libraries with student demographic information. Among the results of this was the implication that students as a group both feel "somewhat" confident about their library skills and consider library instruction to be "somewhat" important (Geffert and Christensen 1998). In a statement that lends credence to the purpose of the current study, Geffert and Christensen say "[f]or bibliographic instruction...to be truly effective, it is essential to know more about the attitudes and skills that incoming students bring with them as they encounter our libraries" (1998, 279).

Kurbanoglu (2003), in discussing the relationship between self-efficacy (one's ability to perform a given task) and information literacy development, also bolstered the need for the current study. According to Kurbanoglu, "perceived self-efficacy can be accepted as one of the psychological factors which has an impact on information literacy" (2003, 637). In other words, if one perceives his or her ability to use library resources as advanced, little motivation will be felt to seek improvement, regardless of the actual level of efficacy present in the individual. Thus, investigating students' perceptions of self-efficacy and how those feelings affect other aspects of educational development is important.

Franklin and Toifel (1994) designed a questionnaire meant to test the efficacy of library instruction. The questionnaire was administered to graduate and undergraduate students at the University of West Florida both before and after the students received library instruction. Results

from the evaluative portion of the post-test indicated that both groups of students felt strongly that library instruction could help them to "better understand how to use" (1994, 232) library resources.

In a study similar to that of Franklin and Toifel, Lombardo and Miree (2003) measured the attitudes of business students at Oakland University regarding different information formats both before and after library instruction. A byproduct of this study showed that students who received library instruction demonstrated an increase in their self-confidence about their ability to use the library. Lombardo and Miree cited several studies supporting the theory that student self-confidence in the library can be affected by library instruction. Here, again, a correlation between student self-confidence in the library and library instruction is demonstrated.

Research reported by Davidson (2001) is closely related to the current study. In an attempt to simply answer the question of whether students feel library instruction is important, Davidson determined that "students clearly find instruction...of library research important" (2001, 157). However, when asked to rank various methods of instruction delivery, students showed the least preference for formal classroom instruction. Online tutorials were the most popular, suggesting that even among students who claim to value instruction, a sense of self-reliance is important (Davidson 2001).

In reviewing the literature relevant to the current study, many reports were identified that addressed the impact that library instruction can have on student perceptions of the library. None, though, appear to have addressed the effect of student perception of library skills on student opinion of library instruction. As Kurbanoglu reasons, self-perception of ability is important when making a conscious decision to seek self-improvement. Further, if students perceive library instruction as unimportant, they will certainly never take advantage of the available library instruction opportunities. Thus, the students will never benefit from a service proven to enhance research skills. The fact that library instruction is effective makes no difference if students are unwilling to give instruction a chance.

### Present Study

The lack of known research addressing the relationship between students' self-assessment of library skills and their opinion of library instruction implies that this is in fact an area in need of investigation. The ten-item questionnaire included here was designed to elicit information from survey participants that would reveal perceptions about their ability to make use of specific library resources as well as opinions about the value of library instruction.

The questionnaire was administered to forty students enrolled in three different first-year English classes at Armstrong Atlantic State University in Savannah, Georgia. All three classes had previously attended a basic, one-hour library orientation class earlier in the semester but information regarding any other library instruction experience was not sought.

Specifically, participants were answered each question by choosing one of five ranked scores designated as such: 1 – Strongly Agree, 1- Agree, 3 – Not Sure, 4 – Disagree, 5 – Strongly Disagree. The presence of a “Not Sure” choice in this survey had little effect on the reliability of the results. Choosing “Not Sure” in response to questions about one’s ability to perform a given task implies that the individual is probably unable to perform the relevant task. Also, in response to questions about the value of library instruction, “Not Sure” implies doubt that library instruction is helpful, thus revealing a negative opinion. Thus, in both cases, the “Not Sure” choice seems to represent a logical progression of feeling along the continuum presented in the scale as opposed to a response that negates the value of the answer in general.

###

### Library Opinion Questionnaire

Instructions: Please read each question and circle the appropriate response:

- 1 Strongly Agree
- 2 Agree
- 3 Not Sure
- 4 Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree

I am able to use the library effectively to find information I need.	1 2 3 4 5
Library instruction is important in learning how to use library resources.	1 2 3 4 5
I can tell the difference between scholarly and popular journals without problem.	1 2 3 4 5
I can tell the difference between a citation to a book and a citation to an article.	1 2 3 4 5
I would benefit from a class about library research.	1 2 3 4 5
Librarians can teach me a lot about the library.	1 2 3 4 5
Using the library catalog to find books on a topic that interests me is easy.	1 2 3 4 5
It is easy to find books in the library using call numbers from the library catalog.	1 2 3 4 5
I can find useful articles for my assignments using online databases.	1 2 3 4 5
I would like assistance from librarians on how to find information in the library.	1 2 3 4 5

## Results

For each of the ten questions on the survey, there is a related summary that includes a frequency count for each possible choice. Each summary also shows the percentage of the total sample population represented by each frequency count. At the end of each summary is the mean response of all participants.

### Questions regarding self-assessment of library skills:

*#1) I am able to use the library effectively to find information I need.*

Questionnaire Response	Frequency	%
Strongly Agree	11	27.5%
Agree	22	55%
Not Sure	5	12.5%
Disagree	1	2.5%
Strongly Disagree	1	2.5%
Mean response for all participants:	1.98/5.00	

*#3) I can tell the difference between scholarly and popular journals without problem.*

Questionnaire Response	Frequency	%
Strongly Agree	7	17.5%
Agree	15	37.5%
Not Sure	11	27.5%
Disagree	6	15%
Strongly Disagree	1	2.5%
Mean Response for all participants:	2.48/5.00	

*#4) I can tell the difference between a citation to a book and a citation to an article.*

Questionnaire Response	Frequency	%
Strongly Agree	4	10%
Agree	18	45%
Not Sure	15	37.5%
Disagree	3	7.5%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Mean response for all participants:	2.43/5.00	

*#7) Using the library catalog to find books on a topic that interests me is easy.*

Questionnaire Response	Frequency	%
Strongly Agree	10	25%
Agree	22	55%
Not Sure	8	20%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Mean response for all participants:	1.95/5.00	

*#8) It is easy to find books in the library using call numbers from the library catalog.*

Questionnaire Response	Frequency	%
Strongly Agree	10	25%
Agree	23	57.5%
Not Sure	6	15%
Disagree	1	2.5%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%

Mean response for all participants: 1.95/5.00

#9) *I can find useful articles for my assignments using online databases.*

Questionnaire Response	Frequency	%
Strongly Agree	9	22.5%
Agree	19	47.5%
Not Sure	11	27.5%
Disagree	1	2.5%
Strongly Agree	0	0%
Mean response for all participants:	2.05/5.00	

### Questions regarding perceptions of library instruction:

#2) *Library instruction is important in learning how to use library resources.*

Questionnaire Response	Frequency	%
Strongly Agree	12	30%
Agree	21	52.5%
Not Sure	3	7.5%
Disagree	1	2.5%
Strongly Disagree	3	7.5%
Mean response for all participants:	2.05/5.00	

#5) *I would benefit from a class about library research.*

Questionnaire Response	Frequency	%
Strongly Agree	4	10%
Agree	19	47.5%
Not Sure	9	22.5%
Disagree	4	10%
Strongly Disagree	4	10%
Mean response for all participants:	2.63/5.00	

#6) *Librarians can teach me a lot about the library.*

Questionnaire Response	Frequency	%
Strongly Agree	13	32.5%
Agree	18	45%
Not Sure	5	12.5%
Disagree	3	7.5%
Strongly Disagree	1	2.5%
Mean response for all participants:	2.03/5.00	

#10) *I would like assistance from librarians on how to find information in the library.*

Questionnaire Response	Frequency	%
Strongly Agree	9	22.5%
Agree	16	40%
Not Sure	8	20%
Disagree	6	15%
Strongly Disagree	1	2.5%
Mean response for all participants:	2.35/5.00	

###

A review of the information included in the summaries above and the table that follows reveals several points worth mentioning. Perhaps most notable is the fact that out of 40 participants, not one had a mean self-assessment score over 3.0 while a score as high as 5.0 was possible. Also interesting is that for no question on the survey was a mean response for all participants found to be higher than 2.63 (#5 "I would benefit from a class about library research"). Furthermore, in response to no question did fewer than 55% of participants choose either "Agree" or "Strongly Agree". This implies that while students clearly feel that they are competent library users, they also believe that librarians are knowledgeable. Participants chose either "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" more than 80% of the time in response to four questions on the survey (#1 "I am able to use the library effectively to find information I need", #2 "Library instruction is important in learning how to use library resources", #7 "Using the library catalog to find books on a topic that interests me is easy", and #8 "It is easy to find books in the library using call numbers from the library catalog").

Eighty-two and a half percent of participants either "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement that they are "able to use the library effectively" while only 57.5% of participants "agree" or "strongly agree" that they "would benefit from a class about library research". It is interesting to note that while students acknowledge the subject area expertise of librarians, these same students consider the idea of attending classes designed to improve library research skills as fairly unattractive.

Table 1 graphs the relationship between students' self-assessment of library skills and their opinion of library instruction. In order to create this table, the mean score for each participant was calculated individually, for both the answers given in response to questions regarding self-assessment of library skills and to questions regarding opinion of library instruction. As a result, each student had a pair of mean scores that were used in the creation of Table 1. Next, the students' self-assessment of library skills mean scores were arranged from lowest to highest and used as the independent variable in the graphing of Table 1. Table 1 shows that as students' self-assessment scores rise, opinion of library instruction scores fall.

## Discussion

Based on a review of mean response scores and frequency counts for each question included in the summary individually, it is clear that students have a very positive view of their own abilities to make use of the library in general. For example, 82.5% of participants either agree or strongly agree that they are "able to use the library effectively." It is interesting, though, that while students definitely rated themselves highly in general library use terms, when it came to specifics, such as telling the difference between scholarly and popular journals or identifying a citation to a book versus one from a journal, the overall confidence level dropped. This could be interpreted as contradictory in nature but it is also possible that these students have simply not yet had much experience in higher-level library research. That is to say, they are rating themselves in general terms based upon the way they perceive their ability to perform simpler tasks such as using the catalog to find titles of interest and finding items in the library using call numbers from the catalog.

Not only is it clear that students see themselves as effective library users but, based upon survey results, they also seem to value library instruction somewhat more than had been anticipated. In another seeming contradiction, though, students were very positive in support of library instruction as a concept (#2 "Library instruction is important in learning how to use library resources" and #6 "Librarians can teach me a lot about the library") but much less so when reporting opinions about actually receiving library instruction (#5 "I would benefit from a class about library research" and #10 "I would like assistance from librarians on how to find information in the library"). These results appear to support the findings of D'Esposito and Gardner (1999) and Davidson (2001) that students are unlikely to seek out formalized library instruction regardless of how they actually feel about it.

As reported earlier in this paper, all of the participants of the current study attended at least one library instruction session within a two-month period before filling out the questionnaire. It is possible that one unintentional result of the current study was to replicate the findings reported in Lombardo and Miree (2003) in which the authors showed that student self-confidence



in library-use skills rose after receiving library instruction. The participants of the current study were not asked to assess their ability to use the library both before and after the instruction they did receive, though, so this is purely conjecture.

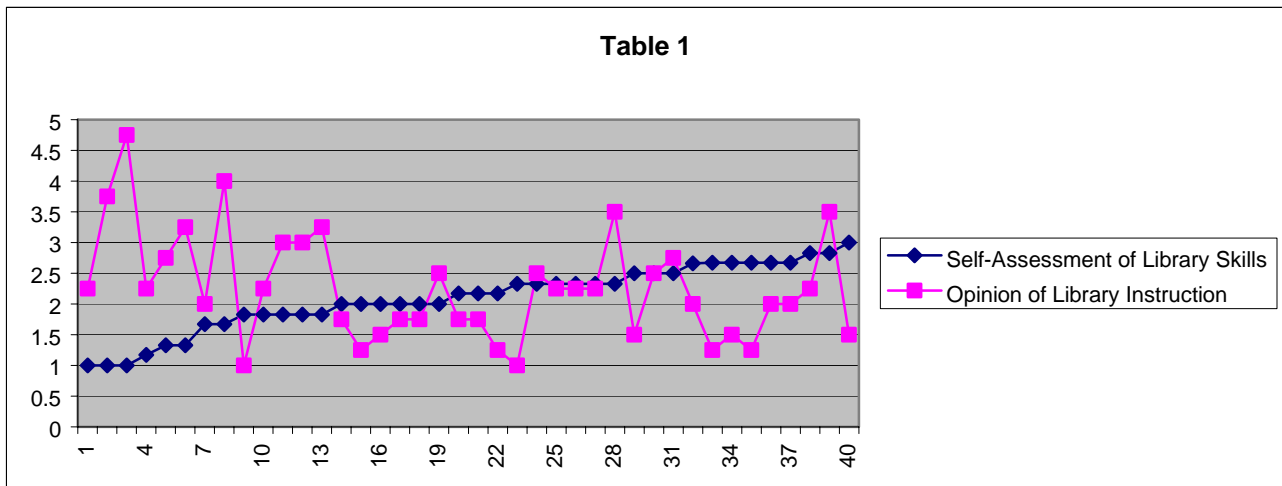
Results from this study suggest that a positive self-assessment of one's library skills generally will have a negative effect on one's opinion of library instruction. This can most clearly be seen in Table 1. However, while the results of the current study suggest that students' opinion of library instruction is dependent on how well they rate their ability to use the library, it would not be accurate to say that this has been proven.

In attempting to further clarify our understanding of how students' self-assessment of library skills affects their opinion about the value of library instruction, it might be useful to construct a survey that allows for more explanation on the part of the student participants. The current study, while laying an important foundation, gave participants a narrow range of choices that

may be responsible for some of the apparent inconsistencies in survey responses. Open-ended questions might give students greater flexibility in explaining their behavior as it pertains to the question at hand. Conducting a case study with in-depth interviews could also reveal students' attitudes about more specific issues of relevance.

It may also be of value to take into account in any future study in this area the actual level of expertise that participants have in the area of library use skills, as well as the students' level of exposure to previous bibliographic instruction. This could be accomplished through testing students' abilities to perform specific library-use tasks after having administered a survey similar to that used in this study. It is certainly feasible to suggest that those students who have accurately assessed their own level of library use expertise may have a clearer picture of whether library instruction would be of any benefit.

**Table 1 – Relationship of Student Self-Assessment of Library Skills to Opinion of Library Instruction**



## References

- Davidson, J.R. 2001. Faculty and student attitudes toward credit courses for library skills. *College & Research Libraries*. 62: 155-63.
- D'Esposito, J.E., and R.M. Gardner. 1999. University students' perceptions of the Internet: an exploratory study. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*. 25: 456-61.
- Franklin, G., and R.C. Toifel. 1994. Effects of BI on library knowledge and skills among education students. *Research Strategies*. 12: 224-37.
- Geffert, B., and B.E. Christensen. 1998. Things they carry: attitudes toward, opinions about, and knowledge of libraries and research among incoming college students. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*. 37: 279-89.
- Kurbanoglu, S.S. 2003. Self-efficacy: a concept closely linked to information literacy and lifelong learning. *Journal of Documentation* 59: 635-46.
- Leverence, M.E.Q. 1997. A study of nontraditional students' perceptions of their library research skills at Governors State University. *The Reference Librarian* 58: 143-61.
- Lombardo, S.V., and C.E. Miree. 2003. Caught in the web: the impact of library instruction on business students' perceptions and use of print and online resources. *College & Research Libraries* 64: 6-22.
- Maughan, P.D. 2001. Assessing information literacy among undergraduates: a discussion of the literature and the University of California-Berkeley assessment experience. *College & Research Libraries* 62: 71-85.
- Quarton, B. (2003). Research skills and the new undergraduate. *Journal of Instructional Psychology* 30: 120-24.
- Rehman, S., and G. Mohammad. 2001. Relationship of library skills with selected personal and academic variables: a study of the undergraduate students of Kuwait University. *International Information & Library Review* 34: 1-20.
- Ren, W. 2000. Library instruction and college student self-efficacy in electronic information searching. *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 26: 323-28.
- Seamans, N. 2002. Student perceptions of information literacy: insights for librarians. *Reference Services Review* 30: 112-23.

## Guidelines for Submission and Author Instructions

*Revised August, 2003*

*The Southeastern Librarian* (SELn) is the official publication of the Southeastern Library Association (SELA). The quarterly publication seeks to publish articles, announcements, and news of professional interest to the library community in the southeast. The publication also represents a significant means for addressing the Association's research objective. Two newsletter-style issues serve as a vehicle for conducting Association business, and two issues include juried articles.

1. Articles need not be of a scholarly nature but should address professional concerns of the library community. SELn particularly seeks articles that have a broad southeastern scope and/or address topics identified as timely or important by SELA sections, round tables, or committees.
2. News releases, newsletters, clippings, and journals from libraries, state associations, and groups throughout the region may be used as sources of information.
3. Submissions should be directed to: Frank R. Allen, SELn Editor, University of Central Florida Libraries, P. O. Box 162666, 4000 Central Florida Blvd, Bldg #2, Orlando, Florida, 32816-2666. FAX: (407) 823-2529, E-mail: fallen@mail.ucf.edu.
4. Manuscripts must be submitted in electronic format as attachment to an e-mail, preferably in MS Word or compatible format. Articles should be written in a grammatically correct, simple, readable style. The author is responsible for the accuracy of all statements in the article and should provide complete and accurate bibliographic citations. Although longer or shorter works may be considered, 2,000- to 5,000-word manuscripts are most suitable.
5. Notes should appear at the end of the manuscript in a section titled "References." The editor will refer to the latest edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* is followed for capitalization, punctuation, quotations, tables, captions, and elements of bibliographic style. The basic forms for books and journals in the reference list are as follows:- Gilmer, Lois C. 1994. *Interlibrary Loan: Theory and Management*. Englewood, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited .- Childress, Schelley. 1994. "Planning for the Worst: Disaster Planning in the Library." *The Southeastern Librarian* 44 (2) (Summer): 51-55.
6. The name, position, and professional address of the author should appear in the bottom left-hand corner of a separate title page. The author's name should not appear in the document.
7. Photographs will be accepted for consideration but cannot be returned. Digital images preferred.
8. No other publisher should be simultaneously considering a manuscript submitted to SELn until that manuscript is returned or the editor provides written permission.
9. Upon receipt, a manuscript will be acknowledged by the editor. Incoming manuscripts are added to a manuscript bank from which articles are selected for each issue. The editor assigns manuscripts to at least two reviewers who receive the manuscript with no direct information on the author or the author's affiliation. Following the review, a decision will be communicated to the writer. A definite publication date is given prior to publication. Publication can be expected within twelve months.
10. Beginning with Vol. 51, #3 (2003), *The Southeastern Librarian* has entered into an agreement to license electronic publishing rights to H. W. Wilson Company. Authors agree to assign copyright of manuscripts to The Southeastern Library Association, subject to certain limited licenses granted back to the author.
11. Advertisements may be purchased. The appearance of an ad does not imply endorsement or sponsorship by SELA. Contact the editor for further information.

## ***The Southeastern Librarian***

Frank R. Allen, editor  
Associate Director for Administrative Services  
University of Central Florida Libraries  
P.O. Box 162666, Orlando, FL, 32816-2666  
fallen@mail.ucf.edu

### **Editorial Board**

Catherine A. Lee,  
Library Director, Wesleyan College  
4760 Forsyth Road,  
Macon, GA, 31210  
clee@wesleyancollege.edu

Phyllis L. Ruscella  
Library Director, Tampa Campus  
University of South Florida  
Tampa, FL 33620-5400  
ruscella@lib.usf.edu

### **SELA State Representatives**

**Alabama:** Linda Suttle Harris  
Head, Reference Services, Sterne Library  
University of Alabama at Birmingham  
1530 Third Avenue South  
Birmingham, AL 35294-0014  
lharris@uab.edu

**Mississippi:** Mary Beth Applin, Cook Library  
University of Southern Mississippi  
118 College Drive Box 5053  
Hattiesburg, MS 33401  
mary.applin@usm.edu

**Arkansas:** Ellen Johnson  
31 Forest Court  
Conway, AR 72032  
ellenj@mail.uca.edu

**North Carolina:** John E. Via  
Humanities Librarian  
Forsyth County Public Library  
Winston-Salem NC 27101  
viaje@forsyth.lib.nc.us

**Florida:** Phyllis L. Ruscella  
Library Director, Tampa Campus  
University of South Florida  
Tampa, FL 33620-5400  
ruscella@lib.usf.edu

**South Carolina:** William (Bill) McRee  
Stow South Carolina Historical Room  
The Greenville County Library  
300 College Street, Greenville, SC 29601  
Wmcree@infoave.net

**Georgia:** William N. (Bill) Nelson  
Library Director, Augusta State University  
2500 Walton Way  
Augusta, GA 30904-2200  
wnelson@aug.edu

**Tennessee:** Stephen Allan Patrick  
Professor and Head, Documents/Law/Maps  
East Tennessee State University Library  
PO Box 70665, Johnson City TN 37614  
patrick@etsu.edu

**Kentucky:** Christie Robinson  
Kentucky Dept for Libraries & Archives  
P.O. Box 537  
Frankfort, KY 40602  
christie.robinson@ky.gov

**Virginia:** Elizabeth Doolittle  
Director of Public Services  
Hollins University Library  
Roanoke, VA 24020  
edoolittle @hollins.edu

**Louisiana:** Melissa Hymel, Director  
Pointe Coupee Parish Library  
201 Claiborne Street  
New Roads, LA 70760  
mkhymel@yahoo.com

**West Virginia:** Frances O'Brien,  
Dean, University Libraries  
West Virginia University  
Morgantown, WV 26506  
fob@wvu.edu

## Are you on the SELA Listserv?

If not you need to be! This is an excellent way to stay informed on issues of interest to SELA members and librarians across the south. To subscribe:

1. Send e-mail to:  
listserv@news.cc.ucf.edu
2. Leave the subject line blank,
3. In the body of the message, type:  
subscribe SELA [then type in your name but without these brackets]

4. To send a message to the listserv, send mail to  
SELA@NEWS.CC.UCF.EDU

Instructions can also be found on the SELA web site at:

<http://sela.lib.ucf.edu/listserv.html>

For technical listserv questions, please contact Selma Jaskowski  
<selmaj@mail.ucf.edu>.

*The Southeastern Librarian* (ISSN 0038-3686) is the official quarterly of the Southeastern Library Association, Inc. A subscription to the journal is included with the membership fee. The subscription rate is \$35.00, which includes institutional membership. Please send notice of change of address to: SELA Administrative Services, P.O. Box 950; Rex, Georgia, 30273 Ph: 770-961-3520. Fax: 770-961-3712; or email: bobfox@mail.clayton.edu. Send editorial comments and/or submissions to: Frank R. Allen, editor; University of Central Florida Library, P.O. Box 162666, Orlando, FL 32816-2666. Email: fallen@mail.ucf.edu; phone (407) 823-2564; or fax (407) 823-2529. Membership and general information about the Southeastern Library Association may be found at <http://sela.lib.ucf.edu/>.

**Southeastern Library Association**  
SELA Administrative Services  
P.O. Box 950  
Rex, Georgia 30273

Non-profit Org. U.S. Postage <b>PAID</b> Rex, Georgia 30273 Permit 2007
---