

## Library Service to Social Scientists

Social scientists and policy-makers thirst for information, but librarians sitting passively behind reference desks cannot quench that thirst. Papers presented at the 75th meeting of the American Academy of Political and Social Science underscored the need for rigorous, systematic, and scientific research attacking the social problems facing our society. The present paucity of objective, usable research data within the social sciences is painfully embarrassing. Communication between scholars in the social sciences, as well as researchers from other disciplines, must be fostered and encouraged. Applied interdisciplinary research, focused on current social, economic, and political problems, should be expanded.

Two inferences can be drawn from the analyses offered by speakers. First, most social problems are so complex and so interrelated that true interdisciplinary research efforts must be undertaken to investigate and solve them. Second, these efforts will require substantial funding from both federal and private sources. Assuming the availability of funds (no mean assumption during this time of budget cutting), it is likely social scientists in colleges and universities will be called upon to do much of the needed research.

Social scientists tend, at best, to possess limited skills and knowledge about the acquisition, storage, and retrieval of information. They all too frequently develop makeshift systems, or "invent" means of storing and retrieving knowledge to handle, however poorly, the information resulting from their own work. To a large degree, these personal information systems are created to fill a void librarians have allowed to exist.

Librarians and information scientists can play an increasingly important, if not critical role, in helping to facilitate interdisciplinary research and the ultimate application of knowledge such research generates. Librarians are specialists in the acquisition, storage, and retrieval of information; hence, the addition of a professional librarian to an interdisciplinary research team would be logical. Almost from the very inception of the project, a librarian could make a major contribution to the research effort. He could help with literature searches, assuring that searching is continued throughout the life of the project. Typically, the literature search is brought to a premature end in the early

days of the project, and the researchers are not made aware of current studies which may be related to their own work. The librarian-information officer could help develop and put into operation a plan for the organization, storage, and retrieval of internal project communications, including correspondence, memoranda, and working documents.

In addition to functioning in an information support capacity during the life of the project, the librarian could also serve as the chief documentation specialist. In this capacity, he would attend all project meetings, record discussions and decisions, and would organize and store these records so they would be easily accessible. Possibly more important, the librarian would maintain the information base after the dissolution of the research team. He would be responsible for integrating project-related materials into the central library collection, thus ensuring continuity and helping other researchers obtain and use project materials to contribute to the growth of knowledge and the solution of social, economic, and political problems.

The role suggested here is certainly not a new one. Special librarians and subject bibliographers have performed some of these functions for many years. What is being suggested is that the librarian become an integral, contributing member of social science research teams. Since there is little disagreement among social scientists concerning the necessity for information support, the only question remaining is who will supply these services? The librarian or a new specialist emerging from the social sciences? Another challenge. Will it go unanswered?

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