

Continuing Education

A national Delphi Study conducted this winter by Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education predicted these major changes for postsecondary education in the next five to fifteen years:

Social problems will get more attention;
A greater proportion of students will enter vocational programs;
Postsecondary education will be more accessible to all kinds of people;
Faculty collective bargaining will be widely adopted;
More and more students will continue education throughout their lifetime;
More TVs, more computers, more of the other new technologies will be used in postsecondary education.

How will academic libraries cope with these changes? Will they respond? Passively or actively? Will they maintain their typical response as mere guardians of man's recorded ideas (more often than not, books)? Or, will they lead and modify change in postsecondary education?

If academic libraries are to cope with changes in postsecondary education, or, better, anticipate and be prepared to contribute to that change with library resources and services, then those making the decisions will have to change too.

How?

Through education: preservice, formal, and continuing education. Perhaps most importantly, through staff development programs which include all staff, at all levels, and which are designed by staff and administration to help their library more effectively assess client (and potential client) needs, adjust and change objectives of the library accordingly, and meet these objectives.

Several years ago Margaret Mead suggested that for most occupations it was necessary to retool every five years (she used to say seven years), simply to keep up-to-date on the job. It has been claimed that the changes facing postsecondary education today are the most significant since the Middle Ages. If such a claim has even an element of truth, well-designed and focused staff development programs are essential.

A recent Association of Research Libraries' survey of fifty-two member libraries identified very few research libraries which are providing centralized organizational support for staff development. The report notes that ". . . the uncoordinated efforts at individual self-development do not produce the staff capabilities necessary for the library to maintain its performance or, for that matter, meet the challenge of the future." In this issue, the late Arthur McAnally emphasizes that "failure to plan for the future has been one of the major weaknesses of university libraries in general, a condition which many authorities agree must be corrected in the Seventies."

Each academic library must consider its level of response to the predicted changes in postsecondary education. Staff together must identify client needs, thrash out their library's objectives, and create or adapt solid, focused staff development programs to enable the library to meet these objectives, several of which will be new.

An alternative future for many academic libraries is all too clearly implied by the last major change predicted by WICHE's survey:

People with money—state legislatures, federal government, private granting agencies, even well-heeled alums—will scrutinize ever more closely how higher education uses its resources.

PETER HIATT