Faculty Awareness and Attitudes Toward Academic Library Reference Services: A Measure of Communication

A survey of the faculties at six colleges was undertaken to measure the degree to which the libraries of those institutions were communicating with the faculty concerning the availability of various reference services. The results demonstrated that the average faculty member was aware of barely half the services actually available. Variables of academic rank, length of teaching, and amount of library and reference use were some of the factors shown to affect faculty awareness of library service.

Communication between the faculty and the academic librarian seriously affects the functioning of academic library service. Without adequate communication between these parties, the library's goals of educational service cannot be fully realized, the instructional and research needs of the faculty cannot be fully realized, the instruction-dent cannot benefit fully from the resources for education and enlightenment that the academic library has to offer. Whatever the quality and quantity of services provided by the library for faculty and students, those services will lack effectiveness if their availability is not made known.

Communication between librarian and patron, although a critical problem, is not extensively covered by the literature of librarianship. Most literature, dealing with this topic, however, only implies the existence of obstacles to effective communication between the academic librarian and the faculty. For example, Knapp, in her study of one liberal arts college library, found a "widespread lack of understanding or, at least, consensus among faculty and staff about what a library can and should contribute to the college—indeed, about what a library is." During her work at Monteith College, she indicated that librarians in the program were never freely accepted by the teaching faculty as members in the teaching process, a failure she partially blamed on problems of communication. De Hart's experiment in providing specialized information services to the faculty did not succeed because librarians and faculty members were unwilling to discard preconceptions; some would not even discuss the subject. Schumacher's analysis of a Small College Information System reported that "faculty . . . appear to be generally unaware of current library holdings and services and of how best to make use of (those) facilities and services." Leonard and his associates discovered that faculty members at Colorado colleges and universities fre-
quently thought that libraries should make greater efforts to "publicize services available to faculty (members) . . . and to explain what these services entail." Lawson's study of university reference services reported that the library's failure to publicize the availability of reference activities resulted in limited demands from the faculty for the activities.

Although these cases suggest problems in communication, there exists a lack of evidence necessary to evaluate the extent of such problems, as well as a method to measure levels of faculty-librarian communication.

**METHODOLOGY**

Faculty members were questioned about the availability of reference services at their college library; their knowledge was assumed to be based on direct or indirect communication with librarians at the college. Six institutions were selected from the California system of state colleges and universities: all had similar academic objectives, similar levels of resources and formulas for resource allocation, and a similar range of reference services. One thousand sixty-seven faculty members, representing a 30 percent random sample from the full-time faculties of the college, were sent a questionnaire listing thirteen reference services, eleven of which were offered by each of the libraries on a regular basis (see Table 1). For each service, the respondents were asked to indicate either (1) that the service was available, (2) that it was not available, or (3) that they did not know the status of its availability. A negative or "don't know" response for the eleven available services or a positive or "don't know" response for the two services not offered was taken to show inadequate communication between the library and the faculty.

Seventy-three percent of the corrected sample returned the questionnaires. Available descriptive characteristics of the respondent and nonrespondent groups, including discipline, academic rank, and years of service at the institution, were compared and tested by the chi-square method. There were no significant differences and the response was accordingly accepted as a fair representation of the entire sample. Since the distribution of awareness data approximated a normal curve, the mean was selected as an appropriate measure of central tendency.

**FINDINGS**

Tabulation of survey data (Table 2) provided the following information.

1. The sample's overall mean awareness score (M.A.S.) of 6.2 significantly represented less than half of the thirteen services listed.

2. Faculty from the humanities and from education had a higher level of awareness than faculty from other teaching areas, but their superiority is statistically significant only in comparison to the science group, which rated lowest.

3. According to the data, level of awareness is directly related to faculty rank, although the difference in M.A.S. between full and associate professors was not statistically significant.

4. Faculty who indicated at least weekly use of the library's reference services had a higher M.A.S. than those who used the services less frequently. Even a moderate use of reference services (1-2 times per month) produce a greater than average awareness of their availability. The small group with a high level of reference use had a mean awareness that was much higher than any subgroup in the study (M.A.S. = 7.8).

5. The M.A.S. of faculty who had served on at least one committee dealing with library affairs was higher than the M.A.S. of those who had not served.

6. Faculty who had been teaching
TABLE 1
SUMMARY OF RESPONSES BY FACULTY TO QUESTIONNAIRE ON REFERENCE SERVICES
(N = 694)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification of Service</th>
<th>Reference Service Provided</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
<th>No Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education—General</td>
<td>Advice and Assistance in Use of the Library</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Library Bulletins and Handbooks</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education—Special</td>
<td>Library Instruction for Classes</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lists of Reference Sources for Specific Classes</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bibliographies for General Distribution</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information—Materials</td>
<td>Vertical Files</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interlibrary Borrowing</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information—Questions</td>
<td>Answer to a Factual Question</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Answer to a Factual Question—Phone</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Answer Requiring a Search</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Answer Requiring Information from Outside the Library</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information—Special</td>
<td>Demand Bibliographies (not regularly available)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literature Search (not regularly available)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 2
FACULTY MEAN AWARENESS SCORES (scale = 0-13)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OVERALL</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>BY LIBRARY USE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY TEACHING AREA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>More Than Weekly</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>3-4 Times per Month</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>1-2 Times per Month</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Arts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rarely or Never</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&amp; Sciences</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>BY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>Members</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sciences</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>Nonmembers</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>423</td>
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<tr>
<td>BY FACULTY RANK</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BY LENGTH OF SERVICE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>10 Years or More</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>4-9 Years</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Professor &amp; Instructor</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>1-3 Years</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY REFERENCE USE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BY COLLEGE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Than Weekly</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>College A</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 Times per Month</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>College B</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 Times per Month</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>College C</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely or Never</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>College D</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>College E</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>College F</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

at the college for at least ten years had a higher M.A.S. than those who had taught for a lesser period; level of awareness varied directly with length of service at the college.

(7) The data indicated that the six colleges, all similar in function and all under a highly centralized state system, demonstrated a range of awareness levels. Some libraries in the sample seem to be more effective in communicating the availability of services to their faculty clients. One college, designated here as College A, had a M.A.S. substantially higher than any of the other colleges. Differences in M.A.S. among the other colleges were not statistically significant.

In general, the most widely recognized
educational service of the library was
the providing of advice and assistance
in the use of the library. Ninety-five
percent of the respondents were aware
that this service was available (see Fig­
ure 1). The most widely recognized in­
formational service was the interlibrary
borrowing activity, with an awareness
response of 85 percent. The least widely
recognized of the available services was
the educational service of providing
reference source lists tailored to specific
class requirements (17 percent) and the
informational service of answering
questions that require a search for the
answer (22 percent). Other services
ranged widely between the extremes.

One variable which accounted for
some of the observed variation seems to
be level of faculty need. Many faculty
feel a more intimate need for the ser­
vice of interlibrary borrowing than for
lists of reference sources tailored to
specific classes for student use, and they
inform themselves accordingly. Uni­
versality of demand for a service and
the ease with which it can be provided
also seem to affect awareness. Advice and
assistance in the use of the library rates
high on both counts.

Moreover, a combination of poor
communication with a low level of ref­
ence activity seems to lower awareness
of some services. Self-evident services
(see Table 3)—advice and assistance in
library use, interlibrary borrowing, and
the distribution of library handbooks
and bulletins—maintain a higher
M.A.S. than do services which require
some deliberate act of communication,
either as a request for information by
the faculty or as an announcement of
availability by the library. Although lev­
el of need, universality of demand, and
ease of provision, complicate the effect
of this distinction by communication,
the evidence furnishes at least minimal
support for the inference that as an act
of communication becomes more of a
requirement, knowledge of the avail-
ability of a service tends to diminish.
That inference, in turn, supports the
basic premise of the investigation, that
communication is less than adequate be­
tween the faculty and librarians in aca­
demic institutions.

The findings also revealed the relative
degree to which the various colleges suc­
cceeded in communicating the availabil­
ity of the services they claimed to offer:
each library had special success in com­
municating certain services. Table 4 in­
dicates that College A, with the highest
M.A.S., ranked from first to fourth
among the colleges with respect to
awareness of individual services. Col­
lege F, with the lowest M.A.S., in one
case achieved a tie for a highest aware­
ness ranking, and it ranked second in
awareness for another service. College
B, with the second highest M.A.S.,
ranked sixth in four of the eleven cate­
gories. This information seems to sug­
gest that the libraries tended to empha­
size various categories of service. Facul­
ty members at College A were particu­
larly aware of all the services that fell
into the category of providing informa­
tion. Its library and reference staff seem
to have been active in promoting what
Rothstein has called a maximum level
of reference service.10

The survey also furnished informa­
tion about faculty attitudes toward the
utility of the services listed. Respon­
dents were asked to indicate the degree
to which they considered each service to
be desirable, whether they thought the
service was currently available or not.
A majority of respondents expressed a
favorable attitude toward each of the
available services (see Table 5). Faculty
members were least likely to react favor­
ably to the specialized information ser­
vices not currently being offered by the
libraries on a regular basis, and toward
the provision of lists of reference
sources for their classes. Marginal com­
ments appended to some questionnaires
further explained the nature of facul­
ty objections to certain services. The objections centered around two points. (1) Several respondents considered the question of the cost versus the potential benefit of specialized services. "I could agree on all the above ‘shoulds’ if the budget were no problem." "If I were to complete this questionnaire to reflect my desires rather than my realistic assessment of the current library and budget-
TABLE 4
AWARENESS OF INDIVIDUAL SERVICES—BY COLLEGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Advice and Assistance</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>90</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bulletins and Handbooks</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Instruction for Classes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lists of Reference Sources for Classes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliographies for Distribution</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>53</td>
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<td>Answer to a Factual Question</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer to a Factual Question—Phone</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>37</td>
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<td>Answer Requiring a Search</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Answer Requiring Information from Outside the Library</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>34</td>
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<td>Vertical Files</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interlibrary Borrowing</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>85</td>
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</table>

TABLE 5
SUMMARY OF ATTITUDE RESPONSES TO INDIVIDUAL SERVICES (N = 668)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Favorable Attitude</th>
<th>Unfavorable Attitude</th>
<th>No Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education—General</td>
<td>Advice and Assistance</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bulletins and Handbooks</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education—Special</td>
<td>Library Instruction for Classes</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lists of Reference Sources for Classes</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bibliographies for Distribution</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information—Materials</td>
<td>Vertical Files</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interlibrary Borrowing</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information—Questions</td>
<td>Answer to a Factual Question</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Answer to a Factual Question—Phone</td>
<td>71</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Answer Requiring a Search</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Answer Requiring Information from Outside the Library</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information—Special</td>
<td>Demand Bibliographies (not regularly available)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literature Search (not regularly available)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ary situation . . .” “I would like to have these services, but when it comes to money to pay for them, I would rather put the money into other things. . . .” (2) Others questioned the capability of the librarian to satisfy their serious information needs. “I feel only the user can discriminate and select.” “The researcher should be (looking up specific questions) for he has the judgment to interpret the information.” “I . . . would not trust any bibliographic . . . work conducted by library reference people as being complete. . . .”

Despite these kinds of reservations, however, the number of people who approved of a service was larger than the number who had known the service was already available for every service except the basic activity of providing assistance in the use of the library. The minimal inference to be drawn from this is that for nearly every service, there were individuals who desired the
service without knowing that it was already being offered.

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that the average faculty member who responded to the questionnaire was aware of only 50 percent of the reference services available to him from his college library. Variables of academic rank, length of service at the college, service on committees dealing with library affairs, and amount of library and reference use were all related directly to degree of awareness. Surprisingly, social scientists showed a relatively low level of awareness. Intuitive estimates of potential friends for the library among members of the faculty have usually rated social scientists highly. Follow-up interviews with a small sample of respondents did suggest that social scientists tended to be more critical of librarians' performance than were faculty members from the humanities; it was not clear, however, whether their dissatisfaction resulted from a higher level of information need and expectation or whether librarians actually performed less competently in the area of the social sciences.

Although academic libraries which are closely related in mission and in resource allocation might tend to define and to execute their responsibilities in similar fashion, an exceptional institution, with the same resources and constraints, may demonstrate the capacity to discharge its defined responsibilities with greater effectiveness. In this case, the library of College A indicated a special capacity for successful communication with the faculty, a capacity that cannot be explained simply in terms of greater resources. The analysis of awareness of individual services (Table 4) indicated that the library of College A was also more successful than others in promoting information services requiring maximum level of reference service. Furthermore, it was more successful in bringing to the attention of the faculty those services requiring communication to be announced. Follow-up interviews indicated that College A librarians were the most active of the group in book selection and collection development, and both librarians and faculty interviewees agreed that this was an important common concern. Both faculty members and librarians from College A spoke enthusiastically of a tradition of public service that had been promoted by the library administration from the time the college had been founded. Finally, librarians from College A seemed to display a higher degree of personal initiative than did other librarians in establishing and in maintaining contact with faculty members.

Although College A did appear to be most effective in promoting awareness for the low visibility services, certain services were still not well known at any of the colleges, particularly those services surpassing the superficial and the commonplace. This low level of awareness has partially been a product of a low level of library activity in providing specific services energetically on a day-to-day basis. Also, low awareness has probably been the result of a low level of faculty confidence in the competence of librarians. With emphasis on the low awareness services, it seems that librarians have not realized the potential available to them for communication and for consistent and confident performance.

Given the range of responsibilities of many academic reference librarians, such realization is no easy task. The problem is complicated by those academic library administrators who have assigned low priority to questions of communication, and even to questions of public service, in their genuine (and justified) concern for the acquisition and organization of the masses of information that are currently threaten-
ing to overwhelm us. The result seems to be that some academic libraries are slighting a share of their responsibility to the individual client who is the ultimate rationale for most of the library's activities.

In this study, the faculty has indicated that it desires a full range of services. If the library is to maintain and enlarge services, librarians must be prepared and encouraged to exercise initiative in using more library resources to promote available services as well as to provide them consistently, competently, and vigorously. A first step should be to establish channels to communicate the availability of services to the faculty. The principal burden of responsibility for that communication resides with the academic library and its corps of librarians.

REFERENCES

7. The original sample of 112 faculty members no longer qualified as part of the survey population, usually because they had left the college during the preceding year.
8. All tests of statistical significance were carried out at an alpha level of .05.
9. This finding is less conclusive than it might have been because of complications introduced by the two services on the list not regularly offered by the libraries. It is likely that some respondents did receive those services on an individual basis and were therefore justified in providing an affirmative answer with respect to them. A reulation excluding responses to the two services in question produced an overall M.A.S. or just over 50 percent (M.A.S. = 5.8 on a scale of 0-11).
11. See, for example, Knapp’s recent suggestion that social scientists might be singled out as being particularly sympathetic toward working with librarians to provide education in the use of the library for students. She suggests that many social sciences rely heavily on the library as a source for data and they also do not often have independent programs for developing library competence for their students. Knapp, “The Library, the Undergraduate and the Teaching Faculty,” a paper presented at an Institute on Training for Service in Undergraduate Libraries, sponsored by the University Library, University of California, San Diego, August 17-21, 1970. Available from ERIC (Ed 042 475).