

Letters

To the Editor:

I was amused to read in a recent article (Henry Snyder, "Quiescence, Query, Quandary, Quietus: Public Services in the Library of the Future" *College & Research Libraries* 47:564-68 [Nov. 1986]) that the National Library of Medicine cuts out articles from its journals rather than providing photocopies. The thought of one of our great research libraries cutting up the journal collection would indeed be disquieting if true. Fortunately, I believe Dean Snyder is confusing the National Library of Medicine with the Institute for Scientific Information.

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Editor's note: Cassandra Allen, head of the Collections Access Section, reports that the National Library of Medicine has never engaged in the practice of cutting out articles from its journals.

To the Editor:

Wonder of wonders! I have often speculated as to what happened to the old Randtriever and why so few were sold, but here it is, in improved form, alive and well at California State University-Northridge, as described in an article by two of that institution's librarians ("Hard Copy in Transition," *C&RL* 47:495-99 [Sept. 1986]).

There is one statement in the article that is, regrettably, misleading: that is, the amount of savings that can be gained via a compact storage device in comparison with "the ten volumes per square foot in conventional open stack shelving." This myth about the ten books per square foot limit (instead of fifteen to seventeen) has really been around too long. Frankly, I think it is intellectually demeaning for librarians to keep using such a discredited criterion. The article I wrote for *C&RL* ("The Curious Case of the Library Building," *C&RL* 44:277-82 [July 1983]) was designed to inter this misconception once and for all. Despite the many approving letters I received from university administrators, it is clear that hopes for a more realistic approach to library space planning have not yet been realized in many quarters.

It would also have been helpful, I think, if the automated access facility described in the Northridge article had offered comparisons with a compact shelving system such as Space-saver. This would enable the reader to compare costs in a way that would permit a clearer evaluation of the loss of the browsing option. There is no necessary connection between the use of Spacesaver and the construction of a separate depository, as the article implies.

At least for those in the humanities and social sciences, browsing through the stacks can be highly efficient and productive with respect to those books that are circulated least often. The scholar in these fields probably knows what's been published recently, but may be inspired by a chance contact with a work of criticism or history written many years ago. Spacesaver and similar compact storage systems retain that privilege, at a density of approximately thirty books per square foot.

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