

## Letters

To the Editor:

We have some additional information on a trend reported in our article, "ARL Directors: Two Decades of Changes," *College & Research Libraries* 52:241-54 (May 1991). In the period 1985-1989, there was an unusual pattern of gender changes, with 54 percent of the new hires replacing a director of the opposite gender. It appeared that male directors were being replaced by females, and female directors were being replaced by males. To ascertain if this pattern is continuing, we analyzed the comparable data for the period July 1, 1990 through June 30, 1991.

During that period, ten directorships were filled with permanent appointees. Of the ten, seven or 70 percent were gender switches: one was a male replacing a female director and six were females replacing male directors. The data indicate that the pattern of replacement by opposite gender is continuing, as is the trend of an increase in the percentage of ARL directors who are female. Female applicants still have a better chance of being offered a position in an institution that had previously been directed by a male than one that had a female director. Male applicants continue to have an equal chance of replacing a male or a female director.

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Associate Dean of Libraries for Administrative Services

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PAULA T. KAUFMAN

Dean of Libraries

To the Editor:

While any librarian concerned with public services must be disturbed by the results of the Elzy, Nourie, Lancaster, and Joseph study ("Evaluating Reference Service in a Large Academic Library," [C&RL 52:454-65 (September 1991)]), I am even more troubled by what the article left out. What was presented as a dispassionate academic analysis of performance levels might equally be characterized as a violation of the professional relationship between department head and reference librarian. The authors seem oblivious to the ethical questions raised by using student patrons as anonymous performance evaluators, and the suggestion that the results of such a study might be used to make salary and tenure decisions would be ludicrous were it not so appalling. Can ten transactions at a busy reference desk possibly be a statistically significant sample? The authors do not present us with sufficient data to judge, but I very much doubt that that is the case.

I for one would be very interested in hearing from the reference librarians at Illinois State University's Milner Library. I am sure that they would be able to offer your readers a trenchant commentary on the merits and methodology of this study.

CHARLES J. TEN BRINK

Head of Public Services

University of Chicago

To the editor:

Mr. Ten Brink raises no issue that we have not discussed again and again ourselves. An in-depth response to his letter could easily fill yet another article for your journal. Our article was written to report the methodology and results of what started out to be

an in-house research project with some practical value. Most research reports are indeed dispassionate and academic. Discussing the concerns raised in Ten Brink's letter would necessarily take the form of an opinion article or a personal account.

Public university administrators across the state of Illinois are requiring increased accountability among their faculty for teaching effectiveness. On our campus every faculty member except the library faculty must undergo anonymous performance evaluations filled out by students near the end of each term. These evaluations are used as an important part of the process to distribute merit pay, as well as in tenure recommendations. Evaluation of reference effectiveness is a logical parallel to the anonymous performance evaluations which scrutinize teaching effectiveness. Ten Brink may not be aware that the tenure process generally involves from three to seven years. Should the library faculty decide to incorporate some form of reference evaluation in the tenure recommendation, documentation of performance using a manageable number of questions spanning three to seven years may indeed be valuable as *one component* in determining a tenure recommendation—particularly in the case of consistently poor performance.

The question of the ethics of unobtrusive evaluation has been debated since the method was first developed over twenty years ago and was debated before and after this project by Milner faculty. Ethical questions were discussed at some length both among the researchers, in general public service faculty meetings, and in a two-day workshop on reference effectiveness conducted by Dr. Thomas Childers for our reference librarians in October of last year. There was, of course, no resolution to the discussion—but all were given the chance to voice concerns.

While no one really enjoys evaluation from either end of the process, it is a necessary activity—and one which we feel is far better accomplished from within the profession and within the institution than by consultants from outside.

Milner Library has formed a committee which will have as one of its charges finding an effective and acceptable method of evaluating reference service. This committee was formed as a direct result of the evaluation project. While unobtrusive study may not be the preferred or popular method of evaluation, it is an effective catalyst for change.

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