

Letters

To the Editor:

At first glance I was delighted to see the article by Laurel G. Bowen and Peter J. Roberts, "Exhibits: Illegitimate Children of Academic Libraries" (*College & Research Libraries*, 54 [Sept. 1993]: 407-15) because it appeared to be a fresh approach to an important subject generally neglected in our literature. I agree with the authors that the requirements for mounting a good library exhibit can be the equivalent of those needed to prepare a major article—indeed, some recent exhibits I've seen clearly reflect a greater intellectual effort than many of the articles we've had inflicted on us. A preliminary scan confirmed that the authors had made themselves familiar with much of the broad range of challenges that effective exhibits must overcome.

But it was with deepening disappointment that I read on, discovering that the authors were apparently unfamiliar with what is actually being done by academic and research libraries in the way of exhibits, and were relying almost entirely on discussions of activities by archivists, art museums, and specialized national institutions such as the Smithsonian to make their point. And their point really had nothing to do with the fundamental question of why academic libraries do not often undertake ambitious exhibits and rarely seem to aspire to the level of sophistication of, say, the exhibits routinely mounted by the New York Public Library.

Instead Bowen and Roberts emit a defensive whimper about uninformed attitudes and unfair prejudices against exhibits that some (unnamed) libraries are presumed to have reflected in assessing the contributions of library faculty: "But exhibit preparators do so appeal to the intellect!" they protest. "Exhibit designers do so stimulate new thinking! Doing exhibits really is intellectually respectable!"

But do we need to be assured that exhibits have "many values"? The essential reality is that good exhibits are relatively expensive in terms of time, talents, and other resources. Academic libraries rarely allocate sufficient funds for such undertakings; very few of them are prepared to make the investment needed to refurbish space for exhibits, to acquire new exhibit cases, to install appropriate lighting, and to undergo other conservation expenses. As those of us know who are active exhibitors, changing exhibitions frequently requires substantial cost for architectural and graphic designers as well as the costs of catalog design and publication—not to mention the production and installation costs of those multimedia features Bowen and Roberts want to see. Surely it is lack of funds, not a lack of respect, that sustains the tradition of unambitious and amateurish exhibits in many academic libraries.

Even so, a substantial number of libraries have long ago escaped from that tradition, as anyone would suspect who is familiar with the ACRL/RBMS awards program for outstanding exhibition catalogs sponsored by Katharine Keyes and Daniel J. Leab and *American Book Prices Current*. If Bowen and Roberts really think librarians who design effective exhibits are treated as if their work "is not a fully legitimate scholarly enterprise," perhaps they should have interviewed recent award winners to see if that had been their experience at Harvard, Columbia, Toronto, Alberta, Maryland, Oberlin, Bucknell, Tulsa, Toledo, Northwestern, Indiana, Stanford, Yale, Southern Methodist, Carnegie Mellon, Brigham Young, Brown, Virginia, and elsewhere.

Unfortunately, in the process of trying "to demonstrate that exhibits are a fully legitimate scholarly enterprise," Bowen and Roberts failed to do some fundamental

research of their own. As a result we still lack a comprehensive study of exhibits in academic and research libraries, one that is based on firsthand evidence rather than on other people's articles in the museum and archival fields.

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To the Editor:

After reading Jean A. Major's "Mature Librarians and the University Faculty: Factors Contributing to Librarians' Acceptance as Colleagues" (*College & Research Libraries* 54 [Nov. 1993]), I felt my story of acceptance might prove of interest to your readers.

I am the Head of Collection Development at the College of Mount St. Joseph in Cincinnati, a liberal arts institution with an enrollment of 2,500. In 1991, less than three years after being hired fresh from "library school," I was nominated for and elected to the Executive Committee of Faculty Council and subsequently chosen as that five-member group's chairperson for the coming academic year. In this capacity I led the monthly faculty meetings, represented various faculty concerns to the administration, served on a Board of Trustees committee, and even got to carry the ceremonial mace during Commencement.

To what factors do I owe this acceptance? Many echo those mentioned in the article's Recommendations for Further Study. First, I grew up a faculty child. Thus I had a leg up in meeting an academic librarian's greatest challenge: understanding the faculty psyche. Second, I became involved in campus committee work as quickly as I could. Third, I did my best to contact faculty members to learn their specific research interests. This enabled me to conduct a vigorous SDI campaign and win their trust and friendship. Fourth, I spent some time with faculty members outside of the library. Informal meetings in the mailroom and lunches in the cafeteria went a long way toward my gaining acceptance.

I consider myself a college employee first, and a librarian second. Perhaps it's this outlook which best defines my particular story of acceptance.

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