

upon electronic materials that cannot be owned. Bibliographic records for cooperative resources such as the Center for Research Libraries' hardcopy collections are being added to local catalogs. As ownership becomes more difficult to define, local collections may no longer be particularly meaningful units for evaluation.

White's clear, provocative, and convincing account breaks new ground in a number of areas. But, as the author argues, collection evaluations are political artifacts as well as objective statements. In the final analysis, the politics of collections cooperation will determine whether the brief test methodology resuscitates the *Conspectus* as a collaborative tool. It's not at all clear that this should still be our goal.—Dan Hazen, *Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

***The Reference Assessment Manual.***

Comp. and ed. the Evaluation of Reference and Adult Services Committee, Management and Operation of Public Services Section, Reference and Adult Services Division (RASD) of ALA. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Pierian Pr., 1995. 372p. \$35 paper. (ISBN 0-87650-344x).

This publication is the product of a ten-year effort by a committee of the Reference and Adult Services Division (RASD) of ALA. It reflects a commitment on the part of a series of astute committee members and chairs to pull together a thorough inventory of instruments that have been developed in the field of reference services assessment. The thrust of this work is to support systematic and complementary assessment across libraries rather than leave the field to the current piecemeal approach. According to the preface, theirs is a two-part goal: (1) to provide one place for those in the field (practicing librarians, reference managers, researchers) to find all the instruments that have been developed for assessing reference activity, and (2) to encourage library administrators to support and promote evaluation of these services.

The structure and extensive scope of this manual should ensure that both goals are met. The fifteen chapters cover the full array of reference service components, for example, library users and reference patrons, reference environment, electronic databases and reference assistance, reference training, costs and outcomes, and reference effectiveness. Each chapter clearly defines its scope, conveys the importance of research in the area covered, and goes on to evaluate the state of the field; describes outstanding research needs; and lists instruments that are more fully described elsewhere. Also, each chapter's organization makes it easy to identify and explore particular areas of interest. For example, an administrator could easily pull out the information wanted on training or cost analysis, while a reference supervisor could work with the sections on duties and responsibilities or "question classification."

The Summaries of Instruments section is impressive. In most cases the actual instruments are provided on an accompanying disk (not available to this reviewer). When the instrument is not provided, full information about acquiring it is noted. The summaries also include information about reliability and validity testing for each instrument, when available (and specific experience with the instrument is also given). The clear intention is for new assessment to build on what exists. The work is also clearly intended to promote further testing of the reliability and validity of the instruments.

Another impressive section is the 140-page annotated bibliography that covers a broadly defined array of reference assessment works. Although it is presented as a "selected bibliography," it in fact offers extensive coverage of articles and monographs from the 1960s through the 1990s, as well as some unpublished works and, providing a historical perspective, some older items dating back as far as 1902. The sources cover both public and academic libraries and, more selectively,



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<sup>\*</sup>Get the complete "Call for Participation" in the January 1996 *C&RL News* at <http://www.ala.org/acrl.html> or by contacting

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special libraries. The topics include general information-seeking studies, user behavior, communication issues, "burnout" studies, effectiveness measurement, training, collection issues, and tools and techniques. This bibliography will serve as a resource in its own right, given its breadth of coverage. The annotations vary considerably in length, perhaps betraying the bibliography's compilation by committee.

The editors clearly note topics that have been excluded from the manual such as BI materials, reference by appointment, and database searching for a fee. They also choose to exclude performance evaluation of reference staff, citing the extensive body of material to be dealt with in that area—enough for a whole other volume it would seem!

There is a general statement that most of these instruments can be easily adapted for the electronic environment, and some have clearly been tested in that new environment (primarily with OPACs or commercial databases). Since we know so little as yet about the ways in which the Internet, electronic reference tools, or expert systems will affect the reference transaction and its assessment, it seems premature to assume that what has been tested and used effectively in a paper-based world will be entirely valid and useful "as is" or with minimal change in the emerging electronic and networked world. It is possible that we will need new tools or adaptations of these instruments to capture and evaluate the user's interaction with reference staff in their new environment.

With that caveat, this manual is recommended for anyone who wishes to do evaluation of nearly any aspect of reference work. By gathering together so much material, it makes a substantial contribution to our field. This volume should become the place to start any reference assessment and the basis for sorting through possible tools and methodology. The authors and RASD are to be thanked for their persistence in bringing it to fruition.—  
*Margo Crist, University of Michigan.*