

## Introduction

On three magnificent late fall days in October 1990, 150 librarians met at Allerton Park to grapple with the issues of evaluation of public services and public services personnel. These proceedings are the formal record of the 1990 Allerton Institute although, clearly, they cannot fully convey the experiences shared by the participants. The papers document the formal presentations, but they do not reflect the atmosphere of intense debate inside the Allerton conference buildings that contrasted so strongly with the lazy sunshine and the beauty of the late fall foliage outside.

Keynote speakers are supposed to start the debate by outlining the issues. James Rettig certainly was effective in starting the process of creative dialog. He reminded us that evaluation cannot begin until we have clearly understood goals and objectives. He then raised a number of objections to one of our more cherished ideals and objectives in reference work: that of providing bibliographic instruction. Reading his paper may provide a partial insight into the discussion that it generated.

After the keynote presentation, papers presented theories and practical examples, overviews and individual experiences. This range of coverage was planned, as was the balance between speakers from library education and from the practice of public service librarianship. Tom Childers gave an overview of the history and capabilities of unobtrusive evaluation; then Wilf Lancaster, Alan Nourie and Cheryl Elzy presented a specific instance of unobtrusive testing in which they expanded the boundaries of the method by evaluating individual service

providers. Charles Bunge spoke about a thoroughly tried-and-tested mechanism for evaluating what goes on in a reference encounter; following him, Prudence Dalrymple discussed ways in which information science research can point out new directions for evaluating information services. Mary Goulding's paper described a classic approach to objectives-based evaluation, while Betty Turock suggested six or seven additional kinds of evaluation that might be attempted. Finally, Rick Rubin gave a masterful survey of personnel evaluation for public service librarians, and Geraldine King provided a specific example of peer evaluation.

This constant juxtaposition of how things are being done now and how they might be done in the future provided the basis for a great deal of debate and discussion. In three planned discussion periods, and in dozens of informal encounters, real-life problems were discussed, ideas were generated, and librarians' commitment to public service evaluation was renewed.

I hope that readers of these proceedings will sense a bit of the heat of that debate from a distance, and that they will benefit from the stimulation and inspiration of those three days.

BRYCE ALLEN

*Editor*