Introduction

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Involvement with library evaluation today is on the increase. Those who have input through the library press or through conferences include librarians, library educators, practitioners from related fields, library consultants, research and development personnel, and the lay users who in one way or another pay the libraries' bills. The development of library systems, changes in the nature of library collections, the impact of new library and educational technologies and services, evolving social needs, and new concepts of library service all tend to focus attention on the need for successful evaluation design and implementation. Then, too, there is a growing realization that systematic programs of evaluation are essential to insure the effectiveness of developing library programs, if not their very existence.

During the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, there were sporadic attempts at evaluation, particularly as it related to library surveying and the development of library standards. The emergence of what was to become behavioral research just at the time of the first major thrusts of doctoral research in library science at the University of Chicago influenced the direction, and doubtless the character, of library evaluation. Certainly Louis Round Wilson, dean of Chicago's Graduate Library School from 1932 to 1942, impressed upon his faculty and students the relevance to librarianship not only of the scientific method but also of the research methods and findings in such fields as public administration, business administration, higher education, sociology, and industrial management.

In the late 1940s the emphasis on postwar planning for library development also provided fresh impetus for evaluation as a basis for planning.

In the 1950s and 1960s the funds available through such federal...
grant programs as the Library Services and Construction Act, and the monitoring of these programs, provided still further encouragement for building evaluation components into long-range plans for library development.

In the 1970s library evaluation, like all other areas of library activity, is affected directly by conflicting forces. Cutbacks in money necessitating retrenchment in programs have come at a time of rising expectations of library service to meet the needs of the total community. As the celebration in 1976 of the founding of the American Library Association approaches, the association is confronted with cleavages within the parent organization. Even the growing need for experimentation with interdisciplinary approaches in library evaluation comes at a time when, at least in some areas of librarianship, amateurish provincialism is more characteristic of evaluation activities than is competent utilization of the findings and the research methodologies developed in other fields.

Because the importance of evaluation of library services promises to grow in succeeding years, the contributors to this issue of Library Trends have attempted to address themselves to the state of the art and/or science of evaluation in their respective areas of librarianship and to discuss evaluative techniques and procedures used by librarians to determine the effectiveness of their programs (e.g., surveys, cost accounting, systems analysis, operations research, PPBS, MBO, PERT), and to identify significant evaluative studies completed in recent years, underway, or planned.

The seven papers assessing the state of evaluation in their respective areas of librarianship were read by three commentators experienced in the fields of (1) business and public administration, (2) sociology, and (3) librarianship.

For those librarians lingering in the pre-evaluative stage of librarianship, the three insightful commentators outline a number of clearly defined challenges. Among those deserving early attention are the following:

1. Is the library profession mature enough to achieve clearly articulated goals and to formulate valid standards for the various types of libraries?
2. Is there sufficient commitment among the professional librarians as to the importance of evaluation to attain effective built-in and continuing programs of library evaluation?
3. Can libraries develop an efficient delivery system which will feed
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research findings back into the system to provide the means for correcting and changing it?

It would be difficult to find ten busier people than the authors who made this issue of Library Trends possible. It is a pleasure to express appreciation for their perceptive and provocative contributions to the literature of the evaluation of library services.