Industrial Information Service Managers: Expectations of, and Support of, the Educational Process

JAMES B. TCHOBANOFF AND JACK A. PRICE

ABSTRACT
TWO INDUSTRIAL LIBRARY managers state the qualities they look for in library school graduates to fill positions in their organizations and the key skills that they expect to be included in the curricula of library schools. Library employers are consumers of library school products and library schools should be aware of their consumers' needs. Special libraries have special requirements in addition to subject specialization such as determining the priority of requests, appreciating the impact of information on the business, and the timeliness of replies to the requests. At the same time, they are often small departments where each member must be a generalist, and there is not much time to take on outside duties. Nevertheless, they recommend several steps that special librarians can take to bring special library concerns and needs to the formal education program.

INTRODUCTION
The industrial sector today is intensely involved with programs to improve the quality of its products and/or services. Whether the program is called quality management, total quality management, total quality control, quality design, or whatever, all these programs place a great deal of emphasis on the roles of customer and producer. How does this relate to library schools and industrial information service managers? There are at least two links between the two:

James B. Tchobanoff, Pillsbury Company, Technical Information Center, 330 University Avenue, S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55414
Jack A. Price, Central Coding and Library & Information Services, Ashland Chemical, Inc., P.O. Box 2219, Columbus, OH 43216

- Industry, as consumer or customer, hires library school graduates, the "product" of library schools.
- Industry, as consumer, must communicate to library schools the types of knowledge and skills that students need to acquire during their time in school. Library schools, as producers, need to be aware of consumer requirements and adjust curricula accordingly so as to produce graduates with competencies appropriate for the current job marketplace.

INDUSTRY AS CONSUMER: RECRUITING
AND HIRING LIBRARY SCHOOL GRADUATES

When library managers in the industrial sector have a staff vacancy that can be filled by a recent library school graduate, they approach the task of recruiting and hiring with essentially two questions in mind:

1. How can I hire a person who requires a minimum amount of time and training to become a productive contributing member of my staff? That is to say, how will a new library school graduate help my department be successful today?
2. How can I hire a person who has the "basic" competencies— both professional/technical and interpersonal—and who can successfully adapt to a rapidly changing business and technology environment? That is to say, how will a new graduate help my department be successful in the future?

These two questions have a practical basis, because resources— especially time—are always limited. The best solution is to hire a new employee who can "get up to speed" quickly so that the library manager has the flexibility to allocate resources to the other tasks or responsibilities at hand.

These questions also pose a recruitment challenge for library managers in the industrial sector. Typically, these managers work in a department of no more than ten people and they have few, if any, professional peers within their company. Consequently, their corporate personnel department usually can only give them general assistance in the recruitment process when there is a staff vacancy. When it comes to recruiting and selecting individuals for staff vacancies, industrial library managers are usually essentially on their own.

Library schools can assist industrial library managers in finding suitable candidates for a staff vacancy by providing a placement service for their current students. Whether the placement service will be helpful to the industrial library manager depends in part on the curriculum taught at the school and the type of people the library school recruits or attracts as students. For example, the library school

that concentrates on recruiting generalists for training as academic or public librarians will probably not have too many viable candidates for positions as reference librarians/online searchers in an industrial (e.g., chemical or food) manufacturing company. In addition to using library school placement services, industrial library managers will probably supplement their candidate search by using advertising, placement agencies, professional associations, or ad hoc arrangements such as the Industry-University Partnership between a group of industrial information managers known as the Industrial Technical Information Managers Group (ITIMG) and the library schools at Pittsburgh, Syracuse, Rutgers, and Drexel.

Once viable candidates have been determined, evaluating them and making a hiring decision is based on a combination of general expectations of the educational process, the specific needs of the position being filled, and specific local practices. In our opinion, employers evaluate potential candidates in at least six areas:

1. What are the professional/technical knowledge and skills of the candidates? For example:
   - What kind of knowledge, experience, and/or expertise do they have in online literature searching, and how well do they understand the databases my company uses most often?
   - How well can they conduct a reference interview?
   - Do they know the standard reference tools and/or the literature in my company's areas of interest?
   - What kind of cataloging or indexing knowledge do they have and what knowledge or experience do they have about MARC, OCLC, and so on?
   - What kind of computer skills do they have?
   - How well do they understand information and its use from the end-user's perspective—i.e., what is their understanding of how library customers create, disseminate, evaluate, and use information?
2. What kind of interpersonal skills and personal characteristics do the candidates have? For example:
   - How well do they communicate with others?
   - How well do they work in teams or groups?
   - What kind of attitude do they have about customer service?
   - How adaptable are they to new situations, technologies, change, and so on?
   - What challenges them? What annoys them?
   - What interests them in the position?
3. What kind of personal or professional experiences do they bring to this position? Such as:

- Did they do an internship, practicum, or similar work?
- Were they working in a library before or during their library school experience?
- What kinds of community service or professional association activities have they participated in? What did they accomplish, achieve, or learn during these activities?

4. What kind of management or leadership skills or capabilities do the candidates have? For example:
   - Where have they shown leadership?
   - Have they planned, sold, and/or managed a budget?
   - Have they supervised other people?
   - What do they know about marketing?

5. What kind of subject background do the candidates have in addition to their library school education (if required for the position)?
   - If they have it, how well versed are they in the subject? Do they have practical experience in the subject? Why do they want a career in the library/information profession?

6. Other factors:
   - How well does the candidate "fit" the position? the department? the company?
   - What else does the candidate bring to the position?

All of these factors—and probably some others—are at play as corporate library employers evaluate candidates. What do we expect of library schools as they educate potential candidates for corporate library positions? Ideally, library schools will always give us perfect candidates for positions, but that is not always a reasonable expectation.

INDUSTRY AS CONSUMER: EXPECTATIONS ABOUT COMPETENCIES

Much has been written about the competencies expected by special library employers of library school graduates (for example, Culnan, 1986; Cortez, 1986; Hill, 1990; Koenig, 1983; Paris & White, 1986; Schulte, 1991; and Tees, 1986), and, undoubtedly, much more will be written in the future. Suffice it to say that expectations of graduates will change and evolve as the profession evolves. The core competencies appear to fall into three areas:

1. basic technical knowledge and skills—e.g., knowledge of standard reference sources, ability to conduct a reference interview, ability to develop a search strategy, and so on;
2. interpersonal knowledge and skills—e.g., ability to communicate orally and in writing, ability to work with other people, and so on, and;

3. management knowledge and skills—e.g., decision-making ability, communicating with staff, budgeting, personnel practices, supervision, and so on.

The specific competencies expected in each area are open for argument, and indeed, the literature is full of articles talking about competencies and curriculum content for special library education. In a special library context, the key to this is not so much what the specific competencies include, but rather in what differentiates "special" library education from "other" library education. For example, a reference librarian will require the same basic reference interview skills or a cataloger will require the same basic cataloging skills regardless of whether they work in a public, school, university, or special library.

What differentiates special libraries from other types of libraries is more than the obvious relatively narrow business or subject focus. Special library programs at library schools need to point out that special libraries—especially those in the industrial sector—are distinctly different from public, school, or university libraries. Corporate special librarians will recognize that:

- all requests are not equal:
    —some have higher priority than others (one works on the vice president's request first before handling the ten routine reference questions that are pending);
    —some requests have more impact on the business (an ingredient shipment being held in customs that will delay your manufacturing and delivery schedule for a major client's order because the customs agent does not know how to analyze for a suspected contaminant is far more important than processing the journals received today);
    —some requests require more resources than others (reviewing the literature on a new technology that can provide the company with a competitive edge will require more resources than that required for a typical literature search);
- information has value and can measurably affect the company if communicated to the right person in a timely fashion in order to impact corporate decision making (telling the project leader, who is negotiating with a supplier for manufacture of a key product component, that a competitor has just patented similar technology allows the project leader to have the supplier indemnify the company against potential patent infringement);
- the management of information generated within the company— e.g., research reports, lab notebooks, and so on—is of equal or greater importance than the management of externally generated information, such as books and journals; and

- industrial library managers, like managers in the operating divisions of their companies, must "do more with less" as budgets are continually examined for their contributions to "bottom line value."

    Library schools need to include these elements into their special library curriculum and then provide their students with:

- the basic technical skills;
- a service attitude and customer focus;
- opportunities to combine classroom learning with "real world" experience in some way, be it "actual" or "simulated"; and
- a basic understanding of library operations and the general principles of business and management.

    Given candidates with these basic skills, practicing librarians can easily train them—once they are hired—in "local practices" and whatever other special knowledge or skills are required in order for newly hired graduates to become productive contributing employees.

    In order to discuss required competencies, we need a forum or mechanism for this purpose. Some of this takes place today in the dialogue between practitioners and faculty on a formal or informal basis, but most of these discussions are ad hoc.

INDUSTRY AS PARTNER: OPPORTUNITIES FOR COOPERATION

    How can practicing industrial librarians assist library school faculty in teaching special library students about these topics? This is a sticky question, especially since most corporate libraries have a small staff, and it is hard enough to handle daily operations, much less take on responsibilities outside the library. However, the answer to this question is essentially the same today as outlined by Clough and Galvin in 1984, namely:

- assisting in curriculum design or development;
- supervising a student doing a practicum, internship, or other type of field experience;
- serving as an adjunct member of a library school faculty; or
- assisting in recruiting students into the profession.

Internships

    Not too much is written about internships in corporate libraries (Coplen & Regan, 1981). However, many companies have internship programs—such as summer internships—and their libraries may also participate just like any other company department or division. Virtually all of the companies represented in the ITIMG have some

type of internship program, although only about one-quarter of the libraries have participated to date. The internship serves at least three purposes:

1. It provides a learning experience for students where they can begin to make the connection and/or transition between classroom learning and real-world experience, as well as providing the company with labor to accomplish a specific task or project.
2. It provides the industrial librarian with a disinterested viewpoint of library practices and operations and a method of learning some of the newer topics being taught in library schools.
3. It provides both intern and employer with a low-risk preview of a potentially longer term relationship.

Participating in an internship program often requires defining a project or task, obtaining the necessary organizational approvals, allocating the necessary resources, obtaining the interest and cooperation of the involved library staff members, and so on, as well as recruiting and selecting the intern. If the internship is a formal part of a library school curriculum, arrangements must be made to assure that the planned internship experience is appropriate for curriculum requirements. Once "hired," suitable training, guidance, support, and supervision must be provided for the intern in order for the internship to be a mutually beneficial experience.

Recruiting interns, like recruiting for staff vacancies, can be a problem, especially when the library staff is small and/or the area does not have a library school. Here, personal professional networks, as well as the sources outlined earlier, can help make the contacts and find the candidates.

Other Educational Roles

Participating in the educational process can also be an option for practicing librarians. Some library schools have practicing library professionals involved in the educational process in some way, such as:

- serving as an adjunct professor who teaches a special library course;
- serving as guest speaker during the school year on a specific topic for the special library class or as a speaker at a formal or informal library school program;
- hosting a field trip or a visit by a special library class to their library for a tour, demonstration of a special capability, or to "see" how a real library operates;
- participating in curriculum design or development, especially as related to special library concerns, by serving on an advisory committee or as a library school trustee;

● hosting a library faculty member to do a sabbatical within an industrial organization, such as AT&T's Bell Laboratories Library System has done. This is useful in providing faculty members with "real world" experiences that they can pass on to their students.

The extent to which any of these occurs depends on the skills, knowledge, and abilities of the practicing librarian—and the extent of involvement they desire or can afford to spend—as well as the needs and opportunities within the library school.

CONCLUSION

Industry's current emphasis on quality in all aspects of its operations—including its libraries—means that industrial library managers must carefully select, train, and develop their staff in order to provide their respective organizations with the appropriate information services and products. The key to an effective library is its staff, and the key to the staff is their skills, knowledge, attitudes, and abilities. In order for us to be successful in the field, we need a more active partnership with library schools in the educational process so that once library school graduates are hired, they can quickly be integrated into our organizations and become contributing members of our staffs.

REFERENCES

Clough, M. E., & Galvin, T. J. (1984). Educating special librarians: Toward a meaningful practitioner-educator dialogue. *Special Libraries, 75*(1), 1-8.

Coplen, R., & Regan, M. (1981). Internship programs in special libraries: A mutually beneficial experience for librarian and student. *Special Libraries, 72*(1), 31-38.

Culnan, M. J. (1986). What corporate librarians will need to know in the future. *Special Libraries, 77*(4), 213-216.

Cortez, M. C. (1986). Developments in special library education: Implications for the present and future. *Special Libraries, 77*(4), 198-206.

Hill, L. L. (1990). Education for special librarianship. *Special Libraries, 81*(4), 317-329.

Koenig, M. E. D. (1983). Education for special librarianship. *Special Libraries, 74*(2), 182-196.

Paris, M., & White, H. S. (1986). Mixed signals and painful choices: The education of special librarians. *Special Libraries, 77*(4), 207-212.

Schulte, L. (1991). Corporate special libraries: Future staff competencies. In *Future competencies of the information professional* (SLA Occasional Papers Series Number 1) (pp. 13-18). Washington, DC: Special Libraries Association.

Tees, M. (1986). Graduate education for special librarians: What special librarians are looking for in graduates. *Special Libraries, 77*(4), 190-197.