

LIBRARY SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION OF THE TECHNICAL SERVICES PROFESSIONAL: A REPORT OF THE ALCTS ROLE OF THE PROFESSIONAL IN ACADEMIC TECHNICAL SERVICES DISCUSSION GROUP MEETING, AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION MIDWINTER MEETING, PHILADELPHIA, JANUARY 1999

The quality of education in the field of technical services has been a topic of ongoing interest and increasing concern in the library world. Many technical services professionals feel that library school programs are not offering students the courses and/or content necessary to enter the profession in an entry-level technical services position. Interest has focused in recent years, particularly on the education of professional catalogers; however, there is also an underlying concern about education in the technical services field as a whole. The three presentations given at this meeting offered attendees the opportunity to hear the results of a recent research project on this issue plus various viewpoints concerning library education in this part of the field. While the session was meant to cover all professional technical services functions, two of the three presentations, as well as much of the discussion which followed, focused mainly on cataloging and the organization of information.

The meeting began with a presentation by Michelle Turvey, Dea Borneman and Karen Letarte, all from Southwest Missouri State University. Their talk, entitled "The Essential Partnership: Library Education, Core Competencies, and Technical Services," highlighted the preliminary results of a research project they were conducting to answer the questions: (1) Is cataloging education being de-emphasized in library schools?; and, (2) Are new graduates being adequately prepared to accept professional responsibilities? They have found that while a higher percentage of programs offer cataloging than when a similar study was done in 1997, a much lower percentage now require all library students to take a cataloging course. There has also been a significant drop in the percentage of programs that require either a cataloging course or a course in the organization of information.

Rebecca Lubas, Catalog Librarian for Serials Documents at Ball State University, followed with a talk that focused on: giving cataloging students the tools they need to remain flexible in a changing environment; the strengths and weaknesses of the three most common approaches to teaching cataloging in library schools; and, the most important things which should be included in all basic cataloging courses. She stressed the role of library education programs in the recruitment, or lack thereof, of cataloging professionals. Current weaknesses of many cataloging courses include dwelling too much on history and on the print monograph. Serials, electronic resources and current developments should be included in basic cataloging courses in order to spark interest in the field, rather than reserved for advanced courses where significantly fewer students will be exposed to them. Libraries can work with educators by encouraging internship programs and the integration of management modules into technical services classes.

Catherine Nelson, Head of the Serials Dept. at University of California, Santa Barbara, was the final speaker. She focused on the need of educators and library professionals to understand where technical services is headed and to see that library students are educated in such a way that they can meet the needs of libraries today and in the future. Technical services educators cannot simply continue to teach their classes as they've been taught in the past. Technical services work,

both professional and paraprofessional, has changed and on the job apprenticeships are no longer the norm. Library education must change so that entry-level professionals are prepared to deal with the expectations of today's libraries.

In the discussion that followed attention was given particularly to: the types of skills that should be taught in cataloging courses; the need to ensure that non-catalogers understand the benefits that come with a general knowledge of cataloging; the role of management in professional technical services positions; marketing in order to attract students to cataloging; and the need for cooperation between library schools, libraries, vendors, and systems specialists in an effort to alter current library education trends. While everyone agreed that cataloging is an important, indeed vital, part of the education of all library professionals, discussion participants held a wide range of views concerning what should be included in cataloging courses, what the expectations of libraries should be, and how we as working librarians can make a difference.

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