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# Getting Our Ducks in a Row:

## Research and North Carolina's Libraries

Kenneth D. Shearer

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Let's not speak any longer of the research "arm" of librarianship. Arm is the wrong part of the anatomy. Research is more like the cerebrum of a profession. It must help govern professional behavior and be linked to its eyes and ears.<sup>1</sup>

One recent illustration of how research ought to relate to the profession will get us started. The beginning salaries of public librarians in the state have been believed to be a problem for many years. But how large a problem? How widespread? Without the detailed, objective data possible only from survey research, there was no way to address the problem.

Recognizing the need for information, the North Carolina Public Library Directors Association asked its Personnel Committee to look into the matter. A survey was conducted by Caldwell County Public Library Director, Jim McKee.<sup>2</sup> The precise extent and degree of the problem was ascertained and was made available to Jane Williams, State Librarian, who shared it with the Secretary of Cultural Resources, Patric Dorsey. The matter has been reviewed by key state officials. The outcome is a policy that salaries for newly hired professional librarians working in a public library system getting state aid for personnel must meet a minimum figure.

In this instance, the right question was pursued in an appropriate manner and passed on promptly to the decision-makers who acted effectively, based on the research findings. Everything seems to have happened as it should: research took place within a framework that related to action.

How can North Carolina library science education, North Carolina library practice, and North Carolina library institutions be brought together so as to make "everything happen as it should" more often? Before we can begin to see the way, let us inventory the resources for research today.

The state library, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the North Carolina Library Association and many individual libraries are involved in research, most often by relating relevant research results to practice and interpreting these results to constituent publics. The state library sponsors publications of research results which it identifies as of special relevance to its state-mandated missions. It also sponsors public librarian/public library trustee workshops annually to, in part, acquaint those responsible for the state's public libraries with important research developments. This work is carried out, as well, through state library consultants bringing expertise directly to libraries in the state and via planned workshops for staff members. Its role in disseminating research results of interest, along with other continuing educational purposes, is furthered by its involvement in the serial publications, *Flash* and *Tar Heel Libraries*.

Playing a role with regard to school media centers similar to that played by the State Library with regard to public libraries, the Department of Public Instruction provides oversight and plans for coordinated growth and development. These two state agencies provide regular surveys of the state's libraries, resulting in reports of basic statistics on the various types of libraries in the state. The state library publishes annual statistics on academic, public, and special libraries; the Department of Public Instruction makes information concerning the school media centers available on demand from its computerized data bank. Individual public libraries were required by the State Library during the late 1970's to conduct research on community characteristics, local information needs, and library responses to these community needs.<sup>3</sup> Several university libraries in North Carolina hold membership in the Association of Research Libraries, thereby joining the sponsorship of research activities which benefit them. An even larger number of North Carolina libraries have membership in SOLINET, which charges fees to carry out research for the network. One public

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Kenneth D. Shearer is Professor at the School of Library and Information Sciences, North Carolina Central University, Durham.

library in the state has joined a national group in order to sponsor and take part in research into public library problems.<sup>4</sup>

The North Carolina Library Association disseminates research through its continuing education efforts, including both publications and biennial conferences. Its journal, *North Carolina Libraries*, is an outlet for much substantive research with special reference to North Carolina's libraries. A look through its tables of contents reveals research findings published by practicing librarians and students and faculty members of the state's postsecondary programs of library and information science education. Occasionally, issues of *North Carolina Libraries* have multiple authors who have been asked to contribute planned, coordinated research findings.<sup>5</sup>

Notwithstanding all the other contributions to research on North Carolina libraries, most of the research efforts undoubtedly are related to the five graduate library and information science education programs, all of which are constituent parts of the sixteen member University of North Carolina System: at Appalachian State University; at East Carolina University; at North Carolina Central University; at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; and at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Two of these programs require a research-based paper as a requirement for the Master's degree (NCCU and UNC-CH) and the Master's paper requirement at UNC-G may be, and normally is, research-based. Appalachian State University requires a research proposal (in conjunction with its required course in research methods) and East Carolina University requires both a research methods course with a proposal and an independent study course which carries the proposal through another step. All five programs, therefore, require students to become more than merely acquainted with research methods and prepare them either to undertake research on their own or actually enforce their creation of such a report.

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The doctorate is held by a large majority of the faculty members employed full-time in these programs. UNC-CH offers a doctoral program. Faculty members are expected to conduct research and publish their results. A retired faculty member, Lester Asheim, and a faculty member currently teaching in North Carolina, Ray Car-

penter, were recently cited as being among the most productive researchers in the United States.<sup>6</sup> The research reports on state issues, often in abbreviated form, of many Master's students are published in state publications sponsored by the state library and the North Carolina Library Association, as indicated above. Others find their way into regional and national publications.<sup>7</sup> Fifteen years ago, an effort was made to provide greater visibility to the historical research done on North Carolina's libraries by publishing a bibliography of it in the *Journal of Library History*.<sup>8</sup> The largest source of research in that bibliography is the result of Master's students' work.

Given the resources available, the quantity and quality of research on North Carolina libraries is remarkable; however, there has been very little coherent planning of research in North Carolina for the conscious, systematic improvement of the state's library and information services, short of the regular statistical surveys and information gathering of the state library and the N.C. Department of Public Instruction, already mentioned. Coherent, consistent statewide research efforts regularly pursued and reported in *Illinois Libraries*, as a notable example, is not yet the Tar Heel pattern.<sup>9</sup>

Although coherent, consistent statewide research efforts are not yet established, a recent development is worth recounting in order to suggest what should be done more often. It points the way to making the research efforts result in beneficial differences in library affairs in North Carolina. Concern over the adequacy of continuing library education (CLE) of library staff members led to a systematic, statewide assessment of existing CLE efforts and needs. The study was supported by the state library using federal Library Services and Construction Act funding.<sup>10</sup> The providers of CLE were found to be, by and large, the same agencies and energies that have already been identified as providers of research on North Carolina's libraries. The consumers are those responsible for the provision of library and information services in North Carolina, including public library trustees. Both groups were carefully surveyed so that findings could lead to sound conclusions. Two thirds of CLE was found to be provided by post-secondary educational institutions, most of it aimed only at the professional staff members.<sup>11</sup>

The researchers found that support staff was much less likely to have had CLE than professional staff members. Furthermore, employees and supervisors are the people who are most effective in bringing CLE information to the atten-

tion of staff members. Finally, consumers of CLE found it often to have lacked relevance to their particular responsibilities and settings.<sup>12</sup> The most important discovery was that the CLE opportunities offered were very often different from what was needed and that, ideally, "future developments of continuing library education would be characterized by direct planning interaction between the consumers of an educational opportunity and its providers" (emphasis given by the original authors).<sup>13</sup>

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Benjamin Speller, Dean, School of Library and Information Sciences, North Carolina Central University, participated in this study as a member of the advisory committee. He saw that the research implied that a state-wide program for continuing library education was needed. Therefore, he proposed that such a program be tried with (a) statewide input, (b) state library funding and (c) its own staff.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the research report, instead of remaining merely a convincing survey with important implications, became an answer to a major need of the continuing library education of North Carolina staff members. The North Carolina Library Staff Development program now exists as a cooperative continuing education effort of all five graduate programs of library and information science. Someone followed through on the findings. That follow-through is usually the missing link in the process.

It is pleasing to see so much research conducted in North Carolina on North Carolina's libraries. It is more pleasing that much of it is published and is, therefore, accessible through the indexing and abstracting services to the profession. Still more satisfying is the recent trend toward cooperation among the state library, the state's librarians and its educators and researchers. Occasionally, at least, the research and development energies at the professionals' disposal serve to advance the field's purposes in rather direct ways, as in putting a floor under public librarians' beginning salaries and meeting the state's CLE needs. More such systematic, planned research efforts with the objective of carrying through the conclusions and findings will bring

about greater effectiveness by the field in the future.

The state's resources to do the research work are substantial, and the way to identify research tasks and then to follow through to implement conclusions has already been charted in recent, persuasive examples.

We can get our ducks in a row. But to do so, research cannot be an arm of the profession; it must be part of its brain.

### References

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2. The survey is part of a mimeographed memorandum from Jim McKee to Public Library Directors dated November 10, 1986 and entitled "Follow Up Salary Survey."
3. David N. McKay. "A State Agency's View of PLA's New Planning Process." *Public Libraries* 19 (Winter, 1980): 115-118.
4. Richard Rubin. "Measuring the In-House Use of Materials in Public Libraries." *Public Libraries* 25 (Winter, 1986): 137-138. Rockingham County's public library is a member of the national Coalition for Public Library Research and was one of six sites nationally for the study reported in this article.
5. An example is the coordinated effort to provide an overview of microcomputing use in North Carolina's Libraries: "Microcomputer in North Carolina Libraries." Benjamin F. Speller, Jr. and Robert Burgin, Editors. *North Carolina Libraries* 40 (Fall/Winter, 1982): 189-232.
6. Robert M. Hayes. "Citation Statistics as a Measure of Faculty Research Productivity." *Journal of Education for Librarianship* 23 (Winter, 1983): 151-172. Ray Carpenter was ranked 31st of the top researchers nationally. Retired faculty member Lester Asheim was also mentioned in this ranking and finished 7th nationally. The ranking was made by a "normalized frequency of citations in substantive articles."
7. See examples such as Timothy P. Hays and Concepcion Wilson. *A Survey of Users and Non-users of the Public Libraries in Region G, North Carolina*. Greensboro, N.C.: Piedmont Triad Council of Governments, 1974. (Highlights from this research with implications for public library planning appeared in Timothy P. Hays, Kenneth Shearer and Concepcion Wilson, "The Patron is Not the Public." *Library Journal* 102 (Sept. 15, 1977): 1813-1818.) Another research project treating a state subject that received national distribution is Karen Crumpton's "The School of Library Science at North Carolina Central University" in Annette L. Phinazee, editor, *The Black Librarian in the Southeast*. Durham, N.C.: NCCU School of Library Science, 1980: 276-281.
8. Raymond Carpenter, Bea Bruce, and Michele Oliver. "A Bibliography of North Carolina Library History." *Journal of Library History* VI (1971): 212-259.
9. The reader is urged to browse through a couple of recent years of *Illinois Libraries* for a suggestion of the rich source that coordinated statewide research, publication, and reasoned development can be in a state's professional life.
10. Joan Wright and Douglas Zweig. *Learning in Progress; A Study of Continuing Library Education in North Carolina*. Raleigh: N.C. State University, 1982.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 26
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 104-106
13. *Ibid.*, p. 109
14. Benjamin F. Speller, Jr. wrote a proposal for LSCA, Title III funding, "For a Continuing Education and Staff Development Program." Durham, N.C.: School of Library and Information Sciences, N.C. Central University, January 1985. (Mimeographed)