

New Opportunities, New Choices: Some Observations About Libraries in North Carolina

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This article is one person's assessment of librarianship and the issues that need attention now. It is not a review of the literature. The focus is North Carolina, but readers should generalize to other states and regions whenever their personal experience suggests that is appropriate. Some of the changes suggested may not seem like they would benefit women and minorities but, in our profession, all changes directly or indirectly affect these groups. If I exaggerate slightly and use other literary devices to make my points, I know that readers will be understanding and patient.

Concerns about employment, legislation, and other topics relating to the participation of women and minorities in society continue to attract scholarly, media, and political attention in this country. The range of topics addressed in this issue of *North Carolina Libraries* is evidence of the continuing concern. Evidence of interest abounds at the national level and in North Carolina. Evidence of action is somewhat more difficult to detect.

Key Terms and Concepts

It is useful to begin with definitions of terms that will further clarify what this article is about. "Minority" is a word that I think frequently is misused. Minority is a relative term, relative to whatever the majority is. In librarianship, men are a minority group. For our purposes, minority groups include Blacks, Native Americans, Hispanics, Asians and Pacific Islanders, persons

with visual, hearing, motor or mental impairments, and veterans. This definition may be unsatisfactory because some ethnic, racial, and cultural groups are not present in large numbers in North Carolina and because of the other groups included in the definition.

A newer and more helpful concept is that of representativeness which, if applied in North Carolina libraries, suggests that our work force should be representative of the diverse population in our state and region and therefore, representative of the clientele we serve. Civil service and other public sector units cannot claim organizational responsiveness without a representative work force. Affirmative action to achieve representativeness can be effective. These ideas and others about the concept of representativeness in the civil service and its relation to equal opportunity and affirmative action are discussed in a thought-provoking article by Nesta Gallas.¹

One additional term should be clarified. "Change" is not only a positive concept but also a prerequisite to organizational responsiveness. Employees in libraries and other organizations often talk about the desirability of a stable work situation as if this were the equivalent of eternal peace and security. In fact, a stable organization is one that is changing at approximately the same rate as the factors in its environment (e.g. in the economy, the population) and as its competition (e.g. other municipal departments, computer centers). An organization that

does not change is not stable; it is out of touch and losing ground quickly. How nice for those old-timers who like to remind us that the more things change the more they remain the same, at least in relation to one another.

Obstacles to the Observer's Work

By now it should be clear that I believe that representativeness and change are necessary to maintain responsive, effective and stable library organizations. How are we doing in North Carolina? I do plan to answer the question but want to address two general problems that tend to impede analysis and progress. First, we do not have very much data about personnel resources in North Carolina libraries. We tend to know the gender of the directors and top administrators because their names appear in directories. This is useful information to which I will refer subsequently in a later section of the article; but the greatest chance for representativeness comes from the bottom of the organization and not from the top. We need to know something about the people who have been hired, during 1985 and 1986 for example, and how they compare in several ways with those who retired or otherwise left the organization during that same time period and with those who remain with the organization. This analysis would give us good data about the likelihood of change and its direction and, perhaps, is a better indicator of affirmative action as practiced by a library's current

leadership than are data for the entire library staff, many of whom may have been employed there for decades.

Because the largest number of library employees are not librarians but rather paraprofessionals and other technical and support personnel, we need to include this large and valuable group in our data collection. At a time when the North Carolina Office of State Personnel (OSP) and its Pay Systems Task Force are recommending changes in the pay plan to reflect the "prevailing labor market(s) with which the state competes for employees,"² we have no data to offer and no basis for knowing whether library staff members are likely to fare poorly or well when such data are available. Keep in mind that the Office of State Personnel sets salaries for library support staff employed by the sixteen University of North Carolina System campuses and for employees of the Division of State Library. The likelihood exists that the Office of State Personnel will collect data about library salaries in municipalities, private universities and corporations and use this to the possible detriment of another group of library staff members. Can we not find library staff who think it is important to study municipal and state civil service systems in North Carolina so that we can make our feelings known about the adequacy of job specifications and pay grades?

A second general problem is that the continuing emphasis on "types" of libraries is counterproductive because libraries vary as much or more by size than they do by type. In a multitype library environment, the emphasis can be on facilities, services, collections, personnel, and the like—areas in which both change and representativeness are more likely to occur and to be measurable. In North Carolina, we have talked about multitype networks and we are implementing a state network, but commitment to the concept is lacking.

As always, lack of commitment indicates lack of profession-wide consensus on goals, and the result is lack of funding.

It probably is helpful and only slightly risky to look at progress toward representativeness and change among basic types of libraries and library-related organizations in North Carolina. Those readers who are research-oriented and looking for a model or a continuum are bound to be disappointed with the level of analysis that follows.

First, the Good News

The good news is that university libraries and school libraries appear to be taking the lead in library development in North Carolina. As noted above, the matter of representativeness, as I have defined the term, is difficult to assess because data are not readily available. This is not to say that each university and school system does not collect data about its staff or would not make such data available if requested to do so.

If we expand the concept of representativeness as I would like to do, we would look at the filled professional positions in each library and ask some of the following questions: How many librarians have had experience working in states other than North Carolina? How many have worked in more than one type of library? How many different library schools are represented among the MLS graduates on the staff? Are there any staff members who were born in a country other than the United States? Are there Black employees on the professional or the support staff who are from New Jersey or the Midwest (for example) as well as from North Carolina or Georgia? If we look only at university library directors, then progress will be hard to detect. Among the six largest University of North Carolina System libraries and the two largest private university libraries, only one is directed by a

woman. (Hopefully, the number will double by the time this article appears in print.) At the assistant/associate director and department/branch head level, the mix is increasingly good, and women, but not Blacks, are well represented. For appointments made within recent memory (about five years), the quality of the appointees appears to be very high.

Among the historically or predominantly Black institutions, judgments about library development can be made by watching two key factors: the qualifications of a recently appointed director and the representativeness of the library staff. At present, only four of eleven Black institutions have female library directors. While the private Black colleges appear to be in a continuous struggle to remain in operation, the five institutions that are part of the University of North Carolina System are doing very well; four of them have new libraries or library expansions under construction or in the planning stage. Library development at these schools bears watching.

Representativeness among school librarians can be assumed because the group is so large in number. Because each library is small, the most practical units for analysis would be all the librarians in a school district, the eight Regional Education Center school media program consultants, and all the librarians (other than those at the regional centers) employed by the State Department of Public Instruction (SDPI). The qualifications and the number of school librarians will continue to increase through the efforts of SDPI, the North Carolina Association of School Librarians (NCASL), and the State Legislature.

How ironic that academic librarians, so often thought to be elitist in attitude, and school librarians, often ignored by their professional colleagues working in other settings, should be leader of

the library pack! These two groups are acting as if multitype library cooperation and networking are both real and desirable.

The universities, especially the sixteen University of North Carolina campuses and Duke University, will soon have operational online catalogs and circulation systems. Their bibliographic files are included in the North Carolina Online Union Catalog where they will be accessible to librarians and library users at many smaller libraries through dial access. High schools in the Charlotte/Mecklenburg County School System use OCLC for cataloging and their holdings are included in the statewide network. High schools in several areas of the state have expressed interest in terminal access to the online catalog at a nearby University of North Carolina campus. These activities are happening at a time when proposals for school-college partnerships are being put forward by education critics and planners. In this state, a recent report about the professional preparation of teachers makes several recommendations for strengthening the relationship between the public schools and teacher education programs.³ Libraries are not mentioned in the report, but any librarian reading it will find much to think about in terms of work to be done. Our own literature is addressing the same topic, especially as it becomes increasingly clear that each school library cannot hope to have the resources needed to support fully the professional needs of teachers and other school personnel, the increasingly complex and comprehensive curriculum requirements of the Basic Education Plan, and the necessary range of bibliographic instruction programs. Academic libraries open ninety hours or more weekly with specialized collections, staff with expertise in many subject areas, and a full range of facilities are valuable partners for school libraries, especially high

school libraries. The benefit to the academic libraries will come from sharing ideas and experiences and from working with colleagues who are knowledgeable about curriculum materials and about teaching.

Other areas of mutual interest to school and academic libraries are the increasingly creative uses of microcomputers for library management and instruction and for listing and scheduling films and other audiovisual materials and equipment, programs for gifted and talented students, and a willingness to experiment with electronic mail and telefacsimile services. Shared interests make shared staff development programs possible—a real boon to librarians not located in the major metropolitan areas.

Approaching Good News

The more visible and stronger leadership role for the Division of State Library should be good news for North Carolina librarians. The State Librarian has used every opportunity to fill open positions in such a way that representativeness among the staff is increasing. Recent hires have come from good experience in other parts of the country and from several different library schools. Best of all, the organization is becoming more functional with less emphasis on type-of-library consulting. Also contributing to improving the environment for multitype library cooperation are efforts to include school and academic library participants in various networking efforts while these are still in a planning or pilot project stage of development. Meetings with representatives of the University of North Carolina Library Directors Council (an advisory group for the Vice President for Academic Affairs), with OCLC officials, and with SDPI Media and Technology Services staff have, I think, produced both the good will and the broad political base necessary for

legislative approvals and appropriations. Greater State Library involvement in projects that show cooperation among state agencies and benefits to many parts of the state enhances the reputation of the Division and the Department of Cultural Resources in the minds of elected officials. Progress of this kind should not be underestimated.

If there is one group of State Library activities that never seems to change, evolve, or otherwise inch forward, it is those activities concerned with public libraries. The problem is that, in North Carolina, public libraries apparently are defined narrowly as being municipal (city, county) libraries. The federal government defines "public library" much more broadly to mean "a library that serves free of charge all residents of a community, district, or region, and receives its financial support in whole or in part from public funds."⁴ This broader definition seems to include school, academic, and community college libraries located within publicly supported systems and institutions. Consider this. Citizens in need of materials, facilities, or subject expertise are more interested in getting what they need from the most convenient source in which they have confidence. They don't care about jurisdictional disputes, e.g. you can't come to my library because it is paid for by the higher education system and therefore serves only college students, faculty, and staff. (What about the spouse of the faculty member? Will the local "public" library and the college split the cost of providing service to this person?)

The point that I am trying to make is that it is contradictory for the State Library to promote multitype library cooperation while, at the same time, continuing to direct a considerable amount of its attention and money to city and county libraries. Perhaps the worst example of this practice is the

publication FLASH! which the State Library sends to "public" libraries only. Direct requests to be added to the mailing list have been turned down. In FLASH! and/ or in Tar Heel Libraries are announcements that indicate that information about grant programs, books withdrawn from the State Library and the like will be sent to "public library directors" or will be available to "public libraries." Other libraries want this information too, perhaps to suggest a joint project idea to a reluctant public library director. The time has come, I think, for the State Library to support libraries that (a) serve a broader range of users than their expected type-of-library clientele, (b) serve as a resource for other libraries and (c) participate in regional (bring back the ZOCs!) and/ or statewide multitype cooperative projects. Staffing at the State Library should be redirected accordingly. We need collection specialists and facilities planners, not consultants who arrive in a community that has a dozen libraries and visit only one.

Some of the News is Bad

If readers have any sympathy at all for the view that one weakness of the State Library is its historical commitment to being the Division of Public Libraries, then perhaps there will be no violence in response to the suggestion that city and county public libraries are the biggest obstacle to multitype library networks, to new roles for the State Library and to library progress in North Carolina generally. Strong words, I know.

Public libraries appear to lag behind other types of libraries in terms of representativeness. It is well known that only one of the seven largest public libraries in North Carolina has a woman as director. I suspect that many senior public librarians at the assistant/associate director and department/branch head levels haven't ever crossed the state

line to work in another library. Many have made only lateral moves within the state or have been in the same job for fifteen years or more. Surely most people reach a plateau in each job they hold, a point beyond which no substantial learning takes place and no new challenges are found. Absence of change is as bad for people as it is for organizations. At the very least, upward mobility of younger librarians is limited, and the best of the new professionals may leave North Carolina for another state. Without adequate information about the characteristics of library staffs, it is unknown whether minorities and other persons representative of the clientele served are present in reasonable numbers among public library staffs. As with academic libraries, the more visible public library positions do not seem to have the level of representativeness that would benefit our profession.

Without question, public libraries contribute greatly to the cultural, social and educational life in our state. Their staffs work under sometimes difficult financial and political constraints to respond to the needs of their communities. I do think, however, that there are three groups (for lack of a better word) associated with municipal public libraries that affect progress toward a more cooperative statewide library environment. These groups are trustees, Friends (especially the Statewide group), and the Public Library Directors Association. These groups, I think, promote public libraries to the extent that there is a negative effect on other libraries and on community attitudes toward multitype library cooperation.

Trustees rightly advise and support the library in its local area, but some trustees are overly enthusiastic in persuading local officials, businesses, and legislators to support projects that benefit only one library and, even that, on a temporary basis. At the state level, some of the pork barrel allocations to

public libraries may do more harm than good. If a local library cannot exist without a few thousand dollars obtained each year by a helpful state legislator, then that community's need and support for the library must be very weak.

Friends of the Library groups do a very good job for the public and academic libraries they support. It is the state and national organizations that concern me because they were founded to promote municipal libraries. Although some statewide Friends groups are changing to a broader emphasis, I continue to believe that libraries can do without them. The American Library Association also has made several efforts to help publicly funded libraries obtain support from business and industry and from other sources. Whether or not these have been fully or partially successful, I think that they serve mainly to distract attention from the need for strong, ongoing state and local level funding support for publicly funded libraries. A library "friend" must do more than raise money. Raising consciousness about library staffing and the need for services to all segments of the community would be a very friendly gesture.

Perhaps someone can explain why there is a Public Library Directors Association. Isn't the Public Libraries Section of NCLA adequate for the needs of public librarians, whatever their job titles?

A Candidate for Change

Surely the most change-resistant organization of them all is the North Carolina Library Association. It is our very own immovable object. If there is such a thing as imitation representativeness, NCLA has it. Rotating the presidency among type-of-library candidates is not only a contrived mechanism, but it also suggests that natural selection doesn't work, that the size of

the talent pool in each category doesn't matter, and that outstanding professional librarians must be interested in and knowledgeable about only the type of library in which they are presently employed. The rotation system is especially offensive because of the two-year term of office. Presumably, when a public librarian becomes president of NCLA, there cannot be another president from a public library for at least six years (eight if a special libraries section is added) even though the number of public librarians in North Carolina is large. Lack of representativeness is evident in other ways. Consider NCLA committee assignments. Why have some committees been chaired by the same person for long periods of time? Surely we have enough talent in the state to give new people a chance. Why have some people served on as many as five committees in a particular biennium when other members have never been invited to serve? Consider NCLA round tables. Many readers will remember how recently the NCLA leadership expressed the opinion that there was no need for round tables concerned with women in librarianship and with ethnic minorities.

The Futures Committee of NCLA presented a series of recommended changes to the NCLA Executive Board last fall. The Committee report has been sent to all members for their review. The report is very good and the changes recommended are the most basic changes needed to give NCLA new life. Nevertheless, early reports are that there is much resistance to change and much misinformation about the implications of the Futures Committee report. Not all of the present NCLA Board members are working in support of the needed changes. Perhaps it is inevitable that some of the people in charge now want to stick with the system that put them in charge. Meanwhile, some of the sections have good leadership and good

programs. They continue to serve their members and, except for financial matters, they have little reason to be involved with the NCLA superstructure.

Unsung but Heroic Participants

Special libraries in North Carolina are not mentioned as a group because so many of them are small and/or associated with a university library. All of the health sciences librarians are active in cooperative efforts and in professional activities. Representativeness for this group and for the private sector health industry libraries is managed by a minority group of sorts, librarians having one or more degrees in the sciences. The large special libraries associated with federal government agencies have participated in statelevel activities when these were compatible with agency mission and funding. Individual librarians give generously of their time in working with library education programs and in service on committees. Private sector special librarians usually are receptive to inquiries about a role in networking if placing their collection records in a public file is not required.

The community and technical college libraries and learning resource centers are fortunate to have employed some of the most outstanding librarians and library managers in the state. How these fine and talented people are able to triumph in such difficult work environments is a puzzle to me. Surely community college librarians operate in the most political, most poorly supported (institution and state agency level), and most undermanaged organizational settings in all of North Carolina. Nevertheless, some individual librarians have brought their institutions and their staffs into valuable roles in multitype library activities, e.g. the Western North Carolina Library Association, the Cape Fear Region

libraries. In the east and northeast, some of the community and technical colleges have provided a base for off-campus degree programs offered by East Carolina University and other universities, often without adequate support from the universities they serve. These relationships should strengthen as the value of the community college collections are more widely recognized, a process that will accelerate now that most of the bibliographic records from community college collections are part of the North Carolina online union catalog.

The Observer Concludes

Without change and without representativeness in staffing, there is not enough energy available to get needed work done in libraries and in communities. All libraries have high visibility in whatever organizational setting they are in; the examples they provide with their staffing patterns, quality of management and planning, and statewide perspective will benefit our profession as well as other agencies of local, county and state government. Local officials and state legislators will be as impressed with our broader view of our mission as we think they are with our narrower one.

References

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