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Government publications

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Government Publications

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Under new editorship, the scope of this column is being enlarged to include local, state, and international government publications as well as U.S. government publications of reference interest. Contributions, in the form of either prepared articles or suggestions for topics which the reader would like to see covered, are strongly encouraged.

The federal government is still the largest single producer and disseminator of information in the United States. Thus it is particularly instructive to examine materials which the government publishes on library and information science. At the present time, four federal agencies produce publications dealing specifically with library and information science: the Library of Congress; the Office of Libraries and Learning Resources, U.S. Office of Education; the Office of Science Information Service, National Science Foundation; and the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS). The recent publications of NCLIS cover the entire spectrum of library concerns and can be very highly recommended as interesting professional reading.

As this is a column and not a book, comments on NCLIS publications will focus on government publications and the possible role of librarians as the future information facilitators, although the publications cover many other topics of great interest.

Toward a National Program for Library and Information Services: Goals for Action

provides the best summary of NCLIS philosophy and present programs. The NCLIS annual reports are also helpful in providing a quick review of commission actions and programs. The commission's long-term goal is to provide every individual in the United States with equal opportunity of access to that part of the total information resources which will satisfy the individual's educational, working, cultural, and leisure-time needs and interests regardless of the individual's location, social or physical condition, or level of intellectual achievement. Throughout NCLIS publications there are indications that information is viewed as a natural resource which could possibly be the key to future social and economic progress in our complex industrial society. Thus expenditures on information may constitute the most promising investment for improved economic productivity. The present NCLIS program appears to be a blend of the concepts of library and information resources as a national resource, equal opportunity of access, use of new technology in networking, protection of authors and publishers, and legislative protection of personal privacy and intellectual freedom.

Controversy involving the NCLIS proposal has centered around emphasizing the building of local collections versus system networking, and issues of intellectual freedom. Parker indicates that information for the information poor is more likely to be of benefit both to the individual and to the society as a whole. If Parker is correct, then we must ask, Is networking the top priority for meeting the goal of supplying information to the information poor? Or will there be too much concentration on networking to satisfy the demands of the

Readers are invited to contribute information of interest. Please address any contributions to Jo Bell Whitlatch, 815 Cambridge Ave., Menlo Park, CA 94025.
few who can afford to pay? The final statement of goals does assure us that the National Program must be built on strong local resources of sufficient scope and quantity to satisfy the immediate needs of the local users.4

Apparently, there is some concern on the part of commission members and conference participants that the U.S. government would exercise more control over our information resources than is desirable. At least, we are strongly reassured that this will not be so: "The Federal government would neither directly control nor operate the nationwide network and in particular, it would exercise no control whatsoever over the information content exchange over the network."5 "The Commission sees the National Program as a force for productivity and creativity and not as an authoritative and inhibitive constraint which would control the behavior of the people."6 "Whatever central authority is eventually established to direct the National Program, local autonomy and the maximum degree possible of local self-determination should be one of the program's major tenets."7 One of the eight priority objectives listed for the recommended National Program is that a locus of federal responsibility be established which would be charged with implementing the National Program under the policy guidance of NCLIS. This agency should have authority to make grants and contracts and to promote standards, but must be supportive and coordinate rather than authoritarian and regulatory.8

One report notes that cause for alarm in the private sector is the dominance of the federal government as the largest single producer and disseminator of information in the U.S. Should the federal government or the private sector publish and distribute information produced with public funds? The commission has recommended developing policy guidelines.9 Other comments concerning government publications are scattered throughout NCLIS publications: Witnesses have asked for the expansion of present Library of Congress services, including wider acquisition and cataloging of government documents.10 The commission goals state that the Library of Congress should accept responsibility for the development of improved access to state and local government publications. Potentially useful information in state and local government publications is not widely accessible to users because it is not uniformly printed, collected, announced, organized, preserved, and publicized.11 Cooperation among federal libraries is also at an extremely low level. There is not government-wide policy concerning the process by which new federal libraries and information services are established. As a result duplicate collections can easily be built.12 Participants in the users conference certainly feel a lack of adequate access to government information: The agriculture report stresses the importance of disseminating current factual information on proposed legislative programs and government actions as well as the need to have access to local documents on land utilization.13 Business librarians complain that government bookstores are overly consumer oriented and stock publications that are of little use to the business community.14 Parker recommends that consideration be given to improving access of each citizen to public information about government services and government decision making at all levels.15 In the future, he predicts more pressure for information, especially government information, to be put in the public domain as the society moves toward more openness and greater freedom of access.16

What role will librarians play in the National Program? This definitely remains to be seen. In the glossary of the goals document the librarian is defined as "A specialist in the organization, management and utilization of recorded information." The information scientist is defined as "A specialist in systems analysis, computers, communications, micrographics and other technology based means for processing information."17 Media specialist is not defined. However, since the NCLIS definition of recorded information includes print and nonprint materials, presumably the media specialist is a librarian. One of the annual reports notes that "difficulties continue between librarians, media specialists and information scientists and now new problems are arising between technicians and librarians involved with automated systems especially where their tasks and responsibilities are not clearly outlined."18
Librarians, then, for the moment have been assigned the central role as the information facilitators. There are many warnings that this may not always be the case. Listed as two of the “barriers to cooperative action” are: the attitude of librarians toward the new technology and new conceptions of the role of the library in society is often negative; and the library work force needed to plan, develop, and operate cooperative networks is not yet well enough trained to deal with nonprint materials or with computer and communication technologies. Thus one of the recommended National Program objectives is to ensure basic and continuing education for personnel essential to implementation of the National Program.

Continuing education is seen as the one means by which library personnel can maintain competence, meet standards as they are developed in the profession, exercise leadership in effecting changes in library delivery services, and achieve career satisfaction. The report on continuing education for library and information science personnel identifies two basic missions: (1) to provide equal access to continuing-education opportunities to insure personnel the competency to deliver quality library service to all, and (2) to create an awareness and a sense of need for continuing education of library personnel on the part of employers and individuals as a means of responding to societal and technological change. The report outlines three basic elements which librarians must possess knowledge of: (1) the materials upon which they draw, (2) the techniques for retrieving and delivering information, and (3) above all, the people who will be on the receiving end. Librarians need to become more interdisciplinary and will have to integrate both applied and basic components of the behavioral and social sciences.

The networking versus local-access controversy has already been mentioned earlier in this column. An analogous situation may arise among the various advocates of continuing education: If funds are limited, which should receive priority—technical skills needed for processing information, or in-depth study of the needs of a special group of users? Also, what combination do various library personnel need to function most effectively? Relevant to the issue of priorities is Edwin Parker’s future “Communication Fantasy”: “When we wanted to learn something the cassette was better than a book or a correspondence course for explaining how things worked and showing how to do things. The children still have schools and teachers because there are many things the communication technology cannot do, especially in responding to emotional needs. But the teaching of subject matter competence in most areas and the retrieval of information is better done through this new technology” (in this instance the new technology is cable TV). In a few years will the only books in libraries be on the fiction and popular reading shelves? The continuing-education report lists the following continuing-education priorities for MLS librarians: (1) management, (2) updating; (3) automation, (4) nonprint media, and (5) human relations. Robert Taylor outlines five similar skills needed by the “professional manpower”: (1) organization of information, (2) information needs and information use, (3) information technologies, (4) research methods, and (5) management. Thus there is a desperate need for librarians who can deal effectively with the total information process. The commission also believes that the Library of Congress should accept the responsibility for providing training and information about Library of Congress techniques, with emphasis on automation. Individualized instruction would eventually be available and the communication would also be two-way: the Library of Congress would also seek information from other libraries as to their needs. The report on the resource and bibliographic nationwide support system also recognizes that resources sharing requires that library staffs be educated to new concepts in library services as well as trained to operate within new systems provided. Finally the commission reassures us that we really can do it: “We on the Commission believe that the profession is prepared and ready to advance traditional librarianship, to apply computer and communication technology and to work together in creating the
strongest possible information services for the country."

Contrasted with the largely technical skills which many of the above sources demand of librarians are the views of special groups of users. The conference on information needs of special groups in the United States has many papers which contain comments concerning either the deficiencies of existing librarians or the librarian needed but not yet available to the user. Typical are the following excerpts: "Services in rural areas will continue to be inadequate as long as schools of library science put their stress on mechanical processing of information rather than community needs, assessments and communications skills.\textsuperscript{31} "Library schools should be oriented to greater focus on community life information service.\textsuperscript{32} "Library schools must emphasize psychological and personal characteristics in the selection and training of library students.\textsuperscript{33}

Library schools must place more emphasis on knowledge of the subject.\textsuperscript{34} Librarians ought to be "well-versed in business and management information oriented rather than publication oriented,"\textsuperscript{35} have "sufficient preparation in special education, clinical psychology,"\textsuperscript{36} preservice training in early-childhood education and related subjects,\textsuperscript{37} etc.

Perhaps technology and user needs can be partially reconciled. The conference on user needs certainly indicates that the library ought to expand its traditional role. Continuing education ought to emphasize the following areas: gathering and selecting life information, organization of life information, active processing and dissemination, effective retrieval (the files would often be people rather than books).\textsuperscript{38}

When nationwide networking is developed, perhaps those who can afford it can pay and the users of the life information will be able to use the same networking to obtain essential information free or at very low cost. I suspect a considerable amount of life information would be unique to the local area. Thus strong local resources would be a necessity.

Another item of interest in the continuing-education report is the remark that consideration in the design of the National Program should be given to promoting the concept that the costs of continuing education should be borne by the employing organization not as a fringe benefit but rather as a condition of employment.\textsuperscript{39} Interesting suggested guidelines are that programs (1) should be relevant to the educational needs of the learner and relevant to the library and information needs of the consumer as identified systematically at local, state, and regional levels; (2) should provide for the active involvement of the participant in the learning process; and (3) should assist learners in assuming responsibility for growth and development in their careers, implementing change in their own performance and throughout the system.\textsuperscript{40}

Implementation of the National Program ought to create a dynamic situation with many creative and exciting challenges for librarians. Let us hope that the money can be found for the vision and that government bureaucracy will not overwhelm the greater visions of the National Program.

REFERENCES

3. Ibid., p.21.
5. Ibid., p.xi.
6. Ibid., p.71.
7. Ibid., p.48.
12. Ibid., p.35.
15. Parker, "Information and Society," p.49.
16. Ibid., p.42.
22. Ibid., chap. 5, p.35.
23. Ibid., chap. 2, p.25.
27. Robert S. Taylor, Manpower and Educational Programs for Management, Research and Professional Growth in Library and Information Services (Washington, D.C.: ERIC, 1974), p.11. This report is ED 100 392. NCLIS has published a number of very interesting papers related to the National Program in ERIC fiche. These are listed in appendix V of the latest annual report.
40. Ibid., chap. 3, p.36.