Against the Grain

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The Library Administrator: A Composite Portrait

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The Library Administrator: A Composite Portrait

by **Matthew J. Bruccoli** (President, Bruccoli Clark Layman; Phone: 803-771-4642; Fax: 803-799-6953)

*Column Editor's Note: I have contemplated no individual's portrait here. This character sketch is assembled from a representative sampling of the bad librarians I have fought against. There were good ones, too — **George Terry**, **John Cook Wyllie**, **Hyman Kritzer** — but they were outnumbered. Bad librarians drive out good ones.*

These animadversions are directed at the unqualified administrators. I have admiration for the troops in the trenches; but, as in war, the generals are butchers and bunglers. — MJB

He has been known to admit that "Books don't interest me." He resents and fears them because they remind him of his exclusion from the company of the educated. He chose his occupation — the word "profession" doesn't apply — in a flash of insight or self-recognition when he realized that he would be unable to earn a doctorate in a serious degree program and couldn't become a teacher or scholar because he had nothing to teach or research. Nonetheless, he liked being attached to a college or university library: not for the intellectual atmosphere, but because it provides a safe haven for academic also-rans. Nobody flunks out of library school. There is no shortage of library jobs. There is no publish-or-perish pressure. Indeed, there is no pressure at all. The requirements for success have nothing to do with education or even intelligence.

He entered Library School — er, School of Information Science — knowing nothing about books as books or their contents. He was not expected to learn anything about literature or history or any of the sciences. Nobody tried to teach him about bookmanship. His classmates who wanted to be music or art librarians already knew about these fields, having learned what they knew on their own. Yet despite his limitations, our boy was ambitious for high position. He wanted to be an administrator — which requires no knowledge. Accordingly, he secured his first library job, one that was removed from handling books — which frightened him because they represented potential exposure of his ignorance. When he was shown a **Faulkner** collection worth millions, all he could think to say was "Nice boxes." When he was told that this collection acquired by his predecessor was valuable and important, he proceeded to claim credit for it. When he was asked his opinion about acquiring an author collection, he played it safe by asking whether the author had received the **Nobel Prize**.

As he crawled up the organizational ladder he consistently opposed book expenditures, which pleased and impressed the President, the Provost, the Vice-Provosts, the Associate Provosts, and the Assistant Provosts — who regarded him as prudent and who shared his indifference towards books. All notable careers require luck — especially in the case of the unqualified. He makes the move from Acting Dean to Dean of Libraries when an alumnus shows up with a big check for a new library. Now Central Administration regards him as a successful fund-raiser. His record of stinginess combined with the accidental benefaction renders him trustworthy to the brass. He proceeds to build on his reputation as a fund-raiser by hiring a staff of fund-raisers who never raise the equivalent of their salaries. Nonetheless, he offends donors of collections with his unconcealable incomprehension of their generosity.

He builds a record of noteworthy achievements. He replaces the reference-book section with a coffee shop. He cancels subscriptions to scholarly journals. He places a moratorium on new subscriptions. He de-accessions newspapers. He boasts that he under-spends his book budget. But he has setbacks when he tries to charge students and faculty for Interlibrary Loan service and when he attempts to ban wheelchairs from the library because they damage the carpeting. He enforces his policy against acquiring collections from faculty members. He declines collections that would take up library space, but he yields stack space to non-library projects. He removes the doors from the toilet stalls. He lives with his fear of exposure, but he is safe: His masters do not know that he has diminished the university.

The best-qualified library directors are often good second-rate scholars. First-rate scholars don't want to abandon research. But the well-trained second-raters understand what research and scholarship require and try to serve these needs. "The third-raters hire fourth-raters."

A losing coach is fired; but a losing library administrator's job is safe. 🐢

Rumors

of $100,000 to enable the school to operate for three years and to make permanent its conditional accreditation from the **American Library Association**.

sils.unc.edu/news/releases/2007/02_grandfinale.htm

Talk about coincidences! I sent an email to **Ted Arnold <a**rnoldte@bellsouth.net> the other day. Remember **Ted**? He used to be a sales rep for **Blackwell Book Services**. Well, he is now retired and having fun as Chair of the county Democrats and starting a county Board of Elections and Registrations. He says he's ready to stop these responsibilities, though, and do more traveling. **Ted** says he was in Charleston the other day and he didn't stop by the library! Boo hiss!

Did you know that **Richard Cox** (**UNC-Greensboro**) got married last year in Charleston before the Conference? And he is coming back this year!

Thomson Scientific has recently released the results of a survey analyzing citation patterns in the field of geology. In the July/August issue of *Science Watch*, data from 224 journals and more than 150,000 papers published during the last decade were analyzed to rank institutions, authors and journals based on total citations. The **U.S. Geological Survey** garnered more than 23,000 citations over the past 10 years, while **NASA** amassed more than 20,000 citations, making them the first and second most-cited, respectively. The **University of Colorado** ranked third with more than 15,000 total citations. The **University of Washington** also makes a strong showing, ranking sixth. Check this out. Very interesting and informative.

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Lots of discussion about **Elsevier's** launch of **OncologySTAT**, a free portal for integrated professional cancer information and clinical resources. The site will provide clinicians with one-stop access to chemotherapy regimens, professional drug and interactions databases, and current articles from over 100 **Elsevier** cancer-related journals including *The Lancet Oncology*, *Lung Cancer*, *The Breast*, *Cancer Letters* and *Seminars in Radiation Oncology*, among others. The site is aimed at more than 1 million US oncologists, hematologists, oncology nurses, and all other healthcare professionals involved in the treatment, care, and diagnosis of patients with cancer. **OncologySTAT** is advertiser-supported and the first online community of its kind launched by a scholarly publisher. Oncology is the second largest and fastest growing therapy class in the world. Cancer professionals are challenged by the multitude of information sources available, and by the frequency in which new information is published. The site operates independently from any particular professional society or sponsor. However, the site offers multiple