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Access: The Key to Public Service

W. Bede Mitchell

SUMMARY. S.R. Ranganathan's five laws of library science are examined for the implications they hold for determining access services policies. A number of theoretical and practical problems are discussed in light of the insights gained from Ranganathan's laws.

INTRODUCTION

It seems appropriate to begin by defining the term "access" as it is used in the library context. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* says that access is having the opportunity or permission to enter, approach, speak with, or use. Thus "library access" could mean permission to use the collections and the opportunity to approach and speak with library staff in order to seek assistance. The opportunity to seek assistance is the aspect of access that leads me to regard it as the key to public service. Permission to use the collection may mean nothing more than opening the library. However, when a library is open but assistance is unavailable the public soon finds it has been granted limited access. Many library users need help to find what they need in the library, and they would not be well served by having access that is limited to “permission to use."

In order to seek a more complete view of what is meant by access, I turn to S. R. Ranganathan's 1931 set of five laws of library science(1). His laws remain one of the best guides to the role of librarianship, and they go a long way toward showing why access is the key to public service:

1 *Books Are For Use.* We should evaluate collections and services in terms of user needs. Preservation needs' are important but should not be considered primary. Objective and empirical investigation should replace subjective, impressionistic approaches. The purpose of all our policies and procedures should be to ensure that users' needs are satisfied.
2 *Every Reader His/Her Book.* We are obliged to help find the resources that meet a user's information need.
3 *Every Book Its Reader.* We should be concerned with exposure as well as accessibility. Library materials should find their potential users.
4 *Save* The *Time Of* The *Reader.* Information services must satisfy needs as efficiently as possible.
5 The *Library Is A Growing Organism.* The library must be willing to adapt to new social conditions, technological developments, needs of clientele, etc.

I think these laws constitute a sound philosophy of public service because they clearly and concisely emphasize that the primary role of librarians should be to assist users in accessing information. Maurice Line made the same point about the importance of maximizing access by identifying five laws which he claimed are more likely to be observed by academic libraries:

1 Books Are For Collecting.
2 Some Readers Their Books.
3 Some Books Their Readers.
4 Waste The Time Of The Reader.
5 The Library Is A Growing Mausoleum. (2)

Line may have been speaking with tongue slightly in cheek, but his laws complement Ranganathan's. These two sets of laws imply that the effectiveness of our public services should be measured by the extent to which library materials are accessible to the public. Because Raganathan's laws constitute a philosophy of public service defined in terms of access, I will examine each law in tum, in search of implications for access services.

BOOKS ARE FOR USE

As already noted, this law stresses that preservation should not take precedence over use. We must define our services in terms of user needs. It seems to follow that we should try to avoid creating access barriers that are intended to protect materials from the public. For example, placing certain sexually-oriented materials in closed stack collections appears to violate this law. Not allowing preservation to take precedence over use also has implications for collection development. Access services librarians should be well acquainted with the *80/20* rule of collection use, which was articulated and documented in the studies of Richard Trueswell and others (3). Without claiming that the figures would be the same in all libraries, Trueswell told us that if we studied the actual use of our collections we would find that something like 80% of all use would be of only about 20% of the total collection. Most of Trueswell's research focused on circulation data, but he also found that usage patterns of books and journals that are used in-house tend to conform to the *80/20* rule (4). Thus it may appear that in order for us to obey Ranganathan's first law we should eliminate all barriers that are intended to protect library materials and concentrate our collection development efforts on supporting the needs of our patrons that are expressed through use patterns.

However, I think this "strict constructionist" interpretation of the first law fails to take into account the way in which Ranganathan's fifth law must be applied to Ranganathan's other four laws. That is, our understanding of what these laws are intended to do must be predicated on our understanding of how changing conditions are affecting access.

When Ranganathan told us that preservation should not be given primacy over access and use, perhaps he had in mind access barriers like closed stack collections. Certainly such collections make it more difficult for patrons to gain access to the materials in question. However, after I had to reorder Annie Leibovitz's collection of *Rolling Stone* photos for the third time because of mutilation, it was clear that I could not conform to Ranganathan's first, second and fourth laws by simply reordering the same book over and over again. If I kept the Leibovitz book in the open stacks in the face of my previous experience with that title, how would I be' saving the time of the reader who finds the citation in the catalog, hunts the book down in the stacks, and finds it to be too mutilated to be of any value?

These failures to conform to Ranganathan's laws are the result of not interpreting his laws in light of current conditions. Similarly, perhaps when Ranganathan told us that preservation should not be given primacy over use he was criticizing the tendency of some libraries to collect arcane materials instead of purchasing more copies of high demand items. However, just as I objected to a slavish devotion to the belief that Ranganathan's laws forbid any kind of restricted access to certain materials, so do I reject the notion that Ranganathan wanted all libraries to collect only those titles that can expect frequent use. To adopt such a collection philosophy in these times would constitute a far greater violation of his laws. Specifically, in the words of Aim Okerson and Kendon Stubbs "the present system of scholarly publishing is in danger. Information overproduction, 'publish or perish' philosophy, the weakening U. S. dollar, skyrocketing prices and the increasing unaffordability, of published research findings . . . all lead the Association of Research Libraries to believe that cancellation projects must be a waystation to longer-range solutions" (5). The experience of the University of California at Berkeley illustrates the point: as Berkeley's subscriptions took an increasingly larger share of the materials budget, the number of monographs purchased went from 83,000 in 1981-82 to 42,000 in 1990-91 (6).

As these ominous trends continue, it has been suggested that future researchers will find yawning gaps in library resources when they attempt to study our era. We are buying fewer and fewer titles; books tend to go out of print relatively quickly due to changes in the inventory tax laws; and we are thus unable to retrospectively fill in collection gaps that are becoming larger every day. While Ranganathan said preservation should not be given primacy, surely that is not tantamount to ignoring completely our obligation to ensure access to information that is important but does not become part of the 20% that satisfies 80% of demand. Directors of ARL libraries, in attempting to find solutions to the crisis in scholarly publishing, are promoting

> a new paradigm for research libraries, with a shift from supply to access; sharing expensive international journals among several libraries statewide or in a multi-university region; exploring opportunities to facilitate transmission of information via developing networks and other technologies. (7)

Irene Hoadley and John Corbin struck a similar note in an article on library organizational structures. "Already libraries are experiencing a leveling off, if not a decrease, in the number of items added to the collection. At the same time there is an increasing number of access tools (such as CD-ROM databases) being added to libraries. There will probably never be as many dol1ars spent on access as are spent on acquisitions, but the prejudice in favor of acquisitions will disappear as the emphasis moves to fulfilling the needs of users rather than simply building larger collections." (8)

In a way, these quotes are basically restatements of Raganathan's laws, but they are based on a understanding of our present economic conditions and the current state of scholarly publishing. The question is how best to achieve the goal of meeting user needs in the face of our budgetary problems. The laws and issues relating to access must be understood in light of the kind of library under consideration. Any non-research library, whether it be a small public or college library, should interpret the “books are for use" law a bit differently than large research libraries. Even though no library can collect everything, major research libraries have an obligation to place greater emphasis on preservation than do other libraries. And this obligation is very much in keeping with Ranganathan's dictum that use be a higher priority than preservation, because one cannot use what is not available *anywhere,* and as all libraries try to cope with declining buying power we will all be more dependent on cooperative programs to ensure access for our users.

To summarize thus far, perhaps the most important lesson to be taken from the foregoing is that our users' needs must be the primary focus of our public services, but the way in which we go about meeting those needs will be affected by the kind of library we are administering, the resources that are available to us, the prevailing social and economic conditions, and user behaviors. Because Raganathan's first law stresses user needs over collection considerations. I will conclude this section with a comment about what constitutes a real need and why the concept of "real need" is important to access services librarians.

All of us have a real need for food because without food we would not survive. But if I say that I have a need for chocolate I am expressing a desire rather than a real need. To apply this distinction to access services, patrons try frequently to persuade librarians to change certain policies because those policies are interfering with patron needs. For example, some patrons may say the loan period should be lengthened because it is too short for them to use materials adequately. However, would changing the loan period really meet patrons' needs? Some studies, such as those by Buckland and Shaw, have concluded that the great majority of books loaned will be returned on, or very near, their due dates, and this pattern will remain even after the loan period is changed. (9) If this holds true, then lengthening the loan period would mean most loaned materials will stay out of the building for that much longer a period of time. The result would be a reduction in the overall level of book availability. i.e., a reduction in the level of patron access to the collection. I believe that access to the collection is the library equivalent of a true need, and in some cases lengthening the loan period can lead to the library's meeting that true need less effectively. By comparison, the convenience of the longer loan period for the patron is a desire, a desire that may lead to less library conformity to the rule that we should save the time of our patrons.

I am not claiming that there is no such thing as a loan period that is too short. My point is that we have an obligation to apply our professional expertise to solving library problems. We need to consider the possible negative effect of proposed policy changes on availability and then determine whether we can find better solutions. We are in a service *profession,* and we should exercise our professional expertise for the good of our users, even if in some cases the users do not recognize that our decisions are in their best interests.

Another way of making my point is to consider the difference between the attitude that says "the customer is always right," and the attitude of the professional, such as a physician, who attempts to influence the behavior of the patient by asserting greater medical expertise. An ethical physician should not prescribe an inappropriate treatment, even if the patient wants to take that treatment. Similarly, if a patron wants to use *Reader's Guide* because he or she is familiar with it but the librarian knows it is not the best source for the required information, the librarian has a professional obligation to explain to the patron why his or her particular need would be better filled by using, for example, *Psychological Abstracts.* Our access policies must be rooted in an understanding of our patrons' real library needs and the ways in which our policies, popular or not, will promote the satisfaction of those real needs.

Another reason why access services librarians must understand what constitutes a real need is that there is a tendency to equate use with need. More and more libraries are carrying out sophisticated use studies which indicate which subject areas and/or specific titles are most heavily used. I want to caution against the danger of assuming that use equals need. Suppose someone goes to the local library with a particular information need and, without consulting a librarian, . concludes that the library has very little of value about that subject. That patron will likely leave the library without using anything, and therefore there has been a unmet need that will not show up in any use study. It may even be argued that use studies may skew our understanding of patron needs because some people will use what we do have, even if it is not what they needed.

Further discussion of determining our patrons' real needs leads us to an examination of Ranganathan's second law.

I understand this to mean that the library must strive to help meet every patron's information need. Therefore we should ask ourselves, what percentage of the people who enter our library are able to access the information they need? We can try to measure the extent to which our materials are available or accessible, but as we have seen, we must also know what needs are not being met and are not being expressed to us. How do we go about 'gathering this information? '

Our professional literature contains many books and articles that offer methods for conducting availability and failure rate studies, and I do not think this is the place to repeat them.lo At this point I would like to discuss the problems inherent in trying to identify unmet and unspoken patron needs.

The first method of assessing patron needs involves the study of the subjects and formats of the materials we seek on behalf of our patrons' through our various resource sharing programs. For example, we can examine the subjects and formats of the materials which our patrons are ordering most frequently through interlibrary loan. Similarly, we can look for subject and format patterns in the referral letters we write to enable our patrons to arrow materials from other libraries, if we have such a service. The information about patron needs that can be gained through resource-sharing records is much too valuable to be discarded in the interest of reducing work.

The second method for determining our patrons' needs is designed to find out what unmet needs are not being communicated to us. This can be done by asking users to fill out a failure slip whenever they cannot find what they need. By indicating the nature of their failed search, patrons enable us to determine whether the patrons failed because:

1 our library does not own the items to satisfy the need,
2 the items were owned but not available, or
3 the items were available but the user searched unsuccessfully.

Carrying out such an analysis of user failure is very labor intensive, especially if it is done all the time. However, Nancy Van House and her co-authors describe in two different books how such studies can be done in public and academic libraries using sampling techniques.(11)

Such studies can yield valuable information. In one such study reported by Schofield, Cooper and Waters, it was found that of all patron search failures, 13.5% were because the titles were not owned, 32.4% were due to inadequate patron searching, and 54% were because the titles, though owned, were not available. (12) These results raise many questions. Just to pose a few of them: Why were over half of the failures due to material unavailability? How much of the unavailability was due to misshelving, or to previous borrowing? Are there policies and procedures that the library can modify in such a way that material unavailability can be reduced?

Certainly there are other useful, if less comprehensive and systematic ways of identifying unmet user needs. We can take advantage of informal contacts with patrons outside of the library. We can invite representatives of groups with unique needs, such as disabled or minority patrons, to meet with librarians and discuss their perspectives on library services. But whatever combination of methods we use, the need to determine user needs can legitimately be considered to be one of the most important parts of our access services enterprise. If we want to help every reader gain access to his/her book, we must take the initiative to find out what needs are unmet and unspoken.

EVERY BOOK ITS READER

This law means we should be concerned with exposure as well as accessibility. Therefore libraries should be judged in part on the basis of how well they inform people about materials of potential use to them. Ideally we would familiarize ourselves with the interests of all of our users so that we can let them know when we identify sources of potential use to them. However, this is clearly an impossible goal for all but a few librarians, such as corporate librarians who support the research of relatively few people. Aside from such exceptions, the lesson of this law for the rest of us is that we must advertise our library resources and services in order to promote their use.

While I believe the other laws carry greater implications for access services, I would nevertheless like to draw attention to the way in which this law relates to a point made by Richard Dougherty: "There is a striking contradiction between our professional imperative of providing free and easy access to information and the rising tide of information that is rapidly engulfing us . . . We need to face the reality that more and more people haven't the time, the expertise, or the psychological make-up to find the information that best serves their needs." (13) A similar point was made by James Rice, who wrote: "End users . . . have little knowledge of how to narrow the search into a manageable and high quality result. We are a profession filled with people who could be helping end users make better decisions in their consumption of informa tion. "(14)

In this context, "Every book its reader" seems to imply that librarians have a responsibility to evaluate materials and recommend those with the most potential use to a patron. But this element of evaluation and selection takes place more appropriately during the process of identifying sources of information, rather than during the process of accessing or delivering those sources. The identification of information sources seems to involve a kind of professional judgment which is not among the professional judgments typically made during the process of delivering information sources. This fundamental difference explains in part why reference is rarely a part of access services. Another reason for that involves the law that states we must save the time of the reader. We will see why this follows by turning to a examination of that law.

SAVE THE TIME OF THE READER

In order to satisfy user needs as efficiently as possible, we need to identify the barriers to access. If we understand the nature of the barriers to efficient access, we can then design services which will mitigate the effects of the barriers. Access services as an organizational model is the result of such a design.

In his book *Library Services in Theory and Context,* Michael Buckland identifies six barriers to access:

1 Identification-A suitable information source is needed.
2 Availability-The source must be physically available.
3 Price-The price of access, in terms of money, time, effort, and discomfort, must be acceptable to the inquirer.
4 Cost-The cost to the library of providing the access, in terms of effort, money, or inconvenience, must be acceptable to the library's view of its role, mission, and values.
5 Cognitive level-The source must not be too advanced or elementary for the inquirer.
6 Acceptability-The source may not be acceptable to the inquirer because the inquirer does not deem the source to be credible, or because the source gives the inquirer unwelcome information.(15)

Not all of these barriers are the responsibility of access services. As I have already said, the first barrier, "Identification," is *not* typically one of the access barriers with which access services is expected to deal. By virtue of their training, reference librarians continue to be responsible for helping patrons identify suitable sources of information. The justification for separating identification from the other aspects of access is articulated by Irene Hoadley and John Corbin. (l6) In proposing a new library organizational structure they distinguish between access services (such as circulation, document delivery, interlibrary lending, reserve, and stack maintenance), and those units such as reference and instructional services, which are concerned with interpretation of materials:

> This proposed structure . . . moves almost solely to a functional structure, which brings about more centralization of activities. For example, since the circulation of all materials is in one unit, it is more likely that there will be uniformity in circulation policies. Bringing together all interpretive or reference services in one location will benefit users by reducing the number of places they must go to find information, thereby decreasing the amount of time it takes. (17)

In short, the adoption of the access services model, with a separate interpretive services unit, is justified because this organization appears best suited to making patron access as efficient and effective as possible.

For reasons very similar to those just cited, I think it is clear why the fifth and sixth barriers to access-“Cognitive Level" and “Acceptability" -are also not normally the responsibility of access services. If an information source is unacceptable to a patron for whatever reason, then we must go back to the reference drawing board to identify a more suitable or acceptable source.

Within Buckland's paradigm, access services have come to concentrate on maximizing "Availability" and minimizing the "Price" of access to the user and the "Cost" of access to the library. We would approach the task of maximizing the availability of library materials most efficiently by diagnosing the extent to which we are failing to meet our patrons' needs for identified titles. Let us briefly consider how a properly designed and implemented user study can help us make such a diagnosis, and how we can respond to those results.

One of the most useful, detailed, and labor-intensive of the various availability studies is the one designed by Paul Kantor. (18) His study determines five separate sub-measures of availability. By analyzing user requests we discover the probability that the library has acquired a needed item, the probability that the user will locate the item in the catalog and get the correct call number, the probability that the needed item is not checked out, the probability that uncharged items are in their proper places on the shelves, and the probability that patrons will find items which are in their proper places. Although failures to find items due to any of these causes are undoubtedly access failures, only some can be directly affected by access services policies and procedures.

Access services librarians will be particularly interested in the probabilities of access failure due to items being checked out, uncharged items not being in their proper shelf locations, and patrons being unable to find materials that are in their proper locations. The latter problem is the simplest to address. The best methods for dealing with patron failure to find materials that are where they belong are to improve signage and other methods of leading the patrons to the location, and to work with bibliographic instruction staff members in order to educate users in understanding how call numbers work, how the range guides work, where are the library's more obscure locations, and so on. Unfortunately these steps will not solve the problem, but if carried out well they will reduce such patron errors dramatically.

The problem of uncharged items not being in their proper places on the shelves is due largely to stack maintenance failures. In my experience stack maintenance is the most important aspect of improving availability, not only because of the real improvements that superior stack maintenance brings but also because of the perceived improvements. By that I mean users know when books are not being regularly picked up off of tables, when sorting shelves remain full week after week, when sections of shelves remain in terrible disorder, and when their favorite areas have scores of books that are not in call number order. When users observe these conditions they not only infer correctly that their ability to find materials is being seriously hampered, but their overall confidence in the library's services is seriously undermined.

I urge access services managers to give greater attention to stack maintenance, even at the expense of public service desks if necessary. If the stacks are in terrible shape but we are truly so strapped what cannot add more staff to the shelving crew, then we should close some of the public service desks a few hours before the building closes (or not staff them until an hour or more after morning opening) and reassign the support staff to shelving during those periods. Remember that stacks which are in poor shape will harm considerably the morale of patrons, shelvers, and desk staff.

The probability that needed items are already checked out, what is sometimes called "circulation interference," can be addressed in a number of ways. In his book entitled *Book Availability and the Library User,* required reading for any access services librarian, Michael Buckland analyzes a wealth of data which lead him to conclude that the two most powerful tools for combating circulation interference are the loan period and duplication of high demand titles. (19) Buckland regards the loan period as the more effective and precise method for increasing availability, with duplication serving as an important alternative method. The danger inherent in relying heavily on duplication is that it can quickly use up our materials budget, but for those public and academic libraries who do not serve as 'research libraries, duplication is an obvious and undeniably effective way to increase availability.

The importance that Buckland attaches to loan period is based upon his drawing a number of conclusions from this data, the most relevant being the following:

1 The longer the loan period, the lower the immediate availability. The shorter the loan period, the higher the immediate availability.
2 There is a marked tendency for materials to be returned or renewed when they are due back, and this holds true regardless of the length of the official loan period, the status of the borrower, or the subject matter of the books.

In other words, we can adjust our loan periods to maximize availability. However, if we adopt this approach we must do so with care. If we reduce loan periods too much we might find users responding with behavior changes that counteract the intended result of this policy. We must judiciously weigh the advantages and disadvantages of adjusting loan periods. If we choose to adjust the loan period for each title based upon the level of demand on the title, we must craft such a policy with special care or it will be unworkable because of the detail involved in managing it. Imagine the patron confusion that would result if every title in the library had a loan period that was periodically adjusted in light of current demand. It would seem wiser to use only two or three loan periods to accommodate demand, for even then there is a danger that adjustab1e loan periods will confuse and frustrate patrons to a degree not justified by the benefits. Nevertheless, in spite of findings such as Reginald Coady's, whose research indicated that due dates may be less likely to be observed in the cases of certain kinds of patrons and certain subjects of books, (20) Buckland has demonstrated that we have the potential to abide more closely to Ranganathan's fourth law by influencing materials availability through circulation policies.

There are many kinds of sanctions that libraries might use to improve availability rates. Take for example the patrons who fail to return books even though they have been told that other patrons have requested those books. I strongly endorse policies which revoke the borrowing privileges of such patrons. I also suggest that academic librarians look into the possibility of including a statement in the university's honor code, if there is one, that such behavior constitutes a violation of the honor code and is punishable by one or more of the honor code's typical sanctions. Certainly the most common sanction in use is the overdue fine. Even so, nobody really knows much about the effects of fines and we will probably never know much about their effects. Part of the problem is that it is very difficult to control all the variables that need to be controlled before it can be confidently concluded that changes in overdue rates were caused by the changes made in the fines policies. An exhaustive review of the literature yields a few articles which conclude that if you adopt a no-fines policy, one where the most serious sanction may be a processing fee for very long overdue books, you may have a higher probability of eventually getting your books back, but if you charge fines for each day or week that a book is overdue you may have a greater percentage of books returned on or near the due date. (21) There are no good rules of thumb for determining how big a fine is too big; the access services librarian must consider the profile of the library's patrons and make an informed judgment about what will be an effective deterrent without being cruel and unusual punishment.

I will conclude this discussion of sanctions by calling to your attention a system I devised that is predicated on the use of positive reinforcement to minimize overdues.(22) The system is as yet untried and therefore unproven, but I recommend it to any of you who are concerned with the problem of overdues if for no other reason than it may stimulate you to some creative thinking of your own.

Another barrier is the "Price" of access. Buckland tells us that price refers to the amount of time, effort, discomfort, and money that the patron must expend in accessing materials. For the purpos~ es .of our discussion I think we can treat time, effort, and discomfort together, although it is evident there are important distinctions between those factors.

Saving the time, effort, and discomfort of the user can be ac-. complished in so many ways that a entire book could (and should) be dedicated to the possible methods. However, there is one thing we can do to reduce the user's price of access that I think is far more important than any other method. I refer to ensuring that our public service desks are staffed by well trained, user-oriented personnel. It is amazing how much patrons will forgive if they know they can get help from friendly and capable staff who are motivated to satisfy the patron.

With this in mind it is important to note that the typical access services unit is made up predominantly of classified staff and student assistants, with an access services librarian and perhaps an assistant access services librarian running the show. Most of the real direct contact with· the public is done by the non-librarians. This is why I think the training of these staff members is the most important means of controlling the price of access. Patrons are heavily dependent on these staff members for efficient and effective access, that key to public service, and yet these staff members are not librarians. These people usually do not come to their first day of work with a thorough understanding of the library principles, service philosophy, and overarching mission of libraries that we librarians are supposed to gain from our library school educations. Staff need to understand what are their library's stated mission and service goals, and they need to understand how their jobs relate to the accomplishment of those goals. They need to understand the fundamental concept of access and how the library's policies and procedures are intended to facilitate access.

Staff who lack this kind of background will be far less likely to realize that in some cases a rigid application of a certain library policy will actually run counter to the library's efforts to facilitate access. Sometimes it is appropriate to waive an overdue fine if there seem to have been certain extenuating circumstances beyond the patron’s control. It may be that this patron will be more likely to comply with circulation policies in the future if we are willing to cut some slack in this particular case. In any event, I advocate designing staff training programs with more in mind than a concern that we cover all the how-tos and don't-do's. A library staff that understands the whys and wherefores is our single greatest weapon in cutting the price of access.

There is also the access issue of price to the user, which includes the debate over when user fees should be charged and when they should not. At the risk of oversimplification, I think the most compelling justifications for charging user fees for certain services have been the perceived need to control the level of use of a costly service, and the need to generate revenue to pay for the service when we lack any other means to pay for it. But in too many situations I fear that fees add to the split between the access-rich patrons and access-poor patrons and so are not justified by the alleged benefits. This reservation should receive greater weight in the future if we do in fact stress greater access at the expense of building collections. The greater emphasis on access implies that more than ever there should be a presumption against assessing user fees. The burden of proof should lie on the side of the debate that supports a proposed user fee.

To conclude this discussion of Buckland's barriers to access, let us consider "Cost." As I said previously, librarianship should have a professional service philosophy as opposed to a business, or "customer is always right" philosophy. If we determine that the resources necessary to offer service X are so great that we would be incapable of maintaining another service that is more in keeping with the library's mission and values, then we should not offer service X. Here I am using the term "service" to stand for any number of possible responses to user demands. A good example of what I mean might be a request that several expensive, highly technical journals be added to the library at which I work, the Belk Library at Appalachia State University. Our institution offers many masters programs and will soon have its first doctoral program, so we are what the Carnegie Foundation calls a comprehensive university-we are not a research university. This role is supposed to be reflected in the performance expectations of our faculty. Teaching is supposedly more important than research. If that is truly the case, then we in the library need to carefully consider the possibility that adding those expensive and obscure journals is not compatible with the mission of our university and our library. In this case, the cost of access to the institution may be too high for us to respond favorably to the request.

THE LIBRARY IS A GROWING ORGANISM

The library does not exist in a vacuum and must be ready to adapt to future needs, technologies, and political and economic realities. I am no futurist, but I will take a few moments to paint with a rather broad brush a picture of what I think will be the greatest future concerns to access services. As we have already seen, many librarians expect that providing means of access will become more important as our ability to build· comprehensive collections continues to decline. Therefore access services departments will be under increasing pressure to use various technologies, cooperative resource sharing programs, and document delivery services to reduce the delays that are inevitable when a needed resource is not immediately available within the library. The growing dependence of libraries on vehicles of access will require that more budgetary and human resources will need to be allocated to access services. As access services personnel attempt to apply technology to meet the access challenges of the future, they wilt need to remain flexible and adaptable because technological changes can be as rapid as they are unexpected.

Changing technology will not only affect the way access services personnel do their jobs, but as Susan Martin pointed out, technology will continue to lead to new products, services, and methods of accessing information that bypass the library, enabling people to find information on their own, without ever coming to a library. (23) But these access opportunities will come at a cost that only some people, and perhaps only some libraries, will be able to afford. The gulf between the haves and have-nots, the access-rich and the access-poor, will widen. Libraries will find it even more difficult to provide their users with levels of access that are commensurate with the levels enjoyed by the access-rich.

We can further expect that technology will continue to make our retrieval tools more powerful and easier to use. Access services personnel will find that this leads to increasing demand and use in general, but in addition we may find that use increases as much in "depth" as it does in "width." Patrons will find more frequently information sources that are now difficult to retrieve due to limitations in printed indexes, card catalogs, and first generation electronic databases. The result could be *wider,* more dispersed collection use, perhaps making the *80/20* law of collection use obsolete. Still, I think access services personnel will continue to struggle with maximizing access to high demand materials because the more powerful retrieval systems are just as likely to lead to increased demand for the materials already in high demand. This is what I am calling *deeper* demand and use. After all, high demand materials are in high demand because they are, to use Buckland's terms, cognitively accessible and credible to a large portion of our users.

On the other hand, we might look much further down the road and find that as more information becomes available in full text electronic databases, there will probably be a decline in demand for hard copy items. Patrons will come to expect the capability of downloading electronic text to their own disks, or the option of offprinting the text. Copyright considerations will eventually be worked out so that we will be able to offer these capabilities. As a result, access services personnel will gradually concentrate less on managing vehicles for making hard copy available, and will concentrate more on managing the means for patrons to access electronic text.

The shift from warehousing to access will cause more libraries to adopt the access services organizational structure, and it will create greater pressure on access services personnel when dealing with the public. Let me address this latter point first. In spite of our best efforts to keep our public informed about our budgetary problems, not all of our users are going to understand, or even be aware of, the sufficient reasons that libraries have for shifting to an access mode from a collection mode. And this shift will lead to some misunderstandings and frustrations, no matter how effective our access services. One example of this is described by Hoadley and Corbin: "At present, when a serial title is acquired it is considered a permanent, continuing commitment. Because of constant price increases and the proliferation of journal titles, libraries will be forced to change their attitude of permanency toward serials: Serials will be acquired as they are needed, not because they were needed at some point in the past. Selection of serial titles will be ongoing, not one-time decisions. This change in attitude will serve the users of the libraries better because there will be more flexibility in responding to current needs; it may even make the publishing world more responsive!" (24)

What Hoadley and Corbin are advocating will lead to many incomplete serial runs, a situation that is difficult to explain to a patron who needs a journal issue that we lack because of when we started or stopped our subscription. In the future, if we do shift paradigms, access services personnel are going to find that they spend a lot more time explaining why we must go elsewhere to obtain an information source. This will be a particular problem at larger libraries where regular users are accustomed to the libraries owning what the users need.

Finally, a word about my expectation that more libraries will adopt the access services organizational model. For the reasons given by Hoadley and Corbin, I think the access services model is logical and leads to better public service. For Hoadley and Corbin, the ideal access services model brings together circulation, document delivery, interlibrary lending, reserve, shelving, and stack maintenance, while at the same time bringing together in a separate but related unit all special formats, such as microforms, audiovisuals, software, maps, current journals, and documents. By centralizing responsibility for, and when possible the physical location of, our lending activities and special formats, we can free reference librarians to concentrate on their identification and interpretation functions. Further, we can realize the staffing advantages of cross-training personnel between access service units, we can increase understanding and communication between access service units, and we can benefit from the uniformity of policies and procedures that the access services librarian can impose on the different access units.

CONCLUSION

There are many other aspects of maximizing patron access to information beyond those that I have discussed in the foregoing pages. Some were not addressed due to space limitations, but others were neglected because they are not usually the responsibility of access services units, or indeed of other public service departments. As an example I refer again to the availability study designed by Kantor. We saw that by analyzing user requests we can gain a greater understanding of the reasons why patrons are often failing to find what they need. Many of those failures to access information are most likely to be overcome by the actions and decisions of librarians who do not work in the traditional public service areas. Therefore, if the name of the game is satisfying information needs quickly and efficiently, then I agree with Michael Buckland that the notion of access can provide a unifying concept for our whole field of librarianship.(25)

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