

Preface

It is with great pleasure that we offer this Festschrift to Wilf Lancaster—renowned teacher, researcher, writer, and editor—on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday. With a varied background of experience in industry, libraries, and research and development companies in the United Kingdom and the United States in what was then the emerging field of computer-based information retrieval, Wilf joined the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science as an associate professor in 1970. Among his early responsibilities was managing a new biomedical librarianship program at the school to which he brought the experience of his several years as an information systems specialist at the National Library of Medicine. At the NLM, in the mid-1960s he had conducted pioneering work on evaluating the recently introduced medical information retrieval system, MEDLARS (Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System), which was one of the first great national (later worldwide) information retrieval systems. The rigor of his research design for this project and the insightfulness of his analyses of the data that were produced represent an approach to information systems research that won enormous admiration at the time and has rarely been equaled since.

At the University of Illinois he was rapidly promoted to full professor and served on the faculty until his retirement in 1992. During these years he displayed a prodigious intellectual energy. Books, articles, reviews, and reports simply poured from his pen (or cascaded from his keyboard). At the University of Illinois he introduced new approaches to education for information science expressed in a range of courses that were designed to prepare his students for a new kind of professional world that was in the making and to developments in which he was especially attuned. Here too he supervised a great many doctoral students, among them always a

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number from other countries, who over the years grew into a formidable Lancaster cohort. He regularly organized and edited the proceedings of a number of the school's Clinics on Library Applications of Data Processing, a series of extremely influential and usually annual meetings on a range of specialist subjects for which the school was responsible.

Beyond school walls, he was the featured speaker at numerous conferences, professional meetings, and schools of library and information science throughout the United States and overseas. Indeed, it was as though no important meeting here or abroad was complete without his presence. International agencies invited him to evaluate their information retrieval systems. He was asked to consult on the development or revision of library and information science curricula and educational programs nationally and internationally. His many books on information systems evaluation, indexing and abstracting, vocabulary control and information retrieval systems, several now in updated editions in which he has involved a number of his doctoral students, have been translated into an extraordinary range of languages. They have influenced and will continue to influence generations of students, library managers, systems developers and information science researchers. Wilf's prominence is probably unique in the field of library and information science, and over the years it has helped to build the reputations of the enterprises with which he is identified, not least that of *Library Trends* itself, and that of the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science, which has been counted among the best programs in the country for many years.

In 1986 Wilf undertook the editorship of *Library Trends* and served in that position for twenty years until his retirement from it in 2006. These years of editing *Library Trends* constitute a major component of both Wilf's contribution to the developing field of Library and Information Science and of his legacy. From the topics addressed in the journal during his editorship, one can construct a time line of major developments in all aspects of the field. Each issue, edited by its own expert, is directed at special sub-communities of practice within the broader field. But what are the areas that warrant the kind of scrutiny an issue of *Library Trends* reflects? Who might best find contributors and assemble their articles into a coherent treatment about these areas? What are the important emerging trends of development that could be given prominence by means of a *Trends* issue? These are the questions with which the general editor of *Library Trends* has continually to grapple. To them, Wilf brought his enormous fund of knowledge of developments in the field, his acumen in assessing what is happening or about to happen, and a comprehensive worldwide network of contacts across the entire field. What he has achieved in his years as editor offers a formidable challenge—but also a touchstone of excellence—for the new editors who have taken over where he has left off.

We express our sincere thanks to Keith Russell and Lorraine Haricombe, former students of Wilf's, for their enthusiasm for this project and for undertaking the work associated with it, and above all in these pages we salute Wilf: *primus inter pares!*

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