

TECHNOLOGY AND THE RURAL LIBRARY

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It is quite likely that for someone working in a rural or small library, reading the current library literature could be a rather depressing activity. Someone reading the current literature would be left with the impression that every library in the country is filled with CD-ROMs, online databases, and the problems of an online catalog. A survey recently completed with the Center for the Study of Rural librarianship, Clarion University of Pennsylvania, showed that this is not necessarily the case in America's rural libraries.

For purposes of research, rural libraries were defined as public libraries with population service areas of under 25,000 as published in the 1989 American Library Directory. The survey sample was selected by using the first public library to meet the definition on every tenth page. When a page did not have a library within the definitional limits, the page was not used, and I progressed on to the next ten pages and proceeded from there. This yielded a sample size of 168 libraries.

The survey was developed and pre-tested among other studies in the College of Library Science. Once it was finalized, the survey was printed and prepared for mailing. These were mailed on Wednesday, March 7, 1990. It was asked that responses be returned by March 31, 1990, but late responses were accepted. All responses received by April 23, 1990 were included in the survey results.

All total, 101 of the initial 168 surveys were returned. Of these, four libraries indicated they were not rural in nature, and their responses were greatly appreciated, but not included in the analysis of survey results. This left 97 surveys that were included in the survey analysis.

An effort was made to include all geographic regions of the country. All states, except Hawaii, were included in the survey sample. Unfortunately, not all states had

respondents. However, those responses that were received did tend to reflect general geographic regions of the nation.

It should also be noted that not all the numbers throughout the survey add up to the 97 usable responses, or even to 100%. This is because not all questions were answered on all the responses, and some respondents provided more than one answer for some questions. All respondents were guaranteed anonymity for their answers. Therefore, survey results are reported only in numerical terms with no effort to identify names or geographic locations.

Finally, a search of the literature yielded no previous studies to either support or refute the findings of this survey. In fact, there seemed to be very little at all on what technology is available and in use in America's rural libraries today.

Perhaps the most surprising thing that showed up in the survey was the response to questions 21 and 25. Both of these questions dealt the M.L.S. degree. Question 21 asked if the respondent held an M.L.S., and of the 94 people answering this question, 36 or 28% responded yes. Another 3, or 3%, responded that they hold Bachelor's degrees in Library Science. These two figures combined, would indicate that nearly half of the people in positions of authority in rural libraries have received some type of formal training in library science.

Further, many of the libraries reported that they employed more than one "professional" librarian. Of the 36 libraries employing Masters librarians, 10 employ more than one. In fact, two of the libraries reported that they employ four librarians with their Masters degree.

One wonders then, if this is somehow related to the fact that 69 respondents indicated that they do at least some of their own original cataloging. Only 34 respondents said they subscribe to any type of cataloging service. Many of these said this is done for them by their regional library system.

Also, it is encouraging to note that 33 people indicated that they use some type of computer program to assist in their cataloging. The software ran the gamut of possibilities. Although the most popular program was Bibliofile, a large number of libraries use of computer capabilities of their regional systems to do their cataloging. It is interesting to point out that two libraries indicated that they have access to OCLC for

cataloging purposes. Fifty-four libraries responding to this question said they do not use any type of automation for their cataloging needs.

Eleven of the libraries answering the survey indicated that they do belong to a cataloging system. Of these four said they belong to OCLC; four belong to a regional cataloging system; and one library said they use OCLC for interlibrary loan purposes. The other 73 libraries answering this question said that they do not have access to any system of this type.

In other areas of technical services, nine libraries said they automated systems for acquisitions, and eight libraries have automated inventory control systems. A few libraries have automated their bookkeeping and interlibrary loans. However twenty libraries report that their circulation systems are currently automated.

This last figure is particularly amazing when the data from question two, who shows that only ten of the responding libraries have automated their catalogs. Of these, six continue to maintain their card catalog. The others have either eliminated, or are eliminating this traditional mainstay of the library. An online, interactive catalog is the popular choice, with CD-ROM the second choice.

Of these ten, two do not have public access to the catalog terminals. In these libraries, library staff will perform catalog searches for the patrons. Five libraries provide patrons informal instruction in the use of the online catalog. Five libraries said their systems are self-explanatory in nature, and therefore patrons are left to instruct themselves in the use of the catalog. Two libraries provide the patron with printed instructions, and one library offers all of the above as well as formal instruction.

The earliest that any of these catalogs described above was automated in 1984. Many of the libraries that are not currently automated do plan to do so within the next several years. Seven plan to complete their automation this year (1990), with another seven planning completion in 1991. The farthest into the future that any libraries projected the possibility of gaining an automated catalog was 1999. Two libraries are aiming for this somewhat distant date. Six libraries plan to automate their catalogs, but were unable to provide any type of time frame for the completion of the project.

Of those libraries that have automated, five of them paid for it through local funds; three used federal funds to finance the automation; one used money received from

their regional consortium; and the final library used state funds. It may be interesting to note that none of the libraries used money received through donations, and none of those planning to automate in the near future indicated that this would be done with donated money.

In the area of reference and providing patrons with access to various database services, 79 libraries responded. Ten libraries said that they provided access to a database within their own library. Additionally, twenty-five other libraries said that they offer access to a database service through another library or library system. This means that 48% of the libraries participating in the survey, have some type of arrangement to provide patrons this increasingly important service. Twenty-one libraries offer online database searches, whether within the library or from somewhere else. Eight libraries offer CD-ROM searches. These are all done with the library. Some libraries offer both online and CD-ROM searches.

Although these are extremely expensive services for small and rural libraries to offer, most do not have any type of user fee in return for the search. A few libraries charge a portion of the cost, and an even smaller number charge the user the full cost of performing the search.

The money to finance the maintenance and operation of the database services is almost evenly split between state and local funds. User fees and money provided by the federal government pick up the remaining slack.

DIALOG is easily the most used of the databases offered in these libraries. Although other choices include BRS, OCLC and Wilsonline, they are not nearly as popular as DIALOG. Most searches are performed by professional staff, whether within the library itself, or at a different library. Very few libraries allow end user searching. However, one library did report that they have a very few patrons who are skilled searchers in their own right. These patrons are allowed to search on their own.

Question 15, which asked the number of searches performed in a week, leaves the nagging question about how necessary it may be for a small or rural library to provide this service themselves. Sixteen of the twenty-three responses to this question report that five or fewer searches are performed in a given week. One library even reported that they perform less than one search a year. Although three libraries reported

performing over 20 searches in a week, it might be less expensive for those libraries performing fewer than ten searches a week, to continue (or begin) to receive these services from a larger, cooperative library, preferably within their regional system.

There does not seem to be a correlation to the main emphasis of library services and the amount or type of technology available or in use in the libraries. Although many libraries marked more than one response, 18% of the responses indicated an emphasis in providing informational services. On the other hand, 53% of the responses indicated an emphasis on providing materials for adult recreation and hobbies, in particular adult fiction. Surprisingly, only 39% of the responses listed children's services and programs among their main emphases. A few libraries indicated that they attempt to serve all areas of interest equally. Four percent listed other areas as the main recipient of services.

From studying the data provided by this survey, it seems as though rural libraries are trying to provide their patrons with many of the same services and advancements that their urban counterparts take almost for granted. Comments written onto the survey form indicated that most of these libraries would like to offer more in the way of technology, especially in the form of an automated catalog. However, funding was the number one problem these libraries face. Yet, the very nature of ruralness guarantees that these libraries will always have smaller budgets to use in providing nearly equal services as urban libraries.

This is exacerbated as we begin to see urban dwellers begin to move back to the small towns and rural communities. These people often arrive expecting to receive the same services and benefits as they did in their more urban settings. This tends to push the local library into providing many of the services and technologies.

The smaller population base means that there will be fewer individuals available from whom taxes can be collected. This, in turn, means that there will be fewer dollars available for the library to use.

Although it would be helpful if generalizations could be made from the data collected in this survey, there were no connections strong enough between any of the questions that any such assumptions could safely be made.

It would be profitable if further study could be done to look for a connection

between membership in a regional library system and the amount of current technology available in libraries. This seemed to be the strongest connection that appeared throughout the survey. There was no inquiry into system membership, but many of those libraries which indicated they either had an automated catalog or did online cataloging also indicated membership in such a system. However, without specifically asking this question, it would be unfair to the other respondents to make such a generalization. It is quite possible that other libraries, which do not have access to these services, may also belong to some type of regional system.

Another, larger, more comprehensive survey may also yield insight into a connection between a staff member with an M.L.S. and either the presence of current technology. There was no such correlation present in this study--four out of the ten libraries with an automated catalog had a degreed staff member. A larger group would be needed before such a generalization could be made. Four out of ten is not a large enough group that this could be assumed to be true throughout the country.

A larger survey might also provide insight into any possible correlations that would be related to geographic location. Although all states, except Hawaii represented in the sending of surveys, no responses were received from Alabama, Louisiana, or Maine, and the response from Nevada arrived too late to be included in the survey results. Another difficulty that would need to be overcome in a follow-up survey of this type, is that the method of drawing the sample meant that those states with a large number of libraries received more surveys than states with a smaller number of libraries. Many states received only one survey. A follow-up study that was looking for a geographic connection would need to take this into account and ensure that all states and areas received equal representation.

This exploratory survey provided a great deal of information itself. It proves that most rural libraries do not generally have the same technological advances at their disposal as their urban counterparts. It also shows that a surprisingly large number of librarians in these rural libraries have their professional degrees. Finally, most importantly, it generally shows that these librarians would like to offer these services to their patrons but lack the funding and resources to their patrons. The fact that their patrons are taking advantage of these services when offered also shows that a need does

exist in this area. The next step is to determine how these deficiencies can be eliminated, and the rural library made equal to the urban library in the quality and types of services offered.

APPENDIX A
SURVEY

Please mark the most appropriate answer.

1. What is the main emphasis of your library's services?

51 Recreational/Hobbies (Adult)

38 Children's Services/Programs

17 Informational Services

4 Other. Please specify.

16 All.

The next questions deal with your library's catalog. Please mark the most appropriate answer.

2. Do you have an automated catalog?

10 Yes (please skip to #4.)

87 No

3. Do you plan to automate your catalog in the foreseeable future? Please indicate year, and continue with the next section on databases.

We plan to automate our catalog in 199__.

53 Plan not to automate. 3 1995

7 1990 1996

7 1991 1997

4 1992 1998

2 1993 1999

3 1994 6 Unknown

4. If you have automated your catalog, do you continue to maintain your card catalog?

6 Yes

2 No

5. Is your catalog on:

2 CD-ROM

5 Online

1 Stand alone (PAC)

1 Consortium

6. How did your patrons learn to use the automated catalog? Please check all that apply.

 Formal classes conducted by you or your staff

4 Informal one-on-one training with staff members

2 Printed instructions

5 On their own, the system is self-explanatory

2 Other. Please specify. Not used by the public

1 All.

7. Please indicate the year you automated your catalog.

We automated our catalog in 198 .

1 1984

2 1988

1 1985

3 1989

 1986

1 1990

1 1987

8. Was the automation paid for primarily through:

16

 3 Federal funds

 1 State funds

 5 Local funds

 Local donations

 1 Consortium

The next questions are about databases. Please mark the most appropriate answer.

9. Do you provide your patrons with databases?

 10 Yes

 66 No

10. If not, do you have an agreement with another library to meet these needs?

 25 Yes

 41 No (Please skip to #17.)

11. What type of databases do you provide?

 21 Online

 8 CD-ROM

12. Which service(s) do you use? Please check all that apply.

 10 DIALOG

 ORBIT

 1 BRS

 2 H. W. Wilson

 4 PAC

 2 Other. Please specify. Regional Library System

 1 OCLC

 1 GEAC

- 2 InfoTrac
13. Do you charge the user:
- 4 The full cost of the search
- 7 A partial cost of the search
- 16 Nothing
14. Are these services primarily paid for through:
- 4 Federal funds
- 11 State funds
- 9 Local funds
- 5 User fees
15. About how many searches do you do a week?
- 16 0 - 5
- 3 6 - 10
- 1 11 - 15
- 16 - 20
- 1 21 - 25
- 2 More than 25
16. Who conducts the searches?
- 12 Staff members with an M.L.S.
- 7 Other full-time staff
- 2 Part-time staff
- Volunteer staff
- 1 User
- 2 All except volunteer

The next questions are about technical services. Please mark the most appropriate answer.

17. Do you use any type of automation in your cataloging activities?

33 Yes. Please specify.

- (5) Regional Library System
- (6) Bibliofile
- (4) Unspecified
- (1) BIP Plus
- (3) MARC IV
- (4) Quick Card
- (2) Librarian's Helper
- (1) CLSI
- (2) Dynix
- (1) Ultra Card MARC
- (1) Avant
- (2) OCLC
- (1) MicroMARC

54 No

18. Do you do your own original cataloging, or do you subscribe to a cataloging service?

69 Original cataloging

34 Subscribe to a service

19. Do you belong to an online cataloging system, like OCLC?

11 Yes. Please specify system.

- (4) Regional Library System
- (4) OCLC
- (1) Marcive
- (1) Maryland Milnet

73 No

20. Do you use an automated system for any of the following? Please check all that apply.

9 Acquisitions

7 Inventory Control

20 Circulation

2 Other. Please specify. ILL

3 Bookkeeping

1 Word Processing

1 Serials

Miscellaneous questions. Please mark the most appropriate answer.

21. Do you have an M.L.S.?

36 Yes

55 No

3 B.S. in Library Science

22. How many full-time staff members do you have? _____

(30) 1 (3) 6

(16) 2 (0) 7

(9) 3 (1) 8

(6) 4 (0) 9

(8) 5 (1) 10

23. How many part-time staff members do you have? _____

(22) 1 (2) 7

(23) 2 (1) 8

(13) 3 (1) 9

(6) 4 (3) 10

(8) 5 (1) 18

(6) 6

24. How many volunteers do you use? _____

(13) 1 (3) 6 (1) 11 (5) More than 15

(9) 2 (1) 7 (2) 12

(8) 3 (4) 8 (0) 13

(6) 4 (0) 9 (1) 14

(5) 5 (3) 10 (2) 15

25. How many of your staff members have an M.L.S.?

(26) 1

(6) 2

(2) 3

(2) 4

20

Name _____ Position _____

Library _____ Address _____

Town _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____