November 2013

Books Are Us

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**Recommended Citation**  
DOI: [https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5428](https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5428)

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who manages and oversees the operation of the department. Three library assistants responsible for serials/periodicals report directly to the Electronic Serials Librarian who manages the process to acquire, renew, and cancel serials in all formats.

Refinements in the department structure, integration of similar activities, reassignment of responsibilities, training of staff, and successful hiring of new staff have helped expedite the transition to a predominately electronic environment. With a librarian and two library assistants whose priorities are management of electronic resources, the department can now pay more attention to maintaining information related to electronic resources, tracking changes in content, and updating URLs. In addition, the staff is responsible for the Serials Solutions A to Z title list and will be maintaining a link resolver.

The consolidation of units and the merger of similar activities resulted in the following benefits:

- Improved efficiency in the materials ordering and receiving process: By combining functions, streamlining workflow, eliminating duplicate efforts, and reducing print processing, MOR staff is able to handle the workflow despite the loss of two library assistants.
- Increased staff productivity in some areas: Training and cross-training developed expanded expertise within the staff who can now fill in for each other and keep backlogs from forming.

- Allowed greater focus on the management of electronic resources: With more staff and professional support available, planning is possible. Management of electronic resources changed from being reactive to proactive.
- Maximized staffing resources overall: The redefinition of positions and reassignment of responsibilities made the best use of human resources.
- Reduced volume of work in print materials processing: The conversion to electronic subscriptions, implementation of shelf-ready books, cancellation of print subscriptions, transfer of bindery activities, and revision of the claiming policy all contributed to changing the workflow to accommodate the expansion of electronic resources.
- Enhanced communications with vendors and among library staff at all levels: One point of contact for vendors was established by creating a departmental e-mail account and designating one phone for electronic resource matters. MOR staff participate in meetings of other library departments and work with other departments to establish policies related to using electronic resources.

Consolidation of the department has provided several advantages, and what we have learned will serve us well as change continues. The following briefly describes some of those lessons:

- Preparing/Planning are very important, especially when many changes of personnel and workflow take place in a relatively short period of time. Trying to anticipate problems and prepare for them gives staff a better idea of what to expect and reduces frustration. Since this area will continue to change for the foreseeable future, these key elements cannot be left out.
- Planning for change and communicating decisions need to take place with the people affected, and their input should be solicited.
- Constant evaluation and reevaluation must take place to ensure that productivity is enhanced as changes take place. Feedback on how changes are working is an important component of the evaluation cycle.
- Having a long-term strategic plan gives a framework for decision-making library wide as well as at the departmental level.

In conclusion, the merger of acquisitions and serials/periodicals has made the management of electronic resources possible and expedited the transition to a predominately electronic environment.

Related Readings


Books Are Us

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Column Editor's Note: This column covers fictitious accounts of people in our industry — librarians, publishers, vendors, booksellers, etc. — people like us. All contributions, comments, suggestions are welcome. — AR

Thanks to Diane Rourke, Director, Health Sciences Library, Baptist Health Systems of South Florida (Miami), for writing: “There is an absolutely ghastly description of the new national library in Paris and also the librarians there in the book, Paris to the Moon, by Adam Gopnik, an otherwise lovely memoir of his five years in Paris, raising his young son and commenting on French cultural life for his columns for the New Yorker... in fact many of the chapters were published in the New Yorker.” While this is not a fictitious account, it aroused my interest.

So I read Paris to the Moon (Random House, 2000; ISBN 0-375-75823-2, trade paper) and was transported to the City of Light, enchanted by Gopnik’s observations on life and customs and raising a child in Paris. I was intrigued by his several page description of the national library, as well as of his experiences there, and wonder if others familiar with the library share his impressions.

Gopnik wrote the “unbelievably vertiginously enormous” new Bibliothèque Nationale must “have been designed by a committee made up of Michel Foucault, Jacques Tati, and the production designer of The Man from U.N.C.L.E. The whole thing is set up, way up, on a wooden platform the size of six or seven football fields, high up off the street. There is an unbelievably steep stairs, leading up to this plateau, which is like nothing so much as one of those stepped pyramids where the Aztecs plucked the hearts out of their sacrificial victims.” There are four glass skyscrapers, each set at one corner of the platform, all very hand-some, “in a kind of early-sixties, post-Levi’s House, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill way.”

Gopnik described applying for and getting a library card as a time consuming experience bordering on exhaustion. He began with a visit to the desk of “one severely disciplinary young lady,” who took information and entered it into the “single-overseeing computer system that was intended as the glory of the place.” Next he visited the desk of another young woman, who recounted and corrected all the information the first girl en-

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tered, then had him pose for his photo, all a more
time consuming process than it should have
been. After more than an hour, he got the card,
and began his descent “into the vast underground
caverns” of the reading rooms.

The books are all located up in the towers,
and the reading rooms are located deep in the
earth. There was no signage to assist him. The
floors are described as “spiked metal” and he
went through several turnstiles and several doors
before getting on an escalator for the ten-story
descent into the basement. Two more turnstiles,
two more windowless metal doors. He
requested a seat in the reading room from a com-
puter, inserting the card into a turnstile to ac-
cess the room. He described the rooms, built
around a grass court, which opened to the sky,
dizzyingly high above. In the glassed-in room
he found a small forest of immense trees, all
chained to the concrete floor. As he progressed
to the seat he had reserved, he felt “more like an
ant than an archivist.”

His experience using the computer to make his
reading selections was also full of frustra-
tion with non-working equipment, delays in re-
trieval, depression from the feeling of no air
and light, and so on. He noted the lack of a cafete-
ria, “only an appalling, gloomy little café near
the subterranean entrance, with a view of the
gagged and bound trees stretching toward the
invisible sky.”

He described how rich the materials used to
build and furnish the Library are but declares it
“the largest and most depressing of all the mon-
uments of pompous official French culture that
have been produced in France since the war, the
administration’s revenge on the individual. All
that French wit, all that charm, all that gaiety,
all that somber pessimism, even all that intelli-
gent despair sunk deep into the earth like a mis-
sile installation, with bad sandwiches and a
chained and bound garden.”

His use of the word monument in describ-
ing the Library prompted me to search the Web
and sure enough under one locates the Bibliotheque
National under Monuments. In spite of his descriptions, or maybe because of
them, this is one National Library I’ve added to
my list to visit some day.

As an opposing view, though admittedly
there is no actual description of the Paris library
in this book, author Dan Brown acknowledged
the assistance of the staff of several institutions
in performing research for his best seller, The
Da Vinci Code, A Novel (Doubleday, 2003;
ISBN 0-385-50420-9), including the Bibliothèque
Nationale, as well as the Gnostic Society Library.

He also has a librarian character in this novel,
and describes the library and the librarian in
Chapter 92. While this is a work of fiction, much
of what he wrote sounds more factual than fic-
tional. The library is described as one of the
“most complete and electronically advanced
religious research libraries in the world,” located
at King’s College in London. The primary re-
search room of this library is a “dramatic oct-
gonal chamber, dominated by an enormous round table around which King Arthur
and his knights might have been comfortable were it
not for the presence of twelve flat-screen com-
puter workstations. On the far side of the room,
a reference librarian was just pouring a pot of
tea and settling in for her day of work.”
The librarian is described as having a genial,
erudite face, a pleasingly fluid voice, and thick
horn rimmed glasses hanging around her neck
(ouch). The description of the reference inter-
view, and the search process, both appear to be
accurate portrayals. The only two items that
seemed off were: the voice of the two
protagonists were seeking the information
they were seeking (do we normally do that?),
and, while the system was working, offered
them both a cup of tea. A rather civilized
way to conduct our business, don’t you think?
And the round table and reading room sound
much cozier than those of the Bibliothèque Nationale.

Books Are Us

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Lost In Austin

by Thomas W. Leonhardt (Director, Scarborough-Phillips Library, St. Edward’s University, 3001 South Congress Avenue, Austin, TX 78704-6489; Phone: 512-448-8470; Fax: 512-448-8737) <leonhardt@libr.stedwards.edu>

Another Midwinter Meeting of the
American Library Association has
been logged, a bit earlier than usual, but
not a bad way to start the new year. We have
been to more than twenty five midwinter meet-
ings but fewer than thirty. In other words, I don’t
remember exactly and am not going to try to
reconstruct my life from that angle.

It is unfortunate that the midwinter meeting
has grown so large. Again, I can’t remember
exactly which year it was but it was an inaugu-
ral year and we met in Washington, D.C. For
the first time, the meetings could not all fit into
the Shoreham and the Shenandoah and we could
meet everyone we knew either in the exhibits or
crossing LA’s car pool going from one hotel to
the other. There was a People’s Drug Store right
near the Metro station before the metro existed
where we would go for breakfast, a home cooked
meal with eggs fried just so, over medium with
grits and bacon on the side and crispy toast that
picked up the yolk that the grits didn’t. The
women behind the counter were friendly and
easy going but efficient, too, traits that came
straight from home. All things considered, it is
my favorite breakfast spot of all the places I have
eaten at conferences over the years with second
place going to The Ferris Wheel, that great,
Greek-owned eatery near the Palmer House in
Chicago. Grits were not served but everything
else was good. Both places, too, had regular
clients who came in for coffee to go and per-
haps breakfast, too.

San Diego is a good place to visit in the
winter but it doesn’t have soul. Give me Chicago
in the winter anytime for a meeting.
Or Washington, D.C. with its presence
created by those rock solid govern-
ment buildings. I hate, though, to
think what it must be like right
now, more a fortress than a city.
I hope that I am wrong.

“There Ought To Be
A Law Department”

It was my good fortune to at-
tend Department of Defense
high schools in what was then
West Germany. I began as a freshman at
Wuerzburg American High School in 1958 and
graduated from Karlruhe American High
School in 1961. The base at Wuerzburg (I ac-
tually lived in Schwaikofen) is still there but the
one in Karlruhe was closed around 1994. The
post library, instead of being disbanded like the
others that were being closed, was offered to
and accepted by the Karlruhe Public Library
and opened its doors as a branch in 1996.

Without going into details, I have developed
a correspondence with the president of the
Freunde der amerikanschen Bibliothek
Karlruhe e.V. (Friends of the American Li-

brary in Karlruhe, tax exempt) whose name
is Karen Adam-Rischmann. She has lived in
Karlruhe for twenty five years (she teaches
English there). She worked it out for me to be-
come a friend by letting me buy a book on
Amazon.de and having it shipped direc-
tly to the Library. Otherwise I would
have had to find a way to send 25 Eu-
ros and incur currency conversion
charges.

If you would like to join, I
am sure that Karen
would be happy to
accommodate
you and if you can send her
25 Euros, you needn’t go
to the trouble of buying an
American book through a
German outlet. But that is not the main intent
here. The main intent is to find an American
publisher for Karen. Here is some background
in her own words.

“I’ve lived in Karlruhe for twenty five
years, longer than in any other place. This
has not made me feel German, if any-
thing more American, but I do like
Karlruhe, more in fact than most
Karlruher who seem to have a complex
about their provincial city. I wonder if
you have seen or read about the recent
film Buffalo Soldiers, which is not about
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