

# **LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE RESEARCH**

**Perspectives  
and Strategies  
for Improvement**

**EDITORS**

**Charles R. McClure**

**Peter Hernon**

# **Library and Information Science Research: Perspectives and Strategies for Improvement**

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# **Library and Information Science Research: Perspectives and Strategies for Improvement**

**Edited by**

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# Foreword

Librarians have long enjoyed a love-hate relationship with research. On the one hand, we have a great respect for the life of the mind which leads to and informs research, and many of us manage agencies filled with the results of that activity. On the other hand, we must be pragmatic in our use of scarce resources to satisfy multiple demands, and many of us come to our jobs having had little or no experience with the methodologies appropriate to conducting research on the complex dimensions of the information life-cycle which is the essential subject matter of our field. Thus, we recognize and respect the need for research, but few of us do it and, of those who do, the quality of the result is mixed. Over the years, many have criticized our field for these failings, but few have suggested remedies. The essays in this book fill that gap. All of the authors offer perspectives on the question of how to improve the quantity of research in our field and many suggest specific strategies for doing so. Two problematic aspects of that effort are constant themes in these essays: The possibility and proper role of research in a field dominated by practitioners and the appropriate philosophy or paradigm that should inform research in library and information science (LIS). The essays in this book do not solve those problems. But they do present thoughtful and intelligent arguments that clarify the issues.

This book is closely connected with the Library Research Round Table (LRRT) of the American Library Association. When Nancy Van House became chair-elect of LRRT in June 1989, she decided that her theme for the year would be a consideration of how to improve the quantity and quality of library research. She asked Charles R. McClure to plan a program on that topic for the 1990 Annual Conference and McClure, together with Peter Hernon, decided to do something bigger—to invite a group of nationally known leaders and researchers to produce papers that would offer perspectives and strategies for improving various aspects of the research enterprise in our field. Five of those papers would be selected for presentation at a LRRT program during the 1990 Annual Conference. All of the papers would appear in a published book, and *all* royalties from the sale of the book would be added to the endowment that supports LRRT's Jesse H. Shera Award for Research.

The first result of those plans was a very successful LRRT program in Chicago at the 1990 ALA Annual Conference. Five of the papers were presented to a large audience and stimulated considerable discussion. This volume completes those plans and presents a multitude of ideas for consideration by everyone concerned about research in library and information science.

Part One of this book includes 11 essays providing an "Overview of Research in Library and Information Science." Papers by Peter Hernon, Mary Biggs, and Robert Grover and Roger C. Greer address the nature of the enterprise. Ellen Altman addresses another dimension of that topic, comments on Federal funding for LIS research, and proposes changes in the makeup of ALA's Committee on Accreditation that would help to improve faculty research. Ronald R. Powell presents a very practical guide to the literature on how to conduct research in our field. Charles Curran comments on the impact of several agendas for LIS research that have been proposed recently by different groups, Michael Buckland and John Gathegi discuss international aspects of LIS research, and Nancy Van House assesses its quantity, quality, and impact. Evelyn Daniel and Cheryl Duran present ideas about library education in general and library educators in particular. Anne J. Mathews presents the role of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Library Programs with a focus on funding provided since 1967 by the Title II.B of the Higher Education Act.

In Part Two, eight experts comment on the role of different agents in improving LIS research. Joe Hewitt suggests 11 practices that library administrators can institute in order to integrate research products and process into the ongoing operation of libraries. Irene Hoadley also makes recommendations regarding the role of practitioners. Julie Virgo analyzes the limited but critical role of professional associations. Dorothy L. Steffins and Jane Robbins describe the role of journal editors and editorial boards. Douglas Zweizig contributes an insightful analysis of the difference between consulting and research with recommendations about how the process and results of consulting could make a greater contribution to research. Michael Koenig describes the role of networks as both subjects for and tools of research. Candy Schwartz describes the role of the information industry in LIS research—a role that is primarily indirect. Peter Young explains why funding from private sources is needed and suggests how to frame LIS questions in ways that might attract such funding.

Part Three begins with an essay by Charles McClure suggesting how library researchers can design and execute applied research projects to ensure that the results will be used by library decision makers. The next five essays focus on research conducted in and about different components of the LIS community. Shirley Fitzgibbons and Daniel Callison assess past research on school librarianship by analyzing several reviews of the research literature and conducting their own analysis of a search of *Dissertation Abstracts International*. They then make recommendations for the future. Charles Townley takes a very different approach for academic librarianship. His comments are addressed to the practitioner and describe both the opportunities offered by research and challenges to getting it done. He then makes general recommendations for improving research in academic librarianship and recommendations for the individual who wants to get involved. Joan Durrance discusses barriers to the creation of a "research culture" in public librarianship and describes several areas where research could play a

major role in helping public libraries be more responsive to societal needs. In his chapter on special librarianship, James Matarazzo focuses on the role of the Special Libraries Association (SLA) in fostering research and on the problem of low involvement in SLA or special librarianship by library school faculty. Robert Dugan and Jane Oederkirk identify potential research roles for state library agencies, explain why research has not been a priority for those agencies, and suggest strategies for change.

The last three essays deal with very broad issues. Marty Hale considers the meaning of the phrase "paradigm shift," describes the recent shift in the paradigm of LIS, and indicates what it means for research in our field. Michael Harris and Masaru Itoga argue that LIS research should be based not on its own paradigm, but on paradigms drawn from the social sciences. They suggest that this strategy "will support librarians in their pursuit of a critical understanding of the structural and functional characteristics of libraries, while at the same time allowing librarians to contribute to the corpus of knowledge about cultural institutions in general." Finally, Beverly Lynch concludes the volume with an essay noting that "the ongoing development of theory and the design of research cannot be divorced from the profession as it is practiced."

Jesse H. Shera would be proud of this book. He believed strongly in the importance of research to the continued vitality of librarianship and would be pleased that 34 experts were willing and able to produce challenging papers filled with strategies for improving research in our field. It is very appropriate that royalties from the sale of this volume will be added to the endowment fund established several years ago when LRRT renamed its 12-year-old research award in honor of Jesse H. Shera. The award is given annually to an excellent paper presenting the results of library research. By giving that award each year, LRRT has recognized and encouraged excellent research. In sponsoring this book, LRRT makes a different and perhaps larger contribution toward its objectives. The many actionable ideas presented here are a challenge to LRRT itself and to the many other groups and individuals in the library and information science community who share Shera's belief in the importance of research.

*Mary Jo Lynch*  
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# Preface

The role and importance of research in librarianship, and later in library and information science, have been controversial. Some maintain that research is important to professional practice and the theoretical base of the profession/discipline, while others disagree. As library and information science matures as a profession and a discipline, there is increased interest in how that role can be strengthened, how the profession/discipline can enhance its research base, and how practicing librarians and other information professionals, might become more aware of the role and importance of research.

The research basis of any profession and discipline merits regular and careful scrutiny and review. That assessment should stimulate thinking about the role of research and the opportunities for the conduct of research. Such an assessment also provides ideas, approaches, and strategies that can assist the advancement of the profession or discipline and improve the overall quality, quantity, and impact of that research.

Any in-depth discussion of research in library and information science should involve individuals from various backgrounds and work-related situations. Such discussions illustrate that research is not the province of any one group and that research plays an important role in the larger context of scientific inquiry.

The 28 chapters in this book provide a forum for individuals from different backgrounds to present their unique perspectives. The chapters offer an overview and perspective on research in library and information science; identify key issues, constraints, and opportunities affecting research; suggest areas of agreement and disagreement among contributors; and offer specific strategies to improve research in library and information science.

As editors, our original intent was for each chapter to comprise a position paper of approximately 15 manuscript pages. However, as is evident, most contributors could not limit their assessment to our page expectations. Nonetheless, the contributors admirably accomplish the four objectives of the monograph:

- Provide a state-of-the-art assessment, discussion, and overview of research in library and information science;
- Offer specific recommendations and strategies for resolving issues related to research in library and information science and for improving the quality, quantity, and impact of that research;

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- Increase the profession's (and library school students') awareness of the role and importance of research in library and information science; and
- Identify and analyze key issues and topics from a broad perspective cutting across a number of groups within library and information science.

The book should appeal to anyone interested in library and information science research and the conditions as well as strategies for improving that research. In particular, the monograph should appeal to members of professional library and information-related associations, individuals associated with private and public funding organizations, library school educators and students, and others interested in issues related to library and information science and its cross-disciplinary base.

*Charles R. McClure*

*Peter Hernon*

*July 1990*