

President's Column

Have It Your Way? No Way. On Bozo Sapiens, the McLibrary, and the Need to Re-Incorporate Faculty Driven Decision-Making into the Academic Library

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Value is not a linear function, nor is money the only value. Our rational economic choice, therefore, should be what secures the highest expected level of what we personally value most. . . .

--Michael Kaplan and Ellen Kaplan, *Bozo Sapiens: Why to Err is Human* (2009)

According to Michael Kaplan and Ellen Kaplan, the *bozo sapiens* are people who constantly confuse value with worth and price. By their clownish nature, these people fail to understand that by saving a dollar they are reducing the value of something. Because achieving a price is their end, their short sightedness leads them to conclude that an inferior thing is a fine replacement for one that “secures the highest expected level of what we personally value most.”¹ Kaplan and Kaplan conclude “in the absence of class, *price* is always a good guide for the uninformed—again, because we conflate value and worth.”² The sad truth is that these observations do not just apply to the marketplace; they also apply to academia and to academic libraries. Examples here include the current national tendency to replace M.L.I.S. (and other advanced degrees) faculty with staff, who may or may not possess a B.A. or B.S. and may or may not have the classroom experience, even though the research need of critical thinking has not changed. In addition, the new fad is for administrators to have libraries reduce their size in order to create information commons, with no outcomes assessment in place to insure these commons do not become glorified study halls. Though buzz-worthy, if they fail to truly engage students or define the space as part of the library, these information commons are

nothing more than annexes to the student union. Or worse yet, they become competitors to the union. One further example of *bozo sapien* “reasoning” is the creation of a collection for the sake of supporting the curriculum, while neglecting to insure that that collection anticipates growth, in the form of the development of new academic programs.

If educating students were the goal of institutions, then the business of education should be *education*, not *business*. If the word *education* were more used as more than lip service to encourage parents to give up their hard-earned money, these *bozo sapiens* would not rise above rank and file faculty. If educating students were the goal of their parent institutions of higher education, then academic libraries would have as their goal the provision of the best support for students, the best opportunities for student and faculty engagement, the best librarians (including specialists), not *reducing costs at the expense of reducing services*. If education were the goal of these institutions, libraries (and librarians) themselves would contribute directly to the university or college’s prestige. Librarians would be responsive to scholarship, research, teaching, and learning. Put into terms those who are more business-minded (rather than education-minded) would understand, “rational agents, pursuing their own ends, would automatically contribute to the public good by providing the products and services others valued enough to buy.”³ But the reality in Louisiana is that we are moving further away from all the most rational activities in favor of decisions made by *bozo sapiens*. This is not just the fault of university administration and library administration. Librarians, too, have lost focus and have failed at closely examining the mission of the academic library; they have become *bozo sapiens* themselves.

Daniel Goldstein's article about academic libraries in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* illustrates how dollar value (price) has become the mistaken focal point of the library. Patrons, whether they be students, faculty, or scholars affiliated or unaffiliated, have been turned into generic customers. According to Goldstein, "libraries, the intellectual heart of universities, have become perhaps the most commercialized academic area within universities, with troubling implications for the future of higher education."⁴ What continues to fall outside of the *bozo sapiens*' (in respect to librarianship) equation is that the library user is not someone who can be reduced to a generic customer. The collection development, cataloging, academic support, and preservation and dissemination of resources cannot be of the generic sort that these *bozo sapiens* seem to reason it should be. In their view, the McLibrary version of academic librarianship should be the model for every institution of higher learning, despite the differences in mission, in faculty needs, and in student challenges and opportunities. Goldstein points out that commercialization's reduction of the patron to customer has moved libraries further away from their own purpose:

Commercialization has impinged on two core facets of university libraries—their collections and their user services. The ownership and provision of research materials, especially academic journals, has been increasingly outsourced to for-profit companies. Library patrons, moreover, are increasingly regarded simply as consumers, transforming user services into customer service. Both developments have distanced libraries from their academic missions.⁵

In Louisiana, as elsewhere, academic libraries are supposed to serve the purpose of the mission of their respective institutions. Many of these missions include the phrase "personal touch" in the education of students; however, this commercialization is resulting in just the opposite. One disastrous by-product is the lack of focus on supporting faculty research. Goldstein points out that commercialized collection development

strategies, particularly with academic journals, has made libraries look more like each other, and less like individuated entities that mirror the missions of their institutions:

the big deals take the decision about which journals to purchase out of the hands of subject-specialist librarians, a trend that is leading to the homogenization of library collections. Many institutions are acquiring near-identical lists of journals from the same vendors.⁶

The frustration for the subject specialist is that the library and the institution are not listening to expertise; rather they favor commercial interests. But it is not just the subject specialist who becomes frustrated here. With all academic libraries being homogenized to become McLibrary, containing nothing that would make one academic library stand out from another, this will prove increasingly frustrating for researchers. How annoying must it be for them to constantly have to use interlibrary loan, to rely on out-of-state university colleagues and friends, or to travel outside of the state in order to conduct research—the very activity that academic libraries and institutions are supposed to support. These McLibrary efforts do not just rest with collection development decisions to support the curriculum only (which is dangerous since any one curriculum in Louisiana looks very much like any other curriculum at any other institution, resulting in what can be termed McCollections). These clownish attempts to create a McLibrary, sadly, reflect a national tendency, as almost any position announcement for academic library director will attest.

The patron, likely a student, approaching an academic librarian does not always want the quick and dirty, economical answer; that student may also possess great intellectual curiosity, no matter the level of research. At times s/he wants to be engaged intellectually. Students want to have their research needs filled in each their own way, which cannot happen at McLibrary. The *bozo sapien* insistence on McLibrary also begs the question of the library's fulfillment of the institutional mission: if McLibrary is a valid

entity, then what makes any institution special? What makes research at that institution stand out from research done at any other university? If all universities are so similar as to make McLibrary a valid response to the business model, then why do we need so many universities and administrators? However, there are also deeper, more philosophical issues at play here: What perspectives are being weeded out of the main stream? What future scholarship is not being anticipated? And finally, how can we reverse this disastrous trend, before these *bozo sapiens* render our academic libraries beyond repair?

Perking Up Our Ears to Listen to the Experts

Regularly, not just at one point in their careers, academic librarians should attend scholarly conferences—not conferences in library and information science only, but in a field of interest or specialization. Some benefits are obvious: they enable librarians to understand better the current methodologies and hot topics of a field; they encourage current knowledge of a discipline; and they facilitate networking, which is really key to informing academic librarians about their role(s) at their own institutions as well as in academia on both local and global levels. For subject specialists, it goes without saying that these conferences feed directly into their work: an intimate knowledge of the resources combined with a current knowledge of the scholarship—hopefully, in combination with their own scholarly engagement for they, too, should be presenting papers and publishing—leads to selecting the best resources, adhering to standards and best practices, and listening to a specific scholarly community. And all of these actions should be brought back to inform other librarians.

The problem is that under the current business model (and this will get worse if the *bozo sapiens* have their way), attending these conferences is the exception, not the rule. Many academic librarians, if they participate in conferences at all, engage in those

in library and information science only. They do this despite the fact that they are liaisons to other fields, that they teach subject-related classes on information literacy, and that they make decisions that impact scholarship in disciplines other than information science at their institutions. In the business model, the costs of going to these conferences are made to seem prohibitive, and all academic faculty, librarians included, need to challenge this reasoning. Meanwhile, academic librarians can engage in regional and state chapter conferences, which are less expensive alternatives to engage with scholars in the disciplines to which they act as liaisons. And academic librarians must argue for the recognition of the value of these conferences among their peers and with their administrators.

In my own experience, I have learned through networking at non-library conferences that most scholars from Carnegie Research 1 and 2 institutions, as well as faculty at four-year and private institutions, are unhappy about *not* having subject specialists in their library. They share the same complaint: their library directors do not listen to them. Opting to favor the general, to create McLibrary, directors have ignored that scholars in various disciplines use research methods that are unique to their disciplines; in fact, being treated as generic customers does them little good. Library directors, however, have recently opted to put on blinders in this regard. In the literature of various disciplines, the argument for having separate libraries or collections, to reflect the researcher needs and methodologies of separate colleges or disciplines, is preferable because it better supports faculty research, allows for the better assessment of the collection, and meets the requirements established by many of the accreditation agencies for various disciplines. Unless library directors learn to listen to the faculty in these

disciplines, they fall prey to the *bozo sapiens*' ill-informed (meaning that these arguments are *not* informed by the experts in the disciplines, the faculty themselves) arguments that these collections are nothing more than "special libraries." These directors argue against what is best for faculty, regardless of the fact that this sectioning of the collection facilitates scholarship necessary to learning, teaching, and research on the user side, regardless of the fact that sectioning meets some of the requirements for best practices in information literacy, cataloging, indexing, and preservation on the behind-the-scenes side, and regardless of the fact that accreditation agencies identify self-contained collections as the paramount in best practices for academic libraries. These directors choose to ignore faculty needs, simply because faculty needs do not match the current faddish agenda of recreating library space, usually to some nebulous end, with no outcomes assessment in sight.

It is not only interesting, but absolutely necessary, for library directors to see the academic library through the eyes of others: It is a hard truth to swallow, but they will realize that faculty can come to view libraries, their directors, and the librarians themselves, as opting to make willfully stupid decisions at worst, and decisions that come across as arbitrary at best. For the short-sighted, business model based argument that creating special collections (or libraries, for larger universities) suggests the favoring of faculty in certain fields, these faculty can offer the counter argument that not having these collections shows no regard to their scholarship or teaching needs. To teaching faculty, the library administrator decision to embrace the alphabetically ordered layout of the LC Classification System as the physical library outlay, even though the letters corresponding to fields/disciplines are not conducive to studying or to research, seems

arbitrary and (to put it bluntly) ignorant. Teaching faculty can only scratch their heads when pondering the reasons library administration prioritizes beginning information literacy classes, rather than the intermediate and advanced classes—those that contain students who are more likely to need to do research. Faculty who are music scholars and teachers can only gasp when they hear that library administration is determined to assign sound recordings to a department that has no experience at all with cataloging or preserving them; those faculty are left to wonder if such an arbitrary decision is an attempt to place more resources, any resources at that, into an empty looking space to make it less empty. If librarians spent time with these faculty and actually listened, they would hear that such decisions seem to be political moves, with total disregard to students, faculty, and scholars who need those resources. Such an exchange would be an eye-opener.

In addition, networking with faculty at non-librarian conferences would prevent the librarian from falling into the trap that scholarship in other fields should be somehow held in less esteem. After all, the academic world is larger than the conference presentations and library specific publications in our field, and less we forget, this out-of-the-discipline networking serves the purpose of driving our decisions based on the scholars who are our mission, based on the needs of the students who are our library patrons. Subject specialists are more than capable of contributing to the disciplines to which they serve as liaison; in fact, their presentations or publications could help drive research decisions in those fields. According to José A. Montelongo, Lynne Gamble, Navjit Brar, and Anita C. Hernandez, this scholarly contribution is the subject specialist's way of generating scholarship:

Librarians who have taken a second advanced degree, especially those with doctorates, often come to their academic positions with the backgrounds in research methods necessary to undertake research in both librarianship and their non-library field. Unlike librarians with only MLS degrees, librarians with advanced degrees in their specialization field are prepared to be active participants in conducting research and creating knowledge.⁷

Historically, a major complaint of library faculty is that they do not receive the same respect as teaching faculty. It seems that part of this problem would be remedied if more librarians actually produced scholarship in the disciplines in which they are subject specialists, reminding scholars (in this case, the teaching faculty) that they, too, are scholars who have a deep understanding of the disciplines to which they are responsible. This is, of course, not news. Current library literature favors collaboration. The academic journal *Collaborative Librarianship* features articles that focus solely on librarian-faculty collaboration. The current urgency of collaboration being championed by university administrations echoes the discussions of the twenty-first century library and/or librarian that is ubiquitous in our literature. Just last month, Paula Kaufman's article advocated that twenty-first century librarians "must get cozier than ever with their partners." These partners include not only teaching faculty, but also organizations and institutions.⁸ Networking at these conferences would surely contribute to seeking these beneficial partnerships.

Montelongo, Gamble, Brar, and Hernandez point out that during business meetings, there are excellent opportunities for subject specialist librarians and scholars to discuss the adequacy of the library's resources.⁹ Potential partnerships need to emerge from these discussions. At national as well as regional conferences, I personally have found scholars who express frustration over having no music subject specialist in their libraries. Many had questions about best practices to preserve music scores, which almost

never is done correctly at their institutions, as scores are placed in a general collection, which is a frowned upon practice of which all these scholars are aware. Their frustrations include encountering library policies that are prohibitive of their students' ability to coordinate resources to do research, due to the improper housing of music resources, and what to them seems a willful ignorance of the specific accreditation requirements of the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM). These concerns again boil down to their perception that library directors (and in many cases, university administrators) are not listening to faculty. I left that meeting with the impression that libraries are moving further away from supporting scholarship, research, teaching, and learning. All at that meeting left knowing the reason why: so that administrators could follow the business model and save a dollar. The bottom line is that library administration has to become more responsive. To simply answer with "we can't have 'special libraries' in the library" is an admission that we are not listening. We are confusing value and price, even if it means risking individual discipline/departmental accreditation.

Going to accreditation web pages, we can learn quickly that what libraries have to do to help departments secure accreditation is not to simply be good enough. Libraries often have to make accessible (and sometimes outright own) resources that go well beyond the scope of the department (that includes outside the scope of the curriculum). We must also be cognizant that not all the best resources will be purchased by consortia, so it is unreasonable for libraries to expect to fulfill specific accreditation requirements through bargain shopping only. Beyond accreditation, libraries should not just aim for *good enough*, by having just the first consulted resources at hand. Teaching faculty have been known to include the research process as well as critical thinking in their

assignments, and librarians should not simply look the other way. Goldstein addresses universities in his library, but his remark also applies to any college or university that considers seriously its students as researchers:

For university libraries, retrieving what is known should be only the beginning. They are laboratories of the mind, unique places where questions that have never before been asked can be formulated and answered; they are centers of teaching where patrons can learn about the organization and the production of knowledge. And much more.¹⁰

Scholars, teaching faculty, and librarians fell in love with academic libraries for the same reason: the libraries were the laboratories of our minds. We fell in love with works there not just because of the space but also because of the people who work at libraries, particularly the ones who seemed most engaged in our intellectual development. Why is it that librarians and library administrators so easily allow for the wealth of opportunities that the library offers to be replaced by something inferior or extinguished altogether? ACRL is correct in observing that there are increasingly fewer tenure track positions in libraries, and many library positions are being either replaced by staff without MLIS degrees or closed altogether. The *bozo sapiens*' McLibrary exists at the cost of critical thinking, depth and breadth of scholarship, and currency.

¹ Michael Kaplan and Ellen Kaplan, "Idols of the Marketplace," chap. 2 in *Bozo Sapiens: Why to Err is Human* (New York, Berlin, and London: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), 22.

² Ibid., 61.

³ Ibid., 22.

⁴ Daniel Goldstein, "Library Inc.," under "The Chronicle Review," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (17 October 2010), <http://chronicle.com/article/Library-Inc/124915/>, accessed 20 February 2012, p. 1 of 7.

⁵ Ibid., p. 2 of 7.

⁶ Ibid., p. 3 of 7.

⁷ José A. Montelongo, Lynne Gamble, Navjit Brar, and Anita C. Hernandez, "Being a Librarian Isn't Enough: The Importance of a Non-library Research Agenda for the Academic Librarian: A Case Study," *College and Undergraduate Libraries* 17 (February 2010): 4.

⁸ Paula Kaufman, "Let's Get Cozy: Evolving Collaborations in the 21st Century," *Journal of Library Administration* 52 (January 2012): 53.

⁹ Montelongo, Gamble, Brar, and Hernandez, 8.

¹⁰ Goldstein, pp. 4-5 of 7.