

From the Editor*

A recent article by Charles Osburn, Librarian at the University of Cincinnati, eloquently traces the role of the journal in the process of scholarly communication.¹ After presenting the history of journal publishing over the past three hundred years, Osburn notes that the scholarly journal's role has grown increasingly more complex; today it provides a means for rapid communication of information and exchange of ideas, a means of access for scholars outside the inner circles of the community, and, perhaps most significantly, a forum for the validation of one's work. Osburn cites favorably the following list of objectives for the scholarly journal:

to serve as the primary and fastest intermediary between author and reader; to publish work of the highest intellectual quality; to uphold the scientific tradition of open information exchange; to present information in the form and style acceptable to the community; to attract good authors, editors, and reviewers; to achieve the reputation or status as a publisher of a superior journal.²

There is little with which to quibble in Osburn's list; nor is there anything that I would not include for a professional journal such as *Law Library Journal*. How does *LLJ* differ from the strictly scholarly journal?

There is, of course, a difference in the types of articles published. A professional journal publishes materials of practical application as well as those of scholarship in the usual sense. And its readership, at least in *LLJ*'s case, is more varied. Even within librarianship generally, a specialist's needs are met by a range of highly specialized publications (e.g., *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, *The Serials Librarian*). For law librarians such needs must be addressed by *Law Library Journal*. And law librarians specialize not only by job but by the type of library and clientele we serve. In addition to our concerns in the library, there are those stemming from our subject speciality in law and our involvement in teaching legal research and bibliography. These and other concerns and interests create the need for a

* This is an edited version of remarks prepared for presentation at the 78th Annual Meeting of the American Association of Law Libraries, New York, New York, July 8, 1985.

1. Osburn, *The Place of the Journal in the Scholarly Communications System*, 28 *LIBR. RESOURCES & TECHNICAL SERVICES* 315 (1984).

2. *Id.* at 321-22 (citing Boucher, *The Place of the Author in the Coming Information Society*, in *STRATEGIES FOR MEETING THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF SOCIETY IN THE YEAR 2000*, at 123 (M. Boaz ed. 1981)).

journal covering a variety of topics and taking both scholarly and practical approaches.

Despite their traditional and continuing role, the future of scholarly and professional journals is not trouble free. Osburn points out that new developments are affecting the journal's ability to meet its objectives. Among these developments are dramatic increases in the number of persons participating in the scholarly communication system and in the number of available journals, articles, and manuscripts.³ Osburn warns that such pressures, coupled with the "ease of making public announcements" made possible by developments in communications technology, create the opportunity for writers to bypass the journal and to turn instead to more rapid media operating "outside the tradition and standards of science and scholarship."⁴ The result is "a great flow of unharnessed and uncontrolled contributions whose significance or accuracy has not been validated."⁵

Michael Freeman addresses different concerns in a recent *Library Journal* review of the overall quality of library science research.⁶ Despite its volume and extent, Freeman finds much to criticize in library literature because the research has failed to take on the attributes of a true science. Similar complaints have been voiced before. Freeman, however, points out that librarians also have failed to develop and maintain an audience for the serious research that is being produced. In a telling example, he notes that many librarians probably have not purchased a single professional monograph over the past year, yet find the reading time to invest in such popular offerings as *Megatrends* or the *One Minute Manager*.⁷

Continuing doubts about the possibility for a professional literature in librarianship, and the profession's apparent disinterest in its own quality literature are troubling for a journal editor. As a law librarian, I believe that the creation of a body of formal literature is critical to the continued development of our profession. To contribute to the lasting literature of our field, it is essential that our scholarship, commentary, and reported experiences be tested and validated through the process that formal publication allows. This process requires significant effort from an author, whose work is evaluated and criticized upon submission, again upon publication, and remains subject to challenge by later writers. These steps are necessary to the development of a corpus of professional knowledge, but they normally are not part of the publication process in media less formal than the journal.

3. *Id.* at 323.

4. *Id.*

5. *Id.*

6. Freeman, "The Simplicity of His Pragmatism": *Librarians and Research*, *LIBR. J.*, May 15, 1985, at 27.

7. *Id.* at 29. A decade ago, the reference might have been to Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock*.

Within our association there now are available to potential authors a number of forums in chapter and section newsletters and in other informal publication vehicles. *Law Library Journal* is not in competition with newsletters, which are without doubt appropriate outlets for commentary, summaries of program proceedings, and reports on developments in local libraries. Often the ideas and approaches found in these materials, if allowed to germinate and subjected to criticism and validation, can be developed into significant and lasting contributions to our formal literature. One has to wonder, however, how many potential *LLJ* authors lose the incentive to carry their work through into a completed article because less rigorous means of publication are readily available.

Some years ago, upon Connie Bolden's retirement as *LLJ* editor, Jack Ellenberger published a brief tribute to Connie's work in which he made note of Connie's "'10-year rule'."⁸ The rule, which was brought to my attention shortly after I assumed the editorship, meant simply that Connie strived to publish in the *Journal* only material that still would be of continuing value after ten years had passed.

The same technological developments that created the many alternative publication opportunities available today may have worked as well to erode the possibility for a strict adherence to the ten-year guideline.⁹ Yet the thought behind the rule remains a worthy aspiration for authors as well as editors. To remain vital, a profession such as our own needs a living and growing body of published research to serve as a record of its accomplishments, to educate its newer members, and to stimulate the individual growth and development of its membership. This literature must be created by writers who are willing to devote themselves to the extra effort necessary to produce works ready to stand the tests of initial evaluation and criticism and of time. Professional and scholarly journals play crucial roles in determining the futures of the professions and the academic disciplines. Ultimately, however, a journal's success in fulfilling these roles depends on the contributions of the members of the community it serves, and on their willingness to do what is necessary to create a meaningful and lasting body of literature.

Dick Danner

8. 70 *LAW LIBR. J.* i (1977).

9. Library technology and automation are today unavoidable topics in professional literature; law librarians want to read about developments in this area, and prospective authors want to write about them. Yet the specific technologies described may be obsolescent in much less than ten years.

