Autumn in America

Around every corner, vistas of lemon, gold, orange and red, were revealed as Dr Norman Stevens drove me through the by-ways of north-eastern Connecticut on the way to Willimantic and the bus to Boston. Although I'd planned this section of my study tour to take place in early October when the fall colours should be at their best, I had no idea that they would be so beautiful, and indeed, cover so wide an area.

The first hint of autumn was on the train from Washington (where for a week the temperature had been in the high 80s Fahrenheit) when here and there a flash of autumn could be seen among the trees. It was past Labor Day, so it had to be fall, and Washington dressed accordingly, despite the temperature. Fortunately, the Madison Building of the Library of Congress is airconditioned. The sixth floor, where I had appointments with the Director of Staff Training and Development, Mrs Sylvia Cooke-Martin and others, was quiet, the staff working behind huge heavy doors. The warmth with which I was received at the Library of Congress was an indication of what I might expect at other institutions around the country.

In many cases, staff gave up a half day or day of their valuable time to ensure that I did not go away empty-handed, both literally and figuratively. At Columbia, Patricia Battin, a speaker at the Brisbane conference, was most hospitable as was Fred Duda, her Assistant University Librarian for Personnel, and Sha Fagan, the Chief of the Social Sciences Division. At Yale I was warmly received by Maureen Sullivan, who will be remembered by those who attended OMS courses in Sydney and Melbourne, and this in spite of the fact that Yale was on strike at the time! Unfortunately Sheila Creth was on leave when I visited Michigan, but her deputy, Lucy Cohen, was very helpful and interesting, as were staff in other institutions.

I was particularly interested to learn about programmes of staff development and performance evaluation in academic libraries, and discovered that in the case of every academic institution, the university's central staff development unit was drawn on for a substantial amount of training for library staff, particularly at the supervisor level. As a result, inhouse training seemed mainly devoted to strictly library topics which are not offered by the central office and is largely the responsibility of supervisors/department heads.

Apart from general staff development, I discovered that the University of Connecticut has had a very successful programme of job-sharing or job exchange. The arrangement is a formal one, complete with duty statements, for a specific number of hours per week and for a minimum of twelve months, which may be renewed. It began as the result of staff requests, and has therefore been well accepted because it was not imposed from above.

Another interesting programme was at the Mann Agricultural Library at Cornell University, where termination of appointments is one of the special responsibiities of the Deputy Librarian, Sam Demas. He described the programme in detail; every effort is made to ensure that staff members understand the reasons behind a recommendation for dismissal, how they can change in order to prevent termination occurring, and what assistance/guidance can be expected from the library. The rationale of this programme is very positive, and although staff are not dismissed as frequently as might be assumed from the existence of such a programme, it is there when required.

Every university I visited had a system of performance evaluation for staff. Usually there are separate schemes for professional and 'classified' (ie non-professional) staff, although evaluations carried out in libraries were usually confidential to the library. In most cases performance evaluation was not tied to salary increases — which are in any case handled quite differently from in Australia. One point stressed over and over again was that it is vital to gain the acceptance of the staff if a performance evaluation scheme is to work, and that two or three years spent laying the groundwork may not be too long. Discussions with all levels of staff are needed, to ensure not only their participation but that their ideas are heard and possibly incorporated into the design.

While some of the institutions I visited on this study tour were apparently suffering some funding constraints, in no case, even in government funded institutions, did the cuts appear to be as severe as in academic libraries in this country. Book budgets seemed healthy, and no-one indicated that maintaining staffing levels is as great a problem as might have been expected.

While Australian libraries would probably find the staff turnover rate at Columbia difficult to cope with, staff there recognised that such a large, complex institution in what is for many a desirable environment on Manhattan's upper West Side will always be attractive to people who may want to move on after a short time. The problem of turnover and recruitment is faced to varying degrees in all libraries, just as it is in Australia, and the differences are of degree, not of kind.

I am very grateful to the LAA for granting me the first of its Study Awards. Together with the grant I received from the University of Adelaide, this enabled me to visit eleven universities as well as the Library of Congress and the Office of Management Studies during my seven weeks away from home. I have acquired much material from these institutions, and hope in due course to be able to report in more detail than is possible here on at least some of the topics I have mentioned. A number of people in the US gave me the impression that similar awards are not widely available there, and the granting of such an award — to a woman too! — was much admired. I have certainly made many new friends and broadened my professional horizons through contact with the institutions I visited, and am a very appreciative Award recipient.   *Chris Hone*
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ACI appointment

ACI has appointed Bernard Hengst to manage its entry into videotex. PIII, the videotex system chosen by ACI, is PRESTEL compatible and runs on the 3081 mainframe under CICS. Support for 3270 terminals is a feature of PIII.

Bernard comes to ACI Computer Services from within the ACI group of companies. His background is electrical engineering but his recent posts in ACI have included large management science and marketing components.