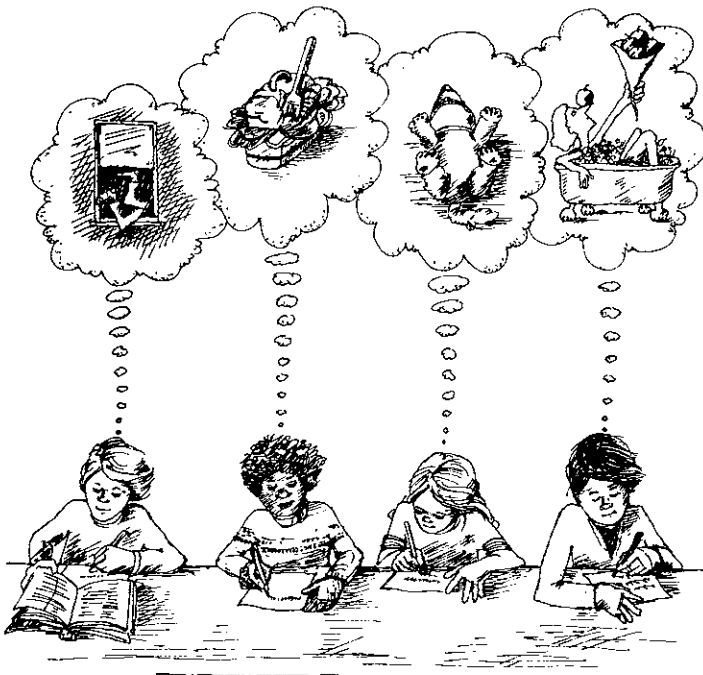


Vol.13 No.2 Summer, 1982 ISSN 0196-0679

InULA

Quarterly



What Are They Thinking?

InULA Quarterly

Vol.13 No.2

The library as an institution, and librarians as individuals in that institution, must periodically reflect on the question, "Are we doing a good job?" That question should be considered from both sides of the information desk—are we satisfied with the services we provide and is the patron satisfied? As a mental exercise, let's think about what we think the patron thinks.

Table of Contents

(What) Do Students Think?	1
Preserving Our Faculties	3
A Variety of Viewpoints	4
Let Them Speak for Themselves	7
Book Review	8
News	10

Cover illustration by Martha Weston

InULA Quarterly is a publication of the Indiana University Librarians' Association. Letters and items of interest should be addressed to Amy E. Novick, Archives of Traditional Music, Maxwell 221, IU-Bloomington. Publications Committee: Jo Brooks, John Curry, Mark Day, Dorothy Niekamp, Amy Novick, editor

(What) Do Students Think?

Gail Oltmanns, Halls of Residence Libraries

John Curry, Health, Physican Education, and Recreation Library

Some years ago there was a map sold in gas stations and bait and tackle shops that showed the United States from the viewpoint of the average New Yorker. Well over a third of a distorted U.S. was New York City. Miami was immediately to the south, and Connecticut was of respectable size to the north. The rest of the country was squeezed together west of the Hudson, which flowed where the Great Plains are usually found. Displayed among genuine corn-cob pipes and postcards, the map was one of those "curios" that has a mysteriously long market life, perhaps snapped up by over-tired travelers or by myopic New Yorkers. But it was never clear whether the joke was on New Yorkers or by New Yorkers.

We can laugh at the map of New York, but the distorted picture can be a bit disturbing. Even more disturbing is that geographers have made quite serious maps that show how different groups of people see the same region in different ways. The geographers' point is that the perceptions people have of a place is conditional. No point of reference means the same thing to everyone alike. Factors such as age, gender, social background, level of education, and social ambition govern how and what people see. It's a sort of geographical Gresham's Law: the law of utter provinciality.

The perception some people have of libraries is uncomfortably similar at times, as is the ambiguity about who the joke is on. Many patrons have no perception or attitude at all, but the view of some is the stuff of folklore. Young students especially often have a cartoon image in which libraries are buildings of things they're not interested in, but that are supposed to be

good for them, guarded by silent and censorious middle-aged people.

The subjectivity of perception would merely be a curious feature of human nature if one of our goals were not to instruct our patrons in the effective use of library resources. Unlike some professions, where expertise is a trade secret, librarians want to share their knowledge. A large portion of our time is taken up with guiding patrons to the place they want to find, and in trying to teach them the "geography" of the library. As the mapmakers of this particular realm, we are aware, as few of our patrons ever need to be, that some of the most interesting and valuable territory in a library is made up of the intangible techniques and processes that allow information and knowledge to be classified and made available. But most people, let alone most young students, only use libraries in a context of need. Even though there are skills they could acquire that would help them in their searches, their attention is focused exclusively on what they need to find, not the how of finding it.

The problem is compounded by the fact that librarians are themselves a group without a single or unambiguous sense of what libraries should be or how they should present themselves. Along with other academic institutions, libraries have in the past relied upon their dignity and cultural purpose to compel respect and cooperation from their clientele. This has become a more and more difficult attitude to usefully maintain.

Given that perceptions are subjective and personal, and that library use is based on immediate and specific need, perhaps we cannot expect to have a larger effect on students than we do now. But we shouldn't abandon our goal of acquainting patrons as widely as possible in the skillful use of libraries. A large part of the cartoon image of libraries is defensive, the result of fear and embarrassment. The general tenor of course evaluations indicate that students do appreciate library instruction courses like Q161. Even those who have little faith in their

ability to use the spectrum of reference tools skillfully feel much less mystified by the library and much more confident about using its resources. The most significant thing students report having learned is that librarians are approachable. This is something to learn early. A distinguished I.U. scholar was, in her own words, "published before I realized librarians could help me. They can find anything. Now I use them for everything." Admittedly, being "used for everything" will give us all pause, but surely it's better, for us and for our patrons, than the cartoon figure that looms in so many people's perceptions of libraries.

To change things is not easy. The perceptions that young students bring to libraries are not simply minor errors of understanding that can be easily corrected. As a rule, students no longer have courses that require term papers or extended library research. Students have to feel that it's useful to them before they attend to new knowledge. If knowing how to use the library doesn't seem to have anything to do with getting good grades, students will tend to remain disinterested. More basic is the intimidation young students feel when confronted by extremely large institutions. Even as they gather in the library to socialize, they are overwhelmed by its real complexity. Extremely peer oriented, they are embarrassed to seem not to know or to be interested in learning. Perhaps this is why, in a kind of compensation, they mill about most of the night. Lastly, many students don't really know what it is they are looking for, and librarians end up posing the question for them. Neither party is ever sure whether it was the question the patron really wanted or needed to ask.

Luckily, the law of provinciality is not an iron law. There may not be one program or course that will allow patrons to realize all that libraries offer, but over time those people who need to use libraries learn to do so.

Ironically, there is one group of students we do reach thoroughly and effectively: hourly student staff who work at a number of library

tasks. Few learn about the library widely or deeply, but they do get to share our perspective. Very few remain indifferent, and most give the library their loyalty and interest. In a sort of straw poll, some of the student staff made these comments:

I dislike being unable to find something for a patron.

I find that since my knowledge of the library has increased, I use it more myself for research than I did before working here.

I love that libraries have phone books from other cities. I love it when someone wants an obscure address in Houston, Texas.

I'm not blown away by bureaucratic obstacles any more.

Since I've worked here, I now suspect that when they say they don't have it, they really do, but I'm dealing with an inept worker. Someone somewhere knows. I just have to keep asking.

I've gotten so I can almost predict what they're going to ask.

For some strange reason, I'm able to get my books back on time now.

What I've learned from working here is that people are basically dishonest and lazy.

I hate patrons who want everything real fast.

Students are messy and lazy and can't keep simple things in order. I've gotten so I'm satisfied when things are organized.

I've learned a lot. I can find information that I need, especially with the use of indexes. I've learned how to catalog my record collection.

I'm much more sympathetic to librarians' roles and their knowledge of the system than I was before I worked here.

This last, of course, is what we've all been waiting to hear.

Preserving Our Faculties

Glenn Read, *Latin American Studies Area Specialist*

How does the teaching faculty view the Library? Does the Library adequately fulfill its role as a reservoir of human knowledge? How does it measure up in terms of the quality and quantity of service it provides?

These are not easy questions to answer, and when one does attempt to answer them the inherent dangers of overgeneralization become readily apparent. In the absence of any definitive surveys of user satisfaction or interviews with faculty groups or individuals, we must fall back on what is, in the final analysis, at the very heart of the matter—our own self-image as a library and service institution.

Whatever perceptions our faculty friends have of the Library must surely be a reflection of the ways in which we librarians and staff, individually and collectively, see ourselves and our own sense of purpose. In the last decade or two we all have been witness to a greatly expanded concept of library service, particularly in academic and research libraries. In the early 1960's the term "library specialist" entered into our lexicon. At first, the term was applied principally to subject or area specialists, suggesting that librarians with that appellation had received some additional training or degrees in a certain subject field, or had special knowledge of certain parts of the world. The term "bibliographer" was also applied to this category of librarians. This interest in specialization coincided with the growing trend among academic libraries to assume the principal role in book selection, an area heretofore reserved for the teaching faculty. At the close of the decade the term "specialist" was also applied to librarians with training in cybernetics, computer programming, multi-media materials, personnel work, and a host of other fields.

In reality, librarians have always been specialists in some field of information management. Some have concentrated in acquisitions or cataloging, developing their own special skills on the job. Others have specialized in reference service, or service to specific groups or clientele: children, the blind, undergraduates, ethnic or racial minorities, chemists, lawyers, the business community. All of us deal with the organization and management of information that we, in turn, provide to our library patrons. In recognition of this essential fact, many library schools have, over the last few years, changed their names to schools of "library and information science" or "information management." Through a gradual process of self awareness we have finally come to that point of recognition that we are all, and at once, librarians, specialists *and* managers.

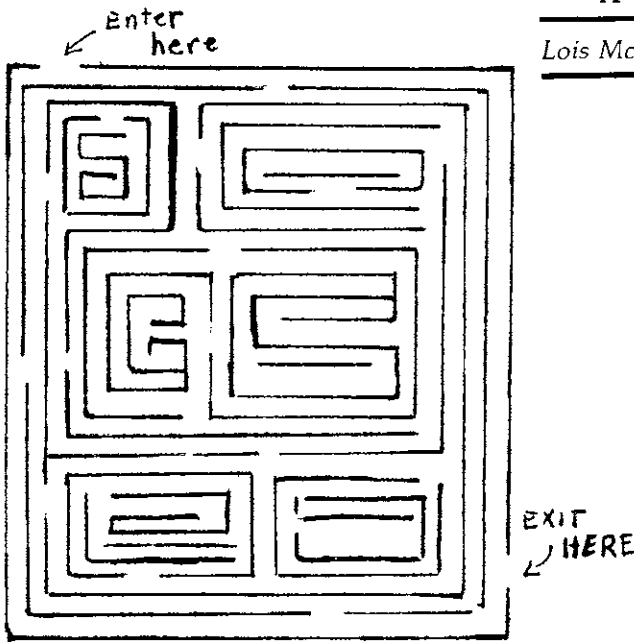
The term "librarian," however, is the one that gives us our corporate identity, the realization that we all share in a common interest and goal—to serve. Service to others has always been, and will continue to be, our *raison d'être*, the hallmark of our existence. Be we managers, specialists, or whatever we choose to call ourselves, our value and effectiveness to the faculty, just as to all our clientele, will be judged not solely on our abilities as book selectors, as catalogers or as organizers and retrievers of information, but on our capacity to "serve," with everything that the term implies.

The use of special titles for librarians, or "working titles," as we sometimes call them, should be an indication that our profession is making a conscious, concerted and continuing effort to improve quality in each and every facet of our work. If this is really the case, then steady improvement in our service should be discernible by the faculty. If we have managed, by our words and our actions, to demonstrate our interest and concern for the needs of each and every faculty member with whom we come

continued on page 6

A Variety of Viewpoints

Lois McCune, Automated Processing

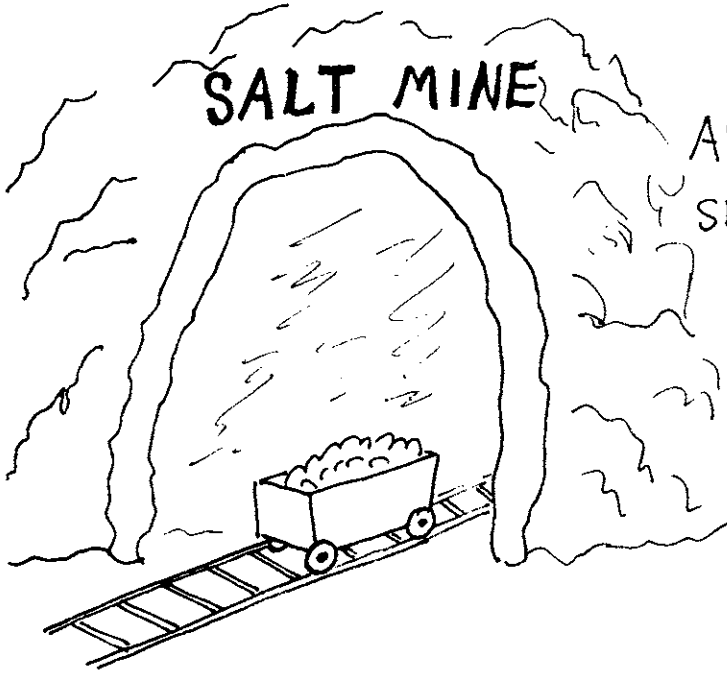


THE FIRST-TIME VISITOR'S VIEWPOINT

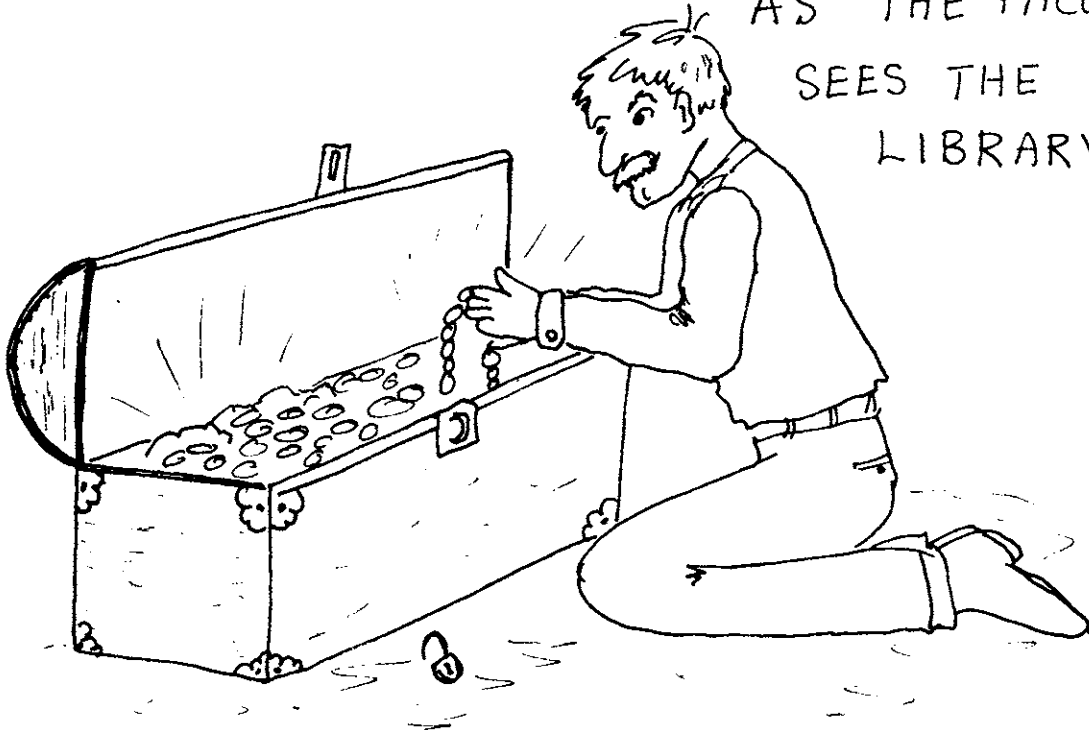


FIRST-TIME USER

SALT MINE



AS THE WORKERS
SEE THE LIBRARY



AS THE FACULTY
SEES THE
LIBRARY

- Wanda
Furd

in contact, then we might well claim a modest success for our efforts.

How have we manifested our concern for better service? Does the faculty perception of this service match our own perceptions of the nature and quality of that service? Are our assessments of these faculty perceptions honest and objective? The answers to these last two questions are, of course, purely speculative. In an attempt to answer the first question, let us briefly review some of these services to the faculty.

The selection of library materials is undoubtedly the area of greatest mutual interest for librarians and teaching faculty. For the library to be successful in this area it must first earn the confidence and trust of the faculty through its ability to select and acquire the best materials to support teaching and research. Book selectors must work closely with their client colleagues to learn their teaching interests and the nature of their research. They must encourage individual faculty members to suggest new titles for acquisition, and they must work to apprise the faculty of important new acquisitions through book displays, acquisitions lists, memoranda, or whatever other means they have at their disposal. With a selector-client relationship that now extends back over twenty years, one is reasonably safe in suggesting that the librarian as selector *has* gained the trust and respect of the faculty. The more active the selector becomes in faculty affairs, the more personal attention he or she devotes to the needs of each client. The more time allocated for reading and study in the area of selection, the more effective the selector becomes as an instrument of library service.

Faculty interest in the library, of course, extends beyond the realm of book selection. The faculty member may need materials for research that are not always held by the library, and may wish to have certain items rush ordered or cataloged. Information on library loan policies, reserves, or photocopying may be requested. The librarian who is familiar with all

aspects of library operations can see to it that these needs are attended to promptly and expeditiously, either by referring the faculty member to the proper library department or by involving him or herself directly in the process. In either event the librarian must be willing to assume responsibility for making sure that these needs are met completely and satisfactorily. We must make the faculty member's concerns our concerns.

Lamentably, this has not always been done, and in a large organization such as our own, requests for various forms of assistance must often pass through many hands before reaching a final conclusion. Sometimes we must play the role of "expediter" to pave the way toward a successful resolution of the matter.

When we fail to order a desired title promptly, or neglect to notify the faculty member immediately upon its receipt, we begin to lose the confidence of that client. If faculty members, when coming to us for assistance, are made to feel that they are intruding on our time, they can only conclude that their library priorities are not our priorities. Are our relationships with the faculty always conducted in a spirit of warmth, friendliness and understanding? Are we genuinely sympathetic to their needs? Do we always greet each faculty member with a relaxed smile and a friendly word? Do we try to anticipate faculty needs in the Library, not just through the books we select, but in other services we provide? Does direct service to our patrons always rank higher in our priorities than the many other things we may be called upon to do in the course of a normal day? If we can always answer "Yes!" to these questions then we need have little worry that faculty perceptions of the Library will be anything less than positive.

Those of us who provide reference service to the faculty must constantly be aware that the quality of that service is dependent upon our willingness and ability to keep abreast of important new writings in our particular fields of expertise. Like the faculty and students, we

must be avid readers, but readers who read widely, wisely and well. Our knowledge of those subjects for which we are responsible must always be honed to a fine edge. We must not only know how to use the reference tools at our disposal with the utmost facility, we must be able to instruct others in their use. Finding those precious moments to read are not the easiest part of our work, but a systematic plan of reading is essential if we are to effectively advise and guide others in the selection of materials for their own study and research.

While most of us, I'm sure, recognize our own shortcomings as librarians, it is not always possible to perceive how we, in turn, appear in the eyes of the faculty. Do they note our shortcomings as well as our successes? Do they see us as the friendly, courteous, knowledgeable and

dependable professionals we would like to see ourselves as? These are perceptions within perceptions. It is enough, I think, to lay aside the question of images and work honestly and constructively to perfect our skills, to recognize that we are here, first and foremost, to serve others. If we are prepared to demonstrate our interest and concern for faculty needs, to steadfastly bear in mind the ultimate objectives of our work, no matter how much it may seem divorced from public service, then I think the confidence, trust and good will of the faculty will be gained. Through initiative, imagination and innovation we can improve and possibly expand our levels of service in ways that will not only be perceived, but greatly appreciated by our colleagues among the teaching faculty.

Let Them Speak for Themselves

It is a common belief that a suggestion box is a good way for the staff of a library to monitor patron satisfaction. Because they maintain their anonymity, people can be perfectly frank in expressing their concerns and complaints.

Below are a few selected comments which were deposited in the Undergraduate Library suggestion box. From them, we can form an idea of what our patrons (or at least some of them) really think of us.

—editor

I think there should be a disco room in the library.

Why is there a sink up in government publications?

Could you please do something about the people who stick bubble gum on the bottom of the desks? When it falls off it could ruin a perfectly good outfit.

Why is it that this place is always so quiet? How do you expect to draw the real crowds and make some dough? No lights, no music, no dance floor!! This is the dullest disco I've ever heard (or not heard)..

As this is one of the wonderful air conditioned places that people can get comfortable in, and with the complication of studying, people are sleeping here. That doesn't bother me. However, they inevitably drool on the desks. . . . How about a 'sponge station' in various areas in order to remove this goo?

Now that summer has arrived more and more young ladies are wearing less and less clothing

in the library. It has become a great distraction to me as well as many other students. Would it be possible to have a separate section for those who wish to expose themselves or a specific hour for nudity?

What is the meaning of life and where can I find it in the library?

I was recently approached by a member of a New York based Christian rug cleaning cult seeking my membership in his holy congregation. Do you have any information on such an organization?

I think you should have more profane magazines around.

The library lacks an original attention getter. It has no imagination, and what's worse is that it loses money as well. This idea will solve both problems: construct a revolving restaurant on top of the General Collections. Here, atop the 11th floor, a marvelous tourist attraction would be created. It would increase student interest and release us from the stomach aches of the cafeteria gut-bombs. Students with overdue books and fines could work off their debts as waiters and waitresses, too!

Hey, what's with all these books?! This library is crowded enough.

Switch completely to the Dewey Decimal System.

It is my opinion that the library is great for studying, with its wide variety of study-type atmospheres and readily accessible volumes of helpful literature in every imaginable language (except possibly Bantu, spoken by a small tribe from the Dark Continent). My one problem is that the quiet, stagnant air throughout the building and stairwells, coupled with the boring contents of college texts, tends to put me to sleep. I think the situation would be remedied if a number of airtight, oxygen-rich study cubicles were constructed for people like me.

I like the changes you made. I too have been getting the urge to move furniture.

If your convenient repository of ideas, rages, and mischief had been here ten years when I was a student, my friends and I could have saved hours of time and hundreds of dollars that we spent commiserating in the cafeteria downstairs.

I believe this suggestion area is an excellent means of communication and it is greatly appreciated by all of us at I.U. Many libraries aren't open to suggestions or take immediate action as you do. Thanks.

Your suggestion board is even more fun than "Dear Abby."

Thanks for letting these writers relieve some of their anxieties at your expense.

Patrons Are People; How to Be a Model Librarian, prepared by a committee of the Minneapolis Public Library Staff. Chicago: American Library Association, 1945. (School of Library and Information Science Library Z712.M6)

Book Review

Amy Novick, Archives of Traditional Music

Patrons Are People; How To Be a Model Librarian undeniably has a promising title. After all, who doesn't want to be a model for his or her profession? And indeed, patrons are peo-

ple. It is of utmost importance for every public servant to bear that in mind, particularly while at work.

The topic is timeless, and the reader should therefore not discredit the work on the basis of the fact that it is thirty-seven years old. The Graduate Library School thought enough of it to acquire it thirty years after its publication. No, there are better reasons to discredit this book.

In fairness, we must realize that *Patrons Are People* was not intended for us. It was written by a committee of the Minneapolis Public Library for in-house use. It was the publisher, the American Library Association, which issued it widely, determining that it has "...something which every library can use and which it is believed libraries will welcome." Thus it traveled the 600 miles from its home to us.

One need not be overly sensitive to notice that the Model Librarian in *Patrons Are People* is consistently a woman, in both word and illustration. Fortunately, in only one place does she sport a bun and glasses. In every instance, though, her shoes can be described by no other adjective than "sensible." Given the tone of the work, it is questionable that the authors intentionally employed the stereotype. Could it be that because of the war there were only female librarians at the Minneapolis Public Library in 1945? Perhaps. The open minded reader will overlook this, and possibly even dismiss it as a historical curiosity.

The book presents a series of situations normally encountered in the everyday life of the average librarian. For each, we are told how the Model Librarian reacts, often with a verbatim recount of her response. To the patron who insists there is no entry for Shakespeare in the catalog, the Model Librarian sympathetically says, "No card for Shakespeare! There should be. Do you mind showing me where you

looked?" Her antithesis, the Muddled Librarian would "raise her eyebrows and inform him haughtily that of course there is a card for Shakespeare in the catalog." While the authors were successful at presenting the material in a light, humorous manner, which was obviously their intention, they were also successful at being simplistic and condescending. It makes one wonder at the perceived caliber of professionalism among the librarians at the Minneapolis Public who prompted the penning of this opus. Need the professional be told, "The Model Librarian does not come equipped with a built-in superiority complex. When tempted to acquire one she remembers that through library portals pass the world's greatest minds, as well as some of its lesser ones"? Perhaps it is vain, but one must hope that the typical librarian is worthy of more credit for sense and tact than the authors seem to believe.

The final insult lies in the nagging feeling that the authors themselves don't believe that patrons really are people. In subtle ways they seem to tell us that it's really all right to harbor patronizing feelings toward our patrons, as long as we don't let them know it. "Sweet young thing," for example, refers to a teenager who, it is insisted, needs respect and understanding. A façade of courtesy and concern will surely get the librarian through the day, but shouldn't the authors have instead encouraged the cultivation of a genuinely healthy attitude toward the public?

In spite of its faults, *Patrons Are People* is at least refreshing. It is a welcome contrast to its modern counterparts: those weighty treatises on interpersonal relations which are so laden with jargon and theory one is reluctant to pick them up. Here is a straightforward guide for dealing with a problem we face in our daily work.

News

The following have been elected to InULA offices for the 82/83 year:

President—Lou Malcomb

Vice President—Gail Oltmanns

Secretary—Leota Boesen

Treasurer—Fred Musto

Member at large—Barbara Dewey (for a 2 year term)

In addition, Ruth Davison will be serving the second year of her two year term as member at large, and Stella Bentley will serve a one year term as a member at large.