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Librarian-book reviewers and librarianship

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LIBRARIAN-BOOK REVIEWERS AND LIBRARIANSHIP

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Library and Information Science

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Library and Information Science

by

Eric Berlin

December 2004

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ABSTRACT

LIBRARIAN-BOOK REVIEWERS AND LIBRARIANSHIP

by Eric Berlin

Two Web-based voluntary surveys—of librarians who write book reviews and of academic library administrators—reveal an array of opinions on such topics as: classification of book reviews as a “professional activity” within librarianship; how book reviews should be prepared and written; what the book reviewer's current role is; how that role fits into the hiring, tenure, and promotion process; and the future of that role in a world of online reviews. By analyzing the survey responses of librarian-book reviewers and academic library administrators, an understanding can be gained of how satisfied librarians and academic library administrators are with the role of book reviewing within librarianship and how, if at all, that role should change in an age of online and electronic content and reviews.

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Introduction

No matter what kind of future digital technology may bring to the world of libraries, it will take a great deal of time to sever the bond between the librarian and the book in people's minds. Librarians, the traditional gatekeepers of information, are thought of as guides down paths of information, primarily in the format of the written word. As knowledgeable guides, it should be no surprise to anyone that librarians extend this role to the written page in the form of book reviews. As librarians publish book reviews that both library selectors utilize in building collections and ordinary readers use to either purchase works or borrow from library collections, the extension of this traditional role is completed. But is it an essential role of modern librarianship? Should it be considered a professional activity, one worthy of being used towards the advancement of one's career?

Further, are librarian-book reviewers content with the role of the book reviewer as it is, or would they like to see changes? With the massive technological improvements and changes taking place both within and outside of library walls, what does the future look like for librarian-book reviewers? How do library administrators view the role of the librarian-book reviewer within academic librarianship? A review of the current literature in this area revealed little, if any, attempt to answer these questions. This led to the development of two Web-based questionnaires designed to elicit responses from librarians who write book reviews and those that hire and promote them.

Literature Review

Several searches of the Library Literature database brought up a host of materials that barely brush the topic of the role of the librarian-book reviewer within librarianship, but never really tackle the subject head-on. Many articles focus on the standards and issues encountered in writing book reviews but neglect to broach what the role of the reviewer is and what it might hope to be.

“Reviewing by Number,” by Peter Sieruta (2003), is by a measure unique in that it goes “behind the scenes” to explain the review rating system for *The Horn Book*, a compendium of reviews. This is a measured step, at the least, towards setting uniform standards for reviews among respected publications. Donia Clark (2002), in “The Essentials of Book Reviewing,” goes further in attempting to set standards for book reviews across the board. For example, reviewers are advised to conduct research, read materials thoroughly, and to think about the audience the book is written for (Clark, 2002, p. 1).

However, one must go to a pair of articles, both found in *Library Journal*, to find an examination of the thoughts of reviewers about the activity of book reviewing. “Don’t Blame the Reviewer” gets into the arena of the reviewer in that it defends the standards used by reviewers for *Library Journal* (2003). However, it is “Reviewers on Review,” a brief *Library Journal* article, that finally touches on the opinions that the reviewers themselves have toward the reviewing process (Fialkoff, 2003). Such tantalizing morsels are offered from reviewers about the relation between reviewing and librarianship as, “[R]eviewing has exposed me to material I wouldn’t have chosen myself. It has made me

a better selector,” and “[I]t's not for the money, which is nonexistent. [It's] to convey the gist of the work, as briefly and economically as possible, so that the potential purchasers/readers may decide for themselves whether or not the particular title is going to be of value for their purposes” (Fialkoff, 2003, p. 62).

Other articles, such as “The Power of Print Media [Book Reviews in National News Media],” trump up the power and value of book reviews—in this case tying book reviews in *The New York Times Book Review* to increased book sales—as well as the value of the book reviewer (Abbott, 2002). Peggy Johnson (2003) follows the same vein by stating, “[R]eviews are important for increasing awareness of new books and for aiding in selection” (p. 2).

A large number of articles, many published in *The Journal of Information Ethics*, look at the ethical dilemmas book reviewers may come across from time to time. These articles tend to look at a portion of the reviewing process and not at the role of reviewers or the state of the review itself. Byrne's “Reviewing Academic Books: Are There Ethical Issues?” in the Spring 2002 *Journal of Information Ethics* tackles the purported bias by some scholarly publications regarding decisions to review works of faculty largely from the more prestigious universities. Meanwhile, Kenneth Kister's (2002) “The Conscience of A Reference Reviewer,” in the same issue of *The Journal of Information Ethics*, looks at the possibility of unconscious bias in writing reviews.

Recent surveys involving book reviews again focus on the reviewing process and some of its issues and dilemmas and not on the role or opinions of book reviewers. Examples include Paul Jenkin's (1999) “Book Reviews and Faculty Book Selection

[Results of a Faculty Survey at College of Mount St. Joseph]", Judith Serebnick's (1992) "Selection and Holdings of Small Publisher's Books in OCLC Libraries: A Study of the Influence of Reviews, Publishers, and Vendors", and Sherry Crow's (1986) "The Reviewing of Controversial Juvenile Books; A Survey of Four Major Review Journals."

Research Question

Because little recent scholarship on the topic of the activity of book reviewing and its place within librarianship was found, a research question was determined: what is the current role of the librarian-book reviewer within librarianship? Further questions to be explored under this general umbrella are: Is the role changing in an online age, and if so, how? What is the status of book reviewing in terms of hiring, promotion, and tenure? And, overall, are librarians and administrators satisfied with the role of the librarian-reviewer, or would they like to see changes?

Methodology

Based on the results of the literature reviewed above, it was determined that the best, easiest, and most efficient way to obtain the opinions of a wide range of librarian-book reviewers and library administrators was to construct two Web-based survey forms that librarians and administrators could access, complete, and submit at their leisure.

The first survey aimed to gather opinions of a wide range of librarian-book reviewers who work or have worked in diverse environments, such as public, school, academic, and special libraries. The second survey was aimed at a much narrower

audience: academic library administrators. Two surveys were devised so that a wide range of opinions from librarian-reviewers could be looked at, while at the same time the opinions of a subset of those who hire, promote, and determine tenure standards (academic library administrators) could also be studied.

For both surveys, a first section of questions was designed to capture some basic background and professional experience that could be used to see where the spectrum of opinions was coming from (for the full list of questions from both surveys, please see Appendix A: Survey of Librarian-Book Reviewers and Appendix B: Survey of Academic Library Administrators). For the librarian-reviewer study, these questions sought to learn the type of library or institution in which the librarian works, the general function the librarian performs, the publications for which the librarian typically reviews, the number of years the librarian has been writing reviews, and the number of reviews ordinarily written per month. To gain further background, the subject(s) or topic(s) that the librarian usually reviews was sought, as well as how the librarian-reviewer came to begin writing reviews in the first place. A final question in this section asked about the specific preparations the librarian-reviewer undertakes for each review. For the academic library administrator study, the title and position within the academic library or institution was asked for. His or her professional background was asked for, as well as any experience had in the writing of book reviews.

Because both surveys existed as a Web page, the options for filling out a response for each question had to be carefully constructed. Some questions, such as the one asking librarian-reviewers the number of years that they have been writing reviews, provided

radio buttons as answer options, which allowed participants of the survey to select only one option, such as “Two to Five Years.” Other questions, such as the one asking librarian-reviewers which publication(s) they typically review for, provided checkbox options, which allowed participants to select more than one choice. Still other questions provided a short answer space for participants to type in their responses while, finally, open-ended essay style questions contained a larger space in which participants were able, should they have desire, to type in as much feedback as they wished.

A second set of questions for both surveys was open-ended. For the survey of librarian-book reviewers, opinions were sought on such topics as the role of review writing within librarianship, where the role of the librarian-book reviewer currently stands, and where it may lead in the future. A specific question focused on any changes the librarian-reviewer may or may not see in how book reviews will be written and published based upon the proliferation of online content. A final question allowed participants to enter any additional comments. For the survey of academic library administrators, the second set of questions focused upon the importance of book reviewing in the hiring and promotion/tenure process at their particular institution. One question asked if book reviewing was considered a professional activity, a service activity, or something else, and why. Open ended questions sought whether or not the administrator was satisfied with their institution’s policies in terms of book reviewing, whether the current role of book reviewing is appropriate for the profession, and whether or not he or she would like to see changes made. Two final questions in this survey asked for the participant’s views on book reviewing during working hours, and what, if

any, changes may be taking place in the role of book reviewing in the age of online content and online book reviews.

A message at the top of each survey form (both existed as Web page: the librarian-book reviewer survey was hosted by a server at San Jose State University; the academic library administrator survey was hosted by a company called Survey Monkey) explained the nature of the survey, who participants could contact to answer any questions, and how they could receive, should they wished to, the results of the survey. It is also explained that when participants clicked the “Submit” link at the bottom of the form, this signifies voluntary participation in the survey and releases permission to use all responses in a research paper format. It was also made clear that all data received would be held in a secure environment and that the identities of all participants would remain anonymous (names and e-mail addresses were not sought on the survey form). Actual responses from some of the participants' comments in both surveys were used to supplement the numerical data. Those comments will be found in quotation marks with no further attribution to maintain anonymity.

Prior to conducting each survey, approval was requested and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), based out of San Jose State University's Office of Graduate Studies (for the full text of the IRB approval letter, please see Appendix C: Institutional Review Board [IRB] Approval Letter). IRB approval is contingent on proving that studies involving “human subjects” will not harm participants or endanger their anonymity in any way.

To get the word out that the surveys existed and were ready to be filled out, e-mails were sent to a number of list serves to which many librarians subscribe. The e-mail message could then, in effect, be sent to many librarians easily. The e-mail messages contained a brief description of the surveys and an invitation to click a link (or place the Web address within a URL bar) that would open the survey Web sites. The list serves chosen are all maintained by the American Library Association and were selected in the attempt to reach the widest range of librarian-book reviewers possible for the librarian-book reviewer survey, and as many academic library administrators as possible for the academic library administrator survey. The list serves that the e-mail message or the librarian-book reviewer survey was sent to included those catering to academic, public, school, federal, special, and new librarians. For example, the e-mail message was sent to ULS-L, the University Libraries list; COLLDEV, a Collection Development in Public Libraries list; and ABYATF-L, an Adult Books for Young Adults Task Force list. For the academic library administrator survey, list serves were utilized that catered to that narrow group, including CJC-L, a Community and Junior Colleges list, and CLS, a College Libraries list.

There were 177 original and unique responses to the librarian-book reviewer survey. However, 4 were eliminated from the results because an inadequate number of survey questions were answered, leaving a final number of 173 respondents for this survey. All percentages used in the survey results section relative to the librarian-book reviewer survey are based on 173 respondents unless otherwise noted.

There were 105 original and unique responses to the academic administrator survey. After 14 were eliminated for various reasons, there remained 91 survey responses, which form the basis for this survey. Percentages for the academic library administrator survey are based on 91 respondents, unless otherwise notes.

Finally, it should be explained that the term “book review” was used in many of the survey questions. Reviews, of course, are being written every day of audio material, video material, electronic material, and other media. Therefore, while the results reported here may hold true for these other forms of media, that it must not be assumed so.

Background and Experience: Librarian-Book Reviewers Survey

While the librarian-book reviewer survey was designed for and marketed to a wide-range of librarian-reviewers, the results of the survey showed that the participants work predominantly in academic libraries. In fact, 71.6% of participants cited an academic library workplace, with public libraries the second largest group at 17.9%, followed by school libraries at 2.8%. Other types of libraries, such as Government Science Research Library, Special Collections/Archives, Medical, State, and Regional Library Consortium were reported by 7.5% of participants. One participant was a library consultant.

Table 1 – Type of Library (Librarian-Book Reviewers Survey)
[Number of participants = 173]

Type of Library	No. of Responses (%)
Academic	124 (71.6)
Public	31 (17.9)
School	5 (2.8)
Other	13 (7.5)

The general arena of work or function within the library for librarian-book reviewers found the largest number of participants to work in Public Services, at 60.1%. Administration was a distant second at 15%, followed by Technical Services (6.3%), Technology Services (2.8%), Collection Development/Management (2.8%), Manuscripts Processing (less than 1%), Library Development (less than 1%), and a combination of functions (5.2%). Eleven participants, or 6.3%, did not disclose their job function.

For the purposes of this survey, therefore, it can be assumed that many of the participants perform reference work or work with the public as a substantial portion of their working day.

Table 2 – Work Function (Librarian-Book Reviewers Survey)
[Number of participants = 173]

Work Function	No. of Responses (%)
Public Services	104 (60.1)
Administration	26 (15)
Technical Services	11 (6.3)
Technology Services	5 (2.8)
Collection Development / Mgt.	5 (2.8)
Manuscripts Processing	Less than 1%
Library Development	Less than 1%
Combination	9 (5.2)
Didn't respond	11 (6.3)

As far as the number of years of experience goes, the largest number of participants of the librarian-reviewer survey, 30.6%, have been writing book reviews between two and five years. Those with between 10 and 20 years of experience were the next highest group at 19.6%, followed by 5–10 years experience (18.4%), 1–2 years (13.2%), more than 20 years (9.2%), and less than a year (6.3%). Four participants, or 2.3%, did not reveal their years of experience.

These data reveal a wealth of experience among participants, with nearly 50% of participants having at least five years of experience and nearly one third with a minimum of 10 years experience writing book reviews. It appears that book reviewing is an activity that this group of librarians has done over a considerable period of time.

Table 3 – Experience Writing Book Reviews (Librarian-Book Reviewers Survey)
[Number of participants = 173]

Range	No. of Responses (%)
More than twenty years	16 (9.2)
Ten to twenty years	34 (19.6)
Five to ten years	32 (18.4)
Two to five years	53 (30.6)
One to two years	23 (13.2)
Less than one year	11 (6.3)
Didn't respond	4 (2.3)

A majority of participants of the librarian-reviewer survey, 57.8%, write less than one review per month. The next highest group were those who write one review per month (16.1%), followed by one to two per month (13.2%), two to five per month (10.4%), five to ten (1.1%), and more than ten reviews per month (less than 1%). Less than 1% did not reveal the number of reviews they typically write each month.

Given these results, it would have perhaps been useful to have asked whether reviewers wished they could write reviews more often, or if they are content with the number that they currently write. That hypothetical question, paired with the evident passion for reviewing many participants evidenced, would have likely been illuminating. While a number of participants commented on whether they spent time at work writing reviews or if they did it entirely during nonhours, it would also have been instructive to have specifically asked this question of all participants. Participants of the academic library administrator survey were asked this question, however.

It is also worth noting that had the distribution of work function amongst librarian-reviewers been different, the frequency of books reviews would likely have been different. For example, had the survey group been more heavily composed of school librarians and less heavily composed of academic librarians, it is likely that respondents would have reported a higher frequency of book reviewing overall.

Table 4 – Frequency of Reviews (Librarian-Book Reviewers Survey)
[Number of participants = 173]

Frequency	No. of Responses (%)
More than ten per month	Less than 1%
Five to ten per month	2 (1.1)
Two to five per month	18 (10.4)
One to two per month	23 (13.2)
One per month	28 (16.1)
Fewer than one per month	100 (57.8)
Didn't respond	Less than 1%

Participants of the librarian-book reviewer survey cover a wide range of subject matter in the reviews that they write. Tied for the most popular subject matter, at 21.9%, is some form of librarianship. Therefore, it can be observed among participants that there are a large percentage of librarians writing for the direct benefit of other librarians and their on-the-job activities. Works of librarianship that participants report reviewing includes reference, collection development, distance education, information literacy, digital libraries, library systems, library science, and library instruction. Science books—covering a wide range of subject matter—share the top spot with librarianship and are also reviewed by 21.9% of participants.

The next highest group is those who review some form of reference work, at 13.8% (the subjects of the reference works vary widely). Therefore, taking together reference works and works directly relating to librarianship, it is seen that over one third of participants write largely for the librarian community in terms of helping collection developers, reference librarians, and other library professionals to learn what is out there and what is worthwhile to read and/or select.

History books form the next group, at 12.1%. Technology/Internet falls next, at 11.5%, followed by Young Adult fiction (10.4%) and Juvenile and YA nonfiction (7.5%), which is a notably high percentage focused on YA works—when taken together—considering the relatively low number of participants of the librarian-book reviewer survey who work in public and school libraries. The next subjects down the list are Business (6.3%), Religion (5.7%), Social Science (5.7%), Cultural Studies (5.2%), Literary Criticism (3.4%), and Journalism/Media/Communications (2.8%). The subjects of Music, Environmental themes, Children's Fiction, and Law each had 2.3% of participants reviewing for them. Sixty-seven other subject areas, ranging from Child Development to the Occult, came in at less than 2%.

So while there is an extremely wide range of subjects covered by participants of the librarian-book reviewer survey, it can be noted that librarianship (21.9%) and reference works (13.8%) both are near the top of the list and directly tie into the work of libraries.

Table 5 – Subject of Reviews (Librarian-Book Reviewers Survey)
[Number of participants = 173]
[Note: participants were allowed to select more than one subject]

Subject	No. of Responses (%)
Librarianship	38 (21.9)
Science	38 (21.9)
Fiction	27 (15.6)
Reference	24 (13.8)
History	21 (12.1)
Technology/Internet	20 (11.5)
YA Fiction	18 (10.4)
Juvenile & YA Non-fiction	13 (7.5)
Business	11 (6.3)
Religious	10 (5.7)
Social Science	10 (5.7)
Cultural Studies	9 (5.2)
Literary Criticism	6 (3.4)
Journalism/Media/Communications	5 (2.8)
Music	4 (2.3)
Environmental	4 (2.3)
Children's Fiction	4 (2.3)
Law	4 (2.3)
67 Other Subjects	Less than 2%
Didn't respond	Less than 1%

Where a librarian-reviewer publishes may have a great impact on how the librarian-reviewer views the process, and whether or not he or she sees the need for great change in either the role of the reviewer within librarianship or how reviews themselves should be conducted in the future. *Library Journal*, at 26%, again a publication by and for librarians and libraries, led the list of the publications for which participants in the librarian-reviewer survey review. Next, at 20.8%, is *Choice*, a publication designed for academic librarians. It is likely that so many participants review for *Choice* because a high percentage of this group of librarian-book reviewers works in academic libraries.

These data indicate again that a large number of participants write largely for other librarians in the attempt to both strengthen their own writing, research, and knowledge of subject matter as well as the collections and professional knowledge of librarians at other institutions. A large majority of the other publications listed by participants are similarly geared towards a readership of librarians.

Next on the list are *E-streams* (15%), *School Library Journal* (8.6%), *American Reference Books Annual* (ARBA; 6.9%), *Voice of Youth Advocates* (VOYA; 5.7%), *Reference Review* (5.7%), *Booklist* (2.8%), and *Journal of Academic Librarianship* (2.8%). A vast swath of publications, 117, from *Midwest Book Review—Online* (MBR) to *Medieval Feminist Forum*, was listed by less than 2% of participants. Therefore, we can see a great range in both the subject matter covered and in the kinds of publications for which the librarian-reviewers in the survey write.

Table 6 – Where Librarian-Reviewers Publish (Librarian-Book Reviewers Survey)
[Number of participants = 173]
[Note: participants were allowed to record more than one publication]

Publication	No. of Responses (%)
<i>Library Journal</i>	45 (26)
<i>Choice</i>	36 (20.8)
<i>E-streams</i>	26 (15)
<i>School Library Journal</i>	15 (8.6)
<i>American Reference Books Annual</i> (ARBA)	12 (6.9)
<i>Voice of Youth Advocates</i> (VOYA)	10 (5.7)
<i>Reference Review</i>	10 (5.7)
<i>Booklist</i>	5 (2.8)
<i>Journal of Academic Librarianship</i> (JAL)	5 (2.8)
117 Other Publications	Less than 2%
Didn't Respond	Less than 1%

While largely tied to subject matter, the time and preparation a book reviewer puts into each review gives an indication of the commitment to the activity and begins to provide insight as to what it takes for an opinion and analysis of a book to translate from a reviewer's mind to the printed page (or online website).

The time reported by participants of the librarian-book reviewer survey to complete each review must be looked at from the perspective that knowledge of subject matter can vary for each participant, as can length of book, and personal experience with an author or subject. It also must be noted that only broad ranges can be looked at to gain an idea. Finally, some reviewers included the reading of the work itself in their responses, while others felt that “preparing and writing a review” excluded the time spent reading the work to be reviewed.

One interesting remark from a participant relating to this topic was that it takes “...more time than I have at my disposal.”

Table 7 – Time Spent Writing Reviews (Librarian-Book Reviewers Survey)
[Number of participants = 173]

Time	No. of Responses (%)
Up to Three Hours	49 (28.3)
Up to Five Hours	25 (14.4)
Up to Ten Hours	39 (22.5)
Up to Twenty Hours	7 (4)
Twenty or More Hours	10 (5.7)
Hours not Specified / Varies Widely / Hard to Say	37 (21.3)
Didn't Respond	6 (3.4)

Taking all of the above factors in mind, it is still notable that nearly one third of participants spend anywhere from between up to 10 and 20 or more hours (a combination of the “Up to Ten Hours,” “Up to Twenty Hours,” and Twenty of More Hours” in Table VII) to write each review, a sizeable amount of time.

In preparing to write a review, it can be taken for granted that the reviewer reads the work, or at least the portions he or she feels are necessary for writing a thorough review. One participant noted reading each work at least twice before beginning to write. For some forms of reference work, participants claimed to be able to skim the work, read the first or last chapter, or use some other method (such as carefully checking selected citations) for coming to conclusions about the work. For most, however, the norm seemed to be to read the work, more or less all the way through, and then begin the process of reviewing.

Table 8 – Preparing Book Reviews (Librarian-Book Reviewers Survey)

[Number of participants = 173]

[Note: participants were allowed to record more than kind of one preparation]

Preparation	No. of Responses (%)
Read / Skim Titles and Related Titles / Reviews of Related Titles	118 (68.2)
Read / Skim Other Works by Author	49 (28.3)
Will Read Existing Reviews of the Work to be Reviewed	48 (27.7)
Examine Background and Qualifications of Author / Read Abstracts / PR Materials / See Where Book Held	44 (25.4)
Won't Read Reviews of Work Before Drafting Review	25 (14.4)
Check Footnotes, Citations, Bibliography, Facts	19 (10.9)
Read Reviews of Author's Other Works / Past Editions	13 (7.5)
Discuss Work with Colleagues / Experts	5 (2.8)
Peruse Author's Website / Conduct Internet Research	4 (2.3)
Didn't respond	Less than 1

The most common way to prepare to write reviews, according to 68.2% participants of the librarian-book reviewer survey, is to read through related titles and the reviews of those titles. Many of these respondents felt that having some level of comfort in the subject area was essential for placing the reviewed work in a proper perspective. In fact, there were a number of participants who insisted that one must have subject area expertise in order to write a good review. One participant sums up this sentiment by saying, “[S]ince I review a very narrow subject area that involves my daily work, I know the current literature in the field.”

Research of the author, of the subject area, of any PR material that might be available, examining citations and footnotes, and fact checking was another method (for 25.4%) of doing very much the same thing. One participant's comment can show the payoff of this form of preparation: “I just reviewed a series of books. When I looked to

see what else was out there on the topic, I realized that the same company had published similar material, so I wanted to see if this was just a basic reissue or if it was new material.” From a selector’s standpoint, this would be very valuable information to have when making a purchase decision.

The biggest difference of opinion when it comes to preparation is whether or not one should read existing reviews of a work before beginning one’s own review. In fact, 14.4% of participants went out of their way to point out that they do not partake in this practice. The most often cited reason for this was that doing so might “color” or have an undue influence upon the original review that was in the process of being prepared. Of the 27.7% who do read reviews before writing, a portion claimed to do so sparingly, carefully, or rarely. Reasons cited for doing so at all were when the reviewer felt unsure of the subject matter or the author, if the author was relatively unknown, or if the reviewer wanted to “check their work” against others.

This disagreement has led some to call for standardized guidelines for writing book reviews. However, it was expressed in participants’ responses that there are standards that do apply specifically for reviews written for some of the well-known publications for which librarians review. For example, two participants made mention that Library Journal mandates a comparison to other similar authors in their reviews. Another creatively notes, “LJ reviews are haiku-like. You need to say a lot using just a few words.” School Library Journal was called to attention for having a form to follow while writing reviews. Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA) “assigns a ‘test’ review” before its reviewers may begin work.” And Choice “...has their criteria clearly

described.” However, there seems to be no evidence of any overriding criteria, principles, or standards in preparing and writing book reviews.

How librarian-reviewers come to be interested in and initially partake in writing book reviews play a role in their later attitudes about the activity and perhaps its place within the wider world of librarianship.

Table 9 – How Reviewers Came to Write Reviews (Librarian-Book Reviewers Survey)

[Number of participants = 173]

[Note: participants were allowed to record more than one origin]

Origin	No. of Responses (%)
Applied to Journal Participant Was Interested In / Asked for Opportunity (includes responding to ads, list serves, etc.)	95 (54.9)
Personal Contacts (includes recruited by friends, colleagues, mentor, etc.)	55 (31.7)
Self-publishing / Writing Duties Led to It	6 (3.4)
Library Workshop / ALA Committee	5 (2.8)
Graduate School	5 (2.8)
Other	4 (2.3)
Didn't Respond	Less than 2%

The largest percentage of participants of the librarian-book reviewer survey, 54.9%, was comprised of self-starters: they saw an opportunity to write book reviews and they went for it. A smaller but still sizeable percentage, 31.7%, was invited by others to begin the practice.

Several participants mentioned a background in writing or “making a name for themselves” through writing as a reason for writing reviews. This is interesting in that many participants, in the course of their responses, selected book review writing as an excellent way to enter the world of writing for the profession.

Sitting on a committee or participating in workshops was an entry path to writing reviews for a few. One participant wrote, “NMRLS offered it as a continuing education workshop, then created a preview/review collection as a collection development tool.”

Finally, 2.8% of participants began writing book reviews during graduate school in part because review writing formed a small portion of the curriculum. One participant wrote, “One session of one grad school class focused on how to write a review.” Another wrote, “Officially, I got the review-writing bug in a graduate school class where we had to write one review a week.” It would have been interesting to have contacted graduate schools of library science to gauge administrators' and faculty's views on writing book reviews and their place within the profession. However, the fact that 2.8% of participants mentioned their place within a graduate school as a factor towards their later professional activities may in fact be somewhat emblematic of the librarian-book review writer's small, permanent yet ambiguous place within the profession.

Table 10 – Why Librarian-Reviewers Choose to Review (Librarian-Book Reviewers Survey)

[Number of participants = 173]

[Note: participants were allowed to record more than one reason]

Reason	No. of Responses (%)
Professional Contribution	125 (72.8)
Enjoy It	110 (63.5)
Publishing Credit	89 (51.4)
Compensation	13 (7.5)
Other	15 (8.6)
Didn't Respond	Less than 2%

At 72.8%, it can be seen conclusively that most librarian-reviewers, or at least the majority of the participants in the librarian-book reviewer survey, write book reviews to contribute to the profession. This evidence ties in well with both the relatively high percentage of librarian-reviewers who publish in profession-related publications (e.g., *Library Journal*, *Choice*) and the relatively high percentage of reviewers that cover some aspect of librarianship, reference materials, and other profession-related subject matter. Again, this is further indication that a large percentage of reviewers felt that they contribute to the profession by writing book reviews.

Matching the percentage who enjoy writing book reviews (63.5%) with those who do it in part for the compensation (7.5%), it can easily be seen that money has very little to do with reviewing, at least not directly. The 51.4% who report writing reviews for publishing credit ties into, at least in part, those librarians who report that writing reviews helps hone writing skills. These reviewers may have their eyes on “bigger” things, such as writing “full-blown” scholarly articles, or perhaps books. They also may wish to strengthen writing skills for other on-the-job functions, such as grant proposal writing, or simply for their own benefit. This also goes back to the participants who point to review writing as being a possible “stepping stone” to other writing opportunities.

Background and Experience: Academic Library Administrators Survey

The academic library administrator survey was designed to reveal the opinions of those librarians who hold the highest positions in academic libraries across the United States. The results show that in this regard, the survey was a success. Over two-thirds of

respondents (67%) hold the rank of Director, Assistant Director, or some other similar office, such as University Librarian, Assistant University Librarian, Head Librarian, or Deputy College Librarian. These results are instructive in that it can be inferred that the respondents work in a variety of types of academic libraries, such as universities, four-year colleges, and community colleges. A minority of respondents (19.8%) hold some other managerial position within an academic library, such as Head of Systems, Head of Reference, Head of Access Services, Head of Collection Development, or Coordinator of Public Services. The smallest group of respondents, 12.4%, reported their title to be Dean of Library Services or Dean of another library department.

Table 11 – Title (Academic Library Administrators Survey)
[Number of participants = 91]

Title	No. of Responses (%)
Director / Assistant Director / University Librarian / Assistant University Librarian / Head Librarian / Deputy College Librarian	61 (67)
Department Manager	18 (19.8)
Dean of Library Services	9 (9.1)
Dean of Another Library Department	3 (3.3)

The greatest number of respondents to the academic library administrator survey (37.4%) had held their current position between two and five years. The next highest group was those administrators who have held their position for one to two years (17.6%), followed by five to ten years (14.2%), up to one year and ten to twenty years (both 12.1%). Last were those who had held their position for more than twenty years (6.6%). While a combined 44% of respondents had five or less years of experience in their current position, it can be assumed that every respondent had a sizeable amount of

experience from other library or library-related positions. Therefore, it can be said that as a whole, the group of administrator respondents were very experienced with issues important to librarians, such as how the activity of book reviewing relates to the profession.

Table 12 – Number of Years in Current Position (Academic Library Administrators Survey)
[Number of participants = 91]

Range	No. of Responses (%)
Up to one year	11 (12.1)
One to two years	16 (17.6)
Two to five years	34 (37.4)
Five to ten years	13 (14.3)
Ten to twenty years	11 (12.1)
More than twenty years	6 (6.6)

The professional background of almost two-thirds of respondents (65.9%) of the academic library administrator survey was in Public / User Services. This shows that many of these library administrators have likely spent a number of years working with the public and thinking about their needs—and the needs of public services librarians—in using the library and working with its materials. The rest of the survey respondents were spread over several areas, such as Technical Services (13.2%), Technology (7.7%), multiple areas of responsible or other (also 7.7%), Administration (3.3), and Government (1.1%).

Table 13 – Professional Background (Academic Library Administrators Survey)
[Number of participants = 91]

Professional Background	No. of Responses (%)
Public / User Services	60 (65.9)
Technical Services	12 (13.2)
Technology	7 (7.7)
Multiple Areas / Other	7 (7.7)
Administration	3 (3.3)
Military	1 (1.1)
Academic / Non-library	1 (1.1)

By a slim margin, the largest group of respondents to the academic library administrator survey (33%) worked for institutions that offer Associate's Degrees only. However, those who work for institutions which offer BA/BS, MA/MS, and PhDs (28.6%) and BA/BS and MA/MS (26.4%) responded to the survey in very similar percentages. Respondents who work at institutions who offer BA/BS only were 11%. These results show that these library administrators represent a variety of academic library environments.

Table 14 – Degrees Offered (Academic Library Administrators Survey)
[Number of participants = 91]

Degrees Offered	No. of Responses (%)
Associate's Degree Only	30 (33)
BA/BS Only	10 (11)
BA/BS and MA/MS	24 (26.4)
BA/BS, MA/MS, PhDs	26 (28.6)
Other	1 (1.1)

While many of the respondents to the academic library administrator survey (64.8%) had written book reviews during some point in their career, only 23.1% claimed to currently write reviews with regularity. This is instructive in that it shows that as academic librarians move into administrative positions, many who at one time wrote book reviews stop doing so at some point during their careers. It would have perhaps been illuminative to look more closely at this phenomenon.

Table 15 – Review Writing During Career (Academic Library Administrators Survey)
[Number of participants = 91]

Has Written Reviews During Career	No. of Responses (%)
Yes	59 (64.8)
No	32 (35.2)

Table 16 – Writes Reviews Currently (Academic Library Administrators Survey)
[Number of participants = 91]

Writes Reviews Currently	No. of Responses (%)
Yes	21 (23.1)
No	70 (76.9)

The reasons that a minority of the academic library administrators who responded to the survey still write book reviews reflect the findings of the respondents to the librarian-book reviewer survey. Those reasons include making a professional contribution, gaining publication credit, gaining valuable knowledge to apply toward collection development, and overall enjoyment gained from the activity. One respondent gave the practice a resounding note of approval by saying, “I think that it is one of the

truly worthwhile types of library scholarship. Plus, it really does help to have a librarian's point of viewpoint on the value to a title." Another administrator sums up by simply stating, "I'd rather write practical pieces than theoretical stuff."

But do these beliefs, expressed by the 21% of the academic library administrators who currently write reviews, hold sway when looking at the practice of book review writing by librarians in the institutions in which they work? With all of these factors in mind, one cannot help but ask, with the number of librarian-book reviewers who write reviews for the profession and believe they are making a contribution to it, why review writing is not always considered a "professional activity" within librarianship?

Review Writing's Relation to Librarianship

It is not surprising that for a participant group who write about such diverse subject matter and for such a wide array of publications, there were a number of different and interesting answers from librarian-book reviewer respondents to the question, "How does the writing of book reviews relate and integrate with your other duties and responsibilities as a librarian?"

Table 17, Part 1 – Relation of Review Writing to Librarianship (Librarian-Book Reviewers Survey)

[Number of participants = 173]

[Note: participants were allowed to record more than one relation]

Relation	No. of Responses (%)
Keeps Librarian Up to Date (Maintaining Interest) with: Materials / Publishing Industry / Areas Outside Accustomed Field / Leads to Higher Job Performance	80 (46.2)
Review Writing: Directly Related to Librarianship (Reference Work, Collection Development, Reader's Advisory, Academic Liaison, User Education, etc.) / A "Necessary Activity" / A "Service Activity" / A "Professional Activity" / Leads to Professional Growth / Meets Scholarship Goals / Allows Active Engagement in Librarianship / Contributes to Profession / Benefits other Collection Developers / Fits in with "Core Activities" of Librarianship	63 (36.4)
Allows Librarian to Think Critically / Sharpen Evaluative Skills / Helps Build Knowledge of Field to Better Serve Patrons	23 (13.2)
Librarianship: Helps Hone Writing Skills / Gain Experience with Publishing Industry / Think Creatively / Obtain Publishing Credit	22 (12.7)
Counts Towards Tenure / Promotion / Job Search Efforts	20 (11.5)
Helps Obtain Free Books for Library Collection	6 (3.4)
Prepares for Teaching in the Field	2 (1.1)
Other	8 (4.6)
Didn't Respond	Less than 1%

Weeding one's way through opinions offered by the librarian-book reviewers who responded to the librarian-reviewer survey, it becomes apparent that the prevailing view regarding the relation between the writing of reviews and librarianship varies between individual library institutions. While most libraries recognize the value of reviews on some basic level, the support for librarian-reviewers can vary greatly. These findings are supported in large part by the results of the academic library administrator survey, as will be seen.

The strongest argument that writing book reviews is a significant if not essential skill for a librarian is that it improves job performance. To put it more simply, one participant stated, “I have drawn on my book review experience to recommend books to patrons.” And another, more emphatic, “Librarians ‘review’ items ALL the time. We might as well write about them. It goes hand in hand with being a reference librarian.”

With many new publications coming out every year, some participants point to the writing of book reviews as a way to lay claim to and maintain an area of subject expertise. The relationship can work out swimmingly for librarians, who already read the subjects they write about, as well as utilizing and working with them on the job. One participant wrote, “[I] am a user of the type of books I do reviews of in my job overall. While I am not on the reference desk, I do reference by e-mail and referral. It is important to do this to keep up with new publishing in the fields for which I am a bibliographer/subject selector, too.”

Another example that book review writing improves job performance is in cases where a librarian reads and writes book reviews about issues central to librarianship, such as digital libraries. A participant writes, “This helps me keep current in the field and develop my own critical thinking in the area and share this. Digital library issues are always changing and it is important to keep up with these; writing book reviews is a great way to do this!” In this manner, the librarian-book reviewer adds to the profession by reading about subject areas, gaining knowledge for use on the job, and then “returning the favor” to the professional community by writing reviews and therefore aiding other librarians in collection development.

Another way to look at the argument—that book reviewing is a strong if not essential part of librarianship—is to see reviewing as both an indirect and long-term investment in terms of adding knowledge and disseminating it to both patrons (on the job) and other librarians (through writing book reviews). In other words, it takes time, but there is a positive payoff. A participant sums up this sentiment by stating, “In some ways it interferes, as it takes time I do not have; but beyond that it has many rewards—keeping abreast of new works and major contributions in your areas of subject expertise; receiving free books to donate to the library, which in our area of specialization is a real contribution; contributing to a specialized field by helping non-specialists select materials; establishing our institution as a major player in the field.”

Writing reviews is also a way for experienced librarians to “stay in the game” or maintain interest in their subject area(s) as well as the everyday job. Two statements from experienced librarians backup this sentiment:

- “As a former children's librarian with 30+ years of experience who is currently a Reference Librarian, writing these reviews allows me to maintain a professional interest in children's literature.”
- “As a dean of libraries now, it allows me to keep my hand in, stay in touch with the field, keeps my name out there since I don't have time to write much at all anymore.”

So, according to several participants of the librarian-book reviewer survey, writing reviews can be seen as a beneficial professional activity for both relatively inexperienced as well as for veteran librarians.

About one third of the librarian-book reviewers (36.4%) felt that writing reviews is a core activity within the profession and should be considered a “professional activity” or a “service activity.” One participant went as far as to say, “I consider it part of my professional obligation. I do it during working hours usually.” This participant did not say if this was a sanctioned activity by the library, but writing reviews during work hours appears to be a rarity.

A more common sentiment among those who share this opinion was, “Reviews are to be considered a professional contribution. There is no official time in the work day allocated, so reviews are to be done on that extra time...the value of keeping up in an area or areas, to feel prepared to complete a review, even a brief one, is an important part of librarianship.” Opinions from the group of academic library administrator survey respondents on whether or not it is appropriate to prepare and write book reviews during working hours, as will be seen, are decidedly mixed.

Nonetheless, claims were made across the board that writing book reviews supports and improves job performance in such areas as reference, collection development, and liaison duties. Areas such as cataloging were also mentioned: “The information I learn from the books helps me and my coworkers with our responsibilities as catalogers and processors. Personally, writing reviews helps overall with my professional development and eventual advancement in the profession.” Reader's advisory, an important function for young adult librarians, is also noted as being benefited from book reviews: “As a young adult librarian I do book reviews all the time in the form of reader's advisory. I'm always giving young patrons my thoughts and the

synopsis of a book's plot. The reviews I do for SLJ are the same thing, just written instead of spoken.”

Book reviewing as professional activity is also expressed in the “beneficial circle” argument as one participant simply stated, “As I use other people's book reviews for materials selection, they can use mine.” And as for collection development, another participant wins the simplicity award for arguing that book reviews are a professional activity of librarianship with, “I do collection development; makes good sense.”

Other participants (13.2%) focused on the critical skills—gained from writing book reviews—that easily transfer to numerous areas of librarianship as proof that reviewing is a professional activity. One participant represents this sentiment very well by stating, “I like reviewing reference books because it forces me to look comprehensively at how books are put together and how well they work. I learn of the kinds of errors that can occur and develop knowledge of publishers' standards. This helps me in collection development, reference, and library instruction. I think I pay attention to reference works more for doing reviews.” Two other statements sum up well the critical skills that are developed by writing reviews and their transfer to the workplace:

- “I have also developed, as result of reviewing, a research methodology for examining author's works in order to determine if we should add more to our library, and to address selection and deselection decisions.”
- “It integrates seamlessly with my daily workflow. Writing reviews develops and hones my critical thinking skills about books and their value, usefulness, etc.”

The intimacy with the book publishing process that book reviewing develops is another reason cited for why writing book reviews should be considered a professional activity. Many factors—such as dealing with editors and seeing the complications and speed bumps in the book production process that can cause a book to slip from being timely to irrelevant—put the librarian-reviewer that much closer to the materials dealt with daily at the workplace. As one participant puts it, “...learning more about [the] book publishing process (quality of editing—or lack of it) for instance has been an eye-opener. You cannot trust even the big publishers to have quality editing for each book. I learn more about the topic by looking [at] books more carefully; helps with collection work and reference.”

Some participants (11.5%) cite book reviews as a component of tenure and promotion at their institutions. This would indicate that some institutions fully support book reviewing as a professional activity within librarianship. However, other views presented by a number of participants would indicate that this is a minority opinion within the profession. Again, responses of librarian-reviewers indicate that opinions—and policy—towards the reviewer-professional activity question vary, perhaps widely, from institution to institution, as well as by type of institution: academic library, public library, etc. As will be seen, this state of affairs will be affirmed by the results of the academic library administrator survey.

Table 17, Part 2 – Relation of Review Writing to Librarianship (Librarian-Book Reviewers Survey)

[Number of participants = 173]

[Note: participants were allowed to record more than one relation]

Relation	No. of Responses (%)
Book Reviews: Don't Relate to Librarianship / Have a Minimal Integration / Wouldn't Affect Job Performance (if participant did not write book reviews)	13 (7.5)
Participant Writes Reviews Mostly on Own Time	8 (4.6)
Book Reviews are not as Important as "Full-Blown" Publication of Articles	5 (2.8)
Other	3 (1.7)

In contrast, 7.5% of participants of the librarian-book reviewer survey did not think that the writing of book reviews should be considered a professional activity or felt that the writing of reviews does not affect job performance one way or the other. One statement tries to set review writing's place within librarianship, or at least within one individual institution: "Our library gives only 'service' credit for book reviews, and I think this appropriate. No 'new' information is being discovered and it is a service to the profession."

A number of other statements reflect review writing's unsettled place within the profession. Several participants stated that their institution gives slim to no backing to the writing of book reviews in determining promotion or tenure. A representative statement: "I do not think that writing reviews is seen as 'real writing' in the same way that articles are. My institution does not have a clearly defined promotion policy and I am unsure how other institutions look upon review writing as compared to other writing. In my situation, any reviews I write are done on my time versus at work." When taken

with other participants' remarks, it can at least be inferred that there is a strong difference of opinion in the librarian community about what the role of review writing should be with regard to professional activity status.

Several other statements by participants provide, if possible, an even less cohesive, fractured outlook at the issue. One participant states that writing book reviews does not relate to librarianship, "...except insofar as I'm expected to publish as one of my job requirements to achieve ongoing appointment and eventual tenure." This implies that the participant's institution does recognize reviewing as an activity worthy of inclusion as a professional activity, but the participant/librarian reviewer does not. One might take this statement as an anomaly but another participant falls squarely into the same opinion category by stating that reviewing relates to librarianship in that it allows for "Scholarship for Tenure" but then goes on to say, "I don't know what role [book reviews] play in the profession...I don't get the impression they play a role."

This would imply that across the profession—from library administrators down to library reviewers (and nonreviewers) on the job—there is a great difference of opinion about where the status of book reviewing as a professional activity within librarianship stands. One participant sums up the collective mood by stating, "I think it varies. For me it has always been a positive thing, but for some librarians it is not really considered a professional activity and they have to do it entirely on their own time."

Book Review Writing and Hiring, Promotion, and Tenure

Moving from the librarian-book reviewer side to the administrators who as part of their duties hire, promote, and grant tenure to librarians, the question is what role, if any, does the writing of book reviews play in the hiring, promotion, and or tenure process in academic libraries.

Table 18 – Importance of Book Reviews to the Hiring Process (Academic Library Administrator Survey)
[Number of participants = 91]

Response	No. of Responses (%)
Extremely Important / Vital	0 (0)
Very Important	1 (1.1)
Somewhat Important	11 (12.1)
Marginally Important	24 (26.4)
Not at all Important / Irrelevant	44 (48.4)
Didn't Respond	11 (12.1)

Table 19 – Satisfaction with Status of Book Reviewing in Promotion/Tenure Process (Academic Library Administrator Survey)
[Number of participants = 91]

Response	No. of Responses (%)
Extremely Important / Vital	0 (0)
Very Important	1 (1.1)
Somewhat Important	19 (20.1)
Marginally Important	28 (30.8)
Not at all Important / Irrelevant	32 (35.2)
Didn't Respond	11 (12.1)

It is interesting to note that no respondent to the academic library administrator study found the writing of book reviews to be “extremely important” or vital in the hiring process, and only one (1.1%) found it “very important.” What may be more noteworthy,

however, is that 12.1% of respondents felt the writing of book reviews to be “somewhat important.” One respondent stated that book review writing is a “way to assess writing style, skill,” which ties in with the numerous librarian-book reviewers who state that book review writing is a good way to hone professional writing credentials. Another respondent states that while “competence is most important; book reviews along with other writing is considered an added bonus.” These statements, highlighting this group of respondents, indicate that even for those who term the writing of book reviews as somewhat important in the hiring process, the activity falls fairly far down the list of attributes that hiring committees are looking for in prospective librarians.

A larger group of respondents (26.4%) found book writing to be “marginally important” in hiring decisions, while a much larger group (48.4%) stated that the activity was “not at all important” or irrelevant. A fairly representative statement from the “marginally important” group came from one respondent: “Librarians are tenure-track here, but book reviews, though they count on evaluations, would be only marginally important for hiring.” This ambiguity fits fairly well when compared to the comments of many librarian-reviewers, who largely felt that book review writing is not an important consideration as a professional activity overall (though they may disagree with this state of affairs). Further compounding the feeling of some librarian-reviewers who felt that book review writing does not get a fair shake as a professional activity, one academic library administrator states: “Though I think writing book reviews is a very good professional activity, I do not use it in making hiring decisions.”

Many of the academic library administrators who feel that book review writing has little or no place in the hiring process base their opinion on the fact that tenure is not offered at their institution. As one respondent states, “Librarians at my institution do not have faculty status, thus there is no expectation or obligation for publishing.” Another simply writes, “We do not expect much publication activity from entry level librarians.” Therefore, it can be deduced that many administrators will only consider overall publishing experience, let alone book review writing, only if those activities are considered part of the job requirements of the positions that they are seeking to fill.

Again, when looking at the attitudes of academic library administrators toward promotion and tenure, zero respondents view book review writing as “extremely vital” and just 1.1% as “very important.” When looking at the next two groups of responses—those who view promotion and tenure as “somewhat important” (20.1%) and “marginally important” (30.8%)—it can be seen that there is a slightly higher rate of response than for hiring alone. Likewise, a comparatively smaller group, at 35.2%, considers book review writing to be “irrelevant” or “not important at all.”

A representative comment from respondent who believes that book review writing holds only marginal importance in promotion and tenure is, “Book reviews, no matter how many, cannot substitute for substantive research articles or books.” Another said, “Library faculty really must go beyond review writing to be successful in the promotion/tenure process.” However, there were those who hold a nearly opposite opinion, as one respondent writes: “Book reviewing is considered a significant professional activity.

While there is some ambiguity as to the importance of book review writing in the hiring process, there is a striking uniformity of opinion in expressing no need for change in policy with regard to book review writing and hiring and promotion at the individual institution level.

**Table 20 – Satisfaction with Status of Book Reviewing in Hiring Process (Academic Library Administrator Survey)
[Number of participants = 91]**

Response	No. of Responses (%)
Satisfied	51 (56)
Somewhat Satisfied	3 (3.3)
Not Satisfied – Reviews Should Have More Importance	2 (2.2)
Not Satisfied – Reviews Should Have Less Importance	1 (1.1)
Didn't Respond / Not Applicable	34 (37.4)

A sizable majority (56%) of respondents to the academic library administrator survey were satisfied with the current role of book reviewing in assessing candidates to hire or in promoting librarians. That number, when taken up to the 91% who answered the question or felt the question was applicable (as compared to the 37.4% of respondents who did not answer the question or felt the question was not applicable), represents a strong contrast to the 46.2% of librarian-book reviewers who felt that book review writing leads to higher job performance, the 36.4% who felt that writing book reviews is a professional activity, and the 11.5% who felt that review writing counts toward tenure, promotion standards, or helps in job search efforts.

Clearly, there is a difference of opinion about the status of book review writing as an activity to be considered for hiring, promotion, or tenure between the librarian-

reviewer and the academic library administrator groups. Some of this difference can perhaps be attributed to the minority within the library-reviewer group who do not work in academic libraries. However, there is still ground for a case to be made that librarians as a whole put more credence into the importance of book review writing as a professional activity – and one that should be given an increased status in hiring, promotion, and tenure – than do academic library administrators.

Because activities that academic librarians perform are often broke down into “professional,” “service,” or some other kind of designation in terms of promotion and tenure, it seemed natural to ask academic library administrators what book review writing is considered at different institutions.

Table 21 – Designation of Book Review Writing (Academic Library Administrator Survey)
[Number of participants = 91]

Designation	No. of Responses (%)
Professional Activity	49 (53.8)
Service Activity	8 (8.8)
Other Form of Activity	8 (8.8)
Does Not Have an Official Role as an Activity	18 (19.8)
Didn't Respond / Not Applicable	8 (8.8)

What is striking is the high number (53.8%) of respondents to the academic library administrator survey who believe that book review writing is considered a “professional activity” at their institution. Coupled with many of the responses to the library-book reviewer survey, it is seen that while book review writing is considered to be a professional activity by a sizeable number of librarian-reviewers and academic library

administrators, it is “treated” more like a service activity (though only 8.8% of academic library administrators responded as such): an activity that, while associated or related to librarianship, falls below other “professional activities” like writing scholarly articles and presenting at professional conferences in determining promotion and the granting of tenure. The remainder of the respondents to the academic library administrator survey found book review writing to be some “other” form of activity (8.8%) or not to have an official role as an activity (19.8%). The question was not responded to or found not applicable by 8.8% of respondents.

What may make pinning down the issue of what kind of activity book review writing is to librarians more complex is the varying types of book reviews themselves. In fact, many of the academic library administrators who chose to comment on this topic felt that the answer lies in the specific book review or book reviews that are to be considered. For example, one respondent stated that, “...depending on where a book review is published, it could be both” a professional and service-related activity. Another went on to define what a book review must be to be considered a professional activity by its author: “Book reviews must be of essay length, comparative and analytical, not descriptive notes in order to be considered as part of a librarian’s scholarly activity. Few general library book reviews quality...” This respondent went on to say, “We advise against using precious pre-tenure time for reviewing.” Another respondent states, more simply: “It depends somewhat on the length of the reviews and their quality.”

Overall, this group of academic library administrators believes that book reviews have a marginal (at best) place in the hiring and promotion/tenure process, and that is

generally reflected in the current policies at the institutions at which they now work. In fact, some respondents are suspicious of book review writing taking over other professional tasks, such as one respondent who states, “We are a small institution and there are so many other demands on the faculty that to add book reviewing to their responsibilities would discourage them from things that really need to be accomplished such as curricular change and setting policy.” In terms of hiring, there is a general sense that while book reviews are a nice addition to a resume or a small “value add,” they add very little overall to a candidate-librarian’s job prospects. This is exemplified by a respondent who states, “Book reviewing is a good additional qualification, but not required. That is, a superior candidate without book reviewing experience will be chosen over a ‘good’ candidate with book reviewing.” Finally, from the perspective of academic library administrators, the level of the institution must be considered, as one respondent writes: “In a community college setting, I don’t think [book reviews] should have... any bearing.”

Because there seems to be little consensus on the status of reviewing amongst librarian-reviewers, it appeared logical to next ask librarian-reviewers if they are satisfied with their current role as book reviewers, and if academic library administrators are comfortable with the current role of book reviewing or if they believe there should be changes.

Current Role of the Librarian-Book Reviewer

Thoughts on the current role of the librarian-reviewer brought back a spectrum of opinions from librarian-reviewers (as well as academic library administrators), some focusing on the status of reviewing as professional activity, some on the current processes in place to publish reviews, and others on the quality of reviews being produced today.

Table 22 – Contentedness with Current Role of Reviewing (Librarian-Book Reviewers Survey)

[Number of participants = 173]

[Note: participants were allowed to record more than one response]

Response	No. of Responses (%)
Things are Fine / Content with Current Role	64 (36.9)
Reviews Should Get More Recognition as Professional Activity from Management or Faculty / Should Count Toward Tenure / Reviewing Should Be Part of Librarian's Regular Duties	23 (13.2)
More Librarians Should Review	18 (10.4)
Reviews are not Substantive Enough / Need More Analysis / Consistent Standards	9 (5.2)
Reviews Need to be More Assertive / Voice Negative Opinions Where Appropriate	5 (2.8)
Reviewers Should be Better Compensated	5 (2.8)
Not Sure	6 (3.4)
Other	38 (21.9)
Didn't Respond	6 (3.4)

For over one third of the participants of the librarian-reviewer survey, the current state of the review is fine and nothing needs to be changed. Most who were content had very little to say on the issue. It can be inferred that these librarian-reviewers are content with the way in which reviewing is integrated into librarianship and their everyday working lives. As one participant put it, "I think it works well for publishers and for

librarians. Publishers often get ‘free’ content; librarians get to contribute to the profession, collect professional development chits and learn more about their fields. Also, you can get free books for your library (or yourself) when the publishers are sufficiently generous.”

For a vocal minority of 13.2%, however, reviewing does not get the respect and recognition it deserves as a professional activity, or the proper credit towards promotion or tenure. One of the strongest and more direct statements on the issue was, “I think that reviewing is an important activity for librarians, and should be counted as publication, not service, for tenure and promotion for tenure-track academic librarians, since reviewing is directly related to the skills of our academic discipline.”

Taking a different slant, 10.4% of participants were worried that there are not enough librarian-reviewers to adequately handle the increasing yearly output of publications or felt that all librarians, as a rule, should write reviews (whether it be on the job or during off-hours). One participant lamented, “So many books are published that it may be hard to find enough volunteers to help add to the number of published reviews in reputable sources. Reader reviews attached to Amazon or Barnes and Noble may, sadly, take on an increasing role for the buying public, if not for the library world.”

A combined 8% of participants were in some way unsatisfied with the general manner of the content of reviews written today. Two major opinions emerged: one was unhappy with the trend toward short, breezy, or “pop” reviews that, it is claimed, read more like a book report than offering substantive analysis that provides real aid to those looking to build a strong collection; the other view voices displeasure at the lack of

gumption shown by reviewers in staking a claim that some books are bad, poorly written, and otherwise not worth selecting for a collection. It is this fear, the latter opinion goes on, that gives rise to nearly unanimous “positive” reviews which, taken as a whole, are unhelpful to readers.

A smaller number of participants were unsatisfied with reviewing standards in general or with specific publications in particular. For instance, one participant wrote, “VOYA [*Voice of Youth Advocates*] rates books with Q and P on a scale of 1–5. Q is quality, P is popularity. The P rating really is a guess though—how can we know or predict popularity? Inaccurate.”

A much higher percentage of academic library administrators (49.5%) than librarian-reviewers expressed satisfaction with the current role of book reviewing within librarianship. Tiny percentages felt that reviews should be given more respect as a professional activity (5.5%), that more librarians should write book reviews or that their roles as reviewers should be expanded (3.3%), or that the book reviews as a whole are overvalued (2.2%). The number of academic library administrators who expressed satisfaction with the current role of reviewing is magnified when the percentage of those who did not respond to the survey question or who felt the question was not applicable (37.4%) is taken into account.

Table 23 – Contentedness with Current Role of Reviewing (Academic Library Administrator Survey)

[Number of participants = 91]

[Note: participants were allowed to record more than one response]

Response	No. of Responses (%)
Things are Fine / Content with Current Role	45 (49.5)
Reviews Should Get More Recognition as Professional Activity / Respect	5 (5.5)
More Librarians Should Review / Role of Reviewer Could Be Expanded	3 (3.3)
Book Reviews Are Overvalued	2 (2.2)
Not Sure	2 (2.2)
Didn't Respond / Not Applicable	34 (37.4)

The vast majority of academic library administrators did not have much to comment on the topic; many were content to say they were satisfied and left the matter at that. However, a few expressed dissatisfaction with “pop” reviews that are short and appeal to a generalist audience. As one respondent stated, “I think on a certain level, the quality of book reviewing is on par with that of other academic disciplines—but only a handful of library-related journals attain that level.” This thought corroborates the feelings of other academic library administrators who would seem to respect the librarian as reviewer more if reviews would take on a longer, more scholarly form than is presently the norm.

Beyond the views of a small minority of academic library administrators, many (29.7%) felt that the prevailing attitudes and policies in place with regard to librarian-book reviews within academic librarianship to be just fine. Taken together with the majority (59.3%) who chose not to respond to this particular survey question, it becomes evident that there is very little impetus to change policies in the higher ranks of academic libraries.

Table 24 – Desire to See Change in Current Policies (Academic Library Administrator Survey)

[Number of participants = 91]

[Note: participants were allowed to record more than one response]

Response	No. of Responses (%)
No Change Desired	27 (29.7)
There Are No Policies / Policies Are Unclear	4 (4.4)
Reviews Should Count More Toward Tenure / Reviews Are Undervalued	3 (3.3)
Other	3 (3.3)
Didn't Respond / Not Applicable	54 (59.3)

One response, which would seem to speak for the many who provided very perfunctory remarks, stated: “If I suggest it then I become responsible for it. I don’t need one more task to do.” Another stated bluntly: “I don’t see book reviewing as an important role of librarianship.” Finally, another respondent reiterated some of the feeling expressed in other areas of the survey by stating, “...other scholarly activities are more difficult and time-consuming and so should be more heavily rewarded.” While it is clear that some of these opinions are echoed in the librarian-reviewer survey, there is certainly a difference of opinion overall when it comes to seeing book reviewing as important to the profession and need for greater appreciation for the activity in general.

While there is a considerable majority of academic library administrators who thought that book reviewing is not a factor in considering job candidates, promotion, or tenure, there are many who felt it is a professional activity and one allowable to be performed while on the job (47.3%). A much smaller percentage (11%) felt that book reviewing is not an activity that should be performed during working hours. There is then a small group (8.8%) who felt that reviewing is allowable with certain caveats, such

as only when it is a minimal amount of time, or when it is only the research and writing portion of the review, and not the reading portion of the activity.

Table 25 – Views on Book Reviewing During Working Hours (Academic Library Administrator Survey)

[Number of participants = 91]

[Note: participants were allowed to record more than one response]

Response	No. of Responses (%)
Reviewing During Work Allowed (Assuming Regular Duties Are Being Performed) / Reviewing Is A Professional Activity	43 (47.3)
Reviewing Should Not Be Done During Working Hours	10 (11)
Minimal Amount of Reviewing During Work is Acceptable / Review Reading Should Not Be Done	8 (8.8)
Unsure	2 (2.2)
Didn't Respond / Not Applicable	28 (30.8)

Some of those academic library administrators who felt that book reviewing is an acceptable activity on the job express the caveat that most academic librarians work more than the “normal” 40-hour work week, and therefore activities during working hours that are considered “professional” but not essential to the job are acceptable. One respondent stated quite succinctly on this point, “When else? It’s part of the job.”

At the same time, others believed that the defining line should be drawn according to the job description under which each librarian works. A few are quite firm on this point, as one respondent explained: “If reviewing is part of job expectations, [they] should be done during working hours.” Finally, a few other respondents make a distinction on whether or not the book reviewer is being paid for his or her services. On this subject, a respondent writes, “[It] depends on whether or not you’re being paid. I

assume almost no one is, so then your institution should support that work. Wouldn't that be nice? Librarians really could read on the job and get paid for it."

However, for the most part, academic library administrators who allow book reviewing during working hours believed that the practice is acceptable as long as other duties are being performed. As one respondent stated, "It is a professional activity that adds to your knowledge and I encourage it, although it is not a primary job responsibility. Take care of business and what else you do to improve your subject knowledge or professional standing is fine by me."

Other academic library administrators took a more ambiguous, or "murky" view at the topic, as one participant put it: "This is a murky area. Teaching faculty can do this on the job but librarians often cannot both by policy and because they have too many other assigned tasks." Another respondent splits the issue into the time spent reading the work and time spent researching and writing: "I consider it a professional activity which therefore falls under the general umbrella of acceptable activities not directly listed on a job description. However, I do prefer that the reading be done outside of work time as we are a small staff with little spare time." Finally, a few others looked at the issue in terms of the length and depth of the review, with an inclination to allow research and writing of lengthy, scholarly reviews of works during working hours but leaning against the authorship of short, breezy, "pop" style book reviews. As one respondent wrote, "If someone were to be engaged in the critical essay type of review that is appropriate [to] the tenure process, it is appropriate that some work time be used. If a person continues to

write light reviews for general interest sources, this is not appropriate and persons are so advised.”

Finally, the group who does not allow the production of book reviews during working hours also looked at different angles on the topic. A few respondents do not view the practice as a professional activity, as one stated: “This would be considered a low priority for during working hours – more of an extracurricular activity (which I think is appropriate).” Another respondent, while recognizing book reviewing as a professional activity, does not feel that it should be done during working hours: “While the librarians here are encouraged to spend some time each week in professional reading, this activity (book reviews and all they entail) should take place outside the workplace.”

Reviewers and Book Reviews: The Future

For those participants of the librarian-book reviewer survey who were or who were not content with the current state of reviewing, what does the future hold? Will things stay the same, or are there changes in store for reviewers and book reviews? And what of the proliferation of online content and the now easy access to online reviews?

Table 26 – Future Role of Reviews (Librarian-Book Reviewers Survey)
[Number of participants = 173]
[Note: participants were allowed to record more than one response]

Response	No. of Responses (%)
Don't Foresee Substantial Change	50 (28.9)
Reviews Will Eventually Be Mostly Online / Relied Upon More	37 (21.3)
"Gathering of Spears" Will Take Place: Convergence of Electronic Resources (sales, holding information, professional/non-professional, reader reviews)	24 (13.8)
Reviewing Process Will Be Speeded Up Due to Online Influence	8 (4.6)
Change Will Come Only to Way Reviews Disseminated	3 (1.7)
Not Sure	8 (4.6)
Other	35 (20.2)
Didn't Respond	12 (6.9)

The largest group of participants of the librarian-book reviewer survey (28.9%) does not foresee any substantial change in the way reviews will be written or produced in the future. It may be notable that many participants who professed to be content with the current role of reviewing also fell into the group who did not foresee changes (perhaps this is in part due to the natural tendency to wish for change when dissatisfied and wish for continuity when content).

A partially related group, at 1.7%, was those who felt change would come, but "only in the way reviews are disseminated." These librarian-reviewers saw a transition taking place, but only one from the printed page to the computer screen. They felt the process of writing and producing reviews will remain exactly the same, no matter the presentation media. As one participant put it, "Writing of book reviews will only change format if journals also move from print to electronic, but the writing of and use of book reviews should not change in coming years."

By looking at several categories together, it can be seen that 39.7% of participants felt that the online factor will be a large one in changing the way reviews are written, produced, or utilized in the future. One reason that may push reviews to an increasingly online format is the rising expense that libraries incur in purchasing print review journals. “Budgets are just getting too tight to spend money on print sources that review print sources,” one participant wrote. “We’re going to have to get reviews online.” Another participant related this same factor to a possible increased importance of written reviews overall in saying, “As libraries spend more of their budgets on electronic content, I’m not sure how important they will find book reviews. But perhaps reviews will be even MORE important, because libraries will have to make careful decisions about their print collections when competing for budget dollars.”

Another major factor in the future of reviewing, mentioned by 13.8% of the participants, may be what one person called the “gathering of spears,” which refers to a transition of reviews to an online environment that may include links to sales information (often referred to as the “amazon.com” model) as well as a host of nonprofessional, “reader,” or “user” reviews. The possibility of a “gathering” garners a distinctly mixed reaction from participants of the survey.

Some participants saw great benefits to both readers and selectors in that much more information (such as links to multiple reviews) is and will be available. As one participant put it, “I love that Amazon has reviews from Publisher’s Weekly and sometimes Horn Book and Booklist, plus reader reviews.” Another said, “I think that hyperlinks to other reviews, to TOC page and publisher summaries will make reviews

more useful, particularly when they are included in sources like Yankee's GOBI product, Books in Print, etc.”

Other participants are much more nervous about a gathering of spears. One participant began on a cautionary note by stating that while reviews will, “...[b]ecome more necessary, but with less authority; informal ‘reader’ reviews will dominate if we don't start participating in the online content game. More hyperlinking means that we will be able to link to reviews from the OPAC, which is a service that I think will be greatly appreciated, and it may allow us to compete with amazon.” Another reviewer was even more pessimistic, stating, “I think that reviews are becoming a passé concept given the collaborative methods that are emerging. An example is the collaborative reviews on Amazon.”

A small number of participants (3.4%) felt that the speed in which reviews will be produced will increase due to the influence of the Internet. Some felt this was positive in that reviews will have more relevance to new publications, while others felt there was a possibility of a decline in the quality of reviews during a tighter production period.

Other comments were scattered over the map with some librarian-reviewers seeing an increase in reviews and others seeing a decline for various reasons.

A very similar percentage of academic library administrators (30.1%) as compared to the librarian-reviewers (28.9%) don't see substantial changes in the role of the librarian-reviewer in the foreseeable future. Some of the comments from academic library administrators on this topic mirrored those of the librarian-book reviewers, such

as, “Reviewing will remain important. The form or medium isn’t relevant,” and “The only influence will be the change in what is reviewed.”

Table 27 – Future Role of Reviews (Academic Library Administrator Survey)
[Number of participants = 91]
[Note: participants were allowed to record more than one response]

Response	No. of Responses (%)
Don’t Foresee Substantial Change	28 (30.1)
Reviews Will Eventually Be Mostly Online / Relied Upon More	5 (5.5)
Reviews Written by Librarians Will Lose Influence	4 (4.4)
Reviews Written by Librarians Will Gain Influence	3 (3.3)
“Gathering of Spears” Will Take Place: Convergence of Electronic Resources (sales, holding information, professional/non-professional, reader reviews)	3 (3.3)
Not Sure	3 (3.3)
Other	8 (8.8)
Didn’t Respond	37 (40.7)

Much smaller percentages of academic library administrators saw some form of change coming in the future to reviews (and reviewers), though the kinds of comments also corresponded closely the comments of the librarian-reviewers. Interestingly, a small percentage of academic library administrators (5.5%) believed reviews will continue to move online, and the online medium will be relied upon more as a source for book reviews, as compared to 21.3% of librarian-reviewers. The academic library administrators who took this view generally do not see the move to online content and reviewing as a positive thing, as one respondent stated: “Reviewing online materials will become more important (but rarely of better quality), if only because there are so many of them.” Another respondent looked at the general prejudice in the academic community

favoring print sources over online sources, stating "...[at] many universities, online publication does not carry the weight as traditional print publication, even if the online publication is peer-reviewed. I believe that will change as more professionals in all fields become more familiar with the changes that are occurring."

A small group of academic library administrators (4.4%) saw reviews written by librarians losing influence due to the availability of online content and reviews, whereas 3.3% took the opposite view and see online reviews increasing the influence of librarian-reviewers. The crux of the argument—debated by the librarian-reviewers as well—is whether the ease of online publishing by non-librarians and non-subject experts will overwhelm the “gates” that librarians and editors have traditionally protected, or whether the Internet will help book reviews written by librarians to disseminate wider, further, and cheaper than ever before thought possible. One respondent summed up the view of the “negative” camp by stating, “Reviewing [by librarians] will undoubtedly continue for the next several years, but its significance and importance will decrease as other methods become more common – such as online community reviewing systems.” On the other side of the issue, a representative thought by a respondent in support of the expansion of influence for librarian-reviewers stated: “Online reviews may make book reviews more immediately accessible and could open up more opportunities for reviewers.”

This discussion is picked up by the 3.3% of academic library reviewers who saw a “gathering of spears” where an amazon.com model of finding reviews becomes prevalent. Like the librarian-book reviewers, the prospect of this new standard for finding, reading, and publishing book reviews brought a mixed reaction. One academic

library administrator summed up this argument perfectly by stating, “I see a trend toward the merging of book reviewing with creation of web guides and annotations to websites. I am somewhat concerned about quality control. Not all reviews or guides are carefully and professionally done. I also believe that the editorial process is important.”

One academic library administrator wrapped up the topic very succinctly and sensibly by stating: “What matters most is the appropriateness and authoritativeness of the reviewer, not so much where the review is found.”

Reviews and the Influence of the Internet

Taken as a given that the presence of the Internet has and will continue to have at least a minimal influence over the way reviews are published, if not written and produced, a more in-depth look into the role of online reviews and reviewers is required.

Table 28 – Influence of Online Reviews (Librarian-Book Reviewers Survey)
[Number of participants = 173]
[Note: participants were allowed to record more than one response]

Response	No. of Responses (%)
Easier / Faster for Selectors to Compare Reviews / Select Materials / More Links / Increases Accessibility / Interactivity / Selection Process Better, More Efficient	41 (23.6)
Don't Think Online Reviews Will Change Anything	27 (15.6)
Online Sources of Reviews Are of Mixed Quality	12 (6.9)
Readers / Selectors Expect Reviews to be Online / More Purchases are Occurring Online	8 (4.6)
Reviews Will Be Shorter	8 (4.6)
Writing of Online Reviews Will be Similar to Print Standards	5 (2.8)
Print Resources Will Always Retain Higher Prestige Than Online Reviews	5 (2.8)
Submitting Reviews Via Web Forms Better	3 (1.7)
Approval Companies Will Take Away Selection From Librarians	3 (1.7)
Not Sure	13 (7.5)
Other	33 (19)
Did Not Respond	15 (8.6)

If it can be taken for granted that librarianship is a profession undergoing great change, the same is true of all traditional media. Reviews are moving online to one extent or another, be they professional journals, user reviews, or independent publications that feature book reviews. The comments from participants to the librarian-book reviewer survey reflected these changes, and underlying some statements was an unease that a respected form—the book review published in established print journals by librarians—is in danger of losing its prestige because of the feared blurring that will take place when links to reviews written by librarians may be listed right alongside links to user or reader reviews as well as reviews published by less respected publications.

A participant set the stage for the issue by stating, “The traditional reviewing structure, while probably never completely replaced, may move to a more dynamic Amazon-like model.” This dynamic structure—a virtual marketplace where library selectors and readers can have access to a great number of reviews: some online versions of traditional reviews penned by librarians in print journals, others an amalgam of reviews from lesser known or completely independent (and unverifiable) publications mixed with ordinary readers' reviews with no more qualification than an interest in the subject—poses many of the same anxieties and opportunities that are currently rocking the wider world of librarianship and technology. Of course, the “dynamic model” already exists to a great degree, replete with millions of volumes available (all for sale), on Web sites like amazon.com right now. However, the prospect of moving the print book review away from the “respectable” publications and into such a virtual marketplace is the issue of the day for the arena of book reviews, libraries, and technology.

For 23.6% of participants, there was mostly upside to these possible changes, with easy efficient accessibility to an array of reviews the most enticing element. The argument here was that the more information there is about books, the better chance selectors will make the right decision for their collections. As one participant put it, “I think more of the ordering jobbers will have the reviews on their sites so that Collection Management librarians can order with the full reviews in front of him or her.” Another participant summed up the likely feelings of many by stating, “The process will

increasingly become more dynamic and less paper based though I think we will still want to read the reviews in a paper format.”

However, 15.6% of participants rejected all or most of this argument and think that online reviews will become, at most, digitized versions of their print cousins: that access will get no better or worse, and that the quality and quantity of reviews will remain relatively the same. As one participant put it, “Well, there are several online review sources and they work pretty much like traditional published ones do.”

A vocal minority of 6.9% of the participants accepted that a new era of online reviewing is either coming or is already here, but voiced concern that while the quantity of book reviews may increase, finding the quality ones within a sea of unreliable content may not be worth the switch over from print review journals. One participant defined the mood of this group by stating, “The chief advantage of the current review process is the ‘gate keeper’ service it provides—the professional/editorial winnowing down of material one has to go through to find the good stuff. If online resources offer the same service, they will be of similar benefit. But while the Amazon model sometimes offers interesting stuff, it is ultimately unreliable.” It is evident that these librarian-reviewers were afraid that the even variable standards imposed in traditional print journals will be lost in a system where anyone with a modem and a keyboard can act as an authority alongside the likes of Library Journal, Choice, Booklist, etc. Another participant summed this up by stating, “One must be careful of online content. If it is an online journal that is edited, reviews can be depended upon. If it is a Web site to which anyone can post anything they want to say, one needs to read those reviews carefully and consider the reviewer.”

Finally, another librarian reviewer added, bluntly, “If I’m looking for reviews, I don’t care what ‘Joe Public’ thought. I want a solid review from someone with knowledge of the needs of the library community.”

Another group, 4.6% of participants, saw the online move as inevitable and are more concerned with changing the habits of librarians and reviewers to best meet the needs of collections and the library community. One participant looked at the needs of the library “user” in the online age: “Users want ‘intuitive relevancy’ in the search results: longer, more specific reviews will help achieve those wants.” Another stated, “I think people will especially be looking for reviews of online resources/databases. I fear that some print journals will cease in favor of electronic ones, and there may be less demand for written reviews.”

Reviews will become shorter, according to 4.6% of participants of the librarian-book reviewer survey, to fit in with the decreased attention spans of the online age. One participant looked at the different skills required for writing online reviews by stating, “I think it will make reviews have to be shorter, more concise, and probably force reviewers to begin thinking more like indexers: thinking up their own keywords, subjects, etc.”

The remainder of the responses was a mixed bag of thoughts about the coming of the online age to book reviews. While the remaining opinions tended to be quite varied, the overall indication is that librarian reviewers felt that, for the most part, both print and online book reviews will have to, and can, coexist for the foreseeable future. Both have a useful place, it is generally agreed, provided certain conditions and standards are met.

Conclusion

The answer to the question “Why do librarians write book reviews at all?” is a fairly simple one: they do it because they love books, love libraries, and want to serve both while performing two activities—reading and writing—that give them pleasure. It is why librarian-reviewers write book reviews with minimal compensation and, to a large extent, without the professional credit and support that such activities as writing scholarly articles garner. One participant to the librarian-book reviewer survey most likely speaks for all librarian-reviewers by stating, “I love writing reviews and wish I could do it full-time for compensation. But doing it as a volunteer is tremendously emotionally and professionally fulfilling.”

This is also why librarian-reviewers will find ways to cope with the changes coming to the reviewing world. From selection moving to off-site private companies to the specter of an amazon-like “gathering of spears,” reviewers will find ways of making their voices heard about what books are out there and, more importantly, which should be selected, read, and recommended by others. It goes back to what brought reviewers to librarianship in the first place, as a participant to the librarian-book reviewer survey perfectly illustrated, “As many libraries are moving towards centralized selection of materials and/or automatic ordering based on profiles, reviewing is one of the major ways for librarians to be involved in book selection and the professional analysis of books, and to remain involved with books.”

It is hoped that the analysis of the two surveys helped to provide an answer to the research question and its other related questions. While there are differing opinions about

the current role of the librarian-book reviewer, both within the librarian-reviewer and academic library administrator camps, some clear patterns emerged. While it is generally agreed that book reviewing is a professional activity, there is much less consensus about what the recognition and promotion of that activity should be. Likewise, while most agree that book reviewing is closely related to librarianship, there are differing opinions about such matters as its relevance to the hiring, promotion, and tenure process. In terms of the influence of online reviews and content, while a minority predicts vast changes to the book review process, most agree that the tradition of writing about books for the benefit of other professionals and the public will mostly hold intact. And overall, a larger percentage of librarian-reviewers would like to see the role of the librarian-book reviewer increased as compared to library administrators.

The two surveys revealed a multitude of opinions on several major topics, but perhaps most of all revealed that the book review writer's place within librarianship is complex and far from being agreed upon by a majority of the profession. It is hoped that this research and analysis will open up discussion about the librarian-book reviewer's place within librarianship amongst librarian-reviewers, other librarians and staff, and administrators alike. As change continues to affect librarianship, the role of the librarian-reviewer and how reviews are utilized by librarians needs to be continually examined and updated.

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Appendix A: Survey of Librarian-Book Reviewers

1. What type of library do you work in? (choose one)

Academic | Public School | Corporate | Other

If other, please list the type of library here:

2. What general area do you work in? (choose one)

Administration | Public Services | Technical Services | Technology | Services | Other

If other, please list here:

3. What publication(s) do you usually review for? (you may choose more than one)

Library Journal | Choice | ALA | Booklist | Other

If other, please list here:

4. How long have you been writing reviews? (choose one)

Less than a year | One to two years | Two to five years | Five to ten years | Ten to twenty years | Longer than twenty years

5. How many reviews do you write each month? (choose one)

Fewer than one per month | One | One to two | Two to five | Five to ten | More than ten

6. How much time do you spend in the preparation and writing of each review?

7. What kind of preparation do you go through for each review, such as: reading the work, other reviews of the work, other works of the author, other works in the field, related reviews, etc.?

8. Why do you write reviews? (you may choose more than one)

Enjoy it | Compensation | Professional Contribution | Publishing Credit | Other

9. What is the subject or type of book that you normally review?

10. How does the writing of book reviews relate and integrate with your other duties and responsibilities as a librarian?

11. How did you get your start in writing reviews?
12. Are you content with the role that writing book reviews currently plays within the profession, or would you like to see changes? If so, what would they be?
13. How do you think the writing of book reviews will change in the coming years, if at all?
14. Do you think the proliferation of online content and review sources will change how reviews are written and utilized? If so, how?
15. Please add any additional comments that you would like to make here:

Appendix B: Survey of Academic Library Administrators

1. What is your title?

Director | Dean of Library Services | Dean of another library department | Other (please specify)

2. How long have you held your current position?

Up to one year | One to two years | Two to five years | Five to ten years | Ten to twenty years | More than twenty years

3. How would you characterize your professional background, before you held your current position?

Public / User services | Technical services | Technology | Non-library / Other (please specify)

4. How would you characterize your institution? It awards:

Associate's Degree only | BA/BS only | BA/BS and MA/MS | BA/BS, MA/MS, PhDs | Other (please specify)

5. Have you written book reviews during the course of your career?

Yes | No

6. Do you write book reviews now with regularity?

Yes | No

7. If you answered "Yes," can you please explain why you write book reviews?

8. How important is the writing of book reviews to the hiring process at your institution?

Extremely important / vital | Very important | Somewhat important | Marginally important | Not at all important / irrelevant

9. Please list additional comments here:

10. How would you characterize the importance of book review writing to the promotion/tenure process at your institution?

Extremely important / vital | Very important | Somewhat important | Marginally important | Not at all important / irrelevant

11. Please list additional comments here:

12. Is book reviewing considered a professional activity, a service activity, or something else at your institution?

Professional activity | Service activity | Other form of activity | Does not have an official role as an activity

13. Please list additional comments here:

14. Are you satisfied with the status of book reviewing with regard to hiring/promotion at your institution?

15. What are your personal feelings regarding the relation of the activity of book reviewing to the hiring and promotion process at your institution? Do they differ from the current policy?

16. Do you think the current role of book reviewing is appropriate to the profession?

17. Would you like to see these policies changed? Why or why not?

18. What are your views on book reviewing (reading, research, writing) during working hours?

19. Do you see the role of book reviewing by librarians changing in the future? Does the influence of online content and online reviews affect your view?

Appendix C: Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval Letter

Text of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval Letter, signed on July 13, 2004, is as follows:

The Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board has approved your request to use human subjects in the study entitled:

“The Importance and Status of the Librarian Book Reviewer.”

This approval is contingent upon the subjects participating in your research project being appropriately protected from risk. This includes the protection of the anonymity of the subjects’ identity when they participate in your research project, and with regard to all data that may be collected from the subjects. The approval includes continued monitoring of your research by the Board to assure that the subject becomes injured or complains of injury, you must notify Pam Stacks, Ph.D. immediately. Injury includes but is not limited to bodily harm, psychological trauma, and release of potentially damaging personal information. This approval for the human subjects portion of your project is in the effect for one year, and data collection beyond July 13, 2005 requires an extension request.

Please also be advised that all subjects need to be fully informed and aware that their participation in your research project is voluntary, and that he or she may withdraw from the project at any time. Further, a subject’s participation, refusal to participate, or

withdrawal will not affect any services that the subject is receiving or will receive at the institution in which the research is being conducted.