ChangeMasters All: A Series on Librarians Who Steered a Clear Course toward the Twenty-First Century

An Interview with Dr. Richard Rubin

Susan Corl

Welcoming" is the first word that came to mind as I entered Dr. Richard Rubin's office at Kent State University. He greeted me with a big smile and a warm handshake. After we exchanged pleasantries, he asked me what the article that I had come to him to discuss was about. When I told him, he said that he wasn't sure that he qualified as a "ChangeMaster." ChangeMasters change lives everyday and may not know it, but Rubin (or Rick as he tells Kent State MLIS graduates to call him) has been changing the lives of students and faculty since he began his career as head of the School of Library and Information Science program in 1999. In fact, soon after I arrived in the program that year, he asked me what I was currently doing and where I might be headed in my career, took the time to give me some very wise advice, and also told me that I should feel free to contact him anytime. If you ask me, that's a ChangeMaster!

Rubin, like many others in the library profession, did not originally plan to enter the field, instead earning his BA in philosophy. Still, he had some influences that led him in the direction of librarianship. His earliest influence was his mother, an avid reader who once ran the book department in a Cleveland store. Today, Rubin attributes his mother's love of reading and books to instilling him with the same, and ultimately to his decision to enter the field of library and information science. His writing and teaching interests also played a part in his decision, steering him in the direction of academic libraries. It became clear to him that "there were a lot of values that librarianship had, which I shared."

His educational background at Oberlin College and the University of Illinois was instrumental in shaping his library experiences. Oberlin College, where he received a BA in philosophy and an equivalent of a bachelor's in English, offered a quality liberal arts education stressing values that would inform his decisions throughout his career, such as "thinking about the importance of helping people and respecting them." The concepts and thinking skills that he developed while earning a degree in philosophy also

Dr. Richard Rubin

served him well as he began working in libraries, particularly in the area of management. "There are lots of issues in management that require a certain kind of thoughtfulness. We don't always have time to be thoughtful." The tools of philosophy helped him to think logically about issues to reach the best solution, such as in instances when managers or administrators must understand subtle distinctions when making a decision. Within a couple of years of having obtained his degree in philosophy, he was already beginning to see how it could be applied and combined with his other interests through further study in library science. Toward that ends, he entered the library school at Kent State, finishing his MLS in 1976.

That was hardly the end of Rubin's formal education, however. After some years on the job as a reference librarian and, later, personnel director at the Akron-Summit County Public Library, he decided to commit to academe and entered the doctoral program in library science at the University of Illinois. Here, he was encouraged to think deeply about the issues of the field, gained a broader perspective of the field and its challenges, and learned the essential academic skills of how to conduct original research. It also helped him to understand the legalities of human resources management, which was later to become an area of his personal expertise.

Work experiences, along with his education and personal influences, helped shape Rubin's career. It wasn't only his library experiences that were formative, though. Rubin attributes his interpersonal skills and his ability to work with the public to a sales position he held while

Susan Corl (scorl@holmeslib.org) is Head of Reference at Holmes County Public Library in Millersburg, Ohio.

he was in high school and college. That job gave him the tools to understand how to work with the patrons at Akron-Summit County Public Library, where he began his library career. His work there as a reference librarian and personnel director gave him a "working background in the issues that [he] had to confront" later in his career.

Once in the library profession, he was influenced by different individuals. Stephen Hawk, the past director of the Akron-Summit County Public Library, was one of the people who opened doors for him. Hawk encouraged him to seek a professional vision and reach for opportunities beyond the reference desk, and thus from 1980 to 1984 he served as the human resources director for that library. Another influential person in his career was Linda Murray, the head of governmental affairs at the Ohio Library Council. She taught him to see how libraries operate within the political realm. Combining the experiences of a human resources librarian with the understanding of the overarching political realities of librarianship gave Rubin a unique perspective. He began working as an instructor at the Kent State University School of Library and Information Science in 1984, became an assistant professor in 1988, an associate professor in 1993, and a full professor and head of the program in 1999.

Of the many positions Rubin has held over the years, that of human resources manager influences how he deals with people to this day. Asked to discuss his major accomplishments, he stated that being able to lead the School of Library and Information Science at Kent State University is a great opportunity, but in doing so he immediately turned the spotlight on the major contributions of his faculty. "Having the opportunity to work with these individuals and to provide opportunities for them to succeed, I'm certainly very proud of that," he stated. With the publication of several articles and books on human resource management, Rubin believes he has helped library professionals as well as individuals in other professions, "navigate through an incredibly complex topic." His book *Foundations of Library Information Science* has become one of the essential texts for foundation classes in library schools across the country. "It may sometimes put them to sleep," he laughed, "but there are ideas embedded in that text that I know people come away with." Through these publications and his many opportunities to speak about legal issues in libraries across the state of Ohio, Rubin has offered practical advice on how to deal with library issues in their daily lives.

Thoughts on Library and Information Science Education

As chair of the American Library Association (ALA) Committee on Accreditation, Rubin has the opportunity to review many different library and information science programs. While generally pleased at the number and quality of programs, he sees that the nature of library education is changing. There are some individuals in the community of library higher education who would direct their instruction to reflect more "traditional library services." There is a place for this thinking, but Rubin believes that the profession needs students with more advanced training in technology as well. "The idea that it is just about libraries when it comes to how knowledge is produced and accessed and organized is behind us," he commented. "Libraries are incredibly important institutions, but information science . . . informs libraries by its research, development, and creation of ideas. It also has its own areas that are not necessarily directed at libraries, but we can learn from all of these other areas of information science. So I just do not see library science education anymore as a viable option. It's got to be library *and* information science in some kind of integrated understanding."

The term "library and information science" reflects these changes in the field, where the word "information" attracts students who are interested in learning about information-gathering techniques and technologies, in combination with the fundamentals of a library background. Rubin believes that students who want to work with information technology in this way are better suited to this kind of a program, rather than in a computer science program, for example, because the library and information science degree supports the values of the profession as well. "The more we teach people about the rights of individuals to information no matter where they go; you hope that they will remember that people have a right to that [information]."

The understanding that technology plays a large part in what librarians do is reflected in the library and information science curriculum at Kent State today. Online courses, interactive video, and course management software such as Blackboard and Vista have changed the way instructors conduct their classes, while Web-based databases allow students to acquire information that would otherwise be inaccessible. "A lot of pedagogy has been affected by more access to [electronic] materials," Rubin commented. He also speculates, as do many others, that with the incorporation of emerging technologies, such as iPods, webcasting, streaming video, and emerging media, there will be even more dramatic changes in how students receive instruction. There will continue to be more online means of instruction, but in addition students will have more choices in course content and their instructors. For example, if a course is offered at another university across the country, they will be able to take it and receive credit for it at their university. Despite these head-spinning changes, Rubin feels one thing will remain constant: "What remains the same, or should remain the same, is the relationship between teacher and student. In the end, it's not how you got the article, it's if you've read it and discussed it. How teachers run classes, increasing interaction, demanding high levels of performance, stimulating imagination and

critical thinking–those were all the same values we've always had in teaching. If we fail to enforce those values, it doesn't matter whether you got something off of a database or Google or the net . . . it's irrelevant."

Although Rubin believes that the library profession overall is moving in a very positive direction, there are some areas that could be improved upon. For example, he believes that the master's degree program should be lengthened to include more options for coursework. He feels that the way the programs are structured now only give students a very superficial understanding of the field. Extra courses and time to delve into the body of research could help students grasp the complexities of libraries and give them a solid intellectual foundation before they enter the field.

Another change Rubin has seen over the years is the age of library and information science students. The faces in the classroom are younger than they have been in the past. "Traditionally, librarianship is a career for what's called 'late deciders.' They've had one or two careers and then they back into it." He is very optimistic about this change, for younger students bring enthusiasm, a commitment to library values such as equal access, as well as a great deal of technological knowledge and experience. Part of the reason that library and information science is appealing to younger people is the technology in the profession is a draw for them, where they see an exciting opportunity to use their technology skills, to help others, and to provide access to information that would otherwise be hard to find. "They have that commitment and ease with the new technologies, which many struggle a little bit to learn. The generations that followed me certainly, they're comfortable in that context. I think young people are fitting right in."

Career Highlights of Dr. Richard Rubin

Research Interests

Human Resources Management
Library Administration
Intellectual Freedom and Censorship
Research Methods

Publications

Books

Foundations of Library and Information Science (New York: Neal-Schuman, 1998).

Hiring Library Employees (New York: Neal-Schuman, 1993).

Human Resource Management in Libraries: Theory and Practice (New York: Neal-Schuman, 1991).

In-House Use of Materials in Public Libraries: Monograph 18 (Urbana, Ill.: Graduate School of Library and Information Science, 1986).

The Baby Boom: An Annotated Bibliography (Boston: Lexington, 1984) [written with Greg Byerly].

Incest: The Last Taboo: An Annotated Bibliography (New York: Garland, 1983) [written with Greg Byerly].

Pornography: The Conflict over Sexually Explicit Materials in the United States: An Annotated Bibliography (New York: Garland, 1980) [written with Greg Byerly].

Edited Monographs

Critical Issues in Library Personnel Management #29, papers presented at the Allerton Park Institute, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Nov. 1987. Also published as "Personnel Management in Libraries," in *Library Trends* 38 (Summer 1989).

Refereed Articles

"Attribution Theory and Academic Library Performance Evaluation," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 25 (Jan. 1999): 18–25 [with Julie A. Gedeon].

"A Study of Job Factors Affecting Current Public Library Employees' Desire to Remain with or Leave Their Employer," *Journal of Library Administration* 22 (1995): 85–111 (published Summer 1996).

"Upward Appraisal: What Do Subordinates Consider Important in Evaluating Their Supervisors," *Library and Information Science Research* 17 (1995): 151–61.

"The Development of a Performance Evaluation Instrument for Upward Evaluation of Supervisors by Supervisors," *Library and Information Science Research* 16 (1994): 315–28.

"The Study of the Organizational Commitment of School Library Media Specialists," *Library Quarterly* 62 (July 1992): 306–24 [with Lois Buttlar].

"The Future of Public Library Support Staff," *Public Library Quarterly* 12 (1992): 17–28.

"Ethical Issues in Library Personnel Management," *Journal of Library Administration* 14 (1991): 1–16.

"Employee Turnover Among Full Time Public Librarians," *Library Quarterly* 59 (Jan. 1989): 27–46.

"A Critical Examination of the 1927 Proposed Classifications and Compensation Plan for Library Positions by the American Library Association," *Library Quarterly* 57 (Fall 1987): 400–25.

"A Pilot Study on Employee Turnover Rates of Librarians in Three Moderately Large Public Libraries in Ohio," *Journal of Library Administration* 6 (Winter 1985/86): 89–106.

"Azariah Smith Root and Library Instruction," *Journal of Library History* 12 (Summer 1977): 250–61.

Thoughts on Management in Libraries

In many cases, library administrators are hired because of their ability to manage, not because of their knowledge about libraries and library services. According to Rubin, this practice is a disservice to the profession. Some individuals may be able to manage adequately, but there are values that are inherent to the field that may not be known or practiced by those individuals. Therefore, it is preferable for people who believe in libraries to look for managers who are also knowledgeable about the special issues and concerns of the profession. "The library background gives tremendous context to what we're managing and why we're managing. In the absence of that context, I still think a manager can manage; they simply can't manage as well."

When asked what advice he would give to a new manager, Rubin suggests the following:

- Read and understand literature on human motivation. Attending workshops on this topic can help, but a thorough reading of research on worker motivation will give managers a better understanding about staff behavior at work.
- Although it is important to understand managerial concepts like fiscal managing, it is also important "to be academically prepared for management positions and to read, particularly in human resources."
- Working with a mentor can give new managers practical and intellectual experiences they can carry over into their own managing styles. "So choose your first job if you can in management with an eye toward who you can emulate, with other people there who will support you and help you."

Rubin emphasizes the importance of managing people effectively in order to get the most out of any library. Part of the manager's job is to hire motivated and knowledgeable people who will work toward the mission of the library, "get them the resources to do their job, and get out of their way; then, reward them for whatever they do. I think the motivational literature would suggest that that's really how you motivate people. Let the work itself give the motivation." Leaders can be found throughout the organization. "There is always somebody smarter than you in an organization. What you want to do is harness those brains to the purpose of the organization; and libraries are wonderful, because their purposes are so noble. Getting people revved up is great."

Thoughts on Libraries and Librarianship

For many years the debate as to what constitutes the defining professional characteristics of librarianship has resurfaced. If most patrons do not care whether the person who helps them in the library has a degree, what motivation is there for the library staff to put forth the effort to advance

in the field? Rubin has very strong ideas about this topic. To him library work is not just a job that a person does for eight hours a day, but rather a vital profession that has "its own values and goals that we should be committed to undertake." He speaks of this in visionary terms. "We have commitments, like to the first amendment. We have to defend those commitments. We have to do something positive to preserve people's right to access. Not just to information–we're always talking about information–but also to stimulate the mind. We should have books for kids that are always stimulating them and for adults. This is what makes better citizens, when people can think critically and imaginatively. Librarians should have a commitment to increasing the citizens' capacity to be imaginative and to think. That's what will make good citizens in a democratic society. That's a commitment to the profession."

One aspect that defines a profession is the quality and quantity of research that its practitioners produce and consume. However, Rubin believes that many librarians tend to not contribute to that literature, or sometimes even to read it. The irony is "librarians are preserving the intellectual reservoir of the world and we will die protecting all these ideas and research, but most librarians don't read their own research. Very few people read *Library Quarterly* and *Library and Information Science Research*, and yet we protect all of that research elsewhere." For example, much quality research has been done in the area of information-seeking behaviors, and particularly Web searching, which is crucial to the field. Even though this research can be readily applied in practice, many librarians do not make the commitment to read their literature and incorporate its principles into their thinking. Rubin adds that some individuals "do not necessarily come into it [library and information science] with knowledge of how to even read research. To some extent their disinterest is in lack of familiarity with the material."

Like many professions, library and information science has gone through many changes over the years. When asked what change surprised him the most, Rubin immediately stated the rapidity of technological advances, especially how the Internet has changed the course of library service. Along with the rapid growth of online technology, the ability to transfer print material to digital formats and the acceptance of them has surprised him. Although the Web has altered people's information-seeking practices in ways both good and bad, Rubin feels that it is not the enemy of librarianship. In effect, it provides "extraordinary opportunities for librarians to *find* information and organize it. We don't need search engines, we need find engines, and librarians are find engines for people."

Another area he would like to see improvement is in the funding for libraries. The reliability of funding sources varies widely across the country, and Ohio libraries are relatively well funded because most of the money comes from the state. However, in many areas the survival of the

3. Penny M. Beile and Megan M. Adams, "Other Duties as Assigned: Emerging Trends in the Academic Library Job Market," *College & Research Libraries* 61, no. 4 (July 2000): 336–47.

4. Pixey Anne Mosley, "Mentoring Gen X Managers: Tomorrow's Library Leadership Is Already Here," *Library Administration & Management* 19, no. 5 (Fall 2005): 185–92.

5. Lynne C. Lancaster and David Stillman, *When Generations Collide* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002).

6. Karen Cargille, "The Up Side of Downsizing," *Library Acquisitions-Practice and Theory* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 53–7.

7. J. R. Hackman and Greg R. Oldham. *Work Redesign* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1980).

8. Steven S. Russell, Christiane Spitzmuller, and Lilly F. Lin, "Shorter Can Also Be Better: The Abridged Job in General Scale," *Educational and Psychological Measurement* 64, no. 5 (Oct. 2004): 878–93.

9. Association of College and Research Libraries, "Overview: Librarian Position Descriptions (CUPA-HR): Task Force Draft Report" (May 21, 2007), www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlissues/personnel/cupaoverview.cfm (accessed Feb. 7, 2008).

10. Amy Oakes Wren, Larry Clark, and Marie Deriso, "Employer Beware: Truth-in-Hiring May Be the New Standard in Recruiting," *Business Forum* 27, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 11–14.

11. Karen Muller, "The Association's Associations: LAMA's Strategic Vision," *American Libraries* 30, no. 7 (Aug. 1999): 7.

12. Jane Kinkus, "Project Management Skills: A Literature Review and Content Analysis of Librarian Position Announcements," *College & Research Libraries* 68, no. 4 (July 2007): 352–63.

libraries depends upon the commitment of their communities. If these libraries received "greater support from their communities, it would simply pay off, not just in dollars or business but in the improvement of the reading habits of their communities." It is thus the responsibility of librarians to continuously remind the communities how valuable the library is in their lives.

In general, Rubin feels very positive about the future of libraries and believes they are headed in the right direction. Not all decisions will be made by librarians. "What drives our services, the forces that drive the shape of libraries will be external, heavily external." Librarians have always kept their users in mind when thinking about improving service. In order to keep up, they will have to be more knowledgeable about what users require in terms of information and materials. Anticipating the needs of the users and providing services will require being proactive, but Rubin believes we must be careful how we interpret that word. Libraries are not the catalyst for information need; they "emerge primarily from those forces." Proactive leaders are ones who "scan the environment" to identify needs and trends and then respond to them. "We should always be scanning to see how those changes are occurring and asking ourselves how we can complement those changes." Therefore, we should not think being reactive is a negative response; it simply means complying with the information gleaned while observing the information environment. He added that this does not mean we are passive while waiting for others to take the lead. "It's those broader changes [found when scanning the environment] that really do affect how we can be successful, or whether others will compete with us and provide more effective service than we do."

Overall, Rubin believes the field of library and information science is strong and vital. "It's desperately needed in a world where information is organized for us or controlled by others. Librarians will play a critical role in making sure that people get what they need not just what is easily provided to them. I am very proud of it as it is. I think it's a wonderful profession. It's one of the few professions that I would call noble. It truly is a public good."

Sentiments like that reveal something of what it takes to be a ChangeMaster in this field. The word itself conjures images of bigger-than-life characters single handedly changing the face of library and information science. In reality, the true ChangeMasters are the ones who change lives everyday. I have met one of them. Dr. Rick Rubin is an unassuming ChangeMaster in a noble profession.