


Response to elitism

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Jean-Pierre V. M. Herubel, in "Elitism and Library Faculty," *C&RL News*, May 1990, uses the words "elite," "elitism," and "elitist"—terms he does not define—in two different senses. The terms are used in the sense of dominant schools, or, as the article sets out to show, schools from which the most full-time library school faculty received their final degrees. "Elitism" is also used in opposition to the traditional public service role of the librarian, i.e., library school faculty should be less elitist because the service ethic of librarianship is strongly egalitarian. To posit a connection between these two definitions is confusing and misleading.

Herubel's usage differs from that in the four articles that he cites. "Elite" is used there in reference to a high measure of cross-breeding; as a result of hiring a large percentage of each other's graduates, a certain group of schools is considered "elite." The notion of crossbreeding is not at all mentioned by Herubel, and it is just as well. In library science, it is unavoidable. There are, as of the March 1990 *Accredited List* published by the ALA Committee on Accreditation, 25 schools that offer an MLS and that also offer a doctorate. Not all the doctorates offered are in library science and/or information science; not all the degrees offered, contrary to Herubel, are Ph.D.'s. Of the 25 existing schools, only 12 existed before 1970. A quick

glance at the *College Blue Book*, "Degrees Offered by College and Subject," (22d ed., Macmillan, 1989) revealed 113 U.S. and Canadian schools that offer a doctorate in sociology, 79 in anthropology, 138 in history, and 104 in political science. It is one thing to state that 10 schools out of some 100 might be considered "elitist"; it is quite another to list 17 of 25 as "elitist" and to state that seven programs (it is not at all clear how this number was arrived at) dominate this list.

Herubel belittles the Ph.D. in library and information science, relegating it to "research and administrative options in librarianship, but not as a *sine qua non* for academic teaching." It is unclear what "academic teaching" means. The Ph.D. is a *sine qua non* for continued employment after a certain number of years; this is as true in library science as it is in other disciplines. It is unlikely that a library school could get tenure for a faculty member who does not have a Ph.D.

The conclusion states, "Library education currently reflects a pattern of elitism. Since most institutions are not reflected in the library school professoriate, a minority propagates the research and teaching agendas developed and acculturated at the dominant library schools. Inbreeding was evident in many schools." This is a strong statement, but no evidence was given in the article to

TABLE 1
SOURCES FOR LIBRARY SCHOOL FACULTY

School (from Herubel)	Number of Faculty with Final Degree from School (from Herubel)	Number of Doctoral Graduates from School
Columbia	58	127
Pittsburgh	42	202
Illinois	38	116
Michigan	35	122
Rutgers	33	92
Case Western Reserve	31	133
Chicago	25	170
Indiana	23	97
California-Berkeley	18	61
Toronto	14	11
Syracuse	12	32
Florida State	10	105
McGill	9	
Drexel	8	19
Maryland	8	20
Simmons	8	15
UNC-Chapel Hill	8	12

support the charge of inbreeding or the charge that a minority of library schools have developed together a teaching and research agenda that they are propagating.

Herubel presents a table, titled "The present study," which lists schools and the number of their graduates represented in library school faculty. This list is, with two exceptions, a list of the library science programs with the largest number of doctoral graduates. The exceptions are Case Western Reserve University, which closed several years ago; it is not at all surprising to find it mentioned in Herubel's list, since while in existence it had a large and successful doctoral program. The other exception is McGill, which has no doctoral program in library science; it is unclear why it is on the list. Are there nine full-time library school faculty whose last degree is an MLS from McGill? Were McGill doctorates counted by mistake?

In comparing his list with those of White and Gourman, Herubel states that "a number of disparities appear. Case Western Reserve becomes a major force while Simmons, North Carolina (Chapel Hill), Drexel, Wisconsin (Madison), and especially UCLA fall by the wayside. Florida State emerges as a strong contender." The reasons for Case Western were mentioned above. Simmons College offers a Doctor of Arts degree, aimed towards administrators and not future library school faculty. North Carolina and UCLA are both new programs (1976). All these programs are small, with the exception of Florida State, which is large. Herubel tries to draw conclusions from these findings, in spite of Bookstein and Biggs's conclusion in

an article he cites, that specific numerical rankings are highly unreliable.¹ This is no indication of a precipitous drop in rankings, rather it is solely an indication of size. Table 1 presents Herubel's table with the addition of a column showing the number of library and information science doctoral graduates from each program. The number of graduates was obtained from an online search of *Dissertation Abstracts* done in the summer of 1988, searching for dissertations in library and/or information science. Omitting McGill from the calculations, there is, as should be expected, a very strong (.8945) correlation between the two columns.

Herubel states: "One can earn a degree in any solid program, but the signal is sent that certain informally sanctioned programs carry greater social and professional weight and influence." This is almost certainly true, but nothing in his study supports this claim. A recent study done at the University of Pittsburgh examined perception studies and determined what separated the schools consistently ranked in the two studies by White from the remainder.² Herubel feels that it is quality, which he leaves undefined. The Pittsburgh study provided evidence that what causes some

¹Abraham Bookstein & Mary Biggs, "Rating Higher Education Programs: The Case of the 1986 White Survey," *Library Quarterly* 57 (October 1987): 351-99.

²John Philip Mulvaney, *The Characteristics of a Quality Library School* (diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1989).

library schools to be ranked in perception studies and others not is:

- having a doctoral program;
- being large; and
- being old.

It is for the profession to decide whether or not this is quality.

Herubel's article presents a number of methodological problems. It is unclear why Herubel only examined the catalogs of 52 accredited library schools. The March 1990 *Accredited List* contains 61 schools.

It is unclear what the sentence, "The MLS and Ph.D. were given equal weight, and terminal degrees in subject fields were acknowledged but not considered germane," means. Given the way many faculty are listed in catalogs—sometimes only degrees are given, sometimes only degrees and schools—how can one tell what subject they were in?

It is not clear why only ten faculty members from each school were used. For the 55 accredited

schools reporting statistics to ALISE in 1988, the average number of full-time faculty per library school was 10.21. Twenty-three schools had between 11 and 34 faculty members. Why were these schools shortchanged?

It is not clear why the 1985 and 1987 Gourman report rankings were used as indicators of quality. Both rankings were the same, and the Gourman report was thoroughly discredited several years ago.³

The only thing that Herubel's article points out is that library school faculty tend to come from doctoral programs in library and information science, and that larger doctoral programs are more highly represented than smaller ones. This has everything to do with arithmetic and nothing to do with elitism (in either of Herubel's senses) or with the quality of the schools' MLS programs.

³David S. Webster, "Jack Gourman's Rankings of Colleges and Universities: A Guide for the Perplexed," *RQ* 25 (Spring 1986): 323-31.