Special Libraries Versus Information Analysis Centers

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available through universities. Ms. Klassen
does not tell us what she has or has not been
doing to further her own educational expe-
rience. This is unfortunate, because it is rea-
sonably safe to predict that with or without
an M.L.S. doing nothing after that leads to
obsolescence. Lest she believe that this is sim-
ply an educator’s tactic for bullying individ-
uals into being students, I need to add that
this was also my view during 25 years as a
practitioner. If anything, the need for edu-
cation and continuing education has become
greater, and will continue to be still greater.
Education is a lifetime process, and the M.L.S.
is just one step along the way. How important
it was or was not for Ms. Klassen depends on
what she has done since then.

On one point she is surely wrong, when she
argues that SLA members are more concerned
than other professional groups about status
and degrees. She should try her B.A. in history
and sociology as a job qualification in apply-
ing for a position as a doctor or a lawyer.

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SPECIAL LIBRARIES VERSUS
INFORMATION ANALYSIS CENTERS

It was with interest and a great sense of
ennui that I read the article by M. Cecilia
Rothschild in the Summer 1987 issue. The
author discusses (pp. 164–165) IAC/library
relationships and says that, “There is a general
consensus on the distinctions between the
IAC and the library.” She then goes on to
point out four distinctions summarized from
the library side: libraries do not produce in-
formation; libraries process documents, not
information; libraries do not directly solve
user problems; and libraries do not create new
knowledge.

I assume that the author speaks strictly of
the distinctions made by the Department of
Defense about the differences between special
libraries and information analysis centers. I
certainly hope so, because those distinctions
fly directly in the face of the definitions clas-
sically adopted for special library services.
Guy E. Marion, a former SLA president and
one of the pioneering leaders in the devel-
opment of the philosophy of special library
services, laid out the basis of these services
in his classic article “The Library as an Ad-
junct to Industrial Laboratories” (Library Jour-
nal, September 1910, pp. 400–404), and
generations of special librarians have tried to
follow them. It is all too true that many of us
have fallen short of his ideal, but I think it is
still our ideal and one that many of us strive
to attain. All too often we are unable to con-
vince management that the library should be
supported to that extent, and those infor-
mation analysis functions (if they are per-
formed at all) get scattered elsewhere in the
organization. And, of course, many of us lack
the subject-based knowledge for undertaking
the kinds of in-depth analysis and repack-
aging of information that are required by our
users. This is, again, a failure on our part to
realize the ideals of our early founders, and
is probably at least partly attributable to li-
brary schools trying to turn out generalists,
rather than professionals, competent in a sub-
ject and in library/information center man-
agement.

The distinctions made in Ms. Rothschild’s
article (if it purports to speak of special li-
braries service philosophy in general) fly di-
rectly in the face of a great tradition—a
tradition that is also the central key to the
future of the special library in the information
society.

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