

Library Assessment Award Remarks for Kendon Stubbs

Presented by

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We are honoring Kendon Stubbs for career achievement in the areas of assessment and statistics. As the press release says, “Kendon Stubbs became the leading authority on measuring the size and services of academic research libraries. He is the father of the ARL Index.”

But Kendon’s work goes well beyond statistics and assessment. At the University of Virginia Library, where he worked for 42 years, people were somewhat aware of Kendon’s statistical work. But it was mostly seen as a harmless diversion. At his home library Kendon was a relentless innovator. He was creative in thinking up wild and crazy ideas, and practical enough to make them happen. A few examples:

In the early 1990s, U.Va. became famous for putting full text materials into cyberspace, doing this before almost anyone else. Kendon made it happen.

For library catalogs the mid 90s were a period of transition. When it was time to replace the online catalog at U.Va. Kendon said repeatedly it would be silly to install another nongraphical version of a computerized card catalog. The World Wide Web was the future, and that was where the library needed to go.

The Library Café –now every library seems to have a coffee shop, but in 1998 putting an espresso bar in Alderman Library was a revolutionary move. Once again, Kendon at work.

One of Kendon’s more radical ideas was that collection development policies should emphasize serving the students and scholars of today, rather than the scholars yet unborn. Toward this end, he authorized a massive book duplication project to reduce the ‘recall wars’ raging among graduate students in English and History.

Later a metric was established stating that 60% of all newly purchased monographs should circulate within in two years. Pretty revolutionary in 2001.

Under Kendon’s leadership, the U.Va. library became a data pioneer, conducting its first faculty survey in 1993, followed by a student survey the next year. The Management Information Services unit was established in 1997. Four years later U.Va. became the first research library in North America to implement the Balanced Scorecard.

An interesting thing about Kendon: as he became a statistical guru, he did not abandon his education in the humanities, or his sense of humor. Several times at library conferences, I heard an obscure speaker lighten up a presentation with a joke or story attributed to “my friend Kendon Stubbs.” One example: “As Kendon Stubbs says, librarians use statistics the way a drunk uses a lamp post. More for support than for illumination.”

Butt Kendon never forgot the reason for collecting data. They were not numbers for the sake of numbers. The data were collected so they could measure our performance, improve our service, and increase customer satisfaction.

One of Kendon's earliest articles has a distinctly un-literary and un-funny title "University Libraries: Standards and Statistics." But the first paragraph contains a vivid and appropriate quotation from Hegel, and the last paragraph calls up his literary knowledge to state his rationale (and our rationale) for collecting and analyzing statistics.

At this point one may feel somewhat like the dreamer of Piers Plowman who through seven thousand lines of poetry asks what he should do to win salvation, and in the end learns that the search must begin again. University libraries that wonder what they must do to be saved will not find the answer in the data table printed on this page. They must look for and measure what is necessary to give users what they need when they need it.

Kendon told us a lot about himself right there: for 42 years he looked for ways to give library users what they need when they need it.

On behalf of this conference I am honored to present Kendon Stubbs the Library Assessment Career Achievement Award.