# Bibliographic Instruction at Learning Resources Centers in North Carolina

## Susan Janney

Whether or not it is a "self-evident social good,"[1] bibliographic instruction (BI) has become an issue, a discipline and even a "political movement"[2] to some librarians. Despite the revived interest in a service that learning resources centers (LRCs) have traditionally provided, little information is available on bibliographic instruction in North Carolina's community college system.

A survey of librarians at LRCs in the state was conducted during fall, 1985, to ascertain how they address the issue in philosophical and practical terms. Besides providing an overview of current adult "library literacy" efforts, the findings might encourage program evaluation, professional development and additional investigation in bibliographic instruction.

### What is BI? — A Survey of the Literature

For purposes of this study, bibliographic instruction is defined as reference services that teach patrons how to use the LRC in particular and libraries in general — the "who, what, when, where, why and how" of library use. Depending upon the setting and objectives, instruction might entail individual reference service, orientation tours, workshops, classroom lectures and/or formal coursework. In this sense, the term encompasses the distinctions writers such as James Rice and Anne Roberts make among "levels" of bibliographic instruction.

Rice's hierarchy consists of "library orientation" (introducing "library facilities, the physical plant, the staff, the departments, and a few very commonly used resources")[3], "library instruction" (covering "more advanced techniques for information access and library use")[4] and "bibliographic instruction" (formal or complete coursework integrating "all levels of library orientation and library instruction")[5].

Roberts defines bibliographic instruction as the "intensive process of teaching ... efficient and effective" library use by elucidating "research methodology, search strategy, and the biblio-

graphic structure of a given literature in a discipline."[6] In her view, bibliographic instruction plus "library orientation" (explaining "available library facilities and services") equals "library instruction."[7]

While library orientation is only a component or "level" of bibliographic instruction, it could be the mainstay of a program for most community college and technical institute students. Generally, curricula are not geared to the "use of sophisticated reference materials so necessary for upper level and graduate study. Instruction is seldom aimed at developing in-depth research competencies."[8] Moreover, vocational and technical coursework is generally not amenable to the "typical, successful library instruction programs keyed to research papers."[9]

Thus, given the community college/technical institute's mission, curricula and diverse student body, various approaches to bibliographic instruction should be offered. Ideally, the program would incorporate the following key elements of adult education: "1. several starting levels, 2. several profitable points of termination, and 3. several rates and directions of advancement."[10] Viewed from this perspective, bibliographic instruction and other kinds of reference work can form the continuum of an "integrated information services program."[11]

However, it should be pointed out that the objectives of bibliographic instruction programs "of necessity must be unique to each institution and be the product of that institution."[12]

### Why BI?

The American Library Association urges all libraries to make user education "one of the primary goals of service" having the "same administration, funding, and staffing as do more traditional library programs."[13] The Association of College and Research Libraries Bibliographic Instruction Task Force guidelines exhort a library "not only to support the teaching function of its parent institution but also to actively participate in that function."[14] The program should be based upon a "written profile of the information needs

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of various segments of the academic community" and a "written statement of objectives."[15] The "Think Tank" recommendations assert that "competency in library research should be a fundamental goal of education. Effective bibliographic instruction" helps students understand the "nature of learning and scholarship, directly supports their coursework, and helps prepare them for self-directed life-long learning."[16]

It may be that "bibliographic instruction needs no more justification than instruction in composition or any of the liberal arts,"[17] but the issue often seems tenable when LRCs try to reach students in other classes. Students in vocational and technical programs, for example, "tend not to have prior library use experience and may be embarrassed or afraid to use the LRC, or may simply see no relevance in it."[18] Furthermore, their instructors also might not have had "library usage as an important part of their backgrounds. They are often not aware of what the LRC can do for them and their students."[19]

Adult students in general do not "identify as completely with the student role ... They have other responsibilities ... which compete for involvement."[20] Their participation in bibliographic instruction "will be shaped more by their own perceptions than by passive acceptance of the values of faculty and librarians."[21]

Then there is the danger of succumbing to the "head-in-the-clouds" approach preached by the "moral majority of the library profession."[22] Constance McCarthy warns that students who have been led to believe that they have been equipped "to use any library unaided, for any purposes, for the rest of their lives" are actually ill-prepared to face the complexity and dynamics of libraries.[23]

John Swan adds that "if bibliographic instruction is treated as an end in itself, a discipline for students to master, rather than a path to the mastery of real disciplines," the relationship between library use and learning can be obscured.[24]

Library instruction that instead encourages a realistic view of bibliographic research will not delude students that one outline or "tipsheet" can "encapsulate good research strategy for all disciplines."[25]

If students can also discover their "own power to get information," bibliographic instruction might provide the "incentive to continue learning begun in the classroom" or to devise personal learning projects.[26] Therein lies its relationship to adult education, or what is known as "lifelong learning or independent learning."[27]

Bibliographic instruction, then, can effectively support classroom teaching if it is practical and student-oriented. It can also serve as one component of a complete learning resources program. Even if it cannot induce most students to become independent, life-long library users, it might help to demonstrate the LRC's interest in their pursuit of lifelong learning.

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### What are North Carolina's LRCs Doing?

What are LRCs in North Carolina's community college system doing about bibliographic instruction? Manual searches of the literature and a database search by the State Library; inquiries at the libraries and library schools at Appalachian State University, East Carolina University, North Carolina Central University, UNC-Chapel Hill and UNC-Greensboro; and contact with the Library Orientation Instruction Exchange uncovered no studies on this specific subject. Consequently, the author conducted a survey during fall, 1985, to get some "baseline" information.

The survey instrument was a questionnaire incorporating key points covered in the ERIC publication, "Organizing and Managing a Library Instruction Program: Checklists;"[28] *Evaluating Bibliographic Instruction: A Handbook*, by ACRL's Bibliographic Instruction Section;[29] and *The Bibliographic Instruction Clearinghouse: A Practical Guide*, by the Bibliographic Instruction Section's Clearinghouse Committee.[30] Nineteen multiple- and forced-choice questions covered bibliographic instruction program planning, administration, implementation and evaluation. A final section employed a Likert scale to elicit attitudes about such issues as the role of public schools, library schools and professional organizations in bibliographic instruction. Most items permitted alternate responses, and comments were encouraged.

A questionnaire and cover letter were mailed to the director or reference librarian (depending upon staff size and job titles) of each LRC in the community college system. Forty-eight of the 58

questionnaires were returned, an 83% response rate. Several participants wrote notes on the survey, supplied sample program materials and provided follow-up telephone interviews.

Results of the survey are summarized below, following the format of the questionnaire. (Note: Some questions were not answered by some participants. Thus, percentages and other statistics are based upon the total number of responses per item.) A complete copy of the survey follows.

*1. What types of BI are provided?* As shown in Table I, the most prevalent approach to teaching library skills is the orientation tour, followed by individualized instruction/reference service. Seven schools also require bibliographic instruction (at least for some students), and five offer an elective course.

TABLE I

Types or "Levels" of Bibliographic Instruction

| Types of BI | % of LRCs | No. of LRCs |
|---|---|---|
| Required course | .15 | 7 |
| Elective course | .10 | 5 |
| Course-related/course-integrated | .50 | 24 |
| Workshops or term-paper clinics | .19 | 9 |
| Individual classroom lectures/demos. | .52 | 25 |
| Orientation tours | .88 | 42 |
| Individualized instruction | .67 | 32 |

48 respondents = 100%

*2. What is usually taught?* Virtually all of the programs (98%) cover general instructions for using basic "research tools" (i.e., the catalog and periodical indexes), the LRC's layout and how to locate materials (96%), and information on resources, policies and procedures for patrons (92%). Seventy-one percent of the programs introduce research techniques. Less than half offer detailed instruction about research, the classification system, reference works and audiovisual media (including computer software). This advanced instruction is offered in the BI courses and in some orientations.

*3. What media/methods are used?* The lecture method is used most often (88%), followed by the use of library reference exercises (65%), audiovisual media (63%), and handouts (62%). Self-instructional modules are used at only four, or eight percent, of the schools.

*4. When is BI offered?* Fall is the busiest quarter, when most LRCs are orienting new students. Bibliographic instruction (all types) is offered an average of 18 times then. Averages for other quarters are: spring, 11; winter, 10; and summer, 7. Three LRCs noted no BI activities during summer quarter, but one reported 50.

*5. How many people are taught annually?* Estimates range from 2,000 participants at one school to 100 at two. The median number is 350; the mean, 523.

*6. Does the LRC administer BI?* At seven of the 48 schools represented, the LRC is not responsible for all, or most, of the BI on campus. Alternatives cited include: work with a faculty liaison, independent work by some faculty, and the incorporation of BI into other courses (course-integrated BI).

*7. Who usually implements BI?* At half of the schools, a "designated LRC staff member" usually provides the instruction. The LRC director teaches most often at 39% of the schools. At 11 schools (24%), the LRC and the faculty jointly provide BI; at eight (17%), an instructor often works independently.

Some of the alternative approaches noted above are exemplified by the programs at Carteret Technical College (required course), Vance-Granville Community College (elective course) and Mitchell College (course-integrated).

Carteret's Library Science 1000 course (General Education curriculum) parallels the one East Carolina University requires of all new students. In fact, LRC director Ed Shearin teaches it as an adjunct professor of ECU's continuing education division. The course is a co-requisite (with the English "research paper" course) for college-transfer candidates. The 1.5 credit-hour course is offered fall, winter and spring quarters. Classes are held two hours a week. Instruction centers upon general research principles and their application. The basic text is a booklet compiled by Dr. Shearin, which is sold in the bookstore. Students are graded on assignments, tests and the completion of a "pathfinder" or bibliography. Most of the coursework is done at Carteret's LRC, but students take at least one "field trip" to ECU's Joyner Library. This fall, the LRC will provide orientations for the technical English course required in vocational/technical programs.

Vance-Granville offers an elective "Library Services" course (English 105) every quarter. An average of 12 students enroll for each class. Taught by librarian/instructor Frank Sinclair, the course acquaints students with print and nonprint media, A/V equipment, the LRC's resources and services, and research techniques. Reference questions, exercises and tests cover such areas as: the Dewey Decimal System, the catalog, general and specialized reference works, periodicals, microforms and bibliography (in principle and practice). Evaluation is based upon assignments and a final exam.

Until recently, Mitchell's college-parallel students took a requisite research skills course for one quarter-hour credit in English. In fall, 1985, the instruction was integrated into English 151, the "research" course. Basic library tools and skills are introduced, and students get experience in using the LRC. Their participation is factored into their final grade.

Marcia Bradshaw, LRC director, begins with a one-hour classroom session for each section of the course (nine were open last fall). Transparencies and a videotape, "The Mitchell LRC" are shown, and a "topic list" is distributed. (The course requires a research paper, and the LRC lists various topics on which it has sufficient resources.) Students also complete an exercise using the catalog, periodical indexes and Newsbank. Copies of "A Reference Guide to the Mitchell LRC" are available at the reference desk for student use. The LRC also provides similar instruction in the technical English course required for vocational/technical students.

All three LRCs (as well as many others) offer a range of reference services, including program-related orientations, to support bibliographic instruction.

8. *Do faculty support BI?* Giving rough estimates of what percentage of the faculty/staff support BI efforts, the LRCs perceived the most cooperation in the integration of BI into classes (mean percentage: 43) and in the assignment of classwork requiring the use of LRC materials (40%). Approximately 30% of the faculty and staff promote BI and/or LRC use, and accompany students during BI sessions. A mean of 27% request orientations. Still fewer plan BI with the LRC staff (18%), require their students to master library skills (16%), personally receive BI (15%), help evaluate BI (13%), and invite LRC staff members to departmental meetings (12%). The lowest level of apparent participation was in presenting BI jointly with the LRC staff (10%).

9. *How is BI promoted?* By far, the most frequent means of promoting BI is through discussions with faculty/staff patrons at the LRC, or with those who frequent the LRC (used by 94% of the LRCs). Eighty-one percent use handbooks, handouts and other materials. Other popular avenues of promotion include: discussions with student patrons (66%), discussions with faculty/staff "non-patrons" (53%) and information in college handbooks and catalogs (53%). Eight LRCs (17%) use the student newspaper; five (11%) use the local newspaper. One each use the school's cable television channel and departmental meetings.

10. *Who usually receives BI?* Seventy-two percent of the LRCs frequently provide BI oriented to students in a particular course (usually an English course). Forty-eight percent concentrate on students in a particular program, usually nursing. Other "target" groups include: associate degree candidates in general (46%) and evening students (33%). Only 24% of the programs are geared to technical and vocational students. Seventeen percent typically involve Adult Basic Education students. Regular BI sessions for faculty and staff were reported by 13% and 4%, respectively, of the LRCs.

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11. *What are the goals?* A primary goal of most of the BI programs (92%) is, indeed, "to help students find sources for their assignments." Eighty-five percent seek to "promote student LRC use in general." Promoting "life-long learning" is a goal of 75% of the programs, while 69% try to encourage faculty/staff use of the LRC.

12. *What are the guidelines?* More than half (60%) of the LRCs represented do not have a written policy, statement of goals and objectives, and set of procedures for their BI program. Ostensibly, most of them do have some written or informal guidelines for this and/or other reference services.

13. *How are needs assessed?* Seventy-three percent of the LRCs consider curriculum requirements in determining needs for bibliographic instruction. Slightly fewer, 71%, take into account faculty and staff comments. Students' comments figure into the assessments at 58% of the LRCs, and one-half of them note recurring reference questions. At three (6%) of the schools, BI pre/post-tests are given.

14. *Is BI evaluated?* Sixty per cent of the LRCs "continuously and systematically" evaluate their efforts in bibliographic instruction.

15. *How is BI evaluated?* The factor most of the LRCs (77%) use in program evaluation is "comments by students." Seventy-five per cent rely upon "comments by faculty and/or staff participants." Twenty-nine, or 65%, of the LRCs note "changes in the types of reference questions asked." Eight (18%) LRCs use "post-instructional questionnaires."

*16. How does BI rate?* Table II lists the ratings the librarians gave to their BI program's methods/media and results/effectiveness. Most of the respondents are satisfied on both counts.

TABLE II

**Self-Ratings of Programs**

| Methods/Media | | Results/Effectiveness | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Rating | %, (Resp.) | Rating | %, (Resp.) |
| Inadequate | 0% (0) | Below expect. | 9% (4) |
| Needs some improvement | 41% (19) | Near expect. | 41% (19) |
| Good | 63% (29) | Meets expect. | 46% (21) |
| Very good | 7% (3) | Exceeds expect. | 4% (2) |

46 respondents = 100%

*17. What affects program quality?* The most common impediment to implementing or improving bibliographic instruction is "insufficient time to work out the logistics" (e.g., needs assessment, teaching methods, evaluation). Fifty-three per cent of the librarians reported that they wrestle with this problem. A contender is the "need for more LRC staff,"cited by 51%. Forty-five per cent point to "low faculty/staff support," while 19% choose "low student support." Only one librarian noted the problem of "low LRC staff support."

*18. What will improve BI?* The plans or priorities the LRCs have for improving their bibliographic instruction include the following: working more closely with faculty and staff (68%), working on program logistics (41%), investigating additional modes of instruction (such as CAI and telecourses) (34%), and improving publicity (34%). Twenty per cent will encourage professional development in BI. Only seven per cent will seek additional funding.

*19. What is best for "neophytes"?* The question, "How do you think library skills are most effectively learned at your school by those who have never, or seldom, used a library?" brought the following responses (Note: 47 of the 48 LRCs responded; some chose several alternatives. Percentages are based upon the number of "votes" each item received.):

informally, as needed ........ *74% (35)*

in a "subject" course, with teacher's help ............. *38% (18)*

in a short-term BI session (e.g., orientation) .......... *34% (16)*

in a BI course ............... 11% (5)

other: "assignment-related," "reference exercises" ....... *4% (2)*

*20. How significant is BI?* Table III reproduces responses to the last item on the questionnaire. Essentially, most of the librarians agreed that:

BI is and should be an important service

faculty should be involved in BI (by requiring or providing basic BI)

teacher training should cover BI

library schools should stress BI

public schools should require BI

professional development in BI is available

the profession acknowledges the significance of BI

## Summary

The survey findings suggest that these LRCs — and others in the state — generally take a

TABLE III

**Positions On BI Issues**

| Issue | % of All Responses | | No. of Responses | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SA | A | D | SD* |
| BI is a minor element of my LRC's services. | 2% (1) | 23% (11) | 40% (19) | 34% (16) |
| BI should be an important element of my LRC's services. | 70% (26) | 46% (17) | 8% (3) | 3% (1) |
| The faculty at my school should teach their students basic library skills. | 4% (2) | 47% (21) | 36% (16) | 13% (6) |
| The faculty at my school should see to it that their students know basic library skills. | 38% (18) | 47% (22) | 13% (6) | 2% (1) |
| Prospective teachers should master, and be able to teach, basic library skills as part of their education. | 29% (13) | 62% (28) | 7% (3) | 2% (1) |
| BI needs more emphasis in library schools' curricula. | 33% (15) | 54% (25) | 13% (6) | 0% (0) |
| BI should be required in the public schools. | 52% (24) | 43% (20) | 4% (2) | 0% (0) |
| Avenues for professional development in BI (i.e., NCLA, LRA workshops, news on BI, etc.) are available to me. | 12% (5) | 58% (25) | 28% (12) | 2% (1) |
| The need for, and value of, BI is underrated by the profession. | 12% (5) | 40% (17) | 47% (20) | 2% (1) |

*Key: SA — Strongly Agree    A — Agree    D — Disagree    SD — Strongly Disagree

practical, appropriate approach to bibliographic instruction and are cognizant of the professional and educational implications of the issue.

The author believes that the subject warrants additional study, particularly in the areas of bibliographic instruction for vocational/technical students, faculty involvement, and the coordination of efforts with library and public schools.

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### Survey On LRC Bibliographic Instruction

1. What type(s) or "level" (s) of bibliographic instruction (BI) does your LRC provide?
   - ☐ required course
     (av. enrollment: _____ when offered _____ )
   - ☐ elective course
     (av. enrollment: _____ when offered _____ )
   - ☐ course-related or course-integrated sessions
   - ☐ workshops or term-paper clinics
   - ☐ individual classroom lectures/demonstrations
   - ☐ orientation tours
   - ☐ individualized instruction
2. What is usually "taught" during BI?
   - ☐ the LRC's layout: locating the catalog, collections, etc.
   - ☐ the LRC's resources, policies and general procedures for patrons
   - ☐ general instructions for using basic "research tools" (i.e., catalog, periodical indexes, etc.)
   - ☐ detailed instructions on the classification system, choosing and using reference works, etc.
   - ☐ using A/V media (including computer software)
   - ☐ general instruction on research techniques
   - ☐ detailed instruction on research techniques
   - ☐ other: _____
3. What instructional media and methods are used?
   - ☐ lectures
   - ☐ A/V media
   - ☐ self-instructional modules
   - ☐ classroom exercises
   - ☐ library reference exercises
   - ☐ research projects
   - ☐ tests or quizzes
   - ☐ bibliographies
   - ☐ handouts
   - ☐ handbooks
   - ☐ displays, point-of-use instructions
   - ☐ other: _____
4. How many times is BI (all types) usually provided each quarter?
   _____ fall _____ winter _____ spring _____ summer
5. Approximately how many people are "taught" each academic year? _____
6. Is the LRC responsible for all or most of the BI at your school?
   _____ yes
   _____ no (please explain): _____
7. Who usually implements BI?
   - ☐ the LRC director
   - ☐ a designated LRC staff member (position): _____
   - ☐ most of the LRC staff, as needed or on a rotating basis
   - ☐ LRC staff and faculty member(s) jointly
   - ☐ faculty member(s)
   - ☐ other: _____
8. Roughly estimating, what percent of the faculty and school staff:
   - ☐ Request LRC orientations for their students
   - ☐ Accompany students during BI sessions
   - ☐ Plan BI jointly with the LRC staff for their students
   - ☐ Present BI jointly with the LRC staff to their students
   - ☐ Help evaluate BI
   - ☐ integrate BI into their instruction

☐ Make assignments requiring the use of LRC resources
☐ Require that their students master basic library skills
☐ Personally receive BI
☐ Promote BI and/or LRC use
☐ Invite LRC staff members to departmental meetings

9. How does the LRC promote BI?
   ☐ via discussions with student patrons
   ☐ via discussions with student non-patrons
   ☐ via discussions with faculty/staff patrons
   ☐ via discussions with faculty/staff non-patrons
   ☐ via posters and/or displays
   ☐ in LRC handbooks, handouts, etc.
   ☐ in faculty/staff newsletters
   ☐ in the student newspaper
   ☐ in college catalogs and handbooks
   ☐ in circulars distributed to the public
   ☐ in local newspaper
   ☐ other: _____

10. What group(s) receive BI most often?
    ☐ students in a particular course: _____
    ☐ students in a particular program: _____
    ☐ A.A., A.A.S., etc., degree candidates in general
    ☐ occupational diploma (voc/tech) candidates in general
    ☐ ABE/GED students
    ☐ evening students
    ☐ continuing education students
    ☐ special credit students
    ☐ faculty
    ☐ staff (non-LRC)
    ☐ community patrons

11. What goals does your LRC have for those who receive BI?
    ☐ to help students find sources for their assignments
    ☐ to help students meet certification requirements
    ☐ to help students prepare for college transfer
    ☐ to promote student LRC use in general
    ☐ to encourage "life-long learning"
    ☐ to acquaint faculty and/or staff with LRC resources
    ☐ to promote faculty and/or staff use of the LRC
    ☐ other: _____

12. Does your LRC have a written policy, statement of goals and objectives, and set of procedures for BI?
    ☐ yes    ☐ no

13. What factors are considered in assessing needs for BI?
    ☐ LRC use patterns and/or circulation statistics
    ☐ recurring reference questions
    ☐ comments by students
    ☐ comments by faculty and/or staff
    ☐ student surveys
    ☐ faculty and/or staff surveys
    ☐ institutional self-study recommendations
    ☐ student-body profiles
    ☐ curriculum requirements
    ☐ area occupational needs
    ☐ pre- and post-tests given during BI sessions
    ☐ other: _____

14. Does your LRC continuously and systematically evaluate its BI?
    ☐ yes    ☐ no

15. What factors are considered in formally or informally evaluating BI?
    ☐ changes in LRC use patterns and/or circulation statistics
    ☐ changes in the types of reference questions asked
    ☐ comments by student participants
    ☐ comments by faculty and/or staff participants
    ☐ results of post-instructional questionnaires
    ☐ results of BI tests and/or exercises
    ☐ other: _____

16. How would you rate, overall, the BI program on:

| methods and media | results/effectiveness |
| --- | --- |
| ☐ inadequate | ☐ below expectations |
| ☐ needs some improvement | ☐ near expectations |
| ☐ good | ☐ meets expectations |
| ☐ very good | ☐ exceeds expectations |

17. What factors impede the implementation or improvement of BI?
    ☐ insufficient time to work out the logistics (e.g., needs assessment, teaching methods, evaluation)
    ☐ inadequate or insufficient instructional materials
    ☐ inadequate support funding
    ☐ the need for more LRC staff
    ☐ low LRC staff support
    ☐ low faculty/staff support
    ☐ low administration support
    ☐ low student support
    ☐ insufficient publicity
    ☐ other: _____

18. What plans does the LRC have for improving BI?
    ☐ working on program logistics
    ☐ investigating *additional* modes of instruction (e.g., CAI modules, telecourses)
    ☐ securing additional funding
    ☐ encouraging professional development in BI
    ☐ working more closely with faculty and/or staff
    ☐ improving publicity
    ☐ other: _____

19. How do you think library skills are most effectively learned at your school by those who have never, or seldom, used a library?
    ☐ informally, as the need arises
    ☐ in a subject-area course, with the teacher's guidance
    ☐ in short-term BI session (i.e., orientations, etc.)
    ☐ other: _____

20. For the following items, please indicate whether you:
    SA — strongly agree
    A — agree
    D — disagree
    SD — strongly disagree
    ☐ BI is a minor element of my LRC's services
    ☐ BI should be an important element of my LRC's services
    ☐ The faculty at my school should teach their students basic library skills
    ☐ The faculty at my school should see to it that their students know basic library skills
    ☐ Prospective teachers should master, and be able to teach, basic library skills as part of their education
    ☐ BI needs more emphasis in library schools' curricula
    ☐ BI should be required in the public schools
    ☐ Avenues for professional development in BI (i.e., NCLA, LRA workshops, news on BI, etc.) are available to me
    ☐ The need for, and value of, BI is underrated by the profession

MANY THANKS for your kind assistance ... and any additional comments you have.

*Plese return the survey by Oct. 14th*

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