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## Review of *Lingua Franca: The Review of Academic Life*

Martha L. Brogan

*University of Pennsylvania*, brogan@pobox.upenn.edu

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NOTE: At the time of publication, the author Martha L. Brogan was affiliated with Yale University. Currently June 2007, she is the Associate University Librarian for Collection Development and Management at the University of Pennsylvania.

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## Review of *Lingua Franca: The Review of Academic Life*

### **Abstract**

*Lingua Franca: The Review of Academic Life* offers scholars in the humanities, broadly conceived, a forum for debate on issues in higher education, with the reformulation of the liberal arts agenda figuring prominently. Launched with a successful trial balloon issue in June 1990, followed with regular bimonthly issues beginning in December 1990, *Lingua Franca* is a gutsy, timely, and topical review of the academy and might be characterized as a grassroots version of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

### **Comments**

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the literature dealing specifically with technological and organizational change in libraries. Managers and library administrators will find the ideas challenging as they confront change in their own libraries and institutions of higher education.—Susan F. Rosenblatt, *University of California, Berkeley, California.*

*Lingua franca: The Review of Academic Life.* Mamaroneck, N.Y.: Lingua Franca, Inc., 1990-. Individuals: \$17.95/year; Institutions: \$35/year. (ISSN 1051-3310).

*Lingua franca: The Review of Academic Life* offers scholars in the humanities, broadly conceived, a forum for debate on issues in higher education, with the reformulation of the liberal arts agenda figuring prominently. Launched with a successful trial balloon issue in June 1990, followed with regular bimonthly issues beginning in December 1990, *Lingua franca* is a gutsy, timely, and topical review of the academy and might be characterized as a grassroots version of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Published independently out of Mamaroneck, New York, *Lingua franca* is the creation of Jeffrey Kittay, former Yale French professor and currently visiting professor at New York University. In addition to academics, contributors so far include primarily New York-based journalists with credentials from *Esquire*, the *New York Times*, *Spy Magazine*, the *Nation*, *Dissent*, and the *New Republic*.

Rarely has a new academic rag received so much attention from the media, leading this reviewer to believe that *Lingua franca* is street-smart and market-wise. From the *Washington Post* to the *San Francisco Examiner*, from the *Boston Globe* to the *Chicago Tribune*, *Lingua franca* has been cited and reviewed enthusiastically. *Lingua franca's* ads abound with pithy testimonials from the likes of Umberto Eco, Catharine R. Stimpson (recent president of the Modern Language Association and Rutgers graduate school dean), and Lindsay Waters (Harvard University Press executive editor). Bill Katz, in *Library Journal*, selected it as one of "The Ten Best Magazines

of 1990." *The Wall Street Journal* and *Harper's* have reprinted its articles.

Why all the fuss? Perhaps because *Lingua franca* takes us behind the scenes in academe and talks frankly about some rather delicate issues: the tenure system at Harvard, unproductive faculty, the great Eskimo "snow" vocabulary hoax, Paul de Man and his deconstruction, and my personal favorite—undercover inside the M.F.A. creativity boot camp—in which the author reviews the propensity for "groupthink" and political consensus that controls writers' workshops across the country. There are also articles of a more practical nature: the diary of a faculty member serving on an affirmative action search, an interview with a faculty member accused of sexual harassment, and a primer on new TIAA-CREF retirement plan options. Academic librarians long concerned about their drab image may be gratified to learn from Valerie Steele's article, "The F-word" (where F stands for Fashion), that they are dressed in vogue for academe. A UCLA history professor explains: "To dress fashionably is to be labeled frivolous. . . . Dowdy is safe and serious; bad dressing, one of the last ways in which academics can project the illusion of otherworldliness." Written in a breezy style, *Lingua franca* is entertaining and easy to read.

Growing from forty (June 1990) to fifty (April 1991) pages in length, each issue typically has a number of regular columns in addition to the cover story, the feature article, and two shorter articles or interviews. Academic librarians will take special interest in the "Breakthrough Books" section of "Field Notes," in which a handful of scholars identify the most recent significant book in their discipline. Although the selections are typically from the mainstream scholarly press, the column serves as a timely annotated list of top hits. "Inside Publishing" looks forward to new releases—for example, announcing *The New York Review of Books'* plans to initiate an Italian edition, *Libri & Idee*, and to develop French and German editions as well, and the resurrection of the influential

Africanist review *Transition*. Appearing under the same rubric is a short column—"What Do Editors Really Want?"—in which acquisitions editors answer queries about the kinds of manuscripts they are seeking in specified fields. Anyone living under the illusion that authors—not editors—set the publishing agenda will be reminded otherwise by reading this column.

Academic librarians should be pleased to read—if not contribute to—the regular column "Research File: Documents in Search of Scholars." Here we find the treasures of our collections—at Michigan State University, the New York Public Library, the Library of Congress, Radcliffe College, the International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam), and the Franklin Furnace Archive (Manhattan)—begging for scholarly investigation. Enterprising graduate students would be well-advised to package "documents in search of scholars" with "what editors really want" for a sure-fire dissertation/monograph success.

Until the April issue, this little magazine devoted 20 to 30 percent of its pages to a regular line called "Jobtracks," tracing the migratory paths of junior faculty to their first positions or of seasoned faculty to senior positions. Academics will no doubt lovingly run their fingers down the long columns of names in search of that lost classmate, colleague, or mentor—now found—at last, promoted to tenure at Emory. In April, through a font and spacing change, "Jobtracks" was reduced to just over six pages in length.

With a circulation of 15,000, *Lingua franca* apparently followed Abbeville's advice and thought first of its audience. Its modest institutional price, \$35, suits its desk-top publishing quality and newsy content. Worthy of our support, yes, but also worthy of our vision. As *Lingua franca* matures—and let us hope it does—academic librarians should help to make their agenda an integral part of its mission. Right now, the magazine is walking a fine line between class clown and class act: its reputation hangs in the balance. A case in point is the

"Field Notes" insert in the April 1991 issue, "Rad Librarians Track the Zeitgeist," in which the travails of Hennepin County Library's cataloger Sanford Berman to establish new Library of Congress subject headings are listed. *Lingua franca* reprints a selection of sixteen new headings from among the 400 initiated by Berman. It lists another thirty—most of which, like "Cat furniture," are largely irrelevant to academics—from among the thousands of unique headings in use at Hennepin County Library alone. Excluded are more serious and surprising examples such as "Marxism" (use: "Communism" or "Socialism") or "Family planning" (use: "Birth control"). *Lingua franca* misleads its readers by prefacing the second list with: "Here are some of the cultural phenomena that the library caught up with during the past year. Look for them soon at your local library." Only if your local library happens to be Hennepin County Library, they might have added. More disturbing, however, is that *Lingua franca* went for the quick laugh and overlooked the more important—and academically relevant—questions: How are new subject headings introduced and adopted by the Library of Congress? How do they reflect cultural changes? *Lingua franca* might have investigated recent changes resulting from German unification, for example. And there would have been plenty of room for humor.

If it can avoid a decline into terminal cuteness, *Lingua franca* will be of interest to graduate students, faculty, academic librarians and publishers, and consumers and critics of higher education.—Martha L. Brogan, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

#### *Scholarly Communication and Bibliometrics.*

Borgman, Christine L., ed. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1990. 393p. \$38 (ISBN 0-803903879-9). LC 90-8745.

Christine Borgman, who teaches in the library school and in the Communications Studies program at UCLA, has compiled eight articles from a special issue of *Communications Research* (October 1989) and eight new essays into a com-