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California Examines Its Divided Catalog

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IN THE AUTUMN of 1938 a brief article was written on the divided catalog in the *University of California Library*.¹ In this paper it was promised that a further report on the use of this catalog would be forthcoming. Although it seemed easy at that time to fulfill such a promise, it has not been until now that this accounting can be made.

To report with objectivity is not usually an easy task. The dividing of a great dictionary catalog—a costly project—usually has both supporters and opponents. In the following report, therefore, every effort is made to provide evidence on both sides of each question involved.

It was decided early in the planning stages of the study to allow the users to speak for themselves. In order to obtain data on use, 1000 mimeographed questionnaires were distributed to students throughout the university's schools and departments—to freshmen and graduate students, service men and civilians, and to professors and librarians. Each person checked his status only, omitting his name so that he might speak freely. The study was made with the university administration's approval,² and the faculty members were, in general, cooperative and interested. Some questionnaires were filled out by users as they

came into the library, but for the most part, the test was given to assembled classes. Information was wanted from students who were not heavy users of the library, as well as from those who were.

The professional librarians were also included in the study. Students in the school of librarianship were considered among the employees of the university library in tabulating answers from the group called "librarians." This group of answers, therefore, represents the reactions of a group of trained librarians rather than those of the California library staff solely.

Questions Used

The test itself consisted of six questions, phrased simply, with diagrams and illustrative examples. Briefly summarized, the questions were as follows:

1. Were you aware that the university has a divided and not a dictionary catalog?
2. Do you find this divided catalog easier or more difficult to use than a dictionary catalog? Does it save time or take time?
3. Do you use the subject or the author-title catalog more frequently?
4. Were you aware, and if so, is it helpful, that the university has placed some duplicate subject cards in the author-title catalog, namely, subject cards for biographies?
5. Do you hesitate as to which catalog to approach, and have you heard complaints on this score?
6. Were you aware that the university has refiled its catalog according to a more strictly alphabetical scheme? Do you prefer this to the conventional system of filing?

¹ Wood, Amy. "California Divides Its Catalogue." *Library Journal* 63: 723-26, Oct. 1, 1938.

² The examinations were given by Jens Nyholm, then assistant librarian, University of California.

The first two questions were the important ones. After the exacting labor of breaking the catalog in two parts, how many users were aware of the division? How many found the change worth while? The following table summarizes the reactions of the patrons (by groups) to the questions on a percentage basis. Question 6 has been divided into two parts. In the discus-

students provide some answer to this question. Had the examinations been given earlier, the figures favoring the change would not have been as high as the reports show.

A final factor to be considered is the chance personalities represented in the group tested. As the work progressed on the analysis of the questionnaires, it be-

TABLE
RESPONSES OF 1,000 USERS TO VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THE DIVIDED CATALOG (IN PER CENT)

Responses	Users (in per cent)				
	All Classes	Librarians	Faculty	Graduates	Under-graduates
1. Unaware of the divided catalog	15	0	9	7	19
2. In favor of the divided catalog	74	60	54	68	78
3. Prefer use of author-catalog over subject catalog	61	65	77	48	61
4. Favor biography cards in author-title catalog	44	65	50	50	40
5. Hesitate as to which catalog to approach	45	7	40	45	50
6. Unaware of changes in filing code	49	0	50	27	58
7. Favor new filing code	82	63	77	62	87

sion which follows references are made to this table.

Before discussing the returns on the questionnaire, it may be well to indicate the factors which relate to the dependability of the answers. Tabulation of the returns was carefully done by two persons. Both of these tabulators were interested in providing an impartial answer to the question of the efficiency of the divided catalog.

Another matter of significance related to the time the test was given. Some librarians were of the opinion that the test was given too late, and that the ideal time would have been soon after the division was effected, so that students who had used the old catalog could react more thoughtfully to the new catalog. The comments of the

came evident that the personality of the users was a dominant factor in adaptability to the new catalog. The undergraduate who wrote: "Neither is easier. It depends upon a person's adaptability how soon he will be able to use either catalog," represents the median group. At one extreme is the adaptable student who wrote: "How could it be easier?" and at the other, the unadaptable, who replied: "It is too complicated, takes too much time."

Awareness of the Division

As shown in the table, undergraduates represented the largest group of users who were not aware of the division of the catalog. For a university the size of Cali-

fornia, perhaps 19 per cent of the undergraduates, or almost one in every five, is within the range of expectation. It was found that many undergraduates did not even use the library. On the basis of the sample, it was estimated that one out of every seven of the total university population was not aware of the division of the catalog. One librarian noted: "The public does not seem to realize there are two catalogs. I find them looking for subject cards in the author file, and vice versa."

In Favor of the Division

Now, after the expensive division, how many found that it expedited searching and saved time? As noted in the table, three out of every four, or 74 per cent, found the divided catalog easier to use and approved of it. Data indicated that the step had been a desirable one.

Since the first two questions were regarded as fundamental, it may be well to consider them in more detail before turning to the other aspects of the study.

The exhaustive considerations of whether the user's mind would react in this or that exact way, of whether this or that nicety in filing was more important, of whether students would look in this or that exact place, gradually appeared quite useless. They were merely the opinions of reference librarians and catalogers saying what they themselves would or did do. As the study of the papers continued, it became obvious that the majority of the students were voting for a system that gave them *a subject approach they had not realized the dictionary catalog had contained before*. They thought that thousands and thousands of completely new subject cards had been made for them. Few showed the slightest conception that it was strictly an inside job of division and reassembling. And they liked it because the trays were not

so full, and that they had fewer cards to (in their own words) "thumb," "plow," "wade," "hunt," "fumble," "file," "leaf," "pick" and "poke" through.

It is difficult to believe this situation existed unless one actually reads excerpts from the student reports. Thirty odd examples have been selected for illustration of this important aspect of the study.

The following quotations are taken from reports of graduate students:

"It is a great help if you don't know the book written on a certain subject to be able to go to the subject catalog and find a list of them." "New subject catalog is one of the best parts of the library, because it doesn't require that you have a specific author or title in mind." "When writing a comprehensive term paper on India without having a book list to refer to, the subject catalog gave me a list of books on that subject. Without the subject catalog I would have had to spend many more hours on hunting books written about India, and would probably have not found all that were available." "In the case of a term paper, where you have a subject to work on, but no definite references, the subject file is a great help." "When writing a paper without specific references in mind, one may look in the subject catalog and find appropriate books (since one cannot browse among books in the particular section to find ones which are good)."

Undergraduates

The following quotations are from undergraduate students:

"Because I often have a subject to look up that I have no idea of any book on, the subject catalog is invaluable." "Oftentimes looking for subject material and do not know titles or author under which to look. Also seldom have time to collect such information myself." "I was writing a paper on Greek education and saved a great deal of time by using the subject catalog when I didn't know what books to read." "It isn't necessary to know authors or the titles of books to go through the subject catalog for each book. They will all be under the subject division."

"If you are working on a term paper, by using the subject catalog you can find all the books on the one subject. If a dictionary catalog were used there wouldn't be such a complete selection given on the one subject."

"The subject file helps in finding references on subject matter for term papers, etc., for which no bibliography is given." "When writing a term paper you can look in the subject catalog and find references you would not have been able to locate under separate titles." "Often in research work the title or author is not known. It would be almost impossible to find the reference material in a dictionary catalog. The subject catalog is very helpful in this respect."

"In collecting data for term papers, I find the subject catalog most helpful with every book, article, etc., listed under the specific topic which I am at the time writing on." "The subject catalog saves one from looking for separate books under separate titles and authors in the author-title catalog." "Many times you may want to find several books about a subject, when you know neither the author, nor the title. In this case, you can look in the subject catalog and find the information wanted immediately." "When looking up a subject such as the Monroe Doctrine, if nothing is known about the leading historians of the subject, this can easily be found by looking in the subject catalog under the specific topic. However, this research would take much longer in the dictionary catalog because the books would be filed alphabetically instead of being grouped together under specific topics."

"At times one wants books in general under a specific topic, but doesn't remember names or authors." "References to available source material filed together under subject matter need not be tracked down individually. I frequently find much source material which I didn't realize is available, and could not have found if entries had not been placed in the subject file." "In the dictionary type of catalog, the subject file is generally neglected, and incomplete."

Frequency of Use of the Two Parts

Sixty-one per cent of the group responded that the author-title catalog was used to greater extent than the subject cata-

log. Faculty members showed more use of the author-title catalog than any other group. Even the graduate group, which showed a preference of 48 per cent for the author-title catalog indicated greater use of this catalog, since 10 per cent reported equal use of the two parts.

One constant complaint arising from the separation of the subject catalog may give some cause for reflection. The returns show that some of the labor-saving devices of catalogers are questionable. Many libraries, when typing their cards, use an abbreviated form for added entries and subjects. When reference is made to another catalog at a distance as results in a divided catalog, the saving in time of typing, however, becomes a dubious practice.

Lack of entries for publications by organizations is another cause for complaints. As one user reports:

"Material by an organization (e.g. C.I.A.) doesn't usually get a subject entry under the organization name," or "The subject catalog contains entries only for material about an agency of the government, whereas their own reports in the author-title catalog are the best material about them." A librarian reported: "Students consider the word *subject* to mean any topic which they have been assigned. As a consequence they are inclined to look in the subject catalog for corporate bodies. In this way the descriptive material is found, but not the material written by the agency."

The third major source for complaint concerning the subject catalog was the existence of catch titles serving as subjects in the author-title catalog. Again, it is not only the librarians who are aware of this flaw in the division. A professor states:

"In the field of filtration, I searched for books and articles: they were not to be found in the subject catalog, but were in the author-title catalog." Another writes, not quite understanding, but aware that something is

wrong: "For a person used to the dictionary catalog, a certain amount of time is lost remembering that this is divided and remembering that the line between subject and added entry is sometimes a fine one."

An undergraduate writes: "The books are more difficult to find in the subject catalog because I've often had to look in both the systems to find a book." The librarians, of course, are only too well aware of this. "Quite frequently the few title cards beginning with the key word will make a student think he has found the subject cards, and all the material here on a subject." Another warns: "We know that catch-word titles of subject value exist in the author-title catalog, so we have to use the two catalogs always so as not to miss material." And the catalogers complained: "In cataloging, we must try to substitute subjects from a frequently inadequate list for catch-word title, which otherwise is a natural and easy solution."

The Professors Cause a Surprise

Impressed with this use and this awareness, remembering the gratitude with which the undergraduate was discovering the subject catalog now that it stood alone, the normal reaction is to decide that more time, more effort and more care should be put into subject work. It is somewhat disturbing, therefore, when professorial opinions are examined. The first one states bluntly:

"I don't feel that it is a special help to have both. An author-title catalog would be sufficient." "The division is confusing until one realizes that the subject catalog is valueless and ignores it completely." Another states: "I use the subject catalog so little . . ." "Usually I have a definite title or author to refer to." The prize, though, is the indifference expressed as follows: "As I remember it, the subject catalog does not interfere in any way with my using the author-title catalog."

Duplicate Cards for Biographies

In the division of the catalog all the cards for biographical works were duplicated and appear in both the subject and

author-title units. This involved considerable work, so more than a little curiosity was present in examining the opinions of the users. Of the total group only 44 per cent found this duplication helpful. The favorable replies from librarians were highest, and this is probably related to awareness, since 52 per cent of the undergraduates were unaware of the existence of the duplication.

The importance of this matter is evident when one considers that one of the factors behind the division was the reduction of the size of the catalog, which was becoming so large as to impede rapid consultation. If hundreds of cards had to be duplicated, it is apparent that part of the gain is balanced by an expensive disadvantage.

Which Catalog to Approach?

As shown in the table, 45 per cent of the total group has no trouble in approaching the correct catalog. Undergraduates had the most difficulty in making the distinction between the catalogs, and librarians the least. This finding is consistent with what might be expected on the basis of the experience of the users. It is significant to cite the remark of one librarian: "Can only repeat that the divided catalog means much more work for the catalog department: duplicate entries, special statistics, double checking."

Students had more difficulty because they were not sure of the contents of the two catalogs; frequently they did not recognize the difference between a "subject catalog" and any other catalog. One said: "I have been wondering if books are repeated in the two catalogs or if different books are listed in each catalog."

The wording of Question 5 provided the students with an opportunity to express themselves on the library service in general. Complaints irrelevant to the card catalogs were of course made. It was clear, how-

ever, that students did not avail themselves of the instructional program of the library, which includes tours, handbooks, and bulletin boards, as well as informational services.

In Favor of the New Filing Code

At the time the catalog was divided, a new filing code had been worked out whereby a good many of the conventional filing rules had been dropped in favor of a system as strictly alphabetical as possible. Although all the librarians knew of this change, almost half of the total tested were unaware of the filing reorganization (see table).

Among the minority who were disposed to favor the old rules were librarians and graduate students. Both of these groups considered the new rules as separating items which logically should stand together. Those in favor of the new rules indicated that straight A-Z filing was more consistent with the approach of the user, especially the undergraduate, rather than that of the librarian.

The catalog remains complicated, however. As one undergraduate wrote: "I can't make any statement as to time saved, or ease experienced, because I never noticed any difference in filing. I just keep looking for the subject until I find it." Despite difficulty in use, however, it may be concluded that the more strictly alphabetical filing code is found to be functionally superior to the conventional one.

Summary

The findings for the divided catalog should be examined cautiously; first, because the vote in favor of it was lower (74 per cent for the entire group and as low as 54 per cent for the faculty); second, because a great number of the undergraduates voted for it under the mistaken idea that it gave them for the first time a subject

approach to the collection; and third, because the complaints were more serious in that they came from the unskilled people of the group, people who could not help themselves. The complaints of the undergraduate students indicated their inability to understand the new catalog and use it effectively.

It should be stated that complaints came from the skilled users also, particularly the catalogers, but on an entirely different basis, raising an entirely different problem. Their complaints were concerning the considerable increase in operating costs. One of the reference librarians confirmed this from another aspect by answering the examination with two terse sentences: "Divided catalog 50 per cent slower. Filing 25 per cent faster."

Despite the seriousness of the complaints, the evidence supports a divided catalog for a large university population. One reason is the sheer bulk of the cards. A greater reason is that many undergraduates are made aware, for the first time, of the subject catalog approach which seems to them a new and remarkable thing.

Now, supporters of the dictionary catalog may well argue that this is an unsound and unfair reason to be used in support of a divided catalog. It is. But until the time comes when adequate instruction in library techniques is introduced into our great university libraries by able and alert reference librarians, any change which makes students more aware of the resources at their disposal must be considered valuable. To interpret this as meaning that the divided catalog makes it possible for students to use the catalog without help would be to entertain an entirely false conception, however, for there is evidence that 22 per cent of the undergraduates experience great difficulty and confusion in its use.

An ironic touch was contained in another reason in support of the divided catalog.

Many of the professors were glad to have subject cards removed from the author and title section, not because it made them aware of the subject approach, but because separation made it possible for them to ignore it. Seventy-seven per cent of them signified they used the author-title catalog almost exclusively.

Now, a thinking librarian cannot see in all this simply a victory for the divided catalog, but much more seriously, a defeat for the dictionary catalog. Apparently university catalogers should have resisted change when the first bright ideas for discarding the old classed catalogs were introduced. All that should have been done, apparently, was to type appropriate alphabetical subjects on the classed catalog cards, making such additional subjects as might be deemed necessary, and leaving them in their separate cases. It would seem from this study that an earlier university public disliked the classed catalog, not because it had authors and subjects in two separate places, but because it was arranged by classification numbers which were too difficult for the ordinary student to understand.

We have seen the influence of personality on the student votes. Is it too much to wonder if the type of personality that is always intrigued with a new approach, without sober consideration for every

factor for and against it, influenced administrators to change from the classed catalog to the dictionary catalog (with the telling argument of "no more confusion—all in one place") when that change may not have best served the needs of the great university libraries? Did catalogers resist both changes in the style of catalog because they were the resistant type of personality we have seen in the students, or rather was it that their staffs were always so pitifully meagre, their supplies so small, the demands on them so great, that they could not afford to throw themselves wholeheartedly into temporary experimentation?

The great need would seem to be for an increasing number of trained people who will investigate, without bias and without exerting or responding to pressure within or without the library, the exact reactions of the library user, not what librarians think he thinks. The public has been seen as a many-voiced body, and as our libraries grow larger and larger we will be able less and less to make changes for any but the most pronounced need. California would seem to have done a distinct service to the profession in experimenting with its catalog at this stage, and most of all in permitting its findings to be open for other libraries to study in the light of their own needs and pressure.

Research Assistantship

The University of Illinois Library School invites applications for a half-time research assistantship in testing and measurement. The position which calls for 20 hours of work per week carries a stipend of \$1440 for eleven months and will be subject to renewal. The assistantship will be open to holders of the first degree in library science who wish to pursue a program of study leading to an advanced degree in library science. Applicants must, therefore, meet the entrance

requirements of the library school. The holder of the appointment will be permitted to carry half the full-time school program.

No special experience or academic equipment is needed although courses in educational psychology, educational or psychological testing, and statistical method would be useful.

The assistantship is available immediately or on Sept. 1, 1948. Applications should be addressed to the director, University of Illinois Library School, Urbana, Ill.