

Teaching Students To Use The Library: Whose Responsibility?

By VIRGINIA CLARK

IT HAS ALWAYS SEEMED curious to me that the librarian, alone among public servants, eagerly insists on teaching the inmost secrets of his craft to his patrons. This permissive attitude toward the procedural mysteries of the card catalog (so unlike that of the keepers of the couch, the confessional, the prescription pad, or the seal) is of course a concomitant of the public library and the open stack. It has not been always thus; and it might be interesting to speculate on what would happen were we to swathe ourselves in our mysteries instead of working so hard to explain them. But since explanation seems to be called for, this discussion will begin with some definitions.

The three terms of the topic are limited to the areas within which the question of responsibility should be raised. The first is the word "teaching," which may be defined as excluding those casual contacts during which learning may occur and emphasizing the planned encounter during which a conscious teaching effort is made. Second, "to use the library" is defined as "how to use the library," ignoring the general promotional campaigns like National Library Week or Book Week and concentrating on instruction in techniques. Third, by "students" is meant the student body as a whole, not the few who will acquire library skills by their own effort.

There is absolutely no question of "whose responsibility" in these situations ruled out of consideration by definition. Any librarian is responsible for giving the best service possible to the patron with whom he finds himself confronted. The school or college librarian tradi-

Miss Clark is Reference Librarian, Wright Junior College, Chicago, Ill.

tionally assumes the further function of making each such consultation a model for the "next time." It has become a universal expectation that the librarian in an advertising culture will promote his goods and services. The question of responsibility for formal, unsolicited instruction in the use of those goods and services is, however, debatable.

The offering of such instruction has been assumed to be one of the objectives of the librarian since the earliest days of American librarianship, indeed even before the librarians were undergoing formal instruction.¹ In accepting this duty the school or college librarian has tried many methods and used a variety of materials. What do we now know about this instruction?

There has been—as reflected in library periodicals—voluminous individual reporting of projects at their conception. There have been some surveys covering more than one program. The 1951-52 *Biennial Survey of Education* included one of these, reporting that separate library courses are offered in 7.5 per cent of universities and 6 per cent of liberal arts colleges. There are also courses taught as units in other courses: in subject courses in 28 per cent of universities and 19 per cent of colleges and as part of a general orientation or skills course in 22 per cent of universities and 20 per cent of colleges. Offerings of a combination of a subject course and an orienta-

¹ U. S. Bureau of Education, *Public Libraries in the United States* (Washington: G.P.O., 1876).

tion program are made in 21.5 per cent of universities and 37 per cent of colleges. Other combination programs also occur, but less frequently.² Other surveys of the problem are primarily graduate theses in librarianship or education. A particularly comprehensive and recent study is Whitten's survey of 72 liberal arts colleges.³ There has been almost no objective, quantitative follow-up evaluation of the effectiveness of any of these programs. It is possible, however, to make the following generalizations:

1. Attempts so far have yielded many more curriculum-integrated libraries than library-integrated curricula.

2. There is dissatisfaction with the present level of student library skills among librarians, faculty, and the students themselves.⁴

3. This present skill level is likely to become even more unsatisfactory because of two pressures:

a. The pressure on librarians and

faculty of greater numbers of students.

b. The pressure on librarians, faculty and students of the increasing size and complexity of libraries.

These pressures mean that the student will have to work both more independently and at a higher level of skill than he does now, to maintain even his present fractional acquaintance with the world of informational sources.

In the search for means to improve student library skills in the face of these pressures evidence should be considered that points to something that has long been suspected; namely, that the faculty play a more decisive role in determining student library-use habits than many librarians would like to admit. The few studies of student library use available are concerned primarily with amount of use rather than amount of skill. The programs at Stephens College and at the Chicago Undergraduate Division of the University of Illinois, among the programs most analyzed, report in terms of increased circulation and numbers of reference questions.⁵ This discussion is more concerned with ability than with quantity. Nevertheless an examination of some of these studies may be relevant.

Harvie Branscomb, in his review of research on student use of several college and university libraries for his *Teaching with Books*, cited Stephens College and four others as having made particularly spectacular increases in the amount of student library use, as measured by increased per student circulation.⁶ At Stephens the library had simply taken over the instructional program when the librarian was made dean of instruction. At Antioch, Lawrence, Olivet, and Southwestern modified tutorial plans had been inaugurated. The same basic

² "Statistics of Libraries in Institutions of Higher Education, 1951-52," Chapter 6 of *Biennial Survey of Education in the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1952).

Institutions Reporting	552			
	107 Universities		Liberal Arts Colleges	
	(no.)	(%)	(no.)	(%)
1. Separate course	8	7.5	33	6.0
2. Part of subject course	30	28.0	104	19.0
3. Part of freshman orientation	24	22.5	112	20.0
4. Combination of 1 and 2	5	4.7	17	3.1
5. Combination of 1 and 3	6	5.6	29	5.3
6. Combination of 2 and 3	23	21.5	203	37.0
7. Combination of 1, 2, and 3	11	10.0	54	9.8

³ L. W. Griffin and J. A. Clarke. "Orientation and Instruction of a Graduate Student by University Libraries," *CRL*, XIX (1958), 451-54; "Library Orientation for College Freshmen: Symposium," *Library Journal*, LXXXI (1956), 1224-31; M. C. Marquis. "A Study of the Teaching of Library Facilities to College Students." (M.A. thesis, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1952); Joseph N. Whitten. "Relationship of College Instruction to Libraries in 72 Liberal Arts Colleges." (Ed.D. dissertation, New York University, 1958).

⁴ E. M. Clark. "How to Motivate Student Use of the Library?" *American Association of University Professors Bulletin*, XXXIX (1953), 413-20; E.E. Emme. "Library Needs of College Students and Ways of Discovering Them," *ALA Bulletin*, XXX(1930), 134; Peyton Hurt. "The Need of College and University Instruction in the Use of the Library," *Library Quarterly*, IV (1934), 436-48; R. O. McKenna. "Introduction in the Use of Libraries; a University Library Problem," *Journal of Documentation*, XI (1955), 67-72; A. S. Powell. "Survey Pinpoints Library Attitudes," *Library Journal*, LXXXIX (1954), 1463; L. R. Reed. "Do Colleges Need Reference Service?" *Library Quarterly*, XIII (1943), 232-40; J. S. Sharma. "Need for Library Education," *Indian Librarian*, XI (1957), 154-56; J. A. Wedemeyer. "Student Attitudes Toward Library Methods Courses in a University," *CRL*, XV (1954), 285-89.

⁵ B. Lamar Johnson. *The Librarian and the Teacher in General Education* (Chicago: ALA, 1948); Johnson. *Vitalizing a College Library* (Chicago: ALA, 1939); David K. Maxfield. "Counselor Librarianship at UIC," *CRL*, XV (1954), 161-66. (Or see any of the annual reports of the librarian, Chicago Undergraduate Division of the University of Illinois, 1951 through 1954).

⁶ *Teaching with Books* (Chicago: ALA, 1940).

type of change had occurred in all five institutions: there had been a change in teaching methods. In one case the change had come about through the initiative of the library, but the campaign had been aimed at the instructional program, through the faculty, rather than at the students directly. The implication of the effect of these five programs on library circulation is echoed in the suggestions of other recent writers on the teaching function of the library that perhaps it is the faculty who are the important element, rather than any program the library can devise directly for the students.⁷

That the faculty *should* bear the responsibility is easily said. But since even the most library-minded faculty member (and they are few enough) is never library-minded enough for the librarian, should not the librarian do the job? Further evidence that the faculty will remain primary stimulants in student library habits despite teaching efforts by the library suggests the contrary.

In his *Teaching with Books*, Branscomb reported on his own survey of student library use at a school referred to as "University A." In the section on reserve use he presented an intriguing distribution of student reserve borrowing in four sections of the same history course.⁸ Here were students who had been exposed to whatever basic orientation program that university library offered. They were being taught the same course, with the same reading list, and were being offered the same library facilities with which to do their work. In earlier distributions Branscomb had failed to find any correlation between

scholastic standing and library use, the most obvious hypothesis; but in his distribution of the borrowers by section the pattern became clear. How much reading the student did depended simply on which of the four professors he had.

All of the findings reported so far deal with quantity of use. Their relevance rests on the assumption that quantity and ability are phenomena each of which suggests the presence of the other. My own experience, which I should like to report to you, deals directly with ability.

The problem was much the same that faced Branscomb—variant performance among sections of the same course. The course was a one-hour-one-semester counseling course which included units on adjustment to college in general, study habits, vocational choice and library skills. All entering freshmen carrying full time programs took the course. (Thus the group of students represented approximates the entering class of a traditional college more closely than would most samples drawn from a community college because of the elimination of the part-time adult students who are the "different" elements in the community college population.) Student assignment to sections was random. The library unit of the program consisted of a one-hour lecture, the issuing of a printed library handbook, and the completion of a written follow-up test done in the library during the week following the lecture and handed in at the next class period. The written test was so constructed as to be a completely individual project; no copying was possible. All papers were graded and detailed records kept for five semesters, 1956-1958. Some of the results are significant.

During this period there were eighty-five sections of counseling with a total enrollment of about 2,550 students. Seventy-eight per cent (1,995 students) completed and turned in the test paper. (This figure tallies nicely with Peyton Hurt's finding that 78 per cent of Stan-

⁷ Griffin, *op. cit.*; S. E. Gwynn, "The Liberal Arts Function of the University Library," In Chicago. University. Graduate Library School, *Function of the Library in the Modern College* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1954); Patricia B. Knapp, "The Role of the Library of a Given College in Implementing the Course and Non-Course Objectives of that College" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1957.) Knapp, "Suggested Program of College Instruction in the Use of the Library," *Library Quarterly*, XXVI (1956), 224-31.

⁸ Branscomb, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

ford graduate students thought library instruction would have been helpful in undergraduate work.⁹ It also matches exactly the 78 per cent of a sample of students drawn from the Wright counseling course one semester during the study who rated the library unit "helpful.") The percentage of papers completed increased slightly each semester. The 78 per cent "helpful" rating referred to above was the second highest favorable rating in the student evaluation of sixteen elements of the counseling course. The library unit of the program seemed an established thing, but questions remained. The percentage of returns and the mean and median scores varied widely from section to section. At the end of five semesters a retrospective study was undertaken to determine why this variation occurred.

None of the factors that might have been supposed to correlate significantly with response and performance did so. There was no correlation between performance and which of two librarians gave the lecture. There was no correlation between performance and whether an audio-visual aid was used. There were a few sections which received direction only from the instructor. A few of these sections did surprisingly well; some did very poorly. An interesting pattern did emerge, however, when the sections were distributed, as Branscomb had done, by instructor. Each section was labelled plus or minus according to the relationship of its median score to the median for the group as a whole for that semester. A total of eighteen instructors from various departments taught the eighty-five sections. Two with only one section each were discounted, leaving sixteen. These sixteen instructors taught from two to sixteen sections each. Of these sixteen, seven rated 100 per cent plus (or minus); that is, every section of each of these instructors performed on one side of the

median for the semester. The sections of four other instructors performed at a 2:1 consistency ratio. Only three instructors had an inconclusive performance record, e.g. two sections above and one below. Only two had an even division of plus and minus sections. That is to say, the students of eleven of the sixteen instructors performed so consistently better (or worse) than the norm, over a period of five semesters, despite variations in lecture personnel, methods, and equipment that it is impossible not to conclude that a decisive factor in the attitude and hence the performance of a student on a library assignment in his classroom instructor.

This suggests strongly that the librarian face squarely the fact that in teaching students he has been teaching the wrong people. The responsibility for student library habits belongs to the teaching faculty not only for the type of reason sometimes advanced: that it *should* for one reason or another; but for the simple and compelling reason that it does. The faculty are responsible probably not only for the amount of student library use but for the level of skill; and we and they might as well realize this and build our library programs from that premise.

This further suggests to me that to be most effective the librarian should concentrate his responsibility on providing the best service he can to the patron who presents himself voluntarily. This service should probably include both personal and printed guidance, and perhaps even the offer of a course in library skills—entirely elective. The librarian should further hold himself responsible for some sort of organized effort directed to make each faculty member of his institution aware of what cooperation with the library has to offer his particular course. This effort should be aimed at the faculty not only because it is easier (there are fewer of them to begin with,

(Continued on page 402)

⁹ Hurt, *op. cit.*, p. 440.

Foreign Libraries

M. T. FREYRE DE A. DE VELÁZQUEZ has been appointed director of the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí in Havana.

WILHELM GÜLICH, director of the library, Kiel Institute of World Economics, died April 15 at the age of 65.

T. D. SPROD, formerly liaison officer, Commonwealth National Library, and librarian of the Australian Reference Library at the Australian Consulate-General, New York, has returned to Australia after three years service in America.

Teaching Students to Use the Library

(Continued from page 372)

and the turnover is slower), but because the evidence suggests that this is the only way to reach the student body as a whole. If his time and his library are not already full, the librarian may still want to storm the fraternity lounges and campus bars for marginal users. But the evidence seems to indicate that unless he approaches these students through their professors his efforts will be largely ineffective.

Faculty members have their responsibilities, of course, to do their teaching jobs to the best of their abilities. This may not always produce the amount and the kind of library use the librarian would like to see; but it may just be possible that the pattern of successful scholarship at certain levels and within certain areas does not demand our kind of library use. We may try, through our work with these faculty members, to convince them otherwise, but in the end they must be allowed to judge. Besides, their feelings will be reflected in their

students despite efforts of the library to reach the students directly.

The student also must assume certain responsibilities. The fact is that in most institutions there already are—and in the rest there soon will be—enough “volunteer” library users to keep both faculty and library staff too busy to worry about the others.

My conclusion is not so much a recommendation as a realization of the way things are. The librarian is most effective at making a success of the casual, voluntary student contact. He should, further, feel responsible for “teaching” the faculty. But “teaching students to use the library”—“formal instruction in library technique for the student body in general” as I have defined it—this is the job of the teaching faculty. The professor should be and clearly is responsible not only for his students’ grasp of the subject content of a course, but also for their concept and acquisition of the skills, including library skills, necessary to master that content.