

Student Book Collection Contests in American Colleges and Universities

Book collection contests for college and university students have been held on American campuses since the 1920s. They are frequently sponsored by library friends groups or library staff. Information from eleven colleges where such contests have been conducted indicates that they can help develop and strengthen a positive attitude toward books and libraries among the student contestants. Some of the essential elements of a successful contest examined are well-funded prizes, a carefully selected panel of judges, a comprehensive set of contest rules, and a stable organization or committee to ensure continuity.

NO ONE WILL DENY that private book collectors have contributed greatly to the development of many of our better university libraries, and yet we often do little in our curricula or in our libraries to encourage students to become collectors.

At a recent board meeting of the USF Library Associates, the University of South Florida's friends organization, the question of the desirability and feasibility of a contest for student book collectors was raised. Aside from the knowledge that such contests existed, the board members knew little about them, and a search through the general library literature provided insufficient information.¹ A file of newsletters from friends organizations yielded the names of three universities that regularly hold such competitions, and a letter was sent to each school requesting further information and asking for the names of other universities with similar contests. In this manner, information was obtained from eleven schools.² This article represents a synthesis

of current opinions and practice at these institutions.

RATIONALE

In fostering book collecting among students, colleges and universities help ensure the preservation of materials that might otherwise become irretrievably lost. They also nurture a positive attitude toward books among the students who may one day contribute to the continuity of the school's own collections. W. H. Bond, of Harvard's Houghton Library, is clearly aware of the ultimate ramifications of motivating students to become collectors:

I believe that if we can get even a few undergraduates hooked on the notion of acquiring and keeping books, in a logical and constructive way, even though they cost little or nothing and are not strictly rare books, then later on when they can afford it they will know what the other kind of book collecting is all about and be moved to indulge in it. These are the people who will support your library when it needs it and when they have established themselves in the world: they will not only have the means to do so, but they will also know what you are talking about and aiming to do.³

In addition to encouraging today's students to become tomorrow's library support-

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ers, a book collecting contest provides a useful focal point for the energies of friends groups and can lead to valuable publicity for the friends and for the library.

SOME EARLY CONTESTS

Student book collection contests seem to have originated with Swarthmore College's "A. Edward Newton Student Library Prize." The contest was begun in the 1920s by W. W. Thayer and continued by E. Pusey Passmore. In 1930 A. Edward Newton funded an endowment that provided for an annual award in the amount of \$50, and the contest has continued to this day. As Newton relates in his book *End Papers*:

At the death of the originator of the scheme it was found that no provision had been made for carrying on the idea. . . . Immediately it struck me that here was a way in which I might do much good with little money. . . . The idea can be made of great and lasting benefit and delight to those who in the formative years learn the joy of having a collection of books of one's own.⁴

Newton also popularized the idea of the award through an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1931.⁵ By the mid-1930s more than thirty colleges and universities had established student book contests. In 1935 the Carnegie Corporation made possible the distribution of a booklet published by the Joint Board of Publishers and Booksellers in New York that described prizes and "rules that will cover the average type of competition."⁶

In addition to Swarthmore, other early contests were held at Smith, Wellesley, Pennsylvania State College, Mills, Wesleyan, and Wheaton.⁷

Another exemplary early contest is the Robert B. Campbell Student Book Collection Competition, held at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). This contest was begun by Lawrence Clark Powell, who stated:

My library career grew out of bookstore experience in both the new and antiquarian field, and throughout my working life I emphasized the things that librarians and booksellers have in common. Friendships have lasted to this day with booksellers at home and abroad.

Thus it was natural to enlist the support of Bob Campbell, owner of the largest new-book store in

the UCLA area. As I recall, I asked Everett Moore and Robert Vosper, then head of Reference and Acquisitions respectively, to establish the contest's format.⁸

The prizes were credits in Campbell's store. After his retirement, cash prizes (presently totaling \$650) were awarded. The first prize was awarded in 1949 for a collection of books on Japan.

One of the contests inspired by UCLA's example is that of Brigham Young University. The friends group at Brigham Young received assistance and advice from UCLA and the Campbells in starting its own book collection contest.

All contests, regardless of format, must deal with certain common problems. These include funding and distribution of prize money, eligibility of contestants, the selection of a panel of judges, publicity for the event, and regulations concerning the nature and scope of the collections themselves.

FUNDING THE COMPETITION

The sources of prize money reported are quite varied and include some or all of the following: support from a friends of the library group, income from designated endowment funds or from general university endowments, local businesses (particularly bookstores) and interested individuals, and contributions from library staff and university faculty.

Although some of our correspondents voiced concern for funding, Jean Wunderlich of the Friends of the Brigham Young University Library, where a book contest is in its third year, wrote:

So far, we have not had any great difficulty in getting sponsors. The Campbells [the Los Angeles booksellers] told me that after awhile, businessmen asked for the privilege of being sponsors, and the number of people who became interested was so large that they could offer more prizes than during the initial years of their venture.⁹

The most commonly awarded prize is \$100, although individual prizes range from \$25 to \$350. Many award more than one \$100 prize, in one case as many as eight, while others awarded second and third prizes of proportionately smaller amounts.

Historically, local booksellers have supported book collecting contests with both cash and credit at their stores, although only one current instance of gift certificates as prizes was reported.

Brigham Young University also awards each contestant a complimentary one-year membership in its friends group. This seems an admirable way to generate further support, in the form of continuing membership, for friends groups.

A frequent provision in contest rules is that judges reserve the right not to award a prize or prizes, if in their opinion no entry seems to merit one.

THE CONTESTANTS AND THEIR COLLECTIONS

Generally, contestants were required to be currently enrolled at the university or its branch campuses. Some competitions (Amherst, Yale, Florida State, Harvard) are restricted to undergraduates or to specific undergraduate classes. Contests at Boston University and Texas A & M were open to all students, while UCLA, Brigham Young, the University of Rochester, and the University of Chicago have separate graduate and undergraduate prizes.

Almost all contest brochures state that the collection entered must be the property of the student and have been assembled by the student. Some allowed contestants who had previously won prizes to reenter if a different collection was submitted.

A standard practice is to require a bibliography, often annotated, and an essay or statement of purpose to accompany each entry. The statement usually describes the collection, explains how and why the books were collected, and discusses the contestant's goals in developing the collection. UCLA, Brigham Young, and Amherst also require a list of ten items the entrant would like to add to the collection, given the proper circumstances and resources. Texas A & M, UCLA, Brigham Young, and Boston University perform the preliminary judging solely on the basis of the bibliography and statement of purpose.

Considerable variation was evident in the limits set on the size of the collections, from not more than fifty (Harvard and Boston University) to a minimum of six (University

of Chicago). Most specified a minimum and maximum acceptable size; e.g., University of Chicago: no fewer than six nor more than fifteen; Brigham Young: no more than fifty, no fewer than ten; Harvard: no fewer than thirty, no more than fifty, etc. Three schools (Florida State, Yale, and the University of Rochester) set no limits on size.

Entrants are usually required to produce all or part of the actual collection as a matter of course, although some contests make this requirement only of finalists. When a collection is larger than the limits set by the contest rules, or when a collection is located elsewhere, the contestant may select a specified number to illustrate its nature; or judges may specify that certain titles on the bibliography be produced for inspection.

Most schools stipulate that the contestants agree to allow the winning collections to be displayed in the library or elsewhere on campus. The receipt, retention, display, and return of private collections require careful planning. Several correspondents noted the importance of having a signed inventory form detailing the contents and condition of the collection when it is received and a receipt signed by the contestant when the collection is returned testifying as to its completeness.

CONTENT OF THE COLLECTION

All the contests allow considerable flexibility in the choice of content and format of the collection. As James Davis wrote, with regard to UCLA's Campbell competition: "The only restrictions on the subject matter of the collections are imposed by the imagination and interest of the students."¹⁰

There is agreement, however, that some unity of theme or purpose should be evident. The University of Chicago is typical in this regard:

The collections will not necessarily be judged for rarity or cost: more important are the indications of personal interest, of clarity and unity of purpose, and evidence of bibliographic knowledge.¹¹

While rarity and cost are usually not the primary consideration in awarding prizes, Brigham Young, Boston University, and UCLA did announce that they would take into account the excellence of design and production of the books submitted.

Harvard adds: "The order and condition of the books and the owner's concern for their conservation will be important considerations."¹²

The University of Rochester's flier expresses the essence of all the contests' rules in this regard:

Suitable collections will be those that have been built up in accordance with some interesting principle of organization. A long list of miscellaneous items will not be considered suitable, and to compile such an entry would be to waste both the students' and the committee's time. As in past years, prizes will be awarded for well-organized collections of moderate or even small size rather than for scattered assortments. . . . while book collections often include rare or scarce items, the expense or rarity of the books is not necessarily a consideration. A well selected group of paperbacks, if coherently organized, is certainly eligible. Collections could be organized in terms of subjects . . . or in terms of special bindings or illustrations, or of a particular author or printer.¹³

UCLA also allows up to 30 percent of the collections to consist of "ephemeral, graphic or manuscript material."¹⁴

In most contest brochures, the contestant is encouraged to contact the judges or awards committee if there is any doubt as to the admissibility of specific materials or the eligibility of the collection as a whole.

An idea of the wide range of interests of contestants can be gathered from the following examples of prize-winning collections:

Brigham Young University—Ballet; Dances, Dancers, Dancing; Classical Greek Authors; Art and Imagination in American Children's Book Illustrations.

UCLA—History of Witchcraft; Comic Books of the Golden Age; Russian Linguistics; Pompeiana (Pompeii and Herculaneum); First Editions of Gertrude Stein; Randolph Caldecott, Illustrator; Bees and Beekeeping; Artistic Mountings and Embellishment of Japanese Swords.

Texas A & M—Horses and Horsemanship; The Frontier American Corporation; Battles and Leaders of the Civil War; The Art and Craft of Writing.

University of Rochester—Photography as a Medium; Home Remedies; Children's Schoolbooks; Napoleon Bonaparte; The Historical Development of Genetics; A Collec-

tion of English Language Editions of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* by A. Conan Doyle.

Yale—The Care and Study of Maps and Charts; American Popular Children's Series from Oliver Optic to the Stratemeyer Syndicate; L. Frank Baum's "Oz" Books; Works of Audubon; Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy; A Collection of Books, Papers, and Illustrations (plus stuffed frogs!) related to the Works of Edward Gorey.

THE JUDGES

The number of judges reported ranged from three (the most common number) to a high of six or more. The panel of judges is usually chosen with an eye to balance between university staff and faculty and the local community. The qualifications for judges at Texas A & M seem especially appropriate: "We try to select judges who are interested in books, well read, fair, and who have differing subject backgrounds."¹⁵

To some extent the selection of judges will reflect local resources, and choices may take into account such factors as prize donors and cooperating or sponsoring organizations. Judges may include a representative of the friends, library staff, university faculty, representatives from undergraduate book collecting clubs, local bookmen and private collectors, and donors of award money. Some contests include a "celebrity" judge, usually a noted author.

As Harriet Clowes of the University of Chicago observed: "The judges who are themselves collectors have all expressed their pleasure in participating in this activity."¹⁶

JUDGING THE COLLECTIONS

Where response to contests is high, there may be considerable time spent in judging collections. At Yale, for instance, where "each applicant and collection is interviewed and inspected by the committee (of judges) the thirty to fifty applicants require about a month of afternoons to process."¹⁷

As previously mentioned, preliminary judging is often done on the basis of the bibliography and statement of purpose submitted by the contestant. In this arrangement only the finalists bring in the actual

collections. By following this procedure, the UCLA contest confines judging to one or two days. Two contests (Harvard and University of Chicago) allow for judges to interview contestants and ask questions concerning their collections or to examine the total collection.

After the initial screening, judges view the actual collection or samples from the collections of the contest finalists. As Jean Wunderlich of the Brigham Young University Friends explains:

Obviously, some of the collections can be eliminated quickly. The ones that are outstanding are quickly discerned. In cases of doubt, the friends call on faculty members . . . who specialize in the field or subject on which the collection has focused.¹⁸

Basic criteria for the actual judging have already been discussed in the section on collection content. The following checklist for UCLA contestants summarizes some of the things that the judges will be looking for when they consider collections:

1. Does the collection represent a well-defined field of interest? How well do the statement, the actual books entered, and the annotations compare?
2. Is the student a book collector rather than a buyer?
3. Thoroughness: Is the collector aware of the wealth of literature in his/her chosen field? Is there a knowledge of the most important "key works"? Is the collector aware of what is presently lacking in his/her collection?
4. What is the value of the collection to the contestant? Is it useful for some research or reference purpose?¹⁹

A cautionary note is struck by Frank Shuffleton, of the University of Rochester:

I think the one danger is to award a prize to someone who is merely after a prize but has not the glimmering of interest in books. I think you will find that undergraduate book collectors are still at a fairly primitive state of the game, but many deserve to be encouraged.²⁰

PUBLICITY

A student book collection contest provides ample opportunity for valuable publicity, not only for the university and its library system, but also for the donors and supporters of the contest, whether they be private business executives or a friends of the li-

brary group. This publicity both precedes and follows the actual event.

The methods used to publicize the contests are as varied as the contests themselves and include announcements in the campus and local press (including newspapers, radio, and television), distribution of fliers and brochures of contest rules, posters on campus and in local stores (especially bookstores), announcements by faculty members in their classes, and word of mouth.

The publicity surrounding such an event can also serve to attract potential donors of prize money for future contests. That such publicity can be of high quality is evidenced by the poster used by Brigham Young University (see figure 1). The paper in the original poster (size 13" x 20") is of very fine, heavy stock, and the printing job is both elegant and pleasing, while prominently displaying the contest's sponsors.

Several of the printed brochures are also well crafted. In addition to the contest rules, these brochures or fliers contain information such as the types of collections that would be considered eligible, examples of previous prize-winning collections, a person to contact for further information, an entry blank, and a short bibliography of suggested works on book collecting.

Some universities (Texas A & M and UCLA) have a formal awards ceremony with an author or other prominent figure as an invited speaker. UCLA, for example, regularly invites a noted author to serve as one of the judges, and past panels at UCLA have included Aldous Huxley and Ray Bradbury. Such "celebrity" judges serve to create even more favorable publicity for the event.

Following the contest, continued publicity can be gained by announcements in the local press (especially appropriate if the contest includes an awards ceremony, with photographs of the winners and guest lecturers) and the display of the winning collections. This display can be placed in a heavily used part of the library or even the display window of a sponsoring bookstore. Good security procedures are indispensable when collections are put on display. In addition to these postcontest publicity mea-



Invitation to participate in the Friends of the Library

Student Book Collection Competition

Sponsored by the ASBYU, BEI Productions Inc., BYU Bookstore, Friends of the Brigham Young University, Intercollegiate Knights, O.C. Tanner Co., Sam Weller's Zion Bookstore, and Utah Office Supply.



Contest rules with registration blanks may be obtained on all floors of the Harold B. Lee Library or the BYU Bookstore. More than \$500.00 in prizes, ranging from \$25.00 to \$100.00, will be given to graduate and undergraduate students. Contest closes March 31, 1980.

Fig. 1

Poster Announcing Student Book Collection Competition at Brigham Young University

tures, Yale also distributes fliers listing the winning collectors, collections, and the amount of prize money awarded.

THE CONTEST COMMITTEE

It is evident that a successful contest requires a considerable commitment of time and effort by the librarians or friends group sponsoring the event.

The responsibility for selecting a committee to manage and promote the competition may fall to the friends group or to one or more university librarians. At Texas A & M, for example:

The previous year's contest chairman serves in an advisory capacity on the current year's contest committee. There are therefore four committee members who do most of the work. As long as the committee members are responsible people, four is just about the right number. You may find that three is enough.²¹

The contest committee should begin work as early in the fall as possible for a winter or spring contest. As Jean Wunderlich, of BYU, suggests: "While on the surface this all seems simple, it takes much advance planning. This should begin at the opening of the academic year. This is one step that can avoid problems."²²

UCLA's "Campbell Contest Procedures Checklist," which details the dozens of activities that must be orchestrated to create a viable competition, allows six months, from September through May, for the completion of its April contest.

THE AMY LOVEMAN AWARD

Until recently, a national contest, the Amy Loveman National Awards, also existed. This contest was created by the Women's National Book Association (WNBA), together with *Saturday Review* and the Book-of-the-Month Club, to honor the late Amy Loveman. Colleges and universities were invited by the WNBA to nominate an outstanding senior student book collector. The requirements paralleled those of the university contests quite closely. They included an annotated bibliography of thirty-five or more titles, an accompanying essay, and a desiderata list of ten additional titles. The first \$1,000 award was made in 1962 for a collection on "Ancient and Primitive Man."

According to Ann Eastman, current national president of the WNBA, the award was discontinued in the early 1970s because the costs of administering it became too high. She reported that there were about 100 final submissions each year during the time the award was given.²³

It seems unfortunate that no library organization has seen fit to underwrite this award or a similar one, since the values promoted are so basic to our profession.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, a student book collection contest involves much work and careful thought. A successful competition, however, can be most rewarding to all concerned; students are motivated to become collectors, friends groups can be sustained by the combined effort and interest such competitions will require, and favorable publicity can result for the library and its benefactors.

As Susan Lytle of Texas A & M expresses it: "At Texas A & M University Libraries, we find the contest to be well worth the work. The contest is a very positive and well-received public relations effort."²⁴

Perhaps the greatest benefit of such contests is the stimulus it provides to students to begin or expand their interest in collecting. Margaret Haller relates in *The Book Collector's Fact Book*:

There can be, after all, an undeniable satisfaction in building a collection which not only reflects one's own personal interests and bent, but which also constitutes the most exciting collection possible within the limitations of time and money imposed by a workaday world.²⁵

A recent winner of the University of Chicago Library Society's contest, George Fowler, conveys most eloquently the effect such contests can have on student collectors:

I devote a good deal of time and energy to my collection of Russian literature, but it is work exclusively for myself. Even the subject matter is a little esoteric. It is an especially fine feeling to be appreciated from without for effort undertaken solely for personal ends.

The contest was of particular benefit to me in several ways. When a book collection grows beyond a certain size, the collector begins to feel the need for a modicum of library-like organization of his books. . . . The contest motivated me

to organize my books into a workable "shelf list" of my collection.

A book collection can tend to take on a virtual existence of its own, perpetuating itself and growing mostly by inertia. Your contest caused me to step back and examine and articulate my aims in collecting and my thoughts about the contents of the collection. I think the aims were there all along, but they were less clearly perceived.

Finally, the prize money will help me to expand

the collection. I have already picked out the books I am going to buy next.²⁶

The organization and support of student book collection contests can be a most gratifying and constructive activity for a friends organization or library staff, and the experiences related here may assist those who are considering such a program.

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