

Evaluating the Adequacy of the Book Collection

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THE MOST usual method of surveying library book collections can be termed "common sense evaluation," a procedure which a modern student of research methodology would describe as mere hypothesizing or pure speculation. Douglas Waples has recently characterized the library literature which has resulted from this technique as follows: "The proceedings of library conventions and the contents of library journals consist in a very large part of such hypothetical analysis. It may become the refuge of the student who leaps to conclusions, of the young man impatient to see himself in print, and of the veteran librarian who has become hopelessly autobiographic."¹

Any account of a self survey must of necessity belong to the autobiographic class if it is to outline for possible guidance of others a procedure for surveying the book resources of a college library. In our survey of the Mount Holyoke College library we relied upon common sense evaluations of faculty and library staff members, who contributed their experience in using our own and other libraries. So far as was possible, human nature being what it is, we endeavored to

direct them toward a reasonably scientific analysis of our book resources.

And now to be autobiographic. It is important that the timing of a survey be psychologically right, otherwise the results may be a hindrance rather than a benefit. The coming of a new librarian to Mount Holyoke College very nearly coincided with the close of one hundred years of book accumulation and the coming of a new president. It was therefore desirable for the new librarian to familiarize herself with the strength and weaknesses of the library before making recommendations to the administration. The possibility of engaging outside experts was considered, but a decision to utilize our own faculty and library staff members was readily accepted, for it promised to give an excellent opportunity to become better acquainted with individual faculty members and to learn of their particular interests and special knowledge. Another factor which weighed heavily in making the decision to undertake a self survey was a conviction that the fullest use of books in a college comes when the members of the teaching staff have cooperated in their selection and are made aware of all available facilities.

Preliminary Procedure

A full year was spent in making preparations for the survey before it was proposed to the faculty library committee.

¹Waples, Douglas. *Investigating Library Problems*. University of Chicago Press, 1939, p. 51.

During this time the librarian studied the history of the institution, its transition from seminary to college, the changes in the curriculum, and the increasing emphasis on individual instruction in various forms of tutorial work. In studying the history of the college, research interests of present and former professors were noted and kept in mind when actual examination of the stacks was made. Often these research interests were found to result in good special collections. Reports of librarians for the past sixty-seven years were read with care and notes were made of special purchases and important gifts. Special attention was given to the records of committee meetings held 1930-35 when the Carnegie Corporation's liberal grant-in-aid for the purchase of books was being spent. Many gaps in the collection had been filled during these years, and memorandums had been made of desiderata for the future.

A tentative questionnaire covering various aspects of the library's activities was submitted to the library committee and revised by them before it was actually sent out. By securing the advice of faculty representatives in the formulating of the questionnaire, we not only profited by their suggestions but were assured of their greater cooperation. Here tribute should also be paid to help received from many quarters. Miss McCrum's account of the survey at Washington and Lee² offered many suggestions. The University of Chicago survey³ was of incomparable assistance, and remained ever before us as an example, for if the University of Chicago library with its million or more volumes could be evaluated as to its adequacy for

² McCrum, Blanche P. "A College Library Makes Its Own Survey Plan." *A.L.A. Bulletin* 31:947-52, Dec. 1937.

³ Raney, M. Llewellyn. *The University Libraries*. University of Chicago Press [1933]. (The University of Chicago Survey. Vol. VII.)

university use, surely our collection of 150,000 volumes could be evaluated as to its adequacy for an undergraduate liberal arts college.

The questionnaire included all aspects of the library and its administration, but the present discussion is confined to the evaluation of the book collection. Opportunity was given each faculty member to evaluate the book collection in these respects:

1. The adequacy of the book collection in his subject field
 - a. Whether or not it was in arrears and if so, an estimate of the number of volumes required to bring it up to date
 - b. Its adequacy for courses now in the curriculum
 - c. Its adequacy for honors students, graduate students, and faculty research
 - d. Its adequacy for books of general and cultural interest, though not essential for curricular needs
 - e. Its adequacy for courses which should be added to the curriculum
 - f. In what aspects is the book collection strong?
 - g. In what aspects is the book collection weak?
 - h. Are there books which are worn out and needing replacement?
2. Reference materials needed
3. The adequacy of its periodical files
 - a. Periodical titles needed, to be listed in order of importance
 - b. Periodical files needing completion
 - c. Periodical files needing binding

Bibliographical References for Faculty Use

It should be recognized that such bald questions cannot be expected to result in replies which are sufficiently detailed to be revealing and helpful. A plan was therefore worked out to supply each faculty member with a few general references and a carefully selected bibliography re-

lating to his specific field. This was supplemented by information regarding departmental book and periodical funds for the preceding five years. Since Randall⁴ had reported that we stood sixth in the list of libraries reporting their holdings of items on the Shaw list⁵ and since many Shaw titles had subsequently been purchased on the Carnegie grant, emphasis was placed on other possible aids. Page references were cited in Mohrhardt's *List of Books for Junior College Libraries*,⁶ and the reference annotated to show its possible usefulness in selecting books for freshman and sophomore students. A few of the references used are listed at the end of this article. (See *Partial Bibliography for Faculty Use*.)

For reference books use was made not only of Mudge, *Guide to Reference Books*⁷ but also of the bibliography and reference syllabus of Columbia University School of Library Service.⁸ This syllabus served as an impetus for more than one professor to make a more careful analysis of our holdings.

With the increase in tutorial instruction, periodicals are becoming more and more essential to college libraries. Here three general lists were used:

Lyle, G. R. *Classified List of Periodicals for the College Library*. Faxon, 1934. (Rev. ed., 1940)

Ulrich, C. F., ed. *Periodicals Directory*, 2d ed. Bowker, 1935.

Litchfield, D. H., ed. *Classified List of 4800 Serials*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1936.

⁴ Randall, William M. *The College Library*. A.L.A. and University of Chicago Press [1932] p. 162.

⁵ Shaw, Charles B., comp. *A List of Books for College Libraries*. A.L.A., 1931.

⁶ Mohrhardt, F. E., comp. *A List of Books for Junior College Libraries*. A.L.A., 1937.

⁷ Mudge, I. G. *Guide to Reference Books*, 6th ed. A.L.A., 1936.

⁸ Columbia University. School of Library Service. *Syllabus for . . . Bibliography and Reference*. . . . *Library Service* 262, 2d. ed. [1937].

This latter list was unusually helpful, because it indicated holdings of college libraries comparable to our own. Comparative studies of periodicals in different fields were also cited, such as:

N.Y.U. Washington Square Library. *An Annotated List of 100 Education Serials*. New York University, 1936.

Redman, A. B. "Classified List of Current Periodicals in the Fields of Athletics. . . ." *American Physical Education Association Research Quarterly* 6:63-74, Mar. 1935.

Walter, F. J. "Religious Periodicals in Public, College, and University Libraries." *Library Journal* 60:602-03, Aug. 1935.

Allen, F. P. *A Check List of Periodical Literature . . . of Interest to Zoologists. . . .* University of Michigan Press, 1935.

This material and general references on college libraries and survey methods such as Raney's *University Libraries*⁹ and Randall's *The College Library*¹⁰ were gathered together in the bibliography room of the library on a special faculty reserve shelf. Specialized knowledge of a narrow field can result in neglect of general aspects of a subject. The bibliography room is located near the library offices and was chosen in order that the librarian might have the opportunity to call attention to our bibliographical resources and to offer suggestions as to procedure. A valuable by-product of the survey was an increased awareness of bibliographical tools.

Seventy-nine blanks were returned by the teaching staff, representing every department of instruction. For the most part, the replies represented individual opinions, but in some cases department members got together and made a group report. In a few instances, a minority

⁹ Raney, M. Llewellyn. *Op. cit.*

¹⁰ Randall, William W. *Op. cit.*

report was made by a single instructor who differed from the group opinion of the department. Although it is dangerous to generalize, we found that young instructors fresh from graduate schools or from teaching elsewhere were, on the whole, more familiar with bibliographical tools and more aware of gaps in the collection than the older, more established professors. This might be explained by the fact that those with longer tenure had already filled in the gaps which they had observed when they first came to the college, and had helped to strengthen our holdings in their own special fields.

The task of translating the replies into a report that could be presented to the faculty library committee and to administrative officers then devolved upon the library staff. Recommendations for periodicals or reference books already owned, sometimes in department libraries or classified in a section little used by the person making the request, were quickly disposed of. Special attention was given to possible needs of departments that were suspected of not consulting the bibliographical helps suggested to them, and an independent investigation was instituted by the librarian. Whenever it was thought that further investigation was desirable, the Library of Congress classification schedule was studied for its outline of the subject; reference and bibliographical needs were considered and checked with Mudge,¹¹ Van Hoesen and Walter,¹² and the Columbia syllabus;¹³ and the history and important landmarks of its literature were investigated and

¹¹ Mudge, I. G. *Op. cit.*
¹² Van Hoesen, H. B., and Walter, F. K. *Bibliography, Practical, Enumerative, Historical*, Scribner, 1928.
¹³ Columbia University. School of Library Service. *Op. cit.*

subject bibliographies consulted to test the exhaustiveness of our holdings.

For every department of the college a record was made of the strength and weakness of our library holdings to be used for future guidance in book selection. This material was also compared with requests made at the time of the Carnegie Corporation grant. We received such replies as these:

Art and archaeology reported strength in material relating to sculpture, reproductions of manuscript illumination, Greek sculpture and Athenian vases; weakness in architecture, Greek and Roman topography, and Oriental art. (Since a course is about to be offered in Oriental art, it is some comfort to be able to remind the administration that this weakness was reported two years ago.)

English literature was discovered to have strength in dramatic literature of the Renaissance period, but weakness in non-dramatic literature of this period.

Geology reported weakness in paleontology, but unusual strength in pre-Cambrian and Scandinavian geology.

Psychology was found to be rich in material relating to the psychology of the blind, but weak in industrial psychology; and so it went through every department of instruction. Reports of strength and weakness were subsequently investigated and substantiated by the librarian.

Much of this would be known through "common sense evaluation" to a librarian who had worked with the collection for a long period of time, but the survey technique accelerated the learning process of the new librarian. Book selection procedure is facilitated by information as to known requirements of groups to be served.

Results of the Study

In tabulating the data, returns from related departments were considered together. Our curriculum is divided into three groups of studies: languages and literatures, natural sciences and mathematics, and social studies. Faculty committee representation is frequently allotted on the basis of this division. The soundness of the group plan was demonstrated when more than one department in a group asked for identical titles of periodicals and reference books. In passing, it is interesting to note that although the library is frequently referred to in educational literature as being the laboratory of the humanities, our science departments over a period of eight years had been allotted 33.64 per cent of the total department appropriations for books and periodicals.

In all, 106 additional periodical subscriptions were suggested and a number of back files requested. These were checked with the holdings of neighboring college libraries and the locations of journals owned near by were reported to the individual making the suggestion. Unless they seemed to be needed for general undergraduate reference, these titles were placed in a "to be deferred list." Incomplete sets were investigated and listed for future completion in order of probable importance. Many sets which would be of greater value to the teaching program if bound were called to our attention and a 50 per cent increase in the binding budget was secured.

Follow-up Procedures: Special Book Interests

Many of the valuable fruits of the survey have been realized in the follow-up

procedures. Of primary importance was the opportunity the book survey gave for conference with individual faculty members. In discussing specific desiderata, information was gained regarding special book interests. Professional enthusiasms may in the long run bring the library its finest collections, and in so doing, provide material for investigations of faculty members, honors students, and graduate students. Even an undergraduate college should indulge itself in a few special collections, although caution has to be taken that essential volumes are not overlooked in the zeal to acquire a single luxury. The conferences which followed the survey convinced the librarian that the composite enthusiasms of college faculty members in showing a wide and sane variety can result in a well-selected library.

Estimating Departmental Costs

The second important follow-up procedure related to budgets and actual cost of books in order to translate faculty recommendations into terms of money that would be needed for carrying them out. Prices of individual items such as reference books and periodical sets were relatively easy to secure. It was, however, more difficult to make an estimate of the probable cost of additional titles that were requested. A study of our actual purchases was therefore undertaken in an attempt to substantiate estimates. We have recently completed a study of the cost of books charged against departmental allocations for the past eight years. Randall's¹⁴ figures based on the first Shaw list¹⁵ show list price per title. Our data (see Appendix I) differ in that they show

¹⁴ Randall, William M. "The College-Library Book Budget." *Library Quarterly* 1:421-35, Oct. 1931.

¹⁵ Shaw, Charles B. *Op. cit.*

net cost per volume for books and continuations. Wide variations are revealed, such as \$1.98 for English and \$10.02 for chemistry. This latter figure was found to be attributable to a single continuation, that of Beilstein's *Handbuch der organischen Chemie*, for when the figure for Beilstein was disregarded the chemistry average fell to \$6.31. The average cost for departmental purchases is \$2.92, but when the volumes purchased from the general library allocation are included, the average drops to \$2.89. This drop may be due to the purchase of inexpensive replacements and volumes for recreational reading.

Measuring Circulation of Books

A third important follow-up of the survey of our book resources is an attempt to measure the use made of books which we already own. A sampling of the actual circulation of books from the main building has been taken this past year. Some very important facts are revealed. The most significant fact seems to be that 22.9 per cent of the titles in the circulating collection were taken from the library during the last calendar year. Since the honors and graduate students who work in the stacks and faculty members working in their studies use books for which there is no permanent record, this by no means indicates the full use made of the collection. Of the volumes sampled, 30.4 per cent show no use outside the stacks since 1919; of these 14.9 per cent were added during the years 1920-39, but 15.5 per cent of them were cataloged more than twenty years ago and have not gone out of the building in these years. A study of this data class by class is in progress, and may, when completed, prove to be a valuable by-product of the survey.

Increased Use of Bibliographies

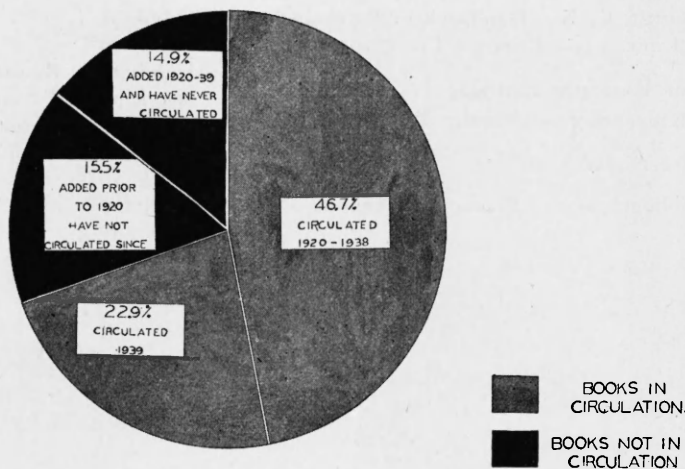
The last important result of the survey is a personal one. It is the increase of our awareness of professional and bibliographical literature, if bibliographies can be considered as literature. To illustrate this, one can cite aids not fully used in conducting the survey that would now be used were we to begin again. (See the end of this article, under *Other Aids*.) Some were in existence two years ago, but did not come to our attention or were disregarded; others have been published since the survey took place. The use to which they can be put is shown in the University of Missouri statement of 1937.¹⁶ The supplement to the Shaw list recently issued is now available. Since our survey was begun, the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools has issued a new *List of Reference Books for College Libraries*, compiled by a committee of librarians with Mrs. Frances Cheney as chairman.

Were the survey beginning again, we would make even greater use of Raney's *University Libraries* and of several of the public library surveys which have been published. For the librarian now considering the making of a survey, the new A.L.A. publication of E. W. McDiarmid, Jr., *The Library Survey*, will be full of suggestions, and a college library survey manual is promised by Peyton Hurt.

There are some things a survey can do and some things it cannot do. It will help to strengthen holdings in present curricular fields, but it will not meet the problem of the introduction of new courses in fields where the library holdings are negligible and for which extra

¹⁶ Severance, Henry O. *A Survey of the Resources of the University of Missouri Library for Research Work*. (University of Missouri Bulletin, Vol. 38, No. 16, Aug. 1937.)

MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE LIBRARY RECORD OF CIRCULATION 1920 - 1939



MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE RECORD OF CIRCULATION

funds are not available. It will encourage the building up of a well-rounded collection, but it will not prevent the enthusiasm of instructor or librarian from carrying away the lion's share of a limited budget. While it will not automatically result in increased funds, it will add weight to one's own "common sense evaluations" and substantiate them with specific information.

Partial Bibliography for Faculty Use

For Art

College Art Association. "List of Books for a College Art Library." *Art Bulletin* 11:235-94, Sept. 1929.

For Chemistry

Crane, E. J. and Patterson, Austin M. A

Guide to the Literature of Chemistry. Wiley, 1927.

Mellon, M.G. *Chemical Publications, Their Nature and Use*. McGraw-Hill, 1928.

For Education

Monroe, W. S. "The Literature of Education." *Educational Record* 17:555-65, Oct. 1936.

For English Literature

Cross, T. P. *List of Books and Articles . . . of English Literary History*, 4th ed. University of Chicago Press, 1926. (Rev. ed. 1939)

For Geography

Starkey, O. P. "Geographic Nuggets in Public Documents." *Journal of Geography* 30:161-69, Apr. 1931.

For History and Political Science

Coulter, E. M. and Gerstenfeld, Melanie. Historical Bibliographies. University of California, 1935.

Guide to Historical Literature. Macmillan, 1937.

Burchfield, L. Student's Guide to Materials in Political Science. Holt, 1935.

For Psychology

Louitt, C. N. Handbook of Psychological Literature. Principia Press, 1932.

For Romance Languages

Livres français choisis. Paris, 1937.

Other Aids

Bibliographical Planning Committee of

Philadelphia. A Faculty Survey of the University of Pennsylvania Libraries. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1940.

Downs, Robert B. Guide for the Description and Evaluation of Research Materials. A.L.A., 1939.

———. Resources of Southern Libraries. A.L.A., 1938.

Henkle, Herman H. "The Periodical Literature of Biochemistry." Bulletin of the Medical Library Association 27:139-47, Dec. 1938.

McColvin, L. R. and Reeves, Harold. Music Libraries. Grafton, 1937. 2v.

National Association of Schools of Music. List of Books on Music (Bulletin No. 3, June 1935; Bulletin No. 6, Sept. 1936; Bulletin No. 11, Sept. 1939.)

Appendix I

Mount Holyoke College Library

Data given below compiled in 1940 by K. Kinder and R. W. Christ, show average number of volumes purchased per year and average cost per volume for books and continuations acquired on departmental allotments 1931-32, 1938-39.

Department	Average Number Vols. Purchased per Year	Average Cost per Volume
Anthropology	10.5	\$ 3.24
Art and Archaeology	99.66	3.99
Astronomy	12.5	4.46
***Botany	30.21	5.47
*Chemistry	27.25	10.02
Classics	58.37	4.43
***Economics and Sociology	255.39	2.15
***Education	52.38	2.13
English	84.81	1.98
***English Literature and Drama	227.26	2.94
Geology	52.25	2.23
German	40.92	2.55
***History and Political Science	208.41	3.78
Hygiene	6.56	3.32
Mathematics	16.63	3.86
***Music	113.13	2.08
Philosophy	34.41	3.48
**Physical Education	32.5	2.57
Physics	24.75	4.13
Physiology	43.65	3.30
Psychology	60.38	2.18
***Religion	154.14	2.14
Romance Languages	148.27	1.95
Zoology	26.96	3.96
Total	1796.36	\$ 2.92

* Detailed study of chemistry purchases shows that the high average cost is largely due to the purchase of 29 volumes of Beilstein's *Handbuch der organischen Chemie*, at a cost of \$991.82. Excluding this title, the average cost per volume of chemistry books drops to \$6.31.

** Physical education has had a library appropriation for only the last two years of the period studied.

*** Includes purchases from restricted funds.