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Problems Confronting University Libraries¹

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HAVING assumed the responsibility of planning programs for the midwinter and summer conferences of A.C.R.L.'s University Libraries Section in 1951, your chairman felt the need of obtaining advice from university librarians in all sections of the country. Accordingly, an inquiry was sent to 72 librarians last October. The mailing list included the directors of large university libraries, the deans of several library schools and the librarians of a number of research and governmental libraries. Forty-two of the correspondents contributed specific suggestions.

The questionnaire solicited information and comment on current research projects in the area of university librarianship and on important problems in this field that ought to be explored. The replies ranged from high-level policy and government in university libraries to specific and immediate problems and in some cases to studies of local value only. Therefore, this report will make no attempt to list or classify all of the 150 projects or problems mentioned by the correspondents, but rather to highlight and summarize those which were repeatedly emphasized or which seem to be of widespread interest.

This report may have added usefulness at this time because of opinions expressed at

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last summer's meeting of the Association of Research Libraries to the effect that the A.R.L. should divest itself of many of its numerous activities in favor of the A.C.R.L. The informal discussion from that point of view was led by Dr. Ralph Ellsworth, long a leader in A.R.L. undertakings, and now President-elect of the A.C.R.L.

This report consists of two principal groups of ideas: first, those which concern university librarianship on a national scale, under the broad headings of bibliographical control, deposit libraries, interlibrary loans and microfilming or microcarding; and second, problems common to many but concerned with the operation of a single institution, under the headings of general administration, finance, personnel, technical services, readers' services and storage.

Bibliographical Control and Organization

Much interest is in evidence in both the University of Chicago Institute of last summer and the recent Unesco Conference in Paris on the improvement of bibliographical services and controls. Several librarians want a further development of points brought out at the Chicago Institute and a study of the pending bibliographical proposals recently made by the Library of Congress, Unesco and other agencies. An evaluation of the work of the various bibliographical centers has also been suggested. Emphasis was given to cooperative bibliography in special subjects, with particular mention of the social sciences currently under exploration at the University of Chi-

ago. The vast accretion of titles in card catalogs points to the need for reference guides in the form of selective and annotated bibliographies in each of several subjects. Closer collaboration between libraries and bibliographical services will help control the tremendous and rapidly increasing body of information available in print.

Deposit Libraries

Concern is expressed by university librarians over the size of university library book collections. The problem of size must be related to the aims of the institution, and also to the task of maintaining good research collections in all the areas in which the institution has such an interest. Some individuals wish that the large libraries in the country could be more stirred up about cooperative deposit libraries as appendages to groups of research libraries.

Interlibrary Loans

The report of the A.C.R.L. Interlibrary Loans Committee which is in preparation has evoked considerable interest. This committee is working on the problem of simplifying and standardizing the printed forms in interlibrary lending. Other items mentioned for consideration are detailed studies of the costs of interlibrary loan transactions, the responsibility for reproduction of materials to meet interlibrary loan requests and the question of borrowing for whom.

Microfilming and Microcarding

Several problems are indicated for the area of facsimile materials. It is suggested that an exposition of our present status in microfilms and microcards should be made. This would imply the development of a clearing house for microfilms located at the Library of Congress, and the pulling together of records as to who has microfilmed what. As one librarian asks: "Should the A.C.R.L.'s University Libraries Section

take greater corporate interest in microfilm projects?" Another possibility is that the section might undertake to determine what important research journals and books should be reproduced by microcard, film or offset printing. Although some such projects may be under way, the need is felt for sponsorship of a comprehensive over-all program. Need is also expressed for a report comparable to a consumers' research report on microfilm and microcard readers. Such a report would evaluate the readers now available and recommend types for purchase. Finally, there is the problem of educating the university faculty to the place where its members will use microreproductions as readily as books in full-size print.

General Administration

In general administration, university library relationships are conspicuously outlined as follows: the relation of the university library to the teaching profession, to the university research program and to the university press; the relationship between the general library and professional school libraries; and an appropriate relationship between the chief librarian and the faculty library committee. A closely related topic is democracy in library administration as it is practiced in the Library of Congress, and in several university libraries.

Finance

The problem of getting adequate financial support is closely related to that of maintaining strong research collections. This problem is becoming all the more serious in view of the expansion of teaching and research and of present inflationary trends. Specific budgetary problems mentioned range from the allocation of book funds to decisions as to where to cut services and what materials to preserve in a time of economy budgets and with due recognition of the problem of preserving a

proper balance between expenditures for books and for salaries.

Personnel

Many of today's most urgent problems concern personnel, in the opinion of several university librarians. One comments: "Before university libraries can hope to do their job adequately, university library service, particularly at lower levels, has to be made more attractive to first-rate people. The total problem involves recruitment, training, salary and status among other things. We have talked a great deal about these problems but very little has been accomplished in solving them."

Again it is the old story of getting more qualified people into the profession. With respect to professional education, one librarian requests a panel of library school directors to explain to the University Libraries Section just what library schools are doing to train young people for work in university libraries. Attention also needs to be focused on present practices and possible improvements in selection techniques. It is still too difficult to locate qualified persons for a specific job and to obtain adequate information about such candidates. Comparison with selection techniques commonly employed in civil service and in business might be helpful. Related topics include the present tendency to cut down on the size of the professional staff with all of its implications, full-time employees versus student assistants and other part-time help, the organization of the staff for administrative efficiency and the drive toward unionization.

Technical services

Dr. Felix Reichmann at Cornell University has been studying the problem of coordination between the acquisition and catalog departments. His observations would be of interest. Acquisition policy is the subject of a series of articles by Harvard's

librarian, Keyes Metcalf, appearing in the *Harvard Library Bulletin*. Studies of acquisition policy should be made in other university libraries. A re-examination of the Farmington Plan appears to be in order. Should librarians be working out alternative means of attaining the plan's objectives? One librarian is urging a cooperative acquisition plan on a regional scale for the acquisition of certain types of American publications, those, for example, of learned societies and of American university presses.

In the field of cataloging, one administrator wants a book written on cataloging "short cuts" and suggests Mr. Low's work at Oklahoma A. & M. as a point of departure; while another suggests an administrative look into the future of a five-million-card catalog. Should the catalog be divided into three parts? Ralph Shaw's experiments with photo-clerical routines may have application here. Processing problems worthy of examination include the handling of serials and representative cataloging of difficult materials such as orientalia.

At least one western university librarian believes that exchanges merit more serious attention. In the handling of duplicate periodicals, librarians might work out an arrangement whereby different libraries would accept the responsibility of preserving extra copies of all journals listed in certain pages of the *Union List of Serials*. This division of responsibility would eliminate some problems in preserving an adequate supply of duplicates for bindery replacements. This same western librarian asked for the establishment of a branch of the United States Book Exchange on the West Coast, to facilitate the handling of gifts for Philippine and Japanese libraries, for example.

To sum up technical services, as one librarian wrote, we need "A continued but perhaps more fundamental discussion of

the internal operating problems of libraries."

Readers' Services

An overwhelming interest was expressed in new experiments in the organization of books for more effective use. One example is the divisional library as in operation at Colorado and Nebraska. Several librarians have asked for an investigation of variations in the application of the divisional principle—specifically the pros and cons of all types of divisional reading room arrangements. Another important trend is the provision of separate physical quarters for undergraduate service in the university library, as exemplified at Harvard and Illinois, and still another is the Princeton plan of throwing open its collection to all users and introducing "reading oases." Several correspondents requested an evaluation of these several types of undergraduate libraries with critical observation of their shortcomings. In fact, the broad subject of service to the undergraduate in the university library seems to deserve a full exploration. The departmental library, too, is offered for study, with respect to such factors as optimum size, effectiveness, cost, relationship to general library service, etc.

Book Storage

Questions raised over storage space for books involve not only criteria for discarding versus storage, but also a formula for the type of material that should be placed in a storage library. Closely related is the problem of a divided catalog for books in storage, as distinguished from books in use; also service to the research worker from the storage area. Robert Orr's current study of the storage library plan at Iowa State College will be of wide interest, as have Fremont Rider's several published studies on problems of book storage.

Miscellaneous

Four subjects are grouped together at the end of this report because they are new developments in the library field, or otherwise timely. The first is the preservation of library materials amid the hazards of war, and further consideration of the role university libraries should take in local defense planning. The present situation also suggests a decentralization of intellectual resources so that the bulk of our books will not be concentrated in a half dozen metropolitan centers.

Second is the improvement of interlibrary communication with an example of one means, the teletype, at Racine and of another, telefacsimile, at Oak Ridge. Investigation should be made of the possibilities of using ultrafax, teletype and similar devices. In clarification, one librarian comments: "Could such mechanisms replace, for example, union catalogs, and bibliographical centers as now organized, or by tying the research libraries of the country together make the total library resources of the country readily available everywhere?"

Third in this miscellaneous group is the problem of accreditation. It is contended that the A.L.A. should concern itself with accrediting libraries for the various regional and professional accrediting associations and also that the A.L.A. should encourage the training of more librarians rather than concentrate its effort on restricting the number of training agencies.

Fourth is the program of the Board of Control for Southern Regional Education and its implications for university libraries. Accreditation as an activity of the A.L.A. and the southern regional program just mentioned will be more fully considered in the two papers we are to hear this evening.

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activities. However, I believe there are obvious differences between such library school courses and those given to undergraduate subject students. Their purposes are essentially the same—imparting knowledge of and familiarity with common materials. For the librarian these are the tools of his trade and the instruction must be more complete, more detailed, more comprehensive; for the engineer this knowledge is an adjunct only, and while it would doubtless be nice to include more, the essentials are all he should be expected to acquire. Principles of book selection and trade information are two items which the librarian needs but the engineer does not.

In almost all categories, whether it be bibliographical variations or knowledge of sources, the approach to the subject stems from a different viewpoint. The librarian tends to have greater interest in the book or periodical, *per se*, as a physical container; its many manifestations, its selection, care and preservation, and accessibility

are his concern. The engineer, on the other hand, is interested only in the container's contents; what happens in the long chain of events bringing it to his use is of little or no real interest to him. His background and training have been entirely different. As a rule, he is not overly interested in books but in the accomplishment of factual results and the means for doing so.

Our basic problem is to convince him that the "means for doing so" include the library. Though it differs from what the engineer is accustomed to think of as instrument or apparatus, the written record of scientific knowledge can be fully as important in providing foundations for work and pointing the way. A library course may thus be compared to those in basic mathematics, instrumentation, drafting and other contributory instruction. The more salesmanship we can exercise the better. By familiarizing the engineer with the printed tools of his—and our—trade, we do him and ourselves a service.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, we trust that the preceding report is of value in its summary of these problems which are apparently of deepest concern and interest to university librarians over a nationwide area. It does describe trends of thought and areas for investigation proposed by a representative group of administrators. In no way is it an attempt to compile a list of all problems confronting university librarians, or to draw conclusions as to which are the most important at this time. This report clearly demonstrates an awareness that established

procedures and points of view need periodic re-examination and that new developments require constant observation. Book collections continue to grow phenomenally. Service staffs, correspondingly, must become larger and larger. The American dollar buys less and less. Budgets reflect an inflationary situation. The problems thus posed can be met only through intensive cooperative effort. The University Libraries Section of A.C.R.L. can and should contribute through the development of an active and expanding program of projects and committee work.