

# Libraries in an Inflationary Cycle<sup>1</sup>

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SINCE that relatively normal period of 1939 (as we have now come to look upon it), the economic stresses of vast proportions which have upset all society have had their effect on libraries, and particularly in collegiate libraries.

In addition to the general inflationary movement, there has been another force accentuating the problems. Libraries have been called upon to render service to almost double the prewar number of students as well as attempting to keep pace with rising costs.

That library service suffered in some cases, particularly from 1946 to 1948, there can be little doubt. In many cases the library service trebled during a single year, so fast that staff could not have been trained even if available.

But, perhaps, not all the results of the forces have been bad; as I shall point out later, libraries and librarianship may have been improved.

I should like to call attention to some preliminary data, which can hardly be called more than the basis for several hypotheses. The further study of this question is the major project of the ACRL Committee on Budgets, Compensation, and Schemes of Service<sup>2</sup> for the next year. Two subcommittees are to be set up: one to study the changes in financial support; the other to

look into the changing status of the librarian, his salary, his position, the use of classification and pay plans, and the like.

## *Library Budgets*

Ten years has seen the size of university library budgets increase by 130 per cent, if the figures for the 20 institutions who reported completely for the two periods are a valid sample. In 1939 these institutions spent \$2,877,588 for library purposes; in 1949 the total was \$6,652,597.

The increase in library budgets for the 13 teachers colleges was only slightly less, 120 per cent above the 1939 figures. The totals were \$243,455 and \$537,014, respectively. Thus library budget increases were essentially the same in universities and teachers colleges.

While these increases were taking place, what was happening to institutional budgets as a whole? University budgets rose 200 per cent and teachers college budgets rose 131 per cent.

Comparing in another way, while university budgets as a whole trebled, the library budgets of these institutions only slightly more than doubled; in teachers colleges, on the other hand, there was only a 10 per cent difference in the increases of total budgets and of library budgets.

The over-all budget increases to each type of institution probably reflect the relative increases in teaching load. Although complete information is not available, it appears that enrolment in universities expanded more rapidly than in the teachers colleges. The shortage of teachers, and the low salaries paid in the profession are evidences of

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<sup>2</sup> Renamed, on July 11, 1951, the Committee on Administrative Procedures.

Table I  
Ratio of Library Expenditures to Total Educational Expenditures of 20  
Selected Universities, 1939 and 1949

Institution	Per Cent of Total Budget for Libraries		Decrease
	1939	1949	
Arizona	2.9	2.6	0.3
Cincinnati	5.5	3.5	2.0
Colorado A&M	1.7	1.5	0.2
Dartmouth	10.1	8.0	2.1
Denver	7.0	5.1	1.9
Illinois	5.0	3.3	1.7
Iowa U.	5.0	4.5	0.5
Iowa State	3.0	1.8	1.2
Michigan	4.4	2.9	1.5
Michigan State	1.6	1.8	*0.2
Missouri	4.9	2.5	2.4
North Dakota	2.5	1.4	1.1
Oregon State	3.3	2.8	0.5
Pennsylvania State	1.6	1.6	0.0
Pittsburgh	3.2	2.7	0.5
Princeton	6.8	6.1	0.7
Texas	7.8	4.5	3.3
Washington (Seattle)	5.4	5.8	*0.4
Wyoming	2.5	2.3	0.2
Yale	4.8	5.7	*0.9

\* Increase.

the reasons why this should be true.

From still another point of view, the belt-tightening in university libraries is shown by the reduction in percentage of budget devoted to libraries. In 1939, according to the ALA figures, teachers college libraries received (from a low of 2.6 per cent to a high of 7.5 per cent) a median of 5.5 per cent of the total educational budget of the institution. The average percentage for the 13 institutions studied for both periods was 5 per cent. In 1949, the ACRL tables reveal a range from 1.8 to 6.3 per cent and a median of 4.4 per cent. The average for the 13 selected institutions was 4.8 per cent.

It will be noted that the average for the selected institutions was below the median of all reporting libraries in 1939, and above the median in 1949. Thus, we may say on the one hand, that the ratio in teachers colleges has not changed; or, on the other, that it has dropped from 5.5 per cent to 4.4 per cent.

There seems to be no doubt as to what happened in universities. In 1939, the percentage of budget devoted to libraries ranged from 1.6 per cent to 10.1 per cent, with a median of 4.5 per cent; in 1949 the range was 1.1 to 8.0 per cent, with a median of 3.3 per cent. Using the figures for the 20 selected institutions, the average in 1939 of 4.35 per cent had dropped to 3.3 per cent in 1949.

If these figures are correct, how did universities maintain library service at all? In some cases, as indicated above, the quality of service may have suffered. But one must remember that the library has a vast storehouse of material upon which to draw. It is not necessary to increase book collections (except perhaps collateral readings) as fast as enrolment grows. In many parts of a library, for example in smaller departmental libraries, a great increase in service may be possible without increase in personnel.

Another possible method of meeting needs

with a more meager budget might be the relative lowering of salaries. The salary aspect is reserved for the third section of this paper.

Still another possible approach would be the change of type of personnel used, which brings us to the second section.

### *The Library Staff*

In 1939, among the selected universities 70 per cent of the full time staff was classed as professional; there were 465 professional staff members out of a total of 665. Librarians were plentiful, and had been for almost a decade. In many cases they could be secured for salaries no greater than required to secure good clerks. Looking backward, we can perhaps see why librarians complained of the nonprofessional nature of much of their work.

With the reduction in enrolments during the war, the increase in government employment of librarians both in libraries and as researchers in other divisions, and the opportunities for more lucrative employment in war industries, the end of the war brought an acute shortage of librarians. Persons qualified for the more technical as-

pects of librarianship were hard to find and hard to keep on a staff.

By 1949 the ratio of professional staff had dropped to 50 per cent; there were now 515 librarians (an increase of 50) and 1026 total staff (an increase of 361) in the 20 selected universities. No longer were catalogers typing their own cards; clerks, on the other hand, were now checking authority files to verify headings (a scandal in 1939).

It is difficult to describe the changes in teachers colleges; but pretty much the same thing happened to a lesser degree. The enrolment did not increase as much; there was a smaller staff increase. But where increases occurred, they were likely to be clerical, or the number of student assistants increased.

What has happened to the status of librarians? Relieved of much of the clerical detail, they may be improving their position, and being scarce, they may have made some gains in working conditions.

A questionnaire sent out in 1948 by Orwin Rush, then executive secretary of ACRL, revealed that in only 59 of 467 institutions were no members of the library

Table II  
Ratio of Library Expenditures to Total Educational Expenditures of 13  
Selected Teachers Colleges, 1939 for 1949

Institution	Per Cent of Total Budget for Libraries		Decrease
	1939	1949	
Colorado (Greely)	4.8	4.6	0.2
Illinois (Carbondale)	3.7	6.3	*2.6
Illinois (DeKalb)	4.0	4.0	0.0
Kansas (Emporia)	7.5	4.9	2.6
Kentucky (Bowling Green)	5.5	6.0	*0.5
Missouri (Warrensburg)	3.2	3.4	*0.2
Nebraska (Kearney)	6.0	2.5	3.5
New York (Albany)	6.6	5.6	1.0
North Carolina (Greenville)	6.3	6.2	0.1
Oklahoma (Alva)	6.1	5.9	0.2
Texas (Commerce)	5.1	3.4	1.7
Texas (San Marcos)	2.6	3.8	*1.2
Wisconsin (Oshkosh)	6.6	6.0	0.6

\* Increase.

staff considered members of the faculty; in 300 all professional members were on the faculty, in 62 the librarian, in 30 the librarian and assistant librarian, and in 16 part of the professional staff.

It may be observed that faculty status for librarians is more common in smaller than in larger schools. But in recent years several of the larger universities have recognized the essential unity of librarianship with research and classroom teaching. Even in many which do not confer academic title,

### Salaries

The salary of the librarian is perhaps the best single measure of his status in the academic world. Have the salaries of library staff kept up with the inflationary spiral? If not, have they kept pace with professors' salaries?

From data available it is hard to answer these questions. Tables of high and low salaries do not tell how many individuals are near the high, how many are near the low. The tables give no medians for any

Table III  
Professional Salary Ranges, 1939 and 1949, in Universities  
and Teachers Colleges Reporting to ALA

Universities				
	1939		1949	
	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum
High	1,400	4,000	3,445	10,000
Median	1,200	1,800	2,400	4,000
Low	720	1,285	1,600	3,000

  

Teachers Colleges				
	1939		1949	
	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum
High	2,000	2,400	3,850	4,620
Median	1,500	1,925	2,800	3,650
Low	900	1,850	1,920	3,240

the library staff enjoys all or most of the privileges of faculty membership.

In only 40 institutions where there were teacher-retirement plans, of the 467 replying to Mr. Rush's questionnaire, were library staff excluded from the plans. In many schools not giving faculty rank, library staff are eligible for sabbatical leave and similar rights.

Although these postwar data cannot be compared to the prewar period, it is apparent that the status of librarians has improved; all the evidence points in that direction.

single institution. The deductions below assume that the median for a library is somewhere, but not far, below the midway point in its scale.

The salaries of head librarians are omitted from computations. So many institutions do not report salaries of categories where individual salaries may be deduced, that figures in this category are deceptive. Those not reporting, oddly enough, tend to be the schools with the highest salary scales.

Salaries of professional assistants in 1939 were shockingly low in comparison with today's costs. They were worse in univer-

sities than in teachers colleges. Among the universities examined, the minimum professional salaries (we may presume them to be the beginning rates) ranged from a low of \$720 per year to a high of \$1400. Imagine, if you will, what this means. Among the 20 university libraries reporting both in 1939 and in 1949, none paid more than \$1400 to a beginning librarian; the median of the institutions was \$1200.

Among teachers colleges, on the other hand, the range was from \$900 to \$2000, for a median of \$1500. The maximum salary of a professional assistant was also generally higher in the teachers college; the median maximum salary was \$1925 as compared to \$1800 in universities.

In universities, the maximum salary in some institutions was higher than the maximum in any teachers college; \$4000 was the university top as compared to \$2400 in the teachers college group.

In 1949 the median minimum salary for university libraries was \$2400, the median maximum \$4000. In teachers colleges the median ranged from \$2800 to \$3600.

The range of salaries in universities between minimum and maximum continues to be greater than in teachers colleges. This is natural because of the larger and more highly-organized staffs, with several levels of supervision.

From these data it is apparent that the beginning salaries of librarians have increased to almost double the figures of 10 years earlier. As the postwar inflation occurred, many schools employed new replacements at salaries as high as or often even above those paid to persons of long tenure. In time, the pressure moved to higher levels but the figures do not reveal whether the adjustment in the middle brackets has been complete.

In 1939 median range between minimum and maximum salaries in a single institu-

tion was \$1020; this might be interpreted as the average amount of increase an individual might eventually receive in the same institution (without becoming chief librarian). In 1949 this median range between minimum and maximum salary was \$1760.

If the distribution of positions between minimum and maximum is now normal, we might conclude that library salaries are once more in balance; but it is possible that salaries still cluster around the minimum.

In 1949 the cost-of-living index was 160, using 1939 as the base. If no adjustments are made, it appears that library salaries have increased in at least this amount. In universities, the median minimum salary has doubled, in teachers colleges almost. The mid-point between minima and maxima of the median salary has jumped from \$1500 to \$3200 in universities, and from \$1700 to \$3200 in teachers colleges. These increases are considerably more than the cost-of-living.

But some adjustments need to be made. First, there is some question as to whether the figure \$3200 represents the average professional salary, although it is not far from the findings of the Bureau of Labor statistics study.

Second, the cost-of-living index is not too good a measure for the lowest salaries, since food represents the greatest single item of cost in lower income groups, and the increase in that item has been to more than 200 per cent of the 1939 base.

Third, net income after tax must be considered. In 1939 the single librarian earning \$1500 (near the average) paid a tax of less than \$20 per year; today the single librarian earning \$3200 pays almost \$400.

In 1939 the range of reported salaries for chief librarians in universities was from \$1800 to \$10,000 with a median of \$4500.

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Even so, we have given a course in school library methods to workers in Idaho, Nevada, California, Washington, Colorado, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, North Carolina, South Carolina, Mississippi, Missouri, Illinois and Texas. This would seem to reflect the nationwide lack of training among school librarians. We have fewer home study students from Utah because we give resident courses. We feel sure that the teacher-training agencies of these states must have missed an opportunity for service.

We hope the day will come when every first class teacher-training institution gives a major in library work. When young people can secure training for librarianship in the same length of time needed to become teachers, when they can do it in their own state or section of a state, and when this training is accepted as the basis for advanced work from one part of the country to another, then we will have our share of the

best young students going into library work. If we want to see the day come when every school library is in the care of a trained librarian, some such realistic approach is necessary.

It seems likely this day will arrive sooner if ALA gets out of the accrediting field so far as school library work goes, and leaves this up to the regional agencies which pass on other questions of training for service in the public schools.

As it is, the situation of some of us is anomalous, to say the least. We explain to our students we are unaccredited by ALA, but our credits are accepted in most states for certification but not by library schools elsewhere. We then ask these same students to join our national organization. The answer of one farm girl is worth pondering:

"Mister, it sounds to me as if you were asking us to buy the front end of a cow."

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In 1949, the range was from \$3800 to \$10,500, with a median of \$7000. The increase of the medians was 55 per cent.

In teachers colleges the range was from \$1400 to \$3750 in 1939, and from \$2400 to \$6000 in 1949; the median rose from \$2200 to \$4250, an increase of 93 per cent.

By reducing the proportion of professional workers, libraries have been able generally to keep salaries in pace with the cost of living, and in some cases to improve them. While figures on teaching salaries are not immediately available for the same institutions, it is probable that librarian salaries have been increased as much as their faculty colleagues' salaries have.

This situation is not one to be accepted

as good; librarianship is still not one of the most lucrative, and often not as well paid as teaching.

In summary, the colleges and universities have been able thus far to survive the inflation by drawing on some of the accumulated book resources, by increasing the use of nonprofessional personnel. On the average, librarians' salaries have not absorbed the economies. How long they can continue to operate on reducing percentages of the educational budget is problematical. The book collections will soon become obsolete; the limits of replacing professional with nonprofessional staff will soon be reached; beyond that library service will suffer deterioration.