

Orientation and Instruction of the Graduate Student by University Libraries: A Survey

WITH THE GROWTH in size and complexity of university libraries and the expansion of graduate schools, the necessity for some sort of instruction in library use for the graduate student has become a matter of special concern to many librarians. Experience has shown that the traditional indoctrination of undergraduates by the English department or by the library staff is not an adequate preparation for the more intensive use of the library's collections which is expected of the advanced student. The policy of limited cataloging and classification of research materials forced on libraries by mounting backlogs and rising costs probably has assumed a degree of bibliographical knowledge on the part of readers which many of them do not have. Moreover, certain types of materials such as international documents and micro-texts require special instruction or experience if they are to be located and used efficiently. Simpler than these causes of the labyrinthine complexity of larger research libraries but equally puzzling to incoming graduate students from other institutions—or, for that matter, to "native" graduates attempting original scholarship for the first time—are the local variations in a large library system, which need to be announced and explained.

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In an attempt to discover how the twenty-odd larger university libraries¹ are approaching the problem, the authors compiled a questionnaire consisting of four questions, and a covering letter which invited comments on local policies and procedures. The response was gratifying: all but one library returned the postcard and many wrote detailed letters as well. In the first place, we wanted to ascertain whether libraries accepted any responsibility for the bibliographic instruction of entering graduate students. Twenty out of twenty-four libraries replied that they did not assume any formal responsibility, and several librarians remarked that they preferred an informal and flexible program of instruction conducted by members of the library staff. In their comments on this question, a number of librarians stated that it was the responsibility of the teaching staff to offer such instruction as they thought necessary, and one librarian asserted that a systematic program would require a substantial outlay. Significantly, some of the libraries where very little is now being done indicated that they were seriously reconsidering their stand.

We also inquired whether courses in reference methods or in the use of the library were offered by the staff, and if these courses were given for credit. Only one library offered such a course for credit, although several others have done

¹Libraries participating in the survey were California, Columbia, Cornell, Duke, Harvard, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Michigan State, Minnesota, North Carolina, Northwestern, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Princeton, Stanford, Texas, UCLA, Washington, Western Reserve, Wisconsin, and Yale.

so in the past. Three libraries reported courses taught by faculty members which were open to students of allied instructional departments. Two libraries replied that they had looked into the possibility of offering formal bibliographic instruction to graduate students but had decided for various reasons that they could not then do anything. The most important reasons given were lack of staff and time for the preparation and administration of courses at the graduate level, and the diversity of subject matter and methodology involved. Two additional libraries reported courses in bibliography and research techniques which had been discontinued because of "scheduling complexity" and lack of response.

The remaining questions dealt with instructional lectures and library tours for graduate students. In the matter of lectures, sixteen libraries replied that members of their staff—primarily reference librarians—conducted them, while two libraries indicated that members of the teaching faculty assumed this responsibility. Indiana, Northwestern, Duke, California, Kentucky, Western Reserve checked the lecture question affirmatively. The following libraries gave further details: Michigan State arranged lectures if requested; Cornell, on request; North Carolina, when requested; Yale, "a few"; Texas, "one to three . . . given in beginning research courses"; Kansas, when requested; Princeton, in American history and others in classes by specialist librarians in charge of special collections, in conjunction with the faculty; UCLA, upon request; Minnesota, "occasionally"; Columbia, orientation lectures in seminars; Oregon, when requested; and Wisconsin, a series of general lectures in bibliography and use of the library in the fields of humanities and social studies, plus specialized lectures in seminars and branch libraries.

A number of replies from libraries which do not offer formal lectures

stressed the value of informal bibliographic conferences with individuals by reference librarians who teach by conversation and example. This, of course, is done at all research libraries and is one of the bases of library service to the scholar and the general public as well.

Eleven libraries regularly offered tours for advanced students, but the remaining fourteen indicated that a special orientation program was not needed. One respondent noted that voluntary tours usually attract such a small attendance that they hardly make a dent in the problem of orientation. At the universities of Minnesota and Wisconsin, tours for foreign students, who are usually enrolled in the graduate school, were offered immediately preceding the fall quarter. Similar group tours for graduate students are arranged by the head of the circulation department at North Carolina at the beginning of each semester.

An analysis of comments and letters from responding librarians emphasized their concern with proper bibliographic indoctrination of graduate students, and, for some, their feeling of helplessness in the face of the situation. "This is a problem which we have discussed among ourselves from time to time," one librarian wrote, "but up to this point we have not made any real progress."

Most of the librarians canvassed considered that their most profitable means of orienting advanced students was through close cooperation with, and encouragement of, the faculty. But there was some disagreement as to whether the library or the teaching faculty should take the initiative. As one librarian put it, the library should offer bibliographic training for any course, graduate or undergraduate, for which a faculty member requests this type of service. At Columbia, however, the reference department takes the lead and

writes to members of the graduate faculties, emphasizing that the library staff is prepared to present orientation lectures to seminars covering such items as organization of the library, content and use of reference books, and the more important bibliographic sources in their particular subject field. The response to this program, the librarian writes, has grown each year since its inception.

Providing instruction for seminar groups by librarians who are subject specialists was frequently mentioned in the commenting letters. For example, at Princeton graduate students in American history are brought to the manuscripts room of the library for one afternoon each year as a part of their course, and the curator spends several hours pointing out to them the manuscript resources in their field. Similarly, at Oregon and Wisconsin the divisional librarians appear frequently before seminars to discuss problems of bibliography and methodology. At most universities, specialized courses in research methods and bibliography were offered by academic departments, professional schools, or branch librarians.² These courses, however, were often elective and failed to attract a significant percentage of advanced students.

In several instances, libraries have tried to supplement this specialized training with more general lectures open to all advanced students. Toward this end, the humanities and social studies librarians at Wisconsin offered two series of lectures—a total of six—for

entering graduate students, which because of crowded schedules and competition for students' time have been only moderately well attended. Certain faculty members have urged their graduate students to be present at these general library lectures and have given their wholehearted approval and support. Yet only a small percentage of students are exposed to the broad view of the library and its facilities, first, because of the pressures mentioned above, and, second, because they believe that they can acquire the necessary bibliographic knowledge in or along with their regular courses and seminars. This indifferent response to instructional lectures has been paralleled by the experience of the University of Minnesota.

Only one librarian put forth the tentative opinion that "students in the fifth year of university work ought to be able to use the library with reasonable facility," but immediately qualified that statement with the clause, "although I must confess that both faculty members and librarians often are disappointed when they discover what these students really know." Bibliographically speaking, what one ought to know, one often does not; nor, even, does a graduate degree automatically confer this knowledge. Librarians who have experienced the regular curricula of graduate study, up to and including the doctorate, before attending library school can testify to the narrow, limited field of specialized bibliography to which they had been exposed.

Other methods suggested by librarians were library manuals designed to answer the usual questions and other guides written specifically for graduate students or graduate students and faculty. A printed guide to the library was included in the registration envelope for all new graduate students at Harvard. Some universities, such as Stanford and Wisconsin, advocated sub-

² Many specialized courses in bibliography and methodology are required of advanced students by graduate faculties. These are conducted with more or less cooperation from the university library at many institutions, among them Minnesota (romance languages), Indiana (chemistry, education, business, speech), Columbia (various professional schools), Stanford (education, health education, biological sciences, chemistry, English, German, political science, psychology, history, medicine), Princeton (various academic departments), Illinois (chemistry, law, medicine, biology, maps, some departments such as English), Texas (various departments), Wisconsin (English, French, geography, German, history, agriculture, medicine), and so on. Undoubtedly, many seminars and graduate courses have substantial bibliographic content. This, however, is largely beyond the purview of the library.

ject guides for advanced students. For example, Purdue has recently compiled a list of references for students of sociology; Wisconsin has a pamphlet on educational research; and the Harvard guides to a number of subjects are well known. In connection with our instructional lectures at Wisconsin, we have prepared a checklist of representative reference titles, revised and brought up to date each year, which is offered to all graduate students.

To summarize, replies by card and letter to our questionnaire indicate that orientation and bibliographic instruction of entering graduate students is a problem of concern to all research libraries—and one for which no complete solution has been found. While all libraries expressed a willingness to help, the great majority disclaimed responsibility for bibliographic instruction of students at the graduate level.

Only two libraries conducted general courses in orientation, reference, and bibliography; and only one of these courses was taught by a member of the library staff. Many specialized courses in research methods and bibliography were given by faculty members, with or without library cooperation. The majority of libraries provided lectures—largely in specific subject areas—which were delivered before seminars and course groups upon faculty request. About half conducted graduate tours of the library.

Several factors militated against a formal program of orientation, bibliographic instruction, and research meth-

odology in the library: lack of staff, time, and funds for preparation and administration of courses and extensive lecture series on the graduate level, and the extreme variation in subject fields involved, which would make a uniformly effective orientation impossible. Perhaps most significant, however, was the complicated problem of scheduling library instruction among the welter of graduate courses and seminars, and the inability or unwillingness of graduate students to take time from their departmental curricula to participate in any kind of separate program sponsored by the library. Most of such attempts continue to be poorly attended or have been discontinued for lack of interest.

The best hope for orientation and instruction of graduate students by the library seems to lie in an even closer cooperation with the faculty. Librarians can take the initiative in offering to provide supplemental lectures and special instruction for established seminars and classes. An interested faculty could easily convince its graduate students of the value of personal appointments with the library's subject specialists and reference librarians to map out both specific and general programs of research and orientation. These contacts might be strengthened as well by the issuing of advanced library manuals and special subject bibliographies and guides. It appears, however, that only by working within the established pattern of scholarship and research can the library offer maximum service to its graduate community.

NOMINATIONS SOUGHT: Nominations are being sought for the 1959 Margaret Mann Citation. Librarians who have made a distinguished contribution to the profession through publication of significant professional literature, participation in professional cataloging associations, or valuable contributions to practice in individual libraries and who are members of the Cataloging and Classification Section of ALA are eligible. Nominations should be made not later than January 1 to the chairman of the section's Committee on Award of the Margaret Mann Citation, Dr. Maurice F. Tauber, School of Library Service, Columbia University, New York 27.