

# Site, Seats, Selectivity

## Some Thoughts on Planning the College Library Building

THE POSTWAR PERIOD has been characterized by ever-increasing enrollments in both colleges and universities. The period of general economic prosperity coupled with long-standing need has made possible the construction of an impressive number of college and university library buildings.

Since 1945 librarians and architects have written instructively in general and specific terms about library buildings. The literature in book and periodical form contains a great number of descriptions, charts, schematic plans, reproductions and reports. In addition there have been numerous special publications containing summaries of conferences and institutes devoted to discussions and criticisms of building plans.

All of these publications were primarily printed to inform and instruct librarians suffering from the seemingly endless labor and intermittent frustration that goes with planning new buildings or renovating old ones. Information in considerable detail, written with earnestness and honesty—though not always based on sufficient investigation—exists about modular and non-modular construction, flexibility, interior communication, wall treatment, lighting, equipment, floor coverings, paint, soundproofing and a host of other details that pertain to library buildings. The librarian who has read and digested the literature, and has attended the buildings institutes with some degree of regularity, has much of the

basic background necessary to plan a new building.

There are, however, some features of planning that need re-examination and a more considered investigation. Our thinking about function, about the most desirable site on which to build the library, as well as provisions for reader and book space seem based more on hoary tradition and blind acceptance of statements by buildings experts than upon contemporary need and student habits.

Since still more college libraries are being planned this seems an appropriate time for this inquiry. Attention to these important details may be the difference between an adequate functional college library building and one that is not only inadequate but inoperative.

### DISTINCTION BETWEEN A COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY LIBRARY BUILDING

It is imperative in planning a college library building for the planners to realize that a college library differs from a university, special or public library. (There are of course a few hybrids that perform both college and public library functions. We are speaking now of the relatively unadulterated college.) This apparently needless admonition is not an attempt at humor; it seems called for. The literature relating to buildings does not always clearly emphasize the various and quite unlike services performed by the several kinds of libraries. Because of the dissimilar functions each type must have different layout, plan and design.

There are those who have maintained that the college, public, and university

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*Dr. Byrd is associate director, Indiana University Libraries.*

library are only variant forms and that elements common to all three are more basic than the differences in designing the physical structure. Perhaps it is this doctrine that is responsible for confusion in the minds of some library planners. It has led to the incorporation in college libraries of unnecessary and expensive features of dubious value to the college.

It cannot be denied that all types of libraries have common elements. All have patrons and give service on printed and other materials. There is, however, a noticeable dissimilarity in the aims and primary functions, particularly of the college and university library. College library services are limited by the very nature of the educational program of the college. No such limitations apply to the university. The ideal college library should reflect and implement the educational objectivities of a particular college. It should not reflect primarily the professional zeal and ambition of a librarian who is confused about the nature of his calling.

#### SITE

Customarily the college librarian is not solely responsible for selecting the site for the proposed building. Administrative officers and trustees, who have up-to-date and intimate knowledge of student habits and customs, usually make the final decision. If the librarian can influence the choice of site, a wonderful opportunity is presented to build the library where it will better serve the students without changing their normal habits of daily life.

For many years authorities have advised that a site should be selected "readily accessible from recitation halls" or "near the center of classroom and study," or as near as possible to the "classrooms in the social sciences and humanities." The expressed reasons for advocating such a location is that students rush from class into the library or that increased short-time use is made of the library dur-

ing the intervals that normally occur between classes. It is also handy to have the library near classrooms so that students may return books between classes.

It can be seriously questioned whether such a location serves the desired purpose. If the college library is located primarily for the convenience of the students, and it should be, a site near that part of the campus where the students spend the greatest part of their waking hours, free of classes, would seem most desirable. Since, on the average, a student spends only fifteen hours each week in classrooms, and perhaps an equal number of hours between classes, the instructional or classroom area cannot be regarded as the center of student activity.

Observation of students, I believe, will reveal that they spend a great amount of their out-of-class-time in the student union, or activities center, and in the housing or dormitory units. A library on a site midway between the housing facilities and the student union would appear to be the preferable location. Such a location would be most advantageous for students who have developed the commendable habit of studying at night and on weekends, free from the interruptions occasioned by classes.

There are colleges that have purposely built men's housing facilities on one side of the campus and women's on the other. Since the mutual attraction of male and female at the college age is fairly constant, the student union becomes the center of much social activity at such a college. The ideal location for the library at this college would be near this gathering place for students.

#### SEATS AND ENROLLMENT

The enrollment increase in institutions of higher learning is expected to reach flood-tide proportions by 1965. Estimates by educators vary, but average calculations call for a doubling of 1950 enrollments by 1965. Educational facilities must be stretched to serve this bulge of

students. Some colleges will increase faculty and expand physical plants to admit a larger number but many will have only limited expansion; a few will hold the line at present levels. Some institutions have already faced this issue and announced their policies.

While it may prove difficult and impossible in some instances to get administrative decision on enrollment expansion it is an essential preliminary step in planning a new building; for the seating capacity, as well as other features of a library building, are directly and inseparably linked with enrollment. In planning the total number of seats the traditional professional dictum has been that space for 30, 40, or even 50 per cent of the total student body should be provided. Thirty per cent is usually regarded as a minimum.

Explanations as to how a ratio of seats and students is arrived at are weak, un-critical, and in some instances nonexistent. Sometimes such factors as "teaching program," "day students," "honors work" are considered. The following paraphrased explanations have been offered in defense of seating requirements. "We need seats for 30 per cent of our student body because our students attend classes six days a week." "We must plan to seat 40 per cent of our students because cars are prohibited and our students must ride bicycles." "Our tuition is higher than in most colleges, therefore we plan a seating capacity for 50 per cent of our student body." The implication is that there is a direct correlation between six-day classes, absence of cars, tuition, and library use.

Perhaps this great emphasis on seats and the desire to have a sufficient number can be explained by the fact that reader space in many colleges has been totally inadequate. There is danger of overdeveloping this aspect of the college library to the neglect of other features.

Seating capacity should be related to

the size of the student body as well as to the educational standards and the teaching methods of the college. In planning space for readers, a survey of all study facilities of the college may prove of value. Facilities available in dormitories and elsewhere should be included as serving the over-all needs. Since a varying percentage of students use library seats to read their own texts, any space outside the library can meet this requirement. Indeed it may be cheaper to provide such study hall space outside the library. Use factor of present library facilities should be charted over staggered periods. The results may reveal that seats have maximum occupancy for only 100 to 300 hours during a given semester. The question then arises whether to plan for normal occupancy or for maximum occupancy which occurs for relatively short periods each semester. The results of a local survey should reveal the approximate seating capacity needed. With information on enrollment trends a college can provide reader space for local use without attention to space provided at colleges with similar numbers of students.

There is no real tragedy nor lasting educational sin committed by occasionally denying a student the privilege of a seat in the library. The vital, all-important feature of library services is to provide the student with the book. Books can be read, contents can be digested, and a mind can be inspired and encouraged in a number of places not mentioned in library literature as study facilities.

#### SELECTIVITY—PLANNING THE BOOK CAPACITY

The size of the book collection must be considered and the annual rate of growth anticipated or estimated when planning the building. We have been told that the book stock of college libraries normally doubles every 13 to 22 years. There are, of course, exceptions to this

general rule. Space for books is often provided according to a formula: The college has  $x$  volumes now. It will grow at the rate of  $y$  volumes annually. Space for 20 years' expansion is desired.  $x + 20y =$  estimated size of the book collection in 20 years.  $z =$  total square feet of floor space for book storage.

Such planning for book storage in a new building is not only expensive but unrealistic. It should be obvious that there are books of unequal educational value in every college library. The keep-every-book-that-comes-to-the-library philosophy has made and will make many of our college libraries storehouses for thousands of volumes that are practically useless in so far as they relate to daily student and faculty need.

It should not become a function of the college library to store books as a mere act of preserving the accumulated knowledge of mankind as it is represented in print. Nor should it become obligatory for the college to keep books that may be needed for research in the distant future. Interlibrary loans and the general availability of research material through photographic reproductions can in part satisfy the latter demand. The college collection should contain the best of the useful scholarly books, books that are alive and in demand because of the current curricular needs of the college. Accumulation and storage belongs in the domain of the university and research library.

Maximum size of the college book collection has been discussed frequently in the past. It has even been suggested that a numerical limit be placed on the gross size of the book collection, discarding volumes no longer in current demand when the top figure is approached. Though this has been suggested it has not been considered seriously and, to my knowledge, is not practiced by any college. A few colleges have discarded at intervals old texts, patently useless books

and duplicates no longer needed in multiple copies. Perhaps weeding if done faithfully and regularly can arrest growth. It is not practiced more widely, we are told, because of the expense involved in withdrawing books. This seems a sad commentary on our efficiency and might indicate that as a profession we are hamstrung by records.

The time is not yet appropriate seriously to consider placing an arbitrary limit on the size of the book collection. We still are in a competitive period and most of us believe in the magic of numbers. Some college authorities take pride in advertising the largest college library in the country, the second largest west of the Mississippi or the largest south of the Mason-Dixon line. If these authorities could be shown what these boasts cost in dollars and cents and how minor a role numbers of these volumes play in their educational program, enthusiasm might be less noticeable.

Since it would appear impossible to set a limit on the size of the book collection or to practice judicious weeding, it would appear economically wise for the college with a substantial number of little used volumes to consider two methods of shelving for the books in a new building. Those books for which there is little current demand could be placed in compact shelving in a part of the building finished at low cost. If they must be kept, use factor would dictate that they be stored at a minimum cost to the institution. This is essentially the storage library idea on an individual rather than a cooperative basis. One college library has used the basement of an adjoining building for compact storage. When a new library is built, it might be possible to use part of the old library quarters for this purpose.

The active or frequently used collection could be shelved in the most accessible manner. There seems to be positive educational value in putting the user

and the book together without barriers. The "good" or "alive" books could be made freely available to all patrons. At periodic intervals books in this collection should be retired to the "dead" collection. Similarly books from the dead collections could be reactivated if in demand.

#### CONCLUSION

Many college libraries erected in the last decade contain poetry rooms, listening rooms, rooms for group study and conversation, microform rooms, browsing rooms and lounges. All of these rooms were designed to further the educational value of the library. It is encouraging to see the college library become a sort of

second home for students. One cannot quarrel with these features if they are needed and used. But the feeling persists that many of them got in quite a few building plans by no other process than that of imitation. In planning a college library the first and only obligation is to provide those services which are needed on a local level without any thoughts as to what is currently in mode nationally or professionally. A college is a unique institution, and in spite of the pressure for educational mass production and standardization, each college differs from all others. The college library must play its role within the framework of this institutional individuality.

## Punched-Card Charging System for a Small College Library

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ious departments, including the library. Since the only record for Keysort library charges is the classed file, it is still necessary to check through the entire student part of the classed file. This cumbersome task can be eliminated by clipping each day the initials of the borrowers' last names, which would thus reduce such checking to one letter of the alphabet, which could quickly be needed. However, thus far, withdrawals have been so few that the additional clipping each morning is not justified. Withdrawals average less than one a week, and, by actual record, the average time for checking a withdrawal is 10 minutes. The extra time, which would be spent if the initials of borrowers were clipped during the morning routine, would be much more than this.

As stated earlier, at first the Keysort system was accepted on a two-year trial basis. After having used it for this period, its advantages and possibilities have become evident. Because of the complete borrower information given on the charg-

ing forms, errors have been greatly reduced, and, when an occasional error in call number does occur, author and title are still available as guides. The entire circulation procedure under Keysort consumes much less than half the staff time used with our old charging system, and such a saving as this compensates many times over for the rather expensive charging cards. Also, by dittoing the backs of the cancelled charging forms, satisfactory charging cards for magazines which circulate for overnight only are available. Just recently it was decided to rent the desk model groover from McBee. The use of the groover is an economy in time, since, with that, many more cards at a time can be clipped than with the hand clip that was first used. Reprinting of cards on which no changes are made can be done from the same plate, and these are less expensive than the original printing. Keysort has been so satisfactory that we are planning to take it with us in our new building which will be ready in a few months.