

The Liberal Arts Function of the University Library

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WHAT IS the responsibility of the university library for the undergraduate students in the arts and sciences? Are not the problems faced by the university library in its relation to the library needs of undergraduates similar to those faced by the library in the liberal arts college? Or, is the reverse true? Comparisons of the responsibilities of college and university librarians usually devote attention to librarians as chief executives. Such comparisons can easily be misleading as they consider the activities of but one member of the staff of the college or the university library and obscure the fact that in the college and university alike there are liberal arts students and their teachers whose library needs must be met. It is only by careful study of these needs that the differences and similarities of the college library and university library can be clearly understood.

Comparisons of the College and the University

Satisfactory comparison of the functions of college and university libraries calls for a clear distinction between the liberal arts college and university, but as yet no thoroughly adequate analysis has appeared. Thirty-five years ago the Association of

American Universities devoted a session of its annual conference to a discussion of the topic, "The Actual and Proper Lines of Distinction between College and University Work." At this conference, Arthur T. Hadley, David Starr Jordan, and several other university representatives presented opinions on the subject.¹ There was no evident agreement among the several speakers as to exact distinctions. However, as presented by Dr. Hadley, there are four categories within the college and university together: academic, professional, technological, and graduate. The first was presented as comparable to the liberal arts college.

Another early discussion of this problem was presented in 1907 by Henry Smith Pritchett.² He clearly distinguished between the college and university on the basis of ideals. The former "exists for the purpose of training men . . . in those studies which lead, not to a particular calling, but to a general view of the world and a comprehension of our duty to it." The latter exists to give "professional training based upon high educational

¹ Hadley, Arthur T. "The Actual and Proper Lines of Distinction between College and University Work." *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses, Association of American Universities*, 1904, pp. 21-25; Jordan, David Starr. "The Actual and Proper Lines of Distinction between College and University Work." *Ibid.*, pp. 25-33; followed by discussion by Munroe Smith, President Eliot, and others, pp. 33-42.
² Pritchett, Henry Smith. "The Distinction between College and University in the United States and Canada." *Second Annual Report of the President and Treasurer, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching*, Oct. 1907, pp. 93-99.

standards" and to conduct "scholarly research." Pritchett believed it desirable for "some universities to develop without undergraduate affiliation," but he recognized that there had developed in the United States a "distinctive type of university embracing under a single administration the undergraduate college, the graduate school and the professional schools." He believed that the graduate school and the professional school should be based upon the college.

Confusion as to Functions of the University

Concerning the functions of the university a confusion exists in the literature which is difficult to clarify. Some university men believe that the undergraduate school, at least the lower division or junior college, should be completely separated from the university. Boucher, in his *The Chicago College Plan*³ discusses the possibilities of a four-year junior college, which would unite the first two years of the present college with the last two years of high school, leaving the third and fourth years of the college to become more closely coordinated with the graduate and professional schools.

Flexner states the ideal functions of the university to be: "The conservation of knowledge and ideas; the interpretation of knowledge and ideas; the search for truth; the training of students who will practice and 'carry on.'"⁴ This last obligation he believes is "not a psychological or parental responsibility"; in other words, he believes that the university should concern itself solely with advanced or graduate students. Thus he would separate the liberal arts college from the

university. He would also absolve the university from any immediate practical responsibility for the problems of society, excluding at the same time responsibility for the maintenance of vocational schools, excepting the professions of law and medicine from this separation.⁵

Important as it is for the librarian to be aware of the various points of view regarding the functions of the university as it might be ideally, he will, after all, be forced to adapt his library program to universities as they are. Perhaps no more pithy summary of the latter can be found than that given by Flexner, himself:

The great American universities . . . are composed of three parts: they are secondary schools and colleges for boys and girls; graduate and professional schools for advanced students; "service" stations for the general public. The three parts are not distinct; the college is confused with the "service" station and overlaps the graduate school; the graduate school is partly a college, partly a vocational school, and partly an institution of university grade.⁶

Stated more prosaically, the activities (as opposed to an ideal definition of functions) of American universities, as they are now constituted, are: (1) instruction: at the undergraduate, graduate, vocational, and extension levels; (2) research: by a few undergraduate students, some of the students in professional and technological schools, graduate students, and faculty and research staffs; (3) publication: usually involving chiefly the publication of the results of research in the local institution; (4) extension: non-curricular extension service, such as agricultural extension, radio talks, and other devices by which the university attempts to extend its services beyond the boundaries of the campus.

³ Boucher, C. S. *The Chicago College Plan*. University of Chicago Press, 1935.

⁴ Flexner, Abraham. *Universities, American, English, German*. Oxford University Press, 1930, pp. 6-8.

⁵ Flexner. *Op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.

⁶ Flexner. *Op. cit.*, p. 45.

Liberal Arts College within the University

Although much has been written about the liberal arts college, there has been no adequate treatment of the liberal arts college within the university. Max Mason, former president of the University of Chicago, has considered the matter, but his statement deals primarily with the stimulating influences which the research activities of the university can be made to have on the undergraduate student.⁷ None of the other university administrators, in the writings referred to, gave any special attention to the college within the university, nor have university librarians presented a more satisfactory discussion of the problem, although most recognize its existence. Where the problem is discussed, it is interesting to find some university librarians joining those university presidents who advocate separation. W. W. Bishop of the University of Michigan proposes that:

Much of the library service in our universities would be rendered far more effective if only the universities would create and maintain separate libraries for aid in the teaching of undergraduates aside from the central university library whose chief function is—or should be—the development of materials and services for higher studies.⁸

The librarian of the University of California Library is even more strongly separatist:

To try to care for the differing and often conflicting needs of hordes of undergraduate students on the one hand, and of graduate students, faculty, and research men on the other, in the same building or buildings, with the same collection of books, and very largely with the same staff, is to attempt the

impossible. The answer seems to be *separate housing, separate book collections, and separate staffs.* (Italics added.)⁹

Far from looking upon service to undergraduates within the university library as outside the realm of possibility, Peyton Hurt makes a proposal which contributes directly to the primary consideration of this paper:

The establishment and maintenance of a separate undergraduate library is an obvious means of defining the library service to be rendered to undergraduate students. The same result might be accomplished, however, at much less expense by a clear definition of the functions of the University Library in relation to undergraduate instruction and limitation of the use of library materials by undergraduate classes. "Some compromise might be desirable. One worth considering would be the designation of a "librarian for undergraduates" and the development of an "undergraduate division" of the University Library. . . ."¹⁰

Comparative Study of Library Functions Desirable

It has already been stated that only by careful study of the library needs of students and faculty in the college and the university can the differences and similarities of the functions of the college library and the university library be clearly understood. It is purposed here to set these needs side by side in order to come to this understanding. To make the most effective use of allotted space, and to make comparison easy, the functions of the college library and the university library, respectively, are set forth in diagrammatic form, arranged to interpret functional relationships. Cf. Figures 1 and 2.

⁷ Mason, Max. "The College within the University." In Kelly, Robert L., ed. *The Effective College*. Association of American Colleges, [c1928], pp. 26-34.

⁸ Bishop, William W. "The College Library and College Teaching." *Bulletin*, Association of American Colleges 23:190-200. Cf. p. 193.

⁹ Leupp, Harold L. "Probable Trends in University Libraries." *College and Research Libraries* 1:57-61, Dec. 1939. Cf. p. 57.

¹⁰ Hurt, Peyton. *The University Library and Undergraduate Instruction: an Analysis of Their Relationship*. University of California Press, 1936, p. 41.

THE COLLEGE LIBRARY

(Diagrammatic Representation: Arranged to Interpret Functional Relationships)

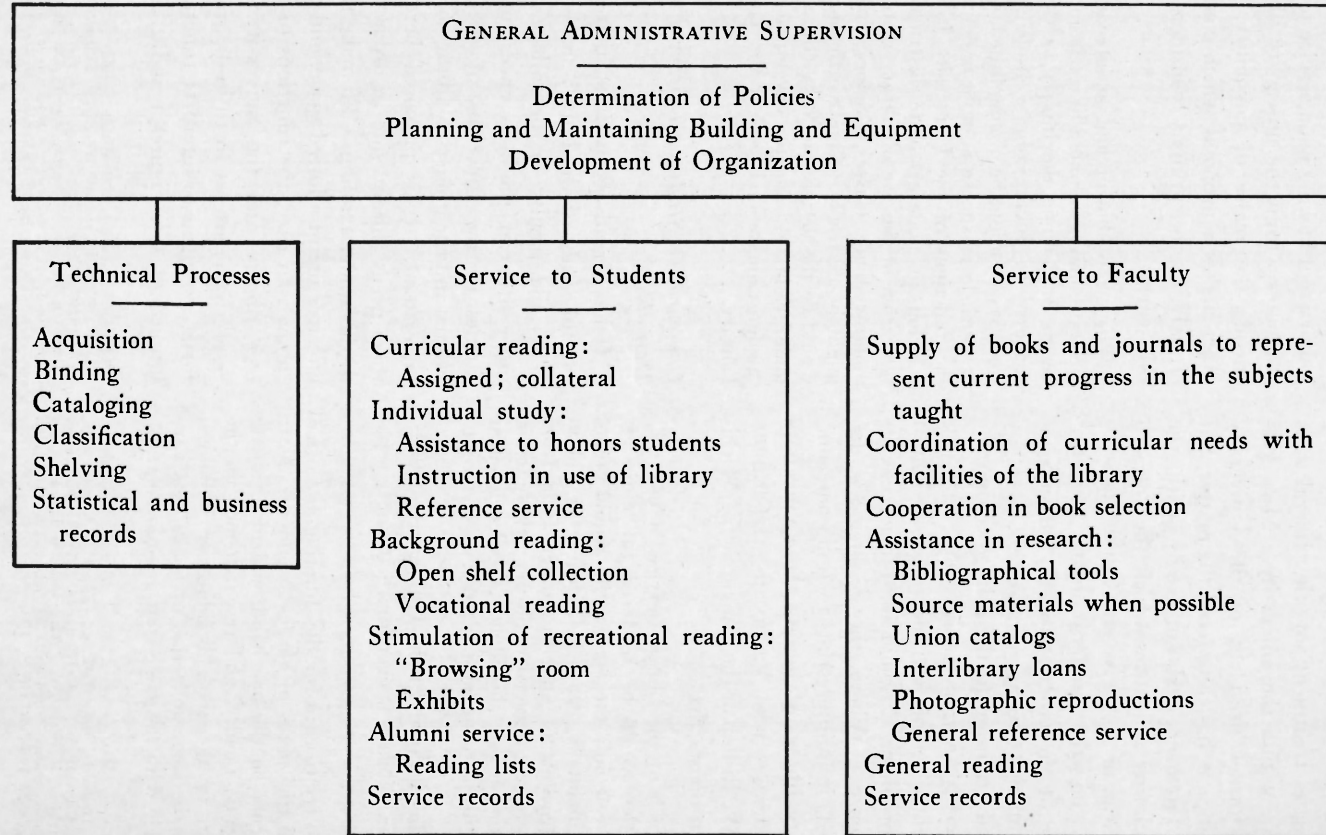
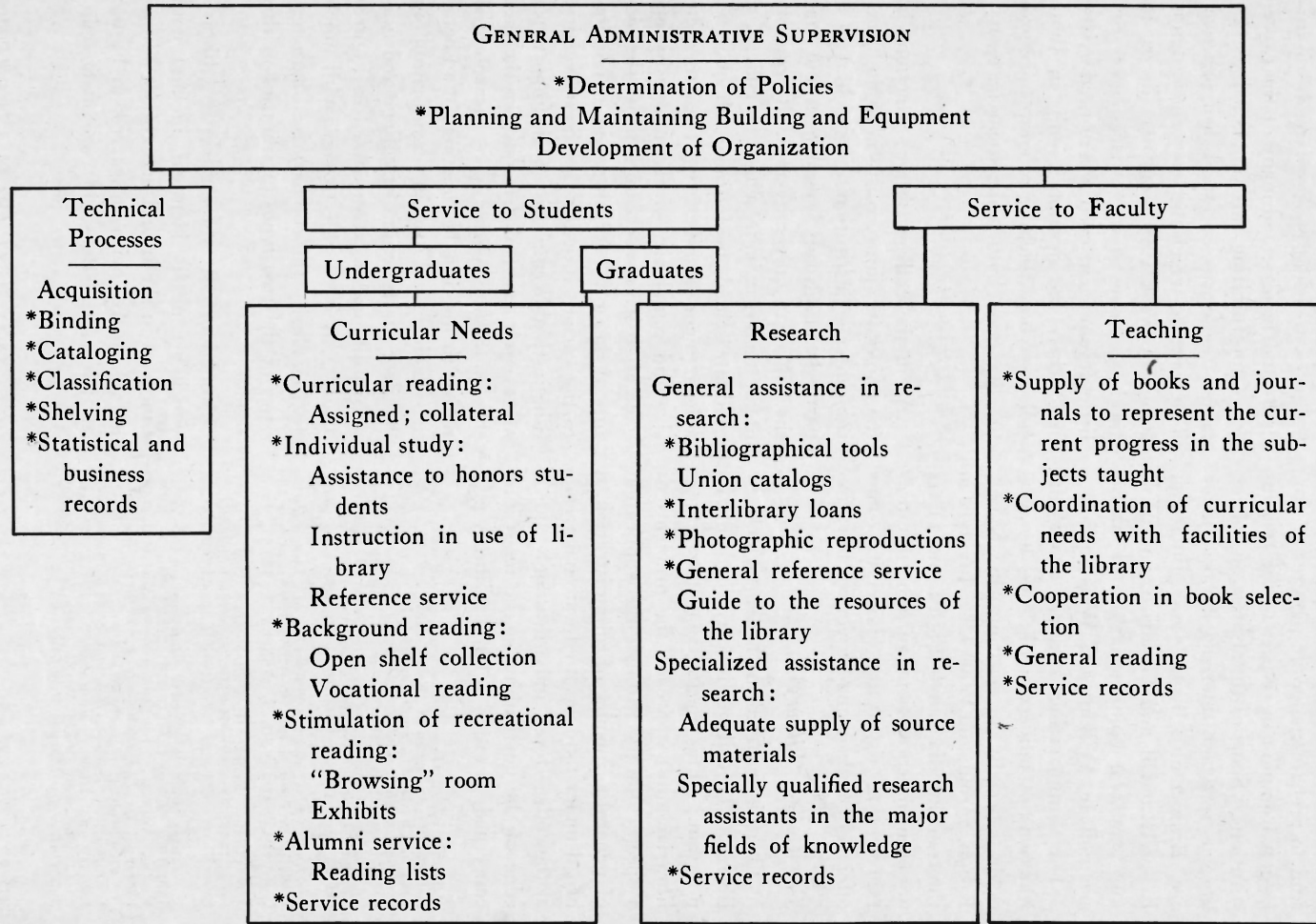


FIGURE I

THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

(Diagrammatic Representation: Arranged to Interpret Functional Relationships)



* Functions which are nearly identical, in kind, with functions in liberal arts college libraries.

FIGURE 2

A considerable portion of the literature on college and university libraries has been read to prepare composite pictures of professional opinion in respect to the two institutions. Some of the writers on college libraries to whom reference has been made are Branscomb, Brown and Bousfield, Evans, Randall and Goodrich, and Wilson,¹¹ and for opinions about the liberal arts college, Wilkins and Wriston.¹²

For summarizing opinion about the functions of university libraries, use was made especially of writings by Kaiser, Keogh, Sproul, and Works.¹³ Involved in the resulting diagrams (Figs. 1 and 2) are my own interpretations, in some instances representing expansion of services now offered by college and university libraries.

The College Library

There is no fixed method by which the liberal arts college is carrying out its program. This means that the college librarian must approach the problems of a specific library through the application of general principles of administration, a broad understanding of educational trends at the college level, and a thorough knowledge of the curriculum in the institution concerned, in order to build a library pro-

gram that will fully meet the local needs.

The primary function of the college library is to make books available to students and faculty, and many of the procedures for fulfilling this function have attained the status of established practice. The points at which the service program is strong or weak vary from one library to another. Some of the services have seen little development even where need exists, and others are developed only in those colleges whose teaching programs are progressive enough to make them necessary.

The University Library

As in the college library, functions in the university library conform to the functions of the institution of which it is a part. It has already been pointed out that the American university normally consists of an undergraduate school or college, a graduate school, professional schools, and a department of university extension. The size and complexity of the university organization have served to confuse the picture of the university library in its relation to the various functions of the university. The justifiable emphasis on the importance of research has tended to obscure the fact that most universities have incorporated within themselves the functions of a liberal arts college. Through examination in detail of the functions of college and university libraries as summarized in Figures 1 and 2, it is possible to view with much greater clarity the comparative characteristics of the two types of libraries in this respect.

Functions of the university library which are nearly identical, in kind with functions in the liberal arts college libraries are marked with an asterisk in Figure 2. Brown and Bousfield¹⁴ are of the opin-

¹¹ Branscomb, Harvie. *Teaching with Books*. Association of American Colleges and A.L.A., 1940; Brown, Charles H., and Bousfield, H. G. *Circulation Work in College and University Libraries*. A.L.A., 1933; Evans, Silas. "The Contribution of the Library to Effective Teaching." In Kelly, Robert L., ed. *The Effective College*. Association of American Colleges, [c1928], pp. 135-45; Randall, William M., and Goodrich, F. L. D. *Principles of College Library Administration*. A.L.A. and the University of Chicago Press, [c1936]; Wilson, Louis R. "The Emergence of the College Library." *A.L.A. Bulletin* 25:439-46, Sept. 1931.

¹² Wilkins, Ernest H. *College and Society*. Century, 1932; Wriston, H. M. "General Education in Liberal-Arts Colleges." *Harvard Educational Review* 9:279-86, May 1939.

¹³ Kaiser, John B. "Newer Functions of University Libraries." *Library Journal* 51:217-21, Mar. 1, 1926; Keogh, Andrew. "The Function of the University Library." In *The Dedication of the (University of North Carolina) Library Building*. The University Library, 1930; Sproul, Robert G. "The Place of the Library in Higher Education." *A.L.A. Bulletin* 24:332-38, Sept. 1930; Works, George A. *College and University Library Problems*. A.L.A., 1927.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

ion that the differences between the college library and the university library, though extensive, are "differences in quantity rather than in kind."

This is borne out by the analysis of functions presented here. In other words, it is clearly demonstrated that in the traditional American university the liberal arts function of the college library is an integral part of the university library's responsibility.

One service to be rendered the undergraduate student calls for special comment, viz., instruction in the use of books and libraries. This commonly receives more lip-service than formal attention. Whether or not it is a function of the library of the college or university to offer such instruction has been debated. More than twenty-five years ago, W. W. Bishop urged the desirability of giving instruction of this sort in the elementary and secondary schools.¹⁵

But the well-known deficiencies of college students in this regard, even today, evidence the lack of any widespread adoption of such instruction in schools below the college level. Until students enter college adequately prepared to make effective use of books and libraries, the college, to insure the effectiveness of its educational program, must instruct them how to do so. This obligation must be assumed by both the faculty and the library, not working separately but in cooperation.

Directly bearing on the library's responsibility to alumni is this matter of instruction in the use of books and libraries. William Rainey Harper once said:

No more important, no more useful, training can be given men in college than that

¹⁵ Bishop, William W. "Training in the Use of Books." *The Backs of Books*. Williams and Wilkins, 1926, pp. 99-124. Appeared originally in the *Sewanee Review*, July 1912.

which relates to the use of books. Why do so many college men give up reading when they leave college? Because in college they have never learned the use of books. The equipment of the library will never be finished until it has upon its staff men and women whose sole work shall be, not the care of books, not the cataloging of books, but the giving of instruction concerning their use.¹⁶

One of the primary responsibilities of the university library toward the alumnus is to meet this need while he is still an undergraduate. If this is done, public libraries may be expected to have a more widespread support, and the feeble efforts of the college and university libraries will not be needed to supply the demand for good books, except to supplement the resources of the public libraries through a program of library cooperation.

Of interest to the university library in relation to library service to undergraduates is the fact that there has been a marked shift in training for the medical, legal, teaching, library and other professions from the undergraduate to the graduate level. In the opinion of the President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching this trend will relieve the liberal arts college of its "vocational pressure."¹⁷ This influence will be felt in the university as well. Sydney B. Mitchell urges that the "swamps of vocational work"¹⁸ should be avoided in the undergraduate training of college librarians; and this same point of view is taken by some members of the medical school faculties toward pre-medical training for the undergraduate.

¹⁶ Harper, William Rainey. *The Trend in Higher Education*. University of Chicago Press, 1905, p. 124.

¹⁷ Jessup, Walter Albert. "The Integrity of the American College from the Standpoint of Administration." *School and Society* 43:177-83, Feb. 8, 1936. Cf. p. 181.

¹⁸ Mitchell, Sydney B. "The Academic and Professional Education of College Librarians." *A.L.A. Bulletin* 30:69-74, Feb. 1936. Cf. p. 70.

Certain unstarred functions in Figure 2 are present in name in the college library as well as in the university library, but in the latter, due to so much more complexity, a considerable degree of comparableness is lost. Though the kinds of library service to be provided in the college and university are the same, it is obvious that the organization in the latter must be much more complex. Within some universities the number of faculty and graduate students is so large that the research function of the library assumes an importance which tends to overshadow the need for service to undergraduates. Research needs are probably only incompletely satisfied in most institutions, and they deserve the most serious attention; but the library should be vigilant to develop and maintain a service which will fulfill the liberal arts function of the university as well.

Implications for Administrative Organization

There are essential conflicts between the library needs of the students at the college level and the research needs of the faculty and graduate students. The undergraduate needs access to a relatively small, carefully selected open-shelf library, supplemented by abundantly duplicated titles for course work. The research worker needs access to a book collection indefinitely large, where selection is not welcome unless the materials excluded have no bearing on his field of research, and duplication is non-essential. The undergraduate is rarely ever called upon to exhaust the bibliographical sources of any subject, and the assistance he needs consists primarily in instruction in how to use the library in order to find the material he needs. The research worker must exhaust bibliographical sources for every

problem on which he works, and the service he needs may require intensive and sometimes extended technical assistance from the librarian.

In spite of the differences, as Mr. Leupp points out,¹⁹ the university library continues to attempt satisfactory service to both groups with the same corps of librarians, and, it may be added, through an organization of personnel which is not designed to serve satisfactorily the needs of either the liberal arts student or the research worker.

The traditional organization of university libraries has been based very largely on two types of differences: (1) differences in technical and service procedures, resulting in departments for acquisition, cataloging, circulation, and reference; and (2) differences in types of library materials, such as periodicals, public documents, maps, or manuscripts and rare books. From the standpoint of conflicting service-needs of the library's clientele this form of library organization is an illogical one, resulting in much confusion and ineffectiveness in library service.

An alternative form of administrative organization is proposed, to include three primary divisions: (1) the Division of Technical Processes, to have supervision of the acquisition, organization, and care of the book collection; (2) the Division of Instructional Service, to have supervision of all services required by students in connection with classroom assignments or individual study programs, and by faculty members in their teaching programs; and (3) the Division of Research Service, to have supervision of the resources and services needed by research workers.²⁰ This

¹⁹ *Loc. cit.*

²⁰ Cf. Henkle, Herman H. "An Interpretation of Research Librarianship." *School and Society* 47:494-99, Apr. 16, 1938.

would be a truly functional form of organization for the university library.

The second division would serve the purposes discussed by Peyton Hurt²¹ in his proposed "undergraduate division."

It would fulfill what we have chosen to call the "liberal arts function of the university library." The choice of the term, "instructional service" in the title of the division, rather than "service to undergraduates," lies in the existence of course work at the graduate level which is essentially like that in the undergraduate college in so far as the kind of library service needed is concerned. Reeves and Russell²² point out the tendency toward the expansion of the college curriculum to include work for the master's degree, forced very largely by the increasing educational demands upon teachers in the public schools. It is their opinion that "the program of work leading to the master's degree is already more akin to the work of the senior college than it is to that of the upper two years of graduate work leading to the doctor's degree."

In Conclusion

In conclusion it should be emphasized

²¹ *Loc cit.*
²² Reeves, Floyd W., and Russell, John Dale. "The Relation of the College Library to Recent Movements in Higher Education." *Library Quarterly* 1:57-66, Jan. 1931.

that one or more persons on the university library staff should be specially qualified for and delegated to give particular attention to the needs of the students in the arts-and-sciences division of the university. And one or more others should be qualified to give instruction in bibliography and in the use of the library. In short, while the research function looms large in the university library, the teaching function is as real and as important as in the liberal arts college library. It may be considered more so, if numbers are significant, for some of our large state universities have many more undergraduate students in the arts and sciences than are served by the largest liberal arts colleges. The administrators of some large universities have pleaded that "size" does not necessarily detract from "quality" in educational institutions. It may be urged that the statements just presented are a necessary qualification of that assumption. Other university administrators may insist that the function of the university is to do research and gainsay their responsibility to serve also the functions of a liberal arts college. Those who hold to this opinion should exercise their institutional integrity and cease to mislead the thousands of students who flock to their halls in the belief that they are to receive a "college education."