COLLEGE
& RESEARCH
LIBRARIES

Letters

The Undergraduate Library (continued)

To the Editor:

In his recent article (Jan. 1978 *C&RL*) Mr. Wingate seems to suffer from some of the confusions he attributes to undergraduate libraries in their attempts to define their role. The "basic tenet" of these undergraduate libraries that still seem to be in a healthy state has very little to do with those identified in the Wingate article but would seem to be more akin to the list Irene Braden (Hoadley) defined in her thesis on "The Undergraduate Library."[1] In fact, several of the "defects" Wingate pinpoints are advantages when observed from the undergraduate library seat.

Most of us go out of our way to avoid "segregating" the undergraduate from the research library. We do, in fact, deliberately try to lead undergraduates, *when they are ready*, to the more comprehensive resources of the other place/s. Statistics in fact show that Toronto undergraduates use all three collections. They do, however, find different needs being met by each collection.

We often make the comparison of supermarket to gourmet store when we speak of the respective roles of the Sigmund Samuel Library and the research libraries. Any multiple copies that are purchased will be in Sig. Sam—our "supermarket"—where there is still a wide enough breadth of titles to support the variety of courses being offered and the diversity of teaching methods being used in the Faculty of Arts & Science.

A number of the institutions whose undergraduate collections have closed do not appear to have had sufficient depth in their collections to meet the diverse demands of today's undergraduate. But we must remember that "*A bigger library is not better for all purposes.* . . . Beyond a certain point, somewhere around 250,000 volumes, further increases in size sharply diminish the usefulness of a library for most demands."[2] By this standard the Sigmund Samuel Library contains approximately 250,000 of the "most frequently used volumes" from the total holdings of the library system.

To achieve our "*raison d'être* as a convenient library of first resort"[3] for the undergraduate and, indeed, for graduate students and faculty members who are new to our campus or to a particular subject, we also concentrate heavily on instruction in library use. This is one objective of undergraduate libraries that seems to have been totally ignored by Mr. Wingate, though it is on Braden's list of the six attributes that distinguish undergraduate libraries from research libraries.

One could go on and on and dissect statistics for each of the institutions quoted by Mr. Wingate or those appearing in the annual statistical compilation in the *UGLI Newsletter*. We may not meet all needs; but in an institution of 34,142 undergraduates and 11,796 graduate students, we *are* still able to keep some of the personal touch in our library services both for undergraduates in Sig. Sam. and for graduate students and faculty members in the research libraries. We feel our readers in Toronto benefit by the split, and similar tales are told by the librarians (and the statistics) at such diverse institutions as the Universities of British Columbia, California (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and San Diego), Hawaii, Michigan, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas and at Cornell, Harvard, McGill, and Stanford Universities and others.[4]—*Sheila M. Laidlaw, Sigmund Samuel Librarian, University of Toronto.*

REFERENCES

1. Subsequently published as ACRL Monograph No. 31 by ALA in 1970.
2. University of Toronto, President's Advisory Committee on the Sigmund Samuel Library Collection, *Report* (Toronto, 1972), p.9–10.
3. Ibid., p.5.
4. ACRL Undergraduate Librarians' Discussion Group, *UGLI Newsletter: Statistical Issue*, No. 12 (Jan. 1978).

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