

# The College Library in the Curriculum<sup>1</sup>

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IT USED to be only Fremont Rider, but lately biologists and other peripheral people have been darting into the library world crying disaster if we don't do something about our geometrical tendency to bulge. These well-meant warnings have had little effect. Keyes Metcalf, in a recent number of the enviable *Harvard Library Bulletin*, said that university libraries should probably be held to 10 per cent of the total institutional budget. He did not say just how it was to be done. Since I work for a library which has been bumping that mystically perceived sonic barrier, and which in one recent year broke through it, I feel a proper concern. The relationship of a library and a curriculum is somewhat conditioned by size and cost, and I think we should first look at those aspects.

When the more philosophical approaches to a problem are too wearing, one recourse is to get out some graph paper and colored pencils, and analyze the true facts. I have fallen back upon this procedure, and am as surprised as you are to be able to report that it has helped somewhat.

The basic situation is familiar to all of us. We have, in any academic library, something akin to an atomic pile. Once

it is set going, it can be controlled only with difficulty and cannot be stopped. Its by-products are dangerous, and some of them have a half life of a thousand years. We are familiar with the symptoms which add up to this effect, such as the serial sets which it is agonizing to discontinue, even when the last interested emeritus professor has departed.

When enough graphs had been drawn the truth began to dawn. An academic library, as a well-functioning technical enterprise, cannot be expected to control its growth. Please note the qualification "a well-functioning *technical* enterprise." The factors that might constrain the uninhibited growth of the library are both environmental and internal. In the case of the general academic library considerations are humanistic rather than technical. What, then, are the conditions that will produce the perfect library and stimulate its perfect use? My Socratic Dæmon promptly asks, "Perfect to whom, for what?" That makes things easier: perfect in the liberal arts college, as a teaching instrument.

Turning now to a concrete instance, I am going to make what may seem an unseemly boast. The academic library for which I work (Dartmouth College) is about as good as they come. If I concentrate upon its defects it should be clear that they are the shortcomings of a very good library which is capable of improved application. This example is not "average." Rather it is oversize. But I think it

<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at the Conference of Eastern College Librarians, Columbia University, Nov. 27, 1948.

can properly be called "typical" because it exemplifies the virtues and faults of other academic libraries which I have used. To its credit it has a well-balanced book stock; spaciousness and comfort for the users of its 700,000 volumes; friendly service; and an open stack. Its inadequacies center in its specialized functions—reference, documents, periodicals, ephemera—and in its programs of instruction and coordination. None of this is said in criticism of present personnel. There are not enough people on the library staff to do what needs to be done, and the orthodox teachers seem to be loaded up with their own work.

I have already made a left-handed confession that we have not been able to do very much to get the library into our curriculum. I am chiefly concerned here with an analysis of why that is true. From the standpoints of personnel and cooperation, Dartmouth College Library is not so badly off as many others. For three years we have had an educational office in the library with a staff of one and a half, and we have the good will of our faculty in what we are trying to do.

### *Reasons for Difficulty*

What, then, causes our difficulty? One basic reason involves the kind of library we have become.

Picture for yourself an Atlantic map of the library world, north and south magnetic poles describing the extreme distinction between the general and special library, while the American and British political poles indicate the difference between a free enterprise and a planned economy of library use. It then becomes the task of each of us to locate his library in terms of its distance from each of these four points of reference, and to decide objectively whether it is really turning up

where it belongs. The comprehensive general collection, its growth determined largely in response to external pressures, will come somewhere on the line between the north pole and the free enterprise pole.

Those, as a matter of fact, are the polar tensions which have produced most academic libraries. You recall Branscomb's remark about book selection. The "needs are too likely to be determined by the persistence and vigor with which the various individuals press their claims. The meek are not likely to inherit the college book funds." Our services also have expanded, one by one, because somebody was insistent enough and the funds were somehow found. The academic librarian has had to content himself with being a judicious coordinator of other people's urges, getting his back up occasionally but having little scope for far-sighted planning. He has built, and has had pride in, the *service* institution. It has been his particular, self-abnegating virtue to find ways of giving other people what they want. Serving many masters, he has had difficulty in being true to himself.

This system has produced good libraries, but the nature of their goodness changes. When the library serves an undergraduate institution the factor of increasing size increasingly offsets its virtues. It becomes better and better for the teacher and the graduate student, but worse and worse for the undergraduate. Our accessions records indicate that there was a time, not long ago, when we had seven works relating to Bolívar, three of them biographies in English. If these were well chosen for their day, the browsing undergraduate would have had no difficulty in selecting the one best suited to his use. Today, in our stacks, the undergraduate is confronted by 83 works relating to Bolívar. Even when we narrow them down to the 13 recent biographies in English, the chance that the aver-

age student will choose the one which best fulfills his need is pretty slim. Mere size has largely offset the advantage of an open stack, and has created a reference problem.

The adviser is also in trouble. When there are more choices it becomes his duty to know more about the field, as well as to be more particular about the nature of the need. In good conscience he cannot behave as if the additional volumes did not exist.

In the organic and almost automatic growth of an academic library, the number and variety of advisory specialists ideally should multiply faster than the book stock. This never happens. Reverting briefly, my useful graphs show what actually has happened in the case of one academic library.

The invoice cost of books added to the Dartmouth College Library 25 to 30 years ago, just about balanced all other expenses.

Then came the miracles of three gifts of a million dollars each—one for a new building, a second for books, and a third for services. There could hardly be a handier situation for the statistical analyst. Those of you who have smaller libraries may think that this is an unreal situation. If so, remember what Don Marquis' ant said to the great pyramid: "Just you wait." If you are sufficiently flabbergasted by this case study, you may save yourselves trouble later. As we are now, so you must be.

We had modest book funds before the million dollar one arrived, but very little book money has come in since. As a result the amount available for books has hardly altered in the last two decades. More was actually spent in the first decade than in the second. The invoice cost of books, year after year, has been around \$60,000. That is fortunate statistically, because it provides a steady factor against which to test all other costs. The following percentages are five-year averages. They are precise to the nearest whole digit.

During our first half-decade in a modern

building, 15 to 20 years ago, the purchase price of books and bindings accounted for exactly 40 per cent of our total expenditures.

Ten to fifteen years ago, these costs were 36 per cent.

Five to ten years ago, they had dropped to 30 per cent.

Last year the ratio was 25 per cent for books and bindings, 75 per cent for all other costs.

This has *not* been Fremont Rider's geometrical growth of book stock. The number of volumes added each year has shown a *downward* trend. It is therefore all the more important to note what the effect of this growth has been upon the costs and problems of maintenance and use.

We have a yearly income of around \$40,000 (from a fund that is all our own) to help in meeting these other costs, but its availability, as a second statistical constant, dramatically sharpens the residual deficit met from the general funds of the College. This subsidy has just about tripled, from a low of \$52,000 in 1934 to a high of \$150,000 in 1948.

To check it another way, our maintenance fund paid 43 per cent of our operating costs in 1931. Last year it accounted for only 21 per cent.

These dismal statistics show that the continuance of sound technological services of acquisition and maintenance, even when acquisitions hold to an arithmetical curve, tends to produce something suspiciously like a geometrical increase in all of the other costs that grow out of the use of a book fund. Estimating subjectively, I would guess that our present undergraduates are no better served—by a much larger staff and book stock—than were those of twenty years ago. The reference librarian has two assistants instead of one. There is a half-time cartographer, with one full-time assistant. Except for these additions, all our

added personnel cost has gone into work done behind the scenes.

Meanwhile our friendly general library has become for the undergraduate a difficult special library—a special library no longer especially for him. Time alone turns everyday popular books into a research collection. Twenty years ago, at a guess, 10 per cent of our book stock constituted a general undergraduate collection. (That would have corresponded to Branscomb's *maximum* quantity for the purpose.) Now, by the same calculation, the general undergraduate collection represents  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent of the total. The undergraduate's  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent of our books are all the more widely dispersed in what has become a special library for teachers.

What is a librarian to do under such circumstances? Are not the throes which grip so many of us a subconscious recognition that our "general" academic libraries, as they grow, are no longer really general in the original sense? I think so. And I think it accounts for our hankering to participate in the shaping of a curriculum which can really make these resources meaningful. The first great phase of library endeavor in this country has been largely fulfilled, and in its large fulfillment it has created a new problem at least as difficult. Our triumphant technologies of recording and maintenance have forced upon us the need for a wiser philosophy of use. In our many separate ways we have been working at this problem but we are still just at the beginning of it. It takes personnel. I have given the actual facts of one concrete situation, in a very good library, because these facts lead straight to the middle of the librarian's great problem: *Where is the personnel, this kind of personnel, coming from?*

Face it yourselves. It is your basic duty to see to it that your book funds are spent wisely, otherwise your library will cease to

live and will become a museum. The books you buy must be properly recorded and kept, otherwise their acquisition has been futile. Minimum services must be maintained for those who know what they want. Even to do these things most of you have to go year after year, to the sources controlling your funds, for more and more money.

The final item, the creative philosophy of use has been in most cases the *last* charge against everything but our consciences. If there is agony in the catalog room, which is six months or a year behind, and if the reference department is overworked, do you fight first for another cataloger or another reference assistant?

The trouble is that the librarian in most institutions is regarded as a partial incompetent. He has a pretty wide leeway to buy, record, and store books. The problem of keeping these books *useful* is his; the problem of keeping them *in use* is a teaching problem, which is baffling because nobody knows where the responsibility for it really lies.

At this point I am going merely to cite, without supporting data, a conviction based upon several diligent years of trying "to get the teacher into the library," and to help him to make a full and rewarding use of our collections. The wider kind of librarianship here indicated *should* get its recruits from the teaching profession but I have had to conclude that it is not likely to do so. This wider librarianship involves all of the known services that acquaint the user with the resources relating to his need, and with the means that call for the least expenditure of effort in using them.

To college administrators these services seem to be the librarian's concern, yet they involve the act of teaching which is the dean's responsibility. The typical results are an inadequately staffed reference department and a series of noble or ignoble

efforts to dragoon the faculty into a more creative view of "teaching with books." What is needed is full responsibility on one of these sides or the other. Knowing teachers, and having tried off and on to be one, I think the responsibility had better be on the librarian's side.

### *Responsibility for Use*

How is this to be done? The first move is to build a philosophy of librarianship which accepts full responsibility for creating a level of *use* adequate to justify all the loving care that goes into acquisition and maintenance. This "third force," to swipe a political image, should not be the marginal "maybe" of our endeavor—but it will continue to be the marginal "maybe" until librarians have made it clear to their presidents and trustees that they are willing to accept full responsibility for the over-all expenditure which the building, maintaining, and *use* of book stock imply. If we continue to feel entirely responsible for behind-the-scenes technology, and less responsible about other services, we shall evade a problem that we ourselves, in our technological pride, create. We shall deserve to be called "mere" technicians.

A librarian aware of his responsibility, and knowing what was expected of him, could take a budget of any size and apportion it between the three factors: acquisi-

tion, maintenance, and use. He would not slight the third. If his book funds automatically demanded more staff than a proportional budget would allow, he could change his buying habits in accordance with local needs—buying perhaps more rarities, or more duplicates—whatever would most intelligently increase the utility of all his resources and lower behind-the-scenes costs.

As matters now are developing, the academic library is tending toward the sad, hypothetical situation of an airline which spends half of its resources for excellent planes, and the other half for superlative airports and upkeep facilities, and has nothing left to pay the pilots.

The program for which I have been arguing calls for a basic reorientation of our concept of the academic librarian. Surely we should not underrate the magnificent work of those who have raised librarianship from a triumph of memory over muddle to a conceptual technology of good order. Technologists become "mere," not in honoring their science to the full, but in forgetting that at best it is a perfect means toward a wise end. All the perfection of means can be futile, or evil, if the end is ill-perceived. Wisdom of final purpose should not be sacrificed to mere technology, when the two conflict. It is my hope that very few of you are content to regard yourselves as "mere."

## The College Librarian as Classroom Teacher

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expected to have. Any claim for faculty status which is only a craving for privileges and is not based on such equality in the essential qualifications, is unreasonable.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I do not share Harvie Branscomb's fear, that a potentially excellent librarian might dissipate his interests and energies by as-

suming larger teaching functions. I believe that the cases of Haverford, Mills, Carleton, Allegheny, Stephens, various others, and, I hope, also Bard, demonstrate that both the library and the academic community gain when the librarian becomes a part of the teaching faculty, bridging the gap between the library and classroom.