

Punched-Card Charging System For a Small College Library

THE NEED for a new charging system at the library of Wisconsin State College, La Crosse, had long been recognized by the staff. With expanded college enrollment and the subsequent heavier demands for library materials, it was noted that too much staff time was being consumed in circulation routines and that the occurrence of inaccuracies of the present system was increasing. In order to present more clearly the approach to the problem, a brief description of the old charging system is given.

The college enrollment is 1,334; the library's collection of circulating materials totals 63,388; the average daily home circulation is 82, and the charging period is for two weeks. Under the old charging system, a light-weight manila pad, 6" x 8", perforated into 2" squares, was kept at the desk for recording charges. A carbon was used with the pad so that the charges were made in duplicate. When the borrower presented his book to be charged, the desk attendant wrote the call number in one of the perforated squares and stamped the date due in the book; the borrower merely signed his name. Thus, the actual charging procedure was rapid, requiring perhaps not more than two minutes per charge. It was the time required for the remainder of the routines, as well as the inaccuracies, that prompted our search for a system that would better serve the library's needs.

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With the old system, the tabulating of the day's circulation, done the following morning, consisted of the following procedures:

1. Dating all charges.
2. Separating original charges from those made by the carbon.
3. Tearing apart the perforated sheets into individual charges.
4. Filing original charges in date file.
5. Counting and recording circulation.
6. Filing duplicate charges in classed file.

Discharging was a lengthy procedure, also, since there were two charging slips to be pulled—one from the classed file, then the one from the date file. After all the previous day's returns were discharged, the last routine of the daily procedure was to pull from the date file the charges which were just then becoming overdue. These charges were then filed in either the students' delinquent file or the faculty delinquent file, alphabetically by name of borrower. Thus, in discharging, there were really four files to be considered—the classed file which contained the duplicate charges, the regular date file which contained the charges not overdue, and the separate student and faculty delinquent files.

Checking for overdues was done once a week and consisted of the following procedures:

1. Pulling original charging slips from delinquent file and rearranging slips by call number.
2. Checking these slips with shelf list and writing on each overdue slip name of author and title of book. (Sometimes this checking revealed incorrect call numbers which left the checker wonder-

- ing what the overdue book was.)
3. Searching shelves.
 4. Checking overdue slips with classed file.
(This procedure sometimes showed that the book had been returned and only the one charge pulled.)
 5. Rearranging overdue charging slips by borrowers' names.
 6. Writing overdue notices.
 7. Refiling charges in delinquent file.

The end of semester checking for overdues was accomplished in the same manner as the weekly routine. Delinquent students may not re-register until their library records are clear. Charges for students not re-registering were filed in the "old" delinquent file. Thus, this made another place to search in the event that the book was returned a long time after the student had left school. Faculty overdues were checked two or three times a semester, the procedure being the same, except that no fines were levied. Delinquent charges for faculty members no longer employed at the college were placed in still another file.

As stated at the beginning of this article, the need to facilitate and "speed up" the entire charging process, as well as to eliminate the seemingly inevitable errors, had become a chief concern of the staff. They therefore read about and investigated various systems, one of which was that sponsored by International Business Machines. This seemed good, but it was much too expensive for our library's modest budget. Other experiences of libraries with punched-card systems were examined. In the meantime, our college received an appropriation for a new library building, and staff members visited new libraries within the three-state area of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa. At each library visited, the charge-system was noted, and, at the State University of Iowa library, the McBee Keysort punched-card system was seen in actual use. This seemed workable and practical for a large university library system. Was it applicable to a small college system?

The staff concerned with this work began to examine the literature on punched cards. The article by F. G. Kilgour in the *Library Journal* for February 15, 1939, was especially helpful. This described the punched-card system being used at Harvard at that time. Other libraries which were using and approving McBee's Keysort cards were the Universities of Georgia, Tennessee, Indiana, and Brown.

Although most of the libraries reporting their experiences were large systems, the staff at La Crosse saw no reason why such a system would not be feasible for a small library. Contact was made with the McBee Company, and its area representative came to explain the Keysort card. Its charging forms were expensive, compared to the simple perforated manila pad used for the old charging method, but there was no expensive machinery to purchase—only the cards, either a simple inexpensive hand clipper or desk model groover, which is rented at a very modest cost, an alignment block, a sorting needle (resembling a blunt knitting needle) and a pack of card savers to be used for renewals. It was decided to try Keysort for two years and a supply of forms for that length of time, since the cards are less expensive when purchased in lots of 25,000, was purchased. The representative showed us samples of cards used in other libraries. Each had distinctive features although the general principles were the same. With the help of the representative, the card shown in the illustration was designed.

The card is quite simple, and many of its printed items are self-explanatory. The "Do not write below" space at the top is used for the date due. Enough room is left here for renewals. Sometimes it is necessary to recall a book for reserve or other reasons, and space is so designated for that. The "Hold for" space is used for recording a reservation on a book, with enough space left for name

WK 4	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	1ST SEM.	2ND SEM.	SUM. SESS.	FAC.	MEMO	BIND	OVER- DUE
CALL NUMBER		DO NOT WRITE BELOW						PD. FOR BKS.		
A	RECALLED						9			
B							8			
C							7			
D							6			
E							5			
F							4			
HOLD FOR								3		
AUTHOR								2		
TITLE								1		
								Z		
SIGNATURE								Y		
								X		
ADDRESS		TELEPHONE						W		
								V		
PLEASE CHECK								U		
<input type="checkbox"/> STUDENT		<input type="checkbox"/> FACULTY		<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER				T		
		DO NOT WRITE BELOW						S		
NOTI- FIED		BK RET'D		FINE DUE				R		
COST OF BOOK								Q		
FLORENCE WING LIBRARY F151346 WISCONSIN STATE COLLEGE, LA CROSSE										

and address of person for whom the book is to be held. It is the holes around the edges of the card which give Keysort its flexibility and make the one-file system both possible and practical.

At the beginning of the school year, each week of the semester is numbered "Week 1," "Week 2," or "Week 3" in consecutive order. This record is kept on a calendar at the charging desk. The holes for Weeks 1, 2, and 3 are used because the regular loan period is for two weeks. Thus, books issued during "Week 1" become due during "Week 3"; those issued during "Week 2" become due during "Week 1," etc. The "Week 4" hole is used for irregularities in charging periods which result from school vacations, in which case students are not expected to return materials as when charged for the regular two-week period. The actual charging routine consists of the following:

1. Borrower fill out charging card with call number, author, title, signature, address, telephone number, and campus status. (The "Other" space on the campus status line is used for borrowers outside the college community.)

2. Desk attendant checks card, especially for correctness of call number, stamps date due on both charging card and date slip in book, and drops card in temporary charging box.

This charging routine consumes more borrower's time than the old system, but its advantages, as will be noted, more than compensate.

Tabulation of the day's circulation next morning is quickly done, as compared with the old system. This procedure consists of the following:

1. Desk attendant pastes card savers on renewal charges, then sorts by class, counts, and tabulates all student, faculty, and "other" charges. There may also be mending, binding, end of semester, or other special charges. In the case of end of semester charges, sometimes made to faculty and occasionally to students, the holes for 1st semester, 2nd semester, or summer session are used. Each type of special charge, which has not been so designated on the printed card, is given a symbol, such as:

The hole for 1 may be used for a special temporary recreation book shelf; or, the hole for 2 may be used for a temporary history collection. A code of such designations of special charges is kept attached to the charging desk calendar. When books have been lost and paid for, such recording is made on the charging card and the "Paid for books" hole is punched and the charge refiled until later when the withdrawal is noted on the shelf list.

2. Attendant clips holes of all charges according to their date-due week or other designation. Thus, charges made during "Week 1" are clipped in the "Week 3" space, except that special charges, such as

mending, binding, etc. are clipped in their corresponding spaces. So far, the holes with the alphabet are not used for anything, but they, too, can be designated for any other special charges needed. They may also be clipped to correspond with the borrowers' last names, if ever necessary.

3. Charging cards are then filed in classification file. Originally, only one such file was kept, but, after the first few weeks, we decided to try two classed files, one for active charges, the other for inactive. This reduces the number of cards to be needed for overdues, as well as the number to be checked for clearance records of students withdrawing from school. Both these procedures will be discussed later.

4. Discharging of return books is very simple and fast, since there is only the one charging card to be pulled. Cards are checked at the same time for reservations and overdues. The name and address of the person wishing a book reserved has been entered in the "Hold for" space, and, upon the book's return, that person is notified by mail. For books returned late, the return date and the fine levied are so noted in the places designated, and the charging card then becomes the fine record. Upon payment of the fine, this card is marked "Paid" and is given to the borrower as a receipt.

The weekly checking for overdues is simple when compared to the old system. The active file is checked once a week—each Monday after the filing of the last of last week's charging cards. The first step is to "needle" the cards for all books which have become overdue. For this the Keysort sorting needle is used with the alignment block which facilitates in getting the cards out in proper classed order. If the past week has been "Week 1," then the needle is pushed through the holes designated for "Week 1" on the card. Since these charges were clipped "Week 1" at the time they were

filed, all such charges left in the file drop in classed order, ready to be checked with the shelves. After searching for them on the shelves and in other likely places, the assistant then clips the holes for "Week 2," so that, if not returned during the following week, these same overdue charges will again drop when "Week 2" is needed for overdues the next week. Notices are sent to all student borrowers having books which have been overdue for as long as a week. Keysort has made this part of the work much faster, since the charging cards contain all information necessary, *i.e.*, call numbers, authors, titles, and borrowers' addresses.

There was some doubt, at first, as to the feasibility of the divided classed file. The one-file system has definite advantages in discharging and checking for the location of a book not on the shelves. However, the divided file makes it possible to eliminate approximately half the cards to be needed each week. Since faculty charges are often for longer than the regular two-week loan period, these are placed also in the inactive file. All faculty charges are clipped at the hole marked "Faculty"; thus, it is easy to needle these out of the inactive file when the time comes to check. In a similar manner, all special collections are checked from time to time by needling out such charges from the inactive file. This includes all end of semester charges, mending, binding, and any special designations that have been made. Thus, the entire inactive file can be checked by "installments," eliminating the necessity for "tearing down" the whole file at one time.

Keysort has been in use for almost two years. Its one disadvantage is a certain cumbersomeness when a student's library record when withdrawing from school has to be cleared. At the college all students withdrawing from school must have a clearance record signed by the var-

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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.

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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.