

## Accrediting Associations and the College Library

*Dr. Brumbaugh is dean of the College of the University of Chicago. He is also secretary of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association.*

THAT AN EFFECTIVE college must have a good library is generally accepted as axiomatic. So also is the assumption that the character and function of the library must be related to the nature of the college program. Any effort to determine the excellence of a college, whatever may be the purpose of the evaluation, must include, therefore, some measure of the quality of its library in relation to the college's purposes and program.

The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association has for many years published a list of accredited member institutions. This list has been a means of informing institutions of higher education throughout the country, and the public in general, that the accredited colleges and universities provide an educational program of acceptable quality when judged by criteria that have been adopted by the commission. The library has always been included as one of the aspects of an institution to be considered for purposes of accreditation.

Prior to 1934 many of the criteria employed by the commission in accrediting

colleges were quite rigid and quantitative in nature. The criterion regarding the library, for example, provided that:

The college shall have a live, well-distributed, professionally administered library of at least 8000 volumes exclusive of public documents, bearing specifically upon the subjects taught, and with a definite annual appropriation for the purchase of new books and current periodicals. It is urged that such appropriation be at least five dollars per student registered.

New criteria adopted in 1934 upon the recommendation of a committee that had devoted several years to a redefinition of the measures of institutional excellence under a subvention from the General Education Board, stressed the importance of evaluating an institution in terms of its own objectives. The acceptance of this point of view led at once to a greater emphasis on the quality of the institution's program in terms of its purposes and called for a type of appraisal that would be more flexible than were the old criteria. Quantitative data were not abandoned; in fact more data of a quantitative nature were called for than previously, but these data were to be interpreted in relation to various intangible and nonstatistical factors. This emphasis upon the qualitative in contrast to the strictly quantitative characterizes the plan of evaluation adopted in 1934 and still in effect.

The committee on evaluation referred

to above made a special study of the differentiating characteristics of fifty-seven institutions which in the combined judgments of educators varied widely in the quality of their programs and which were representative of higher institutions in the North Central territory. The characteristics thus identified were grouped under eleven general heads, one of which was the library.

But the committee was still confronted with the question of what specific criteria might be employed in judging the excellence of a college library. This problem was attacked by first determining what criteria might be employed, then by finding the correlation between each criterion and other measures of institutional excellence. For example, the holdings of books and periodicals was chosen as one criterion. Six measures of holdings investigated were the number of volumes in the library; the number of periodicals subscribed to; the average annual additions to the library; the volumes added to the library in 1931-32, the year immediately preceding the study; the number of books held by the library that were included in a specially prepared checklist; and the number of magazines subscribed for that were included in a checklist of periodicals. All of these measures gave significant statistical correlations with other measures of the excellence of the institution as a whole and with a composite rating of the excellence of the library itself. Because the checklists of books and periodicals yielded a high correlation both with other measures of the library and with other criteria of institutional excellence, and because they provided an instrument that could be used most economically, they were adopted as the measures of library holdings. Other measures arrived at by a similar tech-

nique were the average expenditure for books over a five-year period, and the annual expenditure for library salaries weighted for enrolment.

### *Libraries Compared*

For the purpose of securing comparable data, all member institutions were asked to apply the checklist on books and periodicals to their respective libraries, to report their expenditures for books over a five-year period, and their annual expenditures for library salaries. From these data was computed the percentile position of each institution on each of the four measures of library excellence. The distribution thus arrived at made it possible to compare the library of an institution applying for accreditation with the libraries of institutions that were already members of the association. Lest the inference be drawn that by this procedure the appraisal of a college library becomes merely a statistical procedure, it should be said that these percentiles have been and are regarded only as cues to the examiners in making an institutional survey for the purpose of determining eligibility to accreditation. If the library stands high by the measures employed it is still looked into carefully by the examiners but not as critically as when it stands relatively low.

In this procedure the checklist of books and periodicals is very important. For that reason something more should be said about the compilation of the checklists and about some of the problems that arise in using them. From several lists of titles considered suitable for college libraries that were available at the time our checklist was constructed, the Shaw list of books for college libraries was chosen as the basis for the checklist. The use of any

checklist involves the sampling process. Sampling is necessary because obviously it would be asking too much were librarians requested to check a complete list such as Shaw's containing 14,000 titles. Moreover, were the full list of 14,000 titles checked by the librarians of 280 or more institutions, the amount of statistical work required in the office of the secretary of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education in deriving normative data would be prodigious. Furthermore, Prof. William Randall found a high correlation between the holdings in subdivisions of long book lists and the holdings in the list as a whole. For example, using the entire Shaw list, Prof. Randall found that the number of titles that were held by 103 colleges when correlated with the holdings from the section on history in the same list, gave a coefficient of correlation of  $+ .94$ . Similarly high coefficients were found for other sections. Reference books were found to be particularly useful in constructing a sampling list because they are basic to the whole college program and are less affected by differences in curricular offerings than are departmental lists. A sampling list of 507 reference books was therefore constructed by the committee on evaluation and has been used in the same form since 1934.

#### *Periodicals Checklist Made*

A similar instrument was needed to evaluate the periodical holdings of college libraries. Dr. Eugene Hilton constructed a list of periodicals by pooling the votes of instructors as to the relative importance of various journals to the teaching of standard courses in each of twenty-six different college departments. This list, like the Shaw book list, was too long to be

used in its entirety; consequently only the upper 10 per cent of the titles were selected from each of the twenty-six departmental lists. This list containing 304 titles was reduced still further, giving a comparatively short checklist that was found valid for identifying weak periodical collections but not valid for differentiating collections of over a hundred titles.

The validity of any sampling list of books or periodicals is impaired when that list is used by a library as a purchasing list. The numerous requests for copies of the library checklists and the unusually high rating of some libraries which were found by examiners to be far inferior to expectations based on their percentile standings on the four measures of excellence, led to the conclusion in 1939 that a new checklist was needed.

Among the criticisms of the original list that were taken into account in attacking the problem of making a new checklist were (a) that the original list was not sufficiently flexible to take cognizance of differentiated types of institutions, e.g., the junior college, the technical school, or the liberal arts college whose offerings were restricted to certain fields; (b) also that not enough account was taken of the library needs of institutions whose programs are built around certain basic religious ideas.

The book lists selected for the purpose of deriving a new sampling list were Shaw's supplement to his *List of Books for College Libraries*, published in 1931; the *Selected Bibliography of Engineering Subjects*, prepared by the Engineers' Council for Professional Development in 1937; and the *Catholic Books for College Libraries*, provided by the Library Committee of the National Catholic Education Association. A preliminary list composed

of about one fourth of the 3800 titles in Shaw's supplementary list with some additions from the other lists was constructed. The books in this list were grouped by subjects, twenty-six in all, corresponding to the grouping in Shaw's original list.

### *Holdings Computed*

About 260 institutions cooperated in trying out the new checklist and in criticizing it after they had employed it. New percentiles of holdings on this list were computed, but the procedures employed differed from those used in computing institutional percentiles on the basis of the original checklist. Instead of finding the percentage of books held from the whole list, each institution's standing was computed on the basis of its holdings in relation to the departments in which it gave instruction. The books in the fields in which the institution gave no instruction were therefore omitted before the percentage of holdings was computed. This plan has the advantage of taking cognizance of the specialized programs of some institutions that do not and probably should not be expected to offer the full range of courses found in a majority of institutions in the association. In other words, the computation was made on the basis of titles in the subject-matter fields in which work is actually offered. For example, one institution reported that astronomy and engineering and Catholic religion were not offered in its program. The number of titles on the booklist in these three fields is 135, so this number was subtracted from the total number of titles, 1032, to arrive at a base for computing this institution's percentage of holdings. This institution consequently ranked higher than an institution holding the same number of volumes out of the com-

plete list but which offered a wider range of subject matter and therefore had a higher base for the computation of the percentage of holdings. In applying this technique the question arose whether an institution that offered no instruction in a particular field but reported that its library contained books in that field should be given credit for those holdings. For example, one institution referred to above offers no instruction in astronomy or engineering, yet holds ten titles from the lists in these two fields. Should these ten titles be subtracted from its holdings in figuring its final percentage? On the premise that a good college library should include some volumes outside the institution's immediate curriculum, it was decided that these volumes should be included in its holdings. As a matter of fact, while this procedure seemed to make allowance for good general collections and saved considerable clerical work, it made little difference in the final picture. That is to say, the data showed that a library with a large percentage of holdings in its fields of instruction is likely to hold more books outside of those fields than the library whose holdings in its fields of instruction are more limited.

### *Variations in Ranking*

The results of this experiment in devising a new sampling list have been gratifying in some respects, disappointing or at least perplexing in others. It seems quite clear from the data that the method employed takes more adequate cognizance of the adequacy of the library in the institution offering a specialized or restricted program. On the other hand, the correlation between the percentile ranks of institutions based on holdings on the new checklist and the percentile ranks based on holdings on the earlier checklist is

sufficiently low to be a matter of some concern. Some of the more marked variations are illustrated by citing the cases of a few institutions.

Institution	1939 Per- centile Rank	1934-35 Per- centile Rank
1	3	35
2	3	29
3	4	38
4	7	51
5	13	74
6	15	66
7	16	66
8	19	60
9	20	65
10	22	58
11	23	65
12	28	69
13	30	70
14	34	74
15	35	78
16	38	76
17	42	74
18	51	70
19	57	81
20	59	80
21	71	6
22	74	43
23	74	20
24	82	19
25	92	2

#### *Reasons for Variations*

Several explanations of these variations are suggested. First, the two checklists may measure different aspects of the library. The 1934 checklist probably furnished indices of the relative adequacy of the holdings of libraries without giving any special weight to recent additions. The supplement to the Shaw booklist includes no books published prior to 1930. It may be therefore that some libraries that ranked high in 1934-35 have not been adding new publications as assiduously as have the libraries that ranked lower. Or perhaps the lists measure two different phases of a library, the former indicating holdings of standard reference works, the latter the acquisition of new books in various fields of instruction. On the assumption that the latter may be the case, we are asking institutions applying for accreditation to apply both checklists to their libraries if they stand low in their holdings on the 1939 list.

#### *Validity of Lists*

Second, it is possible that the problem with which we are confronted grows out of a lack of validity of either or both checklists. We have assumed that the original book lists from which our checklists were derived were valid sources. We have no basis now for questioning this assumption. We have endeavored to make our sampling list adequate, but must make further analyses before we can prove its adequacy.

Third, it is possible that some institutions used the 1931 Shaw list as a purchasing list, undoubtedly a legitimate use to make of it, as a consequence giving these institutions a higher rating than others that did not follow the list in making their purchases. The supplement was not available as a guide in purchasing, perhaps leading to a shift in the positions of some of the institutions. We are quite certain that some institutions accredited since 1934 made a similar use of our own checklist, even though we have repeatedly advised against such use, thereby giving these institutions an undeservedly high rank.

Further exploratory studies will be made with a view to determining the validity of our new checklist and to identify the factors accounting for the change in the relative ranks of some institutions for which we see no good reason now.

#### *Changes in Periodical Holdings*

Fortunately, the same situation does not obtain for the periodical checklist. The data we have indicate that variations in the rank on holdings of periodicals reflect actual changes in the libraries rather than limitations in our measuring stick. It appears from an examination of the in-

*(Continued on page 276)*

U.S. Labor Department. Women's Bureau. The Woman Worker. [Vol. 1, No. 1] Feb. 10, 1921 to date. Washington, 1921 to date. Bimonthly.

Has a section "Recent Publications" which lists the new printed and processed material issued by the U.S. Women's Bureau, as well as other federal and state publications on the subject of women in industry. Occasional annotations.

U.S. Library of Congress. Documents Division. Monthly Check-list of State Publications. Vol. 1, No. 1, Jan. 1910 to date. Washington, 1910 to date.

The official and most complete checklist of state publications, both near-print and printed. Limited to material deposited in the Library of Congress. Includes publications of the District of Columbia, the territories and possessions as well as those of associations of state officials and regional organizations.

U.S. President. National Resources Planning Board. Bibliography of Reports by State and Regional Planning Organiza-

tions. No. 1, Jan./April 1937 to date. Washington, 1937 to date. Irregular. Processed.

Includes both processed and printed publications of official planning bodies. Occasionally a cumulated number is issued. Not annotated.

U.S. State Department. The Department of State Bulletin. Vol. 1, No. 1, July 1, 1939 to date. Washington, 1939 to date. Weekly.

Includes three lists of new federal publications: "Regulations," "Legislation," and "Publications." Limited chiefly to printed material but not confined to the publications of the U.S. State Department. Not annotated.

U.S. State Department. Publications of the Department of State. April 1, 1930 to date. Washington, 1930 to date. Quarterly.

Confined to the printed material issued by the U.S. State Department, but cumulative with each issue from October 1, 1929. Includes maps. Not annotated.

## Accrediting Associations and the College Library

*(Continued from page 210)*

dividual library reports that more periodicals are now received on the average by college libraries than was the case five years ago. To maintain the same relative standing on holdings of periodicals that it had five years ago, it was necessary therefore for any given institution to increase the number of periodicals received. One college, for instance, has substantially the same percentile rank now that it had in 1934, but at present it receives 145 periodicals that appear on our checklist, as compared with 93 on the 1934 list. In 1934 this library subscribed for a total of 199 periodicals; now it receives 260. We have found a sufficiently close agreement between the number of holdings on our periodical checklist and the total number of periodical subscriptions to be satisfied that in this field our checklist is a valid measure. It is of course much easier to validate a measure of periodical holdings than of book holdings because the

total number of periodicals available is comparatively small.

I have made this somewhat lengthy and detailed statement for several reasons: First, to inform college librarians of the techniques we have employed in developing checklists of books and periodicals as a measuring device; second, to let the librarians know that we recognize the soundness of some criticisms of the checklists that they have made; third, to provide information upon the basis of which the criticisms of some faculty members and administrative officers may be answered; fourth, to assure librarians and administrative officers that we make no arbitrary or unwarranted use of the data which we secure through our checklists; fifth, to enlist the continuation of the cooperation which librarians have so generously given us in attacking the difficult problem of developing adequate measures of the relative excellence of college libraries.