

The Exchange Experience: A British Perspective

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As many readers may have seen Larry Griffin's article (*C&RL News*, October 1982, pp. 310-12) on his exchange from Indiana University Library to Edinburgh University Library, it may be of interest to American librarians to hear the British point of view. Larry explained how the exchange was arranged and I would like to comment on the differences, problems, and benefits I encountered during my exchange year.

It is essential that any individual contemplating an exchange should be absolutely committed to the idea of living and working in another country for a period of time. In my case it was a one-year period in which I had to adapt to the working conditions, social customs, and lifestyle of a different society. The support of the employer, family, and friends helps considerably in embarking on such a project. As a single person I did not have the problem of a spouse and children whose needs have to be considered in the case of a married librarian. The exchange was between two English-speaking countries with a high standard of education. Factors such as language, housing, and health care would have to be carefully considered if an exchange took place between a relatively rich country and a less developed one.

Having been asked so often about the differences I have encountered between an American and a British university library, I have come to the conclusion that it is difficult and perhaps impossible to draw a meaningful comparison. My own university library work experiences have been in two university libraries—Indiana and Edinburgh—and they are very representative examples of university libraries in the United States and the United Kingdom, although there are local differences in age, environment, and student population which cannot be covered in this article.

Indiana University Libraries operates as an independent faculty within Indiana University. However, the university library at Edinburgh is managed by a library committee consisting chiefly of teaching faculty with library and student representation. The autonomy of Indiana University Libraries within the university results in less restrictions imposed by the teaching faculty, although their needs are always a major consideration. For example, it is unlikely that the teaching faculty within a certain department would determine the location of material in the library, but in Edin-

burgh a group of teaching faculty could influence a decision to move a particular collection from one area of the library to another.

The most significant difference is the use of student labor. The employment of student workers at Indiana determines the extent of the services offered. Students are not employed at Edinburgh and it therefore cannot stay open for such long hours. It would be quite a luxury for Edinburgh students to be able to use the library on Saturday afternoon, all day Sunday, and after 10 p.m. at night—all periods when the library is closed.

Student employees at Indiana do all the routine duties such as shelving, circulation, and clerical duties. The support staff often supervises the student staff, while the librarians are free to do professional work such as reference, instruction, book selection cataloging, and so forth. Given that students are not employed at Edinburgh, the routine tasks are done by clerical staff who do not always have as much responsibility as Indiana's support staff. Edinburgh's academic staff have the same professional duties as American librarians but may also have to deal with many more routine duties. At Edinburgh librarians deal with security problems, entry control, and postal and maintenance work, while at Indiana student workers have responsibility for these duties.

I found Indiana University Libraries to be user-oriented and very welcome to anyone wanting to use the libraries' resources. Accessibility for long hours helped this image as well as a lack of entry control at the main doors. Unfortunately Edinburgh University Library has strict entry control and the library is used primarily by students and staff. Others may use it if they can prove the necessity, but the library does not give the impression of an open welcome in the same way as Indiana.

Access to university education in Britain is not as open as in the United States. Although fees are high in the U.S. it is possible for any individual to work part-time and go to school part-time. In the U.K. students have to meet high entry requirements in order to study at any of the 45 universities. Most students are eligible for a state financial grant based on parental income. Although the cost of being a student is high, it is not so necessary to work part-time during the semester. Increasingly British students are finding the state grants inadequate but they have not sought library employment like their American counterparts.

Edinburgh uses a modified Dewey Decimal classification scheme, but I found the Library of Congress much more flexible and easy to use. Much of

the book selection at Edinburgh is done by teaching faculty and subject specialization within the library is not as highly organized as it is at Indiana.

In both libraries the professional staff has faculty status, although the demands placed on Indiana University librarians are much greater. Edinburgh librarians do not have to write annual reports, write articles, or attend conferences as a requirement for tenure. There is not so much competition and pressure to excel, although British librarians have a commitment to maintain a high standard of professional service in the library. Union membership for all library staff is increasing at Edinburgh, particularly since education cutbacks may be threatening jobs in the future.

Was the exchange beneficial? In my opinion it most definitely was. In working and living in a different country one has to assess one's own job and see the advantages and disadvantages of both sys-

tems. There is no doubt in my mind that by meeting different people and exchanging ideas, horizons may be broadened. The exchange was a success in my case, as I was offered a temporary appointment at Indiana University because of staff reorganization within the library. Edinburgh University granted me a one-year leave of absence without pay and I will return home in August, 1983.

Having mentally prepared for a one-year absence when I left Britain, it may feel strange to return after two years in the United States. Both libraries have experienced changes in the past year, and political changes continue to occur at the local, national, and international level. I may therefore be returning to a different atmosphere in Edinburgh, but I am certain that my American experience will be of immense value—both professionally and personally. ■■

Bibliographic Instruction

Establishing Library Skills Proficiency in a Teacher Education Program

For success in the teacher education program, and later in teaching careers, a basic knowledge of library and reference skills is essential. In "What Do Student Teachers Know about Libraries?" Jerry Walker¹ makes the following observations:

"Today's library holds information packaged in multi-media containers. It is a place where information is stored and retrieved with mechanical efficiency. It is a place where librarians are not only library science specialists knowledgeable in the specific location of materials, but also subject matter specialists knowledgeable in the structure of their disciplines. It is a place where teachers go to seek materials and guidance as part of their preparations for teaching. The size and complexity of the modern school library demand special skills and knowledge from the teacher who would use it effectively, and those who prepare teachers must share the responsibility for providing those skills and knowledge."

According to the article, Walker surveyed student teachers in Illinois and Oregon to determine the adequacy of their library skills. His conclusion was that institutions responsible for training these

students were failing to prepare them to use a modern library.

In April of 1981, questions were used from the Walker survey to test students enrolled in the Department of Education at Idaho State University. Nineteen students in Ed. 101 (Introduction to American Education) and twenty students from Ed. 401 (Philosophy of Education) were included in the survey. Both classes are required for graduation from the teacher education program. Only one student in the ISU survey had taken, at the college level, an introductory class in the use of the library. An examination of the results of the surveys indicates that in almost all areas tested, the ISU students were less adequately prepared than students in the Walker survey. Also, the Ed. 401 students performed at only a slightly higher level than the Ed. 101 students.

Walker recommended that prospective students should have at least one course in library science in order to acquaint them with library service and resources, new developments in library aids, and practices. It was not, however, the purpose of the ISU proposal to suggest that all students entering the teacher education program be required to take such a course. Rather, it seemed more appropriate to recommend that, prior to the time students were admitted to the teacher education program, they

¹Jerry L. Walker, "What Do Student Teachers Know about Libraries?" *School Libraries* 16 (Winter 1967):17-18, 23.