

Community College Library— Cultural Solar Plexus

By BERNARD C. RINK

ROBERT FROST, America's senior poet, said, "I rate colleges by the libraries they have." This conviction is shared by the trustees, the administration, and the faculty of Northwestern Michigan College who have voiced wholehearted approval for the erection of a library as the first major building in the master campus building plan. Grand Traverse County can also take pride in this event by virtue of its support at the polls for the N. M. C. building program. Consequently, a new library building, projected to house thirty thousand books and 275 people, was completed in 1961.

A community college library planned to satisfy ten years of growth is not an extravagant projection. The minimum number of books for a two-year college library is twenty thousand volumes as prescribed by the ACRL standards. Currently, the Northwestern Michigan College library contains about ten thousand volumes. Therefore, we, along with most two-year college libraries, face the task of doubling our book collections to meet minimum standards. Increased demands of enrollment, curriculum, and community will certainly raise our need in ten years.

Our new library has also been planned to house a functional program as economically and efficiently as possible. Books, people, and services have been consolidated in a way that will put every

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material in the library at the fingertips of the user. Flexibility of space and a minimum of load-bearing walls allow the mobility of arrangement necessary to achieve efficiency. Our philosophy is that a functional building is an esthetic building, since the ease with which people can glean ideas is the real beauty of a library. Thus, we realize that the mere physical existence of a new library building does not assure us a first-class rating by Frost's yardstick. What transpires within the walls of that building is the criterion by which we measure the functional effectiveness of the library program.

My primary purpose, then, is to define the role of the Northwestern Michigan College library in its academic and civic communities. Generally, the role of a college library is to promote reading. That reading is still the most useful educational tool is evinced by the fact that accrediting agencies are vitally concerned about the strengths and the weaknesses of the libraries in the colleges they inspect and approve. Logically, therefore, our functional benchmark is the North Central Association axiom that exhorts college libraries to provide the materials

necessary to fulfill the educational task of the institution.

Specifically, this involves providing the resources necessary—for the courses offered, for the professional growth of the faculty, for a basic reference service, and for the vocational, cultural, and avocational enrichment of the students. In addition to these academic aims this college library, by virtue of its community character, offers the following services to the Grand Traverse region: (1) the resources pertinent to the economic activities of this area, (2) the materials preserving the historical record of northwestern Michigan, (3) the resources needed by community adults seeking self-education at the college level.

Expanding this functional definition in reference to our first academic responsibility, providing the resources needed for the courses offered, we endeavor to promote extra-textbook reading. Too many times the student plods down a narrow hallway of learning with blinders on—taking what the textbook says. Through other books in the library related to his subject, he can broaden his viewpoint and thresh his own ideas rather than rely on the readymade judgments presented in the text. Besides, textbooks by their very nature discourage a kinship with books and reading. If we are to serve our primary function of supplementing the curriculum earnestly, we must avoid textbooks and furnish stimulating, imaginatively written books containing the ideas that every student should grapple with during his college years.

Our second academic function, furnishing the resources that promote the professional growth of the faculty, is axiomatic. To perpetuate a vital instructional program, it behooves us to supply the professional journals and current references needed to keep the faculty abreast of contemporary thinking in all subjects. If this is not practiced, teachers stagnate and teach the same old lectures and tell

the same old stories, or they feel suppressed and leave for more accommodating institutions. Faced with unprecedented social, political, and technological changes, we must be informed in order to improve and continue an instructional program of high quality.

The third function of our college library, to provide the basic reference materials, is equally important. Here the students and teachers document and verify their evidence through authoritative sources. A measure of a person's research ability is to observe how reliable his facts and figures are. It amounts to the difference between fact and opinion. How many students are properly informed about or aware of the many shortcuts to facts and statistics that are contained in a good reference collection? Are they taught to follow through and comprehend the significance of the allusions that writers in "great tradition" are prone to use? Or does a lax library program encourage them to be gullible and swallow everything without question? I would be the first to admit a certain amount of gullibility and laxity. In fact, as a fledgling reference librarian, I once spent ten minutes in a blind alley trying to discover the viscosity of molasses in January. However, the invisible obvious soon overcame my research instinct. At Northwestern Michigan College, we feel that the reference collection affords the greatest opportunity a library has to practice its instructional role. If we neglect this aspect of our function, we practice oversimplification in its worst form and produce graduates that can't sift the meaning from the manure.

Our fourth academic aim, to be aware of the vocational, cultural, and avocational needs of the student is vital. It is a known fact that a majority of college entrants have not selected a vocation. To satisfy this need, we supply career monographs, vocational guidance manuals, and career books. This gives the student an opportunity to learn what training is



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needed, how much he can expect to earn, and where the best opportunities are in his field of interest. To aid the student in this important selection of a life's work is of utmost importance.

Culturally, in addition to books, we surround the student with all media of information—recordings, paperbacks, displays, magazines, and microfilm. Recordings, ranging from symphonies to shorthand, from poetry to Mort Sahl, cover all aspects of our culture. Paperbacks, too, are potent tools of culture. They have put more ideas in the pockets of Americans than any other cultural device in the last twenty-five years. We sell them as well as catalog them. In addition to those that are unavailable in cloth binding, many quality paperbacks are cataloged. Before they are circulated we send them to be perma-bound to insure more extended circulation. Our belief is that getting books into the hands of people is important. Whether we sell them or lend them is immaterial.

Displays of art objects, original prints, and reproductions also play a role in our library. Currently, we are displaying Eskimo sculpture and sealskin prints from Baffin Island. These are sold, as are reproductions of famous paintings. In an area devoid of museums and art galleries, the display and sale of art objects and reproductions assumes a agency not jus-

tified in culturally-endowed urban areas. Through the largess of an enterprising businessman, we are also able to supply our students and teachers with the *American Culture Series* and the *American Periodical Series, 1800-1850*—both on microfilm. By exposing the student to these materials, we hope to give him at least a primer coat of culture. We leave the second and third coats to the universities and to experience.

It is somewhat harder to justify avocational materials in our library since they are harder to align with the instructional task of the college. However, we do furnish several books related to each of the competitive sports. Further, we stock books on some of the avocations most directly related to this region, such as archery, skiing, sailing, to name a few. We subscribe to the "sound-mind-in-a-sound-body" philosophy and realize that more leisure time will be ours in the future. This carries with it the resultant obligation to promote and cultivate an intelligent, methodical use of that leisure.

In addition, it does not detract a bit from a library to have a few books and recordings around that are just plain fun to read or to hear. If it relaxes a tired brain to read a Peter DeVries novel or to hear a Mort Sahl record, we are for it. These satirical comments on the passing parade are healthy for the mind in that they induce us to laugh at our manners, our morals, our politics, and ourselves. Consequently, we recommend everything from *Tristram Shandy*, who attributed

all his misfortunes to the fact that his conception was interrupted when his mother asked his father if he had wound the clock, to Richard Armour, who accused Shakespeare of cohabiting with the Muse to produce couplets.

In serving the community, Northwestern Michigan College library cooperates with other local libraries. The Traverse City Public Library contains over twenty thousand volumes and is used frequently by college students. There is reciprocal trade of services and resources between the public library and the college library as well as cooperation in the selection of expensive materials. Though many purchases overlap, it is generally agreed that the college library purchases academic and more advanced materials while the public library buys popular and topical works. An interlibrary loan policy also exists between the college library and the Traverse City State Hospital staff library. The State Hospital is an institution for the mentally ill, and its staff library contains over five thousand books and magazines on mental illness, psychology, and related subjects. These resources are available to us when the need arises.

Within this framework of local library cooperation, the college library serves the community by collecting materials pertinent to the economic activities of this region. For example, we acquire resources concerning forestry, wood processing, and silviculture.

The local fruit growers and canneries are invited to utilize our growing collection on fruit culture and fruit processing. Since a bacteriology course for canners is offered, books on that subject are also stocked in the library for reference. The Northwestern Michigan Technical Society donates several hundred dollars annually to the college library for the purchase of technical books and periodicals that will benefit the students and instructors as much as they benefit technicians, tradesmen, and engi-

neers of the area. These are further steps toward becoming the clearinghouse of research information for this community.

Another aspect of community and research service concerns our steady acquisition of resources pertaining to the historical record of northwestern Michigan. To expedite this program, a microfilm archives of northwestern Michigan history will be proposed in the near future. The dual role of this microfilm archives will be to save space with relatively permanent rolls of film and to collect centrally all of the northwestern Michigan historical records that are now scattered throughout the state and nation. Furthermore, we could never hope to lure prized historical documents away from their owners, but we can film them economically and conveniently. This archives will be a boon to writers, instructors, and students doing research on this region of Michigan.

Finally, let us turn to the third segment of the Grand Traverse community that we endeavor to serve—the adults seeking self-education at the college level. Many of these people have been shortchanged educationally, while some are possessors of a good education and interested in pursuing knowledge further. Our library considers it a responsibility and a privilege to furnish these adults with the intellectual resources they need for self-education.

In fulfilling these responsibilities, Northwestern Michigan College library embarks on a decade of dynamic development that will endeavor to bring ideas and people closer together. It will be an enduring endeavor to become the cultural solar plexus of the academic and civic communities of northwestern Michigan rather than a monumental storehouse at which people point with pride but never use. It will be another milestone on the road toward our goal of becoming the research center of northern Michigan.