

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF BOOK SELECTION POLICY IN UNIVERSITY AND RESEARCH LIBRARIES

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The development of a great research library has a certain mirage quality, something like approaching infinity or attempting to state the exact value of the mathematical symbol π . We may come closer and closer to our goal, but are doomed never to attain it.

An ideal research library, if we can conceive of such perfection, would contain a complete record of human thought, emotion, and action, without restriction as to languages, dates, places, or forms of publication. In brief, its collections would have achieved universality, comprising everything. Such a concept ought to offer an intriguing plot, I suggest, for a science fiction writer.

However, faced as we are with the hard realities of practical library administration, with inevitable limitations on funds, space, staff, and availability of materials, what are the elements in a reasonable acquisition program for, say, a university library?

The first consideration, naturally, is the clientele to be served: administration, faculty, staff, graduate and undergraduate students, and, to a certain extent, a miscellaneous public. There will be wide variations in the requirements of these several groups. The undergraduate, for example, especially at the freshman-sophomore level, will be adequately served by a general information collection, consisting of some textbooks, selected editions of important works of major authors, a few historical surveys, biographies, and a limited number of general periodicals, mainly those indexed in the Readers' Guide. It has been estimated that as few as 5,000 titles are adequate to meet all the legitimate needs of undergraduates, and none of the new separate undergraduate libraries contemplate total collections in excess of about 100,000 volumes.

As we move up the scale, the demands grow. The better upper-classmen, the honors students, and the beginning graduate students call for a wider range of basic texts; complete collections of the works of the more important authors and critics; selections from the writings of authors of secondary importance; a well rounded collection of journals, general and special, current and retrospective; and fundamental bibliographical tools. Library holdings of a quarter of a million volumes, if carefully chosen, would leave little for this group to desire.

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The next stage--involving doctoral candidates, post-doctoral research staff, and faculty members--brings us into the realm of fundamental research collections. Here university libraries are expected to provide all the significant or useful texts, frequently in original editions; published collections of primary sources; an extensive assemblage of critical and biographical works; pamphlets, newspapers, and government publications; and the fullest possible list of journal sets and bibliographical compilations in all areas of pertinent interest. In addition, for certain highly selected fields of narrow scope, we may aim for completeness, and thereby extend library resources into original and variant editions for comparative textual and bibliographical studies, manuscripts, letters, photographic copies of unique items in other collections, and everything else which can be gathered on a subject. For such purposes, a general university library probably should possess a minimum of one million volumes.

Let me pause here, however, to remark that mere size does not guarantee a great library or even a good one. The quality and richness of the book collections are even more significant. There are scores, perhaps hundreds, of good libraries in the United States--places where one could expect to find almost any ordinary book for which he might be searching. The number of really great libraries is far smaller. What is the difference between a good library and a great library? It is the highly specialized collections built up around special subjects, the unusual books, the rare periodicals and newspapers, and unique manuscripts which, when added to the standard book collections, make the difference between good and great. Perfection in cataloging, classification, circulation and reference systems, or beautiful buildings, while highly desirable, cannot compensate for deficiencies in book resources.

The foregoing remarks assume that we are agreed upon the nature of research materials. But for clarity, a few definitions may be in order. Upon examination, we find that library materials break down into several major categories. Books, of course, make up a considerable proportion of most collections, although books and other monographic works are only a part of the scholar's requirements. For the past century or more, serial literature has been assuming an increasingly important place. The learned and technical journals, transactions of academies, societies, museums, observatories, universities, and institutions of all sorts, and the serial publications of governments take more and more of library funds, space, and attention. In a general university library, supporting graduate study in as many as 25 departments, a current list of 10 to 20,000 journals is the minimum for keeping abreast of research activities and developments. In perhaps a majority of fields, the current trend is toward greater emphasis upon serial publication with less attention to monographic forms.

Another great body of research material is government publications--the documents of the federal, state, county, and municipal governments, of foreign governments and international bodies, such as the United Nations, all characterized by an accelerated rate of production.

The last of the principal categories of research materials is collections of manuscripts. These come in diverse forms: government archives; the records of clubs, societies, schools, and other organizations; letters and personal papers of families and individuals; and business archives.

Summarizing, we may say that separately printed books, serials, government publications, and manuscripts are the leading types of resources for library research. However, they are far from exhausting the varieties of records being accumulated. Note, for example, the statistics of holdings reported annually by the Library of Congress. There we find separate figures for volumes and pamphlets, newspapers, manuscripts, maps and views, microcards, microfilms, motion pictures, music, sound recordings, books for the blind, photographs, prints, slides, fine prints, and a miscellaneous catch-all of broadsides, photostats, posters, etc., with the total number of items into the tens of millions.

As applied to specific fields, there is great variation from one discipline to another in the materials for research. A cursory analysis will reveal the main differences. For most of the sciences, the literature of mathematics is fundamental. In the biological, chemical, and physical sciences, the basic materials are complete sets of specialized journals, followed by transactions of societies, monographic works, handbooks, and encyclopedias. In the applied sciences of medicine, surgery, and chemical technology, the situation is similar. In other words, the biologist, the chemist, and the medical man are concerned first of all with the journals in their fields, because it is there that they learn most promptly about the latest discoveries and investigations.

In the so-called "earth sciences"--geology, paleontology, mineralogy, geography, and geophysics--the journal literature is also highly important, but is supplemented extensively by government publications, such as the innumerable reports of geological surveys. Among the earth sciences, agriculture leads all the rest in the rate and scope of publishing activity, ranging from highly scientific and technical reports to floods of popular bulletins for home consumption, distributed in the form of books, pamphlets, and journals.

The research materials needed by social scientists--historians, sociologists, economists, political scientists, lawyers--are far more diverse than are those for the sciences. They comprise numerous journals and society proceedings, government publications, published

archives, laws, treaty collections, court reports, maps, newspaper files, census reports, and other statistical compilations.

For the huge classification of language and literature, the mass of research material is in book form, although a limited number of important journals are devoted to philological and literary studies.

The fine arts and their applications are marked by considerable diversity of materials: journals and other serial publications, monumental collections of sources, prints, slides, photographs, sheet music, music recordings, and architectural drawings.

For philosophy and religion, books, journals, and society transactions are all present in great numbers. We find in this instance that a large body of collected sources, scriptural commentaries, council decisions, and similar records has grown up, relating chiefly to the history and doctrines of Christianity.

In addition to the fields mentioned, new areas are developing constantly, *e.g.*, in our own time we have witnessed the rapid expansion of education, psychology, business administration, and communications, all prolific in the publication of periodicals, society proceedings, statistical series, dissertations, books, and pamphlets.

The quick summary I have just outlined is indicative of the immense scope of our responsibilities when we undertake to create a university or general research library.

With this attempt at a definition of research materials, to determine just what it is that as university librarians we are attempting to collect, let us turn now to the question of how to attack the multiple problems of developing the library's resources. The task has many facets, involving, as it does, assembling collections in the special subject fields covered by the institution's program and general types of material, such as public documents, periodicals, newspapers, and manuscripts. Also closely related are ways and means of enlisting the cooperation of the university administration, faculty, all members of the library staff, and students, along with the constant struggle to assure adequate financial support.

The chief role of the university administration is to provide funds, through regular budget allocations, for the maintenance of the library and its collections. Without strong, consistent backing year after year, the library will be hopelessly handicapped in its growth. Useful financial aid, although usually peripheral and irregular, may also be received through foundations, friends of the library organizations, and individual donors. However, any library forced to rely principally upon such sources for its budget is unlikely ever to attain high distinction, except in such rare instances as finding a Morgan, Huntington, Folger, or Widener.

In the actual building of an outstanding research library, the two key groups are the faculty and the library staff. Both have essential parts to play, a fact not infrequently overlooked. It is a fairly common

practice in college and university libraries for the staff to abdicate responsibility to the faculty for book selection and collection development. Laboring under the delusion that only scholarly specialists are competent to decide what books and journals are worth adding, the librarian assigns practically all funds to teaching departments and treats his acquisition staff as order clerks. The consequences may well be disastrous.

In a talk at the ALA Conference in Miami in June 1962, Robert A. Miller, Director of the Indiana University Library, reviewed his twenty-five years as a university librarian.¹ Mr. Miller asserts that the weakness as well as the strength of our book collections "has resulted from an over-dependence upon faculty members for purchase recommendations, and faculty members have normally been interested and competent only in their areas. . . . In 25 years," Mr. Miller goes on to say, "I have known only a handful of faculty men who were bookmen in the sense that they used judgment in submitting recommendations in their own fields and who had some knowledge of key books and journals in related fields. I have only known two faculty men whose book knowledge extended into other areas and who approximated the knowledge of our antiquarian book dealers."²

The situation described by Mr. Miller will, he predicts, become worse rather than better. We shall be able to rely in the future even less than in the past upon the faculty for aid in book selection because academic careers are being built increasingly not simply upon teaching, but upon research and publication, "travel and self-promotion," with "no time left over for the ordering of books." Hence, the librarians "must take over full supervision and responsibility for selection."³

The opinions and judgements expressed by Mr. Miller are in accord with my own experience as director of three major university libraries, North Carolina, New York, and Illinois. A limited number of faculty members are invaluable in guiding and advising upon the building up of resources for research. These men possess an encyclopedic knowledge of the literature of their own fields, past and present, and oftentimes related areas; they check new and antiquarian book catalogs the same day the lists reach their desks; they are aware of the state of the book market; they are so familiar with the library's collections, what is there and what is lacking, that they know what titles to be on the lookout for; and, equally important, they maintain a relentless pressure upon the librarian for more book funds.

But for every Harris Fletcher, Thomas Baldwin, William Oldfather, George White, Gordon Ray, William Spence Robertson, and Nathan Weston, there are scores of faculty members who never submit a book order and appear quite unaware of library holdings or lacunae, except perhaps when they ask for a specific item.

Therefore, because we are confronted with a condition and not a theory, as Grover Cleveland remarked, it is essential that librarians

participate actively in the expansion of resources. Every large library has, or should have, subject specialists in its organization, and others can be trained, to assist in selection processes. At Illinois, to illustrate, there are departmental librarians in engineering, physics, chemistry, biology, music, agriculture, veterinary medicine, architecture, law, history, political science, classics, English, modern foreign languages, maps, library science, commerce and business administration, education, and other fields, nearly all of whom are in the thick of our efforts to build a library notable for its research collections. In addition, the personnel of the acquisition and serials departments, the reference and circulation librarians, and the catalogers all contribute, in varying degrees, to the total acquisition program. Upon them falls, for example, the chief responsibility for choosing materials of broad scope likely to be overlooked by specialists: general reference works, comprehensive bibliographies, general periodicals, and similar titles.

Discussing the training of librarians for book selection, Blanche McCrum, Bibliographer in the Library of Congress and former Librarian of Washington and Lee University and of Wellesley College, notes that "Access to basic histories, to current works that include bibliographies in books by specialists, to scholarly reviews in journals as they appear, as well as constant consideration of the qualifications of writers can . . . result in real bibliographical scholarship," producing people who will readily recognize "the really first-rate, indispensable, basic works, and definitive editions that must be secured."⁴ In brief, these are competencies that can be acquired by intelligent professional librarians who may lack extensive formal training as subject specialists.

Paradoxically perhaps, the larger and more complex the library's collections become, the less need there is for careful selection, at least in fields of maximum specialization. The small college library with a book fund of a few hundred dollars must choose every title with the greatest of care. In a recent article, Lawrence Thompson recommends that "In universities the librarian should attempt to get away from the concept of selection of individual titles in most cases." Instead, he maintains, "the major acquisition policy should be concerned with whole fields, and the key decisions should revolve around the intensity with which acquisition in these various fields should be pursued."⁵

I would not concur altogether with Mr. Thompson's dictum; nevertheless, where completeness is the goal, as it often is in special collections, a mass of material of a strictly peripheral character will be added. In these instances, as Mortimer Taube points out, we may find ourselves collecting "the bad book, the cheap novel, the pompous genealogy, the insipid poem, the lying history, the dull report, the stupid diary, the ephemeral tract," along with works of established

literary value.⁶ The reason is that such low-quality material has documentary value for the literary, political, and social historian. "Considered as historical evidence," as Mr. Taube notes, "the trashiest novel may be as significant as a literary masterpiece,"⁶ vide Uncle Tom's Cabin.

Several references have been made to finances. The sums of money required to build and to maintain a large research library are staggering. Several years ago, Robert Delzell of the Illinois staff and I undertook to investigate the actual investment in the University of Illinois Library's collections, from the beginning to date. Using an index dollar, with 1947-1949 equalling 100, we discovered that total expenditures as of June 30, 1959, were \$21,741,896. If we were to translate that figure into 1962 dollars, and bring the record up to date, the total value would be approximately \$55,000,000, exclusive of capital appropriations, such as buildings.⁷ Furthermore, the Library's annual operating budget is currently in excess of \$2,500,000. Last year, it might be noted, five American university libraries--California at Berkeley and Los Angeles, Harvard, Texas, and Yale--had book budgets in the neighborhood of one million dollars each, a phenomenal increase over a decade ago, even taking inflation into account.

One of the less pleasant aspects of such booming book budgets is what Time magazine called "The Great Paper Chase,"⁸ keen competition among research libraries for rare books and manuscripts, forcing prices up beyond reasonable levels, irritating our European friends who have to bid against the rich Americans, and in some instances, it would appear, the acquisition of collections simply for prestige purposes.

Nevertheless, those are the facts of life, and if we expect to procure many of the out-of-print titles needed to bring value and distinction to our collections, we must be prepared, as one critic said, "to spend for a rare imprint or first edition enough money to buy the complete works of a dozen major English poets." That is a conservative statement.

To avoid encroaching on Miss Welch's topic, I shall omit consideration of foreign publications, except to observe that over the past 15 years the collecting interests of American libraries, formerly restricted to the United States and Western Europe, have clearly become worldwide, a fact that has involved us in a host of new problems in the acquisition, cataloging, and use of materials. The expanding library activities closely parallel the increased scholarly interest in area studies. A sizeable number of cooperative and overlapping organizations have fingers in the pie: the Farmington Plan Committee and its seven area subcommittees covering the world, the Latin American Cooperative Acquisitions Project, the Joint Committee on Middle Eastern Studies of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council, the Coordinating Committee for

Slavic and East European Library Resources, the Association for Asian Studies' Committee on Library Resources on the Far East, and others. Here is concrete recognition of America's position of world leadership, whether we desire the job or not.

A few general considerations may be outlined briefly in conclusion. First, we are living in an era when the outpouring of print in all its forms has become enormous, pointing toward an acute necessity for carefully defined acquisition policies, specialization of fields among libraries, and cooperative programs of acquisition. Second, in the development of large research collections, we are building as much or more for the future than for the present. A high proportion of books and related materials is acquired by libraries for the sake of completeness and to strengthen existing resources, with potential usefulness in mind, rather than to meet immediate demands. We ought, therefore, to exercise a certain amount of clairvoyance in determining what is actually significant from a long-range viewpoint. Third, the laissez-faire philosophy which university librarians are inclined to follow, attempting to achieve virtual autonomy in wide areas of knowledge and to serve all the needs of their clientele without reference to other institutions, probably calls for re-examination, although I am not optimistic that there will be any radical change in the attitude unless or until a financial pinch is felt.

Finally, may I say that my intention has been to review only the highlights of the university library's acquisition problems. It should be stressed again that a library is never finished. A book collection that has stopped growing is a dead collection and soon loses most of its interest and value for the scholar and student. Furthermore, our ideas about the nature and contents of a research library are constantly evolving. A library that would have satisfied our clientele in the nineteenth century, or even a generation ago, would be regarded as quite inadequate today, and will be even more so tomorrow. Accordingly, to avoid obsolescence, the university library must be a dynamic, living organism, fully responsive to change, and always looking to the future.

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