The Educational Function of the University Library

RAYNARD C. SWANK

This paper reviews recent trends in university libraries toward the more effective realization of their educational or teaching function. Trends in college libraries have been recently covered in Lyle's Administration of the College Library,1 and in Wilson's Library in College Instruction.2 The developments identified in college libraries are also identifiable in university libraries, although differences have arisen because of the larger size of university libraries and because of their emphasis on research. By and large, the emphasis on research in university libraries has tended in the past to neglect of the instructional needs of undergraduate students.

During the last twenty years there has been a reformation in many university libraries—a reformation which does take into account the teaching as well as the research needs of the university. Intelligent and apparently successful efforts are now making possible the fuller use of the library as a tool for instruction. The idea of the library as a teaching instrument, as advanced by L. R. Wilson, B. H. Branscomb, and others, and as implemented by the creative experimentation of R. E. Ellsworth, promises to become a regenerating force of great consequence.

Several trends which are important individually in both college and university libraries, but which now tend to become merged with more general and basic trends in university libraries, will be noted first. The more general and basic trends with educational implications in university libraries will then be described more fully.

Reading is often stimulated by means of browsing rooms,3 dormitory libraries, and other reading centers. For the most part, these centers are extracurricular; they are intended to stimulate voluntary reading

Director, Stanford University Libraries.
of a general cultural and recreational nature. The successful ones attract students by means of comfortable rooms in accessible locations, pleasing appointments, an air of informality, smoking privileges, liberal circulation rules, and shelves of colorful, readable books. Although incidental to the main program of a library, the browsing room in some places has shown that a pleasant atmosphere does encourage reading. It has also suggested the educational value of wise selections of books directly accessible on open shelves.

A number of libraries use their browsing rooms for book talks, poetry readings, chamber music programs, and lecture series. Others use their browsing rooms as headquarters for organized student activities, such as literary clubs and private library competitions. These programs have shown that the library can assume a place in the cultural life of the institution and can organize students for educational pursuits.

There are readers' advisers who really help, who show that libraries can undertake counselling with good effect. Their services go beyond traditional reference service by giving unhurried, personal attention to the reading interests and problems of individual students.

Considerable attention is being paid to the instruction of students in the use of the library. For beginning students, orientation tours and lectures are widely conducted, and short courses of instruction, usually elective, are offered. Hammond has made a systematic attempt to test the effectiveness of these courses in library methods. Upper-class and graduate students may also be offered courses in advanced bibliography. While formal course work in library methods has sometimes proved disappointing because of the lack of specific curricular motivation, the effort has emphasized another educational need which the library should try to satisfy.

The desire to help students use the library more effectively has also led to the publication of handbooks on the collections, organization, services, and regulations of the library. Posters and signs have been widely exploited for directing and informing students within the library building.

These are some of the methods which have been devised to increase the educational efficiency of the library. But these particular methods, however useful and suggestive they may be, are too limited in their conception and application to contribute significantly to the programs of the larger and more complicated university libraries. Recently some university libraries have taken a fundamental turn which places them squarely in the center of the educational pattern of the university. The browsing rooms and readers' advisory services, the dormitory
The Educational Function of the University Library

libraries and the book talks, and even the courses in library methods are but flanking operations. Now, since the establishment of Ellsworth’s Colorado plan, which started a remarkable series of innovations at Nebraska, Washington State, Princeton, Harvard, Iowa, and elsewhere, the university library is more completely within the scheme of things that are germane to a university education.

Open Shelves

Direct access on open shelves to all or a major part of the book collections is now accepted as a stimulant to reading, whether required or voluntary. Some of the newer buildings have been deliberately planned to coerce the reader into open stacks. The physical and administrative barriers formerly set between readers and books have been removed. Every reading room is a browsing room in which students are brought into intimate contact with teaching materials selected to enrich the instructional program. Even books for voluntary reading may be associated with curricular objectives in this setting.

There are many variations in open-shelf arrangements from simple access to a conventional book stack to flowing distributions of stacks throughout the reading areas. Access may be permitted to the entire collections or only to selections of the most important books. The new libraries at the Universities of Colorado and Nebraska display extensive selections of live materials on wall and island shelving in specialized reading rooms. The library at Princeton opens to its readers an enormous stack with carrels, study rooms, and reading tables provided throughout.

Open shelves are not only an educational stimulant in their own right; they are also a condition necessary to the success of other methods of teaching with books. Open shelves are the key to all designs for the library as a teaching instrument.

A Laboratory Situation

A large part of the teaching process is being brought into the library. The library is no longer merely a place to read; it is a workshop in which faculty, students, and librarians work together. It becomes

a great study center for the campus—a workshop where faculty researchers in many departments can study in convenient and stimulating quarters in close association with graduate students—a new kind of home for the College of Liberal Arts, a base that will give personality to and unify many of the now scattered activities of that College—a
center where new methods of teaching and new faculty-student relationships may emerge.]

To create a laboratory situation, an abundance of special study facilities, in addition to reading tables, is provided in proximity to the book collections—study cubicles, faculty offices, conference rooms, seminar rooms, typing rooms, and the like. Library areas are allocated to specific instructional departments, or groups of departments, and adapted to their special needs. Tutorial and seminar classes which make frequent use of library materials are held in the library; faculty members are available in the library for consultation. As far as is possible, all the facilities needed for the scholarly use of books are conveniently concentrated in the library.

In this setting, readers' advisory and other guidance services may develop not merely as special library projects but as regular parts of the teaching program. The laboratory situation provides greater opportunity for observation of student problems, for assistance in the solution of those problems, and for general familiarity with the curriculum. The librarian and teacher work together as colleagues. Cooperation becomes integration; supplementation becomes participation.

Audio-Visual Services

The scope of the library has traditionally been extended to include a variety of visual and aural materials—maps, charts, pictures, models, phonograph records, slides, etc.—but only recently have the educational applications of such aids, especially the non-paper aids, become sufficiently important to command immediate attention. Significant current developments in the field of motion picture films, sound recordings, and slides are now leading to the organization of many audiovisual centers.

These audio-visual aids, like books, are instructional materials, and they are used together with books in the educational process. If the library is to maintain its position as the study center of the campus, it cannot afford to neglect these newer study materials. Aside from the gadgetry of audio-visual services, which often obscures the educational nature of the materials themselves, the parallel with book services is close. The essential jobs to be done are the conventional ones of acquisition, cataloging, circulation, reference, and storage, all of which may be integrated with the older library services.

Because of the elaborate apparatus, however, special facilities for the use of audio-visual materials must be provided, such as phonograph and recording booths and film and slide projection rooms. Also,
The Educational Function of the University Library

because of the local production of audio-visual materials, such facilities as recording studios and photographic dark rooms are desirable. Workrooms are, of course, required for such activities as equipment maintenance and film inspection and repair.

Audio-visual services have been growing so fast in recent years that it is difficult to assess their present nature and extent. On many campuses, these services have become separated from the library and are being developed by the business office, the school of education, the extension department, or some other agency. On some campuses the services are scattered; on others they are centralized. Library-centered services have been established in a number of places, such as the University of Oregon, Purdue University, West Virginia University, Ball State Teachers College, Lycoming College, and Wright Junior College. Library interest in audio-visual aids has now become sufficiently general that the Association of College and Reference Libraries has appointed a Committee on Audio-Visual Work under the chairmanship of Fleming Bennett. This committee has undertaken as its first project a survey of audio-visual programs, both library and nonlibrary, in colleges and universities throughout the country.

The newer libraries, planned as teaching instruments, almost always provide in some way for audio-visual services. The conception of the library as a laboratory presumes the concentration under good working conditions of all important kinds of instructional materials. Failure to integrate audio-visual and book resources cannot help deterring the proper development of study habits and teaching methods and most certainly will limit the contribution of the library to the educational program. It will even limit the effective use of books, since books and audio-visual materials, when used together, supplement each other in many teaching situations.

Organization by Subject

The reorientation of the library toward the educational program has now affected the organization of the service departments, especially in the larger libraries. The curriculum is divided into subject fields; the library follows suit. The traditional organization by forms of materials, such as periodicals and maps, and by types of services, such as reference and reserve, is giving way to organization by subject divisions. Whereas the traditional organization scatters materials and services needed by scholars working on any subject, the newer organization attempts to bring them together. Generally speaking, a subject division is an open-shelf study area, with adjacent stack, labora-
RAYNARD C. SWANK

tory, and possibly audio-visual facilities. It is usually designed primarily for the convenience of advanced students and faculty members.

The subject-divisional organization was first applied in logical form to a university library by Ellsworth at Colorado. The Colorado plan employs three subject divisions—Humanities, Social Science, and Science—which are simply large reading rooms housing extensive selections of frequently used books, journals, bibliographies, and reference works. Some plans employ four or more divisions; variations are numerous. In the newer buildings, the subject divisions may consist of overlapping segments of continuous study and stack areas, instead of separate reading rooms in the conventional sense.

An important extension of the subject-divisional plan involves the departmental libraries in the larger universities. These outlying units, instead of being separately administered by an assistant librarian as special problem children, are organized as branches of the related subject divisions of the main library. The departmental librarians then become regular members of a divisional staff, and their libraries are placed in a definite relationship with the rest of the library system. In some instances, such as the Biological Science Division at Stanford University, a division may consist entirely of departmental and school libraries, with headquarters in the largest unit, and be located entirely outside the main library.

The educational significance of the subject-divisional plan derives from the association of library services with specific departments of the instructional program. The library divisions are given subject content and curricular motivation. Their efforts are focused on a definite clientele, with whose projects and problems the library staff can become familiar. The library’s services are varied to satisfy the widely different needs of physical scientists, social scientists, and humanists. Definite parts of the library belong to them. Library staff members specialize in their divisional subjects, identify themselves with the faculties of instructional departments, and may in fact become active members of those faculties.

A General Education Division

The recent emphasis on general or liberal education, with all its many interpretations, has stimulated the development of separate under-class, or lower-divisional, and undergraduate libraries. C. L. Mowat, in his “Libraries and Liberal Education,” presents a review of general education programs and discusses the implications for li-
The Educational Function of the University Library

Libraries. The university library is characteristically a research library—large, complex, and difficult to use. It is bewildering and frustrating to the underclassman without training or experience in its use. Moreover, it is superfluous for the average underclassman, whose book needs are circumscribed, and its subject departmentalization may actually be bad for the purpose of general education. By and large, the great university libraries have in the past offered less to underclassmen by way of good, appropriate service than have many of the libraries of the better liberal arts colleges.12, 24

The general education division is designed to give beginning students an appropriate and desirable first library experience in the university, to instruct them in the best use of the library, and to spare them the research library (and the research library them) until they undertake advanced study of a specialized nature. The division usually contains an extensive open-shelf collection of reserve books, collateral readings, periodicals, bibliographies, reference works, and a careful selection of good books for general cultural and recreational reading. While the underclassman may be freely permitted and sometimes encouraged to use other divisions of the library, the general education division is intended to satisfy most of his library needs.

The general education division may be conceived as either a lower-divisional or an undergraduate collection, although it appears that in all but the largest research libraries the lower-divisional conception may become dominant. The Lamont Library at Harvard is an undergraduate division; 25 lower-divisional libraries have been established at Colorado and Iowa.26 When conceived as a lower-divisional library, the collection may be oriented toward some theme which is appropriate to the local doctrine of general education. The World Room at Kenyon College and the Heritage Library at the University of Iowa illustrate this possibility.27

The general education division is falling heir to at least two of the more conventional ways of increasing the library's educational usefulness: instruction in the use of the library and the encouragement of voluntary reading. Both are, of course, functions of the subject divisions as well, but they are especially pertinent during the underclass period when reading and study habits are being formed. Freshman orientation, formal introductory courses in library methods, and informal guidance of students working in the library all find a natural home in the general education division. They are significant parts of the general education program. So also is the formation of good read-
ing habits, no matter whether the reading is required or voluntary. The library’s effort to make a reader of every student is being focused in the general education division; and if this division is consequently used as a browsing room by advanced students and faculty, the purpose of general education is served all the better.

Since many variations of the general education division can already be found, and since the value of such a division is still controversial, the University Libraries Section of the Association of College and Reference Libraries has appointed a special committee to investigate the problem. This committee, under the chairmanship of William Dix, has begun a comparative study of the under-class and undergraduate libraries which have so far been organized.

An Academic Staff

A library that participates in the academic program must develop a professional staff of real academic caliber, a staff that deserves to stand as colleagues with the faculty and that is accepted by the faculty. Faculty status or its equivalent for the qualified individuals on the staff is essential. In the subject-divisional organization, the obvious means are graduate training in a subject field in addition to library training, and direct association with the faculty by teaching a subject course or a course in bibliographic methods, by the direction of theses, or by pursuit of individual research.21, 28

The subject-divisional organization, implemented by open shelves, laboratory facilities, and audio-visual services, offers greater opportunity for staff development than any other general type of organization yet devised. Librarians have traditionally tended to remain too much apart from the main current of academic affairs. They have not been curious enough about what is going on and how they can help. They have not shown a convincing interest in the nature and purpose of the activities which their jobs are intended to support. The fault may be partly but not entirely their own; it is partly the traditional character of the library organization, which has not affiliated library jobs with particular fields of academic endeavor. The subject-divisional organization does define and emphasize the academic affiliations of library jobs and charges librarians with the responsibility for getting acquainted. The vacuum of library forms and techniques is broken, new channels of communication with faculty and students are opened, and the rewards for good service are more direct and tangible.
The Educational Function of the University Library

A Functional Building

Some of the methods of increasing the educational effectiveness of the library are contingent upon the creation of hospitable conditions in new or remodelled buildings. To an appreciable extent, the development of those methods has been paced by advances in building construction and design. The librarian who wishes to open his stacks to the reader, adopt laboratory situations, introduce audio-visual services, reorganize into subject divisions, or establish a general education division may be handicapped by an outmoded plant.

The change in library buildings over the last ten years has been remarkable. From the educational point of view, modular planning, dry construction, and new methods of air conditioning and lighting have produced a type of building which is sufficiently flexible to accommodate a variety of new services and to be readily modified as educational needs change. On the other hand, they succeed, with only gestures towards monumentalism, to create a comfortable, informal, friendly atmosphere conducive to a pleasant study experience.

Much can be done with many older buildings, however, to adapt their form and shape to more vital educational activities. Interiors can be remodelled and additions can be built. The University of Oregon library with its recent addition offers an example of an older building modified for subject-divisional and audio-visual purposes.

A Few Questions

Taken together, these elements of the new library programs form a pattern of service which could hardly have been prophesied several decades ago. The pattern is rich in theory, fundamental in nature, and varied in practice. The new programs are still in their formative stage; all are different and every good one contains something new. It will be a long time yet before an evaluation is possible.

Toward the further development of this pattern and its ultimate evaluation, several lines of inquiry may be suggested.

First, it must be explained that in this paper the word “teaching” has been loosely used as synonymous with “educational.” While it is probable that all librarians and most faculty members will agree that the library is an educational division of the university and that the librarian’s work is educational in the sense that it contributes directly to the teaching program, some will not agree that the librarian “teaches” at all in the accepted sense of the word, or, if they grant
that he does teach, will not agree that such teaching is a significant part of the educational program. Are his "teaching" activities as significant to the educational program, for example, as his own distinctive and generally recognized contributions as a librarian? A realistic inquiry into the proper and reasonable use of the word "teaching" in this context might help to ensure that a good program is not over-promoted for the wrong reasons or under-promoted for the right ones. A survey of faculty attitudes on the contributions of the library to the instructional program might be a useful corrective at this time.

Second, it is important for librarians to look forward to the time when it will become possible to compare theory with practice. For example, what solid improvements are realized from the laboratory or workshop theory? To what extent does the theory fail to produce the expected results? How much of the educational process does actually prove in different situations to be centered in the library with good effect?

Third, what conditions should determine whether a separate general or liberal education library is desirable and whether that library, if established, should be undergraduate or lower-divisional in scope? Also, what relationships are desirable between the general education library and the research library? A study of the general education libraries now in existence at various universities, with reference to their curricular origins, would be a valuable guide to future action. The work of the Committee on Underclass and Undergraduate Libraries of the University Libraries Section of the Association of College and Reference Libraries is aimed in a general way toward finding answers to these questions.

Fourth, it is commonly charged that the subject-divisional type of organization is more costly than the traditional types. It may be or it may not; in any case the charge should be investigated, if any method can be found of isolating cost data for equivalent services. Certainly the size of the library would be an important factor in the analysis of relative costs.

Fifth, there are many aspects of the audio-visual program of which fruitful studies could be made. The most important at the moment is present services, a general survey of which the Committee on Audio-Visual Work of the Association of College and Reference Libraries has already begun. Another is the integration of audio-visual and book services in the library. What kinds of audio-visual services—acquisitions, cataloging, storage and lending of materials, production, equip-
The Educational Function of the University Library

- Should be performed centrally by an audio-visual department, and what kinds should be delegated to the regular library departments? Another is the exploration of library facilities and teaching methods for utilizing audio-visual aids in the library as study materials, as contrasted with their use merely as classroom aids.

- And sixth, the basic problem of cataloging (discussed more fully in this issue by Mr. McAnally and Mr. Wright) will become more crucial as the trend toward subject specialization in bibliography and other services conflicts more conspicuously with the established pattern of centralization and uniformity in cataloging. While the service program is undergoing important changes of an educational nature the cataloging program often remains static. How can cataloging be adapted to the specialized needs of the subject-divisional organization?

- These are only a few questions, but they are enough to indicate that the recent educational trends of university libraries are reviving fundamental issues. Nevertheless, there is every reason to expect that, if present trends continue, the central position of the library in the instructional program will be strengthened, and its contributions to that program will become increasingly substantial. The library remains the only major educational division of the university which is common to all faculties, and the study of books is still the greater part of an education.

References


11. Iowa University. University Library Planning Committee: Library as a Teaching Instrument. Iowa City, State University of Iowa, 1945, pp. 4-6.


21. Iowa University, op. cit., pp. 11-12.


27. Iowa University, op. cit., pp. 9-10.

