



# The Relationship Between the Public and The University Library

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SOME YEARS AGO, one of the state librarians took note of the heavy pressure being put upon the public libraries of his state. "There has developed in the last several years," he wrote, "a feeling on the part of some college librarians —perhaps public librarians, too—that their interests are widely divergent from that [sic] of the public library and the two fields have nothing in common, that the college library has its own problems and there is no reason why these two groups should meet together at library conferences."<sup>1</sup> Certainly in the past decade both public and college librarians who held to such doctrine have been jarred loose from their position. A multiplicity of evidence is at hand to demonstrate that college and public librarians must cooperate if their interests and those of their mutual library users both are to be served. The problem, and one uses the term over the protests of many public and college librarians, is not new. It differs only in degree and perhaps in character. Wherever librarians gather, sooner or later the conversation will turn to student use of the library. It is significant that at a conference of Swedish and American public librarians in Lysekil, Sweden, last year, one of the three areas of common concern chosen for discussion was this same question of service to students.

Until fairly recently, emphasis has been upon the question of the secondary school student whose way of academic life was recently subjected to marked change. The impact of the revolution in the American educational scene has been thoroughly explored by H. L. Hamill, Los Angeles City Librarian. The rather precise definition of the respective provinces of the public and school library no longer has validity—to use his words: "the neat and sturdy wall we had erected between the functions of the public library and the school

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library . . . lies in the dust." He offers no panaceas. He does suggest that there are measures that may be taken to achieve cooperation between schools and public libraries, that there should be an expansion of studies of student use of public libraries now underway.<sup>2</sup>

The question of college students and their use of the public library is not as far removed from that of the secondary school student as it would at first seem. True, college students are not driving adults out of most public libraries or creating major discipline problems. They do wear out books. At least a fair share of the considerable growth in theft and mutilation may be laid to college students. Conversely, they constitute an important part of the public library users. The same factors that upset the long established balance between most public libraries and their secondary school clientele—the postwar school population explosion and the assignment of more difficult problems in greater variety than ever before—are likewise affecting college-public library relationships. A considerable proportion of secondary school students are finding their way into junior colleges (now springing up everywhere), colleges, and universities. They carry with them their public library experiences and expect to use the public library as before, although their demands for material will be more exacting. Any hope that the use of public libraries by the college student is a transitory increase vanishes when one studies the present and estimated future number of students in college: 3,500,000 in 1960, 5,379,000 in 1965, 7,020,000 in 1970, and 9,018,000 in 1980.

Public librarians have never been completely free of an anxiety over the amount and kind of use which the college student makes of the public library. For years they were disturbed by repeated requests for textbooks or multiple copies of books used for collateral reading and by the sudden denuding of shelves when an instructor of a survey course made a mass assignment. Term papers took a heavy toll of periodical, pamphlet, and clipping files. On the other hand, some assignment patterns were so well established that public librarians could almost predict when a particular topic or project was going to be assigned and make preparations for the onslaught. Files of fragile newspapers were photostated and later microfilmed when the medium became generally available. Some of the larger systems purchased duplicate files of most frequently used periodicals; others, if notified in advance as they requested, would duplicate specific materials for student use. In some instances, expediency dictated an informal working arrangement in which certain materials were

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withheld from undergraduates. Then, as now, the most difficult fact for the public librarian to accept was that college students found his institution an inviting study hall. His gall was compounded of annoyance at the seeming lack of consideration for the "citizen" who might need that space for legitimate library use and chagrin that the institution was not accorded its rightful recognition as a repository of knowledge.

Many a public library staff conference has stalled under the weight of the student problem, perhaps because until very recently there has been a scarcity of reliable statistical recordings of student use of public library facilities. Public library department heads had a fair idea, based upon long experience, that the college student load had increased measurably. Larger quantities of books were circulating; more periodicals, documents, and other research materials were being sought and used. At vacation times, too, college students home for the holidays flocked to the public library, and if they were not recognized for what they were, they were not at all reticent in putting the librarian on notice, quite often by making offhand invidious comparisons of the local collection with the outstanding ones at their respective colleges or at nearby public libraries.

Public library staffs also devoted a part of their conference time to a consideration of the reasons college students use public libraries. While the great majority did not attempt to make an accurate survey of such use, more or less independently they reached essentially the same conclusions as to the appeal of the public library for college students. At the head of the list stands convenience. Since increasingly larger proportions of the student bodies come from the environs of the college—as much as 70-80 per cent in many urban areas—the public library is often closer to their homes. It is frequently open longer hours than is the college library, and its books may be borrowed for longer periods of time. Sometimes materials are available only in the public library. Again, there are those who prefer the public library because they have been familiar with it and its collections over the years.<sup>3</sup>

In metropolitan New York, a study of the library habits of higher education students revealed that more than eight out of every ten answering the questionnaire used a library in addition to the one in their respective schools and that one-half of them did so at least monthly. This use, furthermore, was not caused essentially by the belief that better things are found abroad. The responses showed some

concern for the size of the collection and moved progressively to larger libraries in accordance with their needs. Only one student in two considered his own school library to be inadequate as to physical plant, hours, or staff. Four of ten, however, felt that their libraries' collections were inadequate, largely on the familiar basis of too few books or too few copies of those in demand.

In 1958 the Los Angeles Public Library, concerned with the adequacy of its library service to students, appointed a committee of six librarians to survey the situation and to make recommendations. In 1960, the system ran two four-week test periods to determine student use; in the branches, junior college and college students made 13.5 per cent of the requests; in the central library, 56.8 per cent.

Watching students virtually monopolize the library with increasing frequency and alarmed that they are unable to meet their full obligations, public librarians have sought for remedies—so far, not very successfully. They have felt, too, that school, junior college, college, and university libraries and faculties have not recognized the problem, or if they have, have ignored their responsibility.

With the purpose of determining what various libraries were doing to meet the increased pressure upon their facilities, in November 1960 the ALA Special Committee on Inter-Related Library Services to Students mailed out a well-conceived questionnaire (questions below) to 46 public libraries and received a return of 37.

1. Is student use, either college or secondary school, of your public library a "problem"? Do you have any reliable information on how much such students use your library?

2. Do you know where these students come from and in what proportion: secondary schools in the community; college or university in the community; students attending school or college outside the immediate community?

3. What in your opinion are the causative factors for such use? Inadequacy of college or school library. Convenience of your library from the standpoint of location, hours of opening, length of loan period, ability to withdraw books. Large numbers of "commuting" students. Other.

4. In your opinion, is high school or college students' use of the public library a real problem or are public libraries making "a mountain out of a molehill"?

5. Have you or your library board met or discussed the situation

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with school and college administrators in the area: If so, please give details.

6. If so, have any solutions been worked out to solve the problem? Give details.

7. What solutions do you think would enable the student to use libraries wherever he found it convenient and at the same time not create an undue hardship upon such libraries?

8. In your opinion, are the administrative programs of college, school, and public libraries in the average community so different that three separate levels of library service must be maintained, although students make no distinction in their use of them?

9. Do you think it would be advisable for the public library to refuse to serve students?

10. Is there a reliable way for the public library to determine what is Student Use?

11. In the following space please describe any different or additional experiences you may have had in giving service to students, in working out problems of such service with other libraries, in setting up cooperative procedures, in discussions aimed at better mutual understanding of difficulties incident to such services, etc.

Because this questionnaire and the one to college librarians deserve a full discussion in another article, the answers will be only summarized here. An overwhelming majority of those answering are convinced that a very real problem exists, not so much in student use of the library but in the fact that present facilities, staff, and collections cannot meet the demands made upon them. At least half of the libraries replying keep no statistics and, of the others, few keep an accurate check. Further, not many of them know the proportion of college to secondary school students and whether they come from within or without the immediate community. As to the reasons for student use of the public library in preference to their own school libraries, the majority feel that the inadequacy of the school library is the major cause; and in descending scale of importance they listed location, hours of opening, length of loan period, and the ability to withdraw books. Various administrators feel that the increased emphasis upon individual work, superior book collections and even the "social" atmosphere of the public library" account for some appeal.

For the most part, individual libraries are making a concerted effort to seek the cooperation of college and secondary school supervisors.

By and large, too, conferences with school superintendents, supervisors and librarians are becoming more frequent. In many instances, the public library director and the college library director have been able to establish a working arrangement and eliminate some points of friction.

The Los Angeles Public Library has given much thought, time and effort to solving its problem with the high school and college student. While it reports that "there have been no solutions," it does list steps which it has taken:

1. A 'Student's Request Form' was evolved and is in use.
2. A letter asking help in curbing mutilation has been mailed for four consecutive years; principals and superintendents have cooperated in bringing the problem to faculty attention.
3. Copies of the Survey on student use of the library were widely distributed to school administrative personnel and the findings considered by committees and at some general meetings.
4. An institute for secondary school faculty on 'Using Library Resources' was held. Public librarians were on the program. Similar institutes in each district are planned for the spring of 1961.
5. Our own professional staff participated in workshops on school and public library relations with emphasis on the consideration of possible solutions. This provided a better understanding and more uniform attitude on the part of staff. Some good suggestions were also offered for possible solutions.
6. Children's librarians and young adults' librarians have been making particular effort to visit, become acquainted with and establish communications with librarians and teachers.
7. Talks given to P.T.A.'s have also included information on the situation.

One of the principal difficulties which public libraries face with the college student is his lack of knowledge about the proper use of library tools and collections. Colleges must give some instruction in the use of bibliographies and in research methodology much earlier than graduate school or the senior year.

When librarians are asked if the public library ought to refuse to serve students, the answer is "No," although some seven libraries feel that a limitation should be placed upon the hours during which students may use the library and upon the materials they may consult.

One aspect of the problem not adequately explored is that of pay-

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ment of the cost of full-scale public library service to college students. More books, more seats, and a greater variety and depth of reference materials will all cost money. Shall this be supplied as it has been in the past at the taxpayers' expense? Can a municipal library system supported by local taxes alone charge a nonresidency fee of some metropolitan residents but except college students? Should the municipality have to bear the financial burden of supplying extensive and expensive reference materials to the student body of a college or university lying outside its territorial limits? These are questions with which to conjure. One can sympathize with the student editor who, after conceding that the fee charged by the nearby municipal library system was reasonable enough in view of the many benefits received, found it "not even palatable, let alone friendly."

The reaction of the college librarian to the problem was sought also by the ALA Special Committee on Inter-Related Library Services to Students. About 75 per cent (63) of the college libraries circularized replied to the questions listed below:

1. Do you consider the resources of the library you administer adequate to meet the library needs arising from normal assignments given to the students in your institution?
2. If adequate, does a student confine his library use for such assignments to your library?
3. If the answer to either of the above is "no," where does the student go to satisfy his library needs?
4. If he uses other library facilities, do you have any reliable information on approximately how much he uses them?
5. What in your opinion are the causative factors for such use? Inadequacy of your library; convenience of other library from standpoint of location, hours of opening, length of loan period, ability to withdraw books; other factors.
6. In your opinion, is the college students' use of the public library a real problem or are public libraries making "a mountain out of a molehill"?
7. Have you or your institution's administrators met with or discussed the situation with public library officials in the area?
8. If so, have any solutions been worked out to solve the problem?
9. What solution do you think would enable the student to use li-

baries whenever he found it convenient and at the same time not create an undue hardship upon such libraries?

10. In your opinion, are the administrative programs of college, school, and public libraries in the average community so different that three separate levels of library service must be maintained, although students make no distinction in their use of them?

11. Do you think it would be advisable for the public library to refuse to serve students?

12. Is there a reliable way for the public library to determine what is student use?

Most college and university librarians believe their libraries to be adequate, but a number concede that they cannot properly provide for "research papers" or changes in faculty assignments. "No library," writes one, "is ever entirely adequate. We manage, but we need more books, more space and more staff." The majority indicate, too, that they do not have accurate information about student use of public libraries, although some refer to studies by public libraries in their areas, notably Los Angeles, Detroit, and Queens Borough. As to what stimulates the students to use public library facilities, here again the answers are not far afield from those of the public librarians: special research materials not available at the college, the wide range of research projects now being assigned, inadequacy of college holdings in peak periods, or "closer to home or work." Two replies are particularly intriguing: "They pamper the student, page his periodicals, etc.;" "a conviction, not always well founded, that the other libraries have more material." A surprisingly small proportion (17) thought a real problem existed, but few were willing to charge the public librarians with making a "mountain out of a molehill."

Fewer than half of the college librarians or administrative officers of their institutions have attended conferences with public library officials. In those instances where meetings have been held, however, constructive action included a request that the school be notified when there were heavy demands in a particular area, and it would purchase "extra resources when notified." One public library invited faculty members to submit assignments in advance.

College librarians varied in their opinions as to what public libraries might do to enable the large number of college students to use their facilities without creating a hardship. Such solutions ran from establishing college reading rooms with a reserve reading collection to a

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“reciprocal privileges agreement or a subsidy,” or to the suggestion that the public library insist that its books be read in the library, a variant of the reserve book room technique. From a public librarian’s standpoint, most significant were the suggestions that college library collections be brought to a level where they would meet student need, both as to types of materials and duplicates, and keeping the college library open longer hours.

One interesting approach to the cooperation between public libraries and colleges in their locality is the suggestion of Helen M. Brown, librarian of Wellesley College, that stations be established in public libraries. These stations would be manned by college library staff members who would also spend a part of their working time in the college library. They would be placed in the main library or in branches strategically located in relation to student homes, and they would have collections that supplemented those of the colleges. They would provide collateral reading for the larger or introductory and survey classes. The upper classes would rely upon the college library facilities.<sup>4</sup>

The proposal that a contract be worked out between the college and the local public library has several variations and has been successfully employed, but certainly it is not widespread. Almost a decade and a half ago, Walter Brahm, Ohio State Librarian, questioned whether public library service ought to be free to college students. He contended that a college would not expect the local board of education to provide a teaching staff at the taxpayers’ expense; so why should it provide without charge library service, certainly a necessary adjunct to a college? No public library should be penalized because it “happened to be in a community where a college is situated.” He offered the very practical suggestion that the college librarian and his college president could assist the public librarian by appearing at budget hearings; and the public librarian could appear on behalf of the college librarian at the proper time. He, too, thought a contract could be arranged to make a division of work between the two libraries.

The New York Commissioner of Education’s Committee on Reference and Research Library Resources recommends, in the light of present-day demands, a policy almost directly the opposite. While stating flatly that “there is no substitute for a library capable of supporting every segment of the instructional program at each college and university,” it realistically recognizes that because of financial limita-

tions, the numbers of students, and their "insatiable demands," this support will probably never be realized. It proposes, therefore, that there be a network of five regional reference and research library systems and that the "state [should] aid in the development of regional cooperative programs for college and university students" to the extent of an annual minimum contribution of \$10.00 for each student "enrolled at all levels and in all categories."<sup>6</sup> Under such a program, the question of local tax jurisdictions would be eliminated.

College students in public libraries, if they are not a problem as some insist, will continue to be a major consideration in the mind of the administrator of the public library. Whether he is able to achieve a "working agreement" with the college authorities, successfully raise funds to meet the increased pressure on the library, or absorb the heavier load, he must recognize the obligation to serve the person who walks in the door. The American public library is there for whoever will use it. It must meet its obligation.

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