



Readers' Services

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MOST PRESENT-DAY librarians have an innate desire to be all things to all people when called upon to render services relating to books and reading. One of them recently described this tendency thus: "We hold in common with all other librarians a built-in compulsion to render service when requested."¹ Although this "compulsion" is beginning to cause trouble as resources are stretched to the breaking point by ever-increasing demands, the search continues for new services to offer, and for ways to make old ones seem new.

This is an especially commendable trait on the part of librarians who serve junior colleges, because it blends perfectly with the over-all philosophy which governs this segment of the educational field. The junior college movement has been a service movement from its beginning, designed to meet a wide-range of educational needs. Its purposes have been summarized as including preparation for advanced study, provision of vocational education and general education, plus community service.² In addition to this, one writer insists that junior college libraries themselves must be "service oriented" if they are to fulfill their responsibilities to their communities.³ An institution with objectives such as these and a profession with a "compulsion to render service" should certainly find themselves ideally mated! It follows, therefore, that readers' services are probably of greater importance in the junior college library than in any other type of academic library.

These services may be divided, for convenience, into two groups: those of an educational nature, and those of a utilitarian nature. The first group includes all readers' advisory service, reference work, and all instruction in the use of libraries. The second group includes circulation work, reserve book services, interlibrary loans, and service in-

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Readers' Services

volving the use of machinery, such as duplication services, or provision of equipment for listening to tapes and records.

The importance of both groups can hardly be over-emphasized, and both must be highly developed in a library that claims to provide a balanced program. Traditionally, the second group of services has probably received greater emphasis. To function at all, a library must have some sort of circulation system. It must make arrangements for reserve books, and the availability of the equipment necessary for the other services mentioned depends mainly upon the affluence of the parent institution. Little imagination is required for basic provision of these services, although they can surely be refined and made more efficient through thoughtful planning and operation.

The educational group of services is receiving increasing attention from concerned librarians in recent years. This is a natural result of the present-day concept of the library as an educational force, which is rapidly replacing the storage and preservation function assigned to libraries of past generations. The teaching function of modern libraries is clearly stated by Felix Hirsch as follows: "What is the essence of the new standards? It is the concept of the library as the intellectual powerhouse of the junior college, and, as a corollary, the concept of the junior college librarian as an educator."⁴ Hirsch refers here to the standards for junior college libraries which were adopted by the Association of College and Research Libraries in 1960.⁵

The world of junior college libraries offers many outstanding examples of effective readers' service programs which are being used to enhance the educational functions of the libraries involved. Marion Harris described the philosophy behind the organization for reference service at Los Angeles City College some years ago. She wrote of the ". . . importance placed on the teaching function in the library. This is the primary motive that is always in the background of service to the student public."⁶

Norman Tanis recently described a successful program of taking readers' services to the students and faculty in the technical curriculum at Henry Ford Community College.⁷ He pointed out that instructors in these courses are usually men outside the academic community and with little knowledge of library resources. Students often have little contact with academic courses which require library use. Reaching these individuals with an effective readers' service program enriches the courses involved. But Tanis speculates on an even greater possible benefit: "If we are successful, we will have produced a

library-minded student who can effectively use any library, public or private, for the rest of his life.”⁸

Some extra indexing is done at San Antonio College, Texas, to facilitate the readers’ service program. J. O. Wallace, Librarian, describes the work done and the atmosphere his staff attempts to create, as follows:

We have several practices which aid students. We have indexed a number of periodicals ourselves which are not in the usual periodical indexes. We have another index of plays in collections not in Ottemiller. Our pamphlet file subjects are all represented in the card catalog by a subject card directing the students to the subject. We attempt to compile bibliographies and discographies related to the curriculum whenever warranted. We do index our record collection so that there are analytics for every selection. Especially do we attempt to make the students in the library feel that they can turn to any librarian at any time.⁹

Compiled with a specific strata of users in mind, indexes such as these will greatly increase the efficiency of the staff member on duty, as well as reduce his time-cost in providing answers.

Probably the best-known program of readers’ services in junior college circles is the almost total fusion of such services with the instructional program achieved by B. Lamar Johnson at Stephens College while he was both Librarian and Dean of Instruction at that institution. His spectacular accomplishments are summarized in his book, *The Librarian and the Teacher in General Education*.¹⁰ Although Stephens College’s student body is not typical of the average public junior college in America, still much of Johnson’s work must be considered carefully for possible general application to junior college library practice.

Interest in experimentation continues to the present time at Stephens College, Columbia, Mo., with concrete results showing in the college’s new “learning center” described by Neal Balanoff.¹¹ This remarkable cluster of buildings combines library, classrooms, electronics communications center, and fine arts center into one unit which “. . . is designed to encourage inter-related use of electronic and mechanical aids to education in an environment conducive to learning.”¹² The years of planning for the Center are recounted in an article by the Chairman of the Humanities Division at Stephens. She voices anew Johnson’s philosophy of the library’s place in the instructional process when she says: “There is no line of demarcation between the librarian

Readers' Services

as an instructor and the classroom teacher as an instructor.”¹³ Indeed, Stephens College may be approaching the ultimate in molding the library to the educational process.

One interesting facet of readers' services in junior college libraries is that in most cases all the professionally trained members of the staff serve patrons. There seems to be no sharp division of staff members' duties between technical processing and public service, as in most other types of libraries. Marion Harris has stated that all staff members at Los Angeles City College (eight in number) participate in readers' services.¹⁴ An examination of the *Procedures Manual* from San Antonio College reveals the same situation there. In fact, J. O. Wallace underscored this point when he wrote: "A brief examination of the duty assignments of the staff will show you that by no means do we have a traditional reference-circulation-technical services differentiation. Every member of my staff does something in each of these areas."⁹

Ruth Scarborough, Librarian at Centenary College for Women, echoes this practice in her library. She wrote: "Readers services are not handled by one person, but by all the library staff, five in number."¹⁵ Charles Trinkner, Librarian at Pensacola Junior College, in discussing the organization for readers' services in his library wrote: "The key to our situation is that all but the technical processing person can work in the immediate vicinity of the control point (circulation desk). Ready reference, vocational guidance, academic guidance, library instruction are always available to the students."¹⁶ Trinkner's staff consists of three professional librarians; two of them work together in giving service to readers. Thus, as the junior college library grows beyond the province of a one-man operation, the staff members continue to enjoy the benefits of the contrasting challenges presented by both main aspects of librarianship. In this day of ever increasing specialization, and the inevitable narrowing of the human spirit which accompanies it, this aspect of junior college librarianship is noteworthy.

An essential prerequisite for a strong readers' services program in any library is an adequate number of staff members. It should be noted that the libraries already discussed have relatively large staffs for junior colleges. Los Angeles City College has eight trained librarians taking a turn at readers' services.¹⁴ San Antonio College has five librarians and four clerks.¹⁷ Stephens College has seven librarians and nine clerks.¹⁷ What about the library with only one or two librarians,

and one or perhaps no clerks? It is evident from a brief perusal of the current *American Junior Colleges*¹⁸ that libraries with staffs this size are in the majority in this country. Is it possible for them to offer a satisfactory program of readers' services to their users?

Many of them are not doing so, according to a recent strong indictment of junior college libraries on this very point.¹⁹ John F. Harvey, who is Dean of the Graduate School of Library Science at Drexel Institute of Technology, has visited many junior colleges in recent years. He says that although some of them offer a high level program of services from their libraries, this is by no means true of all of them.

Most of the librarians were so busy with circulation and cataloging that they had very little time to work with faculty members in developing the curriculum. . . . They were doing clerical work. . . . These librarians did not become strong educational forces on their campuses. . . . The library staff was usually poor. . . . With such staffs, these librarians could come nowhere near achieving the quality of service suggested in the standards. Very little time was available to give reading guidance to individual students and faculty members. . . .²⁰

This is a serious charge and comes from an authoritative source. It deserves careful consideration.

The problem of "very little time" for readers' services is common to most small libraries and should be faced squarely because of its extreme importance. Two approaches to its solution exist. The first consists of careful planning of physical quarters for optimum efficiency in giving readers' services. The second is agitation for an increase in staff.

Careful planning of physical quarters is most fruitful before a new building is erected, of course, but it also can often work wonders in a building already in existence. Robert Pierson discusses the problem of location of service areas and offers this cogent remark: "When I speak of accessibility I have in mind not how far the librarian must walk but rather how far and how fast he must run if he is to watch the door, stay near the phone, greet the public, help at the index table. . . ." ²¹ etc. Pierson's chief concern is with plans for a new building, but his suggestions can be adapted to the reorganization of many existing situations so that the distance a librarian must run to fulfill his varied obligations may at least be reduced, if not eliminated.

However, even a perfectly organized physical plant will not solve the problem of a true staff shortage. If it can be established that serv-

Readers' Services

ice is being curtailed for lack of personnel, then the librarian's chief responsibility automatically becomes the procurement of additional staff members. This usually requires a series of persuasive sessions with the institution's chief administrator. Before these sessions begin, the librarian must arm himself with exact and detailed information relating to his needs. He must know if his needs require additional professional personnel, or if added clerical help will release present professional librarians from routine duties, enabling them to concentrate on services to students which their training has prepared them to give.

Armed with a knowledge of his needs and a willingness to expend some time and effort in attaining them, the librarian is ready to approach his chief administrator. The recommendations concerning staff size given in the "Standards for Junior College Libraries"²² furnish excellent backing for the librarian who is seeking additional positions. It cannot be over-emphasized to junior college administrators that an adequate staff is co-equal in importance with a strong materials collection as essential steps in making the library an educational factor on the college campus.

Instruction in the use of libraries is another readers' service of great importance to beginning college students. It is probably one of the most generally necessary areas in the entire college curriculum. Stanley Gwynn contends that it is actually one of the liberal arts.²³ All of this places heavy responsibility on junior college librarians for a program of instruction in the use of libraries. This program must consist of much more than a guided tour of the library if it is to be effective. It must be a carefully planned course that has been worked out in cooperation with interested faculty members and designed for the specific needs of each situation. One writer underlined the needs for such a course in this manner:

"Freshman orientation programs, conducted tours through our libraries, handbooks or guides—regardless of their value to the individual student—these do not take the place of a thorough and detailed consideration of the modern tools of research and the techniques of tackling an unknown subject."²⁴

The same writer continues with an outline of what such a program should include. Patricia Knapp also gives an excellent guide to the preparation of an introductory course in library use.²⁵ While junior college students are not concerned with the problems of research found at upper division or graduate levels, they do need compre-

hensive guidance in making use of libraries. A program of instruction which is adapted to his needs should be one of the services available to every junior college student.

The second category of readers' services, designated as being chiefly of a utilitarian nature, also deserves consideration by junior college librarians. A cumbersome or inadequate circulation system may be a serious hindrance to an otherwise satisfactory library program. According to one authority, a circulation system should provide the following information: (1) the location of any book at any given time, (2) the date the book is due, and (3) the record of books borrowed by each individual reader.²⁶ Small libraries can usually use systems which provide all three of these records, but as circulation increases it often becomes necessary to drop one or more of them. The record of books borrowed by individual borrowers is usually the first to go. The "best" circulation system for a specific library is probably an adaptation of several systems, fitted to provide the features needed in that specific case. A good summary of the systems now in general use is contained in the Library Technology Project's publication, *Study of Circulation Control Systems*.²⁷ Librarians who are planning to set up a new system, or who are seeking to improve an old one, should consult this study.

Reserve books are a problem every library must face. Until enough copies of all books for all students can be provided, some system of placing on reserve copies of books in heavy demand must be provided in all academic libraries, junior college libraries included. Probably the most widely used practice is to place the books on a shelf at the circulation desk and control their use from that point. Open-shelf reserves have been used with good results in some cases.

Interlibrary loan service, according to the Code adopted in 1952,²⁸ is designed for graduate students and faculty members engaged in serious research. These are reasonable limitations and should be observed by everyone. Books in print can usually be purchased as readily as they can be borrowed. Rarely does a junior college student need an out-of-print book desperately enough to justify an interlibrary loan transaction. This service can be of great value to faculty members, however, and its use for their benefit should be encouraged.

Circumstances may justify interlibrary borrowing for adult members of the local community, especially if there is no strong public library available. This is a service which will help to build good will for the college among local citizens. However, interlibrary borrowing is a

Readers' Services

privilege which must never be abused by a borrowing library. Scrupulous care should be used in verifying titles requested and in returning titles borrowed within the loan period.

Readers' services to members of the local community should not end with an occasional procurement of a book from another library. A majority of our junior colleges are supported in large part by local taxation and as a result have a special obligation to their communities. Part of this obligation can and should be discharged by the library through the provision of readers' services to members of the community. These services are often of great benefit to a community, being unique in many cases, i.e., unavailable from any other source. James L. Wattenbarger, writing of the growth of junior colleges in Florida, observed: In many sections of the state, the organization of a junior college in the community has brought opportunities for cultural advantages to communities in a manner not previously possible. . . . In almost all communities the junior colleges provide a type of research collection which has not hitherto been available to the community.²⁹

The library profession, therefore, finds a tremendous challenge in the junior college. First, the junior college librarian faces demands from the student body, which often consist of first and second year college students with all their needs, plus vocational students with no interest in further college training but with wide needs for library service never the less, plus adults who are returning to college for training they had missed.

Next, the junior college librarian faces demands from his faculty, which in most cases includes both instructors of academic courses with all their divergent interests, and technical education instructors in a wide variety of specialized fields. In addition, the librarian serving a junior college may have requests from the local community to render service relating to books and reading. Surely, if he makes a conscientious effort to organize and operate a library program which supplies the needs of his clientele for readers' services, he will be guaranteed a lifetime free from the boredom of inaction!

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