New Media Facilities

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PHYSICAL QUARTERS DEVOTED TO audio-visual
service in libraries are often makeshift because of their location in old
buildings and/or their secondary status. As a consequence, to write
about them descriptively could be useless. However, when considering
what A-V quarters to recommend, a library consultant is confronted
with drafting an almost equally useless prescription: "Allocate every
square foot that funds will allow, and provide conduit (of sewer pipe
size, if possible) for electrical wiring with outlets placed in the floor,
walls and ceiling every ten feet."

In his recent book on *Planning Academic and Research Library
Buildings*,[1] Keyes Metcalf, a wise elder statesman in the field of li-
brary architecture, quite sensibly devoted some two pages out of
four hundred to audio-visual service areas and, even here, his general
advice was not to accept responsibility for planning such units. Never-
theless, this year hundreds of librarians will participate in planning
new libraries in which they must work for a quarter of a century to
come and, because of both the technological and educational changes
anticipated, they should be helped to get ready to make the best of
a complex, shifting situation.

Unlike the codex book—which was invented a millenium and a
half ago and remained stable for about five hundred years—most
audio-visual material is subject to change in form or format on an
almost annual basis. Users of audio-visual materials are almost as un-
stable in their employment (in an architectural context, their deploy-
ment) of A-V materials. And so, with full knowledge of how ephemeral
such remarks may prove, the writer offers personal, practical, and
very "down-to-earth" advice (most of which is not in books) con-
cerning what, in light of his experience, seems sensible "space and
area" thinking about library service with "newer media." While change

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in communications technology and its increased educational use cause most of the uncertainties in planning A-V facilities, this article confines itself to demands placed by increasing use, and will not attempt either pedagogical or administrative justifications of A-V service as provided by librarians. Suffice it to say, that new media services and their staffing are assigned to libraries often enough to warrant interest and concern on the part of the library profession generally.

To restore some order in the chaos caused by A-V equipment and the space problems encountered in planning library service, the author has chosen to deal with these problems under headings relating to patron use rather than to emphasize differences in variant forms of equipment which the phrase "audio-visual" suggests. In this article, space problems will be discussed as they concern the allocation of space in libraries (1) for *individual* study or service, and (2) for *group* viewing or listening (as well as for exhibits and seminars).

Library use is predominantly on an individual basis, despite public library film showings, stories told in children's rooms or poetry readings held in a college library. While much audio-visual material originates in forms intended for mass consumption, a significant part of what is "published" in various audio-visual formats can be just as effective as information or as an emotional stimulus when addressed to the single student.

Prescriptions for individual study space intended for student viewing and listening have usually been understood in the past to mean requirements for some type of booth having distinct physical isolation and/or resembling a darkened cubicle. This is still true; fortunately, however, it is becoming less so. Actually, current styles in library seating, often designed for one or two persons, allow as much space for listening as do the specialized tables or "booths" used frequently in A-V centers. While viewing films can present special problems, most projectors will accommodate individual use of earphones, and a plain white or neutral wall eight feet away will serve as a satisfactory screen. This is the same amount of space often allowed in designing carrels. The point to remember is that individual viewing and listening activities involving "mass" media can be scattered widely through a library, with little inconvenience or distortion of either book or audio-visual service utility.

To maximize individual use of A-V materials, the purchasing library must buy earphones for use with tape playback machines, record players, projectors, and other audio-visual equipment, and make sure

from the outset that all such equipment is both portable and strong; it must also provide for the maintenance essential to ensure a continuing, as well as quiet, sanitary operation. Those planning a new or refurbished library which is to afford audio-visual service on an individual basis must be certain that special electrical outlets are installed as extensively as overhead lighting to ensure that all areas can be fully used as well as properly illuminated. It is a rule of thumb that the cost of putting in new power outlets after completing or remodeling a building may be ten times that of installation during original construction. All planned uses of library quarters shift and vary over the years, and a free, even lavish, provision of electrical outlets will ensure future flexibility for audio-visual and other needs.

In summary then, the allocation of space similar to that needed for a study carrel, probably 8' × 8', and the installation of adequate electrical outlets in areas which otherwise would be used for stacks or reading rooms are the most that audio-visual service for individual study should require.

In some academic and public library buildings, individual listening booths have been grouped together in banks or clusters. Each booth is equipped separately with earphones so that a central desk or service attendant may play a record or tape desired by any user in any booth. An earlier arrangement was to have an attendant at a central service point who would play a disc by transmitting the sound to a full-volume speaker in a soundproof booth or room where the listener sat. Today, using modern "dial-access" equipment, a listener sitting in a booth can request a lecture or musical performance automatically simply by dialing the proper number or letter code which then activates a remote mechanism to retrieve the proper recording from a reservoir of tapes.

Grouping booths in libraries around a central service area can present both equipment and wiring problems. No architect or librarian should attempt to install such facilities without the benefit of expert consultation. Communications technology is changing so rapidly that generalizations cannot be made as to the most satisfactory arrangement. Of course, some space may be saved when A-V listening facilities are blocked together, but ordinarily this will mean staffing a special station and, thus, an increase in personnel costs.

Traditionally, librarians summon up thoughts of large and small group viewing and listening when thinking of audio-visual service areas. The relatively infrequent use of such space will fret a library

administrator since, inevitably, other areas are often crowded with readers and books; it is true that planning such areas for libraries has too often been done poorly. Too many architects envision group space, especially if it is sizable, as a way to achieve theatrical rather than educational ends.

Therefore, shrewd librarians emphasize and reemphasize to an architect the *educational* importance and use of large group space. Asking for tablet arms on movable chairs will at once alert an architect to the intended use of an area for instruction. Requesting room lighting that will permit reading, even studying, while the room is darkened for projection is another way in which librarians can make their A-V intentions clear. Slanted floors may be justified in some audio-visual presentation areas, but they normally bind the area to a single kind of use. Thus, in most public and college libraries, slanted floors are not recommended since the gains in convenience for A-V showings are small in comparison to gains to be made in flexibility when level floors are specified. For example, having a level floor area will permit a large library room to be used for exhibits or displays and, with only simple rearrangements, for lectures, the screening of motion pictures, and viewing of educational television.

Wherever feasible, large group spaces should be capable of division into smaller spaces by rolling doors or mobile partitions into place. While such areas can actually be made soundproof only in rare instances, they allow fuller deployment of what, without them, would be rarely-used facilities. Also, such room dividers will enable a library to hold several meetings at the same time, or to use part of one area as a short-term storage space without losing or harming the space remaining.

It would be nice if the auditorium in the average public or college library did not demand a special booth to quiet film projector noise. But, unfortunately, motion picture projection is noisy. So one answer here is simply to enclose a projector stand with a special wall so designed as to deaden sound. If the architect will provide a closet to do this, well and good. However, if a fixed enclosure handicaps the flexibility which might be needed to position a screen or projector properly for different locations or sizes of groups, a movable projection "barrier" lined with sound-deadening material should be provided, or else listeners must be asked to ignore the distraction. (The last is a counsel of despair which librarians as well as manufacturers of projectors should not ask of patrons.)

The problem of locating seats for film viewers and a screen or television set (or sets) for maximum visibility is actually not architectural. Only when a space will seat eighty to one hundred persons do the problems of screen size, audio-speaker positioning, and possible installation of a projection booth need to involve the architect. When proper lenses are used, most projectors in general use will throw an image of adequate size in a room which may seat up to one hundred people. However, building plans should specify a ceiling height of at least twelve feet so that a screen or television set may be positioned for good viewing, and so that a projector's throw will clear viewers' heads without obstruction. Speakers should be located at ceiling height or even in the ceiling itself.

The possibility of using a large open space in a library for an exhibit area or "art gallery" was noted above. If the amount of space required has been kept clear of permanent, fixed, specific-purpose A-V paraphernalia, such a service can be provided easily. Bare walls and a clear floor are the primary needs. One useful specification is that a picture rail or slot be provided along the walls of such an area. When not in use, the rail poses no problem. But, if it is available when the area is being used for exhibitions, much time and wall maintenance will be saved. In fact, it would be marked improvement in library halls and in all passages having a clear wall space ten feet or more in length, to specify installation of picture slots. Sooner or later the inevitable makeshift posting of notices, show cards, or signs on such walls will yield eyesores. Providing a picture rail or slot at the start can at the least prevent some damage and at best facilitate optimum effective use of a potential display area.

The storage and security space required to house the various audio-visual media is analogous to "reading rooms." There cannot be (and should not) be one universal standard reading room or mode of shelving; similarly, there cannot be a single design for optimum utilization, storage or security of audio-visual materials. Indeed, it cannot be overemphasized that the search for flexibility, described above in relation to user-facilities, must apply equally to provisions made for storage and security. Too many locked equipment closets create both a nuisance and a delay in service as well as increased cost of use. Whatever neatness and security results from using such facilities almost certainly will not compensate for the loss in flexibility.

Since the average school, public or college library seldom possesses more than one piece of any kind of equipment, one can be rather

casual about both storage and security. As with utilization, the main principle to follow when confronted with a problem of how much of any item should be ordered is to keep from over-specific assignments of space. The sizes of equipment, reels of film, discs, and tapes change so rapidly with technological improvement that precisely designed cupboards and slots can very soon become obsolete.

The large number of breakdowns which occur during A-V presentations contribute to much dissatisfaction with audio-visual library service. Frequently, these breakdowns are due to inadequate user preparation or mismatched equipment. But equipment failure is responsible for the hard core of poor staff performance. Few libraries are able to maintain large repair service units or staff. But some space at least should be provided for checking equipment, storing minor replacement parts, and inspecting films and tapes in order to prevent circulation of damaged material. These and similar maintenance activities are mandatory. An area of 10' × 10' is minimal; an active audio-visual department would require probably twice the space. A repair bench area (or equivalent) having several power outlets and deep shelves (twelve or more) are necessities. As an alternative to transporting equipment to a local repair shop or sending it out of town to a factory, a repair shop will often pay for itself since it will enable a store or travelling service man to do needed repairs on library premises, thereby ensuring added days of equipment availability for A-V service.

From an architectural point of view, the space problems encountered in storing films, tapes, or other projected materials are not unique in the library. Regular library shelving is often adaptable for these materials since they are similar in size to books. Even TV tapes do not pose an unusual problem of storage for a librarian accustomed to shelving large, bound magazines.

However, slides, transparencies, and disc recordings do present special problems. Many sets of slides are sold in boxes to help their handling, and most discs come in attractive albums; both the boxes and album covers, however, are as fragile as a publisher's binding for a novel and usually are not suited to repeated use or long life on a library shelf. Librarians must be on the alert to find more suitable "packaging" for such materials. Furthermore, the basic role of space flexibility dictates that such collections, if they are large, be stored in movable shelving or cupboards which can be reached easily by persons of average height.

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The facilities needed for most non-projected media present another
and different story. Here the old problem of librarians—what to do
with maps and globes—is compounded by the necessity of finding
ways to store flat pictures, cartoons, clippings; models and mock-ups;
specimens; posters, blueprints, charts, graphs, diagrams; felt, flannel,
magnetic and other board materials; and exhibits. Problems of allocat-
ing space and facilities to these materials are numerous and almost
always are rather specialized, depending on user practices, size of col-
lection, and similar local considerations. Map cases have been adjusted
to library use for a long time, and the floor space and strengths they
require are calculated easily. Vertical files pose other problems; cup-
boards for specimens and objects (such as a doll collection) must
usually be custom-made and adapted to the space allotted. Attics and
cellars (if the ever-burgeoning book collection can be kept out, which
is a large "if") can be a boon to the A-V specialist with exhibits on
his hands. In an architect's language, this problem calls for a large
"circulation" or "turn-around" area that, periodically, will be empty.

Since librarians use many book trucks on wheels, the problems of
moving and shipping audio-visual equipment and materials are not
unusual. Of course, mail and receiving rooms should be accessible
from the outside by ramps, as in any well-planned library. Once the
problem of handling materials in the general service area has been
thought through (for example, provision for counters of the same
height as carts used to move projectors and book trucks is vital), re-
ceiving exhibits and other bulky shipments is greatly facilitated, as
are projector or equipment loans to library branches.

At one period or another in their professional lives most librarians
will live in old or marcescent quarters where makeshift or downright
awkward arrangements are unavoidable. The introduction of audio-
visual (or newer media) services into such libraries sometimes, not
always, will strain the long-tested adaptability of even the most ex-
perienced librarian. Since at the base of the newer media are tech-
nologies which change and usually "improve," the shape, size and
special requirements of A-V equipment and materials will, inevitably,
be fluid for an indefinite future. The wise librarian accepts this in-
evitability and, as with other elements of uncertainty in his milieu,
meets the problems posed as standard elements in his over-all re-
sponsibility. At least, this is a "creative" approach. If, as is occasionally
the case, a librarian feels newer media have been foisted on him, poor
service will be virtually certain. But a diffident attitude toward the

physical problems of accommodating new media is not warranted. The problems simply are not as large as all that.

In conclusion, whether new media are viewed negatively in comparison with a librarian's victories over past problems, or are regarded positively in the light of enrichments they may afford, they cannot be kept out of the libraries of today or tomorrow. Proper facilities must be provided, for which simple criteria have now been advanced.

Reference

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