ELEVEN YEARS AGO, Eileen Thornton presented an analysis of cooperation among college libraries. Of financial and other statistics, she had presented, Thornton wrote: “The pertinence of these data to a study of cooperation on the college level is this: staffing is minimal, money so meager that it must go into bread-and-butter materials, and collections often too small for the demands placed upon them. There are outstanding exceptions in every category, but the broad picture is one of small institutions with small libraries, spattered across the map of the country.” She summarized: “Characteristically there are few satisfactory instances of worth-while cooperation among the lesser libraries, at least there are few reported instances of successful cooperation.”

Seven years ago, Helen-Jean Moore wrote on the cooperative efforts of five academic libraries in Pittsburgh: “Each entity is fundamentally concerned with providing for its own students, faculty, and staff, and since these individuals have to use similar sources for their results in knowledge, each of the five libraries is spending a large percentage of its funds yearly to buy exactly the same books, periodicals, and documents as are purchased by the four neighboring institutions and a large percentage of its annual budget to provide parallel services.” From this situation, Moore goes on to describe the positive movement toward cooperation which had been made; so, it astounds one to read in 1967 that, “The Pittsburgh plan apparently floundered when each institution went into more and more areas where library agreements had already been reached.”

Trends in college library cooperation today differ slightly from those of a decade ago. Before attempting to identify these trends, a sketch

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of the academic background which compels pursuit of cooperative solutions to library problems might be useful for establishing a perspective.

The plight of the college library today is apparent—it is riven and driven by supra and collateral, and often conflicting, forces. Most college libraries have lagged in personnel, program and funding even when other components of the college have enjoyed support for growth. Historically, the library has been a minor influence in campus politics and one of the last to benefit from positive analysis in spite of the assistance of faculty committees and countless surveys.

Today, the population explosion couples with the knowledge explosion (and its attendant mushrooming of printed, taped, and recorded information) to accent the already acute situation in college libraries. Demands by administration, faculty, and student body exceed any bounds which even the most handsomely funded and excellently managed college library can hope to meet through solitary effort; consequently, cooperation among college libraries has been a popular topic in recent years as librarians strive to find solutions to the barrages of criticisms fired at them. Even if partially satisfied with general efforts to alter and improve their colleges in a rapidly changing world, most faculties and administrations consistently complain that library administration is deplorable, collections inadequate, and services too few and old-fashioned.

Unfortunately and too frequently, these accusations may be true. Most librarians would agree. Most could find solace as they roam their stacks by murmuring, "I wander, naked and afraid, in a world I never made," for college librarians do not much shape their libraries; college libraries are generally shaped by decisions made elsewhere on campus. Libraries reflect faculty decision and therefore the library is not the master of the faculty, it is the servant. The library does not make college policy; it attempts to serve it. The library problem hinges on college policy or, more frequently, the lack of policy. For most of the past century, regardless of budget, size or location, colleges followed similar patterns: much rote work, many lectures, general reliance on one or two textbooks, and little use of library facilities or collections. Typically, the library holdings were small because college programs were few in number, limited in scope, and lacked financial support.

Suddenly, all of this changed. Smaller and poorer then, the World War II G.I. Bill support lured colleges down primrose paths to bloated
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enrollments, specialization of programs, and modernization of plants. Since then, there has been no surcease from pressures. Sputnik again loosed the strings of federal and private foundation money bags. While colleges still reared and bucked from those golden spurs, foundations with their granting fingers pointed out that man neither began nor will he end concentrated on that tiny land mass which is the sub-continent called Europe; the non-Western world flashed into focus on the college screen.

To compound the difficulties, dual forces exerted influences from below and above: Sputnik triggered programs at the secondary school level which sent hordes of better prepared, more demanding students to college. They required more than old lectures, a textbook, and rote learning; at the same time, graduate schools required greater preparation from their candidates for entrance. To top it all, in the fifties and sixties, the wretched human condition of many Americans (and selected aliens) erupted into prominence and brought support for the social sciences; and today, a trickle of priming support is reaching the arts and humanities. The resultant chaos on campuses is almost overwhelming and in no area is this better demonstrated than in academic libraries.

The proliferation of programs, departments, and courses, the creation of entirely new areas of instruction, and, perhaps the most dramatic and crucial, the efforts to build and to maintain science departments which will attract and hold students and research-oriented faculty—these are obvious examples of developments which require enormous investments of library time, money, and imagination. The more dynamic the college, the greater the effort to remain on top of problems, and the more pronounced becomes the library's lag behind program demands.

Not only has the subject matter changed drastically in some cases—science, for example—but methods have altered and the ship of automation which looms on the horizon, not in many classrooms or libraries yet, nevertheless it performs expensively but adequately in the business offices and is a growing threat to the status quo.

More and more frequently, colleges are permitting ever-increasing numbers of selected undergraduates to pursue individual research projects in all disciplines, research which makes totally unpredictable demands upon the college library. Graduate school techniques and permissiveness have invaded both urban and rustic groves. Meanwhile, back in the library, the gap between the collection and program de-
mands has widened to a seemingly unbridgeable chasm. With rare exceptions, today's college operates as if it were a miniature university. The unvoiced but very real aim of being all things to all men is doomed to failure; consequently, the library can never achieve a satisfactory level of service within its present undefined setting.

Regardless of the degree of excellence attained by a college library, it is hamstrung and buffeted by the well-intentioned goals of administrations, the ill-advised decisions of faculties to add more and more programs and courses, and the whims of transient faculty and student populations. Limited funds are squandered on resources and services which are endlessly duplicated on campus after campus and which stick out like unlovely, useless warts when enthusiasm for the latest idea wanes or the demanding specialist moves on (taking his grant with him) to be replaced by a faculty member whose interests and demands on the library are antipodal.

The solution seems obvious but unattractive: if it is hopeless to attempt to be all things to all men, there must be definition. To define is to limit. To limit is to threaten faculty autonomy. At this point the entire investigation must be terminated, or it is sentenced to dormant life imprisonment while it is turned over to a faculty committee for further study.

More unified than anything else on a college campus is the universal belief that the mismanaged library is the major obstacle to obtaining better faculty, to attracting more and better students, to receiving national acclaim and the flow of gold from taxpayers and foundations, and, in fact, to ending the general blight on the college progress.

Trends in discussions of cooperative venture among college libraries still tend to ignore the causes of college library inadequacies and attempt to solve the unsolvable by group action instead of playing solitaire. Attempts to bring relief to college libraries fall into but a few patterns and are concerned consistently with a limited number of problem areas which may be amendable to cooperative solutions. These areas might be broadly categorized as no more than two—acquisitions and services—and it would be hazardous to draw fixed boundaries separating even these two.

Efforts to streamline and improve seem to involve overlap; nevertheless, both previous and present cooperative ventures concentrate on relatively few types of programs. Library literature indicates a pattern of duplication of cooperative ventures among groups just as duplication of individual library efforts, collections, and services flour-
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ish. Among the frequently attempted solutions are union catalogs, union lists of periodicals and/or serials to facilitate interlibrary loan, non-duplicating acquisition agreements, open-door policies for faculties and/or students, the establishment of central storage centers, the creation of a common research center, and varieties of centralized technical processing.

Legalized and informal associations exist in all parts of the country, e.g., in Kansas, in Oregon, in eastern North Carolina, or as the Associated Mid-Florida Colleges, the Tri-State College Library Cooperative, the Claremont Colleges, the Associated Colleges of the Midwest, the LIBRAS in Illinois, the College Center of the Finger Lakes, and so on. Many of these organizations have existed for several years to serve the total institutions involved and formal effort to spark library cooperation among participants is a comparative afterthought. Spurts of activity in the past few years bear an unquestionable, direct relationship to a federal willingness to consider funding of cooperative library activities.

Because of similarity of efforts, of funding, of goals, and of the level of success attained by the majority of cooperative college library ventures, an examination of only the most prominent should be most fruitful. Honnold Library of the Claremont Colleges group incorporates all phases of cooperation and succeeds to a far greater extent than other efforts for two obvious reasons: the six colleges are for all practical purposes on a single campus and the administrations, faculties, students, and librarians involved accept the irrefutable fact that pooled effort achieves economies of operation, massive collection advantages, and a standard of service that dwarfs any level one of the six colleges could attain by spending its library budget individually. The Honnold Library is in practice a research center serving a university. The Hampshire Inter-Library Center strives for a similar goal but is less used because the supporting institutions are geographically separated (though not by many actual miles) and each institution maintains an extensive separate library. "With the staff established on a firm basis and use constantly rising—noteworthy for a library of 'infrequently used materials'—the main problems seem to be how to maintain financial resources at a level adequate to satisfy the demands of the faculties of the four member-colleges and the decision on the best way to plan future acquisitions programs."

Two other approaches to cooperation have been widely publicized: the Ohio version of comprehensive, automated library service and the
New York State Library facsimile transmission system (dubbed FACTS). FACTS was handsomely funded and fully operable for a reasonable test period. "The conclusion drawn from this was that a conventional interlibrary loan service, operating with a time span of two weeks from request to delivery, would probably be satisfactory for New York." Although the FACTS experiment could not qualify as a college library cooperative effort, the problem of rapid interlibrary loan is common and the "high cost per request filled, which was $62.10," can be accepted as a fairly representative figure by college libraries investigating this avenue for surcease.

The New England Academic Libraries' experiment in centralized processing is not mature enough to indicate its usefulness, economy, or appeal, but should be a definitive operation and may offer new directions as a profession-wide dividend from the Council On Library Resources' substantial investment.

One other cooperative project underway is worth mentioning because of its unique aspects. "Beginning in January of 1969, the Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM) put into operation the first phase of its library cooperation program, a periodical bank. It consists at the outset of a store of some 1500 titles..., microforms being used whenever available. . . . Connection with the member libraries is through the teletypewriter. The desired material will be copied at the bank and mailed to the requesting library on the same day the request is made. . . . Copies of the table of contents of any periodical currently received by the bank will be sent out on standing order in any desired quantity to requesting libraries. The facility is located in the Newberry Library (Chicago) with the main ACM offices." If there are discernible trends in college library cooperative ventures, they appear to be variations on the Claremont Colleges Honnold Library to the degree permitted by geographic separation or an unjustified, act-of-faith pursuit of the answers in the miasmic land of automation. As Eileen Thornton said over ten years ago, there are few worthwhile cooperative projects among lesser libraries. Perhaps an effort to analyze contributions to this lack of spectacular successes might yield reasons for it.

As interlibrary loan based on union lists of periodicals is probably the most widely publicized single activity, examination is in order. Even casual examination quickly reveals that most such lists contain duplicated holdings. Most college libraries individually subscribe to and hold the same titles; therefore, an expensively produced union list
compiled by equals does not provide a key to the extensive range of
periodicals required by today's college programs. College libraries,
therefore, should attempt to attract at least one major research library
into their cooperating organization. As cooperation is a two-way street,
consorting libraries may encounter reluctance unless the research li-
brary is required to extend its services by some legal obligation. The
Pittsburgh plan for non-duplicating acquisitions exemplifies the road-
block: colleges require basic collections on campus to serve all disci-
plines, according to prevailing concepts.

FACTS demonstrated two things clearly: 1) instantaneous availa-
bility is a myth which has been dominating researchers who use
libraries and 2) the cost of automation prohibits its use by libraries
which have insufficient funds even for standard operations and acqui-
sitions on-campus.

Trends in cooperation today do not indicate any revolutionary or
imaginative approaches. The lack of astonishing successes does sug-
gest a possibility to pursue. Communication is vital, between librarians
and administrators, faculties, other librarians, and not least, students.
If the idea persists that everyone on campus is entitled to the instan-
taneous availability of every phrase ever recorded, if every transient
faculty member is permitted the freedom to squander funds on a
pinpoint of interest in an estoeric area, if faculties continue to attempt
by proliferation to convert all colleges into miniature universities, then
college librarians face a dismal future of compounded frustrations.

To avoid the pitfall of irrelevant collections where a library has
thousands of volumes but seldom the one which is needed, faculties
must be educated to a policy of pertinent purchases. Everyone must
accept the reality that a student can learn the techniques of research
just as well from fifty pertinent books on the shelf as he can from that
obscure title held only by the Huntington Library. A professor who
publishes one paper a decade must settle for a two-week lag in ob-
taining that interlibrary loan item. Last, but certainly not least, ad-
ministrations will be the first to understand, authorize, and support
any cooperative library enterprise which holds promise of more serv-
ice for the dollar spent.

To return to the ACM periodical bank—as an example of excellent
communications, it is not revolutionary but it is unique. The most
unique aspect of it is that ten college presidents, administrations,
boards, librarians, and faculties endorsed the idea enthusiastically and
comparatively quickly. The ACM periodical bank incorporates fea-

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tures of acquisitions, interlibrary loan, rapid transmission, massive increase in service, and, not only requires no budget increase but holds promise of being an income-generating enterprise. Communication and support on the home campus is of paramount importance to the success of a cooperative library venture.

In summary, no new trends in cooperative college library ventures were discernible in a search of the literature and in a six-month, on-site (July-December 1967) personal investigation of publicized cooperative organizations; the familiar areas and efforts were proliferating as a reaction to the possibility of obtaining funding; and some sophisticated automation hardware was being tested. The conclusion is that only if a goal is defined can a librarian take appropriate steps to reach it. Only Stephen Leacock’s demented character could get on his horse and ride off in all directions simultaneously.

References

2. Ibid., p. 324.
4. Ibid., pp. 554-561.
8. Ibid., p. 1564.