Community Use of Academic Libraries

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We are increasingly involved in a growing non-Yale community. The library is rapidly finding itself in the position of the man who is supporting two families with the wages from a job barely sufficient for one. The statistics for this past year detail the rising number of non-Yale users, within the Yale Libraries as well as through interlibrary resource sharing. The Library has actively cooperated in the library affairs of the State. ... Demands from the outside continue, encouraged by the University's open-door policy. Our desire is to cooperate to the fullest extent possible, but our means are already overextended. In concert with the Library, the University must define the role of the Yale University Library in both New Haven and the State.¹

The foregoing description of a great university library's involvement in sharing campus library resources with a growing non-campus clientele can be multiplied a hundredfold by college and university librarians all over America. There is considerable evidence that undergraduate students, and especially those from colleges whose libraries are woefully inadequate, are seeking library materials wherever they can find them. The public librarians on Long Island report that college students will drive thirty miles or more and raid public library collections for materials to support their studies.

Shank, in his survey of access to scientific and technical information in the metropolitan New York City area, supports this view by indicating that "individual users, particularly undergraduate students, wander far throughout the region to use library resources. Quite apparently their use is dictated largely by convenience of location of library facilities to their homes and jobs. The more difficult the problem and the more serious the need, the more the users turns to the major

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scientific collections in the region. Little attention seems to be paid to
the rules by these people for access to the libraries.”

In spite of the heavy burden placed on academic libraries by com-
munity users who seek unrestricted access to library collections, the
first national survey of community use of academic libraries reveals
that academic libraries are fairly liberal, for “94 per cent of the 783
libraries, permit to a degree some in-building use of library materials
by persons who are unaffiliated with the institutions. Eighty-five per
cent . . . said that they extend circulation privileges.”

Since the survey referred to above was taken during the fall of
1965, there is mounting evidence that the growing demands by “outs-
siders” to use neighboring academic libraries are creating grave prob-
lems especially for college libraries that are unable, in some instances,
to seat a sizable number of their own students and faculty. The pres-
bure became so acute in the Chicago area that a conference was held
to consider the problem of students using libraries other than those
in the institutions of higher education in which they are enrolled.

Community use of academic libraries is a problem for the university
library as well as the college library, as noted in the report of the Yale
University librarian. In this paper, however, the writer will examine
certain pressures which have forced undergraduates to seek library
materials from other colleges; and consideration will be given to these
and other reasons for an increasing number of outside users of college
libraries. In addition, he will consider what might be done to alleviate
the problem.

There is more than a tangential relationship between the “knowl-
edge explosion” and the “publication explosion.” There is more than
what may be called an “interface.” Between the two there is a very
high degree of interpenetration, especially when one becomes aware of
the fact that there is an annual worldwide publication of 400,000 books
and 35,000 scientific journals with over 1.5 million articles. No one li-
brary will be able to acquire this enormous output from the presses
of the world.

In most areas in the United States, there are no schemes or plans
to provide for the comprehensive coverage of materials in the various
subject fields. Many college libraries continue to develop their acqui-
sitions programs in isolation from one another. While limited book
budgets are purchasing only a portion of the vast publishing output,
there is very little planning for joint acquisitions programs which will
bring into a region or an area a wide range of resources, which could
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provide for full access to comprehensive collections in a larger number of college libraries.

While collection building is still being pursued in isolation from college to college, the library needs of college students are increasing because of changes in the curriculum. Broader courses of study, many of which are interdisciplinary, demand contemporary materials as well as retrospective sources. Students must read on a much wider scale; therefore, the library needs of undergraduates are extensive, because of changing curriculum patterns. Thus it is imperative that college libraries possess a wide range of materials or access to some reservoir to procure these materials.

Library requests from undergraduates show that they use a large volume of periodical titles as well as monographs. There are heavy demands for periodical literature in the humanities, social sciences, and the sciences, with a slightly higher demand in the sciences.

It is in the area of science periodical literature that most college libraries possess little strength. The most persuasive proof to support this assertion may be found in the words of J. L. Wood of Chemical Abstract Service. He writes:

the actual availability of the abstracted and indexed publications to our users has long concerned CAS. When CAS analyzed the library receipts data collected from 334 libraries for the 1961 list it was surprising to learn that 179 U.S. and 32 foreign libraries subscribed to less than 1,000 of the 9,734 abstracted journals. Only 79 U.S. and 11 foreign libraries had receipts ranging from 1,000 to 2,499. Twenty-six U.S. and 1 foreign library had receipts ranging from 2,500 to 3,999 and only 2 U.S. and 1 foreign library fell in to the 4,000-5,300 category. Even the collective holdings of all of the 334 libraries totaled only 9,078 titles or 93.3% of the total.

In order to gain a better insight to the availability of these abstracted publications, we looked at the combined holdings in three U.S. metropolitan areas. Collectively the 16 participating libraries in the metropolitan New York area only held 56% of the abstracted journals. San Francisco with 7 participating libraries had only 51.9%, and Detroit with 5 participating libraries had only 34.3%. In the best situation, New York, only slightly over half of the abstracted journals were locally available.5

We must keep in mind that the preceding description of inadequacy in the coverage of periodical literature is in only one of the sciences. If the metropolitan areas of the United States are found
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wanting, then it is quite evident that the colleges of this country, that are for the most part scattered around in small towns, are poverty stricken in terms of scientific journal literature. The limited journal holdings of college libraries makes it mandatory for undergraduates to seek help at neighboring institutions.

Pressures of expanding and increasing student enrollment are part of the reasons for the demand to use the libraries of other institutions. Unfortunately, book budgets have not kept pace with the growing enrollment and the concomitant demands placed on the library for resources. In another budget category, it becomes crystal clear that there is little or no provision to provide budgets to enable libraries to extend their library hours. Consequently, undergraduates make use of other college libraries, because their libraries are not open a sufficient number of hours.

Another area of growing concern encompassing the motives of undergraduates in using the libraries of institutions with which they are unaffiliated stems from the fact that college professors on a number of campuses give assignments even though they are aware that their college libraries are unable to provide the resources. Many of these professors’ modus operandi seems to be predicated on the assumption that the United States Constitution guarantees access to library materials in any library in the country. If this kind of assignment continues, it goes without saying that this problem will become aggravated before solutions are effected.

On the other hand, and related to the former, is the stark realization that faculty members make massive assignments and are not aware that their institutions’ libraries cannot supply the materials. Too many faculty members in colleges cull their reading assignments from bibliographies in textbooks and from syllabi from favorite courses they had in graduate schools rather than making a judicious selection of materials available in the card catalogs of their college libraries.

The metropolitan areas of the country now account for approximately 70 percent of the population. There has been a continuing growth and development of new collegiate institutions in metropolitan areas. These newly emerging institutions do not have libraries to support their curricular needs. In short, the academic programs of these “have-not institutions” go beyond what their meager libraries can sustain. As a result, students from the have-not metropolitan institutions knock on the library doors of the older and prestigious institutions of these areas for library service.
Most students show a considerable disregard of the fact that no affiliation exists with the institution that possesses the library material they need or can use. The pragmatic approach taken by these students is to use libraries most convenient to them rather than return to their college library in the evening and on weekends.

An example of a college library that has a community use commitment and lends liberally to its neighboring community is reflected in this account:

The relationship of the college library to external communities is also of consequence to its campus relationships. These external communities are bounded on the one extreme by borrowers who are serviced on a national scale through inter-library loans, and on the other by borrowers who live nearby. The prominent place of the library's holdings in the Union Library Catalogue of Pennsylvania perhaps leads to an unusually large number of the loans to the first group, while the presence of two community colleges and the establishment of an extension campus of Pennsylvania State University in the area—in addition to the requirements of neighboring established colleges—strongly indicates a growth in the second group. . . Last year, off campus borrowers who came to the library accounted for one-third of the circulation of books from the library's stacks.8

There is also a growing demand on college libraries to supply materials for the community person who is upgrading himself through various continuing education programs. In too many instances universities offer extension courses and make no provision for library service. Consequently, individuals who are enrolled in the courses flock to the nearest college library for service. By and large, if this person is a local teacher, an alumnus, a member of the clergy, or a local resident, and if he can identify himself, library service will be extended.

We are living in an age, Gardner reminds us, where we must "educate for an accelerating rate of change,"7 therefore, thousands of professional citizens who must stay abreast of new developments in their fields must renew themselves through formal adult education courses or bear the burden of educating themselves. Thus, in the years ahead, college libraries are expected to supply a vast array of library materials for the educated citizen, who may not be affiliated with their institutions.

Although the college library's primary mission is to serve its students and faculty, it must begin to coordinate its resources with growth and development of other institutions in its immediate region in order to
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support persons who are pursuing their own education. Coordination and cooperation with the public library are essential because a large number of adults are enrolled in continuing education programs which constitute, for the most part, one or two courses a semester. In too many instances, these part-time adult students very seldom use library facilities of the college. Hence, they depend primarily on public library resources to sustain and support their studies. In view of this fact, it is imperative that college librarians apprise public librarians of the nature of these courses, so that these materials will be available in the public library.

The foregoing admonition is not intended to convey the impression that the college library does not have any responsibility to part-time adult students. The truth of the matter is that people who are working full-time or who have a minimum amount of time to spend in the library prefer the close proximity of public library facilities and rarely return to the academic facility if it is located miles away. Since most public libraries are unable to offer adequate library service to the serious research library user, we find that this person crowds out the college library facility. The only viable solution seems to be the encouragement of cooperative efforts between the public library and the college library in order to meet the needs of the serious part-time adult student. One excellent example of cooperative efforts between various types of libraries which include the public library and the college library is New York State’s 3Rs Program.*

Another type of unassociated or extramural college library borrower is the serious researcher who no longer pursues formal study; he is a writer, artist, doctor, lawyer, scientist, or poet who may live within proximity of the college library. Usually, this person needs library materials for his professional work, his research, or for speech purposes. Many college librarians report that these people turn to the local college library before they seek assistance from the local public library. They are granted in-building use of the materials and in most cases circulation privileges are extended, if materials are not on reserve. There is a respected body of opinion which believes that if the academic library serves these citizens, it will thwart the development of the public library. There is some justification in this belief; but if there is coordination of the total library resources of a region, with adequate safeguards which will not stymie public library development, perhaps there is little cause for concern.

How can we insure access to library materials, and, at the same time, protect the college library’s primary clientele—its faculty and students? The National Advisory Commission on Libraries’ report indicates that “the requirements for effective library and information...
access for students, scholars, and practitioners in various disciplinary areas and at various levels display sharp and complex variations."

The Commission also suggests that "it is apparent that public, school, and academic libraries will all be obligated to change many of their methods of work, their interrelationships, and some of their roles and objectives in the years ahead." Through new interrelationships, which, in all probability will be in the form of regional cooperative library programs, college libraries can become a part of the solution for providing ease of access to research library materials.

Community use of academic libraries will increase rather than diminish so it behooves college librarians to cultivate the cooperative attitude and develop cooperative library programs among various types of libraries. What kind of cooperative programs should be developed?

To insure a wide range of materials in a wide variety of subject fields in a region, a cooperative acquisitions program which will serve the total research library needs of the area is a necessity. Union lists of serials will help prevent the duplication of serial titles in the region, thereby making it possible for a larger number of different titles to be collected by all of the area libraries. A joint storage center for lesser used materials would certainly ease shortage of library space in all types of libraries. These three cooperative projects listed above by no means exhaust all of the possibilities; they represent only a beginning. The institution of these three programs would remove the isolation of libraries in a region and also would enable the service of all of the libraries in a district or region to be extended and improved even further. Eventually, cooperative programs would provide effective access and unrestricted access to all the library holdings of a region by all citizens who need research materials.

One note of caution must be sounded for library cooperation. Each library in a cooperative program has the obligation to provide basic library service to its own clientele. The cooperative scheme as outlined above is to provide resources collectively that one institution is not able to do on its own. A cooperative program alone will not solve the pressures for community use of academic libraries. A cooperative scheme only assures quick and easy access to research library service, which the individual college library is unable to do alone.

It should also be emphasized that if every college library in America on a certain date decides to give service to all community users after having joined a cooperative program, there are still unresolved questions. The first question that must be defined is, who is the community
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user? Secondly, what is effective and easy access to college library resources? Thirdly, what do we mean by access—on-site use or interlibrary loan? How do we justify the fact that the material is on loan to a community borrower when a campus borrower is demanding the same material? These are thorny questions and they may not be answered until in the words of the National Advisory Commission's report, "What we know today by the term 'interlibrary cooperation' will be superseded by a much more fluid pattern of providing access to distant users without preventing concurrent access by local users." 12

The college library's role to serve its primary constituency—its officers of instruction, faculty, and students—is directly challenged by the emerging library networks and national informational systems. Although college libraries have never had a sacred obligation to serve the general public, historically, they have contributed to the larger library community through interlibrary loan and, to a degree, on-site use of materials. It appears then that a large number of college libraries will be ready to join the emerging national informational system. Those that have not experienced open access policies must of necessity begin to plan for limited access programs, which, after providing adequate safeguards, will put their resources at the disposal of regional and national networks.

Finally, it is clear that college libraries cannot ignore the community use of their libraries, for if America is to have a real national informational system, and if college libraries are to benefit from this system, it is equally clear that college libraries must be consistent and equally share their resources. The issue is not whether to serve community users of academic libraries, but which community users to serve and how to keep service in balance in order not to dilute service to the academic library's primary constituency. This can be consummated, but, if it is to be successful, research and great creative effort are demanded. It is at the peril of our hopes and dreams for a national informational system that college librarians seek a return to the college library functioning in isolation.

References


July, 1969
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11. Ibid., p. 5.

12. Ibid., p. 40.