College Library Standards

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The college librarian who must discharge his professional responsibilities within the framework of an academic institution is dependent upon the level of support he receives from the college administration for the implementation of the library programs he plans. The availability of clear and authoritative standards setting forth the specific limits of acceptable library practice and support may mean the difference to the librarian between professional fulfillment and frustration. It is not surprising that for more than forty years college librarians have shown a lively interest in the search for viable college library standards. In the late 1920s library practitioners in many small colleges desperately needed a clear goal of excellence toward which their institutions could strive and a statement of that goal and the means to achieve it in quantitative terms which they could use with their administrations. Until 1929 the statement of what a college library should ideally be, both in qualitative and quantitative terms, had to be sought in the writings of leading academic librarians.

The framing and implementation of college library standards has been the concern not only of the professional associations, the American Library Association and its division, the Association of College and Research Libraries, but also of funding bodies, accrediting associations and state education departments. This article provides an historical background for the present ALA “Standards for College Libraries” which were adopted in 1959. It identifies specific needs for revision of the standards in light of current trends in academic librarianship and library technology. It discusses more recent activity in standards development and finally suggests a direction that might be taken in the continuing effort to achieve a viable statement.

Since it is characteristic of mature professions to set the qualifications for entrance, it is not surprising that the self-conscious young profession of librarianship should have produced in 1927 and 1928 a series

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of position classifications with examples of typical tasks and qualifications. In 1927 the report of the ALA Committee on Classification of Library Personnel, entitled Proposed Classifications and Compensation Plans for Library Positions, was published by the Bureau of Public Administration, Washington, D.C. The following year a subcommittee of university and college librarians under the chairmanship of Charles H. Brown brought in a report intended to replace the original schedule applying to college and university library positions. The subcommittee report was accepted by the parent committee and in 1929 the ALA council unanimously adopted the whole report as amended.¹

The rationale for the specifications set forth in the report sounds familiar to the librarian of the 1970s. The introductory pages note that during the past twenty-five years college libraries have grown greatly in importance owing to the increase in printed resources, changed methods of instruction and the rapid development of research. Since library organization had not kept pace with these other changes, the most urgent need of academic libraries at that period was for the greater use of qualified professional personnel. The document defines eight classes of academic libraries based upon their total expenditures and for each class presents a typical budget with a schedule of professional positions with qualifications and salaries, a figure for student and clerical help and an amount for books, periodicals and binding. There was no squeamishness here regarding the use of quantitative standards.

The method used in compiling the specifications was to obtain a subjective rating of approximately 100 college and university libraries from a group of experts. It was found that libraries whose services were considered above average had in almost every case income equal to or in excess of $25 per student and the library income was also over 4 percent of the total income of the institution. The committee therefore adopted the double standard as a condition of good college library service.

The objective of the classification was not only to guide college and university administrators but also to give those who wished to enter the academic library field a statement of qualifications necessary for the higher positions. Each job description carried the appropriate faculty rank and in general the qualifications were intended to be the equivalents of the qualifications for the corresponding grades on the teaching faculty.

The College and Reference Section Yearbook for 1930, published by the College and Reference Section of the ALA presented a summary of

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"Suggestions for Minimum College Library Standards." These widely ranging standards were offered by accrediting associations and by a number of individuals with acknowledged expertise in academic libraries. They covered library income, book stock, annual appropriations for books and other factors. The figures were in most cases related to the number of students, the number of faculty or the total income of the institution. There was some consensus that the standards should be developmental in nature and should rise to higher levels as the prosperity and/or size of the institution increased.

In the fall of 1928 the Carnegie Corporation established an Advisory Group on College Libraries, whose function it was to recommend grants-in-aid to the libraries. Since the group discovered there were no accepted standards for college libraries it prepared a set of its own. These standards were published by the corporation in a pamphlet describing the work of the group, William Warner Bishop, in Carnegie Corporation and College Libraries, 1929-1938, reprints the standards and regrets that they did not receive greater publicity in the educational world. The standards, allowing for their brevity, are excellent. Although they contain only one quantitative measure, recommending seats for at least one-fourth of the student body, they are explicit enough to serve as a helpful guide to administrators and librarians. The twenty-one standards cover buildings, staff, book collections, classification and cataloging, and training in the use of the library. Throughout they demonstrate the result of many years' close association with college libraries. According to the "Suggestions for Minimum College Library Standards," the lowest minima were those suggested by the accrediting associations—the Association of American Universities, the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools of the Middle States and Maryland, the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools of the Southern States and the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. Each of these associations used the minimum of 8,000 volumes.

Before 1934 the North Central Association merely required a college library to be professionally administered, with a minimum collection of 8,000 volumes and an expenditure of at least $5 per student. In 1934, following a study made for its Committee on the Revision of Standards of the Commission on Higher Institutions, the association adopted new criteria. The basic assumptions of the study were: (1) an effective college must have a good library and (2) the functions of the college
library should be defined entirely by the educational program of the institution.

The analysis resulted in the identification of six measures for the educational value of the college library: (1) the number of general reference books held by the library that were contained on a checklist of selected titles; (2) the number of periodicals currently subscribed to from a checklist of periodicals preferred by college libraries; (3) the average annual expenditure for books and periodicals during the preceding five years; (4) the annual expenditure for library salaries, weighted for the size of the enrollment; (5) the average annual number of free loans per student; and (6) the average annual number of loans to faculty members.

The list used in applying the first measure was the Shaw List of Books for College Libraries, published in 1931, from which a checking sample of reference titles was drawn. To support the second measure Eugene Hilton compiled a list of periodicals for the North Central Association based on the votes of teaching faculty as to the relative importance of various journals for their work. The third and fourth measures on the financial support of the library made it possible to describe any institution in terms of its relative standing among comparable colleges. Aaron Brumbaugh, then secretary of the North Central Association, stated in 1940 that the greater emphasis on the quality of an institution's program in terms of its purposes had called for types of appraisal that would be more flexible than the old criteria. More data of a quantitative nature were actually requested than previously, but these data were to be interpreted in relation to various intangible and nonstatistical factors.

In February 1943 the ALA Council adopted a new set of classification and pay plans for college libraries as prepared by the Subcommittee on Budgets, Compensation and Schemes of Services for Libraries Connected with Universities, Colleges and Teacher Training Institutions of the ALA Salaries, Staff, and Tenure Board. The membership of the subcommittee was identical with that of an ACRL Committee on Budgets, Compensation and Schemes of Service. The volume of the classification and pay plans covering degree-conferring four-year institutions presents a much more extensive and sophisticated plan than its forerunner of 1929.

The publication includes only those standards which affect the library personnel, that is, those which were needed to determine the size, organization, qualifications and compensation of the staff. It was...
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proposed in 1940 to include other material to make the project more useful for the self-evaluation of a library: items about the building, qualitative appraisal of book stock and special service factors. The plans to enlarge the scope of the program were dropped because of the entrance of the country into World War II. Therefore, in addition to standards of staff organization, qualifications and salaries, the only other personnel standards the document includes are for hours of work, vacations, leaves, pensions and annual salary budget. Also included are standards for size of book collection, annual book budget and hours of use. It is emphasized that these are in all cases minimum standards and that the document is to be used for self-evaluation of libraries and not for purposes of accrediting.

The subcommittee based its work on the study of classification and pay plans which related to libraries and upon job analyses undertaken by approximately thirty-nine cooperating libraries. Constant reliance was placed upon the advice of librarians and educators in preparation of the plans. They are based, as were the plans of 1929, on the library's service load. However, the 1943 plans make use of a weighted service unit formula counting each underclass student as one unit, each upper-class student as two units, each honors student as three units, each graduate student as four units, and each faculty member as five units.

Nine grades of professional service have been set up for college libraries. Educational qualifications, including both professional training and library experience, provide a series of equivalents. The minimum requirement of grade 1 of the professional service is graduation from an accredited college or university, including one year of training in a library school accredited by ALA, or equivalent qualifications. Since all professional staff members contribute to the educational program of the institution, they are considered to be of an academic rank corresponding to the teaching faculty.

The minimum book collection should be fifty books for each unit of the first 800 units of the library's service load; twenty-five books for each of the next 700 units; fifteen books for each of the next 1,500 units, five books for each unit thereafter. In no case should a college library have fewer than 40,000 volumes.

Minimum standards for the annual salary budget and the annual book budget are both defined in terms of the average annual expenditures for the preceding five years and are based on the library's service load. As the salary schedules suggested, these standards are of historical interest only. It is the use of definite dollar amounts that gives such

At the time of the ALA Annual Conference in 1957, the board of directors of ACRL instructed its Committee on Standards under the chairmanship of Felix E. Hirsch to prepare a new standards document for college libraries. The committee proceeded in such a way as to secure membership participation and consequently a high degree of membership acceptance. The committee consulted with many leading academic librarians, with the executive secretaries of the regional accrediting associations and with a group of college presidents. In January 1959 the ACRL board of directors approved the document comprising the new standards.

The standards were regarded by the formulating committee as a guide for the 1960s. The world of the academic library was changing so fast that in 1958 the committee assumed that substantial revision of the document would be necessary in another decade.

The document is the first comprehensive guide for the evaluation of college libraries, embodying in less than six pages the compelling factors in good college library administration. The underlying principles are presented with such clarity as to give confidence to the librarian engaged in a self-evaluation of his library and understanding to the college administration and faculty.

Because the standards were to be of practical value in raising the quality of college libraries, quantitative measures of adequacy are included. College librarianship has an objective data base in the statistics regularly collected by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Pooled professional judgment working with these data has produced reasonable standards for the two most significant factors, the annual amount spent for the library expressed as a percentage of expenditures for all educational and general purposes, and the number of volumes in the collection.

The justification for the inclusion of these measures in the ALA Standards for College Libraries lies in the use made of them. The Higher Education Act of 1965, Title II, marked the beginning of a great national effort to upgrade the collections of college libraries. Had the quantitative ALA standards not been available to define the dimensions of deficiency, American college librarianship would have been shame-
fully unprepared to assume its role in the general educational endeavor.

The overview of the provisions of the 1959 document which follows is intended to place them in the continuity of professional thinking from the late 1920s to the present and to discover where the standards now need revision. The document covers functions, structure and government, budget, staff, collections, building, the evaluation of library service and interlibrary cooperation.

The section on the functions of the college library goes beyond the traditional support to the college program and stresses that the library has a humane purpose of its own, to present the heritage of Western and Eastern thought. In its further prescription that the library should endeavor to meet the legitimate demands of all its patrons, should stimulate the use of its resources, and should play a role in the community and in the world of scholarship beyond the campus, the document presages the independent functions claimed for today's information centers. This essentially modern section ends with the compelling statement that the standards presented in the document must always be interpreted in the light of the objectives and needs of the individual institution.

The "structure and government" portion of the document calls for the responsibility of the librarian directly to the president and for his or her membership on the curriculum committee. It recommends an advisory faculty library committee and a student library committee for the purpose of better liaison with the student body. The internal organization of the library is viewed strictly as a hierarchal structure in which the lines of authority should be clear and the channels of communication well defined and generally understood. The librarian responsible for the administration of the library should seek the advice of his or her staff on important matters of policy and procedure.

This section will need revision especially in light of the trend within higher education and academic librarianship toward democratization of the policymaking function. This trend has affected students, teaching faculty and library staffs alike. Moreover, while the academic department as a pattern for college library organization may not have gained enough acceptance to become a realistic standard, it should be recognized as an acceptable alternative. With the increasing complexity of college administration, many librarians would approve responsibility of the librarian either to the college president or to the head of the academic program.
The budget section sets the normal minimum of 5 percent of the total educational and general budget for the support of the kind of library program outlined in the standards. For the better understanding of college administrators, the factors which influence the budgetary needs of the library are concisely stated. A modern revision of the standards should include as additions to the list of factors, the research activities of the institution and its faculty and the adequacy and accessibility of other library collections available to the college under some interlibrary agreement.

Standards for staff include the minimum number of professional librarians required for effective service, the use of supporting personnel, the qualifications and status of the professional staff and their place in the instructional program of the institution. A minimum of three professional librarians, the chief librarian and the staff members responsible for readers services and technical processes is called for. An adequate nonprofessional staff is required. The ratio of professional to nonprofessional staff is not expressed quantitatively, but is sensibly suggested by the dictum that professional staff members should not spend their time in work of an essentially clerical nature. In recent years the shortage of professional personnel and the rapid development of centralized cataloging have led many libraries, as staff vacancies have occurred, to the use of supporting personnel in technical services positions formerly filled by professionals. New classes of paraprofessional positions in other library areas have been defined. Some recognition of these forces should be made in a revision of the standards.

The document calls for full faculty status for the professional librarians, including the same salary schedule as for the teaching members of the faculty, tenure, sick leave, liberal vacations, an adequate retirement plan and sabbaticals. Librarians have a corresponding obligation to do graduate work in such areas as would contribute to their effectiveness. In 1959 this statement on faculty status was in the nature of a goal, rather than a standard. However, in the intervening years, the drive for academic recognition of librarians has been proceeding steadily and has been widely achieved in at least some measure. Dramatic focus was given to the movement by the fight for faculty status of the librarians in California state institutions of higher education, a struggle in which they sought the support of the ALA. This event led the ACRL to the conclusion that there was need for a new, separate statement of college and university librarians' status which would have a fresh impact on the academic community.
At the Dallas Conference of the ALA in 1971, an ACRL membership meeting received a proposal of its Academic Status Committee "Standards for Faculty Status for College and University Librarians." This document goes far beyond the 1959 standards statement reflecting both the increasing professionalization of librarianship and insistence on the academic nature of librarians' work. One provision calls for self-determination in the conduct of professional responsibilities and another calls for the adoption by libraries of an academic form of governance. The members present at the meeting failed to agree on only one part of the proposal, the education standard. This controversial statement sets two master's degrees, one in librarianship and one in a relevant subject field, as the minimum requirement for tenure for all librarians appointed after its adoption. After lengthy discussion, a motion was passed to accept the document omitting the education standard altogether, as a temporary measure until further discussion could be held with the American Association of University Professors, the Association of American Colleges and other professional and educational organizations. Since setting educational requirements is the normal business of a professional association, the failure to pass an education standard is both disheartening and embarrassing.

The well-expressed section in the 1959 standards on the principles of building the books and periodicals collection is supplemented by bibliographical footnotes listing titles against which the library holdings may be checked as a reliable measure of their quality. The titles have now been superseded and should be replaced by similar, up-to-date material. Since the standards were compiled before the advent of Choice and library profile-based, commercial blanket order plans, a caution should perhaps be added that the librarian and members of the faculty not relinquish too far their book selection responsibility.

The document notes five major factors determining the size of the library collections: (1) the extent and nature of the curriculum; (2) the number and character of graduate programs; (3) the methods of instruction; (4) the size of the undergraduate and graduate student body; and (5) the need of the faculty for more advanced materials which cannot be met conveniently by the use of research libraries in the area. Quantitative standards are suggested based on an analysis of small college library statistics, providing yet another instance of the judgment of academic library experts working from objective data. The minimum standard calls for no fewer than 50,000 carefully chosen volumes, with a steady rate of growth. The rate of growth may slow down
when the number of volumes reaches approximately 300,000. The document suggests as a convenient guide: up to 600 students, 50,000 volumes; for every additional 200 students, 10,000 volumes. These minimal figures have been the basis for the award of grants under the Higher Education Act, Title II A.

Verner Clapp and Robert Jordan of the Council on Library Resources, writing in College & Research Libraries in September 1965, challenged the quantitative figures for library collections in the “Standards for College Libraries” as merely reflecting the accidentals of college library statistics. They presented a new formula which they had developed for their own use, taking into separate account the principal factors which affect the requirements for books in connection with academic programs. Clapp and Jordan’s method was to count titles on various basic general academic and subject lists and use the count to construct their formula for estimating the size for minimal adequacy of the collections of senior college and university libraries. A certain number of volumes was to be added to a basic undergraduate collection of 50,750 volumes for each faculty member, each student, each undergraduate in an honors or independent study program, each field of undergraduate concentration, each field of graduate concentration (master’s work), and for universities, each field of graduate concentration (doctoral work). The authors’ method of breaking their estimate down into component parts gives an air of conviction to the whole. More important, their count of volumes in the basic bibliographies demonstrates that a college library cannot support the educational program without a sufficient number of volumes.

A final paragraph in the ALA standards section on book and periodical collections concerns the organization of the library’s collections for use. In view of the National Program for Acquisitions and Cataloging made possible by the Higher Education Act of 1965 and of Cataloging in Print, college librarians should be enjoined to make full use of the centralized cataloging service of the Library of Congress rather than to spend funds in the perpetuation of local differences of whatever seeming excellence.

The section on “audiovisual materials” needs strengthening in light of the trend toward college libraries as complete information resources centers. Reference might be made to the forward-looking statement in the Regents of the University of the State of New York planning bulletin Education beyond High School regarding the role of the library among delivery systems for the teaching/learning process. The ACRL
Audiovisual Committee has prepared a draft of "Guidelines for the Organization and Administration of Audiovisual Materials" which was to be available in preliminary form by the ALA Midwinter meeting in January 1972. The work of the committee under the chairmanship of Herman Totten will presumably furnish important relevant material for the college library standards.

Building standards should now call for provision of programmed instruction and for possible installation of computer terminals. It has been suggested to library building planners that use of the various microforms, which require space for readers and reading machines as well as for storage, results not so much in a saving of space as in a different use of space. The revised standards should emphasize the need for flexibility in library buildings.

The standard of providing seats for at least one-third of the student body seems inadequate today. The document itself suggests that the changing concept of the role of the library in the academic community may require an upward revision. Another operative factor should be noted: in-house service should be given by the college library to persons living in the geographic community.

The standards lay proper emphasis on the evaluation of library service and on the difficulty inherent in such an evaluation. Of the various ways suggested to measure the success of library activities, one can question the theory that improvement in library service to students can be measured by an upward trend over a considerable period of time in the per capita figures of books on regular loan to students. Both the extensive use of paperback books which students buy in preference to borrowing library books and the trend toward longer periods of loan have reduced the reliability of this measure.

The final section on interlibrary cooperation provides a surprisingly fresh-sounding statement regarding the planned pooling of resources and cooperation among libraries for reference service, the latter anticipating the development of library networks. However, the standards antedated the acquisitions and cataloging consortia which have often sprung to the lure of government subsidy and these developments should be noted. The librarian's responsibility for determining which materials must be in the college's own library and which may be used on a shared basis should continue to be emphasized as in the 1959 standards.

No apology is offered for this pragmatic treatment of college library standards. The ALA "Standards for College Libraries" were meant
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above all to be useful to the librarian, to the college administration, to
the budget-approving authority. In its combination of qualitative and
quantitative measures the document provides the necessary base upon
which the effect of existing variables in individual institutions may be
calculated.

The revision required is the result of a normal aging process acceler-
ated by the rapidity of change within the academic and library worlds
during the last decade. However these revisions are made and whether
or not the present document remains distinguishable within the new
standards, it is hoped that the clarity, dignity and conciseness of ex-
pression which characterize the 1959 standards will be maintained.

In 1968 the ACRL Committee on Standards and Accreditation began
work on a revision of the ALA "Standards for College Libraries"
through an ad hoc committee under the chairmanship of Stanley Mc-
Elderry. By November 1970 the ad hoc committee had prepared an en-
tirely new statement which was approved by the parent committee for
distribution in January 1971. In the following months, Norman Tanis,
chairman of the ACRL committee, solicited reactions to the document
from accrediting associations, educational associations, leaders in college
and university librarianship and divisions of ALA. In June the docu-
ment, "Guidelines for College Libraries," was presented to a meeting
of the College Section of ACRL. The members present withheld their
approval chiefly on the basis of the absence of quantitative standards
from the document. The guidelines therefore have no force at the pres-
ent time, but they are important in that they express the view of re-
sponsible members of the profession.

The ad hoc committee rejected the term standards in favor of guide-
lines, since standards imply a rigid list of prescriptions and the commit-
tee wished to recognize the range of educational and institutional vari-
ables affecting library services. The guidelines reflect prevailing or ac-
cepted practices in typical college libraries. They are so tentatively
stated, however, with an excessive use of the phrase "tends to," that the
resulting first impression is one of timidity and vagueness. The dis-
avowal of any quantitative data base must lead a nonlibrarian to the
conclusion that none in fact exists.

The strong points of the document are its stress on the potential of
the library as an educational instrument and its discerning analyses of
the factors affecting the college library. However, as a substitute for
the ALA "Standards for College Libraries" the guidelines are inade-
quate. The document, for example, calls for definition by the college
administration of the duties of the college librarian and of the responsibility for the acquisition and development of library resources, but does not state how these duties or responsibilities should be defined. The guidelines concede that statistical norms and standards may assist the preparation of budget estimates and state that formulae provide a gross approximation of needs, but fail to point to any clear standard. Yet these definitions and standards for college library support are within the purview of the professional library association which should speak out unequivocally.

The author is indebted to Norman Tanis for sharing with her copies of the letters he had received in answer to his request for comments on the working draft, the file of which constitutes sampling of informed professional opinion. The weight of opinion seems to be that the guidelines allow so much latitude to the individual institution that they are ineffective in establishing a common goal for college libraries or for influencing a cost-conscious college administration.

The quantitatively detailed 1929 *Budgets, Classification and Compensation Plans for University and College Libraries* was born of urgency. By 1968 the centrality of the college library in the educational process was well established and the ad hoc committee was understandably tempted to frame a philosophically oriented document. Now, in 1972, the national economic crisis creates an emergency situation for colleges and their libraries in which authoritative minimal standards of library practice and support are again indispensable.

The efforts of the professional library association to establish a common goal of excellence for college libraries have received reinforcement from the standards promulgated by regional accrediting agencies and state departments of education. While the library standards of the various accrediting associations vary as to inclusiveness, they are all directed toward evaluating the library as an educational instrument for the individual institution. With quality of education the ultimate goal, there can be no incompatibility with the ALA standards.

The state education department standards, on the other hand, have been designed to give very practical guidance to the librarians and college administrators within their jurisdiction. They therefore tend to provide even more quantitative measures for minimal performance than do the ALA standards. The California State Colleges have, for example, worked out a minimum volume formula which takes into account a basic collection, the number of FTE students, the number of

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subject fields of graduate study and the distance of the college from the nearest public institution of higher education.

There is nothing prejudicial to college librarianship in this parallel development of standards, providing only that the professional association maintains its position of leadership and speaks with a clear voice. The ALA "Standards for College Libraries" have had widespread prestige and influence. Although the ACRL ad hoc committee has sustained an obvious disappointment and has undergone a partial change in membership, it is now equipped with a substantial background of experience, a considerable body of informed professional opinion and a mandate to proceed with a revision of the college library standards as rapidly as circumstances allow.

References


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