University Library Standards

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THE FIRST STATEMENT on "Standards for University Libraries" in the United States was adopted in 1978 by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and in 1979 by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), a division of the American Library Association. The impetus to prepare the university library standards began in 1967 and came from university librarians who were impressed with the overall effect the 1959 "Standards for College Libraries" had in upgrading college libraries. In 1959 only a few libraries in the 1500 or so colleges in the United States could meet the minimums set forth in the standards. By 1970 these libraries had improved substantially in the very ways the standards proposed.

Although there was agreement on the apparent need for university library standards, there were difficulties in developing the standards. The difficulties stemmed from lack of agreement on the definition of "university" and disagreement over whether standards should be quantitative or qualitative. The statement finally adopted is qualitative in nature. It excludes quantitative standards, although it does recommend statistical methods useful for comparing one library with others.

Definition of Universities and Colleges

Preparation of the standards was aided by the publication in 1973 of *A Classification of Institutions of Higher Education.*[1] Prepared by the

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Carnegie Commission on Higher Education and based on 1970 data, the classification was revised in 1976.[2] The standards for university libraries are designed for those 184 institutions classified by the Carnegie Commission as Research Universities I (N = 51), Research Universities II (N = 47), Doctorate-Granting Universities I (N = 56), and Doctorate-Granting Universities II (N = 30). The Carnegie classification is based on the number of doctoral degrees awarded and the amount of total federal support of academic science generated over a period of several academic years. The Carnegie list includes a few institutions that did not quite meet the criteria, because of the high quality of their research and graduate training.

    Between 1970 and 1976 a number of universities were added to the list and some changes occurred within categories, particularly within the doctorate-granting categories. The list of the fifty leading research universities composing the Research Universities I category was nearly unchanged. Three institutions were added to the category in 1976: Colorado State University, Oregon State University, and Boston University. Each of these had been classified as Research Universities II in the first edition. Three universities were excluded from the Research Universities I category in 1976: the University of Kentucky, Rutgers, and Vanderbilt University, each dropping into the Research Universities II category. Eight universities moved from the Doctorate-Granting Universities I category into the Research Universities II category. Sixteen moved into the Doctorate-Granting I category, and thirteen moved into the Doctorate-Granting Universities II category. Using the Carnegie Commission's classification, librarians can determine easily whether standards for university libraries should be applied to a particular library, or whether the standards for college libraries should apply.

Early Efforts

    In 1967 ACRL undertook its first efforts to prepare university library standards. It called twenty people to a meeting in January of that year to discuss standards. These people represented university libraries, accrediting agencies, the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States, and the Council on Library Resources (CLR). Later that year, ACRL appointed an ad hoc committee to consider possible standards. In November the CLR funded a two-day conference at Boston University. Twelve people attended, representing ACRL, ARL, CLR, The Carnegie Corporation of New York, and the U.S. Office of Education.[3]

    The Boston conferees concluded that development of standards for university libraries was possible and desirable. They recommended that

ACRL and ARL appoint a joint committee to develop such standards. The conferees called attention to the differing organizational patterns of universities, and suggested that the joint committee give careful attention to the number and quality of academic majors, graduate programs, professional schools, and research institutions, along with consideration of the numbers of students, teaching faculty, research personnel, and other staff members. It was further recommended that the statement of standards include qualitative and quantitative criteria wherever possible in the following areas: functions of the library, staff, collections, facilities, budget, services, and cooperative programs. The conferees urged that available statistical data be analyzed to form the base on which quantitative standards would be developed.[4]

In 1968 the ARL/ACRL joint committee was appointed under the chairmanship of Robert B. Downs. Its members were Clifton Brock, Jr., Gustave A. Harrer, John W. Heussman, Jay K. Lucker, John P. McDonald, and Ellsworth G. Mason.

The Downs Committee

From the beginning, the Downs committee followed the suggestions emanating from the Boston conference. The committee's approach was to prepare a set of criteria for excellence for university libraries, basing the criteria on the best current practice. To determine best practice, the committee identified fifty leading university libraries in the United States and Canada and collected data from them on finances, resources, personnel, space, circulation, administration, and professional school libraries. Of these fifty universities selected by the committee in 1968, thirty-four were classified in the 1976 Carnegie list as Research Universities I, twelve as Research Universities II, two were classified as Doctorate-Granting Universities I, and two were Canadian universities.

The data were published in a paper, "Standards for University Libraries," prepared by Robert B. Downs and John W. Heussman.[5] The data are for 1967-68 and are aggregated. The average is reported, as are the median, the range, and the figures for the first and third quartiles. Using the data, a university library can be compared to the selected fifty in a number of areas. A library thus can be measured against a group of fifty peer institutions, or to an excellent group to which the particular library might aspire.

The relationship of total library expenditures to total university expenditures, is a matter of interest to many library administrators. Downs and Heussman reported that the library's percentage of expendi-

tures, compared to the university's general and educational expenditures, ranged from a low of 1.6 to a high of 8.6. The median was 3.6; and the average of the fifty leading institutions was 3.5.

The relationships of total library expenditures to salaries and wages, books, periodicals and bindings, and general expenses are other statistics found to be useful for comparative purposes. As reported in 1967-68, the percentage of total library expenditures for salaries and wages averaged 57.2 percent. The median was 56 percent. The range was 43.6-67.8 percent. Library expenditures for books, periodicals and bindings averaged 33.8 percent; the median was 36.5, and the range was 21.2-50 percent.

What is the appropriate size of the library's collection? Downs and Heussman reported the average for the fifty leading libraries to be 1,989,188 total volumes as of June 30, 1968. The median was 1,456,684 volumes, with a range of 890,000-7,920,387 volumes.

The committee continued its work. Having struggled with the definition of "university," it adopted the Carnegie classification as soon as it appeared in 1973. Late in 1974, the committee presented a preliminary report to ARL.[6] The committee proposed standards in the areas of resources, personnel, space, finances, public service, and administration. With regard to finances, for example, the committee stated:

> It should be noted that some university presidents object to a percentage standard for library budgets on the ground that there is great diversity of "institutional environments" and of "missions" among individual institutions.
>
> In realistic terms, one has to recognize that the university library's share of total funds is generally well under the old ACRL five percent figure and far below the Canadian utopia of ten percent....Among the 50 libraries reporting,...the average was 3.5 and the median 3.6 percent. The Joint Committee believes, nevertheless, that five percent standard is still reasonable as a minimum for the maintenance of high-quality libraries.[7]

The 5 percent recommendation was one of several departures the committee made from the norms emerging from the data collected from the fifty leading universities. The 1974 report also recommended that the standard for salaries and wages as a total of the library's budget should range between 60 and 65 percent; book, periodical and binding expenditures should range between 30 and 35 percent, and general expenses between 5 and 10 percent.

The committee recommended that the minimum size of the collection for those libraries in categories Research Universities I and II be 1.5 million. It recommended 1 million volumes for Doctorate-Granting

Universities I, and 750,000 for Doctorate-Granting Universities II. Its basic recommendation on collections was that the ARL/ACRL standard be the general Clapp-Jordan formula.[8]

The final report of the Downs Committee on University Library Standards was presented to the ARL membership at its May 1975 meeting.[9] The emphasis of the report was the same as the committee's preliminary report. Specific, concrete criteria were presented as standards. The committee had added an introductory statement on the "Significance of University Libraries" and a section on library cooperation. It had removed the fixed formula for staffing, noting that libraries are in a period of transition, and that fixed formulas would be of doubtful validity from a long-range point of view. The committee did not believe its report to be suitable for adoption as a code of standards. Rather, it expected the ARL and ACRL to appoint a subsequent committee to formulate a code of standards based upon its report.[10]

The Smith Committee

Later in 1975, a new joint committee was appointed with Eldred Smith as chair. The original members were Calvin Boyer, William Kurth, Stanley McElderry, Richard Talbot, Melvin Voigt, and David R. Watkins. Upon the retirement of Voigt and the death of Kurth, Beverly Lynch was appointed to the committee. The committee's work was assisted by a J. Morris Jones/ALA Goals Award and by the Council on Library Resources, which supported a meeting in 1977 of the committee members with representatives of the regional accrediting associations and various higher education groups.

The committee moved quickly to review the work of the Downs committee and to determine the areas in which it would propose standards. In order to make a more informed judgment about the utility or desirability of quantitative standards, the committee gathered data from libraries in the four Carnegie Commission categories. It tested three approaches to quantitative formulas: (1) the Washington State Formula as proposed in the 1974 preliminary report of the Downs committee,[11] (2) the collection development formula proposed by Melvin Voigt,[12] and (3) the regression formulas developed by Baumol and Marcus.[13] Based upon the results of its tests, the committee concluded that neither the Washington State nor Voigt formulas could be used to produce national quantitative standards for university libraries. The results were too variable to be useful guides *for* practice across the total spectrum of university libraries.

In making its assessment, the committee assumed that if the formulas were to be useful, the ratios of actual value to value predicted by the formula should be within 20 percent of unity, and the individual ratios for most of the institutions in any category should be within ±20 percent of unity. In nearly every case, the Washington State and Voigt formulas failed one or both of these tests. For public services and technical services staff in U.S. libraries, for example, the formulas greatly overpredicted the number of staff required. For periodicals, the formulas consistently underpredicted the number of periodicals in university libraries. This was especially true for the largest private university libraries.

The regression analyses based upon the work of Baumol and Marcus offered a more promising approach. The analyses depend upon grouping similar institutions into separate categories and having readily available data for comparative purposes. The analysis does not yield a standard; it does enable institutions to be compared systematically with others. Data are available for those libraries that are members of the Association of Research Libraries. Since the adoption of the standards, ACRL has begun to collect and report data for those university libraries not members of ARL.

The survey by the committee also sought comments about standards from librarians. The results were as expected. Librarians in the larger, wealthier institutions—especially the private ones—were opposed to quantitative standards. The librarians in these institutions believed that standards would be based upon minimum levels far below what had been achieved already by their libraries. Libraries in smaller, less wealthy, chiefly public institutions were more supportive of quantitative standards developed within the profession.

The dilemma posed to the committee by the predictable division of opinion led to the abandonment of the notion of quantitative standards. The committee, in proposing the use of regression analysis, recognized that even within the more precise Carnegie Commission categories, the potential for comparing institutions at either end of the spectrum would lead to invalid comparisons. The committee therefore recommended the acceptance of common techniques rather than quantitative standards. It urged the profession to develop quantitative measures that would lead to useful institutional comparisons, rather than to develop quantitative national standards that at best would be ignored, and at worst, rejected.

Standards applied to university and college libraries in the United States are developed voluntarily. Once adopted officially by the profes-

sional associations, librarians seek to persuade administrators, budget officers, various accrediting agencies, and other agencies of the usefulness of standards for evaluative purposes. The process is a deliberate one. It moves in what appears to be a very leisurely fashion. In the case of the development of university library standards, the process took twelve years.

The Standards

The statement on university library standards that was subsequently adopted offers no quantities.[14] A substantive change from other statements also is reflected in the first standard. It refers to services, not to collections. In recent years the university library community in the United States has been interested more in services than it has been in collections. The standards reflect that shift in interest.

Six elements have been the most common to academic library standards: (1) the size of book stock or collections, (2) the size and composition of staff in terms of numbers of professional librarians, (3) the percentage of the institution's total budget to be used to determine the library's budget, (4) the seating capacity of the library (usually written in terms of the percentage of the student body which can sit down in the library at any given time), (5) the library's services, and (6) the library's administration. All standards for academic libraries emphasize the primary objective of the library—to support the instructional and research programs of the institution of which the library is a part. The six elements and the primary objective of the library are discussed in the standards for university libraries: "These standards are not intended to establish normative prescriptions for uniform application. Rather, they are meant to provide a general framework within which informed judgment can be applied to individual circumstances."[15]

The standards are a series of principles stated succinctly, and amplified in a commentary that follows. The three standards relating to collections are:

> (B.1) A university library's collections shall be of sufficient size and scope to support the university's total instructional needs and to facilitate the university's research programs.
> (B.2) A university library's collections shall be developed systematically and consistently within the terms of explicit and detailed policies.
> (B.3) A university library's collections shall contain all of the varied forms of recorded information.[16]

Quantitative measures are mentioned in the commentary on principle B.1:

> ...formulas...can yield only approximations which indicate a general level of need. If they are applied arbitrarily and mechanically, they can distort the realities of a given situation. Nevertheless, quantitative measures are increasingly important in guiding the qualitative judgement that must ultimately be applied to university libraries and their collections.[17]

The statement on "Standards for University Libraries" does not avoid quantities altogether. The statement offers some guidance to those who are asked to make informed judgments about university libraries and the support those libraries provide to the instruction, research and service programs of the universities. "One technique is the use of regression analysis to facilitate the comparison of similar libraries to one another; another of some general applicability is the 'index of quality' developed by the American Council on Education for relating library collection size to graduate program quality."[18]

The Usefulness of the Standards

How useful are the "Standards for University Libraries"? Are they effective? To answer these questions, the directors of the libraries of the 184 institutions listed in the 1976 Carnegie Commission classification were queried by mail in October 1981. The questionnaire was based on one developed by Larry Hardesty and Stella Bentley for their survey on "The Use and Effectiveness of the 1975 'Standards for College Libraries.' "[19] A total of eighty-eight questionnaires were returned in time for inclusion in this paper—a response rate of 48 percent. No follow-up letters or reminders were sent. The responses under-represent the Doctorate-Granting II institutions. Only nine of a possible thirty questionnaires were returned from that group—a 30 percent response rate. Thirty of a possible fifty-one were returned from the Research Universities I group (59 percent), twenty of forty-seven were returned by the Research Universities II group (43 percent), and twenty-nine of fifty-six were returned from the Doctorate-Granting Universities I group (52 percent).

Of the eighty-eight responses, eighty-two indicated they were familiar, very familiar, or thoroughly familiar with the standards. The two responses indicating no familiarity were from librarians in the Research Universities I category, representing the very largest of the public and private research libraries.

The respondents were asked how they used the standards. Forty-seven (54 percent) indicated they had not used the standards at all. Twenty of these were from Research Universities I institutions; twelve from Doctorate-Granting Universities I. Other respondents indicated they used the standards to justify budgets, to justify improvements in the physical plant, and to upgrade collections. Less use was made of the standards to justify the expansion of staff, the improvement of services or the maintenance of the status quo. Some respondents said they used the statement for accreditation purposes, either as background for members of their faculties and administration who are seving on accrediting teams, or for their own use on accrediting teams.

For each of the sixteen standards, the respondents were asked their opinions as to whether the standard was very useful, moderately useful, somewhat useful, not very useful, or not useful at all. Table 1 reports the opinions of the directors. Over one-third of the respondents found six of the standards to be not very useful or not useful at all: standards A.1, B.1 and B.3, D.1 and D.2, and F.1. Over 40 percent found standards B.1, B.3, D.1 and F.1 to be not very useful or not at all useful.

It was expected that the responses from librarians in the largest research libraries would be significantly different from the others. These libraries represent the oldest and largest libraries. Standards for evaluation purposes often are claimed to be less useful to these libraries than to libraries in younger, emerging universities. A simple chi-square test was performed on the six standards found to be not very useful by at least one-third of the respondents, to determine whether the responses of the directors of libraries in Research Universities I institutions differed significantly from those of librarians in the other categories. A significant difference (at the .05 level) was found in two instances, in standards B.3 (relating to varied forms of recorded information) and F.1 (relating to sufficient budgetary support).

The standards receiving general support as to their usefulness are those for which quantities would not be expected: A.2 (national bibliographical standards should apply to the records of library collections); E.1,2,3, and 4 (pertaining to the policies and practices of the administration and governance of university libraries); and F.2 (the library's budget should be managed by the chief administrative officer of the library). The disagreements continue on the fundamental issue—whether or not standards for university libraries should be quantitative.

The standards for university libraries are applied to a diverse group of libraries. A majority of the directors of these libraries do not find the standards to be very useful. By contrast, the majority of directors of

TABLE 1

UNIVERSITY LIBRARY DIRECTORS' OPINIONS ON THE USEFULNESS OF
STANDARDS FOR UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

Standard	Very useful	Moderately useful	Somewhat useful	Not very useful	Not at all useful	Total Number of respondents
SECTION A Services						
A.1 Promote use	14 (16.6%)	13 (15.4%)	24 (28.6%)	23 (27.3%)	10 (11.9%)	84
A.2 Conform to national standards	20 (29.5%)	23 (27.0%)	24 (28.2%)	12 (14.1%)	6 (7.1%)	85
A.3 Provide access	13 (15.3%)	21 (24.7%)	24 (28.2%)	20 (23.5%)	7 (8.2%)	85
SECTION B Collections						
B.1 Sufficient size	23 (27.1%)	10 (11.8%)	14 (16.5%)	27 (31.8%)	11 (13.0%)	85
B.2 Develop systematically	15 (17.6%)	18 (21.2%)	24 (28.2%)	22 (25.9%)	6 (7.1%)	85
B.3 Varied formats	8 (9.3%)	13 (15.1%)	21 (24.4%)	26 (30.2%)	18 (20.9%)	86
SECTION C Personnel						
C.1 Sufficient number	12 (14.5%)	14 (16.9%)	27 (32.5%)	21 (25.3%)	9 (10.8%)	83
C.2 Sound practice	13 (15.3%)	17 (20.0%)	28 (32.9%)	21 (24.7%)	6 (7.1%)	85

TABLE 1—Continued

Standard	Very useful	Moderately useful	Somewhat useful	Not very useful	Not at all useful	Total Number of respondents
SECTION D Facilities						
D.1 Meet requirements	13 (15.3%)	12 (14.1%)	24 (28.2%)	25 (29.4%)	11 (12.9%)	85
D.2 Convenient	11 (12.9%)	12 (14.1%)	22 (25.8%)	29 (34.1%)	11 (12.9%)	85
SECTION E Administration						
E.1 Structure identified	22 (25.8%)	29 (34.1%)	21 (24.7%)	7 (8.2%)	6 (7.1%)	85
E.2 Clearly specified	18 (21.1%)	22 (25.8%)	25 (29.4%)	14 (16.5%)	6 (7.1%)	85
E.3 Libraries related	20 (23.8%)	21 (25.0%)	21 (25.0%)	16 (19.0%)	6 (7.1%)	84
E.4 Policies defined	19 (22.6%)	21 (25.0%)	26 (31.0%)	14 (16.6%)	4 (4.7%)	84
SECTION F Finances						
F.1 Sufficient support	13 (15.3%)	15 (17.6%)	21 (24.7%)	22 (25.8%)	14 (16.5%)	85
F.2 Managed by librarian	22 (26.2%)	20 (23.8%)	18 (21.4%)	17 (20.2%)	7 (8.3%)	84

college libraries, surveyed by Hardesty and Bentley, found *all* of the college library standards to be useful.[20]

The university library directors were asked whether the standards should be revised. Table 2 indicates the responses to the question. Many of those supporting revision want more specificity and quantifiable minimum criteria. Those opposed to revision believe that the statement is the best the profession can achieve. Those who believe minimum quantities would be useful said so:

> We find truly that the "Standards" are useless in making arguments to our administration or to governing bodies in the State. What these administrators want is data and quantitative comparisons; and for this we turn not to the "Standards," but to whatever we can draw out of the *ARL Statistics* (or the *ACRL Statistics*).

> The Standards are somewhere between guidelines and suggestions. I don't see how they set any sort of a *standard* against which anything can be measured. They are concepts—they are wise advice—but they are so general that they can hardly be used to tell whether a library in fact is doing anything.

Some respondents said that developing and including measures of library effectiveness would be an improvement.

TABLE 2
UNIVERSITY LIBRARY DIRECTORS' OPINIONS ON WHETHER STANDARDS SHOULD BE REVISED

Opinion	Research Univer- sities I	Research Univer- sities II	Doctorate- Granting Univer- sities I	Doctorate- Granting Univer- sities II	Total
Yes	7	8	18	5	38
No	10	6	5	2	23
Undecided	10	6	5	2	23
Total	27	20	28	9	84

Many commented that it would be very difficult, if not futile, to revise the standards in order to reflect greater specificity or quantitative statements.

> The standards are a realistic reflection of the fact that you cannot quantify university libraries—nice as that would be. Universities sometimes fit into "types" and sometimes are very unique. The library, to be effective, must reflect the university's goals and mission. These goals and missions vary widely from institution to institution.

A case can be made that "noble" goals are, in the long run, more valuable than many might think. Liberty, Justice, Honor are certainly vague enough, yet millions died for their interpretations thereof. On balance, perhaps one should leave well enough alone.

A number of supporters of university library standards indicated that it is difficult to achieve a broadly based consensus among the university librarians. While supportive of the standards, they were not supportive of revision:

A number of years of experience persuade me that truly useful standards for university libraries could be written but could not win unanimous approval. The larger private university libraries will continue to oppose quantitative standards or standards which begin to apply uniform measurements to measurable factors. The variety and complexity of university libraries and the number of variables involved make the writing of meaningful standards a difficult, time-consuming and costly task, one that I fear may not be worth the effort, especially if the standards cannot be ratified.

I have found very little support for the application and use of standards at large research libraries. I do not support the establishment of quantitative criteria and therefore see little value in "playing around" with the present language. I feel that compilations of data like the ARL statistics and the ACRL statistics are potentially more useful.

Rather than trying to "improve" the standards directly, I would advocate the development of model procedures and practices such as model budgetary procedures, performance measures, collection policies. In addition, the research library community should publish "suitable ratios" annually as business firms do.

Standards are, by their nature, a compromise. This is particularly true in instances such as the university library standards where they must cover a rather broad spectrum of institutional difference and variety. Under these circumstances it is important to recognize what a particular set of standards can and cannot be expected to accomplish. In the case of the university library standards, I believe that they can be of general help and support but that they cannot be of specific assistance in most cases. Quantification might improve support for part of the constituent group, but it would also jeopardize another part. For example, specific collection size formulas might help some of the weaker libraries and might damage some of the stronger ones. Specific ratios between professional and nonprofessional staff might help to upgrade certain situations, but might unduly constrain others. With regard to university library standards, it is better to stick to broad, qualitative principles rather than attempt to quantify. I believe this results in standards which can be generally supportive over all, but which are of relatively little use with regard to specific issues. This is the best we can accomplish with regard to standards.

Summary

The preparation and adoption of the "Standards for University Libraries" was a major accomplishment and an important achievement. The task was long and arduous, but the importance of it was never in question. University librarians in the United States had agreed that it was incumbent upon the library profession to develop such standards lest the task be assumed by others or the "Standards for College Libraries" be inappropriately applied. The joint efforts of the Association of Research Libraries and the Association of College and Research Libraries, a division of the American Library Association, resulted in inevitable compromises in order to gain the necessary consensus. For some the compromises were necessary and appropriate. For others the compromises were too severe.

Standards for libraries generally are used for purposes of evaluation. Thus, the task of designing a set of standards becomes the task of designing an instrument of evaluation. Standards also are designed to establish goals of excellence to be applied realistically by others. The "Standards for University Libraries" (finally adopted after twelve years of effort) provide a framework, or an outline, for evaluation. The standards provide no bench marks. So the standards are much less useful as a tool for evaluation than are the standards developed for other types of academic libraries.

University librarians know the standards. Some have used them. Many have been guided by them. Despite the criticism, only thirty-eight directors responding to a questionnaire support revision. Twenty-three oppose revision, and twenty-three remain ambivalent. Widespread support for revision of the 1979 "Standards for University Libraries" is not yet evident.

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