Standards for Special Libraries

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SPECIAL LIBRARIES are usually highly specific in purpose and this specificity is the problem which underlies the development of standards for them. This high specificity of purpose arises from the integral role which special libraries play in serving the diverse goals of the nonlibrary organizations of which they are generally a part. The varying histories and objectives of their professional associations, as well as the lack of a continuing need for collecting and analyzing operational statistics, add to the difficulty in developing realistic and useful quantitative and qualitative standards. Other difficulties which contribute to the problem are: (1) absence of a generally recognized and exclusive definition upon which to base an identification of the universe of special libraries, (2) diversity in collection, content, size, operating procedures, facilities, services and staff, and (3) diversity in objectives and responsibilities assigned by nonlibrary management.

Analyzing this problem within the space limitations of this article and expressing our own experience in operating special libraries, the authors see a parallel in the conclusions of the Committee on Scientific and Technical Communication of the National Academies of Sciences and Engineering found in their report, *Scientific and Technical Communication: A Pressing National Problem:*

> The principal impression received . . . was that of diversity—diversity in information-handling activities, in the economics and techniques of operation, in functions, and in users. And we concluded that such diversity was not only characteristic but essential. It facilitates the flexibility, the sensitivity and responsiveness to user needs and the innovative, forward looking approaches required for effective scientific and technical communication. Further, though the heterogeneous complex of

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communication activities in the United States has been criticized frequently and on other counts, there is no evidence of critically inefficient operation. Therefore, we accepted this diversity and concentrated our efforts not on reducing or eliminating it but on maximizing its strengths and overcoming its weaknesses.[1]

Special libraries and their related professional associations are responses to the information needs of geometrically expanding science and technology in the twentieth century, just as public and educational institution libraries arose to serve the "universal education" concepts of the nineteenth century.

For example, the Medical Library Association was formed in 1898, the American Association of Law Libraries in 1907, and the Special Libraries Association in 1909. Also formed during this period were the Music Library Association, the American Technological Library Association, the Association of Hospital and Institutional Libraries, and others.

Thus, in a characteristically American way, special libraries became increasingly fractionalized rather than integrated in their professional grouping as other groups of libraries with common interests engaged in cooperative ventures which often resulted in formal associations. In contrast to this process of fractionalization in the special libraries themselves, organizations such as the federal government, who were concerned about collecting, compiling and analyzing statistics on libraries sought to emphasize similarities between libraries as a means of assembling statistics which would describe the libraries of the United States as an overall resource. The history of the assimilative approach, as represented by the federal government, is of interest since it reflects an emphasis on quantitative statistics by which the similarities of libraries can be more easily described.

A good description of the federal concern with libraries is given by John G. Lorenz, Deputy Librarian of Congress, formerly Chief of the Library Services Branch, U.S. Office of Education, in his paper on "Federal Overview" prepared for an ALA report on planning for nationwide library statistics:

The Bureau of the Census, of course, has as its primary mission providing basic statistics about the people and the economy of the Nation in order to assist the Congress, Federal, State, and local Governments, business and industry, and the public generally in planning, carrying out, and evaluating public and private programs. It collects, tabulates, and publishes a wide variety of statistical data and provides statistical information to Government and private users. This Federal agency first began collecting library statistics in 1850 when it reported on public

school, Sunday school, college, and church library statistics in 31 States, the District of Columbia, and four territories, including Minnesota, New Mexico, Oregon, and Utah. This Census report also included a tabulation for 31 States and the District of Columbia on State libraries, social libraries, students' libraries, libraries of academies and professional schools, and scientific and historical societies.[2]

Havlik points out early federal concern and quotes from Title 20 of U.S. Code S1, 3649:

> The concern of the Federal Government in education goes back to 1785 when the Second Continental Congress enacted basic ordinances which saw to it that lands be reserved for public schools. In 1867 Congress passed the enabling act of the office that provided that this agency "collect statistics and facts showing the condition and progress of education in the several States . . . and to diffuse such information . . . as shall aid the people . . . in establishment and maintenance of an efficient school system, and otherwise promote the cause of education throughout the country."[3]

Lorenz adds that "the Office included libraries in its field of responsibility and in 1876 published one of the most comprehensive reports on libraries ever compiled, *Public Libraries in the United States.* Library statistics in this publication included college libraries, information on printed catalogs, public library statistics on appropriations, benefactions, loss and wear of books, and circulation by various classes of material."[2]

A subsequent history of the Bureau of Education was written by Clark Elliott in 1968.[4]

In 1938 the Library Services Branch was established in what is now the U.S. Office of Education to make surveys, studies, investigations and reports regarding public, school, college, university and other libraries. It was not until 1963 that the creation of a new position of research library specialist made possible the collection of some special library statistics for the first time.[5] In succeeding years, such federal agencies with large nationwide systems of libraries as the Department of Agriculture, Department of the Army, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and Veterans Administration, have conducted surveys of their library components.

In 1968, the Federal Library Committee, established in 1965 to assist the voluntary coordination in federal libraries, in cooperation with the U.S. Office of Education, conducted and published the results of a survey of special libraries serving the federal government.[6] The survey represented an early use of the concepts and criteria, developed and

published in 1966, by ALA. A chapter of this publication outlined criteria for recognizing special libraries. These were:

1. The library must stress the handling of informational materials rather than recreational or educational materials.
2. Generally, the library is part of a larger organization which has non-library objectives.
3. The services of the library are limited to furthering the objectives of the sponsor and the collection of the library is delimited by the subject areas of particular interest of the sponsor.
4. The librarian and his staff are the principal *primary* users of the library. It is their function to interpret the body of literature in the collection for the clientele.[7]

These concepts and criteria for special libraries were not derived overnight. They came after a long battle, beginning at the turn of the century, to gain recognition for the concept of "special" libraries. Jesse H. Shera has described some of the early history:

> Shortly after the turn of the present century, John Cotton Dana arrived at the conclusion that the public library was overlooking an important segment of its potential service by failing to respond to the growing information needs of commerce and industry, and established the Business Branch of the Newark, New Jersey, Public Library [where] he inaugurated a form of librarianship the future promise of which probably even he did not then realize. Because no one knew what to call this new bibliographic breed, its members acquired the name of "special" librarian. The term was much less felicitious than the idea it represented for it is lacking in specificity and descriptive meaning, but it has persisted for more than half a century despite repeated attempts to define it satisfactorily.[8]

The lines of demarcation so separated the special librarians from the others that in 1909 a group under Dana's leadership seceded from the ALA to form their own professional association. A year later, at the ALA conference at Mackinac Island, Dana made a last heroic effort to secure the incorporation of his followers into the ALA, but his efforts were ignored by the executive board. Subsequently SLA was incorporated as an independent entity.

John Cotton Dana, as the first president of SLA, was also the first spokesman for standards for special libraries. His presidential address was, in fact, the first of a long series of official statements and activities relating to the subject.

The first twelve years of SLA were a gestation period for many ideas,

regarding standards. *Special Libraries* was then, as it is now, the forum in which these ideas were aired. Issues discussed in the journal included: qualifications for and certification of special librarians; scope, purposes and goals for special libraries; suggestions of specific areas in which standards were needed; and, tests for the efficiency of special libraries. Fuller discussion of these topics can be found in the Additional References which are from a list compiled by Martha Jane Zachert.

Probably the greatest concern throughout the years has been qualification and certification for special librarians. SLA, of course, was not the only group involved in this problem. In 1920 ALA's Special Committee on Certification, Standardization and Library Training recommended a complete certification program.[10] SLA met this challenge by appointing its own Committee on Certification in 1922.[11] The name of this committee was changed the following year to Committee on Training.[12] As such, it became one of SLA's most active committees. In 1936 responsibility for recruitment was added to its assignment.[13] In 1942 it became the Training and Professional Activities Committee[14] and in 1947 simply the Professional Activities Committee.[15]

The most recent effort to formulate standards for special libraries started in the early 1960s under the direction of Samuel Sass (General Electric Company, Pittsfield, Massachusetts), who was then chairman of the SLA Professional Standards Committee. With the help of the SLA chapter liaison officer and several chapters, six areas of concern were studied and reported to the committee for review and a preliminary draft of standards was produced. This draft, however, lacked standards for budgets, space and collections.

In 1963 Agnes Brite (New England Mutual Life Insurance Company, Boston, Massachusetts) took charge of the Professional Standards Committee. Activities that year included:

1. distribution of the first draft of three sections of standards to selected members for review and comment;
2. drawing up a list of kinds of special libraries in preparation for a survey;
3. distribution of the list of kinds of special libraries to various members of the association with the request that names of excellent special libraries in each category be sent to the committee;
4. compilation of a questionnaire to be used in the survey;
5. distribution of the questionnaire to those special libraries included in the survey;

6. distribution of the first draft of three sections to the Advisory Council for discussion at the Baltimore meeting;
7. writing of a draft of the six sections by Ruth Leonard; and
8. distribution of Leonard's draft to the board of directors, the advisory council, and members attending the St. Louis convention.

A crucial event of the year was the selection of Ruth Leonard (School of Library Science, Simmons College, Boston, Massachusetts) as a consultant. It was through her concerted efforts that the final draft of the "Objectives and Standards for Special Libraries" was approved by the Association's board of directors on September 24, 1964 and printed in the December 1964 issue of *Special Libraries.*

Following acceptance of the standards, the Professional Standards Committee sponsored the compilation of six profiles or composites of special libraries based on data obtained from the committee's unpublished "Survey of Selected Libraries, 1964," visits to libraries, and correspondence on conferences with some fifty librarians. The profiles appeared in *Special Libraries* in March, April, and May-June 1965. They supplement the standards, particularly in the several categories of libraries covered, by providing examples to substantiate the generalized statements, and by delineating applications of the principles to particular types of libraries.

As a follow-up, in 1967 the SLA Professional Standards Committee and the SLA Consultation Service Committee attempted to discover the extent to which SLA chapter consultation officers and the SLA-approved professional consultants had found the standards a useful instrument, by questionnaire and by a jointly sponsored open meeting at the annual SLA convention in New York City, May 29, 1967. The consensus was that the standards were being used as "guidelines" by both management and consultants, but that they were not at that time being used as extensively and as aggressively as they should have been. Their potential for use with management was not sufficiently recognized or explored.

The SLA bord of directors, at the 1967 convention, approved the following recommendations of the Professional Standards Committee: (1) that the Professional Standards Committee cooperate with the Statistics Committee in the compilation of statistics and data necessary for consideration in revising standards and in compiling additional profiles; (2) that the Professional Standards Committee explore with division chairmen the best means of promoting professional standards in their respective fields.

The Professional Standards Committee recognized that standards are not realistic or effective without valid supporting data, so that the trend of the committee's thinking was increasingly towards the need for empirically established standards which, as opposed to "a priori" or "desirable" standards, would have a statistically valid base. Such a base was, of course, largely lacking. This lack, and the recognition of the interrelationship between standards and statistics, was in part the incentive for the 1970 SLA reorganization of committee structure which combined the Professional Standards and Statistics Committees into one Standards Committee. This new committee, composed of individuals representing academic, governmental, and industrial organization, has engaged in a mixture of the activities in which the two previous committees were involved.

During 1971, for example, the Standards Committee provided liaison with the American Library Association's Statistics Coordinating Committee and with the U.S. Office of Education in planning the role that special libraries might play in a nationwide system for collecting and compiling library statistics. The committee chairman represented SLA on the Z-39 Sectional Committee of the American National Standards Institute. The committee worked with the Federal Library Committee which, with U.S. Office of Education support, will gather statistical data on more than 1,900 federal libraries during 1972. The data gathered by this survey on the specialized libraries of the federal government will provide an important segment of the needed statistical base for standards.

Another U.S. federal activity in which the committee was concerned involves one which will have major impact upon the development of operating and professional standards. This is the major revision of the U.S. Civil Service position evaluation and classification standards being proposed by the commission's Task Force on Job Evaluation and Pay Policy Review. The committee was afforded an opportunity to comment on the proposed revision which would place the commission solidly in support of empirically based standards by changing the current evaluation procedure which compares the evaluated position with a governmentwide, commission-developed standard to a procedure which uses actual job descriptions (selected as bench marks), as standards.[16]

An additional task, assigned to the Standards Committee in 1970, was the implementation of SLA's fourth goal to determine future employment needs for special librarians. This assignment again highlights

the problem of identifying those libraries which would provide a valid statistical base for the survey. The survey will attempt to determine by questionnaire trends in number of positions and qualifications of special librarians in the U.S. and Canada for the base year of 1972.

Because SLA covers such a broad spectrum of special libraries, and because "special libraries must develop and maintain the closest possible correlation with the policies and aims of the institution they serve in order to retain their ability to respond most closely to the requirements of the staff,"[17] SLA standards have generally tended to reflect only minimum requirements. Special libraries serving such areas as law and medicine, however, must meet the further requirements of such associations as the American Bar Association and the American Association of Law Libraries and the American Medical Society and the Medical Library Association. Other libraries serving federal, state and municipal governments, industry associations and educational associations must meet standards set up by such organizations. The United States Civil Service Commission Position Classification Standards are representative of the complexity and diversity of federal libraries. There are further complications when one considers that subject-oriented special libraries can serve a multiplicity of organizations; and that organizations often require the services of several subject-oriented libraries. An example of this complex pattern may be found in special libraries serving state governments.[18]

Law libraries present a good example of how some of these problems have been handled in the past. Because of the mixed nature of law libraries, law librarians have looked in many directions for standards. The American Association of Law Libraries has had numerous committees concerned with staff and service standards but has not come up with an association standard. In general, most law libraries consider themselves "special" libraries and refer to the "Objectives and Standards for Special Libraries" of SLA regarding standards for staff library materials, services and budget.

Since the beginning of the century, the American Bar Association, the association of American Law Schools and the American Association of Law Libraries have been vitally concerned with standards for law schools and their libraries. The AALS has been most consistent and persistent in formulating higher minimum standards for law libraries. In addition to specifying standards for staff and services for a library collection capable of sustaining a modern curriculum and a full-scale student and faculty research program, the standards of the Association

of American Law Schools specify the materials which must be in the collection of an AALS approved law school library. These standards are reported each year in the *AALS Proceedings*. Although they are intended as a guide to materials basic to legal education, most of the required materials are needed in libraries which serve the bench and the bar.

State law libraries also provide an example of the application of functional standards to library operations. State law library service may be provided either by independent libraries or by divisions of other state agencies. Some of the libraries presently provide legislative reference services and exchanges of state legal materials, case reports and statutes. The primary function is to serve the state officials in all three departments of state government. The recent American Library Association publication, *Standards for Library Functions at the State Level, 1963* and its revisions, set many applicable standards that are being implemented in these libraries. These standards are mainly qualitative.

Some law librarians do not believe that standards can be enforced by any regulatory agency for bar association libraries, county law libraries or state law libraries because no such agency exists. It is felt that quality standards must come primarily from the attitudes of the law librarians themselves in what they accept or what they try to do with the libraries they work in.[19] A similar pattern may be found in medical libraries.

In general it may be stated that the more specific the objectives of the clientele the library serves, the greater the number of qualifications the library must meet, and the more difficult it is to set quantitative measures. "So far, standards have been applied to the library only. They should also be applied to the library in the framework of its total environment."[20] In this environment special library sponsors are now asking difficult questions. Does the library's collection and services promise results which serve the objectives of the sponsoring institution? Does the library promise results commensurate with its costs to the sponsoring institution? While the test of "what good is it" cannot be simplistically applied to special libraries, there must be standards by which a failure to distinguish between ineffectual collections of information and an effective special library can be avoided. Standards which allow for the dynamic environment which surrounds special libraries are especially needed. Wessel and Cohrssen in their state-of-the-art report on operational standards summarize the problem by saying, "Evaluation and measurement could be applied to library objec-

tives and standards. Determining objectives is relatively easy, but establishing standards is extremely difficult in a dynamic environment, since the work is usually creative and nonrepetitive, and precedent has limited applicability."[21]

A discussion of future trends in standards for special libraries is inevitably more speculative and generalized than a review of the past. It is therefore appropriate to discuss the effects of some general social trends such as: the changing attitudes towards all established institutions, including libraries; a questioning of both the objectives and achievements of these institutions; and the increasing impact of technology through the use of mechanized procedures (whose initial and continuing costs can be more easily identified) to substitute for or supplement human effort. Because this new equipment, which supports these new procedures, includes increasingly sophisticated "counting machines" or computers, increasing collection, storage, and manipulation of statistical data is encouraged.

These general social trends seem to be coalescing toward a reevaluation of the role of libraries, particularly special libraries, which will include the more detailed consideration of costs, both mechanical and human.

In the past, among librarians and others, there has been a resistance to development and even to the thought of the concepts necessary to a thorough appraisal of the costs involved in library operations. Examination of library literature reflects this resistance. Harold Olsen, in his literature review on the economics of information, describes this literature as: "quite spotty and often fuzzy in content. A general framework in which to place particular studies is lacking."[22] More realistic and consistent standards are an essential part of this missing framework.

Of course, general social trends affect the development of standards for all libraries; however these trends are likely to affect special libraries more immediately and drastically because, as integral parts of nonlibrary organizations with often quite specific and short-term objectives, special libraries have less recourse to "resistance" positions than those libraries who are associated with cultural and educational institutions having more general and long-term objectives. Thus, special libraries have both the need and opportunity to develop standards which will be:

1. flexible in application to a variety of operating conditions,
2. comprehensive in coverage of all library functions,
3. valid for cost-benefit analysis, and

4. supportive to the objectives of the organizations of which the library is a part.

Although empirically based standards for special libraries will have something in common with the standards developed for other libraries, this commonality should not be emphasized or expanded to such an extent that special libraries are evaluated upon this commonality at the expense of their effectiveness in helping to achieve the objectives of their parent organizations.

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