Fall 1970

University Library Problems and Trends

Robert Bingham Downs

Follow this and additional works at: https://surface.syr.edu/libassoc

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation
https://surface.syr.edu/libassoc/6

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Libraries at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Courier by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.
FULTON'S CLERMONT.
Courtesy of Frederick Ungar Co., Inc., New York City
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barzillai Pease and Mr. Fulton’s Steamboat</td>
<td>Arsine Schmavonian</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Library Problems and Trends</td>
<td>Robert Bingham Downs</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poems from <em>Once Upon a Dream</em></td>
<td>Martin Buxbaum</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babington’s Bibliography of John Addington Symonds: Some Additions and Corrections</td>
<td>Timothy D’Arch Smith</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanley Edgar Hyman: An Appreciation</td>
<td>Robert Phillips</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open for Research...Notes on Collections</td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News of Library Associates</td>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributors to this Issue</td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
University Library Problems and Trends

by Robert Bingham Downs

One of the interesting phenomena of the current era is that libraries have begun to occupy the center of the stage in our best educational institutions. The present attitude is well stated in a report issued by the American Council on Education, entitled An Assessment of Quality in Graduate Education. The ACE study evaluates and rates graduate programs in universities throughout the country. About libraries it comments: "The library is the heart of the university; no other single nonhuman factor is as closely related to the quality of graduate education... institutions that are strong in all areas invariably have major national research libraries."

Among the reasons why university libraries are receiving so much attention I would list institutional rivalry, with the major universities trying to outstrip each other in the size and richness of their libraries, and great libraries thereby becoming status symbols. Second, there is increasing emphasis on research and scholarly productivity, which means that first-class scholars are unwilling to join or to remain a member of a faculty without a strong library. There are other factors, too, which tend to place the library at the forefront of the academic scene. Changing methods of instruction are sending students to their libraries in greater numbers. Soaring student enrollments are placing a heavy strain on library facilities, causing a great library building boom in colleges and universities. The accelerated rate of publishing and of library acquisitions is responsible for the rapid growth of book collections. These are among the most significant reasons for the phenomenal growth of university libraries since World War II.

The key role played by libraries in universities, especially at the graduate level, is revealed by a study of the relationship between doctoral degrees and library resources. According to figures published by the American Council on Education, 121,750 doctoral degrees were granted by American universities and colleges during the decade 1957-1966. Of the total, about 64 percent, nearly two-thirds, came from 38 institutions with library holdings in excess of a million volumes each. The median figure for the 38 libraries was well over 2,000,000 volumes. A close correlation existed also between the number of degrees conferred and the level of financial support. The
comparisons make clear the fact that, with rare exceptions, an institution outstanding for its graduate offerings is equally notable for the strength of its library resources.

A few years ago it appeared that libraries would be able to count on sustained financial support from federal, state, and other sources. There was a steady upward trend in book budgets, staff growth, and new buildings. Within the past year or two, there has been a sudden reversal. Federal funds for college and university library support have been drastically cut, with a distinct possibility that they may be eliminated altogether, and legislative appropriations around the country are static or being reduced.

The recession comes at a time when libraries, in common with the economy in general, are caught in an upward spiral of inflation, as salaries, wages, books, periodical subscriptions, binding, equipment, and supplies are undergoing a steady rise in costs. Indexes of book and periodical prices over the past decade show an average annual increase of nearly 10 percent. In a number of important classes, the range is even higher. For example, the index figure for periodical prices in chemistry and physics during the past 10 years went from 100 to 223 and for mathematics, botany, geology, and general science from 100 to 219.

Another aspect of the situation affects libraries and increases costs. This is the steadily rising volume of publication of books and periodicals, both in the United States and abroad. The number of titles published in the United States has more than doubled since 1958. According to UNESCO statistics, world book production is following a similar trend; and of course any strong university library has an extensive procurement program abroad.

Combining these two factors—rising prices and increased rate of publishing—it is conservative to conclude that an increase of 15 to 20 percent annually in book funds is necessary to enable a library to maintain a given level of acquisitions from the current publishing production. For a library attempting to build retrospectively, out-of-print and rare books are increasing in price at an even faster pace and are becoming harder to find because of institutional competition.

The first essential in a university library is to possess the books, journals, proceedings of learned societies, government publications, newspaper files, pamphlets, photoreproductions, maps, and other materials required to meet the university's objectives in instruction, research, and public service. Buildings, staff, and organizational efficiency can compensate to only a limited degree for the absence of strong collections.

How does one go about developing a top-notch university library? It is a long-time process, involving many people and much money. A reasonable estimate is that such a library cannot be built in less than 25 years nor for less than $50,000,000, at current prices.

Incidentally, in this connection, the great man theory of historical development—that history is but the lengthened shadow of a dynamic
personality—has a certain validity when applied to the growth of notable research libraries. It is hardly possible to name any famous library which has not been shaped and deeply influenced by one or more strong personalities, who are not infrequently associated with friends of the library groups, such as Syracuse University’s. The impact on libraries may come through inheriting noteworthy private collections, through generous endowments, or through the dedicated efforts of faculty members who guide the development of specialized resources.

I have become more convinced of the truth of this theory after a study of my own institution. The distinction achieved by the University of Illinois Library, now the largest state university library in the nation, during the past 65 years is a direct reflection of the interest of a limited number of individuals. The first hero in the story is undoubtedly President Edmund J. James. When James entered the presidency in 1905, the library held less than 70,000 volumes—a collection that had been nearly 40 years in building. James was convinced that if the University was ever to become a distinguished institution, it had to have a great library. The General Assembly was persuaded by James to appropriate generous book funds, and the President himself traveled abroad to buy large collections. The momentum received under President James has never been lost at Illinois. A succession of presidents and other administrators, faculty members, trustees, legislators, and alumni have united to assure the library’s steady growth, quantitatively and qualitatively.

Over the past 50 years, the leading figures in collection development have been a small but highly potent group of faculty members, representing a variety of disciplines. Their guidance and advice in the building of resources for research were, and in some cases continue to be, invaluable. These men possessed an encyclopedic knowledge of the literature of their own fields and often of related areas; they checked dealers’ catalogs as fast as they appeared; they kept in touch with the state of the book market; they were familiar with the library’s collections; and they maintained a relentless pressure on the librarian and the University administration for more book funds.

It is a mistake, by the way, to assume that a university library can be, or should attempt to become, strong in all areas. Collections ought to be built primarily around the present and probable future needs of the faculty and students, for study, research, and teaching. The way for a university library to gain distinction is to concentrate on a limited number of specialized subjects. That is the way in which the Syracuse University, University of Illinois, and other major university libraries are building reputations for excellence.

What of current and future trends? A library is never finished. Research interests in a university are constantly changing. New departments are created, and old ones decline in importance or move in new directions. The most far-reaching changes, literally and figuratively, in library acquisitions
lately have occurred in the foreign field. Beginning with World War II, the collecting concerns of American libraries, which were formerly largely restricted to the United States and Western Europe, have become world wide. The expanding library activities closely parallel the increased scholarly preoccupation with area studies.

Shortly after the war ended, the Association of Research Libraries inaugurated the Farmington Plan, a cooperative arrangement whereby one copy of every book of research value published abroad is brought into the United States. The Syracuse University Library was given responsibility for all publications originating in Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay.

A natural outgrowth of the Farmington Plan was the Public Law 480 program administered by the Library of Congress. In 1961, the Congress authorized the expenditure of counterpart funds or blocked currencies for the acquisition of multiple copies of publications in certain countries where surplus funds had accumulated. The program presently includes Ceylon, India, Indonesia, Israel, Nepal, Pakistan, the United Arab Republic, and Yugoslavia. The Syracuse University Library actively participates through receiving all publications originating in India, Pakistan, and the United Arab Republic.

Such programs as these, being carried on by major university libraries, are concrete recognition of the position of world leadership occupied by the United States. We will not be caught again in the position in which we found ourselves during World War II when it was discovered that American libraries possessed little material or information about less familiar parts of the world.

Obviously, the present period is an era when the outpouring of print in all its forms has become enormous, pointing toward an acute necessity for carefully defined acquisition policies, specialization of fields among libraries, and cooperative acquisition plans. Further, the building of large research collections is as much or more for the future than for the present. A high proportion of books and related materials is acquired by research-oriented university libraries for the sake of completeness and to strengthen existing resources, with potential usefulness rather than immediate demands in mind. A certain amount of clairvoyance is therefore required to determine what is actually significant from a long-range viewpoint.

There is no doubt that the sharing of collections among research libraries can be greatly expedited through communication and transportation networks, such as are being developed in various localities. In Illinois, for example, the state universities are being connected with teletype installations and special delivery services among the libraries, though we have nothing as spectacular as the Pennsylvania State University Library which uses plane service to fly interlibrary loans back and forth from the Library of Congress.

Bearing upon this subject, it is to be hoped that telefacsimile transmission of material can soon be made economical and efficient enough for wide use. Experiments to date have been promising, but the expense and
slow rate of transmission discourage general adoption. Even now, however, at least one library system, again that of Pennsylvania State University, finds it advantageous to operate a telefacsimile service on a state-wide basis. That system's most recent annual report notes that telefacsimile equipment connects the University Park Library and 18 scattered commonwealth campus libraries. When the telefacsimile network was first established, the decision was made to use the equipment only for the transmission of urgently needed material. That policy was found to be too restrictive and commonwealth campus librarians are now permitted individual discretion—a change in procedure which is resulting in considerably more frequent and effective use of the telefacsimile equipment.

Inter-institutional agreements for sharing resources have been influenced to some extent by large microreproduction projects, which continue to proliferate. Few libraries can afford or would desire to subscribe to all such undertakings. In some instances, neighboring libraries have divided responsibility for particular projects. A new dimension has been added with announcements from the Encyclopaedia Britannica and National Cash Register Company of series of "resource and research libraries" in ultramicrofiche. The Britannica plan is to reproduce about a half-million volumes, starting with a series on American culture consisting of 20,000 titles, using a reduction of 70 or 80 to 1, and selling for approximately a dollar per volume. The National Cash Register project will also publish in series. Those announced are American civilization, literature of the humanities, science and technology, social science, and government publications. The reduction rate for the NCR series is 150 to 1. A good reading machine is indispensable, of course, for this material and the NCR reader seems satisfactory. The Britannica does not yet have a reader on the market, but hopes to produce one for about half the price of the NCR machine and also a cheaper model for home use.

The microforms save an immense amount of shelving space, but it is not all gain. A battery of readers is required for users and hundreds of these would take up considerable space and involve large expenditures for purchase and maintenance. Also, everyone I know would rather read material in the original than in microreproduction. It has been remarked that no one is likely to take a microfilm reader to bed with him, as he might a good book. Probably a major market for this type of material will be the new so-called "instant university libraries," which need to develop their collections quickly.

In some respects more useful than micro-techniques is the reproduction of books, journals, etc., in full size, for example by photo-offset methods. This development is having a dramatic effect on library acquisition activities. Since the coming of Xerox, it has been stated that no book should be considered out of print, if somewhere a copy is available for reproduction. The importance of this fact is accentuated by the requirements of the many new college and university libraries, which have spring up around the country.
In the past, it would have been virtually impossible for such libraries to have acquired the numerous basic periodical files, collections of primary sources, and reference works needed for a research library. The material had gone out of print and often was simply unprocurable. Within the past few years, reprinting has become big business. The current edition of a publication entitled *Guide to Reprints* lists about 200 firms which are engaged to a greater or lesser extent in reprint publishing, in the United States and abroad. Their productions include complete runs of general and special journals, society publications, bibliographical and other reference works, series dealing with special subjects such as the Negro, law, theatre, American studies, criminology, and history of science, and innumerable individual book titles.

Still in the world of technology, some mention should be made of a new factor that is beginning to enter university and research libraries, though its full impact is still uncertain. With the coming of computers and the growing emphasis on technology in library operations, libraries appear out of date to some people if they are not mechanizing. The magic word is automation. Books and libraries are obsolescent, it is suggested, and will be obsolete when the new machines are perfected.

Without question, libraries cannot ignore the existence of automation, computers, data processing equipment, and information storage and retrieval systems. It would be shortsighted and perilous for them to do so, but they ought to see these developments in their proper perspective and add them to the vast arsenal already existing for library service.

It is the conclusion of unbiased experts that the book as we have known it for centuries will remain the staple offering and main business of libraries for at least another generation, and perhaps indefinitely. Meanwhile, the computer can be adapted to make many library technical operations more efficient and faster. Its usefulness for bibliographical control in medicine, chemistry, law, etc., has also been demonstrated. On the other hand, the time when we can get at the content of millions of books by automation appears to lie far into the future. It is possible that as the storage capacity of computers increases and as costs decrease, it will be possible to store far greater quantities of information digitally than it is at present. It is highly questionable, though, whether it will ever be economical and desirable to store vast quantities of information for infrequent use. At this stage in history, the flexibility, economy, ease of use, and information storage capacity of the traditional book are still unsurpassed. The largest computer memory available is still inadequate to store for immediate access the texts contained in even a medium size library. We are far from the concept of a push-button library.

There are other aspects of my subject, “University Library Problems and Trends,” which deserve attention, though I shall not attempt to explore them in detail. One is the library’s physical plant, a matter which has been of long-time concern to the Syracuse University Library. Certainly, if a library is
to give strong support to advanced study and research, it must provide adequate faculty studies, individual study carrels, and other facilities to expedite the work of scholars and students.

In this connection, I became convinced some years ago of the desirability of separating graduate and undergraduate library service. I believe that a separate facility is the ideal solution to the problem of providing top-notch library service to undergraduates. The experience at Harvard, Michigan, and in a rapidly growing number of other institutions has demonstrated that a library building designed with undergraduate needs specifically in mind greatly increases student reading and relieves the central library of the many problems associated with trying to serve a mixed clientele. That is why a separate undergraduate library building was completed and occupied last year at the University of Illinois. Its heavy use and popularity justify the high hopes held for it.

The richness and variety of American library resources are unsurpassed by those of any other nation. In an article for the Encyclopedia Americana on "One Hundred Notable Libraries of the World," I came to the conclusion that 30 of the 100 are in the United States. The college and university libraries of the country alone hold in excess of 300,000,000 volumes, and are growing at the rate of 25,000,000 volumes annually. More than 70 university libraries hold in excess of 1,000,000 volumes each—one of them, of course, being Syracuse University. To these impressive figures can be added the holdings of great reference libraries, hundreds of special libraries, and thousands of public libraries, providing users of American libraries with bibliographical resources beyond compare. The users, however, will never be completely satisfied. They will constantly demand more.

Which leads me to reiterate the point that the business of building a research library is never finished. A library which has stopped growing is dead and soon loses most of its interest and value. Furthermore, our ideas about the nature and contents of a research library are constantly evolving. A library which would have satisfied its users yesterday may be quite inadequate tomorrow. The university library, therefore, must be a dynamic, living organism, fully responsive to change, and always looking to the future.

In one of his stories, The Time Machine, H. G. Wells imagines a device whose owner can travel at will backward and forward through the centuries. The nearest equivalent we have for this marvelous invention is a good library. When one enters the library, he remains in the present. By proper manipulation of the library, however, he may put himself swiftly in touch with another age, familiarizing himself with the wisdom and knowledge of that era, some of which will have significance for our time. Or, like Wells' time traveler, he may look ahead into the future—to tomorrow's society, tomorrow's scientific advances, tomorrow's problems.