THE COLLEGE LIBRARY

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Aside from the faculty, the most important single instrument of instruction in the college is its library. The character of the library and the temper and methods of its administration have much to do with the liberal quality of the education the students achieve. Amidst all the talk of tests and measurement, few objective indices of the reality of liberal learning are as suggestive or as reliable as the figures kept by the college librarian. In an enterprise at once so difficult and so intangible as encouraging students to acquire a liberal education, there is serious need for assurance that the process actually goes on in the college, not merely in the hopes of the faculty and administration. Proof positive can be obtained only by judging the graduates after a period of years; but evidence, depressing or cheering, may be gathered from the library statistics.

The fundamental aim is to induce students to use books for many sorts of purposes. The first is for work, for study. When the freshman enters college, he comes for the first time into contact with a library designed primarily for that purpose. The character of his work requires him, as never before, seriously to search for the right books, and to use them wisely. Immediately there is a temptation to instruct him in the use of the library directly. That is often done in lectures during Freshman Week, or in a short orientation course. While it is the obvious thing to do, it is really putting the cart before the horse; a student does not learn by being told how to use the library, but by using it. Moreover the responsibility for the use of books should not be centered in the librarian, but in the faculty. All the work of instruction must be so organized that the student will need library books. Once that need is clear to him, he is in a mood to learn how to supply it. His first efforts will be awkward and clumsy, as all first efforts are, but if he is convinced that he is going to use the library frequently, in the work in science, in literature and the humanities, as well as in the social studies, he will want to know how to use it effectively. Moreover his use of the library
is not merely a phase of some fraction of his course of study; it becomes an inevitable part of his whole college experience.

Distributive responsibility for library use is fundamental. Making an English department responsible for the writing of good English has tended to release other members of the faculty from any real sense of responsibility. Too often they carelessly accept writing which is bad; too often the student feels that good writing is a function of a course in composition, but not of his entire educational experience. The central problem, therefore, is to administer the library that it facilitates instruction and makes books conveniently available, without taking from the faculty the responsibility for stimulating the use of books, or from the students the rewarding experience of discovering them. Instruction in the use of the library should not be separate and formal, but informal assistance in the performance of a regular task.

The ideal is to have students use books as adults. If there are series of books to be consulted rapidly and in succession, it should be done at the library. If reference books are to be used, they must remain in the library. But if a book is to be read, it is better that the student should do it in private and in the familiar surroundings of his daily life. Under these circumstances the general reading room will be both smaller and more quiet. All too often it is a social center, a place to meet 'dates,' and has an atmosphere of confusion and distraction. It is not a good place for concentrated study or for reflection, and therefore aggravates one of the habits which college should overcome. The organization of schoolwork makes the process of learning so markedly gregarious that many students find it difficult to work alone in a quiet place. Our efforts should not pander to this tendency; we should do what we can to correct it. It is one of the ideals of a liberal college that the student's room should be homelike and comfortable. There in the privacy of his home he should cultivate the private life of the mind.

For this reason the home circulation figures seem to me a very sensitive index of the spirit of the college. When those figures are high and show a normal and healthy increase, it is a good indication of the intellectual well-being of the institution. Of course, the figures must be read with discrimination. Two col-
leges, each with six hundred students and identical libraries, would not have the same circulation. The general intelligence level of the two student bodies would find reflection in the figures. For a number of years I watched the steady rise of the intelligence scores of succeeding freshman classes; with each important gain in that figure there was an advance also in per capita circulation. The home background of students affects their use of books. Students from cities and large high schools are more accustomed to the use of a library than those from small high schools. It takes some time, usually, for those from the country to habituate themselves to the use of the library, even though their intelligence scores may be equal or superior to those of the city-bred.

Methods of instruction are also reflected in library circulation figures. If two colleges had matched student bodies and identical libraries with uniform administration of both, the circulation of the two would not be the same. If the faculty of one depended heavily upon textbooks during the first two years, the number of books used would be sharply different from the other where the faculty utilized a wide range of required and suggested reading. Every characteristic quality in the plan of instruction is mirrored in the library.

The distribution of circulation among the classifications used in library cataloguing is very uneven. Usually the science students read fewer books, but occasionally an instructor in science has a flair for stimulating reading which is quite unusual. Naturally enough the use by students tends to reflect the use the instructor himself makes of the library. On one occasion when this was studied with some care, it transpired that one professor taught a whole year without any significant use of the library; the circulation within the classification which covered his work was also negligible. Interestingly enough the library is used most by professors who own most books.

One other figure within the general circulation statistics is exceedingly important, yet it is seldom considered. If a study is made to find what proportion of the total collection is used in any one year, the results are very suggestive. Sometimes large circulations are accounted for by the rapid turnover of a small proportion of the books in the library. When that occurs it reflects un-
desirable emphases in instruction, or a poorly selected collection of books. Of course it is proper to have on the shelves many books which seldom circulate, but broadly speaking the larger the percentage of the collection which circulates, the healthier that circulation is.

Inasmuch as we are concerned with individual students rather than with some mythical "average student," it is important to remember that gross circulation figures and per capita circulation figures do not tell which or how many students do not use the library at all. It seems incredible that any student should remain in college an academic year without taking from the library for his own use books which are not specifically assigned. Yet there is reason to believe that in some good colleges as many as ten per cent of the student body make no independent use of the library, confining their reading to books on the reserve shelf. These students are not on the pathway to a liberal education.

After the faculty has done all it can to stimulate the use of books, the administration of the library should be hospitable to their use. Open stacks with the freest access for all are essential. Such a policy involves expense to keep the shelves in order, and at best books will be lost. Better much use and considerable loss than careful preservation without use! Furthermore the collection must be constantly refreshed. The correlation between the number of books added and growth in circulation is positive. Shrewd and wise buying is a great stimulus to the use of books.

The administration of the reserve shelves also affects the reading habits of students. For many years I have been looking at college reserve shelves, and have been reflecting upon their uses and abuses; the abuses appear to have it by a wide margin. Sometimes it seems to me the ideal would be to have no reserve shelves at all. There are two principal reasons.

In the first place, the reserve is almost invariably connected with a course. The books upon the shelf lose their own stature and importance; they wear the livery of a course. Any point of view or importance that the book has in its own right tends to be submerged. Unhappily, moreover, assignments to such books are usually for parts or chapters only; those parts peculiarly necessary for the immediate matter in hand are required. This leads students to approach such books not as a whole but to read parts
only, and the total design or structure of the books is lost. All
the artificialities of a curriculum made up of units and credits
are accentuated. Much of the encouragement to read good books
and make them part of life is destroyed.

In the second place, the existence of a selected group of books
put upon special reserve singles them out as the "important"
books, and puts others at a discount in the eyes of the student.
The habit of browsing through the shelves, taking down one book
after another and getting some impression of each, is discouraged.
The student's first-hand knowledge of the resources of the library,
and how to use them, is limited. Using the reserved books, he
faces no problems of choice or selection, of search and sampling.
Incentives to initiative in the utilization of books are impaired or
destroyed.

The reason given for having a reserve shelf is that more stu-
dents can use the books. Yet that is not necessarily the result.
Actual study of the matter has shown that many books in fact
circulate not only more freely but also more frequently when
made available for home use. By cutting down the number of
books held on reserve, the outside circulation grows rapidly, and
even more important, the books are put to better use. Reform of
the abuses of the reserve shelf rests with the faculty. The entire
institutional policy regarding instruction, courses, and credits is
reflected in the rules governing these shelves. As the outside
circulation steadily outstrips the use of reserve books, the liberal
aspects of education make a steady gain.

Departmental libraries, though not so regarded, are in most
instances a form of reserve shelf, and have many of the same
shortcomings. The fundamental fault to be found with them in
a liberal college is the tendency they exert to narrow the use of
books. It is bad to limit a book to those who work in one depart-
ment, for departmental boundaries are mere administrative con-
veniences, and are utterly artificial. They make the political
boundaries of Europe look logical by comparison. There are more
suppressed "minorities" within departmental boundaries than
ever suffered under an alien majority in a political unit. Every-
thing should be done to reduce the significance of such bound-
daries, nothing to exalt them. Great books touch many fields of
thought and interest. Instructors should traverse many of their
That is the indispensable prerequisite to liberal learning. Setting books apart in a departmental library tends to isolate them, to make access more difficult.

There is one exception to this broad rule; a science reference library has much to commend it. The student of science, whether faculty member or undergraduate, works primarily in a laboratory. He is the only member of the college whose first concern is not with books. But in connection with laboratory work there is occasional need to consult the literature, and in most laboratory work there is frequent stand-by time which may be employed in reading if books are immediately available. The books used in this connection are never outside the field of science, and broadly speaking, are not the kind of science books that would appeal to the general reader. A science reference library does not have, therefore, the same illiberal effects that many departmental libraries have.

The reference desk of the library is another sensitive barometer of intellectual atmospheric pressure. The nature and number of questions brought to the reference librarian reflect both the character and temper of instruction, and the intellectual enterprise of the student body. Many years ago I had some experience assisting with reference work. It left an indelible impression on my mind and deeply affected my own teaching and my ideals of a college. I remember the student who transferred to the college after two years in a university which depended for its "junior college" instruction upon textbooks. The boy was neither unintelligent nor unwilling, but he was helpless for want of initiatory experience. Some students, of course, were lazy, and wanted the hard work done for them. It became necessary, if they were to learn anything, to be shrewd in imparting information they could get for themselves. The good students came for suggestions and help, and in working with them I learned as much or more than they.

As the years go on I lean more and more toward tutorial instruction. It puts upon the student responsibilities which should rightfully be his. Under the-lecture system the professors tend to cover the significant literature, make careful analyses, determine the principle of synthesis, and organize the material for the student. These are precisely the exercises which the student
needs most of all; if the undergraduate learns to do them skillfully, the instructor is returned to his proper position as guide and friendly critic. The student will have to use more books, more substantial books, and use them with an independent spirit. Without the tutorial plan, a strong emphasis upon essays and seminar groups may have much the same effect. But by whatever means students are encouraged to find themselves in contact not merely with textbooks but with authentic literature and scholarly writing, the reference librarian will be busy. He becomes a tutor in the use of the library.

Another function of the library is to provide recreational reading. It is a difficult task to meet the competition of the cheap magazines, the movies, the radio, and social diversions. Some students have already acquired the detective story habit, using one of the convenient, if not wholly truthful, excuses which their elders have polished so smooth by constant use. Broadly speaking, the best way to stimulate recreational reading among students is to start with the faculty; then let instructors pass the word along to students in the casual contacts of campus life, in the incidental comments of the classroom, in book review summaries in student convocations and the college newspaper. While the library has the primary responsibility for this phase of educational experience, and while the imagination and skill of the librarian may play an important part, the attack, in order to be most successful, should be as indirect as possible. There is more reason for satisfaction with a smaller, but genuine, demand, than with a forced and artificial circulation.

So far as recreational reading is concerned, students behave much as other people; if the urge to read can be quickly and readily satisfied, the student will read. If satisfaction is delayed or difficult, he will turn to some other recreation or amusement. For this reason a browsing room, while a delightful thing to have, is not essential. Indeed most such rooms have fallen short of the hopes of the designers. If the student is willing to go to the library for a book for recreational reading, he is probably willing to take it to his own room to read. Rather than a browsing room anywhere, I should prefer shelves of good books for recreational reading in the dormitories. Instead of putting money into expensive furniture and decoration, the expenditures should be made
for books—books that are new and fresh, books that are old and beautiful, books of many kinds to match many moods. The money that is often spent in decorating browsing rooms would actually set up an endowment for book purchases. Let the living quarters of the students be made attractive, and there let them read. On the same principle it seems to me that listening rooms should be built in the student residences. The collection of phonograph records should be centralized, but a depot could readily be established in each residence hall, and the records changed from time to time. Reading good books and hearing beautiful music are both worth a major effort on the part of the library, the faculty, and administrative officers.

The love of books is certainly one of the hallmarks of a liberally educated man. Those who really love books must own them. No library, however great or convenient, is a substitute for personal relationship with one's own books. The college library is, therefore, no reason why students should not buy books; one of its functions should be actively to encourage them to do so. Students are poverty stricken, no matter how much money they have, for there are more avenues of expenditure than income can supply. But books should be bought anyway; they would not be worth buying if they were simply added to satiety; they should represent choice at the very least, and often they should mean sacrifice. Therefore, we should not judge student purchases by bulk, but by the discrimination shown in their selection. Generally speaking, students cannot afford, and most of them should not be encouraged to buy, the current best sellers. Those they can rent from the library's special collection or elsewhere. Books for students to buy are those which have a deep and lasting appeal, which years after will still be warm. For myself, some of the volumes I touch most often were bought in college days; many are freely marked in passages that had an especial appeal. If the members of the faculty hesitate long before requiring the purchase of a textbook, but not at all in getting a student enthusiastic about owning some classic, progress will be made. The love of books is infectious; the power of example is the most persuasive of all arguments.

The book collection of the library of a college should consist of substantial works. Textbooks should be banned entirely, or if
permitted as an act of compromise, should never be in duplicate. I am convinced that one of the most disastrous mistakes which can be made is to underestimate the students' capacity for using scholarly works and important periodicals. An essay which can be prepared from an encyclopedia, a few textbooks, and some popular magazines is not worth doing. The basic works of scholarship and periodicals in each field should be purchased until the budget is stretched to its uttermost limit. No hesitation should be felt in buying both books and periodicals in foreign languages. Students in most colleges are required to learn foreign languages; they should be encouraged to read them. The faculty members themselves easily fall out of the habit of using foreign languages unless fresh works of foreign scholars are constantly set before them. Tutorial or seminar students can here work closely with faculty members.

There is inadequate intellectual challenge in poor books. If one seeks to stimulate ideas and to develop intellectual resourcefulness, poor books will never achieve those aims. Great minds have produced great books, and it is acquaintance with them that makes reading worthwhile; better, by far, a struggle with Plato than easy reading about Plato and his ideas. Good as the members of the faculty are, there are yet greater minds with whom the students should establish first-hand contact through books. Occupational fatigue on the part of the faculty should never result in the feeling that students do not appreciate the difference between good books and poor ones. They may complain occasionally that the work is too hard, but within their hearts they are proud of contact with challenging books, and their real satisfaction appears in many ways. The more I see of students and their work, the more convinced I become that we underestimate more often than we overstrain their capacities. A library whose buying policy is aimed down toward the student is on the wrong track; buying for faculty and students should be substantially on the same basis so far as the general collection is concerned.

The library should call the attention of members of the faculty to new books, particularly those published abroad, and should note when and where reviews appear. The librarian should discuss, preferably in departmental or divisional groups, which
books and periodicals should be purchased. This method does much to avoid acquiring ephemeral books, soon forgotten, and lumber on the shelves. Moreover, it maintains a real relationship between the faculty members and their colleagues of the library staff, who ought to have some awareness of the flow of opinion with reference to vital scholarly issues in the several fields. This will do much to maintain the atmosphere essential to a liberal institution.

Of course library purchases for purposes of faculty research will often lead to the acquisition of books which few students will use; indeed the books, after having served the immediate purpose, may remain idle for years. That is no reason for not buying them; if a member of a college faculty has a worthwhile enterprise afoot, he needs all the help he can get. The obstacles to research are serious enough at best, and whatever can possibly be done to facilitate his work should be undertaken. I recall with particular gratitude the purchase of a large set; it had never been asked for before, and since that project was completed has in all probability seen little service. But the purchase of that set of books launched a study which occupied the time available for research for nearly fourteen years, and without that purchase the project would have been abandoned before it was fairly started. Alertness upon the part of the library, genuine interest in what the faculty members are doing, will do much to encourage research. When material cannot be purchased, it may sometimes be secured temporarily through interlibrary loans. An energetic and accommodating spirit achieves much that money cannot buy. Patience, resourcefulness, readiness to make an occasional "unwarranted" expenditure will pay dividends in better and more frequent research activities.

Finally the library can assist the faculty to remain alive to the broad educational problem. Most men of scholarly tastes have shown some suspicion of the new "scientific" study of education. Much of this scepticism has been justified. In every new field of study the pioneers discover things which seem revolutionary, but which prove on longer study and more mature reflection either not to be true, or not to be as significant as they seemed to the discoverer while flushed with his new idea. Men rush into new fields of study, as prospectors hasten into a new gold field and
dream of millions on the basis of one nugget. After the rush is over, the field comes into its normal productivity. Most of the new curricular fields have gone through similar stages. The analogy is peculiarly applicable to education; the effects were especially severe, because instead of being one field among many, the workers in education hoped to alter every aspect of the college and its organization. Admitting frankly all the shortcomings of some of those who have worked as pioneers in the field of education, and accepting as valid many of the criticisms which have been made, the fact remains that there is much of real significance which comes from research in education. The library can perform a great service by maintaining a faculty shelf devoted to educational discussion. It will be particularly helpful if care is taken to see that material is available on topics which are before faculty committees and on the agenda of faculty meetings.

It is a trite saying that the library is the heart of the college. If there is truth in that remark, a good many colleges are suffering from weak hearts. Being so vital an organ, it deserves care and attention, in order that the liberal learning may have vitality.