

Price Tag on a University Library

By ROBERT B. DOWNS and ROBERT F. DELZELL

PUBLISHED ESTIMATES and guesses on the cost of developing a university library and its resources are, by and large, at such wide variance that one can only conclude the figures have little factual basis.

Five years ago, Donald Coney of the University of California (Berkeley) asserted, "Twenty-five million dollars is the kind of money it takes to create a passably good university library. A number of universities, with the help of a host of private benefactors, but often mainly with tax funds, have put into their libraries amounts of this order of magnitude or greater."¹

Mr. Coney did not reveal the method by which he arrived at this nice round sum. His judgement appears moderate and sober, however, when placed opposite a feature story on the Library of Congress appearing in the *Chicago Daily News*. Based on a collection of about eleven million volumes, plus millions of manuscripts and other types of material, the reporter noted, "The cost of replacing the items that could be replaced has been estimated at more than \$2,250,000,000." Correctly, he added, "Many of the items are priceless because they are irreplaceable."² Again, details are lacking on the foundation for the astronomical valuation of two-and-a-quarter billion dollars.

A down-to-earth, solidly factual study, for insurance purposes, was made by Charles W. Mixer of the Columbia University Libraries, though his figures are now a decade old and do not reflect the inflationary values of the nineteen fifties.

¹"A Librarian's View of Library Finance." In E. E. Williams, ed., *Problems and Prospects of the Research Library* (New Brunswick, N. J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1955), p. 136.

²William McGaffin, "Did You Know You Owned This?" *Chicago Daily News*, February 1, 1958, p. 26.

Dr. Downs is Dean of Library Administration, and Mr. Delzell, Administrative Assistant, University of Illinois Library.

Taking into account varying prices of books in different fields, the value of rare books, non-book materials, and other factors, Mixer came to the conclusion that Columbia's collections, then numbering 2,793,605 volumes, should be evaluated at \$12,237,808.³

A more recent estimate for Columbia was made by Maurice F. Tauber and his associates in their survey of the library. "Columbia's collections have been acquired at great expense," they stated, "and the insurance value on them in 1956 was placed at almost \$20,000,000—probably a conservative estimate of actual worth. The collections contain materials that are highly specialized, and, in some instances, are among the best in the world."⁴

In his 1955 report on Harvard, the largest of American university libraries, Keyes Metcalf, using a somewhat different approach, essayed an appraisal of the Harvard Library in terms of cost:

"The University's investment in the Library is greater than is generally realized. The following items, appraised on the basis of prices prevailing today, might be listed:

Building plant, 12,000,000 cubic feet	\$25,000,000
Book collection, 6,000,000 volumes (The rare book and manuscript collections alone may have a	

³"Insurance Evaluation of a University Library's Collections," *CRL*, XIII (1952) 18-23, 29.

⁴Maurice F. Tauber, C. Donald Cook, and Richard H. Logsdon. *The Columbia University Libraries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 40.

commercial value of \$50,000,000, so this figure is undoubtedly conservative.)	\$60,000,000
Processing of 6,000,000 volumes	\$25,000,000
Annual expenditures of nearly \$2,500,000 representing the income of an endowment of	\$50,000,000
<hr/>	
Total investment in the Library	\$160,000,000" ⁵

The figures cited by Mr. Metcalf are comparable only in part to those previously mentioned, since they include building plant, processing costs, and the value of the library's endowment. Nevertheless, all are legitimate considerations in determining an institution's actual investment in its library. More debatable, perhaps, is the well-rounded estimate of \$60,000,000 for the value of the book collection. As Metcalf insists, the figure may err on the conservative side, but in the nature of things, it can hardly be more than an educated guess, lacking detailed analyses.

Such an analysis has lately been attempted for the University of Illinois Library and its collections. The primary sources of information were the Library's own annual reports, which are reasonably complete back to the beginning of the present century, when the Library's development had barely started; and the transactions of the University's board of trustees, which include detailed annual budgets for all divisions.

To have meaning, a cost study spread over a term of years must use an index dollar. For that purpose, the United States Office of Business Economics' *Purchasing Power of the Dollar* was adopted. The average monthly figure for each year was used to measure the purchasing power of the dollar in terms of consumer

prices. This figure ranged from 233.1 to 80.3, with 1947-1949 equalling 100.

The Library's cataloged holdings as of June 30, 1959, were 3,209,404 volumes. Of the total, 2,676,281 volumes were acquired by purchase, and 533,123 bound volumes were received by gift and exchange.

The Library's annual budgets are available for the period 1897 to 1959. For each of these years, the total expenditures for books, periodicals, and binding was multiplied by the purchasing power of the dollar, as determined by the tables of the United States Office of Business Economics. The actual expenditures for 1897-1959 amounted to \$9,574,830, which was increased in value, by application of the index, to \$11,510,648.

Statistics of expenditures prior to 1897 are not available, but using the best available guides to book prices for the period 1868, when the University opened, to 1896, an arbitrary average of \$3.50 per volume was decided upon. Applying the average to 31,646 volumes then held by the Library increased the total cost by \$90,661, or in terms of purchasing power to \$211,330.

In trying to determine a total valuation of the collections, an imponderable of considerable proportions is gifts and exchanges. It is customary for a sizeable number of any university library's rare and costly books to be received by way of gifts, and therefore the unit value of much material in this category may exceed that of purchased works. On the other hand, it is realistic to recognize that a fair percentage of gifts are of relatively low quality. The average is probably on a par with purchased materials. The count of 533,123 volumes at Illinois received by gift and exchange represents, it should be emphasized, fully cataloged bound volumes only, excluding paper-bound, uncataloged publications, which would greatly increase the figure on holdings.

⁵ *Report on the Harvard University Library: A Study of Present and Prospective Problems* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Library, 1955) p. 62.

In any case, it appears reasonable in this instance to apply the same average value to gifts and exchanges as to purchased items. Following the unit cost of approximately \$4.30 (\$11,510,648 divided by 2,676,281 volumes) produces a total valuation of \$2,292,429 for the 533,123 volumes of gifts and exchanges.

Another type of expense involved in the growth of a university library collection, equally valid, is technical processing, the cost of acquisition, classification, and cataloging, without which the expenditures for materials would serve little purpose. Reliable figures for salaries and wages for the University of Illinois Library are available since 1907, but not for the earlier period. The first forty years, however, were comparatively inconsequential. Expenditures for salaries and wages for acquisitions, cataloging, serials, and binding from 1907 to 1959 totaled \$6,887,213. Correcting that figure in terms of the index changes it to \$7,727,489.

In summary, the value of the University of Illinois Library collections, based upon actual expenditures, except for gifts and exchanges and pre-1897 acquisitions, as of June 30, 1959, was as follows:

Expenditures for books, periodicals, and binding (2,676,281 volumes)	\$11,510,648
Estimated value of 533,123 volumes received by gift and exchange	2,292,429
Estimated value of 31,646 volumes received before 1897.	211,330
Total salaries and wages for the technical departments, 1907-1959	7,727,489
<hr/>	
Total	\$21,741,896

Could the University of Illinois Library's present holdings, or any comparable research collection, be duplicated today for \$21,598,053? Certainly not, if one were to attempt to assemble original materials. The preceding figures

give no recognition to tremendous increases in prices for rare books—with which the Illinois Library is richly endowed—many of which have trebled and quadrupled in value, or for thousands of complete files of scarce learned journals, or for hundreds of thousands of out-of-print volumes, or for manuscripts, and all the other types of material which go to form a major research library. In many cases these materials are unprocurable at any price because they have simply disappeared from the market. Neither do the figures take into account the considerably higher salary and wage scales now prevailing.

An intangible factor also of first significance is the contribution that a community of scholars has made year after year in guiding the development of the Library's resources. The specialized knowledge, the intimate acquaintance with the literature of their fields, the understanding of bibliographical problems, familiarity with the current book market, and whole-hearted devotion to library interests of Harris F. Fletcher, Thomas W. Baldwin, George W. White, Gordon N. Ray, William Spence Robertson, William A. Oldfather, Nathan A. Weston, John VanHorne, Phineas L. Windsor, and a host of other Illinois faculty members and librarians are without price.

Of similar worth are the activities of a number of noted private book collectors, whose lifetime accumulations now enrich the Illinois Library, notably: Wilhelm Dittenberger and Johannes Vahlen in classical philology, Count Antonio Cavagna Sangiuliani de Gualdana on Italian history and literature, Jacob Hollander on the history of economics, William Spence Robertson on Latin-American history, George Sherburn on eighteenth-century English literature, Harlan H. Horner and Carl Sandburg on Abraham Lincoln, Franklin J. Meine on American humor and folklore, Ar-

(Continued on page 404)

grants for that purpose. The number of grants in this area will be adjusted to the need exhibited by worthwhile applications. Grants may be requested for work in any area of librarianship or bibliography. They will not be made, however, for any project which is part of work toward an academic degree. Grants will be made in amounts up to \$1,000.

Research grants have been made in several of the previous annual programs, but they will be emphasized more strongly than ever before this year. At least two grants of approximately \$1,000 each will be made as bibliographical fellowships. It has been the special request of the Microcard Foundation that such fellowships be established with its contribution to the ACRL Grants Program.

In presenting the check of the Microcard Foundation to President Wyman W. Parker at Montreal, A. L. Baptie, treasurer of the Foundation, commented: "Originally a librarian conceived the idea of Microcards as a solution to certain library problems. In the years following the Microcard Foundation has had the privilege of working closely with many libraries and librarians and is pleased to express its appreciation in a tangible way. We sincerely hope that our contribution to the ACRL Grants Program will allow the undertaking of some of the tremendous amount of bibliographic work which needs to be done."

There are no professional or associational qualifications on the eligibility of individuals to apply for a research grant from ACRL. An application form is not necessary. The committee invites application by letter. Letters of application should be addressed to Richard Harwell, Executive Secretary, ACRL, 50 East Huron Street, Chicago 11, Illinois. An applicant's letter should state

succinctly the nature and purpose of the project, a budget for the amount of the grant requested, the project's present state of development (if already begun), its proposed date of completion, and the reasons why funds from outside the applicant's own institution are sought. The deadline for applications is the same as for institutional requests. They will be considered in the same fashion and grants will be announced at the same time as are those to libraries.

Robert W. Orr, director of the library of Iowa State University, is chairman of the ACRL Grants Committee. Other members of the committee are Lois Engleman, Edward C. Heintz, Edmon S. Low, Flora B. Ludington, Richard Morin, and Giles Shepherd. Humphrey G. Bousfield has been designated as a consultant to the committee, and the executive secretary of ACRL works with it as an ex-officio member.

FORMS MAILED

Forms on which applications in the Grants Program for 1960/61 should be submitted have been mailed from the ACRL office to well over a thousand libraries presumed to be eligible for grants. The librarian of any institution which has not received forms and which is believed to be eligible in the program should request forms from the ACRL office immediately. Concerning eligibility in the program the introductory note to the application form comments: "The Committee has authority to make sub-grants for any projects which present extraordinary needs or possibilities. An institution which feels that the limitations on eligibility create an injustice in its case is urged to submit an application anyway. Each request will be considered on its merit. Accreditation is not a prerequisite for the award of an ACRL sub-grant."

Price Tag on a University Library

(Continued from page 361)

nold Muirhead on William Cobbett, Tom Turner on modern English literature, Harry G. Oberholser on ornithology, and Henry B. Ward on parasitology. These are the kinds of collections

that bring distinction to an institution, and mark the difference between merely a good library and a great library. To put a price tag on them is doubtless meaningless.