

# Centralization and Decentralization In Academic Libraries: A Symposium

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## Introduction

"CENTRALIZATION" is a term that has been used in library nomenclature to mean several things, depending upon the adjective used to qualify it. For example, we have "administrative centralization," which generally has meant control of a number of library units by a central officer. Or, we may have "physical centralization" of a system of libraries, in which all units are located either in a single building or a restricted number of locations. Or, we may have "operational centralization," in that certain operations are performed in a single place by a single personnel for the various units of a system. As in any operation that includes many built-in relationships and peculiar aspects developing from local conditions, there are various combinations of these types of centralization, depending again upon such factors as historical conditions, personality strengths or weaknesses, types of library quarters, and the nature of library operations. One library may well have administrative centralization but not physical nor operational centralization.

Why is this question of centralization important enough for so many librarians to come to a meeting and listen to a

panel discuss it? Is it not a question that is so dependent upon local conditions (people, buildings, services, etc.) that such discussion can only be academic and not solve the basic problem of centralized or decentralized library service—to provide the best service in the most economical and effective ways possible. Because it is an issue that has received constant attention in the literature of librarianship, and because it represents a basic problem that besets academic administrative officials and librarians, it has the character of a significant topic for periodic re-examination. Moreover, at this period in the development of academic libraries in the United States, it is becoming more and more a matter of specific concern to librarians. The following conditions or activities, for example, may be cited in connection with this concern:

1. The constantly rising costs of academic library operation.
2. The development of new libraries on various campuses in academic institutions.
3. The absorption of academic units and their libraries in expanding university developments.

4. The development of entirely new campuses of part of state university library systems.
5. The expansion of small college libraries into university library systems.
6. The re-examination of the values of centralized control for professional school libraries as compared to departmental libraries.
7. The relation of an individual institution to the library system of a region—that is, the relation of a library to an interlibrary facility, which is designed to provide aspects of centralized services.
8. The relation of an individual institution to a national library service, whether it is a centralized acquisition operation (Farmington Plan), a card service (Library of Congress), or a bibliographical undertaking (*Union List of Serials*).

It is obvious that developments in the latter areas are of direct importance to all units of a particular library system, and the extent to which regional or national library centers or services provide aid may well have a bearing on the operations of individual departmental or professional units. Obviously, there must be a program in the direction of using regional and national services and resources to the maximum.

The discussion that follows has been planned deliberately around various possibilities in centralized services. Douglas Bryant will describe the characteristics of the Harvard library system and the factors which have given rise to it. At Cornell, Stephen McCarthy has been working with a problem of integrating a state university library program with that of a private library program. At both Harvard and Cornell, the problem of centralization of services has been a major one for many years.

The inclusion of Donald Smith on the program was deliberate, because of his association with a university that is moving toward greater centralization than it has had in its previous history. Boston University has been growing in enrollment, faculty, curricular diversification, schools, and library problems. The prospect of a centralized library service for Boston University involves administrative, physical, and operational decisions. How Boston will decide is of interest to all librarians in this period of enlargement of library programs.

This problem of centralization is one that will not be settled by this panel. However, by exhaustively studying individual situations we may be able to arrive at generalizations that will be of value to the profession at large.—*Maurice F. Tauber.*

## Centralization and Decentralization at Harvard

HAVING BEEN in Cambridge eight years, I am now willing to attempt a description of the organization of the Harvard University Library. It is no small task to work one's way through the intricacies of this large and complex library system, but I hope this morning to conduct you through the maze in such a way as to give you some idea of the struc-

ture of this library, of why this structure seems to be satisfactory for Harvard, and of how it helps to make the library a singularly effective instrument for teaching and research.

Harvard University as a whole is a relatively decentralized institution; its many units enjoy perhaps more autonomy and carry more responsibility than is gen-

erally the custom in American universities. The ten faculties and the dozens of departments and research institutions that comprise the university are held together with a minimum of formal organization and red tape. Their policies and programs are coordinated through the various relationships among the president and governing boards, the deans of faculties, department chairmen, and directors of institutions. There is a much honored maxim at Harvard that "every tub stands on its own bottom." This is an accurate description of the administrative freedom and financial responsibility individually carried by the many units within the university.

#### UNIVERSITY LIBRARY COMPONENTS

The Harvard University Library reflects this decentralization in the university's organization. The university statutes provide that, "The University Library consists of all the collections of books in the possession of the University." The director of the university library, who holds the Carl H. Pforzheimer University Professorship, is also *ex-officio* Librarian of the Harvard College Library. The university library is composed of ninety units, including the Harvard College Library, which, though existing for the general use of the whole university, is in a special sense the library of the faculty of arts and sciences and is a department within that faculty. With the college library, to quote the statutes again, "are included for administrative purposes the special libraries belonging to the Departments of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences as well as the libraries of the various institutions for advanced study and research" that are affiliated with the faculty of arts and sciences. The Harvard College Library (containing about one half of the ninety units in the entire system) consists of:

1. The central collection, housed in the Widener, Houghton, and Lamont

buildings and administered directly by the librarian of Harvard College.

2. The nine house libraries (generally of eleven thousand to fifteen thousand volumes) of the upper-class dormitories, administered by the house masters with the collaboration of the librarian of the Lamont Library.

3. The thirty-two departmental libraries within the faculty of arts and sciences, administered primarily by the department chairmen and the heads of the libraries, all of whom work in varying ways and degrees with the librarian of Harvard College.

Closely associated with the college library are the twenty libraries of the institutions for advanced study and research that are affiliated with the faculty of arts and sciences. Typical of these are the William Hayes Fogg Art Museum, the Museum of Comparative Zoology, the Harvard-Yenching Institute, the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection in Washington, and I Tatti at Florence.

Several of the principal libraries at Harvard are among those that belong to the nine graduate schools other than arts and sciences. These include such major collections as the law, business administration, medical, and divinity libraries. Finally, there are the university archives located in the Widener building, about fifteen office and small special collections, and the Harvard books in the New England Deposit Library.

#### "COORDINATED DECENTRALIZATION"

How is this congeries of libraries held together and integrated sufficiently to form a library system? What are the means for attaining the "coordinated decentralization" that characterizes the organization of these collections with such varied administrative and financial bases? For the ninety units of the university library do form a whole and work together in supporting the teaching and research programs of the university and its scholars.

A brief historical note may be of interest. Departmental libraries have existed at Harvard since the establishment of the law library in 1817, and until 1880 these libraries were virtually independent. In that year the corporation voted to unite them (except law) by several devices, including the creation of the union catalog to record the library resources of the whole university. This process of coordination was advanced in 1910 by the creation of the office of director of the university library.

The principal responsibility for achieving coordination among the administratively and geographically decentralized libraries rests with the director of the university library. While he directly administers the Harvard College Library, it is important to bear in mind that his relation to the other libraries in the university is that of influential counselor rather than direct administrator. The librarians of these libraries maintain relations of varying degrees of closeness with the director and his immediate staff, but their primary line of authority is to the deans, the department chairmen, and the directors of institutions, who head the units to which their libraries belong. The director of the university library, who is *ex-officio* the chairman of the committee on the library of the faculty of arts and sciences, is also a member of all the administrative committees of other libraries in the university. This arrangement provides for effective participation in the affairs of those libraries that have faculty committees. Continuing informal contact with the librarians and heads of the many parts of the university also enables the director to see that personnel and salary standards are maintained throughout the university library insofar as local financial and other limitations will permit. Further, these contacts enable him to make sure that book selection policies throughout the system provide for no unwanted or indiscriminate duplication

and for coverage of all subject fields relevant to the university's programs of teaching and research. The members of the staff of the director's office and the department heads and other senior librarians in the college library form a kind of pool of experts who are consulted in all aspects of library policy and operation by the heads of university departments and their librarians. At the present time, for example, as the result of requests from two department chairmen in the faculty of arts and sciences and the director of a research institution, a librarian in the college library is surveying three libraries in order to make recommendations for administrative, organizational, and fiscal improvements in their individual arrangements and their interrelationships.

A major step in the coordination of book collections throughout the university library has been the creation of a new position, counselor to the director on the collections in the Harvard University Library, to which a senior librarian in the college library has been assigned. As his responsibility is to work toward the most effective deployment of total library resources and toward the development of an over-all policy for collection building, his work will significantly increase the degree of coordination among the libraries. There are frequent conferences, conducted by the associate librarian for resources and acquisitions in the college library, in which faculty members and librarians from all parts of the university participate. The major result of these conferences is an increasingly coordinated book selection policy that will insure no unplanned duplication and no inadvertent slighting of materials in any field. Further, the college library's specialist in book selection in the social sciences is in daily contact with those who select books for the graduate schools of business administration, law, and public administration—fields in which overlapping calls for attention.

A major role in holding the libraries together is taken by the union catalog maintained in the Widener building. This catalog contains main entries for the titles of nearly all books in the university library. In addition to its obvious value for reference work and location of materials, it is a primary instrument in the book selection process in all the libraries.

Increasingly, officials in the director's office are called upon by deans, department chairmen, and directors of research institutions in matters relating to the financial support and the budgets for their libraries, as well as other administrative questions. Further, the personnel officer in the college library is playing a broader role in personnel advice and recruitment for all the libraries; one result of this has recently been an increase in the number of promotional transfers of librarians and other staff members among the units of the university library, leading of course to closer understanding and better communication throughout.

In the last several years a series of standing conferences has been established with marked improvement in the coordination of the policies and the practices of the libraries in the university and with notable effect on the morale and *esprit de corps* among the librarians themselves. The first of these is a monthly luncheon meeting attended by the heads of some twenty of the major libraries in the university. Similar monthly luncheon conferences are held with the chief catalogers in these large libraries and with the heads of public services. As an example of the accomplishments of these groups, I shall simply cite the recent publication of a guide for department libraries concerning the relationship of their cataloging to the central library. This guide, prepared at the specific request of a number of departmental library catalogers, contains information on the preparation of entries for

the union catalog, consultation of the union catalog, cataloging services available from the catalog department in Widener, a number of basic cataloging instructions intended for the very small libraries, information on the National Union Catalog and other union lists, rules for counting books, etc. Though the Harvard Library does not classify and catalog its books according to a single classification scheme and cataloging code, this kind of effort toward standardization on basic points is particularly effective.

The most important single means of communication among all units of the library is the *Harvard Librarian*, published monthly throughout the academic year. This newsletter, prepared in the director's office, provides all members of the university library staff with information on personnel, additions to the collections, specific libraries, and other matters of common interest.

Many libraries are issuing guides to their collections and services, and these form a series of guides to the university library, the publication of which is coordinated in the director's office.

Finally, there is the Harvard Library Club to which all members of the university library staff may belong. Throughout the years, this has been a reasonably effective means of bringing together members of the widely dispersed library staff and of promoting friendship and understanding among them.

To emphasize the increase in coordination among the libraries in the university, I should like to mention three fairly recent developments. It has become apparent to the governing boards, the dean of the faculty of arts and sciences, and the director of the university library that the limited endowments of a number of the research institutions are insufficient to provide for library collections and services on a level with traditional commitments and in accordance with per-

sonnel and salary standards generally prevailing elsewhere in the university library. There is a growing recognition of the fact that some general, unrestricted money must be assigned for the support of these libraries. The interesting point to note is that such support will be channeled through the college library, with the inevitable and desirable result that the standards of these libraries will be maintained through the fiscal and administrative interest of the college library.

The increasing number and regularity of the book selection conferences cited in the previous section, together with the appointment of the counselor to the director on the collections, is having an important influence on the quality of book selection and the degree of selectivity through the university library.

The importance of coordination within the Harvard University Library was emphasized by the corporation when, in 1959, it voted that in the faculty of arts and sciences and related areas, " 'Before any significant new library operation is begun, whether it is for purposes of instruction or research, the matter should be discussed with the Director of the University Library and approved by the Director and the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences', and that 'The coordination of any new library with the total structure of the University Library system will be the responsibility of the Director of the University Library, in cooperation with the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.' The vote also specified that there be adequate budgetary provision on a continuing basis, and provided that, when discontinuation of any library collection is proposed, 'notification should be sent to the Director of the University Library, who will decide, subject to the terms and conditions under which the library was established, whether it should be continued, assimilated into the University Library, or otherwise disposed of as seems appropri-

ate.'"<sup>1</sup> The vote further provided that these principles should apply to all parts of the university library. This action of the corporation is sure to increase markedly the coordination within the university library.

#### COMPLICATING FACTORS IN DECENTRALIZATION

Even with the most effective measures for coordination, a number of complicating factors are inescapable in such a decentralized organization. For one thing, communication is not as direct as when there is a clearly defined and centralized administrative structure. To offset this, it is necessary to communicate through a wide variety of techniques that in turn require continuing innovation and imagination to be useful in differing situations and relationships.

In a decentralized library of many units depending on separate financial resources there is always the possibility that in periods of strong leadership and relative prosperity some libraries will assume commitments for collection building, bibliographic activity or other services that it cannot keep up in subsequent periods. This then leads to dislocation of standards and imbalance in the total financing of the university department to which the library belongs. In times of reduced support, research and instructional work can sometimes be curtailed without permanent damage. The cumulative nature of library commitments and decisions, however, makes such reaction to circumstance difficult and often impossible without serious risk of permanent damage.

Varying levels of financial support also mean varying adherence to salary and other personnel standards set by the college library and the other major units of the university library system. One of the principal aims of the new personnel program instituted in the Harvard Library

<sup>1</sup> *Harvard University Library Annual Report for the Year 1958-59*, (1959), Cambridge: 7.

two years ago was to reduce disparities of this kind.<sup>2</sup> The results so far have been significant and improvement continues.

Another factor in this type of organization is the expense involved in duplication of library materials and the maintenance of some space that would otherwise not be necessary. Provided this expense can be kept to a thoughtful minimum—and the process of coordination is the chief force in this regard—the advantages of local libraries tailored to the specific needs of a special department or institution would seem to warrant the relatively small price paid.

As there is no single classification scheme and no unified cataloging code common to all the libraries at Harvard, there is of course some inconvenience for those who use more than one of the library's units. Furthermore, the inclusion of departmental library cards in the university library union catalog also requires the adapting of some main entry headings to the college library code which prevails in this central catalog. Here again, it is generally agreed among librarians, scholars, and students that the advantages of having special needs and circumstances reflected in local cataloging practices probably outweigh the relatively minor disadvantages.

Finally, there are fairly wide differences among the libraries in such matters as hours of opening, regulations for circulation and interlibrary loan, and use of the libraries by non-Harvard readers. This is not a simple matter for library users to understand, and coordination itself will not eliminate the inconvenience. By and large, local needs are satisfactorily met by the provisions of individual libraries, and university-wide needs can be filled by accommodation to the various patterns of use.

<sup>2</sup> Paul H. Buck, "A New Personnel Program for Harvard Librarians," *Harvard Library Bulletin* XII (1958), 289-296. (Also reprinted as Appendix II in *Harvard University Library, Annual Report for the Year 1957-58.*) (Cambridge: 1958).

#### ADVANTAGES OF THIS ORGANIZATION AT HARVARD

It has been said that a library organization based on "coordinated decentralization" is desirable and workable at Harvard, and some of its advantages have been suggested. I should like in closing to recapitulate these and mention a few others. In considering these points it is necessary to recall that we are thinking of a research library of nearly seven million volumes which is over three centuries old and which is an amalgam of collections that have been developed to meet differing needs.

In the first place, geographic dispersal of the library facilities places books and study areas near their users, making the library more easily accessible to more people. Also, the smaller collections typical of departmental and institutional libraries (even if they reach a million volumes as the law library soon will) are more conveniently usable than the single gigantic collection would be if the library resources were physically centralized.

The dispersal of primary intellectual and financial responsibility for libraries is a potent force in creating and maintaining a sense of identity of faculty members with that part of the university library that is their basic source for research. The close bond makes for enthusiastic participation in the building of the collections. And it leads to more refined sensitivity and greater effectiveness in the librarians' anticipation of, and response to, the research and instructional needs of faculty and students.

Another advantage of this local identity and responsibility is that the development of library endowment funds and the solicitation of gifts of money and books is thereby facilitated. Medical scientists and medical librarians presumably know better than general library administrators the potentially most promising sources of support for medical re-

search libraries. While the committee of the overseers to visit the library is concerned with the over-all affairs of the university library, the many visiting committees of departments and research institutions have particularly informed insight into the special needs and opportunities of these parts of the university, including, of course, their libraries.

With the basic responsibility for book selections resting with the departmental and institutional libraries, it is at once possible to pursue policies of the highest degree of selectivity (both in acquisition and in weeding) and to acquire for special use certain materials regarded as expendable. Such practices, it is hoped, provide over the years collections that are as effective as possible for the scholars and students using them.

In the Harvard Library it is usual for the various units to apply special-library theory and practice where these are useful. Notable instances are the city planning analytical catalog in the library of the school of design, the index of anthropology in the Peabody Museum library, and the vertical files of several types maintained in several libraries. These

devices, plus classification schemes and subject headings adapted to local and special situations, contribute to the convenience and productivity of the scholars using the libraries.

A further benefit of decentralization is that the books added to the university library as a whole (about 180,000 a year) can probably be acquired and cataloged more speedily in many relatively small libraries than would be possible in one central processing operation.

#### CONCLUSION

A policy of coordinated decentralization, like walking a tightrope, requires alertness; there must be continuous adjustments if balance is to be maintained. At present, as will have been evident from what has been said, coordination is being emphasized in a number of areas. The need for it is clear, and it is welcomed by the special and departmental libraries; it is not being forced upon them. The developments in question are by no means an attack on the policy of coordinated decentralization; rather, they are adjustments calculated to make it work more effectively.—*Douglas W. Bryant.*

## Centralization and Decentralization at Cornell

I DO NOT THINK that physical centralization of library collections and services on a large university campus is possible or desirable; degrees of centralization, on the other hand, may be and frequently are desirable; but, although physical centralization is not possible, it is my view that unified or centralized administration is desirable, if it can be achieved without loss of library support or vital interest.

I shall try to make these points clear by drawing on my experience at Cornell. Cornell is a private university made up of twelve colleges and schools, some of which—four to be exact—are oper-

ated as contract colleges of the state University of New York. All the colleges of Cornell have a high degree of independence in determining their programs, standards of performance, selection of staff, admission of students, development of resources and sources of support, etc., within the broad policies of the university. To a certain degree at least such independence is fostered by the university administration. The end result is an institution drawing its support from a variety of sources through the efforts of a large group of individuals whose sustained interest is essential to the well-being of the entire enterprise. I suggest



that if the library system of the institution is supported through these same means, this very fact will have or should have an effect on the administration of the libraries.

I will direct my remarks principally to the problems arising from the dual sources of support—private funds and state appropriations—upon which Cornell depends. I have mentioned that the state-supported colleges at Cornell are contract colleges, i.e. through legislation the state has in effect contracted with the trustees of Cornell University to operate these colleges on its behalf. This contractual arrangement provides that the college programs of teaching and research are carried on in buildings owned or leased by the state, and that the instruction, research, and attendant services are given by personnel whose salaries are paid from funds appropriated by the state using materials and equipment provided by the state. The students of these colleges are Cornell students; they are awarded Cornell degrees; the faculty are Cornell professors, selected and promoted in accordance with policies formulated and adopted by Cornell University; they have all the privileges of Cornell faculty members, and they serve the university as a whole in various capacities; many of the higher administrative posts of the university are filled from their ranks. The contractual relationship involving the use of appropriated funds makes necessary the observance of many, but not all, of the detailed state regulations regarding the expenditure of such funds for materials, equipment, and salaries. Salary levels, for example, are determined by a state salary scale and new buildings are constructed under the supervision of the State Department of Public Works, but supplies and equipment are purchased through the Cornell purchasing department. State appropriations in support of these colleges are made to Cornell University for the operation of the respective colleges. In ad-

dition to the College appropriations there is an appropriation for general services, but this is a relatively minor part of the whole.

With this as a sketchy description of the general background, what are some of the possibilities and problems connected with centralized administration of the libraries? It seems to me that this matter can best be presented in terms of several rather specific items or questions, namely, budget, personnel, and services and collections. I shall discuss each of these topics in turn.

### BUDGET

At Cornell there has not been, in the past sixty years at least, any such document as a library budget for the university as a whole. Rather there have been (1) a budget covering the central university library and, at different times, some or most of the departmental and college libraries in the endowed part of the university; (2) separate budgets for the independent departmental and college libraries as part of the budgets of the respective departments and colleges; and (3) budgets for the libraries of the state-supported colleges as part of the appropriations made by the state legislature.

As Cornell has moved toward centralized administration of the libraries, one of the efforts has been to consolidate in one budget the library support for all of the endowed divisions of the university. With the exception of the medical school, located in New York City and operated as a completely separate division, this consolidation has been developed gradually over the past ten or twelve years and is now expected to be complete in the next year.

The problem presented by the state-supported college libraries is different and more complex. First, the fiscal year is different and second the entire budgetary process is different. Once you have adjusted mentally to two different and only partially concurrent years, each with

its own deadlines, procedures, etc., this part of it is relatively unimportant. The other aspects of it present greater problems. Library support is of necessity tied to or included in support of the several colleges, that is, the library budgets of these colleges are part of the college budgets. The college budgets in turn, although presented to the State University and other authorities in Albany by Cornell University as a unit, are, in effect, considered in terms of the individual colleges and their roles in the educational program of the state. This tends to make the dean of the college the key figure in developing support for the college budget. In the past the dean has also been the officer to whom the college librarian has reported. Centralized administration of the libraries effects a change here, but it is considered important that this change should not operate in such a way as to diminish the dean's interest in securing the best possible library support.

The possibility of having a single library budget for all state-supported college libraries has been considered and rejected because it would remove library support from the concern of the several deans and would probably affect such support adversely.

As a method of making centralized library administration feasible and meaningful and yet retaining the advantages of the present budgetary arrangement, the following procedures have been adopted;

1. The college librarians and the director of libraries present budget recommendations to the respective deans.
2. These recommendations are reviewed and budget hearings, participated in by the director of libraries and the respective college librarians, are held by the deans and the university controller. At the conclusion of these hearings decisions are made as to the final form of the budget requests.
3. When the budgetary process has been

completed and the university informed of the appropriations made, the college business officers transmit to the director of libraries the approved budgets of the respective college libraries.

4. The library administration compiles these several college library budgets into a single document which constitutes the state-supported part of the library budget.
5. Combining the library budget of the endowed part of the university and the state-supported college libraries produces the total university library budget.

This has never happened yet, but we expect to try it in the course of the next six months.

This is the first part of the procedure. From this point on, it is a matter of management, control and observance of the requirements for the proper expenditure of the funds provided.

The presumed advantages of centralizing the library budget, as outlined, are to make possible better over-all appraisal of library support, better planning and more coordination of library budgets and more balanced control of library development and operation. It is admittedly a cumbersome procedure, but it appears not only to be necessary but to have some inherent advantages.

#### PERSONNEL

Just as the dean has a vital interest in library support and just as it is desirable to safeguard and develop that interest, so also does he have an interest in library personnel, at least at certain levels. In the past the college librarian has been responsible to the dean of his college for the proper discharge of his duties. If centralized administration is to have significance, responsibility to the director of libraries must also be provided. It is proposed that this will be secured by making the college librarian jointly responsible to the director and the dean. In

practice, it is expected that this will mean that in the normal operation of the college library the college librarian will be responsible and will report to the director of libraries. Annual reports will be addressed to the dean and the director.

With respect to appointments, the college librarian will be appointed only on the joint recommendation of the dean and director. Presumably recruiting will be done by the library administration. Joint recommendations will also be made for all professional positions and promotions. To what extent the deans may wish to interest themselves in such appointments remains to be seen. Similarly, recommendations for setting up new positions are a matter of joint recommendation, with the power of initiating such recommendations to rest with the library administration.

Under these conditions the library administration will continue the practice adopted several years ago of using a single recruiting officer. We hope to extend this to include all general personnel work. This presents some problems because of variations in salary scales and fringe benefits, but we have now had some experience in coping with these problems and we think we know how to do it.

#### OPERATIONS

Within approved budgetary and personnel provisions, the operation of the libraries, both endowed and state-supported, is the responsibility of the library administration with the assistance on matters of policy of the university library board.

As a means of implementing the program of centralized administration, two new assistant directorships were created and the librarians of two of the state-supported college libraries were appointed to these posts. In one case, the college librarian retains his present responsibilities and has certain added supervisory responsibilities for libraries in allied fields; in the other case, the college

librarian retains the title and some of the responsibilities of his college library post, but he assumes half-time duties in the central administration as principal budget and personnel officer.

An administrative council has been established consisting of four assistant directors, the curator of rare books, the law librarian, and the director. It is this group that is concerned with the policies, problems, and procedures involved in developing and operating the unified administration of the libraries.

What appear to be the prospects? As of the present, after only a few months, it would appear that a higher degree of coordination and unification can be achieved, that certain general services can be advantageously centralized, that some others may best remain decentralized but operate under common policies, and that in time a better balance of collections in relation to teaching and research programs can be achieved.

As examples of some of the above, it would appear that we can go farther than we have yet done in unifying recruitment and personnel policies, orientation and in-service training of new staff members, and amount and quality of service available in the several libraries.

Not immediately, but in the not too distant future, we expect to centralize the lending of materials on inter-library loan and the supply of photocopies. This, if it is achieved efficiently, should prove a boon to some of you who may have been bewildered by the results of your efforts to borrow material from Cornell. You might consider this a simple matter and one which could be done quickly. But it is well to remember that personnel, handling, postage, and copying costs are involved. Funds to cover these costs come from different sources and they must be used equitably. There are legitimate ways of doing this, but they are not all simple and easy. An example of a centralized service is offered by our library messenger service: the present university library

carries budget items for the truck and driver, and provides the service to the state-supported college libraries for a monthly fee.

An example of decentralization that will certainly continue for some time and may continue indefinitely is the acquisition and cataloging of books, periodicals, and documents. At present, divisions performing these functions exist in several of the college libraries. They occupy space, use equipment, and are staffed by personnel provided by state appropriations. Theoretically they could be centralized; actually there might be financial disadvantages in so doing, as well as a possible loss in speed of processing and convenience to users. These possible disadvantages may offset the economies that would result from assembly-line processing. However, we do hope before too long to achieve a situation in which no book will be cataloged twice at Cornell. We think one cataloging job should be enough and after that we should use a

camera and a multilith; rather than a cataloger.

An area in which we expect in time to benefit from centralization is that of better balance of our collections. We hope that it may be possible to relocate blocks of material to place them in better relationship to their current use. This can be done as a matter of administration without raising any questions of ownership. We believe also that centralization affords a better basis than we have had heretofore for planning the development of the collections. This, optimistically, should assist in keeping duplication to the minimum and at the same time avoid the inadvertent occurrence of serious gaps in the collections.

In conclusion: in my view, a simple, unified library administration may not be possible in a complex institution, but a more flexible approach to centralize administration may offer real opportunities in such situations.—*Stephen A. McCarthy.*

## Centralization and Decentralization at Boston

TO UNDERSTAND the Boston University library system a very brief outline of the history of this system is needed. The university was incorporated in 1869, although the school which became the school of theology in Boston University was founded thirty years earlier. Within five years after its incorporation, the university adopted or established seven colleges and schools of which only five remain. Today Boston University is composed of five graduate schools and ten undergraduate colleges and professional schools, of which six have been established since the end of World War II. There is also a summer term, and a division of continuing education offering evening and extension courses.

Until a year ago these fifteen schools had among them fourteen libraries, the main library serving both the graduate school and the college of liberal arts. These fourteen libraries mostly grew up independently of one another, because the schools to which they belonged were isolated, scattered all over Boston, even with one in Cambridge. It is only now when twelve of the fifteen schools are on the main campus that it has been geographically possible to have any sort of physical centralization of libraries. Two of the three off-campus libraries are due to move to the main campus within two or three years. That leaves only the medical library across town, where it is likely always to stay.

What does all this mean to the students, the chief users of the libraries of the university? It means that until recently the library of the school in which they are enrolled has tried to be a complete library. This is still the case in too many instances. The libraries have considered themselves to be, and in fact many still are, libraries of the schools they serve, rather than subject collections within the greater system of university library service. Recently for the first time we were able to take a complete library, the college of business administration library, which had 40 per cent of its collection in the liberal arts, and alter its collection to include only business and economics; specifically, only the HB through HJ, and some T portions of the Library of Congress classification system plus reference materials in A and Z. We renamed it the Business and Economics Library to emphasize that it was a subject collection rather than a library of a school.

I might interject here that the cancellation of subscriptions to liberal arts periodicals in this business library all of which duplicated titles received in the main library, permitted the entry of subscriptions to thirty-five business and economics periodical titles not previously found in the university. This experience portends a greatly enlarged and enriched periodical subscription list for the University as other libraries become subject collections. This is only a start in the move to make the school libraries branches in a university library system, and to make them subject collections rather than complete libraries. It should be emphasized that as "complete" libraries they are all inadequate, falling far short of completeness. But joined together as strong, dissimilar parts of a whole, emphasizing the chief subject of each, they will nicely complement each other to form an adequate university collection.

In the meantime, the student cannot

go to one place to find out the library holdings of the university. The union catalog in the main library contains for the other libraries, only main entry cards and then only for entries since 1951. At that, one library started reporting only last year.

Similarly with periodicals; there is no one source that will tell the student what periodicals the university's libraries have or subscribe to. We have started to solve this problem by putting all periodical titles onto IBM cards, from which lists can be run off to be distributed to all the libraries. A year has passed and no list has been distributed. We are currently waiting for the preliminary IBM list to be checked by each library for accuracy in reporting their current subscriptions before we run off the final list. This editing by the various libraries is taking longer than we had expected.

As Boston University moves toward physical centralization of most of its libraries, what are the difficulties that present themselves? First, there is classification. Four of the thirteen collections are in LC, three are partially in LC and are being reclassified from Dewey, four are wholly in Dewey, the medical library is in the Boston Medical Library classification (and shall remain so), while the law library is unclassified. This is the present situation, but it has not always been so. All of those now in LC were either nonexistent in 1948 or were in Dewey. It was in 1948 that the reclassification of the main collection started, from Dewey to LC, and while this was completed last year, eleven years after it began, there are still those three collections in the midst of reclassification. Reclassification means inconvenience for the public in catalog use and in use of the collections. Reclassification means intergration of copy numbers and other, seemingly endless, changes in records. Each book must be re-marked; each book card (for those libraries still using them) must be corrected. The only satisfaction those in-

timately involved in the process have when another collection is finally reclassified is that of a job well done, for no sooner do they finish one than they begin on another, or more accurately, on several at once. The whole purpose of reclassification is to permit the shelving of these now separate collections into one collection in the stacks of our proposed central library, which is about four or five years away from reality.

Second, there is the question of physical location of the present collections. With two more schools moving to the campus within two years, bringing their libraries with them, we are confronted with an increase of this multiplicity of on-campus libraries. In the case of the law library, when it arrives on campus, it shall move into new, separate quarters. but in the case of the library of the College of Basic Studies (which is a junior college) it will most likely become a part of a new unit to be comprised of three libraries now on-campus. Two of these three are classified in LC and one is being reclassified from Dewey to LC. That still leaves the College of Basic Studies library to be reclassified before it can be interfiled on the shelves.

Centralization of the physical location of collections does not necessarily mean that the collections themselves can be integrated. Diversity of classifications can necessitate decentralization of collections on the shelves that are physically centralized in one stack area.

We have been fortunate in having the classification and copy numbering of our LC-classified collections integrated so as to permit interfiling of the books. It would not be possible to interfile the four collections still in Dewey, even if we wanted to, because each was classified in isolation.

Third, there is circulation. The various libraries, having grown up as autonomous units, have had varying circulation procedures and policies. We have not come too far in standardizing these

yet, except to establish uniform fines in all on-campus libraries.

Fourth, there is the problem of interlibrary loans. There is still no central service for this, so that requests received by the main library which it cannot fill are forwarded to the library of the university which is most *likely* to be able to fill the request. I emphasize "likely" reminding you of the shortcomings of our union catalog, our yet-to-be published list of periodicals, and our lack of a central serials record.

I might also say that while two of our libraries are themselves checking and reporting to the third edition of the *Union list of serials*, the others check and report back to the main library which must then compile these reports for forwarding to the *Union list of serials*. How helpful a centralized serials record would be!

Lastly, there is the question of budgets. As each library in the past has been a library of a school, the staff of each has been directly responsible to the dean of each school. Inevitably each library has been treated differently in regard to its budget. Inequities in salaries and in book funds have developed. As these various libraries are brought under central administration; that is, as their budgets become the responsibility of the director of libraries rather than the dean of a school, the task of bringing equity into the budgets presents itself. It is a thankless task, albeit essential.

There are certain principles in regard to centralization and decentralization which become clear after examining a library system that is in flux, such as Boston University's:

1. There are three aspects of library service which can be either centralized or decentralized. They are first, administration; second, technical services; and third, collections and the public service of these collections.
2. We are not faced with an all-or-none situation. It is possible, for example,

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Bowdoin College. Mr. Harwell made the following remarks: "I should simply like to thank you as representatives of all of ACRL for the privilege and pleasure, and even the perplexities, of working with you. I have enjoyed it, really. I think I've enjoyed it most because Elaine Mitchell has been here as

secretary. You'd be much worse off if she were leaving instead of me. Most of us are old enough to remember 1936, but I can assure you that Maine is not really a foreign country and I will still be part of ACRL. But it's a real pleasure at this point to welcome Mark Gormley formally to this job."

## Centralization and Decentralization

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to have centralized technical services and decentralized public services, and even decentralized administration. This approximates Boston University's current situation. Or it is possible to have central administration with decentralized technical and public services.

3. The determining factor in whether a library organization shall be centralized or decentralized should be the extent of *service* that is feasible.

Until very recently the administration of the Boston University libraries has been completely decentralized. The first centralization of administration came on July 1, 1959 when the budgets of four libraries came directly under the aegis of the director of libraries. I might emphasize that you do not have administrative control unless you have budgetary control. Without budgetary control you have administrative control in name only. Yet in spite of this lack of administrative centralization there existed limited centralization in technical services. The main Library as a service agency ordered and cataloged for five other libraries.

The timetable of development at Boston University seems to be for complete administrative centralization fairly soon, gradually increased centralization of technical services until complete, or al-

most complete, centralization results, and a system of decentralized public services and collections until the new central building is constructed. Into the central building will be assimilated most of the present scattered collections.

If, as I have said, the determining principle, as to whether or not a library organization shall be centralized or decentralized, should be the extent of service that is feasible, then why has Boston University chosen almost complete centralization in all aspects of library service?

The answer is easy. The type of library service that would be most desirable would be for each student and faculty member to have his own complete, personal library. It might be practical, but not feasible. Why not? Because of the limitation placed on this solution by the amount of money available to implement it. The limitation placed on implementation of solutions by the amount of money available approaches the equivalency of a scientific constant: the more money—the more service. Boston University has limited resources; therefore, it must have limited library services. It cannot afford the luxury of excessive decentralization. It must choose between decentralized mediocrity and centralized excellence. It has chosen the latter and in time shall achieve it.—*Donald T. Smith.*