

## Statistics and Standards for College and University Libraries

*Problems and discussions are reported which were experienced in the work of the ALA National Library Statistics Coordinating Project and in the preparation of the handbook on Library Statistics. Consensus was reached as to most useful statistics and as to terminology applied to them. Apparently such agreement could be used in expanding statistical reporting into other areas, especially in developing standards for university libraries.*

**P**ROBLEMS IN LIBRARY STATISTICS have been with us for some time, and so have attempts at their solution. What has stood in the way in the past has been the apparent irreconcilability of the needs of various types of libraries with each other, not to speak of internal differences of measurement within each group.

The ALA National Library Statistics Coordinating Project was undertaken in 1964 with the aim of standardizing the kinds of statistics to be collected nationally, and standardizing the measuring units in terms of which they will be reported. It was not the purpose of the project to recommend format or procedures for publication, or to set standards for libraries. There are no standards for university libraries such as exist for college libraries. With the publication of *Guide to Library Statistics; Handbook of Concepts, Definitions, and Terminology*, such a project should now be undertaken with common national applicability assured. The very existence of defined terms with statistical relevance should be of considerable help in this work.

The author represented college and university libraries on the ALA National Statistics Coordinating Project; other

kinds of libraries were also represented. To obtain an accurate measure of the intellectual resources of academic institutions of the country we must have enough data to make the picture meaningful. Not only is agreement needed on uniform terminology in one area, such as the count of holdings, but also a determination of which areas are so closely interrelated as to constitute logical complementary units for reporting.

In addition to the ALA Statistics Advisory Committee to this Project, and the ALA Statistics Committees on College and University Libraries, on Public Libraries, and on Technical Services, the *Handbook* is indebted to the one hundred and seventy people from forty states who represented the thinking of librarians across the country. They worked intensively at four regional meetings. The thinking of all these people, and the conclusions reached as groups are embodied in the *Handbook*.

Far from being unanimous in approaches, differences were recognized. Where they were not reconciled in the final reports of recommendations, they were at least respected. For instance, by accepting a definition of *volume* for all types of libraries it is now possible to arrive at a total of national resources in that category; types of libraries which

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find additional holdings statistics useful may include them in separate categories. Since microtext is being reported separately, it appears in the national tabulation. Any library which feels it useful for its own purposes to add reels of microfilm and number of microcards to its total volume count is able to do so on the local, internal level.

Wherever possible, existing measures and methods for collecting statistics have been maintained. The present attempt has been consciously aimed at clarification by combining already existing forms or by separating them into new elements, rather than by discarding the old and forming a completely new system. Underlying selection of the areas to be included in statistical measurement were the questions of purpose and of means. In the language of historical knowledge, the issues would be those of teleology and of mechanism. The common purpose of librarianship is to control and conserve its intellectual resources for maximum service to its public. As one means to gain insight into where we stand in respect to our activities, our manpower resources, library materials, physical facilities, and financial position, the measurable areas in libraries are presented numerically—that is, statistically. Statistical measurements of libraries not only show where we stand but also, over a period of time, where we have been and where we are going. They are the means by which we predict future growth and relate it significantly to future needs. The problems faced on this project were whether a particular statistic added significant information to our body of knowledge, whether an item could be counted at all, whether it could be added to any other category, and what the basic unit of this count should be.

First, it was necessary to establish a uniform concept of constituent factors in the holdings of one library. Quite apart from local administrative organization is the question of meaningful reporting,

Therefore a university library which reports the holdings of the central campus together with those of libraries on subsidiary campuses increases the distortion factor in lateral comparisons with libraries which report them separately.

One diversity which has been pointed out by many is the problem of proceeding from a base of previously irregular accounting of library holdings, particularly in the volume count. Unreported or undiscovered losses over the years and changes from bibliographic to physical volume count are common to the larger libraries.

This problem increases with the size and age of a library. Looking to the future, however, we can accept the fact that big libraries are big. By agreeing to a common method of reporting now, we will avoid future chaos. With the increase in the number of new libraries, particularly on the college level, standardization of reporting is imperative. While statistics have many uses, one of them is to indicate the size and, by implication, the usefulness of a library's holdings. Out-of-print volumes which many new libraries are able to buy on microfilm, and which established libraries are adding as replacements, are of some consequence to the researcher, as well as to budget and space considerations.

The point at which a volume becomes a statistic may vary. If the figures for volumes added annually are taken from the statistics kept by the catalog department, it is essentially a cataloging count which may represent backlog of other than the current year. If the count is taken when the volumes enter as acquisitions, it may be increased by material not added to the collection, such as unsuitable gifts or ephemera not to be cataloged. To relate the number of volumes added significantly to expenditures, the count should be made at the point at which the volumes enter cataloging from acquisitions. The assumption being made

is that temporary or provisional or partial processing is provided by most libraries to make materials "ready for use."

The areas of greatest diversity of opinion next to volume count are those concerning government documents, capital and operational expenditures, and definition of the term librarian. Government documents were treated by exclusion; that is, only those which are classified according to local practice should be included in the volume count, and only those periodical titles so identified in the February issue of the *U.S. Government Publications Monthly Catalog* are added to the periodical count.

The consensus was to exclude income as a reportable item in the budget, but to treat expenditures in a more detailed way, in order to allow flexibility of interpretation and to avoid the appearance of establishing standards in this area. The fact that no provisions for standards were made does not obviate their usefulness.

The need for the development of ALA standards for university libraries is greater since the passing of the Library Services and Construction Act. The *Analytic Report of Library Statistics of Colleges and Universities, 1961-62* includes "A Résumé of National Academic Library Resources." The drawbacks of such analytic reporting are various. The term "national academic library resources" in the title is misleading since the report omits all those which serve institutions beyond the four-year level. In the information based on the ALA Standards for College Libraries and the Standards for Junior College Libraries, the analysis of the research library is an obvious lacuna. It would probably have been well to have had a rather complete assessment of all academic libraries in the nation available to support Edwin Castagna's effort this year in determining the country's needs in terms of possible solutions under LSCA. It would seem, therefore, that it is time that a project to develop statistics

for university libraries be undertaken.

The absence of standards for university libraries may be in part due to the fact that minimum standards may be interpreted to be maximum standards, and that increases due to the population and knowledge explosions cannot be built in. It may be feared that standards may be a deterrent to expansion. Since growth figures are available for all related factors, however, the expansion ratio of development need not be frozen in a given year.

Statistics which are gathered annually should be measurable against standards; conversely, it will be useful for the future application of such standards if in developing them consideration is given to the recommendation of the chapter on "Statistics of College and University Libraries" in the forthcoming *Handbook on Library Statistics*. The difference between the questionnaire which is reprinted in the back of the book and the final form of publication of *Library Statistics of Colleges and Universities* is a matter of interpreting the raw material. Since all information from the questionnaires returned by libraries is transferred onto punched cards by the U.S. Office of Education, Library Services Branch, it forms a permanent record which is available for research in printout form. For instance, the information on physical facilities gathered by USOE in its "Survey of College and University Libraries, 1963-64" will be available in printout form in the future. This survey is a non-recurrent effort, or at least it will not be repeated for some time. The definition of space in the forthcoming *Handbook* is intended to measure the total space as given by architectural specifications. The questionnaire, however, phrased its definition of space in terms of net space, that is, space available for use measured from the inside walls only. A committee working on ALA university library standards will have to make the decision on which definition to follow. It might be

well to contact the Library Services Branch, in order to determine the feasibility of the method used last year, as represented by its results. There are a number of items, such as equipment, which are treated cursorily in the ALA Standards for College Libraries and for Junior College Libraries; such items in university libraries should no doubt be spelled out in detail.

Since the number of books or volumes per student and faculty only is not indicative of the strength of library service in university libraries, the amounts spent for library materials should be made an integral part of their standards. While prices change and the emphasis on research in various areas is a variant determining factor in expenditures, the ratios may be assumed to remain the same. It is estimated that good library service to graduate students costs about ten times that needed for undergraduate college students annually. The RTSD Standards for Technical Services Staffs Committee (*ad hoc*) will add another important factor when its findings are made public. That there is a relationship between the personnel needed to process material and the amount of material added to a library's holdings is unquestioned, but, Parkinson's law aside, no one knows the cutoff point. Reference Service is another area for which the development of standards is underway.

With the successful experience of cooperation among librarians which resulted from the method used by the ALA National Statistics Coordinating Project, it should be encouraging to anticipate projects which will add further criteria of measurement of library service to our body of knowledge.

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(Continued on page 51)

1964, the workings of international organizations, and selected topics such as sports and education are covered—some quite extensively. Since certain of the articles are over twenty pages long, an index should have been provided for easier access to facts and dates, even though the arrangement is alphabetical and cross references are liberal.—C.S.

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## STATISTICS AND GLOSSARIES

Association of Research Libraries. *Academic*