

The Role of the Academic Library in Urban Development

Many of the problems of the city can best be resolved within the urban university because it is one of the few agencies which in one way or another is concerned with all urban problems. The same range of interest and breadth of mission should be assumed by the urban university library. Three special problems faced by the library in the urban institution are 1) the need to serve well the part-time student; 2) its responsibilities to the local business and professional communities; and 3) its obligations to the general public. It cannot, however, be all things to all men so must always seek to fulfill those functions which it is uniquely qualified to do well.

NO ONE CAN any longer question the fact that the central issue of our times revolves around the problem of our cities. Yet to conclude that the metropolis, because it is no longer viable, is obsolete, is unrealistic and irrelevant. For a society based on science and technology is inevitably urban, and the trend cannot be reversed. Our cities are here to stay. As a matter of fact, those who contend that the city is doomed fail to understand its historic role. The very word "city" suggests that it is the generator of civilization. Cities can be the repository of good things and centers of innovation if we but have the will and courage to make them so.

Here the university in the city can play a major role, for success in overcoming our urban ills will depend in large part upon whether or not the uni-

versity scholar is able to focus new directions of inquiry and investigation upon some of the problems of our cities. It has always been a responsibility of the university to relate itself to the changing needs of society, and the evidence is substantial and conclusive that it has done so in the past. All aspects of life whether they be government, industry, agriculture, or labor, have benefited from universities in the past. There is no reason why the complexities of urban life should be an exception. If the universities cannot intellectualize our communities and influence the social and economic currents of our cities, then they have little reason for existence.

Most universities located in cities have not seen their task in this light. Some, like Columbia and Harvard, view themselves as national and not urban. Others, not typically urban, have been too preoccupied with their own shortcomings and have thus been more oriented to the avoidance of failure than

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to a positive affirmation of their role. This no longer suffices, for the urban university must identify itself with its environment in the same manner that land-grant institutions of the past related themselves in a meaningful way to the problems of field and farm. In short, the urban university must provide the intellectual muscle to give our cities strength and viability.

The academic library of the university has a special role in this respect. The problems of our cities are complex and multi-faceted. They cut across many lines and are not the monopoly of any one department or unit of the university. The training of professionals, which has always been the responsibility of the university, is a case in point. Today all of the major disciplines of the university are being called upon to train manpower for our cities. Our metropolitan areas need the urban sociologist, the human ecologist, the public administrator, the cultural anthropologist, and the legal specialist versed in zoning and land use, to cite a few examples. Poverty and the ghetto are the concern of all, and the university needs to make a total commitment of its resources in this area if it is to make a contribution. The social scientist, the philosopher, the artist, the engineer, and the natural scientist—all touch aspects of urban life, whether the problem is one of sanitation and transportation, of land use, of the disadvantaged in our ghettos, or of crime and poverty.

Since the university, of all institutions in our society, comes closest to being able to identify itself with the whole of the urban scene, the academic library can become one of the units within the university to reflect that totality. Administrators and university librarians should view the university library in that light.

In addition to the general commitment of relating itself to the totality of the urban scene, there are specific areas

to which the library should address itself. Traditionally it has concerned itself with the full-time undergraduate and graduate student, providing them with instructional materials and other aids. The library has also been a central tool for full-time faculty members in pursuit of their own research. But the library located in a city has some additional requirements imposed upon it. Three of these are:

1. *It has responsibility to the part-time commuting student.* Many students enrolled in our urban universities work during the day and come to the campus only once or twice a week in the evenings. As a result they find the regular service of the university library inapplicable to them. Yet in many urban universities the part-time student represents more than one-half of the total enrollment. The Association of Urban Universities, in a recent study of its eighty-seven members, found that fourteen institutions had over 60 per cent of their students enrolled part time, eighteen had at least 50 per cent, forty-seven enrolled between 25 and 50 per cent on a part-time basis, while only eight had less than 25 per cent.

Too often the university is geared to the full-time student. The pressure, for example, to extend library hours on university campuses has come from the full-time student. The part-time student is usually an after-thought and is short-changed in many ways. Many library departments are not open to him. Nor are many of the professional staff available to him. Furthermore, part-time faculty seldom participate in the collection development of a library. Often they limit course readings to textbooks rather than utilizing special library assignments.

The special requirements of the part-time student need to be examined by the university library. The new policy of the University of Wisconsin-Milwau-

kee of remaining open twenty-four hours a day was designed to meet this situation. The part-time student needs to have continuous access to the library on the one or two days a week that he is on campus attending classes. The one-year experiment has been a success and will be continued in the future. It is unlikely, in fact, that it will ever be given up. The opening of the library around the clock has had some other interesting by-products. Night hours have now begun to attract daytime students, especially at examination time, while increasing pressure is being put on other university units, such as the student union and recreation facilities, to remain open around the clock.

Administrators and librarians should examine carefully the special needs of the part-time student. Often he is accused of being less able and soft on intellectual matters. Actually he is serious, mature, and highly motivated. The real problem has often been that the university has not been geared to his needs and requirements, and the library is no exception.

2. *It has responsibility to business, industry, and the professions.* There are, of course, many special libraries in this country, created to meet the special requirements of a specialized and industrialized society. But in spite of this fact, business and industry still need to depend on the large research library and other facilities of the university that can never be matched by the special library.

The relationship of the university library to research and development in the community has not yet been fully understood. Again, the traditional position of the library as catering primarily to the full-time student and faculty member has stood in the way. Yet more and more, industries, especially those that depend on research and the new technology, identify proximity to the university as a major consideration in

site location. The clustering of research laboratories around Harvard and MIT are classic examples. The availability of libraries and the policy which the library has about its use by non-university students has often appeared as a factor in inquiries made by industries seeking new locations.

At the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee library services to industry, business, medicine, and education represented 16 per cent of its total business during the academic year 1967-68. A question does arise about how such services are to be financed and whether special fees should be charged. At the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee no charge is made. The fact that it is state supported is a partial answer, although there are some private universities that provide such services on a non-fee basis. But whatever policy is pursued, it is important to remember that the university library can become an important connecting link between the university on the one hand and the research and development elements of industry on the other.

Also, we should not lose sight of the fact that there are often tangible rewards with compensations that come back to the university when such service is rendered. In Milwaukee, for example, such corporations as A. O. Smith, Allis-Chalmers, and Allen Bradley have given substantial collections to the university which in turn contribute to the enrichment of its total resources.

3. *It has responsibility to the general public.* Continuing education is one of the essential parts of the educational revolution taking place in this country today. Full-time employees seeking to keep abreast of developments in their area of concentration, advanced professionals wanting to keep current in their areas of specialization, housewives released of the responsibility of pre-school children, and citizens who simply want to satisfy some special interest of their

own, are all turning to the university to satisfy these needs. With advances in technology, increased specialization, and additional leisure time, adult education has already become one of this country's growth industries.

Evening instruction, part-time courses, seminars, and conferences are a part of this story. But the library also has a role to play. Too often it has ignored its responsibilities in this area and has not seen itself as a service agency designed to help satisfy the ever-growing, insatiable appetite of adults to continue their education. To meet this need, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee now issues patron permits to people of the area who, as holders, are given the privilege of using library facilities.

A word of caution does need to be expressed. The university always needs to see its special and unique role and not duplicate services already being performed by special libraries in the community or by public libraries. There also needs to be greater recognition of the interdependence of libraries with better

coordination among all of them for common library use.

In pursuing a selective course, the academic library is no different from the urban university itself. It is constantly being subjected to community pressures to accept new responsibilities and engage in new activities. If it moves ahead without discrimination and care, it will spread its limited resources too thin and will be carrying on activities not in keeping with the true purpose of the university. The university has a more important role than simply being the servant of society. It should aim to be respected, not to be popular. This can best be done by performing those functions which only a university can perform and reserving for others activities not properly those of a community of scholars, namely, those of promoting the cause of learning and scholarship. The training of the intellect must at all times be the primary concern of the university. The university, including its library, would do well to be governed by this precept in examining its role in urban society. ■■

