

## Guest Editorial

# The Evolution of the Academic Research Library During the 1960s

Charles D. Churchwell



Today's technologically based academic research library came about through a transformation of the academic research library during the 1960s. The transformation was generated by federal policies and programs. After World War II the federal government's Servicemen Readjustment Act was passed; it was popularly known as the G.I. Bill. It allowed veterans to attend college at the government's expense. Eventually about 12 million did.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the 1960s many veterans had received their bachelor's degree and were entering graduate school to do graduate work in arts and science and to study for professional degrees. This influx of graduate students placed a heavy burden on the library. The burden was immediately felt in the reference department and eventually in all other departments, especially in acquisitions and cataloging.

The federal government's use of the university to carry out military research during WWII was continued in many universities long after the war. This increased the burden on the library. Acquiring research materials for graduate students and federal researchers intensified the burden on acquisitions and cataloging. Larger staffs and more space were required. Management of these growing departments required closer cooperation and coordination. To accomplish this, these departments were placed administratively in one unit called technical services. Meanwhile, students were overwhelming reference and circulation with requests for service. Reference hours were extended, and faculty members and some graduate students were allowed to go directly into

the closed book stacks to get the materials they wanted and bring them to the circulation desk to be charged out. These changes did not solve all the problems that faculty and graduate students were facing, but they did highlight the acute problems of the undergraduate students. They were forced to stand in long lines while they waited for books to be charged out from the closed book stacks. Their problem was eventually solved by creating an undergraduate library within the existing general library.

While the faculty and graduate students' problems were solved by establishing subject departmental libraries wherever space could be found in buildings on campus, this change was expensive and difficult to manage. Management was improved by placing all departmental libraries under a single administrative unit called public services. In the meantime, a new department called collections development was created in technical services to coordinate the purchase of all library materials.

As the library was adjusting to its new administrative structure, the federal government gave the university two new challenges. The first of these came with the start of the Cold War with Russia. At the beginning of the war the United States adopted a policy of containment. Under this policy the United States attempted to contain communism wherever it seemed likely to appear.<sup>2</sup> Shortly after the start of the war, Russia surprised the United States and the world by launching its unmanned spacecraft, Sputnik. This scientific and technological feat demonstrated Russia's advanced space science capability. During World War II, the United

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States had learned the extent to which military power depended on science and technology, and its response to Sputnik was the passage and funding of the National Defense Education Act. The NDEA provided money not only for training for science and engineering but also for training in foreign languages and the social sciences, including library science. The wide range of graduate programs that ensued required large quantities of materials acquired in African, Asian, Arabic, Slavic, Middle Eastern, and other foreign languages; hence, new units called area studies were created.

The second, and perhaps far greater, new challenge was President Kennedy's higher education initiative. In February 1961, President Kennedy told the 87th Congress that the national interest required an education system on the college level sufficiently financed and equipped to provide every student with adequate physical facilities to meet his and her instructional, research, and resident needs.<sup>3</sup> This initiative opened the door to universal access to higher education and what Clark Kerr called the "tidal wave" of students entering college.<sup>4</sup> Such large numbers of students overwhelmed the library and caused fundamental changes in the way the library met their needs. Keyes Metcalf, the Librarian at Harvard, told the university administration that the only way to solve the library problems for the undergraduates at Harvard was to build a separate library for them.<sup>5</sup> The general education problem was also addressed at Harvard. In a letter to the overseers of Harvard, President Conant told them that he was taking the liberty of appointing a university committee on the objective of a general education in a free society.<sup>6</sup> After the

committee's report was published, an alumnus of Harvard, Thomas Lamont, read it and soon afterward told Metcalf that if the university was going to act on the recommendations for a general education in Harvard College, it was going to need to separate the undergraduate library he had recommended. Metcalf immediately pursued Lamont's interest in the undergraduate library and eventually Lamont gave the money to build it. This was the first separate undergraduate library built on a university campus in the United States. In a short time, similar libraries were built at the University of Michigan, University of South Carolina, and other universities. They were badly needed because, with the aid of federal support, thousands of high school graduates continued to enroll in institutions of higher education. The Higher Education Act of 1963 supplied money to help libraries provide library services to the increasingly large student body, and the academic research library continued to increase in size and complexity. It eventually reached the size of a multimillion-dollar operation.<sup>7</sup> Fortunately, great improvements were being made in computer software, and the cost of computer hardware was decreasing to a level where some large academic research libraries could lease or buy a computer and begin to experiment with using them to perform tasks in circulation and acquisitions. By 1969, the computer was beginning to be used to share cataloging data. This was soon followed by the appearance of private companies anxious to sell computerized systems to academic research libraries, and full-scale automation of the academic research library was well underway.

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## Notes

1. Morrison, Samuel. *The Growth of the American Republic*, vol. I. (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 620.
2. Cohen, Arthur M. *The Shaping of American Higher Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 176.
3. *The Annals of America*, vol. 18 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1961–68), 10.
4. Kerr, Clark. *The Great Transformation in Higher Education 1960–1980* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1991), 260.
5. Hoadley, Irene. *The Undergraduate Library*. (Chicago: American Library Association, 1970), 5.
6. Buck, Paul General. *Education in a Free Society, Report of the Harvard Committee* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1945), vii.
7. The Association of Research Libraries. *Organization and Staffing of the Libraries of Columbia University A Case Study*. (Westport, Conn.: Redgrave Information Resources Corp., 1973), 31.