

Principles and Practice of Administrative Organization in the University Library

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LIBRARIANS frequently demonstrate extreme irritation when a nonprofessional enters the field of library administration, and yet, oddly enough, some professionals have administered their libraries as though entirely unaware of the important body of professional knowledge which has been developed in the field of public administration and business management. Fortunately, library administrators are now turning to this body of professional information for guidance in the management of their own institutions. This is given increasing evidence by the attention given to scientific methods of management in recent years in the literature of library administration. An examination of the organization patterns of numerous large libraries demonstrates the extent to which these principles are being put into practice. Recent issues of *College and Research Libraries* have contained a series of studies in which several library administrators have described the organization of their respective libraries.¹

¹ Coney, Donald. "A Note on the Library Organization at the University of Texas, 1934-43." *College and Research Libraries*, 4:228-32, June 1943; Leupp, Harold L. "Library Service on the Berkeley

It is profitable to review these administrative studies in the light of some of the principles of administrative organization. This paper is written with this purpose in view.

The administrative organization of any institution should be developed according to a logical plan, carefully based on an analysis of the objectives of the institution and of the work to be done. Limiting factors frequently preclude the possibility of the most desirable organization. Inadequate or badly planned buildings, inadequate funds for essential personnel, and the particular combinations of qualifications of personnel available all tend to modify the pattern of organization or even severely restrict its planning. In these editorial comments on the organization of specific libraries, an attempt is made to take account of these considerations. In some instances, of course, there may be other local circumstances contributing to the shape of library organization which have not been pointed up in the descriptions referred to here.

There is no need to question the desirability of organization per se. Wherever

Campus, University of California." *Ibid.*, 4:212-17, 232, June 1943; White, Carl M. "Changes in Organization at the University of Illinois Library." *Ibid.*, 4:57-58, December 1942; Williams, Edwin E. "The Administrative Organization of the Harvard University Library." *Ibid.*, 4:218-27, June 1943.

groups of people work together toward common objectives, these objectives are more quickly and more fully realized when the assignment of activities is systematized. Similarities and differences as far as various activities and their interrelationships are concerned may be overlooked in the one-man business or library. In this case unsystematic work may have effect only in the amount of work accomplished by the one man on the job. There are many one-man libraries and a large number with small staffs. It has not been uncommon in the past few decades, when the growth of libraries has been rapid, to have the size of the library and the staff required to manage it expand greatly under the administrative regime of one individual.

Function Stressed

Administrative organization is related primarily to the assignment of activities and responsibilities to personnel and to the grouping of personnel in ways related to the objectives of the institution. In the planning of organization and, in the present instance, in the evaluation of organization, it is necessary to start with the consideration of certain fundamental principles on which the organization should be based.

√ The primary basis for departmentalization in the organization is function. Closely related functions, that is, functions not easily separable for purposes of administration, should be kept together. On this principle the framework of the organization should be developed. For example, inseparable primary functions should be kept in the same department, and inseparable secondary functions should be kept in the same subdepartment or other subordinate administrative unit.

A subsidiary consideration is the principle that the size of the staff and the volume of work to be done are only indirectly related to departmentalization and then only through the number of supervisors necessary to direct and review the work.

In the evaluation of the organization of university libraries it is necessary to begin with an understanding of the functions to be served by the library as an integral part of the university. As manifested in American universities, the primary functions are instruction and research—instruction at the undergraduate, graduate, vocational, and extension levels; and research by a few undergraduate students, by some of the students in professional and technological schools, by graduate students, and by faculty and research staffs. The central functions of the university library are “book service” and bibliographical or reference service, which contribute to these ends. These functions are served by two general types of departments, the circulation department, serving the function of book service, and the reference department, serving the function of bibliographical or reference service to the university community as a whole or to separate groups of readers within the university. In the latter instance, departmentalization may take one of several special forms. It may be based on the class of readers served, on the form of materials handled, or on the subject literatures which constitute the collections of the library and which are related to the subject fields of principal significance within the university.

Types of Departmentalization

Departmentalization appropriate to the types of readers served is illustrated by undergraduate libraries and graduate

reading rooms. Typical forms of departments in administrative organization are those in which specialized reference service is offered for periodicals, government publications, rare books, and manuscripts. Departmentalization by subject literatures takes the form of subject reading rooms or departmental libraries or professional libraries devoted primarily to the service of students and faculty in particular academic departments or professional schools.

Functions auxiliary to the primary purpose of service to readers are acquisition of materials for the library's collections, the preparation and care of these materials for use, and the general functions of budgeting, accounting, and personnel administration. These are reflected in library organization in various ways. Acquisition, preparation, and care of the collections are performed through separate departments, subdividing the assignment of these functions in various ways, or through a concentration of all of the functions into a unified department of technical processes. The general functions related to budget, accounts, and personnel are normally the responsibility of the office of the chief librarian.

The libraries whose organizations are discussed here, by way of illustrations of practice, are those of the state universities of California (Berkeley), Illinois, and Texas, and Harvard University. It is assumed in all of the comments which follow that the organization charts and descriptive notes presented by officers of the respective libraries represent a true picture of the organization in each instance, insofar as details have been given. The reports on the organizations are very uneven in the fulness with which the information desirable for a comparative

study is given. The terminology descriptive of the departmental and divisional organization of all four libraries is very indefinite, and a clear picture of the whole organization of any one of the libraries is difficult to trace.

Centralization and Decentralization

It may be assumed that these four university libraries have common objectives; that the functions referred to above would be found clearly reflected in descriptions of the respective administrative organizations. With minor exceptions the latter is true, but it seems clear that the administrative organization has grown out of the exigencies of local situations instead of being based on an analysis of the functions themselves. One common characteristic is clear. The chief administrators of these libraries inherited a situation characteristic of library development in large universities, namely, the wide dispersion of library resources of the institution into small administrative units that make a logical functional pattern for the public services very difficult to accomplish. The struggle between the philosophies of centralization and decentralization in university libraries is evident in all four of the institutions. In only two, California and Texas, have all of the units been brought together even under a single direction. The primary function of service has, therefore, operated to only a limited degree in effecting a departmental organization. It may be true, as the assistant to the librarian of Harvard University states, that there are "good reasons for doubting that a theoretically quite logical administrative organization, either throughout the libraries of a university or within the main collection itself, is practicable in any but a new—or totalitarian—

institution." But the statement may also be seriously questioned. As a matter of fact, the administrative organization of all four libraries seems to have been undergoing gradual change in line with the fundamental principle that function should serve as the primary basis of administrative organization.

Departmentalization of the service function by groups of readers served is evident in varying degrees in all of the libraries, but in only one is there clear recognition of the desirability of a sharp distinction in departmentalization between library service supplementary to the instructional program of the university and library service to research students and faculty. Harvard University, while it has not yet been able to put its plans into operation, clearly recognizes this distinction in function in its proposed undergraduate library. The other libraries have special units for service of reserve books for student needs but beyond this appear not to have differentiated in their departmental organization or in the special assignments to administrative personnel between the needs of undergraduate and research groups in the university. The University of Texas Library has an experimental position, "service coordinator," designed to keep the library in touch with student needs. In practice, it is probably true that it is the primary intention of many of the departmental and professional libraries to devote most of their attention to the needs of the research group. In view of the large number represented in each of these two quite different clienteles, it would appear that there is room for much more extensive consideration of the service needs of the two groups in the administrative organization.

For the most part, the organization pat-

terns of the four libraries are more logically affected by the functions auxiliary to library service. At Harvard and Illinois the acquisition of material for the collections has unified direction. At California this is also true unless, as may be inferred from the description of the organization, the acquisition of documents has separate direction. At Texas the acquisition of serials is not a function of the order department. At California and Illinois departmentalization for cataloging is unified on the main campus. At Texas there appears to be a separation in administration of the cataloging of separates and serials. At Harvard there is central administrative control of cataloging in Widener Library but not for the numerous departmental libraries.

Over-all Functions

Varying positions are given in the administrative organization to the over-all functions of building service, budgeting, accounting, and personnel administration. At California and Texas these are centered in the office of the librarian. The same is true of Illinois, except for personnel administration which is under the direction of an assistant librarian. At Harvard building service and general financial operations have separate divisional status under officers reporting to the director of the library.

A second dominant principle of organization is that lines of control and responsibility should be sharply defined. The successive levels of administrative authority should form a hierarchy of supervisory officers. Any fuzziness in lines of control will stand as a constant potential source of irritation and confusion. Where the need of direction cuts across lines of separate administrative

units, one of three methods of control may be provided: (1) An officer superior to all the units concerned may be appointed with responsibility for direct control; (2) When the director of a given unit must participate in the control of a coordinate unit, provision may be made for him to do so in the capacity of a staff officer; (3) Staff committees may be appointed to study and advise as to the proper action. In the last two instances supervisory control should be carried out through channels.

Planning and Execution

In connection with this principle there should be considered two over-all functions omitted in the above discussion because of their more appropriate consideration in this connection, namely, planning and execution. Planning requires information and advice. Execution calls for authority to see that work is done. These two functions may be fulfilled in the capacities of a single administrative officer, whether the person in charge of the whole library or the individual in charge of a subordinate division of the organization. When the two functions are separated, planning becomes a normal responsibility of the staff officer, and execution becomes the principal responsibility of the line officer, the latter transmitting information and issuing orders necessary to getting work done. Administrative organization of the library should make adequate provision for fulfilment of both of these functions.

Insofar as it can be interpreted from the organization charts, the lines of control are clearly drawn in each of the four libraries. None of the descriptions of the organizations, however, is adequate for an interpretation of the degree to which re-

sponsibility is clearly defined. It is not possible to ascertain information of this nature except from administrative directions issued in the libraries themselves. A good illustration of a clear statement of functions and authority which should be typical practice in administration is to be found in the memorandum to the University of Illinois staff on the functions and authority of the assistant university librarian in charge of personnel. The memorandum defines specifically the scope of both the "investigative and executive" responsibilities of this officer.

The clarity with which the responsibilities are defined in this instance may be contrasted with those of the associate university librarian in the same institution. The statement is made that he "assists with the general administration of the university library." As a result of the lack of a statement on the scope of the responsibility, such as that given for the assistant director in charge of personnel, the lines of control between the director of the university library and the officers subordinate to the associate university librarian are somewhat vague. A statement of responsibility may be in operation in the University of Illinois Library.

Staff Officers

The position of staff officer does not find wide use in these four libraries. Principal application of this type of administrative officer is at the University of Texas, where three special assistants without executive responsibilities work for and report to the librarian. These assistants include a bibliographer who assists in the evaluation of books; a service coordinator who represents the librarian in consultation with members of the faculty concerning the library needs of their students;

and one member of the staff who serves part-time in the preparation and distribution of library information of general interest in public relations. The duties ascribed to the assistant to the librarian of Harvard University fall in considerable part within the category of a staff officer. While no direct reference is made to the fact, it is obvious that the principal administrative officers throughout all the organizations have responsibility for assisting in the planning as well as for the execution of the work of their departments.

✓ Unity of management is a third important principle, closely correlated with the principle of well defined lines of control. The successive levels of administrative authority should center in the librarian or director of the library as the principal administrative officer. From him there should be redelegated authority commensurate with the responsibility of the successive levels of supervision. The smoothness with which the organization will operate through the central administration will depend, however, not only on these considerations but on the avoidance of congestion of executive responsibility in the chief administrator's office.

The distribution of the planning load may be accomplished through the utilization of the expert knowledge of the several subordinate administrative officers in an advisory capacity or through the setting-up separately of staff positions which may, in some instances, take the form of administrative or technical assistants to the director. Similarly, the executive load can be distributed through subordinate officers having direct responsibility for supervision of administrative units in the organization. The larger institutions may find a solution for the problem of

distributing the load of both aspects of administrative responsibility through the appointment of one or more assistant directors. An important function, responsibility for which rests primarily in the office of the principal administrator, is that of coordination. This function, when not retained wholly by the principal administrator, may very appropriately be delegated to an assistant director serving as a chief executive officer.

Unity of Management

Unity of management presents some important problems in the university library. The fact that the library is an integral part of the university and that its functions are inseparable from those of the university itself leads, in most instances, to a close affiliation between the administration of the library and the faculty of the university which is usually represented by a council or committee on the library. These committees assist in the important function of planning the service policies of the libraries. At Harvard University the College Library Council, of which the director of the library is chairman, serves in such an advisory capacity, and in addition, establishes rules of administration concerning library hours, borrowing privileges, and other regulations directly affecting the public.

In two of the four libraries reviewed here, California and Harvard, an additional problem is posed in the relation between the general library and departmental libraries. While at California the board of regents defines the university library as "the general library and the several departmental libraries together," and while at Harvard the corporation defines the university library as "all the collections of books in the possession of the

university," there is only in part a unity of administration of "the library." At California departmental libraries are considered part of the working equipment of the departments to which they are attached and are subject to the direction of the chairmen of the respective departments. The librarian of the university serves as the purchasing agent and is responsible for having the books of the departmental library cataloged but does not have any supervision over their collections or their service. At Harvard the director of the library has wider responsibility for visiting and inspecting "law, medical, business, and other departmental libraries" and for serving ex officio as a member of their respective administrative committees. The librarians of the several departmental libraries report annually to the director of the university library. The latter officer, however, does not have direct jurisdiction over the management of the department libraries.

At the universities of Illinois and Texas, on the other hand, the principal library officer has responsibility for general management of all the libraries on the campus.

The director of each of the four libraries appears to have adequate staff within his own immediate office to provide the general administrative assistance needed. There appear, also, to be, with some exceptions, subordinate executive officers reasonably adequate to carry the administrative load of the library.

A fourth important consideration may be termed the principle of manageability. Successful supervision depends in large part on the extent to which the administrative or supervisory officer can comprehend the range of problems which arise in his administrative unit. Variety and

complexity of the different types of operations to be supervised are determining factors. Span of control is particularly important for supervisors immediately in charge of an operation, the closeness of supervision or revision determining the number of persons who can be supervised.

Principle of Manageability

This is a principle which has tended to shape the reorganization of some of these libraries. The reorganization reported for the University of Illinois Library indicates that the number of units previously reporting to the director has been reduced from thirty-eight to six. From the point of view of the administrative load of the principal officer of the library, this represents very significant progress. The officers included in this group are the assistant to the director; three assistant directors in charge, respectively, of personnel, acquisitions, and cataloging; the librarian of the University High School; and the associate university librarian responsible for all the service departments as well as for assistance in the general administration of the library. In the instance of all of these administrative officers except the last mentioned, the span of control is well within the limits of manageability. More than twenty public service departments still remain, however, under the supervision of the associate university librarian. This number may be readily manageable if all the units are staffed by competent personnel and if there are no major problems involved in review of the work of the several units. If these conditions are not met in the present situation, the span of control for this officer is probably still too wide. It may be so in any case for fully adequate supervision, in view of the general ad-

ministrative responsibilities borne by the associate university librarian.

A similar situation exists at the University of Texas, where the library has been so reorganized that the librarian has directly responsible to him only ten administrative units or individuals, while the associate librarian is responsible for supervision of sixteen separate units. Eight of these, however, are small departmental libraries, and, except for the fact that the associate librarian must spread his attention over both service and technical processes, the number of units in that particular library may not be excessive.

In the libraries at California and Harvard the organization plans seem to meet reasonable standards in respect to manageability.

In conclusion, this paper has been an attempt to evaluate practice in the or-

ganization of certain university libraries by comparison of practices with the more important principles of administrative organization. Organization is the beginning of administration; it is not an end in itself. It provides the framework, logical or illogical, within which the officers of the institution must accomplish their objectives. Reorganization is not a general panacea for present or past administrative difficulties, although illogical organization may offer explanation of those difficulties. Organization is not a substitute for common administrative hurdles—poorly planned buildings, too small a staff, and inadequately qualified personnel. A well-planned organization should, however, help reduce the ill effects of these. It offers the framework within which dynamic administration is most easily realized.