

University of Illinois Library Programs

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The Radio Program

EARLY IN 1945 the library of the University of Illinois was invited to sponsor a weekly radio program over the university's own station, WILL. The responsibility for providing thirty minutes of educational stimulus week in and week out was not considered lightly, but the library felt that here was an opportunity, which should be seized, for extending its public relations efforts. Therefore, after discussion and careful study, the invitation was accepted and the first program was set for Wednesday, Feb. 14, 1945, from 2:00 to 2:30 in the afternoon. The time of the program was changed several months later to 2:30 to 2:55.

From the beginning the program has been a joint project of the library and the library school. Since several other public relations programs were already handled by the librarians' association, official staff association of the library, it was decided that the new radio program should be operated under the aegis of this organization. The librarians' association appointed a committee of six persons selected from the library staff and the library school to assume all responsibility for planning the programs, securing speakers, and working with the staff of WILL. The writer was designated chairman and served in this capacity until October 1946. The present chairman is the circulation librarian. Replacements of committee members have occurred from time to time, but continuity has been achieved by the fact that three committee members of the original six still serve.

The series was christened "The Library Presents—." The director of the library and library school gave the first broadcast, which was concerned with the beginnings of books. An appropriate exception to the general policy of not scheduling speakers for repeat broadcasts has been made in the case of the director who thus far has been featured on the first broadcast beginning each season.

What Type Program?

In deciding upon the kind of program to be offered, the committee was guided by several considerations:

- (1) The university and the library are educational, not recreational, institutions
- (2) WILL, operating on an assigned frequency of 580 kilocycles, is an educational radio station with a power of five thousand watts which enables it to cover well all of Illinois, except the metropolitan area of Chicago and the western part of the state beyond Springfield; western Indiana also receives a strong signal
- (3) Being scheduled in the middle of the afternoon the program must be adapted largely to housewives, shut-ins, and a miscellany of other individuals who have access to a radio at this time of day
- (4) The university provides an almost inexhaustible supply of scholars and experts who are capable of speaking authoritatively on a large variety of subjects and many of them are glad to link their subject fields with the library.

In addition to these considerations, the committee was unanimous in rejecting the book review type of broadcast as a regular vehicle, although such a program is offered occasionally. A typical broadcast features a talk by a teaching professor, a research man, or a librarian, who speaks on some subject of educational value on which he is an expert. If a given broadcast does not deal specifically with a literary subject, the speaker usually brings in the library or refers to the literature of his subject. Titles of some of our best received broadcasts include:

Lenten and Easter Reading
A University Library Tour
The Country Editor
Christmas Books for Children
The Architecture of Libraries
Progress Towards Peace
Toward Mental Health
Authors, Books, and Libraries

"The Architecture of Libraries" was an excellent broadcast dealing with the architecture of smaller libraries and was given by Alan K. Laing, of the University of Illinois Architecture Department. It was subsequently published in the June 1, 1946, issue of the *Library Journal* and in the June 1946 issue of *Illinois Libraries* under the title "The Architecture of the Small Library."

The last title in the above list was a broadcast by Carl Van Doren who happened to be in his home town of Urbana in December of 1945 long enough to make a transcription for "The Library Presents—."

This program was rebroadcast from WILL on Sunday morning following its original presentation Wednesday afternoon. Several other programs in the library series have been broadcast a second time.

Details of Management

The series is on the air each Wednesday from October through June. Up to the time of this writing not a single broadcast has been canceled, although the committee holds a substitute program ready for such an emergency. Memories of absent-minded professors are jogged on Tuesday before the Wednesday broadcast. The library maintains a file copy of each program broadcast, either in the form of a typescript or a phonograph transcription. Members of the radio committee and other interested librarians listen to the weekly broadcast in one of the library offices, after which letters of appreciation are written by the chairman to the speakers.

It is difficult to estimate how much "The Library Presents—" contributes to the over-all public relations program of the library and the library school. Certainly fan mail from listeners is not heavy. But this is probably true of most educational programs on university stations. However, in addition to the benefit to the library resulting from heightened interest among listeners, there is little doubt that the contact made between the library and the various speakers and between the library and WILL publicizes the library and its services.

The Library Hour Program

PUBLIC relations work, a "must" for the public library, is also important to college and university libraries in establishing friendly relationships with students and faculty and in informing them of their resources. With this consideration in mind, the Librarians' Association of the University of Illinois Library in January 1944 created the Library Hour—a series of weekly programs held every Wednesday afternoon between the hours of five and six. The purpose of this program, as stated by the original committee in charge, was "to stimulate reading on various topics by presenting reviews of one particular book or a group of reviews on one particular subject." To aid in accomplishing this purpose, recommended books on the subject were to be exhibited and a brief mimeographed book list distributed to the audience. Speakers were selected from faculty, staff, and townspeople. Although the main qualification was knowledge of the subject, regardless of university connections, most of the speakers were chosen from the faculty and staff for the obvious reason that they were more likely to be subject specialists than were local residents not connected with the university. Special interests and talents of faculty wives were also utilized and provided some excellent programs.

The series was held at first in a book-lined reading room with a seating capacity of thirty. The atmosphere here was pleasant, but the crowds soon overflowed and it was necessary, therefore, to move to a less attractive lecture room which had a sufficient number of seats.

As now organized, a committee of five staff members decides upon subjects and speakers and manages the rather numerous

details of the weekly programs. Since the University of Illinois has a large faculty and staff, there is never a dearth of potential speakers. Several approaches in making a choice are used. Sometimes a speaker is asked because he is a recognized authority in a certain field, or sometimes, in complete reverse, a subject seems timely and an authority on it is sought. Frequently, too, the personality and popularity of the speaker are the basis for his selection. Now and then the plans of the committee go completely awry. A chemical engineer, famous for his work on explosives, was requested to discuss this field as soon as the government lifted its ban of secrecy. He accepted the invitation, but asked that he be allowed to talk on his recent travels rather than on any phase of chemistry. On another occasion, a zoologist, when asked to show his reputedly excellent film on Eskimos, wanted to speak instead about tropical plants and animals. As goodwill is an important aspect of the program, the committee accepts such changes philosophically, having learned that it can generally rely on the judgment of the speakers.

In certain cases it has been difficult to live up to the original purpose of emphasizing books and other library materials. Some topics, because of their very timeliness, preclude the possibility of any association with literature. At both times when talks were being given on atomic energy and radar the government had just lifted its censorship and practically no printed materials existed. When the new drug streptomycin was discussed by a soil chemist who had made outstanding contributions to its development, the only literature on the subject consisted of a handful of articles

in scholarly journals. Frequently, too, the speakers talk from their own experiences rather than from books. A professor of political science who had attended the San Francisco conference was asked to give his impressions immediately upon his return, when the only existing literature was in periodicals. Faculty members sent to investigate postwar conditions in foreign countries have frequently spoken on the program before sufficient printed material was available to make up a popular bibliography, much less to attempt an exhibit. Whenever possible, however, the committee attempts to correlate each talk with literature by displays and book lists and urges the speakers to mention pertinent literature when such literature exists. In any case, it is evident that for better or for worse the Library Hour has developed into something other than the conventional book review. On the whole, the committee feels that the change has been for the better, since some extremely good programs have resulted.

Variety in Programs

A number of the talks have been illustrated with slides, films, and recordings. Occasionally, the program has consisted almost entirely of recordings, films, or a combination of both. Reading from the works of various authors is another type of program sometimes used.

Naturally, there are considerable details to be taken care of in order to keep a program of this sort going. Speakers must be invited, notices printed and posted around the campus well in advance of the program, smaller notices sent to university personnel, someone found to introduce the speaker (this is always done by a member of the library staff), publicity written, motion picture machines operated and slides shown when necessary, book lists made up, and exhibits gathered and arranged. Fortu-

nately, some of these duties such as the posting and mailing of notices and certain aspects of publicity are taken care of automatically by the library administrative office.

After a period of three years it is possible to draw certain definite conclusions about the Library Hour. In the first place, it is successful. This statement is based on the fact that the average attendance has been 66 (with an unfortunate minimum of 14 and a hectic maximum of 216, when crowds overflowed into the corridors). Although sixty-six may not seem a phenomenal number of people in terms of the size of the faculty, staff, and student body, it compares favorably with the size of audiences at other programs of this type in the university. The committee has tried to analyze the series in terms of audience appeal, and it appears that:

1. Certain speakers will attract a crowd regardless of subject.
2. Audio-visual programs, especially records and films, are popular.
3. Attendance is a seasonal affair, with first-semester programs drawing more people than second-semester ones, when work has piled up and spring weather competes with even the most popular speakers.

The committee suspects that lighter programs bring larger audiences than heavier ones, but so many other factors enter in, such as popularity of the speaker, the weather, and the pressure of outside work, that it is difficult to be certain. Nevertheless, more talks on literary topics are being presented this year and greater use of films and records made than in the past.

Type of Audience

As to the nature of the audience, there are always a few people who come regularly regardless of the topic, but in general the composition differs with each program,

according to subject and speaker. By far the greater percentage of the audience consists of staff, faculty, and graduate students, with never more than a handful of undergraduates except when music or films are featured, and even then university personnel and graduates predominate. This may be partially due to the fact that all dormitories and organized houses serve dinner at half-past five, but experimentation with four-thirty to five-thirty meetings for the Library Hour did not show any difference.

The committee has also discovered that the size of the audience is no criterion of the success of the individual program. One of the best examples of this fact was a talk on the cooperative movement which drew only about twenty people. These twenty, however, engaged the speaker in a lively discussion which lasted about half an hour after he had finished his lecture.

The Library Hour program correlates with another of the public relations programs of the university—"The Library

Presents—," a weekly half-hour radio program over the local university station. The radio and lecture programs are frequently able to make use of each other's speakers.

As a whole, the librarians' association feels that the Library Hour has more than justified the rather considerable work involved. In addition to the value of the program as a source of information to about 2000 different people over a period of two years (a total of approximately 3500 have attended), it has also taught the various committee members a great deal about the workings of the university—its departments and its personalities.

While a large university with its wealth of talent is a reasonably easy field for a series of this sort, it is probable that an even greater need might exist in a smaller school where there are fewer outside events. In any case, such a series, if well planned and publicized, can do much to foster the goodwill of faculty and students toward the library and its staff.

Why Not Teach the History of the Universe?

(Continued from page 413)

what we lack—a sense of continuity and of balance and understanding of human beings organized into societies that move through time. He knows also the remedy, which is historical-mindedness.

In suggesting that historical-mindedness begin at home, in the back yard, I do not mean that it should stay forever in the back yard. There is a front yard too, and the

street which passes by leads to the ends of the earth. Every Iowan ought to follow that street as far as his time, his interest, and his sense of duty propel him. If, at last, it leads him to the rings of Saturn, I am all in favor of it. Why not teach the history of the universe? But not at the outset, not as an abstraction, not until, knowing the history of Iowa, he has history in his blood.

Correction

In the July issue, Part I, p. 259, it was stated in the article on "College and University Library Statistics" that the previous statistics had been published in the March 1943 issue. It should have read "March 1944."