

The Relation Between the Librarian and the College Administration*

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THE PRESIDENT OF A COLLEGE may well be judged by the librarian he appoints, for this selection may reveal a basic educational policy of his administration. The ideal choice is still too often within the realm of the hypothetical. He must fit into an ideal situation, which has been sketched at length in the course on college library administration, where the library building is a functional marvel, air-conditioned and humidified precisely to preserve both books and staff, the annual appropriation inexhaustible, the faculty completely conversant with the classification, the undergraduates more pervasive than silver fish, and the president pronouncing at every convocation that "the library is the heart of the college."

Actually, we are only beginning to overcome the greatest handicap to our profession, both in the library school and actual practice: namely, that the daily routines of library administration are necessary for good housekeeping and an ordered procedure, but only as a means to a far more significant end. Encouraging as the trend is today, *Library Literature* and library school curricula are still too preoccupied in many cases with procedures, and only the grave shortage of the so-called professionally trained librarian has shown all too clearly to us that alert, observant and in-

quisitive "untrained" personnel can often bring the student and the book together more stimulatingly than one who has been taught all the proper authorities, and yet for whom the book has not become alive.

I have recently visited a college library where every obstacle in a made-over classroom building has been overcome by the exhilarating and inviting atmosphere surmounting all difficulties of supervision. I have visited another modern, functional building that is forbidding in its clinical efficiency. If the librarian has no consuming love for the book, all his professional training is of little real use.

This persistent problem, heartening as the attack upon it is, the college president must be aware of in choosing the administrator of his library. For if he is satisfied with a custodian of the book collection, then the library has no vital part in his basic educational policy. He cannot be aware of the deadening influence of course lectures that merely rephrase the text-book; of course examinations, purely objective, permitting no synthesis of accumulated knowledge; and of syllabi that are no starting point into the vast realm of books. Graduates will return, resentful that they never found in the library as undergraduates the wealth of ideas that was theirs.

Now, to be sure, the president may find, upon inauguration, that he has inherited a librarian, as he has a dean of the faculty, and a dean of students, to say nothing of faculty or undergraduates! But this is a normal evolutionary process administra-

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tively, and we would probably compile statistics showing similar situations in all administrative offices from the president down. But a part, at least, of the mutual dedication to the calling of higher education is to be found in the adaptability, resiliency and respect shown in a new endeavor by all participating. The danger today lies in too much anticipation of these changes, where security is sought in job analyses, detailed enumeration of responsibilities, obligations and privileges; a security that suggests suspicion, and makes of a privilege to serve, a task to be done and no more.

Specifically, the relation of the librarian and the president can be readily ascertained in three ways. First, in what way is the annual appropriation handled? Is it arbitrarily established? Will it be only the precise percentage of the total educational appropriation, or the prescribed dollars and cents per student, calculated with little regard of individual institutional budgetary problems? Or is it one mutually accepted with the full realization that the salary scale must be improved, the book and periodical appropriations expanded with growing costs, contingencies allowed for, such as the increased cost in postage of Library of Congress cards, microfilm holdings (that in turn alleviate the space problem at least temporarily), and even capital building improvements which have usually no place in the library budget but must be paid for by the same kind of dollars? How heartening it is, when the librarian can honestly show these needs by working faithfully and uncomplainingly with what he has, and the president is equally determined to provide the needed money as his responsibility.

Secondly, this relation is ascertained by the president's interest in the library staff, in the selection of new members as alert and promising as faculty appointments, in rewarding loyalty and ability in the old

members. On the question of status we shall speak presently.

In the third place, this relation is ascertained in the quality and use of the collection. The librarian is distressingly handicapped if his president does not frequent and use his library. Thereby it becomes difficult to point out needs and usage, and even more clearly the evidence of faculty motivation in student use of the library.

It is not without reason that the Middle States Association, for example, devotes a third of its inquiry in the questionnaire preliminary to its accrediting visitation, to the library, for much of the administration of the college can be ascertained from the well-being of the library.

Our presidents may be appalled to discover that the library is so decisive a factor in their professional success, but it is natural for us to think so, since, with few exceptions, we are directly responsible to them! In this capacity, we are similar to fellow administrators (we still are to come to the perennial discussion of status). But let us realize that we, the presidents' lieutenants, must be capable of administering their educational policies in our own bailiwick. In turn, we have to deal with other administrative officers.

Like King Charles' head, up comes the question of money again. The librarian's relation to the treasurer is constant. Even though his advancement seems to hinge on his ability to say "no," I cannot speak unkindly of him. Once the librarian has fairly convinced his president of a need, he has an advocate whom the treasurer cannot deny. Then, I believe, it is the librarian's obligation to stay within his budget. For I have found that if the treasurer can be assured, year after year, that the librarian will have no deficit, however hurt he may feel that his good stewardship only balances some departmental squandering, the librarian will have a devoted colleague, and see his bud-

et doubled, as I have, without complaint, indeed almost with collusion!

Likewise, if the librarian is truly an infectious lover of books, he can win rank indulgences from the harried superintendent of buildings and grounds. I have won many concessions from an official who is a Civil War addict: friendship, controlled heat, light, paint and plumbing, and I rank them in their order of greatness.

To carry out the president's educational policies successfully, the librarian must be able skillfully to exploit his faculty library committee. Here he succeeds by collaboration, and it matters less whether he is formally chairman or secretary of the committee, than whether he is accepted as a colleague. Here once again I do not believe he can be on equal terms with the faculty, and any more than a custodian of books, "a harmless drudge," to paraphrase Dr. Johnson, unless he is widely acquainted with the contents of books, and a recognized specialist in some discipline.

It is a heavy burden, for one is expected to know all fields. Nevertheless a continuing interest in one large area—literature, history or science, for example—commands respect and keeps one aware of the growth of knowledge as it occurs in all fields. May I inject two comments here: the library school curriculum must be constantly concerned with the relative values placed upon the Master's degree in library science or in a subject field; and, the absurdity of asking for time while on duty for even professional reading must be obvious.

Finally, the librarian approaches his task as an administrator and teacher in dealing with his staff, for he must have both the requisite ability to supervise and delegate authority and responsibility, and bring about the working-out of the presidential educational policies at their vital point of contact between library and its public. If the teaching function of his position is upper-

most, as I believe it should be, then I believe it is far better to be exemplary than supervisory. Given a staff willing to take its part in the chain of achievement of the college's educational goal, I regard detailed instruction and enumeration of duties as a deterrent to real growth and advancement, both of the institution and the individual.¹

I believe that by now I have made it clear that the librarian's position is both that of administrator and teacher, and that he must be successful in both capacities for academic recognition. He is virtually the head of a department, his classes the most informal of seminars, his teaching daily and not hourly. His achievement resolves the vexing problems of status, for he succeeds in his own right and can take pride in his own profession, without the frustrating concern of faculty rank or vote. Those dubious honors will come when the president is made aware of the superior achievement of the library through its staff. Here lies the way for the profession to overcome the handicap that it was still admitting high school graduates to its library schools less than twenty-five years ago.

What are the benefits that accrue in this fully realized relationship between the librarian and the college administration? There are many of mutual and tested worth. The reputation of the college is enhanced by the achievements of the library. New faculty are impressed and undertake their partnership with zeal. Alumni and patrons of the library find its growth and activity stimulating and rekindling, and become, formally or informally, friends of the library, bringing small gifts and large, and frequently prompted thereby to take a greater concern in the college as a whole. The library becomes the integrating power

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¹ Sidney B. Smith, director of libraries, Louisiana State University, has dealt cogently with these personnel problems in his article "A Co-operative Team," *Library Journal*, LXXIX (November, 1954), 19.

its products in much the same manner as does any commercial manufacturer. Another gain lies in the character of library personnel and the general morale of the entire library staff which is due largely to the success of our salesmen. We now have a steadily increasing number of out-going personnel, independent thinkers who move freely and confidently to and from their work, as opposed to the former pedestrian, waiting, inward-turning group. We have personnel who know intimately and completely what we have to sell, engaged virtually full-time in selling the new, the useful, and the productive, achieving a freshness of materials beyond all common practice. From the point of view of the course director, the instructor and the student, this is a most happy situation. Our fields of endeavor require the freshness of last week's information to keep up with the air age. Through the bibliographic assistants and their continuous scrutiny of the working collections our courses have this currency. From the library's point of view, a great gain is made in the immediacy of use. This

library is no archive. Materials which come in one day are in demand the next. There can be no prolonged delays in handling or availability. Everything moves to the point of use and the point of use is as sharp as our kind of human engineering can make it.

CONCLUSIONS

Obviously, any other kind of academic institution would have its own problems in carrying out the concept of bibliographic assistance. We have had unusual and greatly appreciated freedom to experiment in this field. The experiment in a sense was forced upon us, since without it plainly the library was failing. Regardless of what the experiment has done for us or what its application may be in other institutions, it does seem clear that academic libraries in the future must seek ways of promoting the use of their materials rather than counting heads in reading rooms if the profession of librarianship is to maintain its present high status.

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in the curriculum, where the undergraduate often first becomes aware of the interrelationship of seemingly unrelated courses. Out of this common experience of four years may come one of the greatest values of higher education: its carry-over into life beyond the campus years, in the persistence of learning.

I cannot close without reference to the published papers of the nineteenth annual conference of the Graduate Library School of the University of Chicago appearing in the October, 1954 issue of the *Library Quarterly*. Here, at length, from every

angle, by distinguished authorities, the whole problem of "The Function of the Library in the Modern College" has been thought-provokingly explored. I have deliberately avoided specific reference to any single paper, stimulating as I found each of them, for these words of mine would have been at best an imperfect distillation. Nevertheless their papers have prompted and encouraged me in this survey of the implementation and integration of the college president's educational objectives as evidence of the relation between the librarian and the college administration.