

The Silliman University Library: An Appraisal and a Vision

BY GORGONIO D. SIEGA

THE SILLIMAN UNIVERSITY library in Dumaguete City, Philippines, was started during the school year 1906-07, six years after the founding of Silliman. The library started its services with only two bookcases and one small room in Silliman Hall. The first donation of books was made by Harry V. Church, a prominent educator of Berwyn, Illinois.¹ From its humble beginnings the library demonstrated a steady growth. At the end of Silliman's first quarter-century there were approximately eight thousand volumes in the library plus several hundred magazines. At the outbreak of the war in 1941, the collection numbered twenty-five thousand volumes, then probably the biggest library collection in the country outside Manila.

The war years unfortunately caused a tremendous setback in the growth of Silliman University library. Its collection was almost completely destroyed. In 1945 the library was re-established. From the ruins of the prewar collection some five thousand volumes—badly tattered, mutilated, and out of date—were salvaged. These formed the nucleus of a new collection. In the ensuing years, the library slowly but steadily grew. Now the collection includes more than eighty-five thousand volumes. This steady growth has been made possible through donations by friends and sympathizers of Silliman at home and abroad. Not to be overlooked, of course, is the annual book budget, however limited it is. For the current aca-

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demical year Silliman University has set aside P17,000 for the acquisition of current books and periodicals.

Among the donors of books and periodicals to Silliman have been the universities of California and Chicago, and Columbia, Western Reserve, Purdue and Stanford universities. Other agencies, like the United States Book Exchange, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Reader's Service at Stony Point, New York, also have generously contributed to the growth of the collection. Financial grants have been received from the Henry Luce Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia, and from Francis C. Frary and other personal friends of Silliman University.

According to a study of university libraries in the Philippines conducted by the writer, based on the official report of the Bureau of Private Schools, the combined library holdings of the twenty-three universities, public and private, for the school year 1958-59, totaled 879,598 volumes.² Silliman University has the third largest collection in the Philippines and ranked first in the number of books per student. While the national average was twelve books per student, Silliman had approximately thirty books per student. The library collection, however, falls short of American standards. In fact, no

¹ David S. Hibbard, *The First Quarter: A Brief History of Silliman Institute During the First Twenty-Five Years of Its Existence* (Manila: Philippine Education Co., Inc., 1926), p.23.

² Gorgonio D. Siega, "Libraries of Philippine Universities," *Philippine Journal of Education*, XXXIX (June 1960), 12.

single university in the Philippines today meets the minimum standards set by the ALA for college libraries, much less for university libraries. With present enrollment at Silliman it ought to have at least one hundred seventy thousand volumes of carefully selected books if it is to serve the university effectively. The Fenn survey team says:

The book collection is most impressive to one who is familiar with other university libraries in the Philippines. It is excelled in size and quality only by that of the University of the Philippines. However, its excellence is relative, and there are many weaknesses. Too few of the books are on the American Library Association's list of books essential to a college library. For a university library, the percentage would be still lower.³

The system of libraries at Silliman University consists of the university library and branch libraries in the colleges of engineering, law, nursing, and theology. Branch libraries are also maintained in the high school and elementary school. It operates on a so-called coordinated decentralized system. Each branch library except the elementary school library is managed by a full-time librarian.

The university library is open thirteen hours daily except on Sunday. Statistics show that over one thousand books are circulated daily. Within the limits of its resources the Silliman University library actively supports the instructional and research needs of the university. In addition, it also serves the community. On a number of occasions it has served as a center for visiting researchers in the neighboring towns and provinces; it extends its facilities to the teachers and officials of the Bureau of Public Schools, particularly when seminars and workshops are held in Dumaguete City. This public service is unavoidable, for the Silliman University library seems to be the

³ William P. Fenn, *A Survey of Silliman University* (New York: Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1956), p.51.

only library in the region whose collection is reasonably adequate.

If the Silliman University library enjoys today an enviable reputation among the libraries in the Philippines it is not because of the thousands of volumes it has on its shelves. Rather, it is in the quality of service it renders. Among Philippines libraries, it has pioneered in the "open shelf" system and it has done so successfully. Quoting the Fenn survey again:

The library impresses us as one of the most efficient and progressive units on the campus. There is evidence of a clear understanding of the place of books in education and an indefatigable determination to make the most of limited resources. Books that are worth cataloging—and they are not inconsiderable—have been cataloged. More important, they are made available through the open-stack system. We are inclined to accept the opinion that it is the best working library in the Philippines.⁴

Indeed, concerted efforts among the library staff and faculty members are exerted to promote the love for books and to develop lasting habits of reading. Announcements of latest book acquisitions are brought to the attention of the faculty and staff through the Weekly Calendar, and book displays are regularly prepared. Periodicals (more than eight hundred different titles are received currently) are also available on open shelves and students are free to browse among them at any time the library is open.

As Silliman University library continues to grow, and *grow it must*, it is fraught with many problems. One very pressing problem is the fact that the library collection has outgrown the size of Hibbard Hall where it is presently housed. The stacks are congested; so are the reading rooms. The university administration is raising funds for the construction of a library annex and to remodel Hibbard Hall to conform to the design of modern library buildings. It

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.52.

recognizes the fact that the library must be more than just a place to store books; it must also be an excellent place for study, an attractive place to browse. The reading rooms must have more comfortable seats and tables, inviting in decor and attractive in furnishings. Private student carrels and faculty studies are provided to serve those students and faculty members who need some element of privacy for concentration and study.

The library collection needs to be strengthened not only in printed materials but also in such media as microfilms, microcards, and other audio-visual materials related to the academic program and the researches that are done in Silliman University. The administration also hopes to make the library services even more effective with the use of modern library equipment such as book charging machines. More of the time of the professional staff must be devoted to reader

guidance, the preparation of bibliographies, and the indexing and abstracting of articles and books that have research and professional value. Ultimately, the Silliman University library hopes to become the bibliographical center in the Visayas.

With a vitalized educational program at Silliman University and its dedication to the pursuit of excellence in education, new challenges and opportunities for greater library services present themselves. These challenges can be met with quality library facilities, quality library collections, and quality staff members. "This triad is indivisible for one cannot exist without the others, and each needs to be excellent in itself if educational objectives are to be realized."⁵

⁵ Flora Belle Ludington, "Books and Libraries: Tools of the Academic World," in *Of, By, and For Librarians*, comp. by John David Marshall (Hamden, Conn.: Shoe String Press, 1960), p.106.

WORKING CONDITIONS . . .

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ures do not include the extra hours one room is open for study only.

	<i>School Year</i>	<i>Vacation Periods</i>
Low	62.5	15
Median	85	40
High	101	64
Average	84.5	39.4

In requesting information about faculty rank or status, no attempt was made to distinguish between the two or to inquire about details of faculty titles. It was found that twenty-five institutions give faculty rank or status to all librarians, twelve give it only to the head librarian, nine give it to specific staff members (usually department heads and higher), and three do not give it to any staff member.

In the question about sabbatical leave, some answers implied that it was auto-

matic for certain or all library staff members, while some answers indicated that library staff members could apply for sabbatical leave. A summary showed that thirteen institutions give sabbatical leave to all librarians; eight give it to the head librarian only; two give it to the head librarian, assistant librarian, and department head; and twenty-six have no definite policy or did not answer the question.

Most of the questionnaires had an answer about the type of sabbatical leave in effect at the institution. The most-used plan is full pay for one semester or half pay for two semesters. Some institutions have variations, such as one semester with full pay or one year with half pay. Those institutions on the quarter system usually give one quarter with full pay, two quarters with two-thirds pay, and three quarters with half pay. In a few cases, leave was granted without pay.