

## Subject Specialists in a University Library

*In an attempt to supply in other disciplines the bibliographical expertise traditionally furnished by university library systems to departments with departmental libraries, Indiana University has over the past three years established ten subject specialist positions in the social sciences, humanities, and area studies programs. These librarians select material, render reference service to faculty members and graduate students, give instruction in library use, and serve generally as the main channel of communication between the library and the academic departments to which they are allied.*

WITHIN the last three years the Indiana University library has established ten professional staff positions which, in a sense, represent a compensatory action on the part of the library toward those academic departments not served by branch libraries and whose special needs could no longer be satisfactorily met within the traditional library organization. Subject specialists have been appointed to these positions with responsibilities to serve the faculty and graduate students of their assigned academic departments or divisions. The concept of subject specialists assigned to meet the needs of a specific clientele is certainly not new, nor is the employment of such a corps of librarians solely confined to Indiana University. Indeed, library services for the sciences and professional schools have been in the hands of specialists, usually branch librarians, for decades. By the appointment of subject librarians Indiana University has attempted to extend this treatment to other academic departments as well.

Academic departments in the social sciences, humanities, and area studies

programs whose library resources are a part of the general library collection have in the past received only such service as could be provided by a staff of reference librarians with a general background. With the massive and rapidly increasing body of literature and of specialized reference tools within these areas it is no longer possible to meet all the particularized needs of the university's faculty and graduate body without the aid of specialists. The appointment of subject librarians for these disciplines, it was postulated, would both insure more comprehensive book selection and upgrade and personalize services. Further, it would significantly enhance communications between librarian and academician, and between the library and academic departments.

Indiana has appointed librarians for the following departments and area studies: Anthropology-Folklore-Sociology, Economics and Government, English, History, Modern Foreign Languages (European), African Studies, Near Eastern Studies, Far Eastern Studies, Latin American Studies, and Russian and East European Studies. One subject librarian serves two or more departments in some instances. It will be understood that li-

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brarians for area studies must possess unusual competence and versatility, for their duties require a broad range of knowledge in the many disciplines normally encompassed by a particular area program. Experience alone will determine whether a single librarian can perform all the necessary functions for government and economics, or for modern foreign languages, or for a combination of anthropology, folklore and sociology, or for a rapidly expanding area program. Kinship of the disciplines, and observations to date, would suggest the present groupings are viable.

Some elaboration on the primary duties of these librarians may be informative, especially for the university librarian. Much of their time is spent in selecting current and retrospective materials for purchase. All subject librarians are by background, training, and daily activities kept informed about the literature of their field. Information on current publications derives from perusal of scholarly journals, national bibliographies, publishers' announcements, and numerous lesser bibliographical aids. Retrospective materials are purchased as the librarians review the collections and discover gaps, or as a result of specific requests by graduate students or faculty members.

All publications considered important to the departmental programs are purchased through regular order procedures on the recommendation of the subject librarian to whom the departments have delegated this authority. When a subject librarian is doubtful of the utility or urgency of a more costly publication, consultation with the academic department may follow and a joint decision reached.

Faculty members served by a subject librarian are encouraged to continue their traditional participation in book selection. Members of some departments continue to make recommendations, others feel released from a burdensome task which had been performed only spas-

modically. Some departments have regarded the presence of a subject specialist within the library as an unexpected bonus and have combined their book selection efforts with that of their librarian in a renewed program to build a quality collection to support an expanding teaching and research program. In all instances faculty recommendations are routed through the appropriate subject librarian for informational purposes before orders are placed. This screening process has materially reduced the number of duplicate requests sent to the library order department.

The reference service of the subject librarian is confined mainly to graduate students and faculty. The daily requests which involved bibliographical and informational assistance in scope and depth vary with the subject field. The reference work of the librarian for English is normally limited to student queries on available resources for these topics or on technical bibliographical problems, but he has done well in creative collaboration with faculty and student research projects. The librarians for African Studies and Latin American Studies, on the other hand, spend several hours each week assisting graduate students and faculty who seek bibliographical, biographical, and statistical information from a disparate literature not yet under bibliographical control.

Two of the subject librarians have published manuals for the guidance of students. Erwin Welsch, librarian for history, met a particularly urgent need by compiling a "Guide to the Library for Graduate History Students." Alan R. Taylor has published a preliminary edition of "African Studies Research: A Brief Guide to Selected Bibliographies and Other Sources for African Studies" (1964) which has proven most useful and, in many respects, is a model of its kind.

Further instruction in library resources and their use is given by the subject librarians in regularly taught courses, an-

nual lectures to new students, lectures to seminars and classes on specialized library material, group tours, and through the compilation of subject lists. Taylor teaches a seminar on African bibliography. William R. Cagle, librarian for English, offers a course periodically, open to all who can qualify, on descriptive bibliography. Fritz Epstein, librarian for Slavic studies, teaches a seminar in modern European history and a seminar in Slavic bibliography and research. Michel Mazzaoui, librarian for Near Eastern studies, teaches introductory courses in Persian.

It should not be construed from the foregoing that the subject librarians are indulged darlings who work outside the main stream of the daily and demanding library operations. They are sometimes required to serve in the general reference department; they regularly consult with public service and technical departments for advice and information; they can search for a lost book, show visitors around the library, serve on committees and, in brief, in all ways conduct themselves as librarians whose objectives are service to patrons in need. Administratively, all subject librarians report directly to the university librarian.

The subject librarians are regarded as highly skilled coordinators, apologists, and elucidators as well, between the library and academic departments. They keep the library administration informed about departmental developments and the departments apprised on library matters that have special significance to them. Their daily contacts with faculty members have done much to create a positive image of the library. In many minds the library has changed from a highly institutionalized, impersonal service unit to one that is essentially sensitive to the needs of graduate student and faculty in the learning and research process.

Ideally the subject librarian should be physically located near the book col-

lection of his subject field as well as adjacent to the study area for graduate students and faculty, an impossibility in our present general library. The new Indiana University library (construction began fall, 1965) has been planned to bring the books, subject librarians, graduate students, and faculty together in a research tower of eleven floors. The offices of the subject librarians will be on the stack floors with the books in their fields and adjacent to the faculty studies and reading areas for graduate students.

Capable subject librarians represent a considerable annual investment in salaries and book funds. Invariably book funds must be increased to sustain the systematic and comprehensive book selection programs which are the natural outgrowth of these appointments! Indiana University is convinced that its subject librarians are worth the investment in terms of service and improved book collections. Subject librarians assure book collections of depth and comprehension. If selection is solely the responsibility of faculty, some areas are neglected and others given pedestrian attention. The subject librarian is responsible for the whole scope of his field. Areas which are not represented at the moment by a library-minded faculty member are not neglected for the subject librarian strives for a strong research collection that will serve future as well as present research needs.

In recruiting subject librarians, Indiana has sought individuals with both subject and library training, but has not insisted on the latter if a person with language and subject skills has been available. It will be of interest to note, however, that eight of Indiana's ten do possess library degrees. Experience has shown that in-service training, though a lengthy process, can sometimes substitute for formal library training, particularly if the trainee is inquisitive, intelligent, and has a strong desire to become a librarian. ■ ■