

Orientation and Instruction of Graduate Students in the Use of the University Library: A Survey

A recent questionnaire on instruction of graduate students in the use of the university library, submitted to twenty-three large university libraries (and returned by twenty), brings up to date a similar survey reported in CRL in 1958. The problem appears perennial and as yet unsolved, though libraries are giving orientation lectures and tours, providing graduate and faculty manuals, utilizing bibliographers and subject specialists to consult with graduate students or even to conduct formal bibliographic courses, and developing imaginative programs employing new equipment and techniques to interpret the library to this segment of its public. Hope for the future lies in increased communication between teacher and librarian—and programs good enough to be appreciated for their practical utility by graduate students.

THE GROWTH IN SIZE AND COMPLEXITY of research libraries and of new graduate programs seems to require some sort of special instruction for graduate students who must use research collections intensively. In many universities, rising backlogs of uncataloged materials and tight budgets have forced librarians to adopt a policy of partial cataloging and classification for certain categories of research materials. There are "special" collections hidden from the public in most large library systems, as well as local variations in filing or shelving that often confuse students, librarians, and

faculty alike. Explaining these arcane mysteries to beginning graduate students poses a major problem to the administrators and reference personnel of these libraries.

Traditionally, library orientation has focused on the assumed needs of freshmen, and the literature of librarianship still reflects this emphasis.¹ Most schools once offered, and many continue to offer, a brief tour of the library building supplemented by an introductory lecture or two during orientation week or the first week of classes. A few large universities and some small colleges offer bibliography courses or seminars as electives for junior and senior students pursuing honors work. More recently, teaching machines, audiovisual aids, and programmed texts have been developed to teach basic library skills at a time and in a place more convenient to students.

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Other librarians have experimented with closed-circuit television programs and have prepared "do-it-yourself" tour guides that are available at the reference desks throughout the academic year. These guides usually build on the printed handouts prepared for undergraduates. Still other librarians are currently involved in developing computer-assisted courses which will provide an overview of the entire library system for undergraduates. No one appears satisfied, however, that we have solved this problem of orientation at the undergraduate level, although a good start has been made on many smaller and medium-sized campuses. As a matter of fact, it appears that the larger and more complex a library system becomes, the less the campus as a whole is prepared, or can afford, to do, in order to interpret that system to its users, graduate or undergraduate.

Ten years ago we reported in these pages a survey of large university libraries in which we attempted to ascertain how reference librarians were approaching this perennial problem.² We learned then that most librarians in research libraries were genuinely concerned about the lack of orientation for entering graduate students, but a clear majority of our respondents disclaimed formal responsibility for instruction of students at this level. They preferred to rely on occasional lectures, guided tours, and personal appointments with subject specialists to provide the level of bibliographic sophistication needed for graduate study. The best hope for orientation and instruction of graduate students by the library staff, they reported, seemed to lie in closer cooperation with the teaching faculty. Only an interested faculty could convince graduate students of the value of personal appointments with the library's subject specialists and reference librarians.

To examine recent developments in

this area, the authors compiled a questionnaire consisting of two general questions divided into seven parts which could be mailed with a covering letter or used as the basis for an oral interview.³ We wanted to know how many of these large libraries offered separate provisions for orienting graduate and undergraduate students in library use and whether their present practices differed from those of the past. We also asked if their libraries had any local peculiarities that might require a special orientation for graduate students. The response to our survey was gratifying; twenty librarians out of twenty-three (87 percent) in large university libraries returned our questionnaire, often accompanying it with detailed comments and pertinent printed materials.⁴ A few respondents also advised us to contact other libraries which they believed to have excellent orientation programs. To supplement this data, we also interviewed eleven additional people in five of these libraries who have a responsibility for teaching library usage.

We wanted to ascertain first what librarians are doing currently to orient graduate students in the use of the research library and how this differs from past practices. Four libraries replied flatly that they accepted no formal responsibility for teaching library use to graduate students because this was handled adequately by the teaching faculty. "We encourage individual faculty people to take care of this, within the context of their own seminars or courses," one librarian replied. A fifth library offers occasional lectures and tours of its departments "on the request of the instructional faculty." Still another library replied that they have no formal program for library instruction of graduates or undergraduates but that they expect to institute one in the near future. Ironically, this library had made an identical response to this question ten years earlier. Three other libraries stated that the

undergraduate tours and orientation session held during the first week of each semester seemed to serve the needs of graduate students as well. Another librarian reported that his building was so well planned that students had no difficulty in locating materials.

Seven out of nineteen libraries answering this first question reported expanding programs tailored to the needs of beginning graduate students and transfer students from other institutions. "It's a much more complicated bibliographical world" one librarian explained. "These days, there aren't many faculty members who can give sound courses in bibliography. They've lost touch, it's gotten so big and confusing." In his view librarians must begin to fill this need. Cornell advertises, at the beginning of each term, the availability of orientation sessions. "We schedule groups that come in and give them an orientation to almost any depth they choose. We start out just leading a group through the building, then we become increasingly sophisticated, and we finally end up with that handful who get almost individual tutoring." At Yale a general library tour by the reference staff is offered to all incoming graduate students early in the academic year. It differs from those tours traditionally provided for freshmen "in degree only." This physical orientation, which concentrates upon services and locations of materials within the system, is supplemented by bibliographic tours, lasting one to two hours, on specific academic subjects. The students are then shown relevant bibliographic and reference tools and are supplied with printed lists of major information sources in their fields of interest. When the University of Chicago moved into its new Joseph Regenstein Library in the late summer of 1970, it was decided to conduct subject orientation programs for graduate students in anthropology, geography, political science, business, sociol-

ogy, philosophy, education, and library science. "Each session was conducted in the library near the specialized reference tools by the bibliographers and reference personnel responsible for that particular discipline. . . . Our purpose in this program was two-fold: (1) to make the student aware of the major reference works in his field and their location in the new building, and (2) to introduce the student to the library staff members specialized in his subject area." These sessions proved so helpful to students and faculty alike that they will be scheduled again next year and expanded into other disciplines.

Several libraries have prepared printed guides for graduate students which are intended to supplement the formal sessions and the handouts given to undergraduates. Typically, these guides feature detailed information about the local library and its collections, including its membership in such cooperative ventures as the Hampshire Inter-Library Center or the Center for Research Libraries. The student is always encouraged in these guides to look beyond the resources on his own campus for important but little-known materials in other collections that might be obtained through interlibrary loan. Instructions are also provided for securing copies of master's theses and doctoral dissertations necessary for their research. Plans are being developed at the University of Washington "for a library guide (including specialized information for graduate students) to be mailed to all graduate students just before the fall quarter." The State University of Iowa has compiled a particularly attractive and well-organized handbook for graduate students and members of the faculty. It contains a section on the special services that its library staff provides as well as information on the liberal lending regulations for this level group. A similar publication, prepared by the reference staff at the University of Massa-

chusetts, identifies special materials in their library and informs students *How to Use Libraries Outside the University for Serials and Rare Sets*. This handbook is distributed at a series of three informational forums for graduate students and undergraduate majors in the social sciences and the humanities which are offered at two different times in order to include as many students as possible.

Ohio State sent us a nicely printed *Library Handbook for Faculty and Graduate Students* which describes the general library and its collections, the departmental libraries, and, most importantly, the services available through the consultant for library research and lecturer in bibliography, who provides class lectures on research materials for new graduate students. She also holds personal conferences with graduate students at all levels, advises them as to the special resources in their fields, and suggests bibliographic works "which list materials not included in the card catalog." A record card is kept of each student conference, and it is filed by instructional department with the student's research interests, the scope or limitations of his study, and his working languages all duly noted down. Coming at the beginning of a student's dissertation work, this bibliographical orientation, can save him as much as two months time, the library staff asserts.

Still other libraries (notably Iowa and Wisconsin) have issued mimeographed lists of reference books and bibliographic aids in their libraries that the librarians hope will prove useful to graduate students. Wisconsin has also prepared maps showing the location of the subject bibliographers and describing their special collections. Two other libraries (Columbia and Illinois) will prepare additional subject bibliographies in a variety of fields on the request of the graduate faculty. It should

be noted, however, that many other reference departments issue book lists on specific subjects that fit the needs of both undergraduate and graduate students. Northwestern University, for example, has recently inaugurated a quarterly series of brief informational notes on reference materials and selective checklists of new titles, divided on subject lines, which certainly falls within this category. The University of California at Berkeley has prepared a series of Library Orientation Leaflets that cover such diverse topics as lending rules, ethnic materials, and microcopy collections. Varying widely in format, these leaflets contain a great deal of valuable information on this complex system.

A major development in research libraries during the last decade has been the addition to their staff of subject and area studies bibliographers. These specialist librarians usually possess extensive substantive knowledge and a command of several foreign languages as well. Although their primary responsibility lies in collection building, they also participate in bibliographic and orientation programs for faculty, graduate students, and often for undergraduates as well. At UCLA the bibliographers play a considerable role in graduate education, "particularly at the point where a graduate student is beginning to think about a dissertation." At Wisconsin most of the ten bibliographers address seminar groups, and/or advise graduate students on bibliographic problems connected with their research. Eleven other libraries also reported that their bibliographers addressed classes or seminars regularly on the invitation of the instructional faculty. In some schools the bibliographers are members of the subject department and attend departmental meetings. Unfortunately, the bibliographers in several institutions reported that their offices were often "located in out of the way places" and

students did not readily find them. Their services were not as much used by graduate students as might have been expected.

At Chicago, Wisconsin, Harvard, and Columbia, a few specialists give whole courses in the bibliography and research methods of the various area studies, music, the fine arts, agriculture, etc. The librarian for economics and government at Indiana offers an upper level course entitled "Bibliography of Political Science" which "is designed to give students an introduction to library research tools in political science and related social sciences." Students are required to evaluate their experience with these tools, reporting "on the success or failure of their efforts." Two other head librarians reported that their bibliographers would soon offer substantive or bibliographical courses for area specialists. In eleven responding libraries, the curators of rare books and other special collections also work very closely with graduate students and faculty members. Through lectures, exhibits, and tours they make these materials known to interested students and faculty.

All but two responding librarians admitted that their libraries had significant local peculiarities that might confuse graduate students and present problems of access. These included special or departmental collections which are not listed in the card catalog, a dual classification system, segregation of over- and undersized books, and storage areas for little-used materials. Yet a clear majority of the librarians answering this question (fifteen out of twenty) remarked that their provisions for orienting graduate students seemed sufficient and that they did not consider orientation to be a problem in their library. One department head stated that his "building was organized in a way that makes it easy to use, and the quality of the reference staff was excellent." Three librarians admitted that their

orientation programs were simply not reaching enough graduate students, although they were all publicized on departmental bulletin boards and in student newspapers. They attributed this student indifference to a lack of concern and cooperation from the teaching faculty. It is significant, however, that whenever we conducted several interviews in the same library (five times) we found that staff members had a dimmer view of the quality of bibliographic services provided than the director or one of his associates had expressed. One reference librarian admitted candidly that very little was done or could be done for graduate students because of the limited staff available and their heavy workload. Still another librarian noted that orientation for graduate students only works well for small groups of seven or eight students (ten is a maximum). In her view, an all-inclusive program for graduate students was too time-consuming and too expensive for most libraries.

It is a curious paradox that instruction in library use, which so many librarians regard as one of the highest forms of library service, remains so ill-defined and poorly organized. The teaching function is claimed to be important in determining our status, but we appear to take this responsibility lightly or even to neglect it. True, a good share of the blame must also rest with those faculty members who regard anything above a minimal level of library service as "spoonfeeding" their students. Our survey presents some evidence that communication between teachers and librarians about library use is steadily improving, but librarians still spend more time explaining the "what and how" of their operations to students and faculty than "the reason why." The best hope for the future seems to lie in the imaginative programs utilizing new equipment and techniques, which are being developed at a

few colleges and universities to bridge this gap in library service. As provision is made for these programs and they become operational, as the library is tied in more closely with the research and instructional programs of the faculty, and as graduate students become con-

vinced of the practical utility of instruction in the use of the library, perhaps we can do more adequately what is necessary to interpret our collections and services to our patrons at this and all other levels.

REFERENCES

1. The most complete bibliography on this subject was compiled by Allan Mirwis of Indiana University. *Academic Library Instruction: A Bibliography 1960-1970*. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Library, 1971) \$1.
2. Lloyd W. Griffin and Jack A. Clarke, "Orientation and Instruction of the Graduate Student by University Libraries: A Survey," *CRL*, 19, no. 6 (Nov. 1958): p.451-54.
3. We would like to acknowledge our thanks to Charles Helzer, a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin, for his assistance in developing the questionnaire.
4. Libraries participating in the survey were: California at Berkeley, California at Los Angeles, Chicago, Columbia, Cornell, Harvard, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Northwestern, Ohio State, University of Washington, Wisconsin at Madison, Wisconsin at Milwaukee, and Yale.