

## The Failure of the Open Access Residence Hall Library

*Attempting to answer the question whether or not the "open access" residence hall library is useful, the study examines the emergence and development of this form of library and identifies factors that may have contributed to the success or failure of these systems. The study is based on a review of the literature and a questionnaire mailed to twenty-one institutions having had residence hall library systems.*

**R**ESIDENCE HALL LIBRARIES are libraries that serve college and university students where they live on campus. Because they are usually small and because they do not have great old traditions to preserve, these libraries are often regarded as places to experiment with different types of library services. One such experiment in library services is the open access residence hall library.

An "open access" library is a library that is open on a twenty-four-hour basis (usually accompanied by a self-service circulation system) and operated on the honor system. This type of library is to be contrasted with the controlled access library that governs the access to its collections by keeping regular hours of service, by providing staff, and by attempting to maintain strict bibliographic control over its books and circulation records. The appeal of the open access library is its informality and its atmosphere of being a private "gentlemen's library," serving a small, select group of people.

Several institutions have tried to operate open access residence hall libraries with varying degrees of success; they must have had some reason to depart from the controlled access practices. The reasons for this departure probably varied. Perhaps the institutions involved were following the example set by the Harvard house libraries.

The Harvard house libraries were the first residence hall libraries and were open access facilities.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps because residence hall libraries very often start as small, unstaffed collections that later evolve into libraries, providing staff for these libraries was a low priority for the institutions supporting them. Whatever the reasons were for opening them, a question that emerges is whether or not the open access residence hall library is used and is useful.

Attempting to answer this question, this study will examine the emergence and development of the open access residence hall library. It will attempt to identify factors that may have contributed to the success or failure of such library systems. The study is based on a review of the literature and a questionnaire mailed to twenty-one institutions having had residence hall library systems.

The questionnaire by the University of Illinois residence hall library system was initiated because little information has been published about "dormitory" libraries since the 1930s when the Harvard house libraries (and others) were launched. At that time there was considerable discussion in the literature about residence hall libraries, but after the initial interest subsided, information on these various educational experiments became scarce.

An article updating information on the Harvard house libraries appeared in 1948.<sup>2</sup> In 1969 Edward Stanford provided some current information on "Residence Hall Li-

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*Susan Andriette Ariew is residence halls librarian and assistant professor of library administration, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.*

braries and their Educational Potential."<sup>3</sup> (Stanford also cites an "in-house study" done in the 1960s at Syracuse on residence hall libraries.) With the exception of these few references, current information on residence hall libraries is extremely limited.

An initial difficulty in attempting to gather information about residence hall libraries was to locate institutions that maintained them. Some schools had publicized their residence hall library facilities (Harvard University, Princeton University, Syracuse University, Stephens College, University of Chicago, and Indiana University). Other institutions were located through statistical reports, such as those given in the *UGLI Newsletter*, a publication for undergraduate libraries that printed data on "dormitory or branch libraries" in its 1969, 1971, and 1975 issues.<sup>4</sup>

Eleven institutions were listed in the *UGLI Newsletter* as having residence hall libraries (Dartmouth University, Iowa State University, Michigan State University, Pennsylvania State University, Stanford University, University of Alberta, University of California at Los Angeles, University of Kansas, University of Michigan, University of Minnesota, and Yale University). Some institutions were selected for the survey because they seemed to indicate that they would be setting up such a library system: Cornell, for example, was selected because it announced that plans for one were in the offing and requested information about starting one in the 1969 *UGLI Newsletter*. In all, twenty-one institutions were identified that indicated that they had or were planning to have residence hall libraries.

Not included in the original University of Illinois residence hall (UIRH) survey are cluster college libraries, libraries that are located within "colleges" that make up a decentralized university structure. Although cluster college libraries bear some resemblance to residence hall libraries, they seem to function more as undergraduate libraries. When looking at examples of cluster college library programs, one finds a great deal of diversity.

For example, during 1967 plans for libraries in twenty residential colleges were discussed at the University of California at

Santa Cruz.<sup>5</sup> These libraries were to have collections of 10,000 volumes each. But when the University of California recently was contacted about these libraries, it was reported that there are now eight colleges, each with a small library collection. These libraries are not considered to be part of the main library system. Each library is funded by its representative college, and staffing for them is minimal.

At another institution, the University of California at San Diego, the original plans for cluster college libraries were cancelled and replaced by an undergraduate library. Cluster libraries were planned for twelve colleges. Only four colleges were built. Instead of cluster libraries serving individual colleges, the cluster undergraduate library serves all four colleges.

At the State University of New York at Binghamton, the cluster college libraries are supervised by the collegiate librarian who oversees a student staff for them. These libraries are more an integral part of the main university library system than those at Santa Cruz, although the collections are general and the libraries are residential in their location and orientation. They are very similar to residence hall libraries, except that the faculty members associated with each college provide input about what services and acquisitions to provide in their libraries. The cluster libraries of the State University of New York at Binghamton do offer an interesting alternative to the undergraduate library. Again, the cluster college libraries were treated as undergraduate libraries; hence, they were not included in the UIRH survey.

The UIRH survey was sent to the twenty-one colleges and universities in March 1976. Fourteen responses were received initially. In May 1976 follow-up letters were mailed to schools that had not yet responded to the questionnaire. Three more institutions sent replies. The remaining four libraries were contacted and interviewed by telephone in June 1976. The results of the survey were then tabulated.

The first portion of the UIRH questionnaire attempted to discover whether the institutions still had residence hall libraries. It also requested information about the schools that had discontinued their libraries. The

remainder of the UIRH questionnaire covered three major areas: funding, collections, and types of services offered by the libraries.

Of the twenty-one institutions contacted, twelve were found to have residence hall library systems that currently were being funded and were actively serving students (Harvard University, Indiana University, Michigan State University, Pennsylvania State University, Stanford University, Syracuse University, Princeton University, University of California at Los Angeles, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of Kansas, University of Michigan, and Yale University).

Six reported that a program of residence hall libraries had been in existence at one time but had been discontinued (the University of Chicago, Stephens College, Dartmouth University, Iowa State University, University of Alberta, and Illinois State University). The University of Minnesota and the University of Toronto reported having informal collections in residence halls but did not have residence hall libraries as such. Cornell University's plans for building a library in a residence hall complex were cancelled due to budget cuts.

This led to some basic questions: Why were some programs discontinued? What factors contributed to success or failure in maintaining residence hall libraries? Partial answers to the above questions became more evident after reviewing the history of residence hall libraries and their development.

#### EARLY PATTERNS OF RESIDENCE HALL LIBRARIES

The Harvard house libraries served as a model, which to a large extent influenced the development of other residence hall libraries. By examining the Harvard house libraries, one can better understand the reasons behind the open access library and why it became so popular. The Harvard house libraries were beautifully decorated and well-stocked facilities. They were supervised by tutors who were the overseers of the students' educational experiences in the houses. These "gentlemen's libraries" became a means of supplementing the student's education. Much of the collec-

tions in the libraries reflected the educational goals of the tutors, and most of the responsibility for running the libraries rested with the tutors. The open access concept fit nicely with the image of "gentlemen's libraries."

As residence hall libraries became popular, they continued to be regarded as "gentlemen's libraries," with the same goals and objectives as the original Harvard house libraries. Unfortunately, most modern residence halls are very different from the Harvard houses. Designed to accommodate a large number of students, they usually provide a much less intimate living experience for students. The newer residence hall libraries serve hundreds of students, instead of a small close-knit group of residents who are supervised by tutors. The "honor system," which seemed successful with small groups of Harvard residents in the 1930s and 1940s, does not seem to work in the larger community. In some cases, a valuable service to students in residence halls may have been discontinued because of difficulties connected with the honor system associated with open access library operations.

Today the "house masters" and tutors are still responsible for the Harvard house libraries. There are now eleven libraries in the Harvard houses, with a total collection of approximately 125,000 volumes. In the past few years the security of the Harvard house libraries has been tightened. The libraries are no longer open access; they are open about twelve hours per day, and they are always staffed when they are open. The staff for these libraries comes from students living in the houses, and they are paid on an hourly basis.

#### OPEN VERSUS CONTROLLED ACCESS: SOME CASE STUDIES

Some of the problems connected with open access libraries were evident in the responses given to the UIRH survey. Five of six residence hall library systems that were discontinued had open access library facilities. Further, at least three library systems—Harvard University, Syracuse University, and Illinois State University—reported having changed over the years from open access to controlled access. The University of Chicago, Iowa State Univer-

sity, and Stephens College cited budget cuts as the major reason for discontinuing libraries. Dartmouth University and the University of Alberta listed poor library security, indifferent student interest, and the lack of professional supervision as the main reasons for closing their residence hall libraries.

Illinois State University reported closing its fifteen small collections in residence halls because of heavy book losses created by the lack of library security. Respondents from Illinois State University, however, outlined plans for removing the remainder of the small collections into new library facilities outside the residence halls. These new libraries, referred to as area learning resource centers (ALRC), are intended to serve both residence hall complexes and other housing facilities in the area (such as fraternities and student apartments). They are meant to replace the original small open access library collections. There are currently three ALRCs, which contain about 3,000 volumes. The collections include reference and course-related reserves. Staff for the ALRCs include one full-time professional, one nonprofessional, and student assistants. These facilities are not open access libraries.

Of the twelve library systems currently operating, only two (Princeton and Yale) reported that they continue to maintain open access collections. Stanford's library system has a policy that is somewhere in between open and closed access libraries. In response to the UIRH survey, Stanford wrote: "Some libraries are open access; some are keyed to house member keys. One is open only when librarians are on duty." Princeton described having open access libraries that were staffed with student help for four hours per week. Similarly, Yale reported that it provides staff for eight hours of cataloging and shelving weekly for each of its libraries.

The case histories of a number of residence hall libraries (the University of Chicago, Stephens College, Syracuse University, the University of Alberta, Dartmouth College, Indiana University, the University of Michigan, and the University of Illinois) illustrate the issue of the open versus closed access residence hall library.

### *The University of Chicago*

One of the first open access residence hall library systems to be developed after Harvard was that of the University of Chicago. A study of undergraduate reading habits using dormitory library records was conducted in January 1933 by Leon Carnovsky. The unproctored library described in this study was open to residents 7:00 a.m.-10:30 p.m. daily. "A self-charging system, whereby students signed the book cards and left them in a box, precluded the necessity of having an attendant on duty except for a few hours in the morning, afternoon and evening."<sup>6</sup> From these voluntary student records, statistics were produced and analyzed. One of Carnovsky's basic premises was that rules governing the operation of the university's main libraries were overly restrictive and were a negative influence on student reading habits.

The rules governing the dormitory library were much more liberal than prevailed in any other library on campus. . . . Fines were never levied for books past due in the dormitory library; on the other hand, the regular University system of fines prevailed in the College Library. These contrasts are cited merely to emphasize the steps taken to induce reading at the dormitory library, and to suggest the probability that, if under the more desirable conditions optional reading was so limited, it was no less limited throughout the freshman class as a whole.<sup>7</sup>

The motivation for the policy described above was the idea that the fewer rules and regulations the more the student population would be stimulated to read. Although statistical data were provided to support this theory, the statistics were unreliable because of the volunteer circulation procedures used and the fact that there was little or no physical control over the library collection. ". . . a large number of books were withdrawn by residents who neglected to leave the book-cards in the charging box. . . . the withdrawals of resident faculty heads, other faculty members, and library assistants were not recorded."<sup>8</sup>

Carnovsky concluded that reader interest in the University of Chicago residence hall libraries was low. This might have been the result of an inefficient system of circulation. As large numbers of items were borrowed without any records being kept, the task of

locating a desired item became extremely difficult. It is possible, too, that the lack of control over a collection instead of stimulating a reader might have discouraged patrons wanting to read particular titles.

The University of Chicago response to the UIRH survey indicated that, for the most part, the residence hall libraries have been discontinued: "The remainder of the original libraries are still there, but they are quite inactive and they consist of old books and leftover items from when students moved out."

#### *Stephens College*

Stephens College, a liberal arts college in Columbia, Missouri, also experimented with open access libraries. These consisted of small, rotating, leisure-reading collections. In a study involving Stephens College, Lamar Johnson described the attempt to stimulate reading by lack of rules, regulations, and physical control of these collections.

No fines are charged in dormitory libraries, nor is any specific period of time set as a limit for which books may be kept. Students are simply asked to return books which they have finished reading, in order that other students may have access to them. The practice of transferring books from dormitory to dormitory each six weeks requires a checkup in books which are in circulation.<sup>9</sup>

The circulation procedure was similar to that of the University of Chicago. A self-charging system was used in areas that were open twenty-four hours a day to students. Johnson admitted that there were flaws in this system but pronounced the experiment a success.

Eighteen books were lost as a result of having libraries open to students at all hours of the day. This loss appears to be insignificant in the light of the important advantages of having books readily available whenever they might be desired. Should continued experience confirm the success of this plan, it will be extended to additional residence halls.<sup>10</sup>

The problem with a self-charging circulation system like the one at Stephens College is not just that items tend to disappear but that such a system limits the collections to small inexpensive items that are not of value in terms of reference or course-related materials. Because the Stephens

College libraries contain items that need no real security, the author is able to dismiss his losses and maintain that the libraries are a success.

In many residence hall library systems, however, basic reference items are included so that students will have easier access to encyclopedias, foreign language dictionaries, handbooks, atlases, and course-related reserve materials. Naturally, leisure items are also an important part of these collections, but they are not the only items included.

The need to protect the much-used reference and reserve materials becomes apparent as the collection becomes more valuable in terms of the amount of capital invested and the amount of service to students. Losses of these types of materials cannot be tolerated for long; an open access library in the modern residence hall invites such losses. Stephens College reported that it no longer has libraries in its residence halls.

#### *Syracuse University*

The open access philosophy is the subject of an article about an experiment in residence hall libraries at Syracuse University. Again, the emphasis is on keeping rules and regulations to a minimum in order to stimulate reading. The libraries are operated by volunteer students who take complete responsibility for the care and maintenance of the collections. Reporting on the experiment, Fern Allen states:

Once the books are deposited in the house, we at Syracuse feel that the students should take complete responsibility for them—shelve them where they like, return the collection within a month or keep it a whole semester.<sup>11</sup>

Allen is promoting a lack of accountability for the collection. In her enthusiasm for an open, flexible library system, she states, "As to administration of the collection, the more flexibility in the program the better—no fines, no coercion, no high pressure."<sup>12</sup> Again we find the premise that if one takes away restrictions and one increases access to books, one will produce avid readers. "We seldom know what the actual circulation in the house is, since book cards, which we tuck in suggestively, seldom are used. But we do know that books in this collection became shabby in a short time."<sup>13</sup>

Syracuse University, however, has changed its position on open access libraries over the years. Responding to the UIRH survey, it reported that there are now seven libraries in existence that are supervised by a part-time professional. These libraries have circulating books and records and non-circulating reference collections. They are no longer open access facilities; they are staffed by student assistants who proctor them.

#### *The University of Alberta and Dartmouth College*

Among other institutions that tried open access residence hall libraries and discarded them were the University of Alberta and Dartmouth College. The response to the UIRH survey of the University of Alberta discussed reasons for the residence halls libraries being discontinued. The three major reasons given were lack of professional supervision, lack of student interest, and lack of security and protection of library materials: "The original library was stocked with basic reference material, but is now just a study hall with no books. Apparently the books have just slowly disappeared."

Dartmouth College indicated that from 1964 to 1966 it had four libraries that were subsequently discontinued due to lack of funds, student interest, and security of library materials, as well as "lack of supervision within the residence halls because of varying interest in the library by faculty residents." The four Dartmouth libraries were open access libraries with self-service circulation procedures. Although their libraries were discontinued, the Dartmouth respondents maintained faith in the "honor system":

From our experience with resident hall libraries we have concluded that the following are necessary for the success of the endeavor:

1. A stable student residence during their college enrollment and a development of a sense of pride in the library.
2. A faculty resident who is interested in the library and encourages use and development of it.
3. Location of the library in an area that is not readily accessible to nonresidents (two of our libraries were located in the Common Room, through which everyone coming to the hall had to pass).

Unless a library system is prepared to staff the library for a number of hours daily, it did not seem to us successful to lock the room when no one was on duty. Proctoring it a few hours daily and locking it the rest of the time discourages use and defeats the purpose of such a library. Nothing can substitute for the honor system among residents.

#### *Indiana University at Bloomington*

Residence hall libraries were established at Indiana University in 1941. Profits from residence halls vending operations, started in 1941, provide the financial basis for the libraries. The library system has grown over the years to eleven residence hall libraries. These libraries are open seven days a week for a total of seventy hours. Two professional librarians supervise the operation as a whole; the residence hall libraries at Indiana are not open access facilities. The libraries are each supervised by a graduate assistant from the school of library science, who acts as a head librarian, and three part-time desk attendants. Each library is a complete library operation; the library system contains 88,339 volumes, 11,386 records, and 13,996 cassette tapes.

That the libraries are well-used and an important part of student life is evident: In an Indiana University publication, *Your University*, July 1967, an article about the residence hall libraries and the growing demand by students for more libraries stated: "That students depend on the libraries for study help was illustrated by girls who had moved into new Forest Quadrangle before the library area was finished. Just before finals, they wrote letters to University President Elvis J. Stahr and George R. Olson, director of residence halls, saying that their studying was suffering because they had no library."<sup>14</sup>

The article reported the ten libraries as having circulated 15,506 books, 14,368 records, and registering 104,815 student visits for the year. The Indiana University residence hall libraries continue to be one of the more successful library systems in operation today.

#### *University of Michigan at Ann Arbor*

Another controlled access residence hall

library system is at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. Responding to the UIRH survey, it reported having eleven libraries with 26,000 volumes and 17,000 phonograph records, as well as art prints, cassette tapes, and phonographs that circulate to students. A full-time librarian coordinates the libraries, with the help of a clerk, student assistants, and a head librarian in each area who is a part of in-residence student educational staff. Continuing financial support for books and materials comes from room and board fees, and salaries are paid through state funds. The libraries are open on a fifty-two-hour-a-week schedule. When asked whether the libraries were open access, the response was an emphatic "No! Materials are available only during open hours."

*University of Illinois  
at Urbana Campaign*

The University of Illinois residence hall library system, started in 1969, is composed of six libraries. Each library is located in a central area within a large residence hall complex. The library system provides four types of materials: reference books, open shelf books, periodicals, and exam files. The library system has 13,000 volumes and 160 periodical subscriptions. The libraries are supervised by a professional librarian, and they are staffed by a full-time clerk and thirty student assistants.

Between 1969 and 1972 access to the six libraries varied from area to area. In some halls the libraries were used for classes and meetings and were opened on a volunteer basis by students. In other areas, the libraries were proctored by paid student assistants. Some of the libraries were accessible to students on "off" hours. As a result, due to book loss, the value of many of the collections lessened; by 1972 broken sets of encyclopedias and outdated collections that were not valued and not used were evident. In 1973 the library security was tightened, and the collections were replenished with up-to-date reference collections, popular fiction and nonfiction titles, and subscriptions to the more popular magazines. After this, circulation and attendance increased dramatically. To accommodate the growing demands of residents, library hours were

extended, and, as a result, circulation and attendance continued to rise.

Although it might seem paradoxical, restricting access to the libraries helped increase their use. Because the collections were more secure by controlling access to the libraries, they were allowed to be revitalized and brought up to a level that the students were able to appreciate. This point may be substantiated by the University of Illinois residence hall libraries' attendance and circulation statistics for 1972-76. Attendance rose from 27,285 student visits in 1972-73 to 98,615 visits in 1975-76. Circulation increased from 949 books in 1972-73 to 4,671 books in 1975-76. The libraries were serving more than three times the number of students formerly served and circulating more than four times the number of volumes.

Of course, the growth of these libraries cannot be attributed to better library security alone. Over the three-year period some libraries were moved to larger quarters, and library hours were extended. But these changes were made only in response to the tremendous demand placed on the libraries by the students, even though (and perhaps because) the libraries were not open access facilities.

#### THE FAILURE OF THE OPEN ACCESS LIBRARY

The followers of the open access library suggest that its informality can somehow serve to stimulate the patron's interest in reading. There is very little evidence to suggest that open access collections do stimulate reading. For one thing, no one has ever been able to gather accurate or valid statistics to justify such a premise. Poor record keeping seems to go hand in hand with the open access library. Further, the "honor system" that might have survived a small intimate environment does not work in large residence hall complexes. Most open access libraries have had to limit their collections to small, inexpensive leisure-reading items, which would ensure that losses would not be too costly. It is ironic that these libraries that are free of restrictions seem to limit themselves automatically to small collections not worth expanding, protecting, or continuing. When they do expand and grow into viable collections,

like the Syracuse University residence hall libraries, the growth necessitates a change to controlled access libraries.

In his incisive article about factors contributing to the success or failure of residence hall libraries, Edward Stanford remarked that the failure of the open access residence hall library is due to heavy book losses and lack of commitment to continuing them:

Too frequently dormitory collections have been established when one or two individuals with great enthusiasm have been willing to spearhead an initial effort, which, unless sustained by others in subsequent years, has soon led to disillusionment as losses have depleted original holdings, and the remaining books and broken files of magazines have fallen into disuse.<sup>15</sup>

Stanford sent questionnaires to colleges and universities to inquire about their residence hall libraries. The responses indicated that some of the library systems that failed did so because of the lack of staffing and supervision of the collections. One formerly enthusiastic librarian stated:

... the collection simply melted away. My conclusions are that unless these are set up as staffed and controlled collections ... it is not worth investing the money in them ... or expecting much of them.<sup>16</sup>

At Dartmouth College, where open access libraries had been tried and then discontinued, the respondents to the UIRH survey indicated their belief that a sense of pride in the library on the part of students was important for success. Unfortunately, pride in one's library must come from the merit of the library itself. Student interest and pride do not develop from the mere existence of a small open access collection of books in a room that is not adequately staffed. If the institution administering the library provides it with funds, staffing, and security, then it may become worthy of pride.

The evidence available actually suggests that some conditions for success other than those detailed by Dartmouth are more important to the continued existence of residence hall libraries. Among the successful residence hall library systems, one can find at least two common factors. One factor is ongoing, continuous financial support. The other is adequate staffing and tight security for the library operations.

#### CONCLUSION

For the most part, the open access library, though charming in its appeal, has shown itself to be a failure. It has been asserted that there are no obvious benefits to student reading habits because of library accessibility. Because of the very fact of its open access, it is difficult to measure the library's effectiveness. On the contrary, as libraries are depleted of their books, reader interest declines. When patrons find they cannot obtain specific titles, they go elsewhere for their library services. Some university residence hall libraries have been discontinued because of lack of security. After collections are depleted and student support is withdrawn, administrative support collapses. It is unfortunate that potentially excellent educational programs are discontinued.

It has been indicated that the successful residence hall library systems, such as those at Indiana, Michigan, and Illinois, have continuous funding, extended staffs, and tight security. These factors provide the continuity and growth that make these residence hall libraries a major part of student life. It has been demonstrated that increased attendance and circulation may actually accrue to a library that controls its access and tightens its security. As the collections are rejuvenated, the availability of the materials secured, and bibliographic control assumed, the library becomes more useful and more desirable.

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