

Centralized Cataloging in College and University Libraries¹

A COMPLEX PROBLEM in some college and university libraries is the administration of departmental libraries.² This paper is concerned with the administrative problems and policies of the central catalog department in cataloging for departmental libraries. The study is pursued only from the viewpoint of the catalog department. The viewpoint of the departmental library is not considered except insofar as the catalog department attempts to meet it in providing the best possible cataloging service with the resources at its disposal. In 1941 and 1945 through questionnaires sent to twenty-four college and university libraries holding from 150,000 to 300,000 volumes, answers were sought to the following questions: What catalog records are kept for department libraries and where are they kept? Who makes and maintains those records? Are variations from the central library routine cataloging procedures necessary for departmental libraries? Who is responsible for decisions? In other words, Is cataloging centralized in a single department? Is it decentralized, each departmental library cataloging its own material? Or is there a division of labor and responsibility between the central catalog department and the departmental library? How are the attendant problems handled?

Definition. A departmental library, in library literature, has been used to cover various types of special collections, brows-

ing or reading rooms, seminar, laboratory, fraternity house, dormitory, rental, research, branch, group, or division libraries, collegiate, school, or college libraries, and libraries attached to a department of instruction. For the purpose of this study, "departmental library" was defined as "a library attached (1) to a department of instruction and/or (2) to a school or college in the university."³ The following directions were added to clarify the many possible interpretations:

1. Exclude dormitory and fraternity libraries and libraries of other special collections, such as local history, browsing rooms, etc., which do not fall within group (1) or (2) above, even though catalog records are maintained in them.
2. Include only those departmental libraries in which catalog records, *i.e.*, shelflist or catalog, or both, are maintained
3. Include, as far as possible, data on independent, separately administered departmental libraries, even if not integral parts of the general library and even if located in cities other than the university center
4. Include group or division libraries, such as biological sciences, social sciences, undergraduate division, etc., in group (2) above, *i.e.*, those departmental libraries attached to a school or college in the university.

Twenty-four library systems are considered. These systems include 189 departmental libraries, of which 19 were independent and separately administered and are so excluded from the study. Percentages are based either on the 24 library

¹ Based on the author's master's essay, School of Library Service, Columbia University, 1946.

² Works, George Alan. *College and university Library Problems*. Chicago, A.L.A., 1927, p. 63.

³ *cf.* U.S. Office of Education. *Library Statistical Report for Institutions of Higher Education*. Form 8-072.

systems or the 170 departmental libraries. The reasons certain departmental libraries are independent seem to vary with the institutions—the need for specialized service, the pressures of faculty members, the location and accommodations of the central library building and of the departmental libraries, and tradition. The departmental libraries studied fall into two groups, first, those independent and separately administered, and second, those centrally administered.

In the independent, separately administered departmental library all the cataloging is done by the departmental library staff. There is neither control nor supervision by the central catalog department. The departmental catalog records, *i.e.*, shelflist and catalog, are not included in any way in the central library's shelflist for the system nor in the union catalog for the system. Accordingly, from this point on, the independent, separately administered departmental library is excluded from this study.

In the centrally administered departmental libraries the general organization of the cataloging ranges from the completely centralized to the decentralized. Centralized cataloging is defined in the A.L.A. glossary as "the preparation in one library or a central agency of catalogs for all the libraries of a system."⁴ Decentralized cataloging, for the purpose of this paper, is defined as follows: The preparation of the departmental library catalog by the departmental library staff with no supervision or control from the central catalog department. The departmental catalog records, however, either shelflist or catalog, or both, are included in the central library records.

Cataloging is centralized, with or without modifications, in 75 per cent of the

library systems and in 95.9 per cent of the total number of departmental libraries in those systems. The modifications, in 22.8 per cent of the departmental libraries, fall into three groups:

1. (5.8 per cent) The professional work is done in the central catalog department. The master card is sent to the departmental library where the set of cards is completed by the departmental library staff. The latter may change or omit added entries.

2. (5.3 per cent) The professional work is done by a member of the departmental library staff who works part time on his own material in the central catalog department under its direct supervision and control.

3. (11.7 per cent) The professional and clerical work is done in the central catalog department and complete sets of cards are sent to the departmental library; the departmental library staff may change or omit added entries.

Variations from central catalog department practice occur only in Plans 1 and 3 when changes or omissions in added entries, usually in subjects, are made in twenty-two departmental libraries by a professional assistant who either has had experience in his subject field or has had training in library science. The head of the central catalog department may or may not know what policies dictate these changes; for ten departmental libraries he does know, for twelve he does not know. One head cataloger is concerned at this lack of knowledge, while another simply states that his responsibility ends when the catalog cards leave his hands. Plan 2 is essentially a centralized organization; in addition, it has the merit of using the subject knowledge, derived from practical experience, which the departmental library staff can give.

The advantages claimed for centralized cataloging have been enumerated by Mann⁵

⁴American Library Association. Editorial Committee. Subcommittee on Library Terminology. *A.L.A. Glossary of Library Terms*. Chicago, A.L.A., 1943, p. 26.

⁵Mann, Margaret. *Introduction to Cataloging and the Classification of Books*. 2d ed. Chicago, A.L.A. 1943, p. 243.

and by Lyle⁶ as follows: the work is done by one group of specially trained assistants, the best reference books and adequate supplies are generally at hand, consistent policies and practices may be maintained more effectively by one closely knit staff than by several scattered ones, and the concentration and streamlining of work make for an economical organization.

In no system is the cataloging for departmental libraries entirely decentralized. Six of the library systems have a centralized organization in general, with one to two departmental libraries decentralized. In all, seven departmental libraries do their own cataloging, with no supervision or control from the central catalog department. Each, however, provides the central catalog department with records for the union catalog.

So far as the departmental library is concerned, the evidence indicates that decentralized cataloging is entirely satisfactory. It permits the fullest use of the subject knowledge and experience of the staff to meet the departmental library's special needs. As for the library as a whole, the inclusion of departmental holdings in the union catalog ensures the unity of the resources of the system. However, no comments were made as to whether changes and adjustments are necessary in the central catalog department before the departmental library cards can be interfiled in the union catalog; editing is frequently essential in such cases. The extent of such editing would be a factor in determining whether decentralized cataloging was satisfactory to the central catalog department.

Technical Processes

In classification, subject headings, added entries, form and fulness of card, very few

⁶Lyle, Guy R. *The Administration of the College Library*. New York City, H. W. Wilson Co., 1944, p. 91.

of the departmental libraries differ from the central library practice. Only 4.1 per cent differ in classification, 10 per cent in subject headings, 8.3 per cent in added entries, and 9.4 per cent in form and fulness of card. These variations seldom occur in all the departmental libraries in a system. Within any system policy may vary for one or more departmental libraries. Special classification schedules, subject headings, adapted in form or more specific in character, and additional added entries, in one case for series, are requested in certain libraries. A briefer, simpler card is used in some libraries. While no reasons are given, the obvious explanation is that the departmental librarian requires a finding list rather than bibliographical description and that the shorter card saves time in typing. The decision for variations appears to rest with the central catalog department, except in those cases where the cataloging is decentralized and where the departmental library completes its record from a master card.

Catalog Records

Every system has a shelflist to cover all departmental libraries. The shelflist varies in type and scope, depending in part upon the records maintained in the departmental library. Except for two of the library systems, each has a union catalog virtually complete, the only omission being "a few" analytics.

In the departmental library, there is little uniformity in the kind of catalog records kept. They range from complete bibliographical tools to brief finding lists. In all but two departmental libraries there is either a shelflist or a catalog, whether complete or partial, but less than half the systems have both shelflists and complete catalogs in all their departmental libraries. No reasons are given for the variations.

Presumably, the type and size of the departmental collection, its location in relation to the central library, telephone and messenger service, and the character of its staff would all affect the decision.

Seven of the twenty-four library systems supply to their departmental libraries catalog cards for related material in their subject fields which may be located in other departmental libraries or in the central library. One library system supplies such material in full; six supply it in part. Only three librarians state their actual practices. In one system the engineering departmental library is in process of obtaining a union catalog for the architecture, chemistry, chemical engineering, engineering, and metallurgy departmental libraries. In another system, the agriculture departmental library has had interfiled with its catalog that of the animal nutrition departmental library (which no longer has a separate catalog) and also the author cards for the forestry departmental library. The third library has a union list of all its science periodicals in the chemistry departmental library. No comments were made by the librarians who did not include related material in the departmental library catalogs.

Many departmental libraries make and maintain their own catalogs for special material relating only to that particular department and not likely to be looked for elsewhere. The cards for this material are consistently omitted from the union catalog for the system. No library reports that this omission causes any difficulty.

The maintenance of departmental catalog records includes adding continuations and added copies to the shelflist, making changes, etc., on catalog cards, recording withdrawals on shelflist, keeping withdrawal statistics, removing catalog cards for withdrawals, taking inventory, filing in

shelflist and catalog, revision of filing, and supervision and physical upkeep of the catalog. Between the central catalog department and the departmental library there is no clear-cut dividing line for responsibility for this work. Convenience and the character of the departmental library staff may determine the answer.

Coordination and Supervision

Several ways in which to attain coordination and supervision of the work of cataloging for departmental libraries were reported—namely, written codes of practice, consultation between the central catalog department staff and the departmental library staff, and regular inspection and supervision of the departmental library catalog by a member of the central catalog department staff. Half of the cooperating libraries have or plan to have a code or manual of practice in the central catalog department. Only one library system plans a code of practice for its departmental libraries. It is generally conceded that a written code of practice for routine and policy-making decisions is necessary as a clarifying and coordinating factor.⁷ Such a tool should be especially helpful for any system in which the pattern of work differs in the various units. In the area of consultation the majority of head catalogers make some attempt to establish personal contact with the departmental library staff to gain its viewpoint, to make clear that of the central catalog department, and to adjust the one viewpoint to the other. As for supervision of the departmental library catalog by a member of the central catalog department staff, 58.3 per cent of the libraries have some degree of supervision but only 25 per cent make it a regular and fre-

⁷ Wilson, Louis R., and Tauber, Maurice F. *The University Library*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1945, p. 169-70.

quent practice. Many express the belief that it is necessary to prevent divergence and to give professional aid to nonprofessional assistants. Many feel, too, that more supervision would be helpful. Only one head cataloger thinks it is entirely unnecessary. Certainly, the character of the departmental library staff, the kind of catalog work assigned to it, and the adequacy of the instructions given would all influence the extent and type of supervision.

Is the Present Organization Satisfactory?

Do libraries consider their present organization for cataloging for departmental libraries satisfactory? Only 58.3 per cent are satisfied so far as the central catalog department is concerned, and only 45.9 per cent so far as the departmental library is concerned. One head cataloger refers to a difficulty which is probably not peculiar to his system—the constant shifting of books from departmental libraries to the central library and back again, with the consequent labor of changing location stamps on catalog records. Many of the comments point, perhaps, to future trends. One librarian states that departmental libraries are discouraged while two indicate that centralization is the goal. Two others advocate group or division libraries, one expressing the opinion that "Departments get better service when small libraries are combined into larger 'division' libraries." One is putting this policy into actual practice while others are moving in somewhat the same direction in providing a union catalog for several departmental libraries while leaving the collections separately housed. One suggests that the whole question of departmental libraries should be given more consideration in the administration courses in the library schools.

The discussion in the preceding pages was based on information supplied by the

cooperating libraries in 1941. In 1945 current data were obtained from seventeen of the twenty-four libraries. The over-all pattern remains much as it was in 1941, with, however, an increased recognition of the value of a union catalog for the entire library system. One library, previously without a union catalog, installed one in 1944. In two systems a departmental library, formerly independent and separately administered, now is represented in the union catalog, although that same departmental library continues to do its own cataloging with no supervision or control from the central catalog department. Only two libraries contemplate any reorganization in the near future but neither states what that reorganization is to be.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The conclusions which may be drawn from this study are limited (1) by the size of the institutions covered, (2) by the type of departmental libraries included, and (3) by the omission of a direct expression of the departmental library viewpoint. These limitations have reduced to some extent the multiplicity and complexity of the problems involved. However, certain features and certain general trends do appear, many of which will be characteristic of any survey of departmental libraries.

No One Organization

There appears to be no one organization of cataloging for departmental libraries which could be declared mandatory for every institution. Size, type, use, staff qualifications, and location of the departmental libraries vary from one system to another; all these are factors in the decision. The trend, however, seems to be toward centralized cataloging. In the great majority of libraries the organization is already centralized. In those with some

modifications and in those with decentralized cataloging there is, in general, a recognition of the resulting problems; in some cases there is a desire, in others a definite decision, to move toward centralization. The arguments⁸ in favor of centralized cataloging are concerned with (1) the technical results achieved as a result of the coordination of personnel and resources and (2) the economy attained from a closely knit assembly line organization. It is further argued that capable and sympathetic centralized supervision would make adjustments to meet the needs of departmental libraries.

There are some variations from central library practice in classification, in subject headings, in added entries, and in form and fulness of card. These variations seldom occur in all the departmental libraries of a system but are confined, for the most part, to one or more which need and request them. The decision for variations appears to rest with the central catalog department, except in those cases where the cataloging is decentralized and where the departmental library staff is free to change or omit added entries as it desires.

It is a well-established practice for the central library to have both a shelflist and a union catalog for the system. There is no hard-and-fast rule for the catalog records necessary in a departmental library. The size, location, use, and possible development of the departmental library would determine the answer. One of considerable size, located outside the central library building, would undoubtedly need both a shelflist and a complete catalog. One located within the central library building may need only an author catalog. Whether or not the departmental library catalog should include in its files cards for all related material, even though located

elsewhere, is a question. Such cards would, of course, prove useful. Some institutions are answering this need by providing a union catalog in one departmental library for a group of departmental libraries, each of which may still have its own individual catalog. This may be the first step toward the physical amalgamation of those libraries into a division library. Practice varies as to whether the central catalog department or the departmental library is responsible for maintaining the catalog records in the departmental library. Convenience and the character of the departmental library staff may affect the assignment of such work.

There appears to be a trend in some systems toward group or division libraries, *i.e.*, a combination of what, formerly, were several departmental libraries in related fields. Lyle, too, has drawn attention to this development:

The extension of the divisional library plan . . . is worthy of mention since it reflects an increasing emphasis upon integration and synthesis in the college teaching program. The tendency in higher education in recent years has been to reduce the number of departments and to set up a smaller number of major units in their place. This in turn has invalidated the chief argument of those who favor small decentralized library collections, but at the same time it has placed upon the library the responsibility for integrating its services with the new divisional set-up.⁹

The following recommendations are made:

1. Whatever the organization, centralized, decentralized, or some modification of either, there is one administrative principle which should be observed—namely, that responsibility be definitely assigned and that any dividing lines thereof be clearly outlined. It would seem wise to vest over-all coordination and/or supervision in the head of the central catalog department. It

⁸ Lyle, Guy R. *Op. cit.*, p. 91.

⁹ Lyle, Guy R. *Op. cit.*, p. 86-87.

should be his responsibility to establish policies and procedures and to see that they are carried through. Any variations should be made only with his cognizance.

2. Supervision of departmental library cataloging should be centered in the head of the central catalog department or in a senior cataloger responsible to the head. This supervisor should not only make personal contacts with the departmental library staff for consultation but should also inspect the departmental catalogs at regular and frequent intervals. He should advise and instruct any of the departmental library staff who work with the catalog; it would be helpful for those staff members to have an orientation period in the central catalog department.

3. A written code of practice is desirable for the central catalog department and also for the departmental library insofar as it is directly concerned.

4. It would be interesting to have evidence of the claim of economy for centralized cataloging. Studies in cataloging costs and comparisons of costs for various types of organization would be of value.

5. As already indicated, the present study has been limited in scope. Further investi-

gation might be concerned with cataloging for departmental libraries in the larger institutions where every variety of departmental library and every type of organization, with their special problems, usually exist. This investigation also might consider the viewpoint of the departmental library.

Libraries Which Contributed Information

University of Alabama Library
University of Arkansas Library
Bryn Mawr College Library
University of Colorado Library
University of Florida Library
Fordham University Library
Georgetown University Library
University of Georgia Library
Hamilton College Library
Lehigh University Library
Louisiana State University Library
Miami University Library
Mount Holyoke College Library
University of Notre Dame Library
Pennsylvania State College Library
University of Pittsburgh Library
Purdue University Library
Rutgers University Library
Smith College Library
University of Tennessee Library
Vassar College Library
University of Vermont Library
Wellesley College Library
Williams College Library

The Cultural Resources of the Teachers College Library

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ticipate; and burrow without coming up with anything worthy of the search. They have a genius for digging diligently and keeping their shovels empty. . . . The truth is that they are the barnacles of beauty and pleasure, of literature and the drama. Like barnacles they attach themselves not only to the bottom of

the crafts to which they cling but ride forever submerged on the outside of the hull. Their final sin is that they deaden what they touch, managing to make what should be interesting as dull as they are themselves. . . .¹

¹ Brown, John Mason. "Termites of the Stacks." *Saturday Review of Literature*. 29:34-36, May 11, 1946.